



INQUIRY GUIDE

AGUA ES VIDA WATER IS LIFE

Written by David Gonzalez with Cecilia Macuilxochitl Ortega
Dance & Music by Mexico Beyond Mariachi
Editing & Animation by Abiasahf Pineda
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ABOUT THE STORY

Rhythm of the Arts presents

Agua es Vida/Water is Life

A CELEBRATION OF DANCE & SONG FROM MEXICO

Written by David González with Cecilia Macuilxochitl Ortega
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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE PLOT

“Why is there fire in the woods? Where did the water go?” The world is out of balance, and we must work together to bring the world, and ourselves, back into balance. Our Indigenous storyteller, Cecilia, guides us on a journey that starts with the magical Danzante and leads to a nearly impossible challenge.

All along the way dancers and musicians from all parts of Mexico bring their glorious traditions to life. Featuring dances from Veracruz, Guerrero, Michoacán, and more, *Agua Es Vida* is a dance and storytelling adventure that celebrates Mexican culture with ALEGRÍA!

Agua Es Vida is a dance and storytelling adventure that celebrates Mexican culture delving into rich traditions of music and dance to deepen students’ understanding of Mexican and Latin American culture. Featuring regional dances of Mexico, colorful costumes and traditional music *Agua Es Vida* teaches about Mexican culture beyond the expected!



[Watch this trailer](#) for *Agua es Vida* to get a preview of what you’ll see on the virtual stage.

ABOUT THE CREATORS



ABOUT THE COMPANY

Mexico Beyond Mariachi (MBM) was created 15 years ago in New York City by a group of people who saw that there was a need in the community to know more about traditional Mexican performance culture that was extended past the stereotype of just Mariachi music. They wanted to explore “A Mexico beyond

the headlines, beyond the beautiful beaches, beyond the guys with big hats and trumpets.....” What seemed so obvious was being overlooked!

THEY HAD A BIG QUESTION:

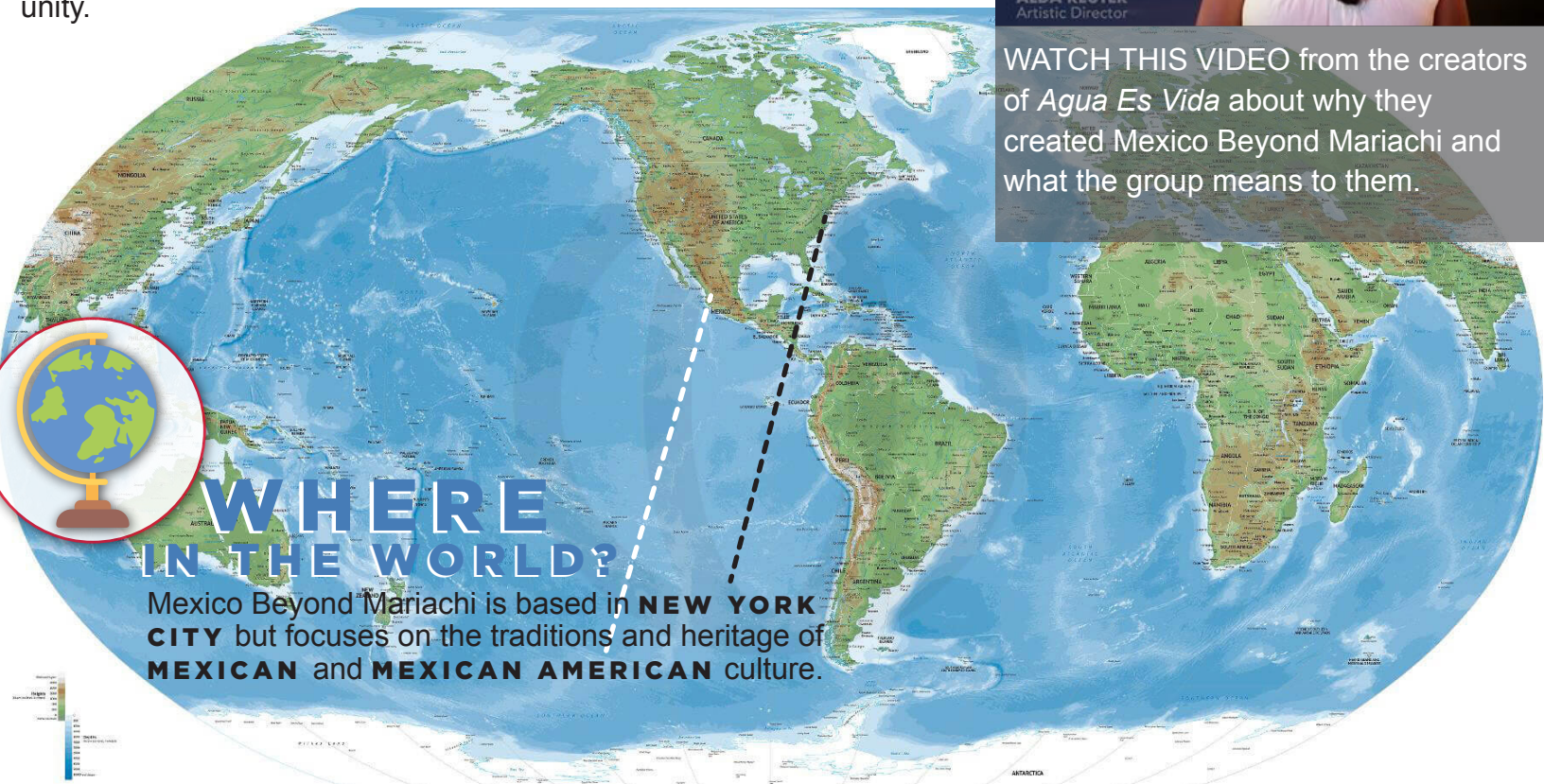
“Even though Mexican influence is all around us, what do people really know about the traditions of Mexico’s music and dance culture? Or the origins of the stories, legends, and myths that are interwoven together? And how do we share that knowledge with young audiences?”

RESPONDING TO THAT NEED,

MBM created *Agua Es Vida!*. They have reached over 100,000 students in over 250 schools and communities. MBM began traveling around the United States to tell the story to young audiences and families around the United States. They believe it is an important time to reach new audiences with the message of equity, tolerance, and unity.



WATCH THIS VIDEO from the creators of *Agua Es Vida* about why they created Mexico Beyond Mariachi and what the group means to them.



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Mexico Beyond Mariachi is based in **NEW YORK CITY** but focuses on the traditions and heritage of **MEXICAN** and **MEXICAN AMERICAN** culture.

ABOUT THE ART

SEEING A SHOW

Seeing a performance is different, even on a computer, than watching a movie or TV show. What is different and what is the same? Use the the printable chart on [page i](#) to keep track.

In this performance you will see people singing, dancing and acting on stage. **The actor uses their body, facial expressions, and voice as tools to tell the story. The actor's most important job is to communicate to the audience how their character feels about what's happening to them in the story.**

THINGS TO WATCH FOR

Use the glossary below to select one or two terms that you will watch for in the actors' performances, the story, or the way the stage is set up. After the show, report your observations to the class. Add observations to a class list or create a digital record using www.padlet.com.

GLOSSARY

BELIEVABILITY: theatrical choices thought to be true based upon an understanding of any given fictional moment, interpretation of text, and/or human interaction

CHARACTER TRAITS: observable embodied actions that illustrate a character's personality, values, beliefs, and history

CONFLICT: the problem, confrontation, or struggle in a scene or play; conflict may include a character against him or herself, a character in opposition to another character, a character against nature, a character against society, or a character against the supernatural

DIALOGUE: a conversation between characters

FOCUS: a commitment by a participant (an actor, technician, director) to remain in the scope of the project or to stay within the world of the play

GENRE: relating to a specific kind or type of drama and theater such as a tragedy, drama, melodrama, comedy, or farce

GESTURE: an expressive and planned movement of the body or limbs

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES: the underlying actions and events that have happened before the play, story, or devised piece begins

IMAGINARY ELSEWHERE: an imagined location which can be historical, fictional, or realistic

IMPROVISE: the spontaneous, intuitive, and immediate response of movement and speech

INNER THOUGHTS: the underlying and implied meaning or intentions in the character's dialogue or actions (also known as subtext)

MOTIVATION: reasons why a character behaves or reacts in a particular way in a scene or play

NON-REPRESENTATIONAL MATERIALS: objects which can be transformed into specific props through the imagination

OBJECTIVE: a goal or particular need or want that a character has within a scene or play

PLOT: a narrative as revealed through the action and/or dialogue; traditionally, a plot has the elements of exposition, inciting incident, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution or falling action

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS: technical elements selected for use in a specific production, including sets, sound, costumes, lights, music, props, and make-up, as well as elements specific to the production such as puppets, masks, special effects, or other storytelling devices/concepts

SCRIPT: a piece of writing for the theater that includes a description of the setting, a list of the characters, the dialogue, and the action of the characters

STAGING: patterns of movement in a scene or play

STORY ELEMENTS: characters, setting, dialogue, and plot that create a story

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS: the elements such as sets, sound, costume, lights, music, props, and makeup used to create a unified and meaningful design for a theatrical production

THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS: practices and/or devices that the audience and actors accept in the world of the play even when it is not realistic, such as a narrator, flashback, or an aside

THEME: the aspect of the human condition under investigation in the drama; it can be drawn from unifying topics or questions across content areas

CHAPTER GUIDE

The entire performance of *Agua Es Vida* lasts just over 30 minutes and is easily viewed in one sitting. If preferable, use the time markers below to divide the material into chapters. Viewing in shorter sections may allow for deeper engagement with the region, dance, instruments, and clothing featured in each performance. There is a lot to explore!

USING VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES: (adapted from Facing History and Ourselves)

Watch the video of the performance and then pose the following three questions in order. Pause after each question to give students time to reflect.

1. What do you **see**? What did you **hear**? What details stand out?
(At this stage, elicit observations, not interpretations.)
2. What do you **think** is going on? What makes you say that?
3. What does this make you **wonder**? What broader questions does this image raise for you?

Follow the same three steps for the video link. Play through multiple times if needed. Expand the first question to include:

Watching and listening creates a feeling of really being immersed in the scene. It might provide an opportunity for a creative writing response, a short story of an imagined scene beyond the dance that evokes the 5 senses:

- I **see**
- I **hear**
- I **touch**
- I **taste**
- I **smell**

CHAPTER 1:

0:00 Introduction

SUMMARY:

Cecilia tells us that she is from Veracruz, Mexico, a place where people speak Spanish and also a language called Nahuatl. The Indigenous people of Veracruz are “people of the land” and “one with nature.” They speak to the Earth through their songs and dances. Cecilia decides to ask her friend, the Danzante, her questions. He uses sacred dances to communicate with the ancestors.

OBSERVE:

What do you see in the background of Cecilia’s house? What can you learn about her from the setting? What information can you learn about Cecilia by observing her clothing?

LEARN MORE:

Did you know that Mexico is the home of many Indigenous people? And that they speak native languages other than Spanish? Mexico, like the United States, has Native American or Indigenous people who are both members of tribal nations AND citizens of their country.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Indigenous people of Veracruz.



CHAPTER GUIDE

CHAPTER 2: 4:15 Danzante Dance

The Danzante performs a sacred dance to the ancestors. He calls to the four directions, North, South, East, and West, and to the sky and the Earth. And then asks the questions and listens to the answers through his dance. He learns that the world is out of balance and that is why there isn't enough water and that fires are burning where lakes used to be.

OBSERVE:
The Danzante begins dancing with the message, "Creator of all things, I thank you." He wears special clothing that communicates his connection to nature by depicting birds, reptiles, and even the circle of life in the skeleton. What do you see represented in his clothing and headdress? What do you notice about other musicians' clothing and instruments? What animal sounds or instruments from nature do you see?

CONSIDER:
The Danzante tells us that we have to find our way back to balance together. That we must all come together with "one mind, one heart." What does that mean to you?

The ancestors told us that there will be a test. The people must prove they are serious about creating balance by tying a long ribbon called La Faja in a knot with their feet. Why do you think they would create that test? What do you think it will mean?

CHAPTER 3: 11:40 La Danza de los Viejitos (Dance of the Old People)

SUMMARY:
The next dance comes from the Purépecha people in the state of Michoacán. The dance usually features four old people who are meant to represent the four elements - fire, water, earth and air. They start the dance with hunched backs relying on their canes, but soon they are dancing and moving freely. The dance is meant to remind us of the wisdom of our elders.

OBSERVE:
The Viejitos are wearing special clothing during their dance. They have a sarape - a cloak made out of blanket - each with designs and sombrero hats with long ribbons hanging down. They also wear wooden soled shoes, and an old man mask over their faces. They use their canes and their shoes to stomp along to the music with percussion sounds.

What do you notice about the Viejitos in the dance? How does their body change through the dance? How does their special clothing impact their performance?



CHAPTER GUIDE

CHAPTER 4:

15:27 El Panuelo
(The Handkerchief Dance)

SUMMARY:

This dance features three important instruments that come from different traditions of Mexican people. All the instruments - despite their different histories and sounds - work together to create balance in one beautiful song.

LEARN MORE:

Listen to each of the instruments play alone. How would you describe the sounds each one makes? How do you imagine they will work together?

Ayayote - ankle shakers made with seeds from the Chachayote Tree.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19WeznaldDQ>

Quijada de Burro - a percussion instruments made with the jawbone of a donkey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JQVvT65yzw>

Violin - a traditional instrument brought to Mexico by the Europeans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh-pBxeHE3U>

CHAPTER 5:

18:25 El canto del Sinsonte
(the Song of the Mockingbird)

SUMMARY:

This dance from the state of Tabasco reminds us of the importance of our animal friends. You can hear the call of the mockingbird represented through the performance.

LEARN MORE:

Listen to the song of the real mockingbird. Can you hear the similarities between the instrument and the bird?

Mockingbird - El canto del Sinsonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRS9KQp3mys>

Can you spot a turtle shell? An antler? An animal bone?

CHAPTER 6:

22:00 Samba

SUMMARY:

From the state of Guerrero, Mexico this song reminds us that even when we must do challenging work we can still be joyful!

OBSERVE:

What do you notice about the clothing of the performers? What about the rhythm? Does the song make you feel joyful as well?

CHAPTER 7:

26:47 La Bamba

SUMMARY:

The last performance comes from Veracruz. Many different Indigenous people have made their home in the land now called Veracruz. Some of them speak Náhuatl, just like Cecilia!

EXPLORE:

During this song the dancers try the test! How do they do it?

Use a long piece of ribbon or string to give it a try. Can you do it by yourself using only your feet? Can you do it more easily with a partner?

CHAPTER 8:

Final 30:58

What seemed impossible isn't! Cecilia finally finds the answer she needs to talk to Luna and Sol thanks to the ancestors and from dancers across Mexico.
"If we are going to help the earth we must work together with alegría (happiness/joy)!"

CONSIDER:

What lesson from the ancestors do you think is most important? Which one can you try? Give what you can, Take only what you need Listen and the ancestors answer. The world is out of balance, we must find our way back to balance.

We can only do the work needed if we all gather together.

INQUIRY 1

When you have a problem, big or small, how do you try to solve it?

Agua Es Vida starts with Cecilia trying to solve two problems. One problem is how to explain a news story to her children. The other is much bigger. How do we live in balance with the Earth?

GOALS:

Activating Prior Knowledge

DISCUSSION STRATEGY:

Students can use sticky notes to write their problem-solving strategies and post to a whiteboard chart or talk to a shoulder partner about their idea.

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER:

Use the chart on [page ii](#) as an individual printable or to project and complete together.

Categories: what do you THINK, what did you LEARN *through consulting a source*, what do you still WONDER about?

Note: The source in the LEARN column does not have to be an informational article or traditional book. A student, a student's family or a member of the community are also valuable sources for rich learning!

Note: The source in the LEARN column does not have to be an informational article or traditional book. A student, a student's family or a member of the community are also valuable sources for rich learning - just like Cecilia seeks wisdom from her ancestors.

Part of the problem-solving process (no matter what the problem is) requires looking inward at your own ideas, thoughts, feelings and prior experiences. Other solutions require consulting others and asking questions about what you don't yet know or understand. Students may begin to fill in the THINK portion of the chart considering Cecilia's problems. This chart can be reused to consider other issues.

Remind students that the THINK column is a place for revision. Having initial thoughts crossed out and revised or adding additional information to an entry shows a willingness to grow your thoughts!

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

Other cultural/geographic regions have rich and meaningful traditional practices. These practices are meaningful to those persons in a similar way that my cultural/familial/religious practices are meaningful to me and my culture/family/religion.

INQUIRY 2

How can we care for the places we live and the future inhabitants? How do we live in balance with the Earth? What does Water Is Life mean?

GOALS:

Conducting Research
Organizing Information

RESEARCH STRATEGY:

Students may read the primary texts on water conservation and the impact of wildfire as a whole class, or in small groups, and keep notes to add to the LEARN and WONDER category. Remind students at the conclusion of their reading to consider what questions remain unanswered or what they still want to know more about.

Use the graphic organizer from Inquiry 1 on [page ii](#) as an individual printable or to project and complete together.

TEXTS TO EXPLORE:

(click on the images to link to the articles)

California conserving water as drought dries up some reservoirs

Present Save Read Aloud Share Hide Print

+ Add To Text Set



Note: Create a free Newsela account to search for articles. Teachers can adjust the reading level of this article on the Newsela site.

Billie Parks, 83, uses her cane to bang on her water tank to monitor how much water is left as her well has run dry at her home surrounded by vineyards near Templeton in San Luis Obispo County, Calif., Aug. 29, 2013. Al Seib/ Los Angeles Times/MCT

Newsela article on the impact of drought in California.

INQUIRY 2, cont.

TEXTS TO EXPLORE

Dwindling freshwater resources

Present Save Read Aloud Share Hide

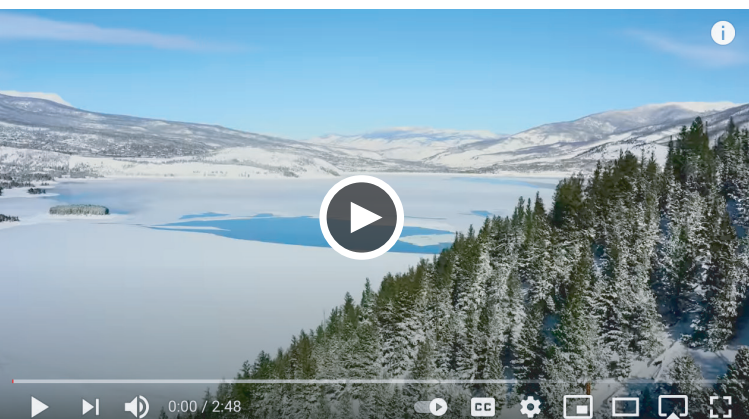
Print Add To Text Set



Newsela article focuses on the limited freshwater on Earth and the political and environmental impacts of the shortages now and to come.



A video for K-3 students about the importance of water to the health of the planet.



This video for Grades 2 and up from National Geographic discusses water conservation in the state of Colorado.



National Geographic exploration of water conservation in a Florida garden and at home anywhere in the world. Grades 2 and up.

NOTE-TAKING SIDE-BAR:

Many teachers assume students know how to take notes. But often, students are never explicitly taught how to take thorough notes in an efficient way. Consider discussing the following tips with students ready to take notes and model for younger learners.

1. Underline new vocabulary.
2. Skip lines between new ideas.
3. Draw lines between ideas or facts that connect to each other.
4. Take notes using symbols and drawings, not just words.
5. Don't worry about spelling as you take notes. You can check for proper spelling later.
6. Use bullet points to list sub-points.
7. Place a star by main ideas.
8. Place a question mark by anything you do not understand.
9. Abbreviate.

(adapted Facing History Teaching Resource Library)

INQUIRY 3

What can you do to help the Earth? How can you contribute to solutions? How are the solutions in the articles and the ones from the Danzante the same? How are they different?

GOALS:

Connecting to Global Perspective
Presenting Information

Considering the information found in **INQUIRY 2** - What are some of the solutions to conserving resources suggested by the articles? What are the solutions presented by *Agua Es Vida* and Cecilia's ancestors?

The texts, videos and *Agua Es Vida* all emphasize the importance of all of us working together towards living in balance with the Earth and in making change to conserve water resources.



PRESENTING NEW LEARNING:

- Students can create a slide in a shared google slide show illustrating their main understandings about a selected article or video to allow a jigsaw sharing of information.
- Creating a poster gallery titled *Agua Es Vida/Water Is Life* with students' interpretations of the title in drawings, collage, and/or text.
- Students may work in pairs to come up with a strategy towards water conservation for the home or in the wider world. Present the top 10-12 facts with another class to spread the word. Or create mini-posters with water conservation facts to be posted around the school or at home to encourage others to conserve too!

TECHNOLOGY EXTENSION:

For older students or for those looking to incorporate more technology into their presentation students can use Animoto <https://animoto.com> and create a short movie from still images and even add a voice recording. Note: Have students join a class account or have them create individual accounts in order to save and access past work.

INQUIRY 4

The ancestors are a powerful source of wisdom and knowing for Cecilia.

How does my connection with the past impact my life? Do those who came before me (in my family, culture/, religion, or community) help me today? Why or why not? Is this meaningful to you?

GOALS:

Drawing on Funds of Knowledge
Connecting to Self and Others

STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT:

Define “ancestor” by asking for student input.
“What is an ancestor?”

Agua Es Vida defines ancestors as:

The grandmothers of our grandmothers and the
grandfathers of our grandfathers -- the keepers of our wisdom!

DEFINE IT!

A kid-friendly definition from Merriam-Webster:

Ancestor 1: *a person, typically one more remote than a grandparent that you are descended from: my ancestors are from Germany. Noun.*

Ancestor 2: *An ancestor, also known as a forefather, fore-elder or a forebear, is a parent, a grandparent, great-grandparent, great-great-grandparent and so forth. Noun.*

Have students first complete a 5-minute quick write to the prompt:

In my (family/culture/religion/community) my ancestors are:

Invite students to consider both their family and any other identity or group to which they belong. Students may choose to write about their grandparents, a tradition in their church, or a cultural/ethnic/racial group. Where and who do they come from? Teachers may need to model examples, especially for younger students.

After completing the quick-write, students should be prepared to discuss whether they feel connected with their ancestors and why or why not they get wisdom or inspiration or strength from people who lived before them - often even before they were born! - with a partner or small group.

BIG QUESTIONS:

How do you connect with the past? Especially those who you are related to but haven’t ever met? How do these lives impact yours? Why do people across all kinds of religious, cultural, and geographic communities create traditions to mark important occasions and gather together?

Have students complete a page to be made into a class book or ask students to create a thinglink (www.thinglink.com) using an image that represents one of their ancestors. Students may present their thinglink and explain their connections in a Living Museum gallery desk walk.

The family tree is a familiar image but one that often leaves out important people in our past. Using the metaphor of the river and image on [page iii](#) students may place themselves along the water’s edge, labeling and illustrating others who have impacted their lives’ path. Where is the river going? Where has it been?

Note: Some students may have less defined biological ancestral connections. Emphasize that ancestors can be related to us by blood/family or by a connection to a shared culture or interest. Who are the ancestors of basketball? Who are the ancestors of the Civil Rights Movement? Who are the ancestors of dance or poetry or hip-hop? Broaden the definition to include all kinds of wisdom-givers from the past.

REFLECTING WITH THE ARTS

ARTFORM 1: VISUAL ARTS

There is an amazing place in Mexico City in Chapultepec Park called Cárcamo de Dolores. It's an indoor/outdoor space created by the architect Ricardo Rivas and the artist Diego Rivera that celebrates the history of water in Mexico City.

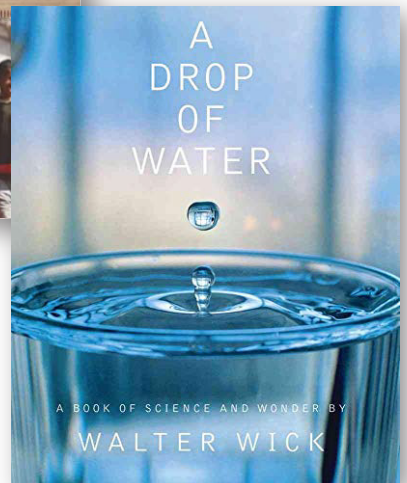
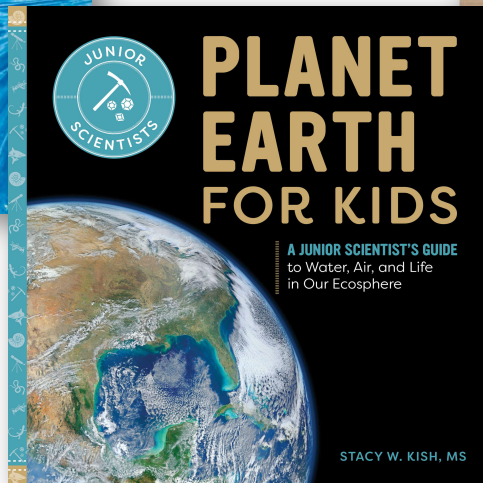
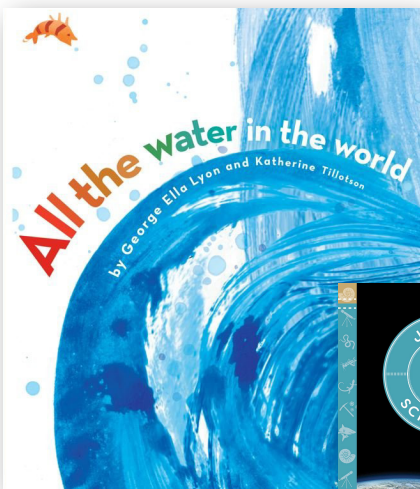


Then follow the link to explore more:

<https://en.mxcity.mx/2016/06/underwater-mural/>

LEARN MORE:

Check out these books to learn more about water conservation!



The teacher can discuss with students:

After you leave the performance in some ways your experience of it has just begun! We want the ideas you thought about and the people you watched and listened to in the performance to stay in your mind. Take some time to consider one (or more!) of the questions below:

1. What part was most memorable or stuck out in your mind?
2. What idea did the performance make you consider? Did you have any connections?
3. What part was most interesting to see or to listen to? What was your favorite?"

Craft an email to share with your class, with families or with Mexico Beyond Mariachi, about your experience.

Follow our template below to get started.

Dear

DATE

Write a sentence or two about you – your name, age or grade to introduce yourself!

(If you get stuck, here are some sentence starters to get you thinking:)

My favorite part of the show was...

While watching the show I felt... because ...

I have drawn a picture of the scene when...

This experience was special because ...

Sincerely,

(your name)

Students might choose to draw a favorite part or create a collage. They might choose to write a letter or a short story that is connected to the performance; they might even make a video where they share a review and post to the class webpage!

However students choose to respond, we'd love to hear from you!

RESOURCES AND SOURCES

Indigenous Mexico

<https://indigenoustmexico.org>

Tour on Chapultepec Park

<https://en.mxcity.mx/2016/06/underwater-mural/>

Videos on Instruments:

Ayayote -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19WeznaldDQ>

Quijada de Burro -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JQVvT65yzw>

Violin -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh-pBxeHE3U>

Mockingbird

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRS9KQp3mys>

Facing History and Ourselves

Newsela:

<https://newsela.com/read/california-drought/id/2484/>

<https://newsela.com/read/natgeo-freshwater-resources/id/50453/>

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

ABOUT THE ART (PAGE 3)

Use this printable chart to list the similarities and differences between going to the theater and watching tv or seeing a movie. How are they the same? How are they different?



SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

INQUIRY 1 AND 2 (PAGE 7 AND 8)

what do you THINK	what did you LEARN	what do you still WONDER

METAPHOR OF THE RIVER AND IMAGE

INQUIRY 4 (PAGE 11)

