

American Voices

Lesson – *Cultural Heritages*

Companion Video – *Escaramuza*

Suggested Grade Level

Grades 5-8

Objective

Students will recognize that America is made up of many diverse cultural heritages and that people come from many different background. Students will research their own family history to learn about their background and share their family’s cultural heritage with their peers. They will research the musical traditions of their heritage and present their findings to the class.

Suggested Materials

- BPO video of *Escaramuza*
- Composer Fact Sheet (provided)
- Poet Fact Sheet (provided)

New York State Arts Standards

MU:Re7.1.5a-8a

MU:Re7.2.6b-8b

New York State English Language Arts & Literacy Standards

Writing, Standard 1, 4, 5, 6 & 7

Speaking & Listening, Standard 1, 2, 4 & 5

Language, Standard 1, 2, 3, 4 & 6

New York State Languages Other Than English Standards

Standard 1: Communication Skills

Standard 2: Cultural Understanding

Procedure

- 1) Have students read through the Fact Sheets for composer Gabriela Lena Frank and poet Brandon Williamson.
- 2) Discuss with students how individuals’ backgrounds, upbringing, culture, languages, and customs influence their everyday life and experiences. Ask students: Are there any traditions or customs your family partakes in that are unique to your heritage or



Lesson – *Cultural Heritages* (continued)

- ethnicity? Are there specific celebrations or customs that your family follows? How do these customs influence your life?
- 3) Have students watch the video of Brandon Williamson’s poetry performance, followed by the BPO performance of Escaramuza. Then, have them connect the performances to the biographies they read. Ask students: How did each performance reflect the heritage of the respective composer?
 - 4) Brandon Williamson selected his specific poem based on Gabriela Lena Frank’s *Escaramuza* piece. Ask students: Why do you think he chose this specific poem? How does the poem relate to the music?
 - 5) Have students research their own family lineage to discover their cultural heritage. Did your family come to the United States from a different country? What is your family’s heritage? Students should include a musical practice or custom that reflects their family’s cultural background. Have them describe the techniques and cultural significance of the music and provide a musical performance example (audio or video). Students should compile their research into a formal PowerPoint presentation to share with the class.



Gabriela Lena Frank



Gabriela Lena Frank currently serves as Composer-in-Residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Born in Berkeley, California to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Gabriela explores her multicultural heritage through her compositions. Inspired by the works of Bela Bartók and Alberto Ginastera, Gabriela has traveled extensively throughout South America in creative exploration. Her music often

reflects her own personal experience as a multi-racial Latina, as well as her studies of Latin American cultures, incorporating poetry, mythology, and native musical styles into a western classical framework that is uniquely her own.

Civic outreach is an essential part of Gabriela's work. She has volunteered extensively in hospitals and prisons and is also a climate activist. In 2017, Gabriela founded the award-winning Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music whose mission focuses on artistic excellence coupled with a humanitarian view on proactively working with and playing for people from all demographic backgrounds while being eco-friendly. She currently resides on a mountain farm in California.

Escaramuza

Escaramuza signifies "skirmish" in the Spanish language and is inspired by the *kachampa* music of Andean Peru. The *kachampa* dance depicts a demonstration of warriors preparing for battle. It was thought that when going to war, warriors should be well dressed in order to separate themselves from the enemy and show their superiority. The movements of the dance are sudden and strong and are typically performed to military-style music. Through most of Frank's *Escaramuza*, no section of the ensemble is allowed to rest for long, maintaining the high energy typical of *kachampas*.



Traditional Peruvian kachampa dancer

Brandon Williamson



Brandon Williamson is a poet, performer, Creativity consultant, workshop developer and Creative Problem-solving Facilitator who works in the Office of Admissions at SUNY Fredonia. Born and raised in Buffalo, he graduated from SUNY Fredonia in 2007 and returned to his hometown, where he taught at Oracle Charter School for four years.

Brandon has made it his life goal to reach out to students in inner city neighborhoods similar to the one he grew up in. In 2012 he founded the Pure Ink Poetry Slam. As the

only monthly running poetry slam in Buffalo, the Pure Ink Poetry Slam caters to the community of poets in the area, as well as authors, musicians, dancers, and comedians. Brandon works hard to build a community of art that everyone can be part of.

He has performed, competed, and won poetry slams and been featured throughout New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Ontario, Michigan, and California. In 2015 he published *Critical Lens*, a book of his selected poems.

*I've lost count of breathless moments full of love and punch lines,
thrills and red wine, each lost breath is reflective of the mountains I've climbed.
When mountains form across the desert of my skin. Do not consider them wrinkles. They are
simply lifelines
walking a bit too close to deadlines protecting the liquid fire
that still burns within my eyes
When my eyes revoke me of my vision, know that they have cried
in the presence of a beautiful sunrise, and sunset.
they have witnessed the majesty of you in this moment.
And I'm proud to have been a part of that. When you see,
my hands,
brittle, broken branches
of a lifeless tree.
know that they have planted seeds, constructed bridges to build communities,
I hope that is the legacy I leave.
When my heart stops, know that with its last beat it kept our rhythm.
Our same two step American slow dance,
the African romance drumming through our blood. They now stand still for us,
like a candlelight vigil haunting the memories of those we love.*

-excerpt from *The End of This Life* by Brandon Williamson

