

Process Writing Steps for Composing a *Corrido*

Notes to the Teacher: Although *corridos* are normally written in Spanish, composing or studying them addresses skills in other curricula such as language arts and social studies. Students may compose *corridos* in either Spanish or English; however, compositions should follow the other conventions of the genre to be recognized as a *corrido*. Writing original music is not required. For a classroom exercise on the poetry and content of *corridos*, students may borrow a tune from an existing *corrido*.

Guidance to Students

1. Pre-writing

- Listen to at least three mentor texts of *corrido* performances. Many are accessible via YouTube, e.g., “*La Persecución de Villa*” <https://genius.com/14532991> or “*El Moro de Cumpas*” <https://youtu.be/YURfTjYEN1o>. For K–12 education, *narcocorridos* are not appropriate.
- Read transcripts of the songs.
- Individually chart characteristics of a *corrido* that you notice by listening, viewing, and close reading. Discuss these observed characteristics with others and create a comprehensive checklist to serve as a writing guide.
- Interview family or community members for additional ideas or memories about *corridos* and particular heroes, outlaws, or events in their lives.
- Review events of interest (primarily current events but past events are acceptable).
- Select one topic (event, hero, outlaw story, town, etc.) for writing a *corrido* to present orally to the class and wider community audience.

2. Drafting

- Draft 1: Compose *corrido* concentrating on content, telling the story.
- Draft 2: Shape content of the *corrido* with attention to form, word choice, sentence fluency, and story organization.

3. Responding

- Read or perform your draft for a group of three to four peers to get constructive feedback.
- Also confer with the teacher for feedback.

4. Revising Options

- Clarify.
- Reorganize.
- Refine.
- Edit language use (correct, precise, succinct, clever, etc.).

5. Publishing Options

- Read from an Author’s Chair in class setting or perform the *corrido*.
- Perform the *corridos* live for a real or virtual community audience.
- Record and upload the performances for online documentation.
- Create a commemorative booklet in physical or virtual form, including images if appropriate.

Classroom Connection: *Corrido* Writing Contest

Anyone can compose a *corrido*. For example, the author of this article is not a professional *corridista*, yet he has composed many. A *corrido* writing contest can be organized at any level, from classroom to school, district, or state. The contest described below is based on a competition held in high schools in Arizona.

Some years after the author began organizing a *corrido* contest for Tucson Meet Yourself, a local folklife festival, the University of Arizona Poetry Center approached him to assist in organizing a *corrido* contest in a few local high schools. After only two years, the contest became so popular that it quickly expanded to all the high schools in Southern Arizona and soon after to the entire state. The contest operated annually for 15 years. One year there were over 400 submissions! The entries were judged by a panel of two or three judges who varied over the years. One year, Linda Ronstadt (yes, that Linda!) and the author were the judges. Each year the top three winners were invited to a celebration where their *corridos* were performed, and they received cash prizes. To be sure, one does not need to offer cash prizes, any recognition will do, including a simple certificate that can be printed in color.

Below are details for a classroom contest that may work best in Spanish classes although it could easily be included in language arts, humanities, history, and social studies. The same structure could be applied at the school or district level.

Fall

- At the beginning of the school year, announce the contest. The teacher can make it a class requirement or assignment. The notice should include details on the contest, such as the following:
 - Specify a due date.
 - Provide directions on how to submit entries (written, electronic).
 - Describe limitations, such as length and topics (we recommend not accepting *narcocorridos* glorifying drugs, drug trafficking, drug violence).
 - Each student may submit only one *corrido*.
 - Encourage students to submit entries in Spanish, using common, everyday language, although entries in English may also be accepted.
 - The tone can vary from sincere to humorous to satirical.
 - Include one or two paragraphs describing *corridos* and encourage students to conduct research on their own.
- Entries should be submitted no later than the end of Fall semester.
- Students are not expected to compose music for their *corridos*. The focus is on the lyrics, and it is quite acceptable for students to borrow tunes, especially standard tunes from other *corridos* as this is part of the *corrido* tradition.

Spring

- Entries are judged in January–February by a panel of 2–3 judges (local volunteers) or by the class.
- Winners are notified early March.

- If the winners do not sing or play an instrument, local musicians (perhaps a parent of a student) can be recruited to work with the composers to learn and put music to the winning *corridos*. Ideally, composers would sing their own, but this is not required.
- In late April or early May, family and friends of the winning *corrido* writers gather to witness the composers receive their prizes or certificates and hear the winning *corridos* performed, followed by a small reception.

Such guidelines can be modified to the local context. Contests need not be complicated, keep them simple and manageable.

Contest Promotion Tips

If the contest is at the school level, following are a few tips for promoting it:

- Display flyers in the school library, cafeteria, and hallways.
- Send a notice announcing the contest to the school website and newsletter.
- Publicize the contest in the student newspaper.
- Announce the contest on the PA and/or at assemblies.
- Include teachers in the planning, particularly Spanish and language arts teachers. Ask them to teach *corrido* lesson plans and encourage students to enter.
- Write an article about the contest and ceremony for the PTA newsletter.
- Post about the performances and award ceremony on the school social media.