

How to Write a Mexican Corrido in 8 Steps

You, too, can write a modern version of this traditional Mexican folk song.

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If you live in the United States, you've probably heard a Mexican corrido.

These tragic ballads—often mixed with accordions and bouncy norteño music—play nonstop in Mexican restaurants and on Spanish-language radio stations.

The 150-year-old Mexican ballad format narrates tragic tales based on real events. Nowadays, corridos are often associated with narco-corridos, a variation that glorifies Mexican drug lords and their lavish lifestyles.

Next America recently participated in a corrido songwriting workshop at the Library of Congress. About two dozen people showed up eager to learn this Mexican tradition, and we even got some help from a surprise guest: U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera.

HOW TO
Write  **Corrido***
(*a traditional Mexican ballad)
in 8 easy steps!

The workshop was led by Sones de Mexico, a Grammy-nominated Mexican folk band based in Chicago. Band leader Juan Díes told us the basics: Choose a real-life, heroic character with a tragic story. Oh, and make sure each verse has eight syllables and follows an ABCB rhyming pattern.

We all ended up choosing to immortalize Sandra Bland, the African-American woman who was arrested for a minor traffic violation in Texas and was found dead in jail a few days later.

Here is our group song:

The Corrido of Sandra Bland ©

(The English translation below does not follow corrido rhyme or rhythm structure.)

**Voy a cantar un corrido
de una mujer que murió
Sandra Bland se llamaba
Dicen que se suicide**

**El 10 de julio en Texas
Un policía la arrestó
por no señalar la vuelta
a la cárcel se la llevó**

**I am going to sing you a corrido
about a woman who died
Sandra Bland was her name
They say she committed suicide**

**The 10th of July in Texas
A police officer arrested her
for not signaling a turn
to jail he took her**

**Era una mujer valiente
sus derechos conocía
Era una gran activista
y desafió a la policía**

**Brian era hombre soberbio
un policía prepotente
a Sandra Bland abusó
ahora lo sabe la gente**

**[Sandra] Conocía los peligros
de la discriminación
Decía que Black Lives Matter
Esa fue su perdición**

**Cuando Brian dijo a Sandra
que su cigarro apagara
ella le dijo que no
porque en su derecho estaba**

**Brian, bastante molesto
de su carro la sacó
con violencia y empujones
a la fuerza la arrestó**

**Estuvo presa tres días
no se supo que pasó
con una bolsa de plástico
dicen que sola se ahorcó**

**Tengan presente señores
la violencia seguirá
aunque se grabe en video
eso no te salvará**

**Vuela, vuela palomita
'this isn't your last stand'
aquí se cantan los versos
de la grande Sandra Bland**

**She was a fearless woman
who knew her rights
She was also an activist
And challenged the police officer**

**Brian was a proud man
An overbearing cop
He mistreated Sandra Bland
Everyone now knows that**

**Sandra knew the dangers
of racial discrimination
She said Black Lives Matter
That was her downfall**

**When Brian told Sandra
To put out her cigarette
She said no
because she knew her rights**

**Brian, clearly bothered,
Got her out of her car
With violence and pushes
He arrested her by force**

**She was in jail for three days
No one knows what happened
With a plastic bag
They say she suffocated herself**

**Be aware gentlemen
the violence will continue
Even if caught on video
That won't be enough to save you**

**Fly, fly little dove
This isn't your last stand
Here we sing verses
of the great Sandra Bland**