

# *The Story of Rey Mambo*

A Classroom Curriculum for Middle School  
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# *The Story of Rey Mambo*

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“Rey” Mambo (second from right) with his band. His wife, Lynn, is the vocalist.

Overview: This curriculum guide facilitates usage of an educational video based on an oral history with Marvin Baumel, a.k.a., Rey Mambo, bandleader of a group featuring Latin music. He came to Miami Beach in 1938 at age 13. He attended junior high and high school on Miami Beach. Rey was interviewed as part of the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. His full interview will be available online in Florida International University’s Digital Library.

Rey’s story was chosen as the subject of the video for this age group because he arrived on Miami Beach when he was middle school age and embraced cultural differences which allowed him to create a new identity for himself. We believe middle school youth will relate to Rey’s experiences, his love of music, his playful sense of humor and his positive personality.

*Related subjects: Miami Beach history, Art Deco architecture, vintage Latin music, history of bongos/percussion, importance of oral history, social studies, musicology, World War II.*



## How Marvin Baumel Becomes Rey Mambo



Marvin Baumel says in his interview that he fell in love with Miami Beach when he arrived at age 13 in 1938. He was immediately drawn to Latin music. He says he also loved the food and the girls. He decided that he wanted to “be Cuban.” So what did he do?

First, he studied Spanish and was fluent by the time he entered high school. Rey loved the beat of the bongos but was too poor to buy a set so he made some out of round Quaker Oats boxes tied together with string. He learned to play by listening and playing along with Latin music that he heard on radio broadcasts from Havana.

By the time he enrolled in Miami Beach High School, he was proficient\* in Spanish and on the bongos. He formed a band while in high school. When World War II came along, he was drafted. During his service years, he was a musician with the Khaki Kaballeros (*a corruption of the spelling of the Spanish word “caballeros,” or gentlemen*). They entertained soldiers in hospitals.



After the war was over, he and some fellow musicians got a gig at the Pan American hotel to play Latin music. The boss said he had to have a Spanish name for the ad in The Miami Herald.

So, on the spot, Marvin came up with Rey (Spanish for King) Mambo (a Latin dance just becoming popular at the time). So “Rey” and his musicians went onstage as Rey Mambo, they were a hit, got steady work and the name stuck. He goes by the name Rey to this day.

[\*Proficient means being very good at doing something.]

*What was going on in the world in 1938?* The United States was in the grips of **The Great Depression**, after the stock market crashed in 1929.

Many people were out of work. This is why Rey's father decided to move his family to Miami Beach. The Beach was the major tourist destination on the east coast and even though the Beach also experienced hard times, Rey's father felt his chances of providing for his family were better in Miami Beach, since it was a tourist resort.



In Europe, **Adolf Hitler** was making a name for himself as a military leader and maneuvering his way to power but the U.S. was not aware of how dangerous he was yet.



There was a building boom on Miami Beach. Much of what we know as South Beach today had been destroyed by a very powerful **hurricane in 1926**.

Developers and architects, certain of Miami Beach's future as a vacation resort, rebuilt hundreds of hotels and apartment buildings

in the style of architecture popular at that time - modern, streamlined, imitating the new age of machinery and speed. Later this style would be called "**Art Deco**," now a term applied to other buildings and art works made during the late 1920's up until the mid 1940's and the end of **World War II**.

**PAGE 4**







Even though the war was fought in Europe and the South Pacific, the City of Miami Beach was very involved in war preparations and felt very threatened by the presence of German submarines offshore, which destroyed many supply ships coming

up from the Gulf loaded with petroleum. Rey remembers tar balls washing up on the beaches from oil tankers which were destroyed offshore by German submarines.

There was a massive training program for **Army Air Corps** soldiers on Miami Beach. Soldiers were living in the hotels and drilling on the streets and beaches.



In 1942, Rey turned 18, the age at which young men were drafted into military service. Because of his musical background, he was given a job entertaining the troops to keep up their

spirits during the war. He met a young woman who was a singer also entertaining the troops, whom he married when the war was over. Lynn became the vocalist of his band.



Rey is retired now. He is very involved with his church and its activities. Occasionally, he gets interviewed by the media, recalling the glory days of Latin music. He has enjoyed working on this project, going through his archives and scrapbooks and telling stories.

## *Importance Of Oral History For Social Studies*

Oral histories are interviews in which the interview subject talks about personal memories of growing up, giving glimpses of daily life and accounts of the personal impact of historic events. Oral histories give us an idea of what every day life was like for average people. Reading, watching, or listening to the accounts of different people remembering the same period of time gives a deep and wide perspective on events and historical developments. Without oral histories, the study of the past would focus just on events and not how people were affected by the events.

### *Doing An Oral History*

Think about an older person in your family, neighborhood or faith community who might be interesting to talk to. Ask permission to interview her or him about their life and share it with others. You may be surprised at how eager most older people are to talk about their childhoods and growing up. There are many differences in experience between the generations but there are also things you will find you have in common.

Here are some suggested questions to get you started:

1. What was your daily life like growing up?
2. Who were your friends, how did you meet, and what did you do together?
3. What was school like? Did you enjoy it? What kinds of extracurricular activities did you participate in?
4. What important events occurred during your life that had a big impact on you?

Be sure to listen carefully and ask questions if you need to if you are uncertain about certain facts and feelings.

Writing all this down is hard and important details can be missed. If you have a way to videotape or do an audio recording, that is better. Be sure record the date and name of the person you are talking to.

***Note to Teachers:** If students have cell phones or can borrow one from a parent that can record video, this can be downloaded to a computer. Otherwise, there are inexpensive tape recorders available at Best Buy or Brands Mart, if the school does not have any available. If your school has a television production studio or a place where morning announcements are televised, perhaps the interview subject could to the school to record the interview on school equipment if that can be arranged.*

**Writing Themes For Language Arts:**

1. Imagine Rey's world at age 13: no cell phones, no Internet, no computers. How different would you life be today without all these things? How would you research your school projects? How would you communicate with your friends? Do you think young people were less social then? Did they know as much?

2. Draw Your Family Tree: Write your name on the trunk. The branches on the left represent your father's family, on the right side, your mother's. See how high up the tree (how far back in time) you and your family can remember names by writing them on the branches.

While asking a parent or family member for names, find out where your parents were born and where your grandparents were born. If they were not born in the U.S. or you were not born in the U.S., when did you or they come? What was it like adjusting to a new place? Are there any family stories about overcoming the challenges of a new environment and new culture?

3. Pick someone on the tree to write about. If he or she is still alive and you can communicate with them, ask them about their childhood and write down what they say. You may write it in "first person" or "third person,"\* whichever feels more natural to you.

\*First person is using the word "I" and "we" to tell a story or explain events. Third person is using "he or she or they" to tell a story or explain events.

4. Rey was good at learning a new language, making music, and drawing. What talents do you have that you could develop? Do you have an interest or a hobby that you enjoy? Explain what your talent or interest is and why you like it.

5. Download and listen to some of the Latin music popular when Rey was in school and compare it to Latin music today. Are there any similarities? What are the differences, if any? Is there music from a culture different from yours that you especially enjoy? What is it that you like about it? Describe the effect that listening to the music has on you?

***Note to Teachers:** The archive containing Rey's full interview is projected to be online sometime in 2014. There will be a general announcement. Once the full interview is accessible online, here is another activity which will require students to research the site independently or in class via white board: Below is an activity related to use of the archive:*

Listen to the part of the original interview with Rey. Choose a quote from him that you especially liked. Write it down and explain why you liked it and what it tells you about Rey as a person. Does it relate to your life? Does it make you curious about the past? Does it help you understand why a specific time or event in history was so important to the people who lived through it?

### ***Bibliography***

Miami Beach: A History, by Howard Kleinberg, Arva Moore Parks, John Gillan.

Miami Beach Memories: A Nostalgic Chronicle of Days Gone By, by Joann Biondi

Sunshine, Stone Crabs and Cheesecake: The Story of Miami Beach, by Seth Bramson

Miami Beach Historical Association, [www.miamibeachhistory.org](http://www.miamibeachhistory.org)

City of Miami Beach Historic Photo Gallery  
[http://web.miamibeachfl.gov/cityclerk/historic\\_gallery/historicphotogallery.aspx](http://web.miamibeachfl.gov/cityclerk/historic_gallery/historicphotogallery.aspx)

South Beach Deco Step by Step, by Iris Chase.

WW2 Vets and the Edison Hotel  
[http://www.miamibeachvets.com/edison\\_history/index.html](http://www.miamibeachvets.com/edison_history/index.html)



## *The Music*

Rey recommends listening to WDNA, 88.9 FM, each day Latin Jazz Quarter, 12:00PM-3:00PM, and Latin Jazz Quarter, 8pm-11:00pm.

Names of famous Latin musicians: Conjunto Casino (Havana) Orchestra Riverside. Roberto Faz (singer and band), Miguelito Valdez, Sonora Matancera and Celia Cruz (the Cuban Ella Fitzgerald).

The later mambo period: Damaso Perez Prado (Cuban later went to Mexico), Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, Frank “Machito” Grillo (groundbreaker).

Miami Dade College Latin Jazz Institute, Ed Calle, plays with Palo (band) access on Facebook, Google Ed Calle



“Rey” Baumel with Nautilus Middle School Jazz Band Members