

Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saints: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil

Lesson Idea 1

Geography of Northeast Brazil: Design a Diorama

Grade levels 7–12 (this lesson can be adapted for varied grade levels)

Summary

Through researching articles about the *caatinga* biome, viewing online images and maps of this area, and studying aspects of life in the *sertão*, featured in *Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saints: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil* exhibition, students will become inspired to recreate a small three-dimensional diorama that reflects geographic aspects of this dry region. The diorama may depict physical features of the land (flora, fauna, or people) and/or the human relationship to and impact on the region. Students will use varied materials to create an image of what they envision this region to look like, to capture a moment in time that illustrates people, place, and the environment using everyday materials to make a small-scale three-dimensional representation.

Objectives

- Students will understand aspects of the *caatinga* biome in the semi-arid region of Brazil's *sertão*.
- Students will research and learn about some of the physical qualities and flora and fauna of the *caatinga* biome.
- Students will understand some of the Brazilian states that make up the *sertão* area.
- Students will research and learn about some of the human inhabitants (past and present) of the *sertão* and their relationship to the land.
- Students will understand the concept of a diorama.
- Students will convey information they have researched to create their own three-dimensional miniature bio-dioramas of a scene from the dry backlands to illustrate an aspect of this region they find most interesting.

About the *Sertão* in Northeast Brazil . . .

The land, plants, and animals

The *sertao* (ser-TOUN) region (the dry backlands of northeast Brazil) is part of the *caatinga* biome in South America and dips into eight different states in northeast Brazil. The *caatinga* biome is a very large dry forest in South America that occupies about 60 percent of the Northeast, and makes up about 90 percent of the Brazilian state of Ceará. It rains here on average less than 30 inches a year,

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which makes it difficult to grow much. The *sertão* region is very susceptible to drought and this combined with poor, rocky soil affects all life forms. Deciduous scrub forests, *caatinga* (dry thorny brush), and other types of plants (cacti, bromeliads, and succulents) and grassy savannas grow in this the area. There are approximately 148 species of mammals found in the *caatinga* biome including the three-banded armadillo, the Lesser anteater, and the puma as well as 348 species of birds, 185 types of fish, and 154 species of reptiles. Many plant and animal forms are under threat and stress due to hunting and the impact of human population. Some species of palms and fruits are cultivated here. Vulnerability to drought is ever present.

People and impact

Approximately 45 million people live in the *sertão* and exist on short-cycle farming, cattle herding, or breeding animals. Poverty is high due to limited resources, irregular rain patterns, and limited sources of income. Chronic drought and misuse and abuse of the land (unregulated harvesting of timber for firewood, excessive harvesting of fruits, and overgrazing by cattle, goats, and sheep) create more desert-like conditions and threatens the land.

Vaqueiros (va-KEHR-ohs) (Portuguese for cowboys) live in the *sertão* and make a living catching, roping, and selling cattle to merchants as cattle herders. The Portuguese cowboy typically wears leather garments to protect himself from the harsh conditions of the region. The cattle ranching tradition comes to South America from Spain—the region’s dry climate with sparse grass requires vast amounts of land in order for herds of cattle to obtain enough to eat.

Retirantes (hey-chee-RAHN-tes) are the migrating rural poor of the *sertão* who are forced to leave their homeland to escape drought, poverty, and starvation. They leave in search of a better life and hopefully to obtain a better livelihood in the cities of the South. Many people in the dry Northeast still depend on subsistence agriculture. Poverty and underemployment is high in the region.

A famous historic figure of the Northeast dry backlands is Lampião (born in 1897 as Vergulino Ferreira da Silva). The son of subsistence farmers, he formed a group of bandits (*cangaceiros*) (kon-ga-SEHR-oh) who killed cattle, raided villages for supplies, took hostages for ransom, and tortured and maimed people. He justified his actions by taking from the rich to give to the poor for what he perceived to be justice. Lampião’s “Robin Hood-like” behaviour made him an enemy of the police who placed a high bounty on capturing him. Because of Lampião’s familiarity of the *sertão* and his connections, the police had difficulty tracking him down. His girlfriend Maria Bonita accompanied Lampião in his various illegal activities. It was not until the summer of 1938 that Lampião, Maria Bonita, and his *cangaceiros* met their violent end at the hands of the police. After their death, the heads of Lampião and Maria Bonita were put on display in the state of Bahia to prove that the bandit king was finally dead. Lampião, Maria Bonita, and the *cangaceiros* have lived on in the lore of the Northeast to this day inspiring many stories, books, and movies. Despite his illegal lifestyle, many people of the Northeast consider him a hero.

Materials Needed:

- Maps of Brazil (see regional maps of the *sertão* and *caatinga* as part of the resource section)

- Access to the internet for additional geography research and access to photographic images of the *sertão*
- A diorama planning worksheet (see resources section)
- A small cardboard box (shoebox size or larger if desired) to create the illusion of looking into a “room”
- Colored paper and magazines (issues of *National Geographic* can be useful)
- Tagboard or other stiff paper for inserting drawn images into diorama to stand vertically
- Markers
- Glue (hot glue sticks and a hot glue gun may be most useful)
- Tape
- Scissors
- Miscellaneous materials to create ‘realistic’ miniature versions of rocks, soil, plant life (clay, reindeer moss, gravel, paper, cardboard, paint, sticks, etc.)

Lesson Time

- one class period for visiting the exhibition *Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saint: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil*
- one class period to teach and discuss in detail *sertão* geography
- one class period to present the bio-diorama assignment and have students plan and sketch the diorama idea and complete additional research
- one class period to work on the diorama (if desired)
- one class period to showcase the student dioramas and have each student present about his or her work

Lesson Procedures

Step One (Research, brainstorm, and plan)

Following a visit to the *Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saint: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil* exhibition and an in-class discussion about the geography of northeast Brazil (the *sertão* region in particular), present the assignment of designing a diorama inspired by the flora, fauna, landscape, and people of this dry backlands region. Explain that a diorama is a small scene that relates a moment in time and place and creates an illusion of three-dimensional space about a particular theme or topic. For this assignment, students will decide what aspect of the *sertão* they might choose to depict using a variety of materials. **Will they choose a scene that focuses on an aspect of animal life that reveals the animal’s relationship to the land? Will they choose to visually describe a relationship between animals in the *sertão* and the people? Will they choose a scene that describes the plants and landforms of the region and how humans interact with them? Will they imagine and describe a particular person or imagined group of people in the backlands?** Invite students to conduct additional research and use the diorama planning worksheet (included as a resource in this lesson) to help refine the idea.

Step Two (Demonstrate, innovate, and process)

Show students examples of dioramas from museums (permanent installations in natural history museums) or other diorama small scale examples made by students. Have students make an inventory of key elements to include in the diorama that best describe the scene desired and make a brainstormed list of potential materials that might work best to visually describe these elements (thinking in small scale and three-dimensionally if possible). Share that hobby store miniatures, small toys, clay, twigs, branches, pebbles, and thrift store finds are all good sources for finding inexpensive ways to flesh out ideas. Before students are tasked with creating their diorama work, demonstrate some techniques for making use of boxes and ways to creatively manipulate everyday materials to create surface textures or miniature effects (branches or twigs for trees, gravel for boulders etc.). Explain that students will need to work on the diorama **from the back of the box to the front**. The background and the “ground” surface areas will need attention first, then other details can be added in front of it. Introduce the visual concepts of foreground, middleground, and background, and share with students that to create the illusion of depth in the diorama, students might consider making the imagery in the “distance” smaller in scale (in the background) than the objects in the front (foreground) of the diorama.

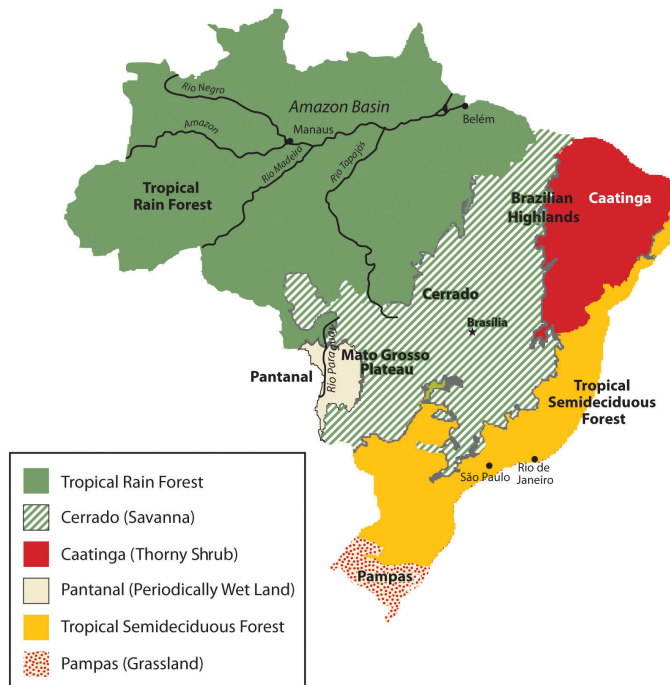
Step Three (Create)

Designate a timeframe for completing the diorama. If class work time is allocated, set up stations with additional materials (papers, magazines, three dimensional objects, paint, paint brushes, and a hot glue gun and glue sticks) and make sure students know how to properly use materials. Keep reference materials (images of the region) or a computer workstation handy in the classroom for research and inspiration.

Step Four (Reflect, discuss, and relate)

Once the dioramas are completed, invite students to discuss with each other as part of a class discussion what aspect of the *sertão* they chose to depict and why. Students can also share what they found most challenging in creating this work, what they found to be most successful, what they liked the most in the project, and didn't like. The dioramas can be displayed in the classroom as part of a larger Brazil unit of study and/or viewed by other students/classes or paired with a cordel poetry writing lesson—all students could write poems about the *sertão* in relation to the dioramas created in this lesson.

Resources:



<http://botany.si.edu/projects/cpd/sa/sa19.htm>

<http://www.acaatinga.org.br/english/>

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Diorama Planning Worksheet

A diorama is scene that is recreated in three-dimensions that describes a moment in time. This diorama will reflect a scene from the *sertão* (dry backlands) region of northeast Brazil that covers part of eight different Brazilian states. Use this worksheet (front and back) to brainstorm and flesh out ideas for making a diorama.

List three different animals found in the <i>sertão</i> region.			
List three different plants found in the <i>sertão</i> region.			
List three different trees found in the <i>sertão</i> region.			
Describe some of the people who live in or have lived in the <i>sertão</i> and what they do.			
What three words might best describe the <i>sertão</i> ?			
Imagine scenes of people interacting with animals, the land, or each other in the <i>sertão</i> . What happens in the scene?			

Choose a *sertão* scene that most interests you to recreate and write the title here:

List the things you need/want to include in the diorama to describe this scene.	What kind of everyday items or materials might you need or use to make each item?	Where can you find this item?	What other techniques might be used for the "ground," background, foreground, and middleground, of this scene?

Connections to Common Core Standards

Standards for English Language Arts

(example standard grade 7)

Reading Standard for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details

- Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inference drawn from the text.
- Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g. how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text; including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g. how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).
- Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.
- Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

Writing Standards (substitute "create" and "image" for the purposes of making a diorama)

- (Create) Write informative/explanatory (imagery) texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
 - Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information . . .
 - Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details . . .

Text Types and Purpose

- (Create) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generative additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source . . .

Speaking and Listening Standards

Comprehension and Collaboration

- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners
- Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched materials under study, explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or use to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
- Follow rules for collegial discussions. . .

Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(example standard grade 7)

Key Ideas and Details

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- Identify key steps in a text’s description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- Describe how a text presents information (e.g. sequentially, comparatively, casually).
- Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

Connections to National Visual Arts Standards

(example standard grade 7)

Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work

Va:Cr1.1.7a

Apply methods to overcome creative blocks.

Va:Cr1.2.7a

Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work

Va:Cr2.17a

Demonstrate persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods, and approaches in creating works of art or design.

Va:Cr2.3.7a

Apply visual organization strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.