

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

Lesson Idea 2

Create your Own Cordel: Poetry and Prints

Grade levels 6–12 (this lesson can be adapted for varied grade levels)

Summary

Using a reproduction of an authentic work of *literatura de cordel* (part of the education outreach kit that accompanies the *Bandits and Heroes* exhibition) students will read excerpts from a poem translated into English, be able to see and sound out Portuguese words to better understand the poem’s original cadence, and reflect upon the meaning of the poem and what it says about life in Brazil. Students will also evaluate if the illustrated cover of the poem successfully relates its story and if the image would help “sell” the poetry book to a prospective buyer. Each student as part of this activity will write his or her own poem about an admired person, place, or a news event that relates an experience or an opinion that is personal, local, or national. Students will design an image using a simple printmaking technique to decorate a colored paper front and back cover for their poem. Each poem will be printed and published in a four or eight page booklet using a computer, printer, paper, and staples. Students will have the opportunity (if desired by the instructor) to orally perform their work as a classroom activity, a “slam” poetry competition, or as a public performance. The individual cordel books can also be sold to the public if desired.

This lesson can be paired with the bio diorama lesson to describe aspects of the northeast of Brazil.

Objectives

- Students will learn about and understand the Brazilian folk art form of *literatura de cordel*.
- Students will understand how to make a poem booklet.
- Students will learn to write a poem that describes something about everyday life relevant to themselves or the world they live in.
- Students will understand how to design a cover to illustrate and accompany a poem they write using the medium of printmaking.
- Students will orally present and perform (and potentially sell) their poetry through an in classroom or a community performance.

About Cordel Literature

Literatura de cordel as it is known in Portuguese, translates to English as “stories on a string,” and is a hybrid of popular and folk poetry from Brazil. A folk tradition in Brazilian cities and towns for many years, it has in recent past seen a revitalization, made possible by easy production and distribution using personal computers and printers. Historically these poems reflected the stories or beliefs, pastimes, and pleasures of the people of northeast Brazil, the *nordestinos*, and were printed on inexpensive paper and sold to the public in markets and at festivals.

To sell poetry in the markets and at festivals, the poetry booklet itself had to be visually pleasing (colored paper covers were decorated with woodcut prints) and attractively displayed. Excerpts of the poem also might be theatrically performed in the marketplace to help make a sale. The seller would not perform the climax or end of the poem in order to persuade listeners to buy it. Once purchased at the market, the poems were brought home to be read to others in a family.

These 4 x 6 inch poem books contain a poem that is written on eight or more pages that is generally formatted in six or seven line free verse (some poems in the past might have been as many as 60 pages). *Literatura de cordel* generally contains rhyming words that occur on the even (not odd lines) of verse of a six-lined stanza (lines 2, 4, 6). From reading works of cordel literature, one can understand aspects of local, national, and international life in Brazil, the soul of the people.

Materials Needed:

- reproduction of a booklet of *literatura de cordel* (included in the education outreach kit that accompanies the exhibition)
- paper and pencils for drafting and writing a poem or sketching ideas for a print design
- access to a computer and printer to type and format a finished poem
- 8 ½ x 11 inch sheets of computer paper (two sheets are needed for an eight page poetry book, only one if a four page book is desired)
- glue stick (if needed)
- stapler and staples
- two styrofoam meat trays (one cut into a square shape 5 x 7 inches for print block, the other used for holding printing ink and rolling the ink onto the brayer)
- scissors
- newsprint or other inexpensive paper to test print block
- heavy sheets of colored paper 8 ½ x 11 inches (one sheet is needed to make a front and back cover by folding it in half but several might be needed to pull a print for obtaining the best image)
- black printing ink
- printing brayer to spread the ink
- paper towels or wipes

Lesson Time:

- One class period for viewing *Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saint: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil*
- One class period to introduce and contextualize *literatura de cordel* and present the project assignment
- One class period (if desired as in class work) in which to write and refine a poem
- One class period to design and print a cover
- One class period to assemble cordel literature booklets and/or practice reading poetry as a small group
- One class period (if desired as in class work) to perform in front of the entire class or other audience

Lesson Procedures:

Step One

Following a visit to the *Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saints: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil* exhibition and an in-class discussion about the history, function, and format of *literatura de cordel* in Brazil, invite each student to brainstorm topic ideas for writing a narrative poem about an admired person, place, or news event that relates an experience or an opinion that is personal, local, or national. Using the reproduction of a *literatura de cordel* poem (included in the education outreach kit) read a few stanzas aloud in Portuguese so students can hear the rhyme and cadence of the structure, then share the meaning of the English translation of the words. Provide instruction about the poem format (six lines per stanza, the rhyme occurs on the even lines (2, 4, 6) of each stanza and that the poem is free form—it can be comprised of many stanzas.

Step Two

Have each student draft a poem and encourage them to edit it for grammar and make revisions. Invite them to determine the finished size of the cordel booklet. Should it be four or eight printed pages, based on the length of the poem? The text can be typed and graphically laid out using varied font styles and sizes. Have students take one or two 8 ½ x 11 inch sheets of paper and fold them in half to help visually decide which stanzas should appear on which halves of each page, so when the booklet is stapled in the fold, the poem reads like a book left to right. The poem can be typed and laid out in this format using a word document and printed then folded in the center. Younger students can assemble the “book” first, folding in half one or two pages of paper together and then cutting and pasting the printed out poem text using scissors and glue stick to paste text directly onto each page of the finished booklet.

Step Three

In one class period, have students examine the cover image from cordel literature and discuss if the students think the image depicted helps illustrate the poem. Ask students if they encountered this poetry booklet in a market, would they pick it up, study it, or buy it just based on this cover? Why or why not? Using scratch paper, have students brainstorm and sketch rough ideas for an image or design they each might use to illustrate their own poem and serve as the *literatura de cordel* cover. Discuss and demonstrate how a simple relief print (using styrofoam 5 x 7 inch sheets cut from a

meat tray as the print block) can be made by using a dull pencil to draw into the surface of the print block. Demonstrate how to ink the brayer by rolling the brayer over a small amount of ink squeezed out of a tube onto the other meat tray. Roll the brayer over the surface of the print block. Show students how to pull a print by laying a sheet of paper over the surface of the inked print block, rubbing over the surface of paper, then gently pulling the paper off the block. **Stress to students that the image is printed on the paper in reverse of how it is drawn into the surface of the tray. This is especially important if students wish to include text, like the title of their poem, in the printed image.** Also emphasize and demonstrate that if using a singular 8 ½ x 11 inch sheet of colored paper for the front and back cover, share that students will need to print the image directly onto of the far right half of the paper 8 ½ x 11 inch paper when laid horizontally (placing the image to the right of the fold if folding it in half and opening it) to make a front and back cover. Prints can also be printed on white paper, cut out, and then pasted to a sheet of colored paper (the right half of the center fold) for making the cover. The text/title of the poem can also be printed separately, cut out, and pasted onto the front cover if desired. Lastly, invite students to add their names to the work if desired.

Step Four

Allow students a class period to design, ink, and pull prints of their cover image so they might select one for a finished cover when dry. Have them assemble the pages for the poem in the correct order, so when the sheets are folded in half, the poem reads like a book. Have them fold the sheet of colored paper for the cover (making sure the print will appear on the front when folded in half). Using a stapler, demonstrate to students how to staple the binding of the booklet in the center fold. Spread all the sheets open and in the fold, staple in the middle (on top of the fold exactly in the crease) and at the top and bottom ends of the fold. The *literatura de cordel* should now be a booklet.

Step Five

Allow time for students to practice reading his or her poem aloud in small groups for feedback or have them practice at home. Remind them of how the original cordel poets in the markets had to “perform” the work in order to sell it and make the words come alive. Demonstrate ways to read poetry using voice, emphasis, inflection, and or facial and hand gestures to make it engaging for the listener/viewer. If desired, have students read their works publicly (to an audience in or outside the school) as a public program/performance. Consider having students make multiple copies of their works of poetry and sell them at a student fair or other event as a class.

Resources:

Reproduction of excerpts from *literatura de cordel* included in the education outreach kit.

Connections to Common Core Standards

Standards for English Language Arts

(example standard grade 6)

Reading Standards for Literature

Key Ideas and Detail

- Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- Describe how a particular story or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
- Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

Writing Standards for Literature

Text Types and Purposes

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
 - Introduce a topic; organize ideas and concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
 - Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
 - Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
 - Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
 - Establish and maintain a formal style.
 - Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented.

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
 - Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
 - Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
 - Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shift from one time frame or setting to another.
 - Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.
 - Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
- Gather relevant information from multiple texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

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 studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
 - Follow rules by collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
 - Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.
 - Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

Language Standards

Conventions of Standard English

- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and speaking when writing.

Knowledge of Language

- Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression

Connections to National Visual Arts Standards

(example standard grade 6)

Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work

VA:Cr1.1.6a

Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.

VA:Cr1.2.6a

Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work

VA:Cr2.1.6a

Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.

Refine and complete artistic work

VA:Cr3.1.6a

Reflect on whether personal artwork conveys the intended meaning and revise accordingly.

Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

VA:Reg.1.6a

Develop and apply relevant criteria to evaluate a work of art.

Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

VA:Cn10.1.6a

Generate a collection of ideas reflecting current interests and concerns that could be investigated in art-making.

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

VA:Cn1.1.6a

Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.