

## MATERIALS

- styrofoam printing sheets 4" x 4½"
- water soluble printing ink or acrylic paint
- brayers
- cookie sheets
- drawing or scrap paper 4" x 4 ½"
- copy or colored paper 8 ½" x 5 ½",
- newspaper
- pencils
- erasers
- ballpoint pens or sharp clay tools
- wipes or paper towels
- string & clothes pins for hanging

## RESOURCES

- Museum of International Folk Art - online collections  
<http://collection.internationalfolkart.org/collections>
- The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress  
<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/Symposia/litordel/>

## VOCABULARY (Definitions on page 4)

- **Colonists**
- **Poetry**
- **Indigenous**
- **Folktale**
- **Festival**
- **Legend**
- **Literatura de Cordel**
- **Troubadour**
- **Woodcut**

## NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS

### STANDARDS

- **Creating:** Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- **Presenting:** Interpreting and sharing artistic work.
- **Responding:** Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- **Connecting:** Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.



*Iemanja*, woodblock print by José Francisco Borges. Bezerro, Pernambuco, Brazil, 2013. Museum of International Folk Art, gift of Tesoros Trading Company. Photo by Carrie Haley

# Literatura de Cordel

## INTRODUCTION

*Literatura de Cordel* (Literature on a String) refers to small hand-printed chapbooks of *poetry*, which address popular themes, *folktales*, and *legends*, native to the dry, impoverished interior of northeastern Brazil. Following a medieval European *troubadour* tradition introduced by the Portuguese, the Brazilian poets were often the salesmen, singing the stories out loud to a mostly illiterate rural population. Some of the poets are also self-taught woodcut artists, and the covers of their chapbooks feature simple black-on-white images relating to the poems.

## OBJECTIVES

- To understand how *literatura de cordel* is an art form used to tell stories, to entertain and to convey important information in Brazil (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn about the materials used to create *literatura de cordel* (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
- To find solutions in the process of creating stories on a string (creating and performing).

# Brasil & Arte Popular



Map from Viajrobrasil.com

The varied cultural mix found throughout the vast region of Brazil not only draws from the original *indigenous* inhabitants, but also from the Portuguese *colonists*, who began to settle there in the 16th century. Enslaved Africans brought by the Europeans contributed their own religions and rituals, as well as vibrant arts, music, and dance. Eventually, traditions merged to create the dynamic cultural fusion that is so uniquely Brazilian.

During the 20th century folk artists found that they had more freedom to portray their history, folklore, and daily life. Religious practitioners could carry out their rituals openly, and festival performers were able to draw from old traditions and use contemporary issues to create lively pageants and dramas.



*Forró na Fazenda*, woodblock print by Ivan Borges, Bezerro, Pernambuco, Brazil, 2004. Museum of International Folk Art, gift of Tesoros Trading Company. Photo by Carrie Haley

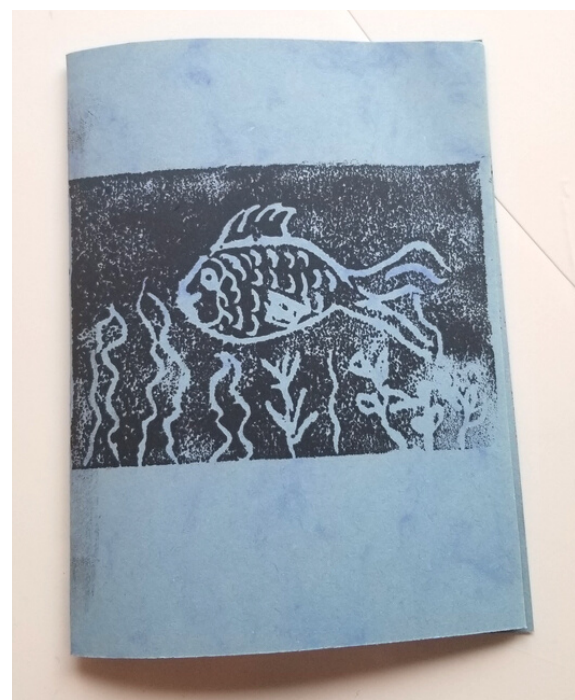


## MOTIVATION

- Discuss different ways that people communicate with your students. What are their favorite ways to get the message out? You can talk about newspapers, magazines, the internet, poetry slams, as many forms as possible. Introduce the way that Brazilian folk artists use literatura de cordel to tell stories, sing songs, make jokes and get important information out to people.
- Tell the students that they will be making their own literatura de cordel. They can write their own story or poem or illustrate an existing story or poem. Students should think of an image to create for the cover. Remind them that letters and numbers need to be written in reverse to be read.

## PROCEDURE

1. Students draw ideas for the print on the drawing or scrap paper, then lay the paper on the styrofoam plates and press into the styrofoam with a pencil, pen or clay tool.
2. Roll out the printing ink or paint onto a cookie sheet using a brayer.
3. Place the styrofoam with the engraved design facing up on a stack of newspaper pages.
4. Roll the ink onto the styrofoam.
5. Fold the 5 ½" x 8 ½" paper in half for the cover.
6. Place the cover paper on top of the inked styrofoam so that the fold is on left hand side and rub.
7. Lift off the paper and admire.
8. Hang the prints on string with clothes pins.



## EVALUATION

- Display the prints on a bulletin board with descriptive labels made by the students.
- Have a workshop day where your students teach other classes how to make relief prints. Have a print swap after many students have created prints.

## EXTENSIONS & CONNECTIONS

### • Social Studies

Have students visit a local newspaper or press where they can see how automatic presses operate. They can write about the differences between the types of printing when they return to class. Extend their writing or discuss the way that computer directed printers relate to the other methods.

Collect images of graphic arts from many countries. Have students compare the styles and uses of graphic arts.

### • Music

Listen to selections of Brazilian music and study the instrumentation.

### • Geography

José Borges uses a very hard wood which is not found outside of his country to carve his woodblocks. Have students research the types of trees that grow in Brazil and explore their qualities.

## VOCABULARY

1. **Colonists** - people who settle in a new country.
2. **Indigenous** - originating in a particular region or environment.
3. **Festival** - a time of celebration marked by special observances.
4. **Literatura de Cordel** - stories on a string, Brazilian folk pamphlets with graphic covers and text inside.
5. **Poetry** - literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm.
6. **Folktale** - a story originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word of mouth.
7. **Legend** - a genre of folklore that consists of a narrative featuring human actions perceived or believed both by teller and listeners to have taken place within human history.
8. **Troubadour** - a French medieval lyric poet composing and singing in Provençal in the 11th to 13th centuries, especially on the theme of courtly love.
9. **Woodcut** - a printing technique done by carving a block of wood to create a design, formerly and widely used for illustrations in books.



*O Vendedor De Ovos* (The Egg Seller), woodcut print by José Francisco Borges, ca. 2000. Museum of International Folk Art, IFAF Collection.

# Literatura de Cordel of Pernambuco



Booklet - *O Homem Gosta de Mulher e Mulher Gosta de Dinheiro* (The Man Likes the Woman, The Woman Likes Money) by José Soares, Olinda, Pernambuco, Brazil, 1995, Gift from the Dr. James Bert Smith and Dr. Beej Nierengarten-Smith Collection. Photo by Blair Clark.

*Literatura de Cordel* (Literature on a String) refers to small hand-printed chapbooks of *poetry*, which address popular themes, *folktales*, and *legends*, native to the dry, impoverished interior of northeastern Brazil. Up until recently these booklets were primarily sold at fairs and open markets in Recife and the interior of Pernambuco, displayed hanging from string. Following a medieval European *troubadour* tradition introduced by the Portuguese, the Brazilian poets were often the salesmen, singing the stories out loud to a mostly illiterate rural population. Some of the poets are also self-taught *woodcut* artists, and the covers of their chapbooks feature simple black-on-white images relating to the poems.

One of the most famous cordel poets and illustrators is José Francisco Borges, who likes to be called J. Borges. He was born in 1935 in the small town of Bezerros in the interior of Pernambuco and grew up helping his father in the fields. When he was 20 years old, he bought a set of chapbooks from a local poet and became an itinerant peddler, selling them in the plazas and markets of small towns. They sold well, so he decided to write his own. He paid a woodcut artist to do a cover illustration for his first booklet but soon taught himself to do the woodcuts. His images became popular with other poets who hired him to do the covers and print the text for their cordel. Other well-known authors and woodcut artists from Pernambuco are José Severino Cristóvão, José Ferreira da Silva (Dila), José Costa Leite, and Marcelo Soares. Abraão Bezerra Batista, in Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará, has also been doing similar work.

## WOODBLOCK PRINTS OF PERNAMBUCO AND CEARÁ

In the 1960s, J. Borges realized that a market was developing just for the images on his *literatura de cordel*. By enlarging the black-and-white woodcut prints to folio-size or larger, he could create a freestanding art form. He began carving larger wood blocks to produce single sheet images of religious ceremonies, festivals, and social dances, as well as scenes from folklore and everyday life. This work caught the attention of publishers, art collectors, and gallery owners. Since the 1970s, Borges has received increasing orders for the prints. By the late 1980s, he was experimenting with colored ink to enliven the scenes. This style has continued along with the traditional black-on-white images.

With the success of the larger woodcut prints, other cordel artists, such as José Costa Leite, Marcelo Soares, and Abraão Bezerra Batista, began producing single sheet images as well. J. Borges also encouraged members of his family to get involved in the work. His brother Amaro Francisco and Amaro's wife, Nena, became skilled woodcut artists developing their own styles. Borges brought his adopted son, J. Miguel da Silva, into his workshop to assist and learn the art form. He has become very respected in his own right. Borges's younger son, Ivan, grew up in the workshop and is now producing beautiful, detailed images.



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## CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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## WEBSITES

Museum of International Folk Art - online collections  
<http://collection.internationalfolkart.org/collections>

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress - Literatura de Cordel: Continuity and Change in Brazilian Popular Literature  
<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/Symposia/litcordel/>

## VIDEOS

Library of Congress - video/film, 2015  
*Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera Discusses Literatura de Cordel*  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/webcast-6921>