

Exploring Community and Personal Identity through Brazilian Art

Nicholas C. Brooks

Graduate Student, Art Education

University of Texas at Austin

Topic: Community involvement, art, creative expression, and problem solving

Intended grade level: High School (Level II and above)

Unit Time Frame: approximately 3 weeks (1-hour class period per day)

This unit is intended to assist in students' identification, definition, and understanding of the importance of the communities in which they participate, and their individual role in them. During this unit, students will discuss current issues faced in their communities (discrimination, poverty, homelessness, etc.), and investigate communities in Brazil facing similar issues. They will discuss issues Brazilians face in their communities, how students' own communities compare, and what can be learned from their Brazilian counterparts. Also the role of art, music, and performance will be discussed and what role specific organizations (and their student participants) and artists play in their communities. In culmination of the unit, students will create individual projects in performance, multimedia, or studio art representing their understanding and/or ideas about how their community functions and relates to themes studied in Brazilian art and performance.

Exploring Community and Personal Identity through Brazilian Art

Nicholas C. Brooks
Graduate Student, Art Education
University of Texas at Austin

Intended Age Group: High School

Subject: Visual Arts

Time Period: approximately 3 weeks, five one-hour class sessions per week

Established Goals:

Expand students' awareness of Brazilian art as well as increase knowledge of Brazil's geography, cultures, peoples, and practices.

Expand participants' awareness of their community(s) by:

- Identifying local community(s)

- Identifying individual roles in their community(s)

- Identifying the benefits of participation in a community

Facilitate an exploration of the participants' personal and communal identity through various arts projects and researching selected arts organizations.

Further develop artistic skills including studio art and multimedia production, as well as interpretation and symbolism.

Help students realize a new purpose for art besides personal enjoyment.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, Visual Arts Standards:

Art Level II:

(1) Four basic strands—perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation—provide broad, unifying structures for organizing the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire. Students rely on their perceptions of the environment, developed through increasing visual awareness and sensitivity to surroundings, memory, imagination, and life experiences, as a source for creating artworks. They express their thoughts and ideas creatively, while challenging their imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and problem-solving skills.

(2) By analyzing artistic styles and historical periods students develop respect for the traditions and contributions of diverse cultures. Students respond to and analyze artworks, thus

contributing to the development of lifelong skills of making informed judgments and evaluations.

Knowledge and skills.

(1) Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment. The student is expected to:

- (A) interpret visual parallels between the structures of natural and human-made environments; and
- (B) compare suitability of art materials and processes to express specific ideas relating to visual themes, using precise art vocabulary.

(2) Creative expression/performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. The student is expected to:

- (A) formulate multiple solutions to expand personal themes that demonstrate intent;
- (B) apply design skills in creating practical applications, clarifying presentations, and defining choices made by consumers; and
- (C) select from a variety of art media and tools to communicate specific ideas in drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, fiberart, jewelry, photography/filmmaking, and electronic media-generated art.

(3) Historical/cultural heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to:

- (A) study a selected historical period or style of art;
- (B) analyze specific characteristics of artworks in various cultures; and
- (C) select and research career and vocational choices in art.

(4) Response/evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to:

- (A) select and critique artworks in progress, making decisions about future directions in personal work; and
- (B) select and critique original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers or others.

Art Level III:

Knowledge and skills.

(1) Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment. The student is expected to:

- (A) analyze visual characteristics of natural and human-made subjects in a variety of ways, illustrating flexibility in solving problems, creating multiple solutions, and thinking imaginatively; and
- (B) analyze visual qualities to express the meaning of images and symbols, using precise art vocabulary.

(2) Creative expression/performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. The student is expected to:

- (A) solve visual problems by planning and attempting a variety of solutions;
- (B) solve visual problems and develop multiple solutions for designing ideas, clarifying presentations, and evaluating consumer choices, using design skills; and

(C) select from a variety of art media and tools to express intent in drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, fiberart, jewelry, photography/filmmaking, and electronic media-generated art.

(3) Historical/cultural heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to:

(A) study a selected period, style, or movement in art;

(B) trace influences of various cultures on contemporary artworks; and

(C) analyze a selected career opportunity in art, identifying the training, skills, and plan of action necessary for realizing such a goal.

(4) Response/evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to:

(A) select artworks for a personal portfolio based on evaluation of developmental progress, competency in problem-solving, and a variety of visual ideas; and

(B) analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions to form conclusions about formal qualities, historical and cultural contexts, intents, and meanings and to show innovation and provide examples of in-depth exploration of one or more themes.

Understandings:

This unit is intended to assist students in identifying and exploring the communities in which they participate as well as establishing parallels to the Brazilian art and art organizations studied. Students will discuss current issues faced in their communities (discrimination, poverty, homelessness, etc.), and investigate communities in Brazil facing similar issues. They will discuss issues Brazilians face in their daily lives, how students' own communities compare, and what can possibly be learned from their Brazilian counterparts. Also, the role of art, music, and performance will be investigated and what role these specific community organizations (including their student participants) and artists play in their communities.

An essential part of this overall understanding is the identification of their own personal role and what impact they have (or *could* have) in their communities. It is intended that participants will gain a greater vision of their individual role and the potential they have as individuals to help their communities progress.

In culmination of the unit, students will create individual projects in performance, multimedia, or studio art representing their understanding and/or ideas about how their community functions and relates to themes studied in Brazilian art and performance.

Essential Questions:

What are some prominent Brazilian artists? What makes their work unique? How is their work affected by their community/surroundings?

What is a community? How do the participants define their community?

What does it mean to be a part of, or participate in, a community?

How are others in your community affected by your personal actions?

What issues are some communities in Brazil facing? Do we face similar issues in our communities? What role has art, music, and performance played in addressing these issues?

How does your community compare to some of the communities studied in Brazil?

What role have the arts organizations studied played in the local Brazilian communities? How have the communities been affected? How have the individual participants been affected?

Learning Activities:

Investigation of Programs in Brazil.

This lesson is divided into three main segments: research, exploration, and design. Each has as its aim to increase students' awareness of personal and communal identity through creative projects and reflection. It is suggested that students keep a sketch/writing journal throughout the process to document thoughts, images, research, etc.

Research

Students will do some research on the general history of Brazil (such as colonization, slavery, crime, *favelas*, music, art, dance, etc.). Students should gather images from the Internet, books, and magazines that illustrate issues they find important from Brazil and share them with the class during one of the first class periods. Students can be assigned specific topics or periods to research to facilitate a more well-rounded class discussion.

Students will also look at programs in Brazil and/or local programs that socially empower participants. Some exceptional examples of Brazilian programs are provided along with corresponding reference materials. They include:

Didá: A program based in the northeastern region of Brazil that teaches music to girls and young women, focusing primarily on percussion instruments. They give performances in their community which combine lively drumming and dancing. They also work to provide a place for children to eat and learn in a communal environment with other women and girls.

Pierre Verger Foundation: This program is based in the same city as Didá in northeastern Brazil. This organization was founded by the famous photographer Pierre Verger who spent much of his life exploring African and Afro-Brazilian culture through his photography. He lived and worked among the Afro-Brazilian community, and his foundation continues the work he dedicated his life to by teaching youth to explore their culture and heritage through photography and other art forms. The foundation is located on the site of his former home, which also serves as an archive for his work.

Nós do Morro: This organization is located in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro. The organization works with youth and young adults from the community on various types of acting and music productions. Their main purpose is to “develop actors, technicians, and audience, presenting all the magic of theatre to inhabitants of the community who do not have access to art.”

Students will gather information on these Brazilian groups as well as community arts organizations from their local areas via multiple research methods including video (CD, youtube), photos, written research, Web sites , and in class (teacher) presentations. (A list of beginning resources for each organization is listed at the end of this document. Multiple additional resources exist for each online.)

Students will research two programs—one Brazilian and one local (with direction of the teacher)— to serve as two models of comparison. Students will write a short two-page paper outlining what they have learned about each organization and how they are similar and different. This writing will also establish background information for the students’ artistic exploration. Students can gather information such as types of classes offered, class size, demographics of the community in which the organization is located, public involvement, who established the organization, organization’s goals, etc.

Explore

Cameras (digital if available, or disposable): students take photos from around their neighborhoods, focusing where possible on social and community projects (nonprofit organizations, community gardens, recycling projects, etc.). Add these photos to journal. Students will submit a few select photographs (from research on both Brazilian and local programs) to the instructor, who will create one inclusive slide presentation for the class. Solicit responses as to what students saw, recognized, felt, etc. Also, discuss how the Brazilian and local organizations compare as far as demographics, sense of community involvement, projects, goals, how they do or don’t address local issues such as poverty, violence, etc. Explore ideas of what we can learn from these Brazilian programs. What has been successful there? What can we apply to our community programs? What would our experience be like if we were to go there and participate for a day/week/month in one of the programs in Brazil? What would it be like for a Brazilian to come here and participate in ours?

Keeping the sketch journal (15–20 minutes daily) of drawings, notes about photos taken, what they see in their community, what the feel while visiting different parts of their neighborhood, etc. is especially important during this phase of the project as it is where students will have the most intimate involvement with their own communities.

Design

Individual final projects: creation of performance, multimedia, or studio art project representing their understanding and/or ideas about how their community functions and

relates to themes studied in Brazilian art and performance. Sharing with the class is encouraged, but not required. Presentation to the teacher is required.

Additional possible activity:

Exchange of art, video, photography, etc., with a partner project in Brazil.

Resources:

Pierre Verger Foundation (Salvador, Brazil)

http://www.pierreverger.org/fpv/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1&lang=en

Didá (Salvador, Brazil)

<http://www.projetodida.org/>

<http://www.dida-salvador.com/english.html>

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/portal/portal079/dida.pdf>

Video: *Girl Beat: Power of the Drum* Copyright 2003 by Suzanne Girod
www.cinemaguild.com

Nós do Morro (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

<http://www.nosdomorro.com.br/eng/institucional.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/TEDxSP#p/u/33/iGtg0hzuZ2s>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TdIUWJNtHY>

Resource list with online links to popular Brazilian artists and images:

<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/nationalities/Brazilian.html>

<http://www.lost.art.br/zezao.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjlvJd2ekMA&NR=1>

Brazil in Black and White (2007)—available to watch in full at the PBS Web site

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/brazil-in-black-and-white/video-fullepisode/2104/>

Fulbright 2010 Travel Blog

<http://blogs.utexas.edu/brazilartsfulbright/>

Performance Tasks:

Students will be graded on in class discussion/presentation, submission of sketch/note journals, photography, and final projects, as well as reflective understanding of Brazilian programs studied in their work.

Contact:
Nick Brooks
Modernism78@gmail.com