

Student Information Sheet: Celebrations in Northeast Brazil

Carnival is an annual pre-Lenten celebration in every city, town and village in Brazil. It is known as Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana. The celebration is from the Friday to the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday in Brazil and in the U.S It takes many months of preparation for neighborhood groups to organize and develop the floats, exhilarating percussive music, dance and the elaborate costumes. In Brazil, samba is carnival's music; in the U.S., jazz is the music of Mardi Gras.

Frevo is a popular dance and music in the state of Pernambuco. It is popular during street celebrations during carnival in the Recife and Olinda. Acrobatic dancers use yellow, green and red umbrellas while performing. Instruments in a frevo band are: saxophones, trumpets trombones and percussion.

Maracatu, first recorded in 1674, is a traditional African Brazilian procession with dance, poetry, music. Music from the drums, large metal bells, snare drums and shakers play the background for the parade group. The characters in the parade include: a standard bearer, singer, small percussion orchestra and a queen and a king of the Congo for a day. They perform during carnival in the cities of Olinda and Recife in the state of Pernambuco. Maracatu is also found in the city of Fortaleza in the state of Ceara.

Other Festivals

Reisado is performed by a group of musicians, singers and dancers who go door to door singing about the arrival of the three kings. It is celebrated from Christmas Day to January 6th. Instruments used are: an accordion, viola, ganza (Brazilian rattle) tamborines, flutes and maracas. The characters are energetic humans and animals doing various reisado dance steps.

Bumba-meu-boi is a popular comic- dramatic dance telling the story of a bull who dies and is brought back to life. It takes place in Northeastern Brazil but celebrations can also be found throughout the country. Songs and music from the tambourine, tamborim or small drum, and an accordion, play

as the parade of human and animal characters dance. In many states it is held during the Christmas season; in other states like Maranhao and Amazonas it is celebrated in June.

Festa de Yemanjá is observed on February 2nd in Salvador.

Yemanjá is the Candomblé orixá who is the queen of the sea. Music, dancing and singing begin at daybreak. Fishermen take the gifts that were prepared in large baskets out to the sea. Presents included are: flowers, jewelry, combs, mirrors and lipstick. Thousands of people dressed in white walk through the streets, going down to the seashore. Huge parties continue into the night.

Black Consciousness Day is celebrated on November 20th in many states throughout Brazil. In Salvador the entire month is celebrated as Black November. This holiday commemorates the anniversary of the death of Zumbi, Brazil's most important African Brazilian leader. He was the last leader of Palmares, the largest free African settlement, and died resisting enslavement in 1697. Zumbi is a symbol of the fight against racism and discrimination. Participants acknowledge their African heritage in speeches, clothing, artwork, and song and dance. Celebrations include: marches, parades, music, songs, dance and special programs on racism and racial equality.

Think about . . .?

- What event or person would you like to see celebrated as a holiday in the U.S.? Why do you think this?
- Have you participated in a holiday of an ethnic group different than your own? What did you learn?