

# Carnaval in Brazil's Northeast

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## Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe Carnaval celebrations in Brazil's Northeast (*Nordeste*).
  - Compare and contrast Carnaval celebrations in Olinda, Bezerros, and Salvador
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## Materials

- Student Handout: **Carnaval in Bezerros**
  - Student Handout: **Carnaval in Salvador, Bahia**
  - Student Handout: **Carnaval in Olinda (1)**
  - Student Handout: **Carnaval in Olinda (2)**
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## Activities

1. Divide the class into groups giving each group one of the student handouts: **Carnaval in Olinda (1)**, **Carnaval in Olinda (2)**, **Carnaval in Bezerros**, and **Carnaval in Salvador, Bahia**.
    - a. As a group, direct students to read the interview making a list of the main ideas.
    - b. In the same groups, direct students to discuss what they have learned until each person understands and can explain the information.
  2. Reorganize the groups so that each group contains one student who has read each interview.
    - a. Direct each student to explain to the new group what s/he has learned.
    - b. After each student has spoken, ask student in the new groups to discuss similarities and differences of Carnavals in Olinda, Bezerros and Salvador.
  3. Extension activity
    - a. If Internet access is available assign students to work in groups of to gather further information about the Carnavals using the urls listed in the handouts. (**Teacher's Note:** Some sites are only in Portuguese; however, if the teacher encourages students to look for cognates (words that are very similar in Portuguese and English, like *foto* and *photo*), they can gather some basic information and find interesting pictures.
    - b. As a whole class, ask students to share the information they have learned about the cities and Carnavals in the three towns.
    - c. If the classroom possesses the capability, students should be encouraged to include a PowerPoint presentation to accompany their group presentations.
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# Carnaval in Bezerros

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Based on an interview with Lauciana Dutra conducted on July 20, 2006.

(For additional information on this Carnaval, visit Bezerros' official Carnaval website at [www.bexerros.pe.gov.br](http://www.bexerros.pe.gov.br) and/or [www.foliadopapangu.com.br](http://www.foliadopapangu.com.br).)

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## Papangu

Carnaval in Bezerros, Pernambuco, Brazil is celebrated *nas ruas*, that is, in the streets. *Blocos*, or groups of similarly dressed celebrants with music, create parades with many spectators watching or joining in. For the past several years, *EduCarnaval* has been an important *bloco*. Students of many ages dance and participate. In fact, at their school, traditional folk dancing is a regular part of the curriculum in addition to the traditional subjects.

Like the festivals in Recife and Olinda, Bezerra's Carnaval includes frevo, the dance that grew out of capoeira and whose music has a march music beat and a lively melody. Dancing starts around 2:00 p.m. and continues until dawn during the week-long celebration.



What makes this Carnaval unique, however, is the Papangu. This is a character with a costume, often of old clothes, and a huge mask. Any person can choose to dress as a Papangu. The word come from “papa,” which means to eat a lot and “ango,” a typical food of the region made from corn, milk, coconut milk, salt and butter. This figure is dressed (and masked) so that no one can know the persons true identity. S/he then goes from house to house asking for “ango.” A couple of people also said that s/he goes into houses to steal it. The tradition comes from the time of slavery when slaves went to the Big House, to ask for (or take) food during Carnaval. For 101 years, this figure has dominated Carnaval Sunday.

Many others are also masked during the celebration. It can be a mask that covers only the face, a “mascara,” or one that covers the whole head, called a “cabeção”.

Traditionally, masks are made from “papel colé,” although more recently, some are made from paper maché. The difference between the two is the kind of glue that is used. The latter creates a slightly smoother surface that is preferred by some, but the former is more common to keep with tradition.

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## Mask-making



Mask-making is simple, but not easy! Generally a plaster form is used. Strips of torn newspaper cover the form. The first layer is dipped only in water so that the mask will not stick to the form. Then, seven layers of papers are dipped in glue and fitted to the form. The last one is leveled a bit with the fingers, after which the mask must dry for an hour. Next, eyes are cut into the mask and it is painted with bright colors and shapes. Nowadays, common figures, such as Mickey and Minnie Mouse, may be imitated, but this is a break with strict tradition.

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## Lula Vassoureiro

Another unique aspect of this Carnival are the *Oficinas de Mascaras*, booths set up to model how masks are made. They are in schools and in the streets. In fact, the town has opened a year-round Carnival museum that features many masks. In addition, the most famous mask maker, Lula Vassoureiro, operates the *Casa de Cultura* where he displays many of his creations and demonstrates the making of masks to tourists and students who come from Recife and other towns.



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## In Conclusion

The theme of Bezerros' Carnival 2006 was *O fantastico mundo de circo na terra do Papangu* (The Fantastic Circus World in the Land of Papangu). People are equal in the time of Carnival, no matter what their usual socioeconomic status; everyone participates! The local government, in cooperation with the national one, has been publicizing the event attracting many tourists. So, let the festivities begin!

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## Carnaval in Salvador, Bahia

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Dancing and celebration transform Salvador during the 6-7 days which are Carnaval! It is also a very lucrative time for businesses, including the craft markets. *Blocos*, or groups of celebrants, are led by *Trio Electricos*, bands of musicians, who ride on huge floats. Nowadays, the float includes giant screens to show the singer(s) or other video, many dancers in matching costumes, as well as the musicians.

In 1951, three men began what are now called *Trio Electricos* with a guitarist, drummer, and keyboard vocalist riding on a truck with huge speakers so that they could be above the crowd during the Carnaval parade. Followers of the group surrounded the truck, dancing and singing along.

Since then, tradition has grown immensely so that 3-5,000 people form the *blocos* which are started by the band or famous singers. The groups sell shirts to mark those who are part of the official group and to make money for the float. Anyone can buy an *abada*, or shirt, for 1-3 days, paying more, of course, for three days than for one. This entitles the wearer to be inside the restricted areas near the float and to take advantage of a traveling bathroom and bar, or even a dance floor, that each bloco maintains. The more services provided, the more expensive the shirt! Also, *blocos* of famous singers cost more. A Carnaval goer can elect to buy a shirt for three different bands or the same band for multiple days. It costs anywhere from 20 to 1,000 *reais* (about \$10 to \$500).

Salvador's parades follow one of two routes: the official route, *Campo Grande* (Large Field), or the alternate course, *Baixa-Ondina* (Lower Ondina). The second was added about ten years ago because one route could not handle the crowds and excitement! Along these streets, *camerota* or stands are built in front of buildings; Carnaval-goers pay to use these front row seats of the parade. Parades start at 4 p.m. and continue until about 6 a.m. A sequence of ten blocos participates each night in a set order. Although the Carnaval continues for a week, the most important parades are on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The final parade is on Wednesday along the Baixa-Ondina route. Some of the biggest blocos include: *Ivete Sangalo*, *Daniela Mercury*, *Carlinhos Brown and Timbalada*, *Araketu*, *Filhos de Gandhi*, *Asa de Águia*, *Chiclete com Banana*.

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For more information and pictures, visit Salvador's official Carnaval website at [www.carnaval.salvador.ba.gov.br](http://www.carnaval.salvador.ba.gov.br).

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## Carnaval in Olinda (1)

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Based on an interview with Gil on July 14, 2006, in Olinda, Pernambuco, Brazil. (For more information, visit Olinda's official Carnaval website at [www.olindabc.com.br/](http://www.olindabc.com.br/).)

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Officially Carnaval lasts for 4 days, Saturday through Tuesday, but unofficially, it is being extended bit longer each year. It lasts the entire 4 days. The government creates a schedule for the parade and the *troças* (groups of people), clubs, and *blocos* (other organized groups of fans). Everyone joins in the parade and dances. They go on all the streets of town, even the hills. There are sometimes floats with *trios electricos*, (musical groups) but only on the main flat and wider streets. Many people participate in the festivities in Olinda and later go to Recife, the nearby city, to dance and party there, too.

There are formal blocos that have sponsors and are highly organized. They wear the same costumes that are provided by the sponsors. *Clubes* are less organized, but still practice together and have the same costumes. The least organized are the *troças*. All three types of groups participate in the parades. Anyone can create a *fantasia*, or costume, and join any group. In other cities, this is not possible, but in Olinda, it is very democratic and anyone can join in.

During the parade, there are dancers, then the band, followed by more dancers. In the past, there were various groups who were rivals, so there was a lot of violence as the groups clashed. Groups started asking *capoeira* players (those who practice the martial arts that includes music and is typical to Northeastern Brazil) to participate, leading the group, so they could protect the others. They started dancing and adapting their steps to the *frevo* music. A new dance form was born.

Also in the past, dancers carried long knives to protect themselves, but they were outlawed. So, the dancers carried umbrellas that had knives hidden in them. Although umbrellas are an integral part of *frevo* dancing today, they no longer have knives in them! The umbrellas (*sombrilhas* in Portuguese) are small to make them more maneuverable for the dancers who put them under their legs and around their bodies as the dance. Many represent the flags of Brazil or Pernambuco.

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As the parade advances, *frevo* dancers perform various very athletic steps. They take turns so that some dance in a space in the middle while others are around the edges protecting the dancers and creating space for them. (The protection is from the press of people and other dancing groups.) Since the streets are narrow, there are generally no people just observing the parade. Tourist may start as on-lookers, but they soon join in.

People who want to join a group find out who is teaching the dance steps or organizing the club and just ask to become a part. Most groups do not have a fee to participate although some of the blocos may.

Generally, beginning in January there are people in public places dancing frevo. This provides practice and anticipates the Carnival which is in February or March (during the days just before Lent begins).

Olinda's Carnival music was created from march music mixed with various kinds of European music, such as the polka. It has a strong beat, but mixes in other styles. It originated in Recife, but is now known around the world. The orchestra is made up of many percussion and brass instruments whose names in Portuguese are: *pandeiro, surdo, tarol, trompete, clarinete, tuba, trombone*. (English: tambourine, several kinds of drums, trumpet, clarinet, tuba, trombone). Crowds know it is a fantastic orchestra if it includes three tubas (especially since these are heavy instruments to carry and play.)

There are 2 kinds of *frevo* (the traditional Carnival dance of Olinda and Recife): *maracatu rural (solto)* and *virado*. Olinda's Carnival is marked by large figures (*bonecas*) that are carried on a dancer's shoulders (making him more than two times as tall as he usually is). One example of a figure used in *maracatu rural* is the *caboclo de lança*, a representation of a story from the *engenho* in slavery times.

The largest club is called *O Galo da Madrugada* (Morning Rooster). It has made record books. The rooster is seen everywhere in pictures and on things sold to tourists. Other clubs are *Homem da Meia-Noite* (Midnight Man) and *Mulher do Meio-dia* (Mid-Day Woman). Gil's club is called Vasorinos and is based in Amparo, a neighborhood in Olinda.

Gil said that initially he felt some fear because of the number of people involved. But, slowly he began to develop *frevo* dance steps and began to get involved. Gil has been dancing with a club for ten years. He teaches dance steps to students who practice year-round. Sometimes he is asked to go to a different club to help them learn steps. He is from Olinda and has *frevo* in his blood!

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## Carnaval in Olinda (2)



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Based on an interview with Clarice Andrade on July 25, 2006, in Olinda, Pernambuco, Brazil (For more information, visit Olinda's official Carnaval website at [www.olindabc.com.br/](http://www.olindabc.com.br/).)

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Carnaval in Olinda is a festival in the streets. It is profane, not related to any church or religious significance. It revolves around music and dance and *fantasias*, costumes that people wear. In the past, people would set up speakers in their houses directed to the street. *Blocos* (blocks or groups of people) and others would dance in front of the houses. The music was very loud, however, and five or six years ago, a law was passed forbidding these activities. A couple of years later, *passadromos* began. These are parades of blocos that go along the main streets near the ocean. Since Olinda's streets are narrow and often steep, it is difficult for them to parade through the whole town. Clarice was not sure if there is a contest for blocos, but does not think so.

The Carnaval in Olinda is loosely organized and informal. People choose to celebrate in various ways. Some just watch from the windows of their houses. Others participate in specific blocos while others go from one group to another. Most wear costumes. Some people rent a house or apartment near the festivities and party there. The Carnaval is in the streets and in the houses. No one day is really more important than any other, the party continues all the time. On Tuesday morning, however, all of the *bonecas*, large figures are in the street at the same time. Carnaval officially lasts from Saturday until Tuesday just before Lent, but unofficially it starts earlier. Beginning shortly after New Year's Day, on the weekends (often starting Friday evenings), there are parties and dances with music.

Blocos are groups that have music, a banner, and a plaque with the name of the group and a design. They are generally just for fun ranging from small, informal, newly-formed groups to those that are huge and have been in existence for many years. Some *blocos* are friends; others are co-workers or relatives. There is no rule or tradition relating to the size of the groups. Ceroula is one of the oldest. Large *blocos* have a theme for each year. *O Galo da Madrugada* is a huge *bloco* from Recife. It has more than a million members. *O Homen da meia noite* and *O Mulher do Meio Dia* are two large, well known blocos from Olinda.

Music of Carnaval includes *frevo de bloco*, *blocos liricos*, *maracatús (rurais e da nação)*, *afoxé*, and *La Oura* (rapid chanting).

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