

## Mia Couto's Children's Books and Law 10639/2003: Literary-Pedagogical Proposals for the *Books o Beijo da Palavrinha* (The Little Word's Kiss) and *o Gato e o Escuro* (The Cat and the Dark)

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses issues concerning Mia Couto's children's books and the use of them for application of Law 10639/2003 in Brazil. This law has set out the curricular guidelines for teaching African Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in elementary and secondary schools in Brazil. Therefore, we propose a discussion about this law and about Mia Couto's books *O beijo da palavrinha* ("The Little Word's Kiss) and *O gato e o escuro* ("The Cat and the Dark"). Also, we suggest activities to be used for teaching Afro-Brazilian history and culture, particularly in the subjects of Arts, Literature and History.

**Key words:** children's literature, Mozambican literature, Law 10639/2003, Brazil, Mia Couto

### 1. Brief Scenario of the Creation of Law 10639/2003

The theme of African culture and history has not been effectively addressed despite the education reform in 1996 and the institution of the PCN (National Curriculum Parameters) in 1998. After intense discussion in ethnic-racial struggle movements, the theme has been introduced in schools by a decree-law. Then came the realization that there were not many literary works, nor literary pedagogical activities, that could favor the implementation of Law 10639/2003. It is very difficult to include the theme of subjectivity of black people in pedagogical practices, particularly because their place has been historically deconstructed by the Eurocentric culture. After being subjugated by slavery, and upon attempting to position themselves as subjects, the black lack a place of their own and ultimately resort to "whitening", be it in behavior or in attitudes (FANON, 1968).

On the other hand, the concept of "politically correct" is overstretched in the literary kits provided to Brazilian schools. This was the case of the book *Negrinha* ("Little black girl"), by Monteiro Lobato, which was present on the list of the *Programa Nacional Biblioteca na Escola* ("National Library at School Program"). The book was the subject of great debate, owing to the fact that the eponymous story, about a black girl's life, contained terms that are considered to be pejorative nowadays. But how can we raise awareness if we do not provide access to history? Knowledge has to precede action; eliminating ethnic-racial issues present in the literature is not the best way to deal with the consequences of the denial of black people's History in Brazil.

Literary texts can make pertinent intersections in the lives of individuals, allowing a change in values,

paradigms or even in a person's life direction to a greater extent than other means. Literature may change people's behavior and worldview because reading literary works prompts individuals to ponder over and challenge the social condition of human beings. As a consequence, they can feel motivated to fight to make significant changes in their behavior and even in the society in which they live. This question was raised in the field of education, not only when prejudiced attitudes present in many textbooks were recognized but also, especially, after consolidation of Law 9.394/1996, amended in 2003 by Law 10639/2003, which, in turn, instituted the curriculum guidelines for teaching African Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in elementary and secondary schools. The contents of the above-mentioned law are quite significant (the author's translation of it into English is provided in Appendix I):

**LEI Nº 10.639, DE 9 DE JANEIRO DE 2003.**

Altera a Lei nº9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996, que estabelece as diretrizes e bases da educação nacional, para incluir no currículo oficial da Rede de Ensino a obrigatoriedade da temática "História e Cultura Afro-Brasileira", e dá outras providências

O PRESIDENTE DA REPÚBLICA

Faço saber que o Congresso Nacional decreta e eu sanciono a seguinte Lei:

Art. 1o A Lei no 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996, passa a vigorar acrescida dos seguintes arts. 26-A, 79-A e 79-B:

"Art. 26-A. Nos estabelecimentos de ensino fundamental e médio, oficiais e particulares, torna-se obrigatório o ensino sobre História e Cultura Afro-Brasileira.

§ 1o O conteúdo programático a que se refere o caput deste artigo incluirá o estudo da História da África e dos Africanos, a luta dos negros no Brasil, a cultura negra brasileira e o negro na formação da sociedade nacional, resgatando a contribuição do povo negro nas áreas social, econômica e política pertinentes à História do Brasil.

§ 2o Os conteúdos referentes à História e Cultura Afro-brasileira serão ministrados no âmbito de todo o currículo escolar, em especial nas áreas de Educação Artística e de Literatura e História Brasileiras.

§ 3o (VETADO)"

"Art. 79-A. (VETADO)"

"Art. 79-B. O calendário escolar incluirá o dia 20 de novembro como 'Dia Nacional da Consciência Negra'."

Art. 2o Esta Lei entra em vigor na data de sua publicação.

Brasília, 9 de janeiro de 2003; 182o da Independência e 115o da República.

LUIZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA

Cristovam Ricardo Cavalcanti Buarque.

Este texto não substitui o publicado no D.O.U. de 10.1.2003 (Brasil, 2003).

For the purpose of complementing the previous law, a new one was required. In addition to the ethnic-racial theme, it included the indigenous theme in the official curriculum of schools (please see Appendix II for a translation of it into English):

**LEI Nº 11.645, DE 10 DE MARÇO DE 2008.**

Altera a Lei no 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996, modificada pela Lei nº 10.639, de 9 de janeiro de 2003, que estabelece as diretrizes e bases da educação nacional, para incluir no currículo oficial da rede de ensino a obrigatoriedade da temática "História e cultura Afro-brasileira e Indígena" (BRASIL, 2008).

According to Petronilha Gonçalves (BRASIL, 2004), Law 10639/2003 does not defend, as many critics claim, an ethnocentric approach, which could be seen as merely an exchange of places between a European approach and an African one. The objective of the Law, she explains, is to expand the base of school curricula for the sake of Brazilian cultural, racial, social and economic diversity. It proposes an expansion of what is central, so

that everyone can have the right to speak, and the right to being on the core. Sometime after the approval of Law 10639/2003, the date of November 20 was officially instituted as the Black Awareness Day and became a national holiday in Brazil<sup>1</sup> to “celebrate” the theme of Africanity. In the month of November, schools are “forced” to deal with such theme. Therefore, literary kits that are often forgotten in lockers at school offices or piled up in libraries are then required. However, most of the time, pedagogical activities ultimately reinforce the stereotypes of the submissive, cheerful and alienated blacks. Racist and pejorative jokes about the Black Awareness Day are frequently made in this period; they occur in our society and in public educational, cultural and reading-related institutions.

Although blacks have played an important role in the formation of the Brazilian society, they had not been duly recognized in it. Law 10639/2003 is the first initiative that encourages discussion about the Afro-Brazilian culture and history.

## 2. Children's Books by Mia Couto

This section starts by raising issues relating to children's literature, which is subject to two strong stereotypes that need to be challenged: the first one is that it is lower-quality literature, and the second is that it is “easy read”. In fact, we can only state that it is literature, while the label children's literature is far more related to the pedagogical use that is made of literature written for children.

It can be said that, regardless of readers' ages, there is always something from childhood that blends with the emotional demands of delight and pleasure. The use of fiction books in the early school years is essential to have children develop the habit of reading. Soares (1999) discussed the use of children's books in schools, that is, the schooling of literature. Schools often use children's literature for the purpose of addressing a particular topic, e.g., literacy, grammar review, advice on hygiene, behavior, etc. As a result, they fail to benefit from the enjoyment that literature can provide to children.

Thus, we need to be aware of the process underlying the use of literature by schools. Soares (1999) points out that the schooling of literature is inevitable, “since the institution of school knowledge is the essence of schools” (Soares, 1999, p. 17)<sup>2</sup>. As with literature in general, children's books can enact themes and contexts, and it is the reception of each reader that will tell which lesson he or she will learn by reading that type of book.

Mia Couto expressed his point of view on the issue of classifying fiction books as meant for children or adults, in his testimonial included in the book *O gato e o escuro*: “I am not sure if anyone can make books ‘for’ children. In fact, no one introduces oneself as a creator of books ‘for’ adults” (Couto, 2008, p. 5). Mia Couto's statement corroborates that of Abramovich, who claimed:

Querer saber mais sobre aflições, tristezas, dificuldades, conflitos, dúvidas, sofrências, descobertas que outros enfrentam, para poder compreender melhor as suas próprias, faz parte das interrogações de qualquer humano em crescimento...(ABRAMOVICH, 1994, p. 98)<sup>3</sup>

When selected to develop pedagogical activities for adherence to Law 10639/2003, children's books inevitably imply not prioritizing enjoyment and delight only. Because they are adopted on the basis of the

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<sup>1</sup> LAW 12.519, of November 10, 2011. It officially establishes Zumbi's National Day and Black Awareness Day.

<sup>2</sup> Source text: “já que é da essência da escola a instituição de saberes escolares”.

<sup>3</sup> Author's translation: “Wishing to know more about affliction, sadness, difficulty, conflict, doubt, suffering, discovery, as faced by others, in order to better understand their own, is part of the questions asked by any growing human being...”

"schooling of literature" process, they induce teachers to use them to develop the themes of Afro-Brazilian history and culture, particularly in the subjects of Arts, Literature and History. When a fiction book is inserted in a pedagogical context, it becomes more difficult to read it without taking into account a pedagogical perspective. However, it may be possible.

The choice of children's books from Afro-Brazilian Literature should not only be based on all the common criteria for selecting school books, but also include books whose black characters do not reproduce stereotypes about black people in Brazil and abroad. Importantly, one also needs to avoid images and considerations that perpetuate errors of the official, universal, and Brazilian history about black cultures. Books that may arouse any kind of prejudice about "race", ethnicity, color and gender are supposed to be avoided.

Following this explanation about children's literature and Mia Couto's opinion on it, the next section presents an analysis of children's books by this Mozambican writer; particularly, *O gato e o escuro* and *O beijo da palavrinha*.

### 2.1 O Gato e o Escuro ("The Cat and the Dark")

The back cover of the book *O gato e o escuro* contains information that makes readers aware of possible linguistic differences between Mozambican Portuguese (the language used in the book) and Brazilian Portuguese. The use of Mia Couto's original spelling shows respect for the author's intention to make the Portuguese language of Mozambique acknowledged (and known).

The Brazilian edition of *O gato e o escuro* was illustrated by Marilda Castanha, a Brazilian award-winning artist who received the Jabuti Award (a well-known literary award in Brazil) for best illustrator in 2000.

The narrative strategies present in *O gato e o escuro* enable an aesthetic perspective which favor neologisms, constructions of orality and universal issues concerning human beings. Moreover, they foster reflection on topics such as the affirmation of blacks and Africanities for children.

The contributions of this narrative to the application of Law 10639/2003 can be easily observed in the identity issues present in the book *O gato e o escuro* and also in the other children's book by Mia Couto that was selected to compose this article: *O beijo da palavrinha*.

### 2.2 O Beijo da Palavrinha ("The Little Word's Kiss")

Mia Couto's efforts to explore the language of his country are clearly seen in some of his narratives, and classified by the editorial market as children's literature, which show how he experiences the Portuguese language. Based on this assumption, this literature allows people to discover the diversity of the same language in different places in the world. Concomitantly, books written in a Portuguese-language variety that is a little different from our own can motivate us to form opinions, to search for information, and to construct knowledge about African history and culture, which have to be made available to students at school, as proposed by Law 10639/2003. Mia Couto's book, *O beijo da palavrinha*<sup>4</sup>, was published in Brazil in 2006 by publisher Língua Geral, in a collection called "Mama África", whose purpose is described on the back cover:

[...] resgatar contos tradicionais africanos, recriados por alguns dos mais importantes escritores do continente, e ilustrados por nomes igualmente sonoros das artes plásticas. Livros, portanto, que juntam a arte à literatura, e a tradição à modernidade. Livros para as crianças, mas também para os seus pais. Livros para

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<sup>4</sup> The story had no page numbers, originally. The pages had to be numbered for citation purposes, with number one being assigned to the first page of the story. Consecutive numbering continued to the last illustrated page, in a total of twenty-six pages.

coleccionar (Couto, 2006, contracapa do livro)<sup>5</sup>.

The book features illustrations by the recently deceased Mozambican artist Malangatana Valente, and tells a story that takes place in a village in the countryside of Africa, the home of a very poor girl who falls ill and dies. In this narrative, the word *sea* kisses the girl on her deathbed. That little word and its simple gesture will guide readers through a plot of with a great deal interaction between the characters Zeca Zonzo and Maria Poerinha, who experience pain, love and sympathy together.

The illustrations in this book are constructs that intensely interact with the plot; they are drawings of human figures with sad and suspicious faces that oppose to the well-known illustrations of most children's books, which present cheerful and/or soft hues. Thus, the illustrations have a purple hue, representing the moment of imminent death; later, when the girl transitions to another plane of life, the illustrations have a blue hue.

As regards the text arrangement of the narrative, there are sentences in which very small font size letters are mixed with huge ones, mixing the moments when the characters and their actions are minimal, with some larger facts that are independent of their strengths. In addition, the text is arranged in a certain fashion to indicate the feeling or action of what the author wishes to narrate. A textual organization that resembles that of poetry:



Figure 1 Text Form of the Book *O Beijo da Palavrinha*

Source: Couto, Mia. *O beijo da palavrinha*. Rio de Janeiro: Língua Geral, 2006.

This work allows to deconstruct a series of untruths about the continent. The fact that Mia Couto is white, per se, helps us deconstruct the view that every African is black and makes us aware of the risk of envisaging only one type of identity. The focus on deconstructing stereotypes is a remarkable and attention-worthy feature when we analyze teaching materials of schools, especially textbooks.

Regarding the importance of impartial information about ethnicities in teaching materials, Lopes (2014) explains:

O negro e o amarelo nunca são mostrados como elementos constituintes da cultura europeia, isto é não existe o negro europeu ou amarelo europeu. Quando se diz africano quer dizer negro, ou asiático quer dizer amarelo; assim, elabora-se uma identidade única para cada etnia permanecendo seus estereótipos. No entanto, quando se narra a África e Ásia, o branco é mostrado por diversas etnias bem assinaladas para que fique bem

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<sup>5</sup> Author's translation: [...] rescue traditional African tales, recreated by some of the most important writers on the continent, and illustrated by equally outstanding names in the visual arts. They are books, therefore, that combine art with literature, and tradition with modernity. Books for children, but also for their parents. Collectable books (Couto, 2006, back cover of his book).

delimitada cultura de cada etnia. (Lopes, 2014, p. 65).<sup>6</sup>

Mia Couto, always astonishes those who, as emphasized by Lopes (2014), believe that “when you say African you mean black”<sup>7</sup>. Also, according to Lopes (2014), the colors of the characters cannot influence their psychological characteristics or justify their actions. The power given to writing of liberating or reinforcing socially constructed places can be addressed in *O beijo da palavrinha* because the sea, known to be immeasurable, is, in Mia Couto's story, a word in the diminutive form, which will make Maria Poeirinha move on to the space of death in a lovingly rather than passively manner, with a kiss.

At the end of the story, Mia Couto tells us a Mozambican tradition; people affix photographs of the dead to one of their house's walls. And as in every fable, the girl's memory is protected by her brother Zeca Zonzo who, tells us that:

Ainda hoje, tantos anos  
passados, Zeca Zonzo,  
apontando o rosto da sua  
irmãzinha na fotografia,  
clama e reclama:  
-Eis minha mana  
Poeirinha  
que foi beijada pelo mar.  
E se afogou numa  
palavrinha (Couto, 2006, p. 24)<sup>8</sup>

In this surprising ending, we can see that instead of the traditional “once upon a time” that usually begins a story, we are surprised by the magic of other resumptives. As a result of the literary analysis we made of the book, we can apply, in the educational activities, the relevant elements of Law 10639/2003 found in the texts, as well as explore the books of Mia Couto.

### **3. Literary-pedagogical Proposals for Mia Couto's Children's Books**

Children's books on Afro-Brazilian literature are a great source of inspiration for the discussion about the racial situation in Brazil, especially about the representation of blacks in literary and pedagogical materials. However, before educators use the target books in the classroom on a full basis, they should be made aware of

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<sup>6</sup> Black and yellow people are never shown as constituent elements of European culture, that is, there is no Black European or yellow European. When you say African, you mean black, or Asian means yellow; thus, only one identity is envisaged for each ethnic group, thus preserving stereotypes. However, in narratives about Africa and Asia, whites are shown by several well-defined ethnicities, i.e., the culture of each ethnicity is clearly represented (Lopes, 2014, p. 65).

<sup>7</sup> Source text: “quando se diz africano quer dizer negro”.

<sup>8</sup> Author's translation:

Even today, so many years  
past, Zeca Zonzo,  
pointing to the face of his  
little sister in the photograph,  
cries out and complains:  
-Here is my sis  
Poeirinha  
that was kissed by the sea.  
And drowned in a  
little word. (Couto, 2006, p. 24).

stereotyping of black characters in children's literature.

Few children's books on the theme of blacks were known by educators until the publication of Law 10639/2003. According to a study on ethnic-racial relations<sup>9</sup>, held in 2005, in Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and Salvador, the first and the sixth books on the theme of blacks that were most cited by teachers and principals were, respectively, *A menina bonita de laço de fita* ("The beautiful girl with a ribbon bow") by Ana Maria Machado, published in 1986, and *A bonequinha preta* ("The little black doll"), by Alaíde Lisboa, published in 1938.

The authors of the above-mentioned children's books took the praiseworthy initiative of touching on the subject of the blacks and had the merit of promoting a discussion on a subject that did not use to be addressed in children's literature. However, although we recognize the pioneering spirit of *A bonequinha preta* and the innovative approach to the racial issue proposed by *A menina bonita de laço de fita*, we think that these books need to be contextualized in order not to reinforce the myth of racial democracy in Brazil. As far as *A menina bonita do laço de fita* is concerned, "notably, analyses have pointed out that the approach to the material promotes the paradigm of the myth of racial democracy, because when advocating miscegenation, it tends to minimize the existence of racial conflict"<sup>10</sup> (Igualdade, 2007, p. 40). Importantly, we are still at the beginning of the path to learning to respect racial differences, but we must be careful not to step back or reinforce pedagogical errors previously detected in several literary works.

The next section presents suggestions for literary-pedagogical activities inspired by the literary analyses described in the previous section.

### 3.1 O Beijo da Palavrinha ("The Little Word's Kiss")

The first outstanding feature of works considered to be children's literature are their illustrations, which are complementary resources to the text. In this sense, the illustrations in *O beijo da palavrinha*, by Malagantana Valente, an artist recognized for drawing characters whose eyes look very expressive, make readers feel astonished. This feeling is caused by the shift from Europeanized illustrations to illustrations inspired by the African culture. Students can be asked to look at the illustrations and report their impressions, illustrate excerpts from the story in an unusual way and/or with different artistic material from the one commonly used. For this purpose, they can use, for example, colored earth, paints extracted from vegetables, recycled materials, etc.

Educators, by suggesting different ways of making illustrations, can encourage discussions about the acceptance of different types of art, physical biotypes and landscapes. We can see that the illustrations complement the plot of *O beijo da palavrinha* because, according to Martins, "form and content go hand in hand, and the themes of differences, of multiculturalism, the plurisignification of meanings seek the place of their true meaning in the interlocutors"<sup>11</sup> (Martins, n.d, p.17). This statement by the author makes us wonder whether the great difference between the illustrations of the Brazilian edition and the Portuguese edition of *O beijo da palavrinha* would convey the same meaning to readers.

The comparison of the illustrations of the Brazilian edition with the Portuguese one, available on the Internet<sup>12</sup>, can provide interesting outcomes for a discussion with students in the final grades of elementary school.

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<sup>9</sup> Data Source: IGUALDADE das Relações Étnico-raciais na Escola (2007). São Paulo: Peirópolis.

<sup>10</sup> Source text: "é importante mencionar que análises têm apontado que a abordagem do material promove o paradigma do mito da democracia racial, pois ao fazer a apologia à miscigenação, tende a minimizar a existência do conflito racial".

<sup>11</sup> Source text: "forma e conteúdo caminham intimamente ligados, e as temáticas das diferenças, da multiculturalidade, a plurissignificação de sentidos buscam nos interlocutores o lugar de seu verdadeiro significado".

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <http://pt.slideshare.net/esbordinhos/o-beijo-da-palavrinha-2-mia-couto#> in March 2014.

The reason is that the Portuguese edition brings much simpler pictures than the ones of the Brazilian edition, as can be seen on the covers of the two editions.

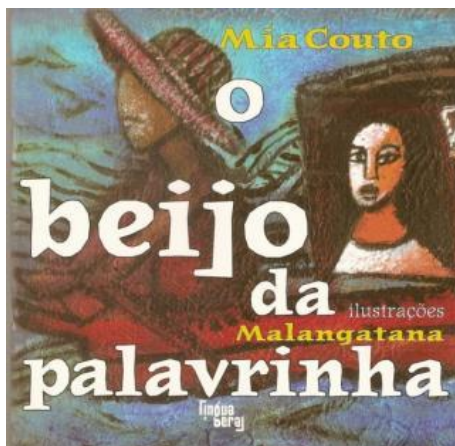


Figure 2 Book Cover of the Brazilian Edition

Source: Mundo dos livros<sup>13</sup>

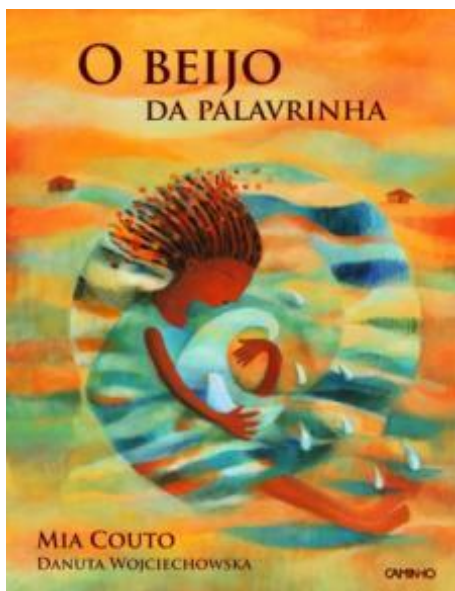


Figure 3 Book Cover of the Portuguese Edition

The theme of death is very present in the book, and readers learn about the situations experienced by children in Africa, their dreams and also the way they deal with death-related issues. For African people, in general, death seems to be something natural, while for Brazilian children, it is a taboo subject since the early stages of development.

The issue of writing/literacy can be deeply explored in classes at this level of schooling, because Maria Poeirinha's brother, Zeca Zonzo, "writes" the *sea* for her, and makes a kind of acrostic with each letter of the word *sea*. Based on that, teachers can create word lists with their students, using the letters of the word *sea*. Another possibility is to suggest the production of an acrostic of the word *sea*.

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<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <http://pt.slideshare.net/esbordonhos/o-beijo-da-palavrinha-2-mia-couto#> in November 2014.



Children's books are almost always linked to the traditional "once upon a time" tales and their usual "happily ever after" endings. In *O beijo da palavrinha*, the ending is different than expected; the girl was not cured, but can we assume that the characters lived "unhappily ever after"? Children can answer that question or create different endings to the story. Working with other possibilities of narrating stories, allows children to appreciate cultural diversity, because according to Knop (2010):

É importante que a criança se reconheça no espaço da história narrada ou lida, que se perceba representada por personagens que se assemelham a ela e que gozem do mesmo poder que príncipes, princesas e líderes têm no contexto clássico. Contar histórias de reis, magias, bruxas e fadas não é ruim, mas cabe à escola propiciar o diálogo dessas histórias com outras, particularmente com aquelas que valorizam traços da cultura brasileira e de formação de seu povo, dando assim lugar ao "esta é a sua vez" (Knop, 2010, p. 76).<sup>14</sup>

The readers' dialog with the character Maria Poeirinha and the African space she refers to allows children to realize how much they can identify or not with this girl's misery. Children who are ignorant of the sea can be encouraged to think about it even though they have never seen it. Teachers can build a panel with the drawings of students who have already been to the beach, while those who have not, can draw the sea based on how they imagine it to be. Students can also do some research on the issue of water for human consumption: why is sea water, which is so abundant, not suitable for drinking? They can also address the scarcity of drinking water, waste and conscious consumption.

The book *O beijo da palavrinha* offers several interdisciplinary activities that support the application of Law 10639/2003 and enable the interdisciplinarity of Literature with the other subjects taught in the initial grades of elementary school. In fact, both *O beijo da palavrinha* and *O gato e o escuro* offer a wide range of literary and pedagogical possibilities. The next section describes some educational activities for the latter book.

### 3.2 O Gato e o Escuro ("The Cat and the Dark")

There are many similarities between this children's story and *O beijo da palavrinha*, especially regarding illustrations and racial themes; therefore, many of the pedagogical proposals suggested for that book can be adapted for this one.

The central theme present in the plot of *O gato e o escuro* is fear. We can do research with students on the various types of fear, classifying them into categories: those arising from real facts and those stemming from our fantasies. However, as previously noted in the analysis of this book, we must be careful when using this story in the classroom to avoid adopting it as a pedagogical resource to frighten children and force them to obey their mothers, or lead them to believe that their skin could be blackened as punishment for not following this rule.

Teachers, after telling the story to students, can collect information about the right to respect the differences of each human being, either in terms of their physical type or in their aesthetic or behavioral choices.

The theme of colors covered in the book can provide a playful activity for children; for example, the experiences of creating a rainbow with a hose nozzle or through prisms. Students could make an artistic creation by adding new colors to the rainbow, just as black was added in the story *O gato e o escuro*. Another activity that could provide good results is mixing paints to create new colors.

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<sup>14</sup> Author's translation: It is important for children to recognize themselves in the space of the story narrated or read, for them to see themselves represented by characters who resemble them and who enjoy the same power of princes, princesses and leaders in the classic context. Telling stories of kings, spells, witches and fairies is not bad, but schools should alternate between these stories and others, particularly those that value traits of Brazilian culture and the formation of its people, thus giving place to "this is your turn" (Knop, 2010, p. 76.).

All these suggested activities deserve to be contextualized for a discussion about the idea that the use of colors as a form of discrimination against subjects is unjustified in human relationships. This way, students can learn, ever since the first educational stages, to deconstruct the idea that each physical type is naturally/biologically endowed with social behaviors.

#### 4. Literary-Pedagogical Activities and Law 10639/2003 — Challenges for Alignment

The obligation to teach African history and Afro-Brazilian culture, as established by Law 10639/2003, is in line with the quest of teachers, at all levels of education, for respect for ethnic plurality within Brazilian schools, and also with the idea that the self-esteem of thousands of citizens can be built by destroying the myth of racial democracy. Educators have to be able to demystify a past built upon their experiences as students and upon their teaching practice in order to be able to develop activities that encompass contemporary knowledge of themes dealing with Africanities and ethnic-racial relations. These challenges are pointed out by Nilma Gomes (2006), when she asks:

Mas que história será contada e recuperada em sala de aula, se a grande maioria dos professores em atividade não a conhece? O que fazer diante de uma manutenção sistemática e bem engendrada do sistema educacional brasileiro, em doutrinar um olhar eurocêntrico? Como desconstruir a ideia de uma África atrasada e selvagem? Além desses primeiros questionamentos, há outro que considero delicado e mais resistente de se quebrar, ou seja, como sensibiliza ruma importante parcela de professores e alunos evangélicos quanto ao fato de o estudo de história da África não ser o mesmo que se estudar os cultos afro-brasileiros, popularmente chamados por alguns grupos de *macumba*? (Gomes, 2006, p. 70.)<sup>15</sup>

Although there is a strong desire to comply with Law 10639/2003, the most important role is that of the educator, that of each school, that of each professional in the school community. The challenge goes beyond educational changes; one needs to face society and its religious prejudice against whatever is African. We need to find ways to convince the publishing market, showing that it is feasible to include the racial theme in a profitable structure, built over centuries, without leading to financial losses.

The inspiration for a thorough application of Law 10639/2003, whether in the subjects suggested by this law (History, Literature and Arts), or in an interdisciplinary fashion, may start to emerge from reading. The act of reading succeeds in crossing the wall of racial discrimination and all the hardships it imposes on human beings. One day, educators may be able to break the limits of the educational system and act like Pintalgato, which managed to leave its fear behind and

... inspirou coragem e passou uma perna para o lado de lá, onde a noite se enrosca a dormir. Foi ganhando mais confiança e, de cada vez, se adentrou um bocadinho. Até que a metade completa dele já passara a fronteira, para além do limite (Couto, 2008, p. 12).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, by assuming their transformative capacity, educators will be able to establish dialogs with the school

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<sup>15</sup> Author's translation: But what story will be told and recovered in the classroom, if the vast majority of active teachers are not aware of it? What to do in the face of a systematic and well-engendered maintenance of the Brazilian educational system that indoctrinates a Eurocentric view? How to deconstruct the idea of an underdeveloped and wild Africa? In addition to these first questions, there is another one that I consider to be delicate and more resistant to rupture, that is, how to sensitize an important part of evangelical teachers and students about the fact that studying African history is not the same as studying African-Brazilian cults, popularly called *macumba* by some groups? (Gomes, 2006, p. 70.)

<sup>16</sup> Author's translation: ... inspired courage and moved a leg over to the other side, where the night curls up to sleep. As it gained more confidence, it got in a little bit more. Until half of it had already crossed the border, beyond the limit (Couto, 2008, p. 12).

community and build a borderless path towards the construction of equality between human beings.

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## Appendix I

### Translation of Law 10639 into English

#### LAW 10639, OF JANUARY 9, 2003.

Amends Law 9.394, of December 20, 1996, which establishes the guidelines and grounds of Brazilian education, to include, in the official curriculum of schools, the mandatory theme "Afro-Brazilian History and Culture", and other measures.

#### THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC

I inform that the Brazilian Congress decrees and I approve the following Law:

Article 1. Law 9394, of December 20, 1996, enters into force with the addition of the following articles 26-A, 79-A and 79-B:

"Article 26-A. In elementary and secondary schools, whether public or private, education on Afro-Brazilian History and Culture becomes mandatory.

Paragraph 1. The syllabus referred to in the head provision of this article will include the study on the History of Africa and Africans, the struggle of black people in Brazil, the Brazilian black culture, and the black in the formation of national society, redeeming the contribution of black people in the social, economic, and political fields pertinent to the History of Brazil.

Paragraph 2. The contents relative to Afro-Brazilian History and Culture shall be taught within the scope of the entire school curriculum, especially in the fields of Artistic Education and Brazilian Literature and History.

Paragraph 3. (VETOED)"

"Article 79-A. (VETOED)"

"Article 79-B. The school calendar will include November 20 as 'Black Awareness Day'."

Article 2. This Law shall enter into force on the date of its publication.

Brasília, January 9, 2003; 182nd year after Independence and 115th year after the Proclamation of the Republic.

LUIZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA

Cristovam Ricardo Cavalcanti Buarque.

This text does not replace the one published in the Federal Register of 01.10.2003. (BRASIL, 2003)

## APPENDIX II

### Translation of Law 11645 into English

#### LAW 11645, OF MARCH 10, 2008.

Amends Law 9.394, of December 20, 1996, amended by Law 10639, of January 9, 2003, which establishes the guidelines and grounds for national education, to include to include "Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture" as a mandatory theme in the official curricula of schools (BRASIL, 2008).