Cuica (Laughing Cup)

In this activity, you’ll make a *cuica* (pronounced KWEE-kah)—a musical instrument popular in Brazil.

**What Do I Need?**

- paper cup
- pushpin or nail (alternately, the tip of a ballpoint pen)
- cotton twine (or thick string)
- scissors
- paper clip
- flannel or other small piece of cloth (optional)
- cup with water (to moisten the cloth)

**What Do I Do?**

1. Poke a hole in the bottom center of the cup. Make it large enough to thread your twine through it.

2. Cut a piece of twine about 18 inches (45 cm) long.

3. Poke the end of the twine through the bottom of the cup.

4. Reach into the inside of the cup and pull the twine through.

5. Take the end of the twine that’s outside the bottom of the cup and tie it to a paper clip, using two knots so it’s secure. This functions as a stopper so the string doesn’t
6. Dunk the flannel in the water and squeeze out the excess water.

7. Using the wet flannel, grab the string inside the cup and rub it along the string to create sound. Try rubbing the string with short strokes, then long strokes to create different rhythms.

Variations
Use different cups or other containers to create different sounds. Here are some ideas:

- A coffee can with the plastic lid removed and a hole in the bottom.
- A tin can with the plastic lid on but the bottom metal removed (put the paper clip end on the side with the plastic lid).
- A plastic cup with dental floss instead of twine.
- If you don’t have flannel or another piece of cloth, moisten your fingers and rub your fingers along the string.

Decorations
If you used a plain paper cup, you might want to decorate it.

- Add a rooster head to make a clucking chicken cup.
- If you want it to be a laughing cup, you could draw a face on it.
- Use your imagination to come up with other decorating ideas.
What’s Going On?

When you rub the wet cloth on the string, the cloth sticks then slides, causing the string to vibrate and create sound. (All sound is a traveling vibration.) The paper cup or other container amplifies the sound—that is, it makes the sound louder. You may have noticed that most instruments have parts that vibrate, such as strings or reeds, and a large hollow part in which air vibrates, amplifying the sound.

The instrument in this activity is based on the Brazilian cuica, a small “friction drum” usually made of metal with a thin bamboo rod (instead of string) suspended in its hollow center. Of African origin, the cuica is best known today as one of a group of instruments used to play samba music during Brazil’s famous carnival parade.