



The Cajuns: Natives with a Difference!

Curriculum Unit 88.02.01
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Imagine the Louisiana bayous made habitable by the Acadians! Smell the aromas of their cuisine! Listen to the lilting sounds of their music! The Cajun way of life comes alive in this unit.

Why should my students study about the Acadians? The answer is simple. I teach French, and my students and I spend a great deal of time studying French culture. I especially like to show the students how French culture has influenced the United States. The Cajuns are French-Americans who have not been entirely acculturated. They settled in southern Louisiana after generations of living in French Canada. They spoke French, practiced French customs, and celebrated French holidays.

In Louisiana, the Acadians adapted to the land and the climate, and borrowed customs, cooking techniques, and even language, from the Spanish, Africans, and French and Spanish Creoles living there. The Cajuns have developed a fascinating culture that is uniquely American. In studying about the American Acadians, my students will deepen and enrich their knowledge of French culture.

This unit is a continuation of a unit I wrote in conjunction with John Warner in 1983 entitled *The Preservation of a Heritage: A Study of the Acadians*. The first unit treated the Acadians generally: their history, traditions, customs, festivals, architecture, dress, food, and some of their language.

The Acadians were discussed as two groups—those who still live in Canada and are called “Acadians”, and those who forged a French-American lifestyle in Louisiana and are called “Cajuns.” Classroom activities were devised for both middle school and high school students.

The following unit is based on the first one. Together they form a concentrated study of the Acadians. The two units may be used separately, as well as together.

This unit is ten weeks long and is designed for students in French III, IV, and V. As this is a cultural unit, students of all abilities will be able to learn the information through differentiated activities. All of the activities mentioned below are student-centered, with a focus on what the students will do. This unit can be used in conjunction with an American Literature or American History class.

The unit begins with a review of the history of the Acadians and the Cajun way of life, as well as their experiences as immigrants. To make the immigrants’ adventures and problems more compelling, the students will read excerpts of *Evangeline* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. This sympathetic and melodramatic

presentation of the dispersion of the Acadians helps to set the stage for our study of the Cajuns.

While the students are reading *Evangeline*, they will be reviewing the essential information about the Cajuns' background. The students will use what they know about the Cajuns to understand Cajun life today.

The major topics explored in this unit are Acadian history and the immigrant experience, Cajun music, food, and language. An historical perspective of each topic will help to situate it in a cultural context.

UNIT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

In order to attain the objectives of this unit, the students will participate in a variety of experiences. These experiences will range from large group to small group to individual activities, as well as aural-oral and written exercises. The students' active involvement ensures a lively and entertaining ten weeks!

OBJECTIVE 1 To learn about the immigrant experience.

The immigrant experience is, in essence, a definition of American culture. Immigrants, coming from a defined culture and settling in the United States, adapt their customs to their new life, thus making the American culture richer. During the process of assimilation, however, immigrants go through many hardships such as prejudice, low-paying jobs, ramshackle houses, and not having enough to eat. To find the "streets paved with gold", immigrants work very hard. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes they do not.

The stories of immigrants and their efforts to achieve the American Dream are fascinating. Students will be encouraged to share their knowledge of the human side of immigration in discussions based on facts from their American History textbooks and friends' or relatives' experiences. Excerpts from books such as *The Fortunate Pilgrim* by Mario Puzo and *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair will help to broaden the discussions.

The discussions mentioned above will present the basic information that students need to know about immigration in general. To focus their attention on the Cajuns, student volunteers might present the historical facts in forms of skits or soliloquies as a person living at that time. They could draw pictures depicting historical events, or act as reporters and report the news of the dispersion. Some students might want to make a filmstrip or video tape based on the Cajuns' history. Others might research and then depict famous or important historical figures, either by drawing pictures or acting in skits.

OBJECTIVE 2 To compare and contrast the immigrant experience with that of the Cajuns' arrival and early settlements.

Certainly, most of the Acadians' experiences in their exile parallel immigrant experiences. When they were loaded on ships, separated from their families, and put in alien places far from their familiar country, they had to contend with the anguish of not being accepted along with all their other problems.

The students will take the responsibility of presenting the similarities and differences between the experiences of immigrants and those of the Acadians. They will research the information in certain chapters in books provided on the Student Bibliography below, as well as the excerpts from *Evangeline* which focus on the exile. These discussions, in small groups, will treat specific and separate topics, such as why people emigrate, how immigrants fit in with an established community, why immigrants choose to settle in certain areas, what the Acadians' choices were and how they accepted their fate.

Some students might choose to write a diary, pretending to be Acadian, and describe his/her daily life. Others might write a letter to their relatives in France describing their plight. Students might also choose to act out a skit in which they dramatize the Acadians' experiences. Other students might write an account of the exile or the early settlements that could be put in a newspaper, or done orally as part of a radio or television broadcast, a type of "You Are There."

OBJECTIVE 3 To understand the Cajuns as an ethnic group.

A discussion of what an ethnic group is and how the Cajuns have retained their identity while so many others have not will help the students to understand the strong ethnic pride of the Cajuns. The students will now concentrate on Cajun culture. Many of the activities for attaining this objective and the two that follow, will lead to a culminating event. This event will be a Cajun Festival with authentic music, costumes, dances, and food.

Certain excerpts from *Evangeline* highlight the Acadian culture, homes, costumes, customs, food, etc. The students can use these passages as a point of departure for their own projects. The students might want to refer to a list of suggested topics and projects supplied by the teacher (see below).

The students can research topics such as food, music, dance, costumes, customs, and holidays. Then working together or alone, they can make and present their project to the rest of the class.

Some students might want to demonstrate a recipe for the class. Then they could share a typical Cajun meal. The class could see Paul Prudhomme's two videos on Cajun cooking and then try to duplicate one of the demonstrated recipes.

Students who are very interested in music might want to listen to tapes of Cajun music and then discuss its origins; and similarities and differences between Cajun music and Country and Western music. They might want to learn one or two songs and perform them for the class.

OBJECTIVE 4 To understand Cajun life today.

My first unit on the Acadians and reviewing their history and customs through reading *Evangeline*, will have given the students a well-developed understanding of the Cajuns' background. The students will be able to use this knowledge to form opinions about Cajun life today.

It is very difficult to find material on present-day Cajun life outside of Louisiana. Therefore, the students will write to the Louisiana Board of Tourism for all the information they have about the Cajuns.

Some films can be shown in the classroom. A list of possible choices is included in the resource list at the end of this unit.

The students will learn about Cajun food and music; and through these two topics they will learn more about the Cajuns and their lifestyle today. The resurgence of ethnic pride manifests itself predominantly in Cajun music and food. Many of the activities mentioned above will lend themselves to helping the students understand the Cajuns today.

OBJECTIVE 5 To use the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening to learn about the Cajuns.

Many of the activities mentioned above, especially the discussions, can be conducted in French. It depends on the abilities of the students whether an activity will be conducted in the target language or in English. Even

though the main purpose of this unit is cultural, as many of the activities as possible should take place in French. Some exercises may be bilingual, students of lower ability doing them in English and those of higher ability doing them in French.

The students may read some of the folk tales listed in the Student Bibliography, and then write their own, in French, based on historical events or interesting customs. They can write skits for other students to act out, as well. Some students may want to write a collection of articles about Cajun life and put them together like a newspaper or magazine.

After listening to some songs in Cajun French, some students may want to translate them into English. Other students may want to write their own Cajun song.

Interviews of famous Cajun musicians offer students many opportunities to work with their language skills. They can read and translate an interview into English. They can study an interview for cultural information. They may focus on a paragraph in Cajun French to see the similarities and differences in its structure from a similar paragraph in traditional French.

Students may also be encouraged to write a short story, a poem, or a song in French and Cajun French. This activity would be for advanced students who are more adept at learning languages, and who can recognize the subtleties in structure.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT SHEET

Dear Student:

For the next ten weeks we will be learning about the Cajuns of southern Louisiana. You will be doing several projects either alone or with other students in small groups (no more than four!). You may select five different topics and at least five different types of projects from the lists below. When you have made your choices please see me to be added to the Project List.

TOPICS

- history
- tourism
- daily life
- famous people
- music
- dispersion of Acadians
- first settlements in Louisiana
- holidays
- festivals —
- folk tales
- geography
- food
- Cajun houses
- Cajun language
- Cajun dances

Cajun dress
Cajun life today

TYPE OF PROJECT

personal diary
time line
letter
tourist poster
filmstrip
videotape
skit
calendar of historical dates, birthdays of famous people, holidays and festivals
diorama
booklet
pictures
maps
mural
montage
collage
puppet show
oral report
written report
newspaper
demonstration

(Other lists may be included with specific names of famous people, or holidays, etc.)

HISTORY OF THE ACADIANS

The Cajuns today have a unique lifestyle which is rooted in their history. The first French colony in the New World was established in Nova Scotia (Acadie) in 1604. This colony was settled by Frenchmen from Brittany (la Bretagne), Normandy (la Normandie), and Picardy (la Picardie). They were trappers, hunters, and fishermen.

After the War of the Spanish Succession, France lost *Acadie* to the English. The Acadians were to be allowed to leave their colony with all their possessions during the following year, but the English, wanting their new colony to be populated, wouldn't allow the Acadians to leave for forty years. When the British could make a profit from their colony, they would allow the Acadians to leave.

The Acadians obeyed their new rulers and continued to live the way they had always lived. France tried to get the Acadians to revolt against the English in another war in 1744, but they refused to break the Treaty of Utrecht which had ended the War of the Spanish Succession. Because of their refusal, Nova Scotia (Acadie) continued to be under the English flag.

Finally, in 1748, the English brought over twenty-five hundred settlers from England. They could now claim *Acadie* as their own and expel the Acadians who had lived there for a century and a half!

The *Grand Dérangement* (great displacement) began in 1755. The Acadians were told about their exile on a Sunday morning in church. Several days later the expulsion began. People were put on ships, usually separated from their families. Their homes and villages were destroyed.

More than 8,000 Acadians were deported. Half of them died at sea, some from diseases such as smallpox. The survivors were deposited along the Atlantic coast in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia, Connecticut, North and South Carolina, New York, and Maryland.

The Acadians were thrown out of most of the colonies where they tried to settle. Maryland was the only colony that welcomed the exiles. From Maryland, they made their way south to Louisiana, as there were other French people settled there.

Louisiana welcomed them. The first party arrived in 1756 and aroused such sympathy among the French people that Baron de Kerlerec, Governor of Louisiana, gave them lands, seed and provisions for establishing in the interior. They were permitted to choose their lands. An engineer was appointed to locate the sites for their settlements, along navigable streams. Land was distributed according to the number in the family. Other Acadians poured into Louisiana from all parts of the United States, with due bills for services, issued by the government of France and by Canada. Thirty years after the *Grand Dérangement* a group of 1500 Acadians who had been living for a quarter century in France came to join their relatives in Louisiana. (Carolyn Ramsey, *Cajuns on the Bayous* (New York: Hastings House, Publishers), 1957, p. XIII.)

The transplanted Acadians settled in and forged their own lifestyle. They were hardy peasants used to hard work. Their ancestors had been fishing off the coast of Nova Scotia for centuries.

The Acadians didn't isolate themselves. They married other Frenchmen, the Spanish, Creoles, and Indians. They became farmers, alligator hunters, fishermen, cane planters, and moss gatherers. They adapted to their

new lives and created a new culture.

A separation did exist, however, between “Cajuns” and

“Creoles.” Creoles were the descendants of the first French and Spanish settlers who were noblemen, and who had “. . . established a culture distinctly their own in the New World. Their glamorous traditions contrasted strongly with the peasant background of the early Acadians. Creoles were gallants, extravagant cavaliers, Acadians were sturdy plodding peasants.” (Ramsey, p. XVI)

A time line of important events in Acadian history, as well as a list of some famous people can be found in my previous unit. (see Teacher Bibliography)

EVANGELINE BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

SUMMARY OF THE STORY:

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.
Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighboring ocean
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest. (*The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow* , (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.), 1893, p. 71)

Thus Longfellow presents the setting for his story about the Acadian exile. In a few picturesque words he evokes the haunting setting of *Acadie* and the Acadians’ attachment to their land. Right at the beginning he hooks the reader and encourages him/her to learn Evangeline’s story.

In a fertile valley surrounded by corn fields, orchards, fields of flax, vast meadows, pastures, forests, and mountains, lay the Acadian village of Grand-Pré. The Acadians led a quiet, pious, industrious, satisfying life.

Evangeline was the beautiful seventeen year old daughter of the wealthiest farmer in the village, Benedict Bellefontaine. She was fair with black eyes and brown hair. She was pious and modest. She wore “her Norman cap, and her kirtle of blue, and the ear-rings,/ Brought in the olden time from France, . . .” (*Longfellow* , p. 73)

Gabriel Lajeunesse, son of Basil the village blacksmith, was in love with Evangeline, and she with him. Their engagement was celebrated. Then disaster struck.

The villagers were summoned to the church. As they filed in they saw many English soldiers. They were told that within a week they were to leave their homes forever. They had a few days to gather their belongings to

be ready to sail.

They were astounded. What could they do? Instead of rebelling, they went home to get ready for the dispersion. Five days later, they were summoned to the river with as many of their possessions as they could carry.

Thus to the Gaspereau's mouth they hurried; and there on the sea-beach
Piled in confusion lay the household goods of the peasants.
All day long between the shore and the ships did the boats ply;
All day long the wains came laboring down from the village.
Late in the afternoon, when the sun was near to his setting,
Echoed far o'er the fields came the roll of drums from the churchyard.
Thither the women and children thronged. On a sudden the church-doors
Opened, and forth came the guard, and marching in gloomy procession
Followed the long-imprisoned, but patient, Acadian farmers. (*Longfellow* , p. 82)

The men sang a religious song as they went to the boats. Then they prayed. The British loaded the boats without keeping families together. The boats were going to different destinations. Most families would never see each other again.

Gabriel and his father were among the first to be shipped out on separate ships. Evangeline and her father were kept on shore, not allowed to board a ship, nor allowed to return to their home.

Soon after the first boats sailed, the British burned down the village of Grand-Pré. Evangeline and her father watched the flames destroy their lives. Benedict Bellefontaine died. They buried him near the sea so that when they returned he could be buried in the churchyard.

Finally the last ships could depart, and *Acadie* was no more.

And with the ebb of the tide the ships sailed out of the harbor,
Leaving behind them the dead on the shore, and the village in ruins. (*Longfellow* , p. 84)

Many years passed. The Acadians were scattered all along the Atlantic coast. Some settled in certain areas

and made a new start, others wandered and never settled in one place. Still others died in despair.

Friends they sought and homes; and many, despairing, heart-broken,
Asked of the earth but a grave, and no longer a friend nor a fireside.
Written their history stands on tablets of stone in the churchyards. (*Longfellow* , p. 84)

Evangeline looked everywhere for Gabriel—in many towns and in their graveyards. “Thus did that poor soul wander in want and cheerless discomfort,/ Bleeding, barefooted, over the shards and thorns of existence.” (*Longfellow* , p. 85)

In her wanderings, Evangeline met other exiled Acadians. They joined together to search for relatives and friends, and, at last, found their way to Louisiana. They found green islands, cotton trees, broad lagoons, flocks of pelicans, china trees, luxuriant gardens, mimosa, mosses, cedar trees, cypress trees, plantations, and a land of perpetual summer.

The Acadians found Basil the blacksmith now working on his own farm as a herdsman. His farm was fertile and prosperous. Gabriel was no longer with him. He had gone off to find Evangeline.

Evangeline pursued Gabriel but couldn't find him. She searched everywhere, on the prairies, in Michigan, and in the Ozarks. Years passed. Evangeline got older. Her brown hair turned gray. She kept on looking, certain that she would find Gabriel.

Finally, Evangeline settled in Pennsylvania with the Quakers. She lived as a sister of mercy helping people and acting as a nurse when they were ill.

One summer, a plague broke out in the city. Evangeline helped as a nurse in the poorhouse. One Sunday morning she entered a ward and found Gabriel, dying of the disease. She held him in her arms. He recognized her. Then he died.

When Evangeline died some time later, she was buried next to Gabriel. They were together in death, closer than they had been in life.

Longfellow's tale ends with the Acadian way of life continuing in its new home.

In the fisherman's cot the wheel and the loom are still busy;
Maidens still wear their Norman caps and their kirtles of homespun,
And by the evening fire repeat Evangeline's story,
While from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced, neighboring ocean
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest. (*Longfellow* , p. 98)

ACADIAN CUSTOMS:

In addition to the sad story of Evangeline and Gabriel, Longfellow's poem introduces the reader to Acadian customs and beliefs. The reader learns about their houses, their dress and occupations, superstitions, and religion.

There are two descriptions of houses in *Evangeline*, one in *Acadie* and the other in Louisiana. Both were built well and were in an Acadian style. In *Acadie* the Acadian houses resembled those in France.

Strongly built were the houses, with frames of oak and of hemlock,
Such as the peasants of Normandy built in the reign of the Henries.
Thatched were the roofs, with dormer-windows; and gables projecting
Over the basement below protected and shaded the doorway. (*Longfellow* , p. 72)

In Louisiana, the houses took on a "southern" flavor.

Near to the bank of the river, o'ershadowed by oaks, from whose branches
Garlands of Spanish moss and of mystic mistletoe flaunted, . . .
Stood, secluded and still, the house of the herdsman. A garden
Girded it round about with a belt of luxuriant blossoms,
Filling the air with fragrance. The house itself was of timbers
Hewn from the cypress-tree, and carefully fitted together.
Large and low was the roof; and on slender columns supported,
Rose-wreathed, vine encircled, a broad and spacious veranda, . . .
In the rear of the house, from the garden gate, ran a pathway
Through the great groves of oak to the skirts of the limitless prairie, . . . (*Longfellow* , pp. 88-89)

Acadian dress and occupations as presented by Longfellow, give the people of his story reality. They are living, breathing people.

Matrons and maidens sat in snow-white caps and in kirtles
Scarlet and blue and green, with distaffs spinning the golden
Flax for the gossiping looms, whose noisy shuttles within doors
Mingled their sounds with the whirl of the wheels and the songs of the maidens. (*Longfellow* , p. 72)

A major occupation in the village was farming. One job closely related to farming and the animals was blacksmithing. Longfellow describes Basil and his work most poetically. Basil would “. . . take in his leathern lap the hoof of the horse as a plaything,/ Nailing the shoe in its place, while near him the tire of the cart-wheel/ Lay like a fiery snake, coiled round in a circle of cinders”. (*Longfellow* , p. 74)

The children played like other children. Longfellow mentions that they played darts, and in winter they sledded.

The Acadians were very religious but they were also superstitious. Children would look for a particular stone that was said to give good luck.

Oft in the barns they climbed to the populous nests on the rafters,
Seeking with eager eyes that wondrous stone, which the swallow
Brings from the shore of the sea to restore the sight of its fledglings;
Lucky was he who found that stone in the nest of the swallow! (*Longfellow* , p. 74)

Evangeline was called the “sunshine of Sainte Eulalie”, for “that was the sunshine/ Which, as the farmers believed, would load their orchards with apples”. (*Longfellow* , p. 74) Her piety and goodness radiated from her like the sun.

The Acadians were close to nature. Nature reflected their feelings, hopes, and dreams, as well as their sadness. They called autumn the Summer of All-Saints which is what we call Indian Summer.

Filled was the air with a dreamy and magical light; and the landscape
Lay as if new-created in all the freshness of childhood.
Peace seemed to reign upon earth, and the restless heart of the ocean
Was for a moment consoled. All sounds were in harmony blended. . . .
Voices of children at play, the crowing of cocks in the farm-yards,
Whir of wings in the drowsy air, and the cooing of pigeons,
All were subdued and low as the murmurs of love, and the great sun

Looked with the eye of love through the golden vapors around him;
While arrayed in its robes of russet and scarlet and yellow,
Bright with the sheen of the dew, each glittering tree of the forest
Flashed like the plane-tree the Persian adorned with mantles and jewels. (*Longfellow* , pp. 74-75)

CAJUN FOOD

When the Acadians settled in Louisiana, their cooking was predominantly French. They brought few possessions with them when they left Nova Scotia. They did bring, however, practicality, ingenuity, and resourcefulness, all of which contributed to their new cuisine.

They learned to use the natural resources of the area seafood, game, rich soil, semi-tropical climate, and plenty of water. They adapted and adopted African, American Indian, Spanish, Italian, and even some German techniques and dishes which helped to make Cajun cooking one of a kind.

Cajun cuisine is a totally indigenous American cuisine, drawing from pure French, pure Spanish, Acadian and other Louisiana French elements as well as Black, Indian and other elements in Louisiana's history and culture and is a traditional food having evolved over a prolonged period of time. . . . Cajun cuisine . . . has drawn upon the foods native to Louisiana including Louisiana's abundant, high quality seafood, game, poultry, pork and beef. Contrary to what has been reported elsewhere, Cajun cuisine is distinctive from Louisiana's Creole cuisine of New Orleans, although the two may have shared similar influences. (*Cajun Cuisine* , (Lafayette, La.: Beau Bayou Publishing Company), 1985, p. 5)

The main differences between Cajun and Creole cooking are: 1) Cajun cuisine uses herbs, seasonings and spices to enhance the main ingredient of the dish to make its distinctive taste; 2) Cajun dishes aren't as greasy or fatty as Creole dishes; and 3) Cajun cooking makes attractive use of leftovers to create new dishes.

SOME KEY ELEMENTS OF CAJUN COOKING:

1. *An iron pot*- for all the slow cooking in Cajun dishes.
Roux- is the basis for many Cajun dishes. It is a preparation made with flour mixed with butter or another kind of fat (lard) and melted into a liquid used to thicken sauces. It is originally a French technique.
2. *Stock*- is boiled game, meat, bones, poultry, or fish which becomes a sauce or soup.

- Herbs and spices*- are an integral part of Cajun cooking. They come from roots, stems, leaves, seeds or fruits of plants. The most popular herbs are onions, flat-leaf parsley, bell-peppers, celery, garlic, marjoram, chives, onion tops and bay leaves.
4. *Gumbo*- is a hearty, soupy stew that can be made with any available meats. Roux is the base for this dish. When the roux reaches the right consistency, herbs are added. When the vegetables are soft, cold water is added. Then a combination of meats is added and cooked. The name for this dish, gumbo, is an African word meaning okra.
 5. *Courtbouillon*- comes from the French, meaning a clear broth made with water, wine, and herbs in which fish is cooked.
 6. *Crawfish bisque*- bisque is a creamy French soup made with fish; in this dish crayfish are used.
 7. *Jambalaya*- is probably adapted from the Spanish *paella* a saffron rice dish cooked in a skillet with chicken, pork, and seafood. The name comes from *jambon* (French for ham) or *Jomba* (an African word for bundle in which meat and fish are cooked together with crushed oily nuts). The Cajuns use rice as the base for jambalaya, not roux.
 8. *Etouffé*- is French for smothered or steamed, and describes a dish that is braised or is a stew which is served over rice, with any meat, fish, or shellfish.
 9. *Sauce piquante*- in France is a sauce made with mustard, vinegar, and gherkins. To the Cajuns, it is a stew made from alligator, squirrel, turtle, or any meat, fish or shellfish. This dish has roux as a base, with tomatoes and spices.
 10. *Maque choux*- a Cajun dish made of sweet corn covered with onions, fat, seasonings, garlic, and one red tomato.
 11. *Tarte ^ la Bouillie*- might be an adaptation of a French pie. It is made with a sweet dough for the crust, and filled with rich vanilla custard.
 12. *Lacuite*- is heavy cane syrup just before it turns to sugar. It can be used in coffee or maybe on pancakes. It is a Cajun specialty.
 13. *Tic-tac*- popcorn balls, another Cajun specialty.
 14. *Filé*- ground sassafras leaves used for thickening a sauce or soup, originally used by the Indians in Louisiana and adapted by the Cajuns.
 15. *Tasso*- is a Cajun seasoning made of dried smoked pork, and added to many dishes.
 16. *Mirliton*- is a French word which has nothing to do with cooking. The Cajuns use the word to refer to a green vegetable like chayote or a vegetable pear.
 17. *Okra*- is a green pod vegetable used in gumbo or as a side dish. It was probably brought to the United States from Africa.
 18. *Cayenne*- is a long thin hot red pepper used for seasoning. It is not found in French cooking.
 19. *Cracklins* or *gratons*- are small pieces of fried pork skin and fat, a special Cajun snack!
 20. *Boudin*- is a particular kind of sausage made in France. The Cajuns add their own spices to the preparation which give it a Cajun flavor.
 - 21.

CAJUN MEALS:

Breakfast—called the “little breakfast,” consists of cereal, which might be grits or *couche-couche* (a thick cornmeal cereal similar to Moroccan couscous, brought by African slaves; served with butter, milk, and sugar or real cane syrup), eggs, sausage, bread (which sometimes is cornbread or *Pain Perdu* (French Toast, Cajun style), butter, cane syrup, milk and coffee.

Dinner—at noon is the main meal of the day. It consists of meat (veal, beef, lamb, wild birds,

poultry, pork, turtles, frogs) or fish (redfish, trout, crabs, shrimp, crawfish), Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, or corn, green vegetables, salad or marinated vegetables, rice, dessert (preserved fruits, pie, cake, or pudding).

Supper—leftovers attractively prepared; sometimes cornbread, syrup, milk and milk products are supper.

Three excellent cookbooks on Cajun Cuisine are: *Cajun Cuisine* published by Beau Bayou Publishing Company, Lafayette, Louisiana, 1985; *Cajun-Creole Cooking* by Terry Thompson, published by HP Books, Tucson, Arizona, 1986; and *The Prudhomme Family Cookbook* by the eleven Prudhomme brothers and sisters and Chef Paul Prudhomme, published by William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1987. These cookbooks situate Cajun cooking in the Cajun culture. They present authentic recipes explaining how, when, and why the dishes are to be made.

CAJUN MUSIC

The music of French southern Louisiana is called “Cajun music.” Black musicians call it “Creole music.” It is through this music that Cajuns define their culture.

When the Acadians began to settle in Louisiana in 1765, they wanted to duplicate the closeness of their Acadian society. They established themselves so firmly into southern Louisiana that after one generation they dominated the area and absorbed other ethnic groups settled there. These groups were French Creoles (descendants of earlier French settlers), Spanish, Germans, Scots-Irish, Afro-Caribbeans and Anglo-Americans. These groups “eventually adopted the traditions and language of this new society which became the south Louisiana mainstream. The Acadians, in turn, borrowed many traits of these other cultures, and this cross-cultural exchange produced a new Louisiana-based community, the Cajuns.” (Barry Jean Ancelet, *The Makers of Cajun Music*, (Austin; University of Texas Press), 1984, p. 20)

Some of the Acadian settlers were isolated in the swamps, the Atchafalaya Basin, saltwater marshes, and the southern coast. They retained much of their culture and language because of this isolation.

Others settled west of the Atchafalaya Basin, along the Mississippi River, and in the bayou regions. There was a strong Creole presence in this area. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, French immigrants helped maintain close ties to France, and its linguistic and cultural development. St. Martinville and Abbéville resemble French villages more closely than other towns in southern Louisiana.

The western prairies were settled by Acadians because of the railroads and highways. Their towns resembled frontier towns.

It is on these prairies that diverse cultural influences blended with a strong western French/Acadian base to produce what is now called Cajun music. (Ancelet, p. 20)

The early French settlers did not bring musical instruments to colonial Louisiana, but they brought the melodies.

. . . Even with houses to be built, fields to be planted, and the monumental task of reestablishing a society,

families would gather after a day's work to sing *complaintes* , the long unaccompanied story songs and created new ones to reflect the Louisiana experience. They sang children's songs and lullabies . . . and developed play-party ditties for square and round dancing. (Ancelet, pp. 21-22)

Their songs reflected the joys and sorrows of life on the frontier, love affairs, ancient wars, wandering husbands and wives, etc.

As the Acadians settled into their new way of life, they began to acquire musical instruments such as the violin, fiddle, and clarinet. The musicians got a lot of practice, particularly at the *beals de maison* , which were traditional dances held in private homes, where the furniture was cleared out so that relatives and neighbors could come in and dance. The dances at these parties were Virginia reels, jigs, and hoedowns, learned from their Anglo-American neighbors, polkas, and three types of French country dances: *contredanses* , *varsoviennes* , and *valse ^ deux temps* . These dances were lively and expressed the Cajuns' joy of living.

The diatonic accordion was invented in 1828 in Vienna, Austria, and came to Louisiana with German settlers. The accordion transformed Cajun music and made lots of music for dancing. The accordion dominated the music and simplified it.

Many of the Cajun bands added the triangle, washboard, or spoons to the accordion and fiddle for their music. By the late 1920's most of the bands' repertoire were developed and considered to be Cajun music. The first commercial recordings of Cajun music were published between 1928 and 1932.

A series of events interrupted the smooth cultural rebuilding of the Cajuns. In 1901 oil was discovered near Jennings ("Evangeline Field"); this discovery brought money and Anglo-Americans into French Louisiana. In 1916 state and local school boards imposed compulsory English language education and banned French. World War I "brought Cajuns and Creoles into contact with the rest of the world, forcing upon them the realization that they were a minority within a larger American context." (Ancelet, p. 24) Mass media and clever programming on the national networks eclipsed local programs and encouraged Americanization. Improved transportation and new highways opened the previously isolated area to the rest of the country.

The melting pot philosophy, as articulated by Teddy Roosevelt, melded the people of America into a nation. In southern Louisiana, French culture and language were slag to be discarded in the Cajun's rush to join the mainstream. (Ancelet, p. 24)

Americanization and the Depression intensified class distinctions in Louisiana Acadian society. Those Cajuns who were upwardly mobile and were concerned with money and education as a way out of their class, embraced the movement toward English and away from French. They championed this movement particularly in the schools. If a person was "French," he or she was lower class, a peasant who worked in the fields.

Being 'French' became a stigma placed upon the less socially and economically ambitious Cajuns who had maintained their language and culture in self-sufficient isolation. . . . The pristine prairies described in eighteenth and nineteenth-century travelogues as a paradise lost became a dumpsite for the melting pot's hazardous waste. (Ancelet, pp. 24-25)

In the 1930's, Cajun music reflected the social changes. The music was heavily influenced by hillbilly and western swing music. The accordion disappeared when string bands with electric amplifiers, steel guitars, and trap drums appeared. Eventually, bands recorded bilingual songs, leaning heavily on English. The French language and traditional sounds began to disappear from Cajun music.

By the 1940's Cajun music was almost totally Americanized. In 1948, Iry Lejeune, a pivotal figure in revitalizing Cajun music, performed in the traditional style at a concert. He died in 1955, but others took up where he left off.

Traditional music was again in demand especially after World War II when returning soldiers wanted the comfort of their own culture. They had been able to converse with the French people in French, and they came back wanting more.

Cajun music was making a comeback, changed to some degree by outside influences. In the 1950's the national popularity of Jerry Lee Lewis and "Fats" Domino had a great influence on Cajun musicians.

The national folk revival movement gave Cajuns the impetus to revive the culture that was being destroyed by the "melting pot." In 1964 Louisiana French musicians performed at the Newport Folk Music Festival along with many other folk musicians. They received a standing ovation. This event acted as a catalyst for the resurgence of interest in traditional music as the focal point of Cajun culture.

CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana) was created in 1968. New laws were written to establish French language education. Teachers were brought from France, Belgium, and Quebec to start the program, and until Louisiana would have prepared its own teachers.

Preservation of the language and culture came under CODOFIL's jurisdiction. CODOFIL was responsible for all cultural events. The annual Cajun Music Festival not only preserved traditional music and musicians, but encouraged young musicians to look to their roots.

Through their music in particular, Cajuns have revived their traditions and allowed other people to experience their lifestyle. This ethnic movement is an example for others who want to preserve their culture.

The Louisiana experiment shows that American regional and ethnic cultures can endure, when change comes organically from within and when the past survives to serve the present, not as a restriction but as a resource. (Ancelet, p. 33)

SOME CAJUN MUSICIANS:

Both of the books mentioned in the Teacher Bibliography which are entirely about Cajun music are a rich resource of Cajun culture. Much of the reading in French that the students will be doing come from these books. They will read interviews with some of the most famous musicians and some of the history of Cajun music from these books.

Some of the musicians the students will learn about and whose music they will hear, are Clifton Chenier, Nathan Abshire, Marc Savoy, Amédée Ardoin, Leo Soileau, Iry Lejeune, D.L. Menard, Bois Sec Ardoin, John Delafosse, Lula Landry, and others. Students will read about the musicians' contributions to Cajun music. They will listen to some of their most important songs, and perhaps learn the words to some of them. This section of the unit is so interesting that more work needs to be done in this area.

TEACHER BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancelet, Barry Jean. *The Makers of Cajun Music Musiciens Cadiens et créoles* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press), 1984.

Good background information on the history of Cajun music. It contains bilingual interviews with famous Cajun musicians who talk about their music and that of other musicians. It is one of the sources for the student reading selections.

Bauman, Harriet J. and John C. Warner. "The Preservation of a Heritage: A Study of the Acadians" *Cross Cultural Variation in Children and Families Curriculum Units* by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Vol. VI. (53 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute), 1983.

Good background information and suggestions for activities. This unit can be used with the present unit for a well-rounded study of the Acadians.

Brasseaux, Carl A. *The Founding of New Acadia* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press), 1987.

An excellent book! It contains much useful information about the early settlers in Louisiana. The whole book should be read for the quality of its information.

Giraud, Marcel. *Histoire de la Louisiane FranCcaise Tome IV* (Paris: Presses Universitaires), 1974.

A detailed account of the colonization of Louisiana.

Savoy, Ann Allen. *Cajun Music A Reflection of a People Vol. I* (Eunice, Louisiana: Bluebird Press, Inc.), 1984.

This volume contains a history of Cajun music to the present time, instruments for Cajun music, songs with words and music, and interviews with certain Cajun musicians. Creole and zydeco music are presented also. An excellent book for the study of Cajun music!

Taylor, Joe Gray. *Louisiana A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.), 1976.

A well-written history of Louisiana from colonial times to the present. For this unit, the most interesting chapters are "Colonial Louisiana: A Study in Failure," "A Holding Action: Louisiana as a Spanish Colony," "Louisiana in the American Revolution," "The Americanization of Louisiana," and "Recent Louisiana: The Sweep of Change."

In addition to the books mentioned above, all books in the Student Bibliography are highly recommended for teachers as well. Another source of information is films. Les Blank Flower Films 10341 San Pablo Ave., EL Cerrito, Ca. 94530 is the best source available.

STUDENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Browne, Turner. *Louisiana Cajuns Cajuns de la Louisiane* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press), 1977.

The introduction to the book talks about life today in southern Louisiana. This is a picture book with authentic photographs of Cajuns and their activities. I highly recommend this book for students.

Cajun Cuisine (Lafayette, Louisiana: Beau Bayou Publishing Company), 1985.

Easy to follow authentic recipes. In addition, there is an excellent essay on Cajun cooking.

Gumbo Ya-Ya A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1945.

This book contains fascinating folk tales of southern Louisiana, superstitions, customs, and colloquialisms.

Marchand, Sidney A. *Acadian Exiles in the Golden Coast of Louisiana* (Donaldsonville, Louisiana: Sidney A. Marchand), 1943.

Good historical information on Acadian homes, church, and settlers, as well as the expulsion of the Acadians from Grand-Pré.

Parker, Maud May. *Louisiana A Pageant of Yesterday and Today* (New Orleans: Hauser Printing Co.), 1917.

A play in the form of a pageant celebrating Louisiana history. Younger students as well as older students might enjoy learning through reading and performing this play.

Ramsey, Carolyn. *Cajuns on the Bayous* (New York: Hastings House Publishers), 1957.

Another collection of stories about life in southern La. The stories are interesting. There is a very informational preface to the book, and good photographs.

The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1893.

The complete poem of *Evangeline* is include in this volume. Students may want to read it completely and not in excerpts.

The eleven Prudhomme brothers and sisters and Chef Paul Prudhomme. *The Prudhomme Family Cookbook Old-Time Louisiana Recipes* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 1987.

A collection of family recipes and memories of growing up Cajun.

Thompson, Terry. *Cajun-Creole Cooking* (Tucson, Arizona: HP Books), 1986.

A history of Cajun cooking is included in this book. There are easy to follow recipes, not necessarily duplicated in the other cookbooks. There are good color pictures of dishes too.

Wilson, Justin. *More Cajun Humor* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company), 1987.

This book contains humorous stories and ethnic stories about Cajuns and Cajun life. Students might enjoy

reading some of these stories which give the reader insight into the Cajun character.

(figure available in print form)

H.J.B 1988

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