



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1988 Volume II: Immigrants and American Identity

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## **The Cajuns: Natives With A Difference!**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 88.02.01  
by Harriet J. Bauman

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. Classroom activities were designed for both middle and high school students. My 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.

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.

(Recommended for French III classes, grades 10-12; French IV classes, grades 11 and 12; and French V classes, grade 12)

### **Key Words**

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