



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume II: The Family in Art and Material Culture

Cajun Music: the Voice of the Cajun Family

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“Laissez le bon temps rouler!” (Let the good times roll!) can be heard everywhere on beautiful Saturday mornings in Cajun Louisiana. Delicious smells waft through the air along with the sounds of musicians tuning up, getting ready for a day-long celebration of music, dance and food.

Saturday is important to the Cajuns because it is the end of the work week and the day before the Sabbath.

On Saturday, from nine in the morning to past midnight, all over Acadiana—and especially in its heartland, around Mamou and Eunice and Opelousas—is impossible to escape the sound of the fiddle, the guitar, and the accordion, the nasal singing of the old Cajun lyrics, the tingle of the triangle and spoons, and the rhythmic clomping of the two-step, the most popular Cajun dance because a two-step works well with the simple rhythms of the songs. (Amy Wilentz, “Bon Temps on the Bayou”, *Condé Nast Traveler* (New York: Condé Nast Publications Inc.; June, 1991), p. 145)

Cajun life is defined by its music. Cajun music is the focus for this unit as it reflects Cajun family life, customs, and language.

Using music to discuss a culture, its background and influences, is a special approach to the study of the family. For the Cajuns, music reveals their deepest feelings and expresses their philosophy of life. Cajun music can be studied in several different ways: 1) historically, as to its origins; 2) culturally; and 3) socially. With the family as the center of the ethnic group, and the focus for this unit, Cajun music will provide here the means for exploring the latter two aspects, for understanding the culture and the people.

As a French teacher in the New Haven Public Schools, I am required to teach a particular curriculum. Included in this curriculum are aspects of French culture which are highlighted in the textbooks for every level. In addition to the “mandatory” culture, there are cultural topics that I include because I am interested in them, and, because the students find them interesting as well.

I enjoy teaching French culture. Sometimes, however, the information seems too remote from my urban students’ American experience. Therefore I make an effort to include cultural topics based on French influence on the United States (food, fashion, language, etc.), as well as the study of French Americans. Because I am fascinated by the culture of the French Americans in Louisiana, especially the Cajuns, I take every opportunity to learn more about them. I have written two other units about the Cajuns which can be used along with this unit: “The Preservation of a Heritage: A Study of the Acadians” in 1983, and “The Cajuns: Natives With a

Difference!" in 1988.

This unit is designed for French classes in levels 2, 3, and 4. It can be used in a U.S. History class, an American literature class, a music class, and an art history or Humanities class. The unit may take between five and ten weeks, depending on the interest of the students, and the constraints of the curriculum.

In order to learn about Cajun music within the context of its culture, I am using an object analysis approach. Object analysis concentrates on an object from a particular time or culture. In studying the object thoroughly, conclusions about the culture can be reached.

Jules D. Prown, in his article "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," (see Bibliography) describes the three major phases of object analysis as description, deduction, and speculation. In the descriptive phase, the observer is limited to what can be seen in the object itself: its measurements and weight, the materials used, and the ways in which the materials are put together. All decorations, designs, words, and letters are examined. And, as the final step in this phase, "formal analysis" occurs in which the observer describes the object two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally, as well as in terms of color, lights and darks, and texture.

In the deductive phase, the observer uses the information learned in the first phase. He/She interacts with the object and draws some conclusions about the society from which it comes. This phase relies on the observer's senses, and his/her intellectual and emotional responses to the object.

The final phase of object analysis is speculation. In this phase, the observer is required to use his/her imagination in a creative manner to hypothesize about the object. The theories derived from these hypotheses need to be tested through research, so that questions raised from the close observation of the object can be answered satisfactorily.

Music, though not a material object, can be analyzed using Prown's method. The record album cover, the lyrics, and the music itself, all can be studied to provide insight into the Cajun culture.

The album cover can be examined descriptively, deductively, and speculatively as a cultural object. Cultural information can be gleaned from the design of the cover, not only from what is included, but from what is not, as well.

One can study the lyrics of a song in their original form linguistically and grammatically, in translation, and as presented in different versions. The lyrics may be studied historically and culturally. The lyrics provide several lessons for language classes to analyze Cajun French.

The music can be studied historically to learn how it has been influenced. In addition, one can examine the music for its unique qualities—elements that make Cajun music different from other forms of American music.

OBJECTIVES

1. To use the Cajuns and their music to engage an interest in and to learn French.
2. To learn about the Cajuns, their customs, work, leisure time, food, and how their music unites them as an ethnic group, with emphasis on the family.
3. To learn the history of Cajun music.
4. To learn about Cajun music of today.
5. To analyze several Cajun songs, using the object analysis method.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Brief History of the Cajuns

In the 1500's French explorers left France and sailed west to the Bay of Fundy in what is now Nova Scotia, Canada. At first they hunted, trapped, and fished, and lived a rather nomadic existence. In 1605 they founded a town called Port Royal on the northern coast of the Bay of Fundy where they could live in a permanent settlement and farm the land, but continue to hunt and fish.

Because they felt that they had found an "earthly paradise" like Virgil's Arcadia, these settlers started calling themselves "Acadiens" (Acadians). Politically, however, there were problems in paradise. The British and the French were beginning their struggle for domination of the Americas. The Acadians were neutral in this struggle, but because they were French, the British became suspicious of them.

At the same time that the French were settling Acadia (Nova Scotia), other groups of French settlers were establishing themselves in Louisiana. The political situation was getting worse and worse in Acadia, so much so that some of the Acadians began thinking about moving to Louisiana where the French ruled the area securely and the Catholic religion was supreme.

In 1713, Acadia was ceded to the English under the Treaty of Utrecht. The population was entirely French Catholic. The treaty allowed the people to leave the country within one year, with their belongings, or to remain and practice their own religion insofar as British law allowed. (Jacques-Donat Casanova and Armour Landry, *America's French Heritage* (La Documentation FranCaise and the Quebec Official Publisher, 1976), p. 64)

In 1754 the Mouton family left Acadia for Louisiana. Their move became the first recorded migration of Acadians to Louisiana, and the Moutons became the first "Cajuns" (an Americanization of the word Acadian). In 1755, Governor Charles Lawrence of Nova Scotia formally expelled the Acadians.

This is the central experience of Cajun history and lore. In French it is called 'Le Grand Dérangement,' the great disturbance, in English commonly known as the Expulsion. Between September, 1755 and the end of the year, more than five thousand Acadians were shipped out of their homeland for unknown destinations. Families were separated, often on purpose, by the British, who would put men on one ship and women and children on another.

The deportation continued in spurts, until almost every single Acadian had been expelled from the land his or her forebears had tamed. (Wilentz, p. 106)

The Acadians were dispersed far and wide. Some went to France or England. Others settled in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, the Carolinas, or Georgia. Still others ended up in Haiti, Martinique, or Guadeloupe in the French West Indies. It sometimes took many months and even years before the exiles reached Louisiana where the King of France was offering them land for settlement.

When the Acadians finally arrived in Louisiana, they discovered a hostile, disease ridden environment. Even with all the problems they encountered here, they found that the land was rich for farming; there were thick woods teeming with game, and rivers, marshes, and swamps filled with fish of all kinds.

It was hard to starve in the new Acadia, and even if the French Creole planters of New Orleans and its environs did not want to have much to do with the now penniless Acadians, at least French was spoken throughout the colony, even during its brief cession to the Spanish. The religion was Catholic, and the Acadians could erect their churches here without fear that the Protestant English would burn them down the next day. (Wilentz, pp. 106-107)

Cajun farmers settled on the prairie, and the trappers and fishermen built their houses in the bayous ("Bayou" is from a Choctaw Indian word "bayuk" meaning creek or small river). The Cajuns made use of the natural resources of the area, and, in so doing, created a new way of life.

A Brief History of Cajun Music

Cajun music "is a major lifeforce of the Cajun culture. It is vital to the continuation of that culture and by continuing to live, it serves to bond together the generations. Those who can identify with this music can identify with the people because the music is a reflection of the lives, strengths, sorrows, and joys of the people." (Ann Allen Savoy, *Cajun Music : A Reflection of a People* , Volume 1 (Eunice, Louisiana: Bluebird Press, Inc., 1984), p. XI)

Early Cajun music was born in the struggle to survive in a difficult living situation. Cajun music reflected the day to day problems and the hardships faced by the new settlers. They worked hard and played even harder. Their music defined a sense of community as several musicians worked together in playing their music for social gatherings.

The first music of Louisiana was brought by the settlers. The music was that of their ancestors, "... beautiful ballads that told stories of bygone years. Many of these songs can be traced back to France and many songs from France drifted to the bayou and prairie region via New Orleans and Nova Scotia." (Savoy, p. 13)

The voice as well as the fiddle were the instruments of choice in early Cajun country. There were two fiddles customarily employed for playing this music; one played the tune while the other played the rhythm. Later the Germans brought the button accordion to Louisiana and it was incorporated into Cajun music. It became the instrument of choice in the 1920's.

Here was an instrument that could withstand the problems that ravaged violins in the semi-tropical climate... Here also, was an instrument of huge volume that even offered its own accompaniment by supplying a bass and a chord section, so its full sound was an asset to the packed, noisy dancehalls. Thus Cajun music began a major change. (Savoy, p. 13) Because the accordion was simple, it could not form the delicate nuances of the old songs. But many beautiful songs were written for it. The era of the accordion is considered by some to be "traditional

Cajun music.” (Savoy, p. 13)

The Cajuns also started using a guitar for rhythm. A typical Cajun band was made up of a fiddle, an accordion, and a guitar or triangle for rhythm. In the 1930’s the accordion began to lose its popularity due to the influence of hillbilly music which was introduced during the discovery of oil in Louisiana. During World War II the typical Cajun band consisted of the fiddle, the guitar, the upright string bass and drums. Sometimes mandolins and banjos were included.

After World War II, accordions became popular again. “Not only was the availability of the accordions the reason for this instrument’s regained popularity, but Cajun national pride was in full bloom; those who had left during the war saw that the Cajuns were as ‘good as anyone else,’ and they had longed for the symbols of their homeland.” (Savoy, p. 14)

As soldiers, the Cajuns were used to translate and to act as liaisons with the French allies. The Cajuns were amazed that the language they were forbidden to speak outside their homes in Louisiana, was not only acceptable but respected by everyone they met. They felt very important because they could contribute something unique to the war effort—their language. Their renewed pride in their culture manifested itself in their music when they came home. They wanted their music played and sung the way it had been before World War II. Nevertheless, changes occurred in the music after the War.

An important structural change was the phasing out of the ‘bridges’ used in the old songs. A ‘bridge’ is an alternate tune (usually formed by omitting the second chord of the melody) used to break up the monotony of one or two instruments repeating the melody over and over again. The addition of the steel guitar as a third lead instrument omitted the need for an alternate melody since enough variety was already offered by the increased instrumentation. (Savoy, p. 14)

Creole and Zydeco Music

“Creole” originally meant a person of French, Spanish, or Portuguese descent born in the United States. Its meaning subsequently changed to a person of mixed ancestry-European and Black, who speaks the Creole language (a mixture of African and French). The latter definition of a person of mixed ancestry who speaks Creole is preferred by the Blacks in southern Louisiana.

Slaves were brought to Louisiana from the west coast of Africa between 1719 and 1809; ‘Gens libres de couleur’ (free people of color) came to and developed in Louisiana before and after the Haitian revolution; French planters exiled from Cuba in 1810 brought Caribbean French slaves with them; blacks from Virginia and Maryland also came to Louisiana, Slavery, though common in eastern Louisiana, was practiced on a small scale in the Cajun part of Louisiana. Many blacks found work as tenant farmers among the hard working Cajuns after their release from slavery. To the Cajun culture these people of many nations brought spices, new language elements, culinary arts, and rhythmic influences to the music. (Savoy, p. 304)

Early Creole music was made without instruments because instruments cost money. Therefore the Creole musicians used what they had, their bodies, their voices, or simple instruments made from ordinary household items to make their music. “When instruments became available the black Creoles were among the earliest to master the accordion. The early available recordings of Creole musicians show a closeness in style to the Cajun musicians.” (Savoy, p. 304)

The early singers were mainly women who sang old ballads or story songs that came from Old World sources,

brought over by French and Spanish settlers. Other singers were called “juré singers” who sang inspirational songs praising God with hand clapping, foot timing, calling and singing testimonies to God. Surrogate instruments were sometimes used such as mule jaws or bones, washboards, and sticks rubbed on wood.

After World War II rhythm and blues and other instrumental music influenced black Creole music. The washboard was replaced by corrugated steel vests. French songs were played faster, and the words of songs were simplified. There were changes in rhythm also. “La-la” music was characteristic of this period of Creole music. “La-la” music is fast French dance music with a rhythm and blues influence. Single row and triple row accordions were the instruments of choice for “la-la” music. “‘Zydeco’ is really the expression that replaced ‘la-la’ and ‘pic-nic’ in referring to a dance or the music played at a dance.” (Savoy, p. 305)

THE CAJUN FAMILY AND ITS MUSIC

For the Cajun family, music is a way of life. The musicians are primarily self-taught, using borrowed or very inexpensive instruments. The bands are made up of family members, girls and boys, women and men. The songs are based on family traditions, and the same songs are sung within the family for generations.

Music has been important to Cajun families since they arrived in Louisiana. After a long day’s work building houses, or plowing the fields, “families would gather... to sing *complaintes*, the long unaccompanied story songs of their French heritage. They adapted old songs to reflect the Louisiana experience. They sang children’s songs, drinking songs, and lullabies in the appropriate settings and developed play-party ditties for square and round dancing... They filled the loneliest nights in the simplest cabins with wisdom and art.” (Barry Jean Ancelet, *The Makers of Cajun Music Musiciens cadiens et créoles* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1984), pp. 21-22)

No holiday is complete without music. The Cajuns have special songs for Christmas and for Mardi Gras (Shrove Tuesday). They celebrate their holidays enthusiastically and play their music, or sing, or dance with gusto. Even common events such as a “boucherie” (hog butchering), for example, are celebrated with music.

MEET JOE AND CLÉOMA FALCON: TYPICAL CAJUN MUSICIANS

In Joe Falcon’s family hardworking farmers eked out a sparse existence raising cotton and sugarcane. When Joe was seven years old his father bought him an accordion, which he taught himself to play. He competed in accordion contests and often won. One day, when he was a young teenager, he brought his accordion to a dance, and was asked to sit in with the band. Thus his career began.

Joe was friendly with Amédée Breaux. He spent a lot of time with Amédée’s band playing the triangle while Amédée played the accordion. Amédée’s sister, Cléoma, played the guitar in Amédée’s band. She soon played the rhythm guitar while Joe played the accordion in the dancehalls. They were married and made their musical partnership a permanent one.

In the late 1920’s when Louisiana was blooming with some of the finest Cajun music and the accordion was, for the first time, the ‘king’ instrument, the musical team of a feisty, tough young man and his beautiful wife

electrified the Cajun dancehall scene. Joe and Cléoma Falcon's popularity was outstanding and they packed the dancehalls from Lafayette to East Texas. The curiosity of a woman playing the guitar in a dancehall at a time when the family unit formed the law in the community was a shock to the people of southwest Louisiana. (Savoy, p. 90)

Joe and Cléoma's band was made up of family members. The band had a powerful sound played by an accordion, fiddle, steel guitar, and washboards. Its songs were predominantly old songs that were part of the family's heritage.

Cléoma's voice was in the middle range. She sang with a lot of emotion. "Her favorite themes were the sorrows of being taken away from one's family and lost love. Besides the traditional songs of the past, Cléoma would translate popular western songs into French." (Savoy, pp. 91-92) She and Joe also sang some black blues songs to fill out their repertoire.

Cléoma died in 1941 in mysterious circumstances. She had had an accident three years earlier when her sweater was caught on a car, and she was dragged a quarter of a mile and injured badly. She never recovered from the traumatic experience, and died at thirty-six years of age.

Joe continued to play with his band, but not with the interest he had shown before Cléoma's death. His second wife, Theresa, joined the band a few years later. She played the drums and sang until Joe stopped making public appearances. Joe died in 1965.

Joe and Cléoma's records are still well loved in Louisiana and Joe Falcon's style of playing the accordion, though not technically as outstanding as others who followed, is considered to be a standard—a definition of traditional Cajun accordion playing. (Savoy, p. 91)

STUDYING CAJUN MUSIC THROUGH OBJECT ANALYSIS

Joe and Cléoma Falcon's music will serve as examples of how to study music using an object analysis approach. First we will study the record album, and then we will study the lyrics of one song. The music will not be analyzed at this time as more research is needed.

We are looking at an album cover entitled "Cléoma B. Falcon: A Cajun Music Classic" put out by JADFEL Record Company in 1983. In describing this album we would say that it is approximately 12" X 12", a perfect square. It weighs about 10 ounces with the record inside. It is made of paper with ink on it. What we would call the front of the album has words in the center: "Cléoma B. Falcon A Cajun Music Classic, along with some other letters and numbers in the upper right hand corner: JADFEL LP-101. The words "Cléoma B. Falcon" form an arch over a rather large circle with a picture of a woman holding a guitar. The other words "A Cajun Music" are in a straight line underneath the picture, with "Classic," also in a straight line underneath "A Cajun Music."

The picture of the woman in the center appears to be a photograph. The circle is defined, but by a fuzzy outline. The woman has her hair parted in the middle. It is dark and curly. She seems to be wearing an earring in her left ear. She has a beaded necklace around her neck, and is wearing a soft dress with a frill of some kind on her left shoulder. She is young and pretty. She is holding a large guitar with both hands poised to play, even though we only see her right hand ready to pick the strings or strum them. The guitar has six strings. It appears to have a small border outlining its shape.

On the back of the album, there are many more words in different styles of printing, and a rectangular picture in the upper left hand corner. This picture is a more complete photograph than the one on the front cover. It seems that the picture on the front is a blow-up of the woman in the picture on the back. In this picture we see all of the woman. She is sitting on a chair or a stool with three legs, which appear to have two sections separated by circular designs. Her dress is short, with lace on the bottom. The frill on her left shoulder now seems to be a long scarf going down below her waist with a cloth flower on her shoulder either holding the scarf or part of it. Her left hand is holding the neck of the guitar with her fingers holding certain strings. She is wearing high heeled shoes.

There is a man in the picture also. He is seated to the left of the woman. He is seated on a very large chair, rectangular in shape with four legs, stretchers holding the legs together, and a back which comes up to the middle of the man's back. It appears to be all wood with some very simple designs made with the wood, on the legs, the stretchers, and on the back.

The man is good-looking and the woman is beautiful. He appears to be taller than the woman, and much larger physically. His hair is parted in the middle and lies close to his head. He is dressed up in a suit with wide lapels on the jacket. The lapels appear to have a trim outlining the shape of the lapels. The pants have cuffs with a trim similar to that on the lapels. He is wearing a plain white shirt and a striped tie. His shoes seem to be made of soft leather, but they are not dressy. He is holding an accordion which seems to be a one row accordion. He is holding the accordion with both hands as if he is ready to play.

In back of the two people there seems to be a stage backdrop. There is a building in the background behind the man, and at least one other large object, perhaps a bench, which is located behind the woman.

Underneath the picture is the title: "1928 Photo of Cléoma and Joe Falcon Photo courtesy of their daughter, Lu Lu Falcon Langlinais." Under the title are five paragraphs telling about the people in the picture. On the right hand side there are twelve songs listed with the titles in French and English and the credits for each song. There is also a paragraph thanking a collector for his recordings which were used to put this album together.

The album is buff colored, perhaps a pinky beige, with brown lettering. It is not shiny. The pictures have light areas which are beige, the same as the album cover. The pictures' dark areas are the same brown as in the lettering. The sepia tones give the pictures and the album a feeling of a time long past. The woman and the man stand out from the background as they are lighter and more clearly defined. The woman is lighter than the man and she is highlighted by a plain light area in the background of the pictures.

There is a feeling of antiqueness on both sides of the album cover. The lack of shine in the material of the album cover, and the sepia tones give one the feeling that one is looking at a daguerreotype or a very old photograph. The fuzziness around the picture on the front cover, and in the background of the picture on the back cover make one think that the pictures are much older than they are. The fancy printing of the title of the album evokes a feeling of antiquity as well. In addition, the hairstyles of the two people in the picture, as well as their clothes and their instruments, vice strong evidence of the age depicted.

For the deductive phase of the study of the album cover, one may conclude that the era depicted is important and is revered. The person who created this cover is nostalgic for a time long past where pretty women and hand some men played beautiful music on guitars and accordions for special occasions.

The woman and man are not equal. The woman is set apart from the man by the long neck of the guitar, as well as by the light area behind her. She is the focus of this album. He is included because he is important to

her and to the music. His importance is indicated by his equality of size with the woman; the same color for his clothes as for hers; his musical instrument which covers as large a part of his body as her instrument does to her; and the size of his chair as well as the turning of the chair toward the woman and toward the person who is looking at the album.

Speculation about the relationship between the man and the woman and their music leads one to ask the following questions: Where are the man and the woman? In what century or year is the event taking place? Why are they there? Who are the man and the woman? Are they related or not? Are they married or not? Do they only play the instruments shown in the photograph? Do they play together or separately? Are they equal as performers? Do they write their own music? Does one of them play and the other plays and sings? Are they famous?

The hypotheses to be tested are: The man and the woman are on a stage somewhere; Because of their old-fashioned hairstyles and clothes the man and the woman might be living in the early Twentieth Century, perhaps in the 1920's or 1930's; They are in this place to perform, to play their instruments and perhaps sing; Because there is no written music to be seen in the photograph, one might assume that the people know their music by heart; The man and the woman may be related or married, or not but they are connected by their music; They play the instruments they are holding but there is no apparent evidence that they play other instruments; The people play together; The man and the woman are not equal as performers; One cannot tell from the photograph if the man and the woman write their own music, or if one of them plays and sings, or if they both play and sing; They are famous.

The speculations and the hypotheses above lead one to the paragraphs below the picture on the back of the album. We learn that this album was put together by Cléoma's great nephew as a tribute to her and to her husband Joe Falcon and their music. "Aunt Cléoma deserves the spotlight for once. Listen to her extraordinary sounding vibrato voice as she sings beautiful Cajun and Cajun interpreted songs... Enjoy the songs as they roll from her heart to her lips as she strums her guitar to the accompaniment of her husband (Joe Falcon) on the accordion and Cléopha Breaux (her brother) on the fiddle. Truly a classic collection of pure, authentic Cajun music." (Johnnie Allan, *Cléoma B. Falcon A Cajun Music Classic*, (Lafayette, La.: JADFEL Record Co., 1983), rear cover) One might read Ann Allen Savoy's book entitled *Cajun Music A Reflection of a People* (see Bibliography) for more detailed information about Joe and Cléoma Falcon.

To her great nephew, Cléoma Falcon was extraordinarily special. He admires what she and Joe accomplished with their style of Cajun music. He wants the listeners to appreciate their music as he does.

The lyrics of one of Joe and Cléoma Falcon's songs can be analyzed using the object analysis method. The song is called "Léve tes ffnetres haut" (Raise My Window High—in standard English translation the title would be: Raise Your Windows High). In looking at the sheet music (see Appendix), we notice that the tune is in the key of G and played in 2/4 time. The French words and the English translation contain the main interest for the observer. A musician might be more interested in the music, however. One may listen to the song (on tape and on file at the Yale New Haven Teachers Institute Office, 53 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511) to hear the melody and the words of the song.

To describe "LEve tes fenFtres haut," we can say that the song has four verses of unequal lengths. The lines do not rhyme, but there are repetitions of words and whole lines. There are letters missing from words and some very different than traditional French grammatical constructions. There seems to be a progression from one verse to the next, with the last verse summing up what was said before, and bringing the problem to a resolution.

In the first verse the person telling the story asks another person to open the windows wide when he comes, and when the narrator leaves, the other one must cry. The second verse tells about the narrator getting drunk a great many days, especially this particular night that the song is being sung. A switch takes place in the third verse where the singer discusses working very hard for very little money. His wife takes most of it, leaving him with the change. Finally, the fourth verse asks the listener to give the singer her right hand if she doesn't want him, and if she doesn't, he doesn't want her either.

“Lève tes fenFtres haut” is a good example of Cléoma Falcon’s most interesting songs. Singing about unrequited love suits her emotional singing style. It is interesting to note that in this song Cléoma sings a male role. One might say that gender in Cléoma’s songs is unimportant because she is singing about the human experiences which can happen to men and women.

A careful look at the French lyrics reveals some characteristics of Cajun French. “Je” (I) is frequently written without the “e” when it is followed by a consonant: “j’suis (I am).” In standard French “je” drops the “e” only when it is followed by a vowel. “Moi” is used a great deal: “quand tu vois moi venir...” (when you see me coming...); “Si moi je...” (If I...); and “Ma femme prend la piastre et moi faut je fais avec les sous” (My wife takes the dollars and I have to make do with the coins). “Moi” is an emphatic pronoun underscoring the importance of “I.” In standard French the correct use of “moi” is found in “Si moi je...” Cajun French has used “moi” differently in the other two examples. In standard French, the line “quand tu vois moi venir” would be written “quand tu me vois venir;” and the line “Ma femme prend la piastre et moi faut je fais avec les sous” would be written “Ma femme prend fasse avec les sous” or, “Ma femme faut faire avec les sous.” In the second verse a reflexive verb is conjugated with “avoir” instead of “Ftre” in the passé composé: “Je m’ai saoulé...” instead of “je me suis enivré.” These differences of language make Cajun French more colorful and vibrant, not incorrect.

The other songs from the album “Cléoma B. Falcon A Cajun Classic” contain equally fascinating lyrics as “Lève tes fenFtres haut.” After listening to these songs and studying them linguistically, one might begin to understand the Cajun soul.

STRATEGIES AND SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

In order to attain the objectives mentioned above, it is necessary for the teacher to become better versed in the culture of the Cajuns. Please refer to the bibliography for several excellent sources of information on the history and culture of the Cajuns, as well as their music. Also, please refer to my other two units (see Bibliography) for many other ideas for teaching about the Cajuns.

SAMPLE LESSONS

Objective To analyze a Cajun song, using the object analysis method.

Procedure The teacher sets the stage by explaining to the students that they are going to learn about Cajun culture through a study of their music. (They will have learned about the Cajuns’ history and life in Louisiana in previous lessons.)

- The teacher will play the song on tape for the students several times, asking them to listen closely to the music. The students will be asked what instruments they can recognize, and how the music makes them feel, as the music is played. A list of feelings and a list of instruments can be written on the blackboard or overhead projector as they are mentioned. The lists could be written in French or English. These lists should be saved for further discussions.
1. The song is played again for students to discover words, phrases, and sentences that they know. Another list may be compiled of the recognized language expressions, and what they mean in English.
 2. The teacher hands out the French lyrics to the song. The students read the song to themselves as it is played once more.
 3. The students take turns reading the lyrics out loud.
 4. The students work together in small groups to determine the meaning of the lyrics.
 5. The students study the lyrics for differences between Cajun French and standard French. This activity can be done in small groups.
 6. The students study the lyrics for cultural information.
 7. If there is more than one version of a particular song, the students can compare and contrast the versions, especially if they are from different French-speaking groups (Cajun, Creole, Zydeco, French Canadian, or French).
 8. Students may compare a Cajun song with a traditional French translation of its lyrics.
 9. Some students may want to learn the song and perform it for an audience.
 10. Other students may want to learn a typical Cajun dance that might be performed with the song.
 - 11.

Teacher Bibliography

Bauman, Harriet J. "The Cajuns: Natives With a Difference!" *Immigrants and American Identity Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Volume II* (53 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute), 1988.

This unit is the second in a series of units on the Cajuns that I have written. It uses the poem "Evangeline" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as a means of studying Cajun culture. Many student-centered activities are included in the unit.

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, Volume VI* (53 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute), 1983.

The first unit in a series on the Acadians and Cajuns. It gives useful background information on both the Acadians and the Cajuns, as well as a somewhat detailed look at their houses, customs, holidays, food, etc. There are several useful student activities included in this unit.

Broven, John. *South to Louisiana: the Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company), 1983.

A good source of information about popular music in Louisiana, particularly Cajun music.

Dupont Jean-Claude. *Histoire populaire de l'Acadie* (Montréal: Leméac), 1979.

Interesting information about the Acadians' social life and customs and the Cajuns' social life and customs. There is a useful list of films on page 435.

Prown, Jules David. "Style as Evidence" (The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur, Museum), 1980.

Good background explanation with reasons for studying a culture's objects.

Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" (The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum), 1982.

This article explains the techniques for studying a cultural object. An important source for how to learn about a culture. Both of Prown's articles give the teacher new tools for teaching.

Reed, Revon. *L'œche pas la patate: portrait des Acadiens de la Louisiana* (Montréal: Editions Parti pris), 1976. This whole book is interesting, particularly the chapters on language, customs, and music.

Student Bibliography

Allan, Johnnie. "Cléoma B. Falcon: A Cajun Music Classic" (Lafayette, Louisiana: JADFEL Record Company), 1983.

This record is the source of the songs studied for this unit. It is on tape and on file at the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 53 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511.

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

A history of Cajun music, with interviews with famous musicians, as well as interesting photographs. It is written in French and English and can be used for cultural readings in the classroom. An important resource for teaching about the Cajuns and their music.

Butler, Joseph T. Jr. "Bayou Lafourche" *Travel/Holiday* magazine, March, 1978.

An informational account of life today in southern Louisiana. It ends with short blurbs describing five fairs or festivals typical of the region.

Casanova, Jacques-Donat and Armour Landry. *America's French Heritage* (La Documentation FranCaise and the Quebec Official Publisher), 1976.

A very well written book with short chapters divided into five categories. All of the book is useful, but read "Louisiana the Beautiful," "Forced Exodus," and the whole section entitled "The Urge to Explore."

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

This book is a collection of stories gathered in visits to Louisiana by the author. Chapter VII “Fais-Dodo with Grand Isle Baratarians” tells about a typical Saturday night, Cajun-style!

Reed, Roy. “Down Home in Acadia.” *The New York Times Magazine The Sophisticated Traveler Part 2* (New York: The New York Times), October 9, 1983.

Another way of getting familiar with Cajun life today! A short article that captures the spirit of the Cajun people.

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

One cannot teach Cajun music without this book! Not only does it contain information about important musicians and their music, but it has complete discographies of each musician discussed.

Saxon, Lyle, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant. *Gumbo Ya-Ya A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 1945.

See chapter 21 “Songs” for a detailed discussion of Creole music.

Wilentz, Amy. “Bon Temps on the bayou” *Condé Nast Traveler* (New York: the Condé Nast Publications, Inc.), June, 1991.

A well written article on Cajun life today. The flavor of Cajun life portrayed in this article makes one hungry to visit the area.

Appendix

(Figures available in printed form)

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