



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

Guide for Curriculum Unit 91.02.02
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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.

Cajun life is defined by its music. Cajun music is the focus for this unit as it reflects Cajun life, customs, lifestyle, and language. Using music to discuss a culture, its background and influences is a special approach to a study of the family. 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 make an effort to include cultural topics based on the French influence on the United States, as well as the study of French Americans. Because I am fascinated by the culture of French Americans in Louisiana, especially the Cajuns, I take every opportunity to teach their culture to my students.

This unit is designed for French classes in levels 2, 3, and 4. It can also 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. There are three phases to object analysis: description, deduction, and speculation. Music, though not a material object, can be analyzed using this method. The record album cover, the lyrics, and the music itself, all can be studied to provide insight into the Cajun culture.

(Recommended for French II & III, Music, American History and Humanities, grades 10, 11, 12; French IV, grades 11 & 12)

Key Words

Cajun Acadian French Music

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