

Cajun and Zydeco: Flavors of Southwest Louisiana

A Smithsonian Folkways Music Pathway for students in Grades 6–8.



Teacher's Guide

Lesson Hub 2:

Cajun and Zydeco: Migration and Location

Lesson Hub Overview

Cajuns are descendants of people from Acadia, a region of Canada that is today called Nova Scotia. Acadia was first colonized by the French, until the British took over after the French and Indian War. In 1755, the British (Protestants) forcibly exiled the French-speaking (Catholic) Acadian people from their homeland. Fifteen to eighteen thousand people were forced to find new homes. The largest group of Acadians eventually settled in southwest Louisiana's bayou country—an area that came to be called “Acadiana.”

First inhabited by Native Americans (Attakapas, Chitimacha, Coushatta, Houma, and Opelousas tribes), then colonized by the French in 1682, Louisiana has always been a hub of multicultural exchange. One of the most significant populations to migrate to Louisiana were African Americans. The first slave ships arrived in Louisiana in the early 1700s. The enslaved Africans who arrived on these ships spent most of their waking hours working on farms and plantations.

After a slave revolution in Haiti in 1804, almost ten thousand Haitian refugees joined the population of the growing port of New Orleans, doubling its numbers. Being now Free People of Color, many of these refugees ended up settled on the bayous of Louisiana near the banks of the Mississippi.

By the end of the Civil War (1865), the diverse population on the bayous of southwest Louisiana created the ideal breeding ground for today's Cajun and zydeco musics.

In this lesson, students will actively engage with music from the Smithsonian Folkways collection and learn about traditions in pre-Civil-War southwestern Louisiana. The lesson highlights how music migrates and fosters the development of new styles.

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Lesson Paths and Student Objectives*



1. **Rendezvous in Louisiana** (20+ minutes)
 - Students will describe how migration affected the development of Cajun and zydeco music in southwest Louisiana.









2. **Exploring Traditional Song Types** (30+ minutes)
 - Students will describe the characteristics of the music that traveled to Louisiana along with migrant groups (e.g., ballads, reels, contredanses, waltzes, and African-derived rhythms & chants).



3. **Combining Influences** (30+ minutes)
 - Students will demonstrate how the mixing of musical forms and styles can produce new musical “flavors.”

*Note: The learning icons used above signify the type of learning used in each Path. Keep in mind that these Paths are not intended to be sequential; rather, teachers or students may choose which Paths they’d like to use from each Lesson. The time estimate given for each Path indicates "in class" time. The + indicates there are optional extension activities and/or a suggested homework assignment.

While all learning types ( History and Culture,  Music Listening,  Music Making and Creation, and  Creative Connections) fulfill 2014 National Music Standards, non-music teachers will be able to use  History and Culture and  Creative Connections Paths without specific musical knowledge.

Teaching Plan



1. Path One: Rendezvous in Louisiana

To prepare:

- Read through this Path.
- Preview Path 1 of the **Lesson Hub 2 Slideshow** (slides 4–22).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson Hub landing page. *(If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link, which will not show the notes.)*

1. Opening Discussion: (slides 5–8)

Share contextual information embedded in the slideshow. Then, pose this question for the students to consider:

- *Why do you think this area became an important landing place for European settlers and such a heavily fought over region?* (slide 7)
- Discuss the importance of **The Port of New Orleans**. (slide 8)

2. Exploring Cajun History (slides 9–12)

- The Cajuns’ arrival/Le Grand Derangement (slides 9-10)
 - (Note: French pronunciation found in slide 10.)
- Acadiana (slide 11)
 - Optional map activity embedded in slide 11 notes.
- The Acadians and religion (slide 12)

3. The Acadians and Music: (slide 13)

Listening Activity: Students will listen to embedded audio examples of the type of music the Acadians brought with them to southwest Louisiana.

- A 30-45 second excerpt is a good length for this type of introductory listening experience of an **Acadian ballad** (“La Reine de la Salle” by Odile Falcon) and an **Acadian fiddle tune** (“The Mad Reel” by Michael Doucet and Dennis McGee).
- You may want to share with students that a **ballad is a narrative song** (a song that tells a story). These types of songs are often **passed down from one generation to the next** (by ear). The topics of these songs **are often sad**. Ballads (and several other traditional song types are further unpacked in Path 2 of this lesson).
- Optional: Lead a short class discussion about the musical characteristics of these tunes. For example,
 - *what instruments do you hear?*

- *Are they singing in English?*
- *Are the songs fast or slow?*

Specific musical and stylistic characteristics are covered further in Lesson 5.

4. Exploring Creole History: (slides 14–19)

Lead a discussion: Point out to students that the Cajuns, originally from Canada, were *only one* of the groups responsible for the music and culture of southwest Louisiana, and only one of the groups we will be exploring in this pathway. Many other groups of people also contributed to the rich culture including:

- Enslaved Africans (slide 15)
- Maroons (runaway slaves) (slide 16)
- Free People of Color (slide 17)
- Haitian refugees (slide 18)

5. Rendezvous in Louisiana (slides 19–20)

- A. Use the information embedded in the slideshow to lead a short discussion about how migration affected the **musical “gumbo”** of Cajun and zydeco music.
- B. Especially if you did not complete Lesson 1 of this Pathway, click the embedded buttons to listen to samples of the Cajun and zydeco sound.

6. Consider the following optional extension activities: (slide 21)

See notes embedded in slideshow for how to direct these discussions.

- Research and discuss the French colonization of Canada, the US, and the Caribbean.
Ideas:
 - Find out why beaver pelts were so lucrative.
 - Set up a classroom Trading Post of items to have students actively participate in an exchange of goods.
- Research and discuss the French and Indian War.
Ideas:
 - Investigate why the “Join or Die” logo became popular during this time.
 - Create a new flag or logo that would demonstrate the issues colonists had in this conflict.
- Research and discuss the Louisiana Purchase.
Idea: Twitter War Activity
 - Read the following letters written during the 1800’s in support or protest of the purchase of the Louisiana Territory. After reading and discussing the articles and letters with your group, write a series of 10 social media posts, with each student posing as one of these characters.

- [Alexander Hamilton](#)
- [Rufus King and Thomas Pickering](#)

7. Learning Checkpoint (slide 22)

- In what ways did migration affect the development of Cajun and zydeco music in Southwest Louisiana?
Answer: Many people (like the Cajuns and different communities of enslaved people) were displaced from their homes and ended up migrating to the SAME location - Louisiana - where it was inevitable that cultural exchange would take place.

2. Path Two: Exploring Traditional Song Types



To prepare:

- Read through this Path.
- Preview Path 2 of the **Lesson Hub 2 Slideshow** (slides 24–44).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson Hub landing page. *(If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link, which will not show the notes.)*

1. **Introduction: Music and Migration** (slide 25)

Tell students that migrants brought different song styles with them when they came to southwest Louisiana.

2. **Acadian Ballads** (slides 26–29)

A. Listening Activity: “La Fille de Quatorze Ans,” performed by Madame Daniel Bourke (slide 26)

- Play the embedded audio example of this **Acadian ballad**.
 - Consider having students move or tap along with the time structure as they listen.
- Prompt students to think about these questions as they listen:
 - *What are your first impressions of this song?*
 - *What do you think this song is about?*

Lead a short discussion about these topics or ask students to discuss them with a partner or in a small group.

B. About Ballads: After leading a short class discussion, share contextual information about ballads (slides 27–29).

C. Optional Video Activity: “The End of an Old Song,” film by John Cohen (slide 28).

Watch a video clip that illustrates the typical performance style of Acadian ballads. *(If you choose to show the optional video, play from minute 3–5.)*

D. Optional Interpretive Activities: (slide 29)

- Use the lyrics ([find below](#)) to unpack the story of this ballad more fully. OR,
- Have students find a ballad written about the area in which they live. Read the lyrics and compare the two stories. Choose one of the two ballads and make a story book by creating illustrations for each verse of the ballad.

3. **Reels and Contredanses** (slides 30–32)

A. Listening Activity: (slide 30)

- Play excerpts from the embedded recording of a **reel** (“La Reel a Fruge,” by Dennis McGee and Sady Courville) and a **contredanse** (“Contredanse de Doucet,” by Michael Doucet & Beausoleil).
 - Consider having students move or tap along with the time structure.
 - Prompt students to think about these questions as they listen:
 - *What similarities and differences do you notice?*
 - *What do you think this music was for?*
- More guidance is provided in the following slides.

B. About reels and contredanses: After leading a short class discussion, share contextual information about *reels* and *contredanses* (slides 31–32).

4. The Waltz (slides 33–36)

A. Listening Activity: (slide 33)

- Play excerpts from a traditional European **waltz** (“Der Offene Walzer (the Open Waltz)” by Brass Folk Dance Band) and old Louisiana **waltz** (“La Valse de Coupique” by Cyprien Landreneau).
 - Students may move or tap along with the time structure as they listen.
 - Prompt students to think about these questions as they listen:
 - *What similarities and differences do you notice?*
 - *What do you think this music was for?*
- Lead a short discussion. More guidance is provided in the following slides.

B. About the waltz: After leading a short class discussion, share contextual information about waltzes (slide 34).

C. Optional Extension Activities: (slides 35–36)

- Watch the embedded videos and discuss similarities and differences between the European waltz (slide 35) and the Cajun waltz (slide 36). OR
- Teach students a simple waltz step and perform it along with one of the audio recordings.

5. African-Derived Rhythms and Chants (slides 37–40)

A. Listening Activity: (slides 37–38)

- Play excerpts from a **Caribbean dance song** (“M’pas bwè m’pas mangé: Work Song” by Libera Borderau & Ti Yogan) and an African American **shout song** (“Hold the Baby,” by the MacIntosh County Shouters).
 - Consider having students move or tap along with the time structure as they listen.
- Prompt students to think about these questions as they listen:
 - *What similarities and differences do you notice?*
 - *What do you think this music was for?*

- Discuss **similarities and differences listed on slide 38.**

B. About African-Derived Chants and Rhythms in the Diaspora: (slides 39–40)
Share contextual information about African-derived chants and rhythms and their connection to Creole musical styles.

6. Concluding Discussion: (slides 41–43)

A. Ask students to think about these questions:

- *What do all of these musical styles have in common?*
- *In what ways are they different?*
- *How do you think these musical styles relate to Cajun and zydeco music today?*

Potential discussion points and conversation starters are listed on the **next two slides.**

B. Consider having students write down (or journal about) their observations.
(Discussion points embedded in slides 42-43)

- Musical similarities and differences
 - Most of these styles were originally types of **dance music** or used in the context of social dancing, primarily couples dancing. This holds true for both Cajun & zydeco music today.
 - Many of the types of music featured either the **fiddle** or the **accordion** as the primary instruments, which are the “stars” of Cajun music.
 - Most of this music was either in **2/4, 4/4, or 3/4 time**: The primary time signatures found in Cajun & zydeco music.
 - Most Cajun and Creole dance tunes two **alternating melodies** (ABAB), although some have only one, and others have more than two (ABCABC).
- Cultural blending
 - All song types covered in this lesson migrated to Louisiana—where they blended and influenced the development of Cajun music and zydeco.
 - However, it should be noted that many of these musical styles also influenced one another in Europe, Canada, and the Caribbean before they arrived in Louisiana.

7. Learning Checkpoint:

- Can you describe some characteristics of the music that traveled to southwest Louisiana along with migrant groups (e.g., ballads, reels, contredanses, waltzes, and African-derived rhythms and chants)?
 - **Answer:** Responses to this query can be found in the discussion from the previous two slides (slides 42-43).



3. Path Three: Combining Musical Influences

To prepare:

- Read through this Path.
- Preview Path 3 of the Lesson Hub 2 Slideshow (slides 46–51).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson Hub landing page. *(If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link, which will not show the notes.)*
- Print the “Combining Influences Worksheet” for each student ([find below](#)).

1. Creative Musical Activity: Combining Musical Influences (slides 47-51)

A. Activity Introduction: Arrange a familiar tune (slide 48)

Within this activity, students will have an opportunity to use their knowledge about the ways in which musical styles can migrate from place to place and influence each other as they create their own arrangements of a familiar tune.

B. Activity Instructions (slides 49–50)

Students will follow these steps* as they complete this activity (these steps are also outlined in the slideshow and on the “Combining Musical Influences” worksheet).

**Depending on your students’ experience/ability level, you might want to complete a “class example” arrangement before having them work on it individually. You could also consider having the students arrange music in small groups.*

1. Identify three genres of music that you like or have personally influenced you. (ex. rap, hip-hop, rock ‘n roll, jazz, country, folk, opera, classical, pop, Broadway, Latin, etc.)
2. Define characteristics of these genres (related to time/meter/tempo, rhythm/melody, instrumentation, vocal timbre, etc.)
3. Choose a familiar tune to arrange (examples: Happy Birthday, Twinkle Twinkle, Row Your Boat, Old MacDonald, etc.)
4. Change (arrange) this song based on the characteristics of the musical genres you previously identified (example: rap “Twinkle Twinkle” to a rock beat played on conga drums and maracas.
5. Practice your arrangement.
6. Perform it for others.

2. Learning Checkpoint: (slide 51)

- Did a new musical “flavor” emerge when you mixed musical styles in order to create your own arrangement of a familiar tune?

Answers will vary.

2014 National Music Standards Connections

MU:Cr2.1.a Select, organize, construct, and document personal musical ideas for arrangements and compositions within AB or ABA form that demonstrate an effective beginning, middle, and ending, and convey expressive intent.

- Can I create my own arrangement of a familiar tune?

MU:Cr2.1.b Use standard and/or iconic notation and/or audio/ video recording to document personal simple rhythmic phrases, melodic phrases, and two-chord harmonic musical ideas.

- Can I document my arrangement?

MU:Cr3.2.a Present the final version of their documented personal composition or arrangement, using craftsmanship and originality to demonstrate an effective beginning, middle, and ending, and convey expressive intent.

- Can I perform my arrangement for others?

MU:Re7.2.a Explain how the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to the structure of contrasting pieces.

- Can I compare the ways in which the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to the structure of the contrasting musical styles we experienced in this lesson (e.g., ballads, jigs & contredanses, waltzes, African-derived chants and rhythms)?

MU:Re7.2.b Identify and compare the context of music from a variety of genres, cultures, and historical periods.

- Can I compare the historical and cultural context of these musical styles?

MU:Re8.1.a Describe a personal interpretation of how creators' and performers' application of the elements of music and expressive qualities, within genres and cultural and historical context, convey expressive intent.

- Can I describe how the performers' application of the elements of music and expressive qualities led to interpretative differences between "traditional" and "Louisiana" versions of musical styles (in particular, the waltz).

MU:Cn10.0.a Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music

- Can I use musical genres that I like (or have influenced me) to create my own unique arrangement of a familiar tune?

MU:Cn11.0.a Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

- Can I describe the social, cultural, and historical context of the musical styles we experienced in this lesson?
- Can I explain why and how these early musical styles influenced the development of Cajun & zydeco?

Additional Readings and Resources

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Worksheets

“La Fille de Quatorze Ans” - Lyrics and translation

Traditional ballad; performed by Madame Daniel Bourke

Translation by Ann Allen Savoy

Translation

Une jeune fille de quatorze ans
Ah oui, grand Dieu, quelle belle brune
Un jour elle dit à son papa,
Papa je veux me marier

A young girl of fourteen years,
Oh yes, great God, what a beautiful brunette
One day she said to her father
Father, I want to get married.

“Fille jeunette, now taisez-vous
Vous n’avez pas-t-encore quinze ans (bis)
Vous n’avez pas-t-encore quinze ans,
Z-a pour-e-plaire a-t-un amant.” (bis)

Young little girl, now be quiet
You are not even fifteen years old
You don’t even have fifteen years
With which to please a lover.

Et quand la belle a entendu ce discours
Elle a monté dans sa chaumière (bis)
Ses beaux yeux noirs elle s’est les essuyes (bis)

When the beautiful girl heard these words
She went up to her hut
To try to dry her beautiful black eyes

Elle avait p’us qu’un seul ‘tit frère
Il la reconsole nuit comme le jour (bis)
“Ma chère sœur, reconsole-toi,
Papa te mettra au couvent” (bis)

She had nothing left but one little brother
He comforted her in the night as in the day.
My dear sister, be comforted, or
Papa will put you in a convent.

“Dans un couvent des orphelines
Là ou ce qu’on prie au Dieu souvent” (bis)
“Mais c’est celui que mon cœur aime,
Il y est d’esclave dedans la guerre” (bis)

In a convent of orphans
Where they pray to God often.
But he who I love ...
He is enslaved in war.

J’étais-t-en guerre quatre ans de temps
Je me suis battu de nuit et jour (bis)
Quand j’suis revenue de ma revolte
Droit c’ez la belle je m’en ai etc. (bis)

(speaker changes to her lover)
I was in war for four years
I fought night and day.
When I came back from my revolt,
Directly to my beauty’s house went I.

En demandant ayou la belle
Ayou la belle que j’aimais tant (bis)
Ses beaux yeux noirs je voudrais les voir
Je voudrais les voir encore une fois (bis)

Asking, Where is the beauty?
Where is the one I love so much?
Her beautiful black eyes that I want to see
That I want to see one more time

On m’a répond, Ta belle à toi
Elle est plus là pour toi la voir
Elle est morte, morte et enterrée,
Depuis trois jours, c’est pas longtemps.

They told me, your beauty
She is no longer there for you to see.
She is dead, dead and buried
Since three days, that’s not long

Bonsoir la belle pour la dernière fois,
T’es dans ta tombe, je t’aime encore.
Mes yeux pleurant de nuit et jour
C’est pour la belle brune que j’aimais tant

Goodnight, my beauty, for the last time,
You’re in your tomb, I love you still.
My eyes crying night and day
For the beautiful brunette I loved so much.

Je me ferai faire un grand crêpe noir
Pendant six mois je le porterai.

I will have made a big black crepe band
I will wear it for six months.

“Combining Influences” Worksheet

Name: _____

	Musical Influence #1:	Musical Influence #2:	Musical Influence #3:	“New” arrangement of this familiar tune: <i>Which musical characteristics will influence your arrangement of this song?</i>
Instrumentation (Which instruments are common in this tradition?)				
Time/Meter/Tempo (4/4? 3/4? Fast? Slow? Meant for dance? Emphasis on 2 and 4? Strong beat? Etc...)				
Rhythm (syncopated? Swung or straight? Simple or complex? Etc...)				
Structure (Verse/Chorus; 12 bar blues; AB, Srophic (AAA), improvisation? Etc...)				
Melody/Vocal Timbre (spoken or sung? embellished melody? what is the singer’s vocal style? Etc...)				