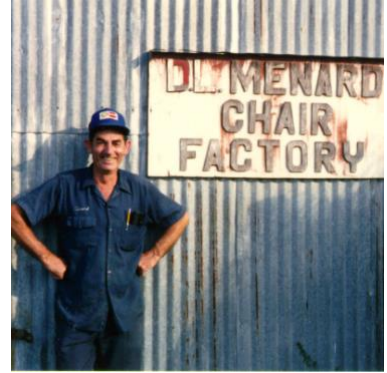


Cajun and Zydeco: Flavors of Southwest Louisiana

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



Teacher's Guide

Lesson Hub 9

Heartache, Suffering, and Resilience: Sociocultural Themes in Cajun and Zydeco

Lesson Hub Overview

The lyrics and musical characteristics of Cajun and zydeco waltzes commonly reflect **heartache and suffering**. This recurring theme can be understood as the musical embodiment of the hardships that have been endured by Cajuns and Creoles throughout history. The lyrics and musical characteristics of Cajun and zydeco two-steps often illustrate another important element of their cultural identity: **Resilience**. Cajun and Creole musicians take pride in their ability to change songs with sad themes into upbeat, danceable numbers.

In this lesson, students will identify common sociocultural themes in Cajun and zydeco music and will identify and demonstrate how the music exemplifies the expressive qualities of these themes. They will also consider the cultural meaning of and musical similarities and differences between Hank Williams' famous tune "Jambalaya" and the Cajun standard "Grand Texas".

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Lesson Paths and Student Objectives*



1. Listening for Heartache and Suffering (15 minutes)

- Students will identify and describe how Cajun and zydeco musicians express the theme of heartache and suffering in their music (especially waltzes).



2. Listening for Resilience (20+ minutes)







- Students will identify and describe how Cajun and zydeco musicians express the theme of resiliency in their music.



3. “Jambalaya” vs. “Grand Texas” (30+ minutes)

- Students will identify and explain similarities and differences between the song “Jambalaya” and the Cajun standard “Grand Texas”.

*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: Listening for Heartache and Suffering

To prepare:

- Read through the Path.
- Preview Path 1 of the **Lesson Hub 9 Slideshow** (slides 4–11)
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson Hub landing page. If you can use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow link, which will not show the notes.

1. Heartache and Suffering in Waltzes (The Sound of Sadness)

- A. Share the contextual information about two common themes in Cajun and zydeco lyrics: heartache and suffering (slide 5).
- B. Show the embedded Smithsonian Folkways video (slide 6): Within this video, the Balfa Brothers play a Cajun waltz and reflect on the meaning of the song lyrics (heartache and suffering).

2. “The Cajun Yell”

- A. Attentive Listening: “O Malheureuse” (Oh, Miserable One), recorded by Cajun legend, Dennis McGee (slides 7–8).
 - i. Play a short excerpt from the recording. prompt students to follow along with the song lyrics (embedded in slideshow) as they listen (slide 7).
 - ii. Listen again, as students think about these questions:
 - *If you didn’t know what the lyrics meant, would you still know that this song is sad? Why?*
 - iii. Lead a short discussion based on student responses to this question before moving on to the next slide, which provides explanation (slide 8).
- B. Share information about the Cajun “yell” and other musical sounds that indicate sadness and/or loneliness (slide 9).
- C. Optional discussion (slide 10): *Can you think of any other songs that you have heard in this pathway that exemplify this theme?*
 - **Examples include:** “J’ai Passe” (Lesson 3), “Jolie Blonde” (Lesson 7), “Two-Step de Eunice” (Lesson 3), “Quo’ Faire” (Lesson 3).

3. Learning Checkpoint (slide 11):

- What are the most common sociocultural themes in Cajun and zydeco music?
 - **Answer:** The lyrics of many Cajun and zydeco songs commonly reflect heartache and suffering – the embodiment of hardships endured by Cajuns and Creoles throughout history.

- Apart from lyrics, what are some ways that Cajun and zydeco musicians express these themes?
 - **Answer:** The sadness and loneliness of many Cajun and zydeco songs are communicated through instrumental and vocal stylistic techniques, such as the Cajun “yell.

2. Path Two: Listening for Resilience



To prepare:

- Read through the Path.
- Preview Path 2 of the **Lesson Hub 9 Slideshow** (slides 13–24).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson Hub landing page. If you can use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow link, which will not show the notes.

1. Deceptive Dances (Songs that *Sound* Happy, but Speak of Suffering) (slides 14–19)

A. Attentive Listening Example 1 (slides 14–15)

- i. Play an excerpt from the embedded audio recording of “Les Flammes d’Enfer,” recorded by Joe Falcon ([find lyrics below](#)).
- ii. Ask students to consider these questions:
 - *What is the general feeling of this song?*
 - *What do you think this song is about?*
 - *Do the musical elements and/or expressive qualities give you clues about the song’s meaning?* (tempo, timbre, dynamics, articulation, etc.)
- iii. Encourage students to write down their ideas.
 - **Students might notice** the songs seem “happy” or “upbeat”, based on how the music elements are used (up-tempo, danceable, fast, loud, etc.).
- iv. Share embedded information about the lyrics of this song (slide 15).

B. Attentive Listening Example 2 (slides 16–17)

- i. Play an excerpt from the embedded audio recording of “Parlez Nous à Boire,” recorded by Beausoleil with Michael Doucet ([find lyrics below](#)).
- ii. Ask students to consider these questions:
 - *What is the general feeling of this song?*
 - *What do you think this song is about?*
 - *Do the musical elements (tempo, timbre, dynamics, articulation, etc.) and/or expressive qualities give you clues about the song’s meaning?*
- iii. Encourage students to write down their ideas.
 - **Students might notice** the songs seem “happy” or “upbeat”, based on how the music elements are used (up-tempo, danceable, fast, loud, etc.).
- iv. Share embedded information about the lyrics of this song (slide 17).

C. Discussion (slides 18–19)

- i. Lead a short discussion based on the student responses to this question:
 - *Was your original guess regarding the meaning of these songs correct?*
- ii. Share embedded contextual information about contradictions in Cajun and zydeco music (slide 19).

2. Resilience (slides 20–23)

A. Share embedded information (slides 20–22) about how resilience is expressed through music in Cajun and Creole culture. Ask students to consider this question:

- *What does the term “resilience” mean to you?* (According to the dictionary, resilience is **the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties** (toughness ... the ability to “bounce back”).

B. Optional Discussion (slide 23): If students have completed other lessons in this pathway, consider leading a short discussion based on this question:

- *Can you think of any other songs that you have heard in this pathway that exemplify resilience?*
- **Examples include:** “Hip et Taiaut” (Lesson 5), “Zydeco Sont Pas Sales” (Lesson 8), and “Paper in My Shoe” (Lesson 4).

3. Learning Checkpoint (slide 24):

- How do Cajun and zydeco musicians illustrate “resilience” through their music?
 - **Answer:** They take songs with sad themes and turn them into upbeat, danceable numbers to reflect a spirit of “joie de vivre” (joy of life).” The music, especially two-steps, encourage people to dance and shake off their troubles.

3. Path Three: “Jambalaya” vs. “Grand Texas”



To prepare:

- Read through the Path.
- Preview Path 3 of the **Lesson Hub 9 Slideshow** (slides 26–39).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson Hub landing page. If you can use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow link, which will not show the notes.
- Print (or prepare to display on screen) the lyrics to “Jambalaya” and “Grand Texas” ([find below](#)).

1. Listening to “Jambalaya”

- A. Use the information provided in the slideshow to share background information about Hank Williams and his famous hit song “Jambalaya” (slides 27–29).
- B. Attentive Listening (slide 30)
 - i. Play an excerpt from a cover of “Jambalaya,” recorded by Lucinda Williams in 1991. As students listen, prompt them to think about these questions:
 - *Have you heard this song before?*
 - *What type of music is this?*
 - *Why do you think this song became a “hit”?*
 - ii. Lead a short discussion based on student responses.
 - **“Jambalaya” is a well-loved song around the world.**
 - **Although Lucinda Williams was primarily a blues musician, this song most closely aligns with what most people think of as “country-western” music.**
 - **This song has a very catchy melody – which is probably why it quickly became a “hit.”**
- C. Optional Extension Activities (slide 31)
 - Listen to Hank Williams’s original recording of “Jambalaya.”
 - Conduct an in-depth analysis of the song lyrics and their cultural references.
 - Compare and contrast different arrangements of this song.
- D. Engaged Listening (slide 32)
 - i. Pass out (or display) the lyrics to “Jambalaya.”
 - ii. Play the Lucinda Williams arrangement (or any other version you like).
 - As students listen, encourage them to sing along (especially if you are teaching this lesson in a music classroom).
 - Encourage students to try to incorporate the vocal style/inflection of the singer(s) on the recording.

- *Optional for the music classroom:* Add rhythmic *ostinati* and instruments to this activity.
- iii. Consider asking students to share their thoughts about Lucinda Williams’s (or another artist, if you chose a different example) vocal style.

2. Listening to “Grand Texas”

A. Attentive Listening (slide 33)

- i. Play an excerpt from “Grand Texas,” recorded by Chuck Guillory and Papa Cairo. As students listen, prompt them to think about these questions:
 - *What type of music is this?*
 - *How is this song similar to “Jambalaya”?*
 - *How is it different?*
- ii. Lead a short discussion based on student responses.
 - **Unlike the previous recording, this is actually an example of “Cajun” music.**
 - **It has the same melody, but different lyrics, a different style, and different instrumentation.**
 - **Like most Cajun songs, the original song lyrics are in French.**

B. Engaged Listening (slide 34)

- i. Pass out (or display) the lyrics to “Grand Texas”
- ii. Play the track and ask students to sing (or hum) along as they listen.
 - Encourage students to try to incorporate the vocal style/inflection of the singer(s) on the recording* (especially if you are teaching this lesson in a music classroom).

**Since this song is in French, review the pronunciation of the words ahead of time.*
 - If you do not have time to learn the French, consider having students hum along instead.
 - *Optional for the music classroom:* Add rhythmic *ostinati* and instruments to this activity.

3. Compare and Discuss

- A. Ask students to take a closer look at the song lyrics for “Jambalaya” and “Grand Texas” (slide 35) while considering this question:
 - *Do you notice a difference in the song topics/themes?*
- B. Lead a short class discussion based on student responses before advancing to the next slides for explanation and potential discussion points (slide 36–37).
- C. Share the following quote with students* (slide 38) and prompt students to discuss whether they agree or disagree with this idea:

- *“Ethnic music is usually unpalatable for a mass market unless it is diluted in some way. The broader audience related to ‘Jambalaya’ in a way that it could never relate to a true Cajun two-step led by an asthmatic accordion and sung in patois” (Escott, Merritt, and MacEwen 2004, 214).*
- ***Note:** Suggestions for adjusting the quote to make it accessible for younger students are embedded in the teacher notes on slide 38.

4. Learning Checkpoint (slide 39)

- What is the difference between the message of “Grand Texas” and “Jambalaya?”
 - **Answer:** The melody to the Jambalaya was actually “borrowed” from a classic Cajun tune called “Grand Texas.” --- “Jambalaya” celebrated the Cajun way of life from the outside looking in, highlighting their “joie de vivre,” while “Grand Texas” was written by Cajuns for Cajuns and exemplified the heartache and suffering many experienced as a result of many people leaving their homes in Louisiana to seek work in Texas.
 - How are the songwriting styles of Cajun and country music different?
 - **Answer:** Country songs often tell an explicit story while Cajun music tends to be an expressive embodiment (lamentation or celebration) of a particular emotion.
 - What types of factors shape our musical preferences?
 - **Answer:** All sorts of things! Age, cultural upbringing (location, family history, etc.), and personal tastes.
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2014 National Music Standards Connections

MU:Pr4.1.a Demonstrate and explain how the selection of music to perform is influenced by personal interest, knowledge, and context, as well as their personal and others' technical skill.

- Can I interpret why Hank Williams chose to arrange and perform “Jambalaya”?
- Can I explain why so many other musicians have chosen to cover this song?

MU:Pr4.2.a Demonstrate understanding of the structure and the elements of music (such as rhythm, pitch, form, and harmony) in music selected for performance.

- Can I describe/demonstrate the differences in the ways that the elements of music are used in the versions of “Jambalaya” and “Grand Texas” we listened to?

MU:Pr4.2.c Identify how cultural and historical context informs performances and results in different music interpretations.

- Can I identify how cultural and historical context contribute to the musical and stylistic differences between “Jambalaya” and “Grand Texas”?

MU:Pr6.1.a Perform music, alone or with others, with expression, technical accuracy, and appropriate interpretation.

- Can I incorporate the vocal style/inflection of the singer(s) on the recording as I sing/hum along with “Jambalaya” and “Grand Texas”?

MU:Re7.1.a Demonstrate and explain, citing evidence, how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.

- Can I explain how themes that are common in Cajun and Zydeco music (heartache, suffering, resilience) relate to the experiences of Cajuns and Creoles in Southwest Louisiana?

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

- Can I describe how musical elements and expressive qualities were applied in the music we studied in this lesson?

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

- Can I identify the context in which the songs we studied in this lesson are usually performed?

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 Cajun “yell” helps to convey expressive content?
- Can I explain how musical contradictions in Cajun and zydeco music illustrate the theme of resilience?

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 explain why Cajun and Creole musicians often write and perform songs that exemplify themes such as heartache, suffering, and resilience?

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

- Can I explain how historical events and previous experiences have influenced the music Cajun and Creole musicians choose to write and perform?
 - Can I explain the context in which Cajun/Zydeco waltzes and two-steps are usually performed?
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Additional Reading and Resources

- “Big Texas’ – Julius ‘Papa Cairo’ Lamperez.” 2015, July 13. *Early Cajun Music* (blog). <http://earlycajunmusic.blogspot.com/2015/07/big-texas-julius-papa-cairo-lamperez.html>.
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- Spires, Will. 1977. “About the Musicians.” Liner Notes for Balfa, Dewey, D. L. Menard, and Marc Savoy. *Under a Green Oak Tree*. Arhoolie Records ARH00312. <https://folkways-media.si.edu/docs/folkways/artwork/ARH00312.pdf>.
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Worksheets

“Les Flammes d’Enfer” Lyrics

(Traditional)

O, ‘tite tante priez pour moi
 Sauvez mon âme des flammes d’enfer
 Sauvez mon âme, priez pour moi
 Priez pour moi, ‘tite tante, sauvez mon âme

O, ‘tite tante priez pour moi
 J’suis condamne pour les flammes d’enfer
 Priez pour moi, sauvez mon âme
 Sauvez mon âme des flammes d’enfer

Translation

By Ann Allen Savoy

Oh, little aunt, pray for me
 Save my soul from the flames of hell
 Save my soul, pray for me
 Pray for me, save my soul

Oh, little aunt, pray for me
 I’m condemned to the flames of hell
 Pray for me, save my soul
 Save my soul from the flames of hell

“Parlez Nous à Boire” Lyrics

(Traditional, translation by Ann Allen Savoy)

Chorus:

**Oh, parlez nous à boire
Non pas du mariage.
Toujours en regrettant
Nos jolis temps passes.**

Verse 1:

Si que tu te marries avec une jolie fille
Tu es dans les grands dangers;
Ça va te la voler.

CHORUS repeat

Verse 2:

Si que tu te marries avec une vilaine fille
Tu es dans les grands dangers;
Faudra tu fais ta vie avec.

CHORUS repeat

Verse 3:

Si que tu te marries avec une fille bien pauvre
Tu es dans les grands dangers;
Faudra travailler de toute ta vie

CHORUS repeat

Verse 4:

Si que tu te marries avec une fille qu'a de quoi
Tu es dans les grands dangers;
Tu vas attraper des grands reproches

CHORUS TUNE:

Fameux, toi, grand bon rien
Qu'a tout gaspille mon bien
Fameux grand bon rien,
Qu'a tout gaspille mon bien

Chorus:

**Oh, let's talk about drinking
Not about marriage.
Always regretting
The pretty times of the past.**

Verse 1:

If you marry a pretty girl
You're in danger;
They will steal her from you.

CHORUS repeat

Verse 2:

If you marry an ugly girl
You're in danger;
You'll have to spend your whole life
with her.

CHORUS repeat

Verse 3:

If you marry a very poor woman
You're in danger;
Of having to work your whole life

CHORUS repeat

Verse 4:

If you marry a girl who has something
You're in danger;
Of being greatly reproached

Chorus tune:

You famous good for nothing
Who wasted all that was good in me
You famous good for nothing
Who wasted all that was good in me

“Jambalaya” Song Lyrics

Lyrics by Hank Williams

A good-bye Joe, you gotta go, me oh my oh
He gotta go-pole the pirogue down the bayou
His Yvonne the sweetest one, me oh my oh
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou

Thibodaux, Fontaineaux, the place is buzzin'
A kinfolk come to see Yvonne by the dozen
Dressed in style they go hog wild, me oh my oh
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou

Jambalaya and crawfish pie and filé gumbo
For tonight, I'ma gonna see my ma cher
a mio
Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the
bayou

Settle down far from town, get him a pirogue
And he'll catch all the fish in the bayou
Swap his mon to buy Yvonne what she need-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou

Jambalaya and crawfish pie, filé gumbo
For tonight, I'ma gonna see my ma cher
a mio
Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the
bayou

Jambalaya and crawfish pie, filé gumbo
For tonight, I'ma gonna see my ma cher
a mio

Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the
bayou

Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the
bayou

Jambalaya and crawfish pie, filé gumbo
For tonight, I'ma gonna see my ma cher
a mio

Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the
bayou

Jambalaya and crawfish pie, filé gumbo
For tonight, I'ma gonna see my ma
chera mio

Pick a guitar, fill fruit jar and be gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the
bayou

Jambalaya and crawfish pie, filé gumbo
For tonight, I'ma gonna see my ma cher
a mio

“Grand Texas” Song Lyrics

Traditional, arr. by Chuck Guillory.

Recorded by Chuck Guillory and Papa Cairo - ARH00473

Translation:

Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller, du grand Texas	<i>You've left me to go away to big Texas</i>
Oui t'en aller aussi loin z'avec un autr' Criminelle, comment tu crois, mais moi j'vas fair' ?	<i>Yes to go so far away with another Criminal, what do you think I'm going to do?</i>
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller, pour t'en aller	<i>You've left me to go away, to go away</i>
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller	<i>You've left me to go away</i>
Oui t'en aller aussi loin z'avec un autr' Chère 'tite fille comment tu crois, mais moi j'vas fair' ?	<i>Yes to go so far away with another Little girl, what do you think I'm going to do?</i>
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller, pour t'en aller	<i>You've left me to go away, to go away</i>
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller, s'à Galveston	<i>You've left me to go away to Galveston</i>
Oui t'en aller aussi loin z'avec un autr' Criminelle, comment tu crois, mais moi j'vas fair' ?	<i>To go so far away with another Criminal, what do you think I'm going to do?</i>
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller, pour t'en aller	<i>You've left me to go away, to go away</i>
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller	<i>You've left me to go away</i>
Oui t'en aller aussi loin z'avec un autr' Chère 'tite fille comment tu crois, mais moi j'vas fair' ?	<i>Yes to go so far away with another Little girl, what do you think I'm going to do?</i>
Oh Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller, pour t'en aller	<i>You've left me to go away, to go away</i>