

**ATCHAFALAYA BASIN PROGRAM:  
EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS  
LESSON TWO:**

**“A CULTURAL GUMBO:  
THE PEOPLE OF THE ATCHAFALAYA”**

GRADE LEVEL & SUBJECT AREA:

8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies

TIME NEEDED:

3 days

LESSON INCLUDES:

1. Essay for students
2. Essay quiz
3. Critical thinking exercise
4. Internet resources
5. Student experiment
6. Three-day lesson plan, drawn from student essay

ASSESSMENT:

1. Essay quiz
2. Fill-in-the-blank paragraph, drawn from Internet research
3. Venn diagram
4. Letter to the editor

GRADE-LEVEL EXPECTATIONS COVERED IN THREE DAYS:

5. Describe and analyze the distinguishing physical and/or human characteristics of Louisiana regions (G-1B-M1)
8. Identify and describe factors that cause a Louisiana region to change (e.g., natural occurrences, disasters, migration) (G-1B-M3)

11. Explain why humans settled and formed societies in specific regions or why immigrant groups (e.g., Acadians) settled in specific areas of Louisiana (G-1C-M3)
12. Describe the causes and effects of cultural diffusion and the effects of cultural diversity in Louisiana (G-1C-M5)
13. Describe factors that contribute to economic interdependence at the local, national, and global level, as related to Louisiana's past and present (G-1C-M6)
14. Analyze, evaluate, and predict consequences of environmental modifications on Louisiana landforms, natural resources, and plant or animal life (G-1D-M1)
17. Identify a contemporary Louisiana geographic issue, and research possible solutions (G-1D-M4)
41. Explain the importance of being an informed citizen on public issues, recognizing propaganda, and knowing the voting issues (C-1D-M5)
75. Describe the contributions of ethnic groups significant in Louisiana history (H-1D-M1)
81. Explain cultural elements that have shaped Louisiana's heritage (e.g., festivals, music, dance, food, languages) (H-1D-M6)

## **THE ATCHAFALAYA BASIN: LESSON TWO: Student Essay**

### **A CULTURAL GUMBO: THE PEOPLE OF THE ATCHAFALAYA**

#### **I. ATCHAFALAYA GUMBO**

Louisiana is famous worldwide for its gumbo—a thick, dark soup that begins with “making a roux.” Ask someone in a Louisiana home about how to make a roux, and you’ll probably hear about cooking flour and oil in an iron skillet until it turns dark. (And different cooks like different degrees of darkness.) Then you add onions, garlic, celery, bell pepper, parsley, and green onions. Then you add water and seasoning. And then you add seafood (shrimp, oyster, crab, crawfish) or meat (chicken, duck, venison, sausage). Many people add okra to their seafood gumbo as a thickener. Gumbo is often seasoned with a dash of filé just before serving. Of course, the finished product is served over rice.

Gumbo...roux...okra...sausage...filé. Familiar words in a Louisiana kitchen. But did you know that gumbo was first created by Louisiana’s French colonials, who adapted bouillabaisse to local conditions? That the Choctaw people were the first ones in Louisiana to grind sassafras leaves in order to make filé? That Cajuns contributed gumbo’s dark roux? That Germans brought their own andouille sausage? And that Africans gave gumbo its name? “Gumbo” means “okra” in various African languages—namely, Bantu languages. (Bantu languages are a group of many different African languages, spoken by millions of people. Swahili is the most famous Bantu language. Many slaves brought to Louisiana spoke Bantu languages.)

Gumbo is a delicious symbol of the Louisiana’s combination of cultures: it represents how different groups of people have come together to create a distinctive society—particularly in the Atchafalaya region. Native Americans, Acadians, Europeans, Africans, Creoles, and other groups have all added to this “Atchafalaya gumbo.” Let’s look at the different cultural contributions.

## **2. THE FIRST LOCAL COOKS**

Try to picture a time when only Native Americans lived in the Atchafalaya swamps. What can you imagine seeing? Palmetto huts dotting the landscape? Dug-out canoes being navigated through moss-draped cypress swamps? Wood fires burning in the open spaces? Native Americans of different tribes have populated the Atchafalaya region for hundreds of years. The Chitimacha Indians are distinct because have never had to leave the land of their ancestors.

### The Chitimacha Indians

More than three hundred years ago, in 1650, about 4,000 Chitimacha Indians lived in the Atchafalaya region. They lived mostly along Bayou Teche. In fact, Bayou Teche takes its name from the Chitimacha word "tenche," which means "snake." True to its name, Bayou Teche meanders (follows a winding path) for 130 miles throughout Southwest Louisiana. It begins in Port Barre and ends in Morgan City. According to Chitimacha legend, a particular snake was over 100 miles long. When the Chitimacha people finally destroyed the destructive snake, it coiled and twisted and curved and deepened, as it struggled to survive. Eventually, the snake buried itself in the soil, creating the winding waterway that we call Bayou Teche.

The Chitimacha were able to live peacefully along Bayou Teche until the French declared war on them, between 1706 and the 1720s. During these wartimes, some Native Americans were forced to become slaves on plantations. However, many Indian slaves were able to escape and return to their homeland. Today, there are approximately 1000 Chitimacha in St. Mary Parish. Their language has disappeared, but the tribe still lives on its ancestral land.

The Chitimacha are best known for their basket weaving. Scarlet, Melissa, and John Darden are three of four living Chitimacha basketweavers. Their baskets are woven from river cane, which grows wild in the Atchafalaya region. The Dardens cut their own cane, and then split the cane with their teeth. Then the process of dyeing and weaving begins. Their traditional colors are red, black, and yellow. Perhaps some of these baskets were first used for storing filé!

### Other Tribes

The Tunica-Biloxi Indians are another Atchafalaya tribe. They live today in Avoyelles Parish. Tribal members originally lived in the mid-Mississippi Valley. In the early eighteenth century, they moved near the Red River. And then after 1780, they moved into Avoyelles Parish, where they live today. The Spanish

government gave them a land grant and promised them that they would be able to keep their land. Today, approximately 250 tribal members still live in Avoyelles Parish. Like the Chitimacha, the Tunica-Biloxi weave baskets. While the Chitimacha make their baskets out of wild river cane, the Tunica-Biloxi baskets are made of pine needles. The Tunica-Biloxi, as well as the Chitimacha, are recognized by the federal government.

Until the early 1800s, some Atakapa Indians also lived in the Atchafalaya Basin region, near Bayou Teche. Other Atakapa lived a seminomadic lifestyle in Southwest Louisiana. The Atakapa called themselves "Ishak." Today no known Atakapa communities exist. Either they married into other cultural groups, or they left Louisiana after the Louisiana Purchase. Nevertheless, their importance is recognized in a statue of an Atakapa chief on the church square in St. Martinville.

In addition, the Opelousa lived in Opelousas around 1725, but, like the Atakapa, no documented descendents exist today. Indeed, the Chitimacha are a special tribe because, unlike other tribes, they continue to exist on their early ancestors' land in the Atchafalaya Basin.

While the Choctaw Indians have not inhabited the Atchafalaya region, they do have historical importance to South Louisiana. After all, it is the Choctaw who gave the Atchafalaya its name: "hacha falaia," which means "long river." And the Choctaw first taught Europeans about filé. Choctaw begin arriving in Louisiana after 1760. Today, The Jena Choctaw are federally recognized and live in Grant Parish. The Clifton Choctaw live in Rapides Parish. And the Ebarb-Choctaw-Apache live near Zwolle, in Sabine Parish.

### **3. ACADIAN CONTRIBUTIONS**

When Acadians were expelled from Nova Scotia in the mid-eighteenth century, some of them came to Louisiana and settled along the Bayou Teche in the Atchafalaya region. They brought their fishing traditions with them, and learned how to live off the land and water of South Louisiana.

The first Acadians of the Atchafalaya settled at the Attakapas Post (around St. Martinville) in 1765. There were nearly 200 settlers at this time. The names of members of this original group are inscribed on a wall in St. Martinville, and

their descendants are numerous, especially along the Bayou Teche and the western edge of the Atchafalaya Basin.

Descendents of these settlers will have names such as: Aucoin, Babin, Bergeron, Boudreau, Chevalier, Daigle, Gaudet—and many others that may be familiar to you. If you'd like to see a complete list of the names, visit the website <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/wallnames.htm>. Or you may want to take a trip to visit the Acadian Memorial in St. Martinville.

In 1785, nearly 2000 Acadians settled on the eastern side of the Atchafalaya swamp. By the late nineteenth century, the thousands of Acadians who lived in the Basin had developed ways to survive in the swamp. Remember, in the previous essay, "Let's Go Paddling," we talked about the different flooding seasons of the swamp? How residents of the Basin had to "go with the ebb and flow"? Well, because of these different seasons, the "Cajuns" had different activities for different times of the year:

- High Water Spring: During the spring floods, swampers gathered moss and caught fish—namely, catfish and crawfish.
- Mid-level Summer: When the waters were lower, Basin people frogged, crabbed, and caught turtles.
- Low Water Fall & Winter: The waters are lowest during the fall, swampers continued fishing, caught alligators, hunted, and trapped.

Living so near to people of other cultures—Indians, Africans, Creoles and Europeans—the Cajuns learned from other cultures, married into them, and adapted their traditions to their new homeland. While associating with different cultures, there was, nevertheless, a "dividing line" between Acadian immigrants and Creoles, who descended from French and Spanish colonials. The Creoles appeared to have a more glamorous culture—with opera houses and ballroom dances---while the Cajuns were rural people, who worked hard to make a living from the land and water. Many European groups settled in the Atchafalaya Basin.

Cajuns are very practical people, who have created ways to cope with their challenging surroundings. In order to cope with the changing water levels, some people lived on "camp boats," which allowed them to change locations as the

environment changed. The campboats are houseboats often on log rafts. They usually had three rooms and a porch. Many people lived in campboat communities, until 1975, when they had to move to land because of changes to the waterways. When they lived on the water, they passed on their traditions of fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, moss gathering—and any other way of surviving.

#### **4. AFRICANS ADDITIONS**

African Americans of the Atchafalaya Basin generally fall into two different groups: “Black Creoles” and “English-Speaking African Americans.”

##### Black Creoles

“Creole” is a word for talking about how things are “mixed together.” If you eat “shrimp creole,” you’re eating a dish of tomatoes, vegetables, rice, and seafood—all mixed up. Some people use “Creole” to talk about people of mixed European descent, such as Spanish and French. “Black Creole” is a term used to talk about African Americans who have a “mixed” heritage: they share a history with African slaves, *gens libres de couleur* (free people of color), French and Spanish colonists, Cajuns, and Native Americans, among others.

In the Atchafalaya Basin, the majority of Creoles live in these parishes: Iberia, St. Martin, St. Mary, and St. Landry. They descend from free blacks, and/or slaves who usually came from the West Indies, and/or Native Americans, and/or Cajuns. They have a very complex heritage. Many Black Creoles speak French, and they tend to be Catholic. In fact, they share strong connections with Cajun culture, such as music, dance, and food.

##### English-speaking African Americans

Some African Americans in the Basin descend from blacks who came to Louisiana in the nineteenth century. These people came with Anglo settlers, who purchase plantations in Louisiana. Often, these Anglos had moved from other Southern states, such as Mississippi, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, many more Anglo settlers came to the plantation regions to prosper, and brought their English-speaking slaves with them. English-speaking blacks of the Basin have not participated in fishing and trapping as the Cajuns have done. Instead, many have been farmers or have pursued other occupations.

## 5. ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, many Anglo settlers came to the Basin region to plant cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco. Anglos, who were mostly Protestant, settled in St. Mary Parish, near Morgan City. They bought large pieces of land so that they could raise their crops. Cajuns and White Creoles who owed money on taxes were forced to sell their land and move deeper into the Atchafalaya Basin. Anglos tended to live outside the levees to establish large farms. Cultural conflicts between Cajuns and “*les Americans*” were sometimes a problem, because of their differences in religion and culture.

On the prairies of Southwest Louisiana, American farmers of German descent settled. These German settlers are different from those who settled in St. John and St. Charles Parishes, along what is called “The German Coast.” The Germans that settled west of Lafayette, in Roberts Cove, grew out of the efforts of a New Orleans priest, named Father Thevis, who had left Germany to escape religious persecution. In 1880, he persuaded some of his family from Germany to immigrate. They settled in Roberts Cove, and remained devout Catholics. They established a church, St. Leo’s, and also built their own school, which closed in 1927. On their farms, Germans grew wheat, cotton and rice. Today, descendants in Roberts Cove celebrate their heritage with “Oktoberfest.”

## 6. THE MAIN INGREDIENT

All these cultural elements are important to “Atchafalaya gumbo.” But it is also important to remember nature’s contributions. Imagine South Louisiana without seafood! People brought different spices and methods. But without nature, it would be hard to cook up a good seafood gumbo. Nature is the main ingredient.

Today, coastal erosion is jeopardizing Louisiana’s seafood industry. Pollution also threatens the health of our seafood. What do you plan to do to help preserve nature, the main ingredient so that we can continue to celebrate our unique culture?



## WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. The only Indian tribe in the Atchafalaya region to live today on the land of its early ancestors (ancestors who lived before 1700):
  - a. The Tunica-Biloxi
  - b. The Opelousa
  - c. The Chitimacha
  - d. The Atakapa
2. Which one of the statements below is false:
  - a. English-speaking African Americans came to the Atchafalaya region with Anglo settlers and were Protestant.
  - b. In the early days of Louisiana, there was no dividing line between Acadians and White Creoles.
  - c. Basin dwellers sometimes built campboats to go with the ebb and flow of the water seasons.
  - d. Black Creoles are often Catholic and of mixed ancestry.
3. A "cultural gumbo" is best described as:
  - a. A mixture of different cultures, whose customs and traditions have blended together
  - b. A group of cultures that eats rice everyday
  - c. A group of cultures that lives on campboats
  - d. Cultures that like to fish
4. Bayou Teche takes its names from:
  - a. A Choctaw legend about a snake
  - b. The people who wandered around looking for a new home
  - c. A Chitimacha legend about a snake
  - d. The baskets of the Atchafalaya region
5. What city has a memorial to Acadians:
  - a. St. Francisville
  - b. New Iberia
  - c. Lafayette
  - d. St. Martinville

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

You have read about how Acadians lived in campboat communities to cope with the changing water levels. Can you imagine other ways to cope with water level changes, other than living on a houseboat and moving it from season to season?

## LET'S GO SURFING

Visit the following websites to learn more about the Atchafalaya River and Basin.

The Cabildo: American Indians, The First Families of Louisiana

<http://lsm.crt.state.la.us/cabildo/cab2.htm>

Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana

<http://chitimacha.com/>

Cultural Traditions

<http://www.lsue.edu/acadgate/culture.htm>

Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana: streaming videos

<http://www.wlf.state.la.us/apps/netgear/page6.asp>

Louisiana's German Heritage Predates Arrival of Acadians

<http://www.theadvertiser.com/ouropinion/html/6DE1E6F5-2FBE-41D3-BCAA-63117225C216.shtml>

Maps of Atchafalaya Basin

<http://www.atchafalayatrace.org/Maps/Base%20map%20final.pdf>

Roberts Cove Germanfest

<http://www.robertscovegermanfest.com/>

Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana

<http://www.tunica.org/>

## **JUST FOR FUN**

1. Make your own filé. First you must find sassafras leaves, either in nature or at a store. First find the leaves, wash them, and hang them in a dark place until they dry out. Once they are dry, remove the leaves from the stem and break them into small pieces. Grind the pieces into a fine powder with a mortar and pestle, or in a food processor. Store filé in a tightly sealed container.
2. The essay you have read talks about a Chitimacha legend about a large snake, which gave the Bayou Teche its name. Create a legend of your own which tells about how the Atchafalaya River got its name from the Choctaw people. Remember, they called it “hacha falaia,” which means “long river.” What story can you create to tell about how this river got its name, and how it eventually became known at “Atchafalaya”?

**FOR THE TEACHER:  
THREE-DAY LESSON PLAN  
8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES**

OVERVIEW OF THREE-DAY LESSON:

These lesson plans, to be covered in three days, should be taught after Lesson 1 so that the students have an understanding of the geography of the Atchafalaya Basin. This unit focuses on the cultures of the Basin, using “cultural gumbo” as a symbol of how the different groups have blended together to create a unique mix of people.

On Day 1, before the students read the essay, they will perform an on-line scavenger hunt to research the ingredients of gumbo that have come from different cultures: filé from the Native Americans; okra from Africans; andouille from Germans; and roux from Cajuns.

On Day 2, the focus is on how the different cultures have shared-yet-separate characteristics. The students will work in groups to complete a Venn Diagram.

On Day 3, the focus turns to how these cultures how used the natural resources of the Basin. The unit ends by encouraging students to help conserve the resources of the Basin for future generations. They begin by writing a letter to the editor, asking citizens to take action.

**DAY 1: CULTURAL GUMBO  
(45 minutes)**

GRADE-LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:

5. Describe and analyze the distinguishing physical and/or human characteristics of Louisiana regions (G-1B-M1)
13. Describe factors that contribute to economic interdependence at the local, national, and global level, as related to Louisiana’s past and present (G-1C-M6)

75. Describe the contributions of ethnic groups significant in Louisiana history (H-1D-M1)
81. Explain cultural elements that have shaped Louisiana's heritage (e.g., festivals, music, dance, food, languages) (H-1D-M6)

TEACHER PREPARATION:

1. Read student essay for background.
2. Read information at the websites linked to this lesson in "Let's Go Surfing."
3. Visit the websites listed in this lesson to become familiar with what students will be researching.
4. Consult additional resources listed, as needed.
5. Prepare handout for each group with websites to be researched and paragraph to be completed.

MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT:

1. Maps of Atchafalaya Basin
2. Internet access
3. Handouts for students with website addresses they are to surf

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS (10 minutes):

1. Before asking students to read the essay for this lesson, introduce them to the cultural groups of the Atchafalaya Basin by talking about gumbo ingredients that came from specific cultures. Ask students how many of them have eaten gumbo; what their favorite kind of gumbo is; do that like it dark or light; thick or thin; do they like okra; do they add file.
2. The primary question to ask, after these introductory questions, is this: Do you know where gumbo comes from? This question will lead to a discussion of the different cultural groups that have contributed to our modern-day understanding of the famous recipe. Allow students to provide a lot of different—even incorrect—answers without saying that they're answers are "wrong." The purpose of this lesson is to seek out answers. So they'll want to investigate how their own answers compare/contrast with the ones they find on line.

MAIN LESSON (25 minutes): INTERNET SCAVENGER HUNT

1. Divide students into 4 groups and give each group the websites listed below to search for information. Each group will research the one ingredient of gumbo

that has particular cultural roots. Do not tell the students which cultural group contributed which ingredient. Let them discover the answers on their own.

2. After the students visit the required websites, have students fill in the blanks of the paragraph below:

**GROUP 1: FILÉ**

Food Reference Website

<http://www.foodreference.com/html/artfilegumbo.html>

David's Cajun and Camp Cooking: Horticulture at Texas A&M

<http://generalhorticulture.tamu.edu/prof/Recipes/File-Sassafras/file.html>

Woodland Foods

[http://www.woodlandfoods.com/products/GUMBO\\_FILE.html](http://www.woodlandfoods.com/products/GUMBO_FILE.html)

**GROUP 2: OKRA**

Food Reference Website: okra

<http://www.foodreference.com/html/artokra.html>

Congo Cookbook

<http://www.congocookbook.com/c0047.html>

Food Reference Website: gumbo

<http://www.foodreference.com/html/artgumbo.html>

**GROUP 3: ROUX**

Gumbo Pages

<http://www.gumbopages.com/food/ingred.html>

Tips for Roux

[http://www.goodeatsoftexas.com/pf\\_roux\\_tips.html](http://www.goodeatsoftexas.com/pf_roux_tips.html)

Encyclopedia of Cajun Culture

[http://www.goodeatsoftexas.com/pf\\_roux\\_tips.html](http://www.goodeatsoftexas.com/pf_roux_tips.html)

**GROUP 4: ANDOUILLE**

Jacob's Sausage

[http://www.goodeatsoftexas.com/pf\\_roux\\_tips.html](http://www.goodeatsoftexas.com/pf_roux_tips.html)

John Folse & Company

[http://www.jfolse.com/mm\\_history.htm](http://www.jfolse.com/mm_history.htm)

Gumbo Pages

<http://www.gumbopages.com/food/andouille.html>

**PARAGRAPH TO BE COMPLETED BY EACH GROUP:**

My group researched the ingredient \_\_\_\_\_. We discovered that it was the \_\_\_\_\_ people who contributed this ingredient to Louisiana. This ingredient is made by \_\_\_\_\_. This ingredient has become necessary to Louisiana's culture and economy in the following ways: \_\_\_\_\_.

**CONCLUSION:**

Have each group read their paragraph to the class.

**HOMEWORK:**

Distribute student essay to students, and have them read it for homework.

## **DAY 2: CULTURES OF THE BASIN**

**(45 minutes)**

### GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:

5. Describe and analyze the distinguishing physical and/or human characteristics of Louisiana regions (G-1B-M1)
11. Explain why humans settled and formed societies in specific regions or why immigrant groups (e.g., Acadians) settled in specific areas of Louisiana (G-1C-M3)
12. Describe the causes and effects of cultural diffusion and the effects of cultural diversity in Louisiana (G-1C-M5)
75. Describe the contributions of ethnic groups significant in Louisiana history (H-1D-M1)

### TEACHER PREPARATION:

1. Download Venn Diagram and print 4 copies on overhead transparencies

### MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT:

1. Four copies of Venn Diagram, printed on overhead transparencies:  
<http://www.louisianafolklife.org/louisianavoices/unit7french/louisianavoicesvenndiagram.html>
2. Student essay
3. Dry erase markers for transparencies

### INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS (10 minutes):

Have students take the quiz on the essay and collect them to mark and return later. This may be an open-book quiz, if you like. After the quiz, discuss the essay, beginning with the questions below.

### MAIN LESSON (25 minutes):

1. ASK STUDENTS SOME INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
  - a. Review fact-based quiz questions.
  - b. How are the cultures of the Atchafalaya region like a “gumbo”?
2. DIVIDE STUDENTS INTO FOUR GROUPS, AND GIVE EACH GROUP A VENN DIAGRAM PRINTED ON TRANSPARENCY (from La. Voices website).
  - Group 1: focus on Chitimacha and Tunica-Biloxi (section 2 of essay)
  - Group 2: focus on Acadians and White Creoles (section 3)



Group 3: focus on Black Creoles and English-Speaking African Americans (section 4)

Group 4: focus on Anglos and Germans

3. Have each group complete a Venn Diagram, with the differences of each group listed in the separate spaces, and their similarities listed in the overlapping space.

### CONCLUSION:

Ask each group to present their Venn Diagram to the whole class, using an overhead projector. The focus of this exercise is to show cultural groups that have different traits, are nevertheless, similar in many ways. Establish discussion for following day by saying that all groups shared one thing in common: wrestling with the natural environment.

### HOMEWORK:

1. Give students the following list of natural resources found in the Basin: crawfish, palmetto, cypress trees, catfish, alligators, nutria, sugar cane, black bear, bald eagle, egret
2. Have students research this question: Are any of these resources on the endangered or threatened list? They can find the answers at their local library or on the Internet, at  
<http://www.endangeredspecies.com/>  
La. Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries  
<http://www.wlf.state.la.us/apps/netgear/index.asp?cn=lawlf&pid=693>  
Louisiana's Atchafalaya Basin: A Threatened National Treasure  
<http://www.audubon.org/campaign/wetland/atcha.html>
3. If the animal is endangered or threatened, have students research the reasons why.

[Answers:

Black bear: threatened; loss of habitat

Bald eagle: was endangered; now threatened;

Cypress trees: logging industry]

### **DAY 3: NATURE AND CULTURE** **(45 minutes)**

#### GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS:

8. Identify and describe factors that cause a Louisiana region to change (e.g., natural occurrences, disasters, migration) (G-1B-M3)
14. Analyze, evaluate, and predict consequences of environmental modifications on Louisiana landforms, natural resources, and plant or animal life (G-1D-M1)
17. Identify a contemporary Louisiana geographic issue, and research possible solutions (G-1D-M4)
41. Explain the importance of being an informed citizen on public issues, recognizing propaganda, and knowing the voting issues (C-1D-M5)

#### TEACHER PREPARATION:

1. Read student essay to identify references to natural resources
2. Prepare letter format for student's letter to the editor
3. Locate and print images of resources on website for "Creole State Exhibit,"  
[http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/CSE/creole\\_home.html](http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/CSE/creole_home.html):  
Dugout canoe of cypress:  
<http://www.louisianafolklife.org/FOLKLIFEimagebase/FLImagesListing.asp?Page=2>  
River Cane basket:  
<http://www.louisianafolklife.org/FOLKLIFEimagebase/FLImagesListing.asp?Page=1>  
Palmetto:  
<http://www.louisianafolklife.org/FOLKLIFEimagebase/FLImagesListing.asp?Page=1>

#### MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT:

1. Student essay
2. Internet access for Creole State Exhibit items
3. Copies of photographs, or electronic display of web photos

#### INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS (10 minutes):

After spending two days of talking about the cultural groups of the Basin, turn students' attention to how these different groups interacted with the natural environment. Review physical layout of the Basin and the Bayou Teche, using a map. Then discuss issues of conservation with the students: How have cultural groups used their environment? How have they changed it by using it?

MAIN LESSON (25 minutes):

1. Ask students to re-read the essay and to underline every natural resource used by the cultural groups of the Basin. They will underline such items as: crawfish, sassafras leaves, okra, palmetto, cypress trees, river cane, pine needles, moss, catfish, frogs, turtles, alligators, trapped animals (nutria, muskrat), hunted animals (deer, rabbit, fowl), sugar cane, cotton
2. Ask students to report on their homework: which of the resources in the Atchafalaya Basin are endangered or threatened and why?
3. Discuss how cultural groups have used these resources historically. Show images of cultural items from Creole State Exhibit (websites listed above).
4. Ask students which of these resources they use in their own daily lives?
5. Spend the rest of the hour asking students to research possible solutions to conserve the natural resources of the Atchafalaya Basin. Encourage students to evaluate the information, to distinguish between reliable data and propaganda.
6. Encourage them to visit the website <http://lacoast.gov/education/10ways.htm> to read about the "Ten Ways You Can Help."

CONCLUSION:

Have students brainstorm about actions they can personally take to help conserve Louisiana's wetland areas.

HOMEWORK:

Have them write a letter to the editor, encouraging citizens to take action to conserve the Atchafalaya Basin and other wetland areas. Their letter should address 3 items: identification of the issue they're concerned about; a request for action; a polite thank you. Students should state the problem in their own language, and come up with their own request for action.

Collect the letter from the students and evaluate it according to the following criteria:

1. However precisely did the letter describe conservation issues associated with the Basin?
2. How convincing is the request for action?
3. How few mechanical and grammatical errors are in the letter?
4. Is the tone appropriate, polite as well as enthusiastic?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ancelet, Barry Jean et al. *Cajun Country*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

Army Corps of Engineers: brochures  
<http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/pao/brochures.htm>

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