Wedding Traditions
Secondary

Historic Homes • Gardens • Artifacts • Costumed Crafts People
Boat Tours • Gift Shop • Restaurant
Standards

Standards as developed by the Louisiana Department of Education. Available online at http://www.vermilionville.org/vermilionville/educate/lesson-plans.

Grade 8
Social Studies
Places and Regions
  • GLE #9: Explain ways in which goals, cultures, interests, inventions, and technological advances have affected perceptions and uses of places or regions in Louisiana (G-1B-M4)

Physical and Human Systems
  • GLE #12: Describe the causes and effects of cultural diffusion and the effects of cultural diversity in Louisiana (G-1C-M5)

Louisiana History
  • GLE #73: Describe and explain the importance of major events and ideas in the development of Louisiana (H-1D-M1)
  • GLE #80: Trace the state’s economic development and growth toward economic diversity (e.g. fur trade, tourism, technology) (H-1D-M5)

English Language Arts
  • SL.8.1.c: Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others’ questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas
  • SL.8.1.d: Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented
  • W.8.2.f: Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented

Objectives

1. The learner will compare and contrast Creole, Acadian, and Native American traditions.

2. The learner will identify courtship rituals and marriage customs of the Creoles, Acadians, and Native Americans.

3. The learner will define terms such as *charivari*, *corbeille de noce*, *vieille fille*, *vieux garçon*, jumping the broom, dancing with the broom, money dance.
Pre-Visit Activity

Materials needed: document #1

Teachers. We have made two introduction documents available to you on our website – a word document as well as a PowerPoint with pictures depicting the cultures that we represent. Please take some time to review these two documents with your class prior to your visit here. You can access them here, by clicking on

- Introduction to Vermilionville
- Vermilionville PowerPoint

The teacher will review the list of words with the class prior to their visit to Vermilionville (see document #1).

Anchor Lesson

Materials needed: dried beans, rice, construction paper, plastic cups, duct tape, Admit Slip (document #2), Exit Slip (document #3), Native American Wedding Traditions (document #4), Acadian Wedding Traditions (document #5), Creole Wedding Traditions (document #6)

The following books will help you better understand the wedding traditions in Louisiana.


Hand-out Admit Slip (document #2) to students as they arrive at the chapel. This asks students what they know about wedding traditions prior to the lesson.

Start the lesson in the courtyard, adjacent to the chapel, in front of the *presbytère*. Here, students will learn about Native American wedding traditions (document #4).

Next, students will move inside of the chapel where they will learn about the customs of courtship and weddings in the Acadian culture (document #5).

Then, students will move to the front porch of the chapel for the Creole section of the lesson (document #6).
Students will be handed an Exit Slip (document #3) that will ask them one fact they learned that stood out to them.

Finally, students will make noise-makers and participate in a *charivari*.

**Post-Visit Activity**

**Materials needed: Venn diagram**

Students will work on a Venn diagram, comparing and contrasting the different wedding traditions they learned of during their Vermilionville trip.

**Evaluation**

The lesson can be assessed through formative measures through discussion and observations. Teachers will post questions to make sure students are understanding what is being taught.

Check for completion of the Admit and Exit Slips.
Document #1

Vocabulary to know for Vermilionville visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word/Concept</th>
<th>Student knows</th>
<th>Student heard of it</th>
<th>Student doesn’t know</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charivari</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corbeille de noce</td>
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<td>Vieille fille</td>
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<td>Vieux garçon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jumping the Broom</td>
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<td>Dancing with the Broom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Money dance</td>
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**Charivari**: When the bride or groom has been widowed or divorced before, family and friends interrupt the wedding night by banging loud pots and pans outside their window. The company does not stop the noise until they are invited in for something to drink and eat. This is a playful way of honoring the new couple.

**Corbeille de noce**: in Creole society, this was a wedding basket the groom would present to the bride-to-be before the wedding. The basket would hold several pieces of lace along with some jewelry. The jewelry was not to be worn before the wedding, and the young woman could not leave the house at all three days before the wedding.

**Vieille fille**: French for “old girl”, but it refers to an unmarried woman.

**Vieux garçon**: French for “old boy”, but it refers to an unmarried man.

**Jumping the broom**: If the bride and the groom got married but the priest had not blessed the vows, they would jump over a broom. That would make their marriage legal until the priest could come.

**Dancing with the broom**: If the bride or the groom had an older sibling that was not married, that sibling would have to dance with the broom.

**Money dance**: Acadian tradition that consists of pinning money to the veil of the bride while dancing with her to the money-dance song.
Admit Slip

What are some wedding traditions you already know of or have recently witnessed at a wedding?

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Admit Slip

What are some wedding traditions you already know of or have recently witnessed at a wedding?

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Admit Slip

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Document #3 - Exit Slip

Exit Slip

What was your favorite part of the lesson? What stood out to you?
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Exit Slip

What was your favorite part of the lesson? What stood out to you?
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Exit Slip

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Exit Slip

What was your favorite part of the lesson? What stood out to you?
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Document #4 - Native American Wedding Traditions

There are many customs surrounding Native American weddings and we will explain a few here. Each tribe, each band is likely to do a variation of what follows.

Typically, a Native American wedding ceremony will be held outdoors, with Father Sky as the roof of the most sacred cathedral, and Mother Earth at the people’s feet, and the trees and plants to surround and embrace the families and the community.

All the guests will be invited into the Medicine Circle – the Sacred Medicine Wheel that is symbolic of life and the connection and continuity of all living things. As they enter the Circle, they will be saged (cleansed and purified), and symbolically enter the womb. For when they leave the circle, they are reborn as married – not just to each other, but to the family and the community, and they to them.

**Baskets**
The sisters and mothers will carry baskets and will hand them to the bride & groom. During the wedding, they will exchange their baskets which symbolizes the tangibles of how the couple will take care of each other during their marriage. Basket items may consist of bread, corn, and meat.

**Vase**
A week or two before they are married, the future husband’s parents make a wedding vase. When it is ready, the groom and his parents will go to the bride’s. Traditionally, the Medicine man would prepare a nectar to be shared by the bride and the groom. Holy water or herbal tea can also be placed in the wedding vase.

In this ceremony, the bride and groom take turns drinking from a single vase to symbolize the life they will share as husband and wife. The two separate spouts remind them that they will remain two separate and unique individuals even as their lives become one.

The couple will treasure the vase through their married life. It is never to be broken, discarded or destroyed.

**Blanket**
In this ceremony, the bride and groom are first wrapped individually in blue blankets. While wrapped in blankets, the officiant blesses the couple’s union. The blankets are then removed and the couple is wrapped in a single white blanket. The blue blankets represent the elements of the couple’s individual past lives and the white blanket represents the couple’s dedication to filling their new lives with peace and happiness.

**Rings**
Because metal was not available, rings were not traditionally exchanged in Native American weddings. However, it has become popular in modern times.

**Avogel tradition**
Chief John Mayeux works at Vermilionville and he is the Old Chief of the Avogel tribe and current Chief of the Bear Clan. He was interviewed to help with this lesson plan and here is what he said about a typical Avogel wedding.

When a groom chooses a bride, he presents gifts to her parents. This is not to buy her, but to give thanks to the parents and attempt to replace what he will soon take away from them. If the bride and/or the parents refuse the marriage proposal, they will keep the gifts.

The wedding ceremony will be two part – a religious part, often Catholic, and a Native American part. The Chief will perform the Native American wedding which will take place before the entire community. The bride will bring a basket with moccasins and corn, the groom will bring animal hides in his basket and they will...
exchange them. During the vase ceremony, the Chief will give advice to the bride and the groom on how to have a successful marriage and on the importance of raising a strong family.

If a husband dies during battle, the widow will generally live with her sister and her family. It is well understood that the children are the future of the tribe and they have to be well taken care of. By taking his wife’s sister and her family under his wing, a husband will help raise strong children.

Polygamy was accepted in the Avogel tribe even though it was not widespread. However, to have multiple wives, a man had to prove he could take care of them. If he failed, he wasn’t allowed to marry more than once.

One last fact about the Avogel tribe is that before she marries, a woman wears her hair on her back. After she weds, she wears it in the front. Men will tie their belts on the right side before they marry, and after they will tie it to the left.
Document #5 - Acadian Wedding Traditions

Acadians are strong Catholics and they take part in religious events surrounding the important events in an individual’s life such as courtship and marriage.

**Courtship**
Courtship was very strict. Girls were required to have a chaperone every time she went out with a young man. Time spent together was usually at the girl’s house with her parents or the chaperone monitoring all of their actions. The girl and boy in a courtship were not allowed to spend time together more than one or two nights per week. The courtship period was not a lengthy process. The young man would ask the girl’s parents for their permission to marry their daughter rather quickly after courtship started.

Women usually married before they turned 20. They would be considered “old maids” after that.

**Wedding and reception**
After permission was granted for the daughter to marry, her parents would visit the parish priest to arrange the marriage. Wedding usually took place during the winter. After the ceremony, the wedding dinner took place at the house of the bride’s parents and then the evening celebration took place at the groom’s parents’ house. The newly-weds usually lived with one set of parents until they were able to build their own house.

During the wedding reception, older unmarried sibling were required to dance barefoot in a tub or dance with a mop/broom. This is a way of poking fun at the older one for still being single.

It still is tradition to pin money on the bride’s veil. They money helps the newly-weds pay for some expenses.

**Jumping the broom**
If a bride and a groom got married without a priest being able to be present, they would jump a broom held by family and friends. That would make their marriage legal until the priest was able to come to their village.

**Charivari**
If a bride or groom has been widowed or divorced before, family and friends would interrupt the wedding night by banging loud pots and pans outside their window. The company would not stop the noise until they are invited in for something to drink and eat. This is a playful way of honoring the new couple.
**Document #6 - Creole Wedding Traditions**

**Courtship**
A young couple was never allowed to be alone. If they tried to seek time alone, a family member would intervene and dispel this behavior. The young man usually spent the evening playing dominoes with the girl’s father, while her mother and aunts asked him questions regarding his family background and his socioeconomic status.

When a young man made an initial visit, there was no great importance placed on this. However, if he continued to call on the young lady, and not mention what his intentions were, her parents would demand that he do so, without hesitation. Creole girls did not waste time on flirts. Marriage was their ultimate goal. If she were to be unmarried by the age of 25, she would lose hope and was supposed to accept the hooded bonnet with ribbons that tied under her chin.

If a young man fell in love with a girl, he had to approach her father and asked for his daughter’s hand. The young lady had nothing to do with it. Once the proposal was accepted, each family carefully examined each other’s family tree. An interesting aspect is that material wealth meant very little, family meant everything. They wanted to know if they came from a good family and make sure that there were no scandals surrounding the young bride and groom.

It was only after this strict examination that material considerations factored in. A formal marriage contract was drawn up. This contract listed the young man and woman’s financial assets. This included property, furniture, number of slaves, cash. The girl’s dowry normally ranged from one to forty thousand dollars. This was submitted to be examined by the young man and his father. A young man might have been unable to support a wife, but this did not stop a marriage from happening. Many times, the bride’s father would find a place for the groom in his business, if the young man’s background was acceptable.

After the engagement was announced, the couple was still not allowed to be alone. If the young man was visiting in the parlor of the girl’s home, the whole family remained there. When they went out, the future husband had to expect to have plenty of company. It was perfectly acceptable for as many family members to accompany them if they felt so inclined.

An engagement breakfast was held after the formal announcement, which all members of both families attended. The bride-to-be was presented with her ring at this event. The ring was a large ruby surrounded by diamonds, and it was in a flat, yellow gold setting.

As the wedding day neared, the groom would present his bride-to-be with a wedding basket, containing several pieces of lace and some jewelry. The jewelry was not worn before the wedding nor could the lady leave home for three days before the marriage.

**Wedding**

*www.everyculture.com*

Weddings, usually held at the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, were opulent affaires with Swiss Guards meeting the wedding guests and preceding them up the aisle. Behind the guests came the bride, accompanied by her father, and then the groom, escorting the bride’s mother. The groom’s parents followed, and then all the relatives of both bride and groom. A relative’s absence was interpreted as a silent protest against the wedding. The bride’s gown was handed down through generations or purchased in Paris to become an heirloom.

There were no ring bearers, maid or matron of honor, nor any types of floral decorations in the church. The ceremony always took place in the evening, as the Creoles would have found it mortifying to have the couple around all day after a morning marriage.
Rice was never thrown, nor did the bride toss her bouquet. The bouquet was sent to the church, the cemetery, or
to the convent where she had received her education.

There was a grand reception that followed. Champagne and dinner were served. The bride and groom mingled
with the crowd for about an hour or so, then it was considered decent that they leave. The bride cut her cake
and every girl present at the reception received a piece.

Weddings on Creole plantations outside the city were much more elaborate affairs. Everything was ordered from
New Orleans and shipped by boat. Wedding cakes and nougat pieces, fragile as they were, would arrive
undamaged. Even hairdressers were summoned to arrange the hairdos of the bride and other ladies. Five
hundred guests at a wedding was not unusual. Often the bride’s father chartered a steamboat to bring the
guests out to the plantation.