**Double Fork TEACHER’S GUIDE**

**As students read the selection from the text, stop them at the indicated spots to take the indicated notes.**

We open this book with a song dedicated to Juan San Malo’s gran kouraj [*great courage*].(Students note this phrase in Kréyol and English) His story has been told in Louisiana for centuries, and through its many tellings, we are able to learn about the language he mostly likely spoke: Louisiana Kréyol. A blend of vodou rhythms connect ―San Malo‖ to music found throughout the African diaspora. The syncopation, with its counterpoint rhythms, are played in the Caribbean and parts of Latin America to entertain the spirits. The melody calls, the bass responds. A space in between is created, but it is not empty. By not cluttering it with lyrics or notes, there is room for the spirits to enter. In music around South Louisiana, from jazz to zydeco, it is what brings people close together.

In the 1940s, Alan Lomax recorded Creole jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton’s conversation with his neighbor in the Seventh Ward of New Orleans:

―We had all nations in New Orleans,‖ said Jelly Roll; ―But with the music we could creep in close to other people, adds Dr. Bechet.

Clarence ―Jockey‖ Etienne, one of the most versatile drummers in Louisiana, also explained how when conversation reaches its limits, music can continue to speak:

It’s a feeling. To get it, you got to go through it. If I can’t show you by talking, I’m going to try to show you by singing. I’m gon try to let you know how *I* feel. But that mostly came out of church. I would call it a deep feeling blues. You try to express yourself. You ain’t hear me now, let me see if you can feel me.

There’s different ways you look at it. I’m not hard headed, I’m gonna try you. I’m gonna listen. I may not agree at the time, but I ain’t forget you. I be you I try you. You never let nothin go.

The space for memory and feeling is an important part of Louisiana Kréyol as well. Like many African-influenced languages:

*The direct statement is considered crude and unimagi-native,(Have students note this section.) the veiling of all contents in ever-changing paraphrase is considered the criterion of intelligence and personality. In music the same tendency...is noticeable: no note is attacked straight, the voice or instrument always approaches if from above or below. [Sidrak 1997: 6]*

The deep blues feeling becomes bent notes that convey complexity. As Mervyn Alleyne writes, ―The format of interaction is the circle, not the line‖ (Alleyne 1989: 160). Counterpoint in Louisiana Kréyol is often where the poignancy lies;

words may shift meaning from standard French. (Have students note.) Folklorist Nick Spitzer cites one example:

Here in French Louisiana, Monde Créole is used by community members to inclusively mean the ―people of color,‖ black Creoles or African-French Creoles, and more broadly their social and cultural aesthetics and networks. The word ―monde‖ (―world‖ in standard French) translates locally as ―people.‖ (Have students note this word in Kréyol and English) [Spitzer 2003: 58]

In a well-known Creole song, ―Ti Monde,‖ Alphonse ―Bois Sec‖ Ardoin uses the word differently as a term of endearment for someone who is hurting: ―Oh ti monde mo koné te dan le blues, bébé.‖ [*“Oh, little one, I know you in the blues, baby.”*] Have students note this phrase in Kréyol and English. In Kréyol, context is important in understanding the full meaning of words. Leroy Etienne, whose first languages is Kréyol, gives another example:

I think about the word ―neg.‖ Neg means black, (Have students note this word) but in Kréyol, you can say it as a love word, and you can say it as an aggressive word, too. It’s all in how you express it. When my daddy’s speaking to my mother in the house, he would ask her when she is going to the store: ―Oh, Neg, to menné kéckchoz por twa?‖ [*“Oh, Honey, you bringing something for yourself?”*] Have students note this phrase and the differing meanings of ―neg‖) He’d say ―Neg‖ as a love word. But in another way, when he’s talking about somebody back there who’s crossing the property, it’s the other way. It’s not going to be the same thing. Double fork.

While a great deal of the structure of the language is based in French, Kréyol holds onto memories of the ethics of other languages; how relationships develop through them. Leroy explains:

Growing up between two languages, sometimes I thought some words were more powerful in Kréyol—more meaningful—because we always used it when there was something important to say in the family; it was private. When I walked in the door, my mother would say, ―Ga sa ki la! Mo ti boug vayon, ranti, ranti!‖ [*Look who‟s there! My fine little boy, come in, come in!*]‖ Have students note this phrase.) The way she said, made you feel like a king. She make me feel good. If I got hurt, my family always approached me in Creole: ―Kwa ya! To fé ton mal?‖ [*What happened? Did you hurt yourself?*] )Have students note this phrase) You could feel the person cares for you in the way it is expressed.

In Louisiana Kréyol, people still use words that are based off of eigtheenth century French like “boug” for boy instead of “garçon.” They also use “astor,” which is the equivilent of “maintenant” for “now.” (Have students note use of some 18th century French, and the Kréyol words.) Writing out these differences may take us back to places in our lives we probably do not want to visit—early elementary school classrooms with small desks and green chalkboards, or Xeroxed foreign language worksheets and flashcards we memorized for tests. It’s easy to revisit the swirls of confusion as we try to figure out the patterns. Think back to the way teachers taught you how to read and spell in English, or conversations you may have had with people who were trying to master English as a second language. How many times did an exasperated teacher end up saying, “Just memorize it!” Why? Because the spelling of English is not consistent.

The language, as we are writing it now, comes from its own process of creolization that was a response to the French occupation of England in the Middle Ages. The ―Middle English‖ of Chaucer was one of the first times that the hybrid language of a predominantly French vocabulary overlaying an Old English/Germanic grammar structure was written down. Nothing was standardized, the way people communicated was in flux. Now we have rules, but the only rule in life that really plays out is change. With language, linguists know that speakers will, like a river, move towards the most streamlined path. ―Th‖ sounds turn to ―ds,‖ contractions pull words together.

Fast forward a few hundred years. Africans who have crossed the Middle Passage are forced to learn to understand unfamiliar languages, including English and French. In the British col-onies that eventually became the United States, the rhythm and grammar patterns of English was transformed as people began to learn to speak it, and in Louisiana, the same occurred with French, but because of the size of the plantations, Kréyol diverged even more significantly than Black English into its own language. The same disparaging comments that we hear about Black English—that it is uneducated or ―incorrect‖ English—French speakers say about Kréyol. Clayton Sampy, whose family spoke the language, said people often think: ―it’s really broken down because it’s a different kind of grammar.‖

But like most sets of rules, once you get to know them they are usually easy to follow. Pronouns are a good example of Kréyol diverges from French. In Kréyol, gender is not marked except through context.(Students note this fact) Below is a chart with the Kréyol words, with the French and English translations next to them. (Students note the words below)

**Mo:** Je/I **Nuzòt:** Nous/We

**Twa, To, Vu:** Tu, Vou/You

**Li:** Il, Elle/He, She **Ye:** Ils/They

Mennen bèk [*remember*] the times when you had to listen to a new language and words ran together—you weren’t sure where one ended and another began. If you had to repeat them, perhaps you wouldn’t catch the breaks. In Kréyol, the articles of words (―le‖ and ―la‖ in French and ―the‖ in English) are often part of a word in Kréyol. (Students note this fact). For instance, French speakers would look at the road to the plantation house along River Road, or through the cane fields to the Mississippi levee, and say, ―la rue.‖ A Kréyol speaker may hear the words and say, ―lari.‖ The same for ―hand.‖ In French, it is ―main,‖ but, in many parts of Loui-siana, it is ―lemen‖ in Kréyol—with the article attached to the noun. (Students note the words Lari for road and Lemen for hand.)

When Sunpie formed his band and started singing in Kréyol, Leroy cautioned him that it could be hard to attract an audience to the songs; they wouldn’t be able to understand the lyrics and it would be hard to compete with songs written in English. Record producers felt the same. The reality is right. It is a challenge to ask people to stretch and connect to the language. Sunpie remembers his band members in Fernest Arcenaux’s band, the Thunders, who often sang in Kréyol,

challenging audiences: ―What’s wrong with that? I understand you. Why can’t you understand me?‖ We created this project to help bridge the languages, and ask a similar question: What do we learn when we step outside one way of knowing and into another?‖

We asked Jockey to tell us what happened when he began creating a new way of drumming when he started playing with Fernest. He told us in his Creolized English:

Oh, they try to stop me now. Oh, they tried to barricade me many times. Now I have to figure you trying to barricade me because you didn’t get there. Cause loneliness coming. Don’t bring me with you. I ain’t going. I’m telling you now. You get mad if you want to; that’s up to you. That’s your decision.

Now we return to the story of San Malo, which was preserved in the Records of the Cabildo housed in New Orleans at the Old U.S. Mint. Reintroduced to us by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall in her book *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, it tells the story of how he broke out of the barricades in his own life.

**San Malo**

In San Malo’s time, people who were born in Louisiana, like others in European colonies in the Caribbean and parts of Latin America, used the word ―Creole‖ to identify people who traced their roots back to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean—Portugal, Spain, France, and parts of Africa—but were born in the Americas. There is no record of whether San Malo was born in Louisiana, the Caribbean, or Africa, but his experience was part of *creolité:*

a process in which people of dramatically different ranks in society lived together through forced labor, trade, affairs, and travel.

San Malo escaped the d’Arensbroug plantation on the Côte d’Allemagne (German Coast), an area where people still speak Creole. The land sat next to the Mississippi River snaking wild and huge through cypress groves. Boats on the German Coast were continually leaving for New Orleans with produce. If he made his way to the city, he may have learned of a series of bayous in the back of the city that were connected to lakes that opened to the sea. During this time, Bayou Road crossed Bayou Petite Au Lavoir around where North Doregnois Street now runs. Next to the Choctaw Market and Place Bretonne, the little bayou connected to Bayou Gentilly to the edge of Lake Borgne (Johnson 1992: 39; Hall 1992; Lewis 2015). This area was called Bas La Fleuv, [*the bottom of the river*](Have students note this phrase.) Around the Rigolets and on the far ends of Lake Borgne, he was one of the earliest known underground railroad conductors, not only helping others escape the bondages of slavery, but also creating villages on shell middens from Indian settlements that provided enough high ground to make a safe haven for a few hundred people. Along the bayous that wove through the area, they logged cypress trees to build homes and sold lumber to local sawmills (Hall 1992).

San Malo fell in love with a woman named Cecilia, who, according to colonial authorities, was ―his inseparable companion in all his exploits‖ (Hall 1992: 232). Together, they helped runaway slaves join their maroon villages. Children could grow up without the fear of the whip. Nearly a hundred years later, in the late 1800s, Lafcadio Hearn spent time with a group of Filipinos who settled in the same area. Here is his account of the sunset at San Malo Bayou:

The bayou blushed crimson, the green of the marsh pools of the shivering reeds, of the decaying timber-work, took fairy bronze tints, and then, immense with marsh mist, the orange-vermilion face of the sun peered luridly for the last time through the tall grasses upon the bank. Night came with marvelous choruses of frogs the whole lowland throbbed and laughed with the wild music—a swamp hymn deeper and mightier than the surge sounds heard from the Rigolets bank: the world seemed to shake with it! (Hearn 2001: 90)

By the late 1780s, plantation owners organized against the maroons. They pooled their money and funded militias to stalk their camps. Records of the Cabildo document these missions along Chef Menteur and into the swamps. San Malo, Cecilia, and others were captured and brought into the city. They were accused of killing white people who had tried to apprehend them at Bay St. Louis. All the maroons deserved punishment. Their freedom provoked, if not a physical, than an existential uprising. Spanish authorities said their quick inquisition led to San Malo’s confession. On June 19, 1784, he was hung in Jackson Square. Cecilia said she was pregnant, and avoided death, but their other companions Jolie Coeur, Michel, and Henri were also executed, despite protests of Capuchin priests. Miró reported

that they had captured a total of 103 maroons, although there were others who had escaped. (Hall 1992: 230).

The maroons who survived the Spanish crown’s attack relocated to a barrier island off of Barataria Bay, but the names of the bayous in the area around La Bas Le Fleuv—Bayou San Malo and Bayou Marron—continued to hold the memory of the maroon settlements. In the 1880s, George Washington Cable transcribed and translated ―Dirge for San Malo‖ in an arti-cle, ―Creole Slave Songs‖ published in *Century Magazine* (April 1886). In this account of his life, San Malo does not confess, but stands strong with his people:

Yé mandé li qui so comperes.

Pov St. Malo pas di’ a-rein!

*They asked him who his comrades were.*

*Poor St. Malo said not a word!* (Have students note this phrase).

[Cable 1959: 418–419]

It is his last act of resistance before he loses his life. The power of the song went up against the court records to hold onto a different version of history.

**WHEN THE READING IS COMPLETED, STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE THESE NOTES**

* + - * gran kouraj ------------------great courage
      * The space for memory and feeling is an important part of Louisiana Kréyol as well. Like many African-influenced languages: The direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative
      * Counterpoint in Louisiana Kréyol is often where the poignancy lies; words may shift meaning from standard French.
      * “Monde” (“world” in standard French) translates locally as “people”.
      * “Oh ti monde mo koné te dan le blues, bébé.” ------------“Oh, little one, I know you in the blues, baby.”
      * Neg means black
      * Oh, Neg, to menné kéckchoz por twa?-------------------------Oh, Honey, you bringing something for yourself?”+
      * Neg can be used as a love word, or in a negative way.
      * Kwa ya! To fé ton mal? ------------------------------What happened? Did you hurt yourself?
* In Louisiana Kréyol, people still use words that are based off of eigtheenth century French

-------- “boug” for boy instead of “garçon.”

---------Also “astor,” the equivilent of “maintenant” for “now.”

* In Kréyol, gender is not marked except through context.
* Mo: ---------------------Je/I
* Nuzot, Nous/-----------We
* Twa, To, Vu: Tu, Vou---You
* Li: Il, Elle/-----------------He, She
* Ye: Ils/---------------------They
* Mennen bèk-------------remember
* .In Kréyol, the articles of words (“le” and “la” in French and “the” in English) are often part of a word in Kréyol.
* French speakers would look at the road to the plantation house along River Road, or through the cane fields to the Mississippi levee, and say, “la rue.”
* A Kréyol speaker may hear the words and say, “lari.” The same for “hand.” In French, it is “main,” but, in many parts of Louisiana, it is “lemen” in Kréyol—with the article attached to the noun.
* Bas La Fleuv-------------------the bottom of the river
* Yé mandé li qui so comperes.---------------------------------They asked him who his comrades were.
* Pov St. Malo pas di’ a-rein!--------------------------------------Poor St. Malo said not a word!