**TEACHER KEY TO MATCH TEXT TO ORGANIZER QUESTIONS**

**Paterres**

In the 1930s and 40s, Works Progress Administration hired researchers who had a fluency in French and Creole to collect songs and folklore in both languages. A WPA writer, Robert Tallant, interviewed Raoul Desfrene, a “French Negro,” who told him he had visited the home of Marie Laveau in New **2)**Orleans and saw a statue on her altar called “Saint Marron, whom he described as, “a colored saint white people don’t know nothing about. Even the priests ain’t never heard of him ’cause he’s a real hoodoo saint (Tallant [1946] 1998: 78). Raul remembered going on Monday nights to a vodou gathering, **1**)called a parterre, with Marie Laveau over at Mama Antoine’s house on Dumaine Street. Parterre translates from the French or Creole into English as flowerbed or orchestra, but could mean, in a broader sense, a well-organized mélange of different offerings and music. Here is a description of what he saw:

***3)*** *A feast was spread for the spirits present on a white tablecloth laid on the floor. The food included congris, apples, oranges, and red peppers.* ***4)****There were lighted candled in the four corners of the room; Raul recalled their colors as red, blue, green, and brown. A Negro named Zizi played the accordion. (Tallant [1946] 1998: 78)*

Far from the bayous of San Malo and Marron, the women of the parterre danced to the breath of the accordion. The spirits love its yearning feeling. In New Orleans, a Creole vodou priestess upholds the memory of runaway slaves.

In the late 1980s, San Malo was still being used in spiritual work in South Louisina. On All Saint’s Night, the Fleming Cemetery in Lafitte was illuminated with candles to honor ancestral spirits. After the Cajun **5)**families had left the cemetery, Creole and Native Americans came out to give their food offerings. They would leave statues of snakes, palmetto crosses, golden horseshoes, and glass beads for San Malo. Like St. Expedite—a spirit you call not just for everyday things but when there is a real emergency; when you need the strongest support in the moment.

Catholicism looms large in the history of creolization in south Louisiana and around many parts of the Caribbean and Latin America. The Code Noir justified slavery on missionary grounds, and many old world spirits from Africa have been dressed in the images of the Catholic saints. **6)**Altars, with candles, offerings, and iconography have been incorporated into a New World “mélange,” which brings together **7)**different cultural ways of knowing. Art historian Donald Constentio has written beautifully about the process in the Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou, where he reminds us that vodou in West Africa had developed with cosmopolitanism embedded into its ethos. *“Cruficixes, rosaries, plaster images of the*

*saints..these and other sacramentals were assimialted by Africans in Dahomey and Kongo before the Middle Passage” (Constantion 30).* Costentio’s dialogue with St. Lucian poet, Derek Walcott, has informed many scholars in their understanding of Afro-Atlantic assemblage arts. Here is Walcott:

*Break a vase and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than the love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles...[28]*

Suzanne Blier has written about the art of “bringing together,” “uniting,” “agglomeration,” and **8)**“gathering together” (kple, ha, agblo, and fo) in the Fon langage to help describe the multi-media, and Dana Rush expands on all of these bodies of work in her own project of undersanding vodou in coastal Benin. She writes, for instance, *“Vodoun does not refuse Christianity; rather it welcomes Jesus as another Vodun spirit.” (Rush 21).*

The paterre, or altar, is one example of the gathering of these pieces. The act of building them created **9**)a ritual practice in New Orleans, like many parts of the New World**10**), that brought people together, and created a shared visual language to help identify their connection with each other and to the broader spirit world, close by and across the water. Historian of Marie Laveau, Barbara Trevigne, explains her own experiences with religion in New Orleans:

*Even though we are Catholic, all persons who are Catholic don’t necessarily practice the same rituals in Catholicism. We have different rituals here than a lot of Catholics have somewhere else. Yeah. So maybe that’s why our religion here is a little different. You know, because we’re founded on the Latin Catholic, and because of the influence of West Africa and those slaves bringing with them the cultural memory of their religion. I remember the May crowning at St. Mary’s Academy when it was in the*

*French Quarter. Your parents pledge you to the Virgin Mary so she can always protect you. Very Catholic, very traditional. We would take a wreath of flowers and put it on the Virgin Mary.*

*When I got older, and ventured a little further out of the community, I realized that everybody didn’t have a religious altar in the home.* ***11****) Because we always had an altar, and there was always candles burning, and there’s always pictures of saints and ancestors. I didn’t know that other people did not do that until I left the community. Mmhmm. While we were very Catholic at home, we also talked about Hoodoo. And I always heard of Marie Laveau. It wasn’t anything to be afraid of—it was embraced. And it’s more or less incorporating those elements together. I always heard, “Oh girl, you look just like Marie Laveau” because I liked hoop earrings. Matter of fact, my grandmother used to play Marie’s numbers in the lottery: 3, 7, and 11.*

**12)**Robert Farris Thompson has written that, *“an altar is a school of being, designed to attract and deepen the powers of inspiration” (Thompson 147).* He also encourages us to see them as acts of writing. Of course, many altars lay sacred books out as part of their communion with God, **13**)but in Afro-Atlantic altars, we can also see writing in cosmograms like veves. We could also see the assemblages created by altars as created a multi-dimensional “text” where the different parts are in conversation with each other.

**14**) Like songs, the paterre can be seen as a form of publication that drew audiences, and invited collaboration through offerings. At times when the languages of power in the city, French and English, were battling for control, people were gatherings around paterres to sing songs in Creole. As the leader of a maroon village in Suriname said an altar, “is a place where you realize your belief.” It is also a place where you can realize a sense of self, and community. Imagine creating them at a time when the front cover of the newspaper advertised people for sale.

In 2008, an anthropology graduate student named Erin Voisin worked on a master’s thesis to learn whether St. Marron, or his historical counterpart, San Malo, have stayed on the altars of the city. She talked to different vodou priestesses and scholars and found, to her disappointment, that there were no physical representations of either available to the public (Voisin 2008: 65). But his memory is still a powerful inspiration. In Erin’s interview with Brenda Marie Osbey, she explained her poem, “In the Business of Pursuit: San Malo’s Prayer”:

*As I get older, these kinds of people become more and more significant. They come to symbolize something that, although I’ve always been aware of them, they could not possibly have meant to me what they mean to me now. [Voisin 2008: 6]*

Paying homage to San Malo, or other ancestors, creates a spirit that fits into the cosmology of vodou. As a gorovodu priest Fo Idi said, *“We Ewe are not like the Christians, who are created by their gods. We Ewe create our gods, and we create only the gods that we want to possess us, not any others” (Rosenthal 1998: 45).*

As part of Le Kér Kréyol, we created a traveling altar for San Malo. We went to the F& F Botanica on North Broad, and asked Jonathan Scott for advice. **15**)He said that St. Martin de Porres was often used for St. Marron. From Lima, Peru, St. Martin was the son of a Spanish man and an African or Indian woman from Panama who had been a slave. He is often called the patron saint of interracial harmony and social justice. His feast day is in the beginning of November. Jonathon said:

**16**)*There is only one black saint, and it is him. If you had brown skin, and wanted to have a saint who looked like you, he was the only option. In the early 1990s, when I first started working at Mr. Felix’s*

***17****)shop, people would also come in and buy a St. Anthony or St. Michael statue and paint the faces to match their own.*

*For instance, Santa Barabara, a white woman, was the saint associated with Shango,a West African orisha who is supposed to be a brown-skinned man without his shirt on, wielding an ax. Now it is different. About ten to 15 years ago, a company in the Dominican Republic began making orisha statues. Their largest market is in Brazil, but F&F acts as the distributor for other stores in the Southeast United States.*

*But in all the years I’ve been working here, I don’t see a lot of loyalty to particular saints and orishas. People use what works. If they see it has power, they will try it. Now there is a desire to have something look like you, and there is a desire for otherness. Both have power.*

Vodou has a long history of incorporating new spirits into their pantheons, or creating new ones. In operation is what Michael Taussig has called**, 18)“**the mimetic faculty.” Found in cultures around the world, it is our ability to “copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even**19**) assume that character and power” (Taussig 1993: xiii).

In the United States, Spiritual Churches honor the spirit of Black Hawk, the Sauk leader who resisted the Indian Removal Act of 1830 in Illinois. He became famous after his autobiography was published, and he traveled the country. Hearing about the Black Hawk war, church leaders incorporated his spirit into their own altars and spirit possessions. Similarly, while the Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Shows are often derided for their commercialism and voyeruism, they also contained a great deal of power. They started the Fancy Dance competitions in Pan-Indian pow wows, and the regalia was an inspiration for people of African descent in Carnival both in New Orleans and around the Caribbean. Whether an image on an altar or an embodied experience, the pursuit of the power of the Other and the reconciliation of the past is present.

Along the coast of Ghana, Togo, and Benin, Ewe vodou practitioners honor the spirits of enslaved people who were kidnapped in northern Ghana, and were either kept as slaves in their own families, or sold to slave traders crossing the Atlantic. An American ethnographer, Judy Rosenthal, was informed by an Afa diviner in Togo that she should do the same in the United States for the spirits of enslaved Africans were ancestors owned.

*Why should you not pay your debts to the slave spirits the way we Ewe do? You would be better off for it. Some of them died violently. Their spirits are powerful; they can help, hel, and protect you when you need them, if you honor them fully. [Rosenthal 1998: 153]*

**22)** In our altar, we began to pay the debt to San Malo. We began by creating a broadside the incorporated some of the layers of history, and Sunpie’s song in Louisiana Creole. Sunpie photographed St. Martin de Porres with his broom, and our friend, the artist Francis X. Pavy, placed the statue sweeping the waterway along his highway; Chef Menteur. Behind him is a page from a trial transcript where it is reported that Spanish colonial officials tracked other maroons who were in the “compania de San Maló” \*company of San Malo+, in the same area. Kiernan Dunn at the New Orleans Community Print Shop took these layers of images and screen printed the lyrics of “San Malo” in Kréyol on shimmering blue paper.

Around the broadside, we set photographs of the swamps where the maroon villages were settled on a table covered with aubrun cypress leaves and white shells that are found in middens in the areas where the maroons settled. At dusk, we lit the candles surrounded by palmettos. Sunpie and the Louisiana Sunspots poured a libation, and began to play the opening lines of the song on his accordion as the opening night to New Orleans’ Airlift’s Music Box Village.

A few months later, we relocated the altar to the Old U.S.Mint for an exhibit for Black History Month. At a site of official memory to tell the decolonized history in the same building where the Spanish empire’s “Records of the Cabildo” are housed. **23**)Visitors were asked to write their own hopes of freedom, and to read the lyrics of “San Malo” as a route back into remembering the language, which has rarely entered the public record.