



Bal de Maison 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

Louisiana History

- **GLE #75:** Describe the contributions of ethnic groups significant in Louisiana history (H-1D-M1)
- **GLE #78:** Describe and analyze the impact of Louisiana's geographic features on historic events, settlement patterns, economic development, etc (H-1D-M4)
- **GLE #81:** Explain cultural elements that have shaped Louisiana's heritage (e.g. festivals, music, dance, food, languages) (H-1D-M6)

Pre-Visit Activity

Materials needed: document #1 (one for each student), document #2, music - "Stompin' at the Bal de Maison" by Gator Beat, available on YouTube by clicking here: [Stompin' at the Bal de Maison](#), stick-horse

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 and
- Vermilionville PowerPoint

Prior to visiting Vermilionville, you could rehearse this little skit with the class.

Alphonse (father)
Rose (mother)
Marie (daughter)
Gaston (son)

Scene begins with Rose sewing and measuring Marie on the front porch. Alphonse walks up from working outside.

Marie: (To audience). Hey everybody! My name is Marie. I'm a 14 year old Cajun girl. I live with my parents here at this house. This is my mother, Rose. And this is my father Alphonse. My little brother Gaston is somewhere around here. I'm sure he will show up later. The year is 1890 and tomorrow is my 15th birthday.

Alphonse: What's going on, ladies?

Rose: Hey honey. I'm sewing Marie a beautiful new dress for the *bal de maison* tomorrow night.

Alphonse: Great. (Turning to audience) Can you say that: Bal de May-Zon. Again. Bal de May-Zon.



Rose: (To audience). *A bal de maison* (hold up vocabulary poster) is a neighborhood folk dance. All of the neighbors take turns hosting this house dance every weekend. So there's a party every Saturday night. It's the primary source of entertainment.

Alphonse: But why do we have to host it?

Rose: Because it's our turn, Alphonse.

Marie: Dances are held on a weekly basis to celebrate weddings, Mardi Gras, other holidays, and birthdays. What perfect timing for us to host the dance since tomorrow is my birthday! Maybe I'll even find a boyfriend! (Say the last part to the audience)

Rose: Now that Marie is turning 15 it's time to start looking for a suitor.

Alphonse: Hmm. I don't like the sound of that.

Rose: A suitor is a young male that could potentially marry a young girl. In the 1800s, people didn't live as long as they live today. Life events happened at younger ages since people died earlier. If a woman reached the age of 20 without marrying, she was considered an old maid. Turning 15 was more like turning 25. Time to find a husband!

Marie: Like I said, I might find a boyfriend!

Alphonse: And I'll be chaperoning VERY closely. Speaking of watching young males closely, where in the world is your brother?

Marie: Well, daddy, he sort of borrowed your horse to deliver invitations.

Alphonse: What do you mean "borrowed" my horse?

Marie: (To the audience) He pretty much borrowed the horse without permission. Oh look, here he comes now!

Gaston: (Rides up on a stick-horse. Starts handing out handouts (document #1). Hey everybody! This *bal de maison* is invitation only. You need your invitation to get into this party.

Rose: (To audience) Well, why don't you go ahead and open up your invitations. You can use it to follow the rest of the lesson!

Alphonse: There are even vocabulary words on there for you.

Marie: But make sure you come to the party! That's the most important part. Hey, Gaston, who did you invite?

Gaston: All of the isolated frontier families. Whole entire families. Young and old alike. Even the babies.

Alphonse: That sounds like too many people.

Rose: It will be so much fun, honey! (To audience) People couldn't hop in their car and drive to the movies or to the mall for entertainment. People could only travel by horse or by boat along the waterways. People came from far to these dance parties. Like I said, this is the primary source of entertainment.



Marie: Yeah. The *bal de maison* reinforced social bonds between all of these spread out families and friends. Even babies and small children came. Mothers put the babies to sleep in a special room before they went out to dance with everyone else.

Gaston: Anybody here ever heard of a *fais dodo*? (Hold up a vocabulary poster). Say it with me Fay Doe Doe.

Alphonse: *Fais dodo* literally means “go to sleep”. Mothers put their babies to sleep then went dance. So, the name *fais dodo* is another name for the *bal de maison*.

Rose: Social life was extremely important to the Acadians. They worked really hard every day. The term “work hard, play harder” definitely applies to the Acadians.

Gaston: They had something called *joie de vivre* (hold up vocabulary poster). Can you say it with us? Joie de Veev. That means joy of life. They really liked to have fun, and they still do today!

Marie: And social life was important in small rural communities like ours.

Alphonse: Since whole families attended including grandparents and it was by invitation, the nature of the *bal de maison* was peaceful.

Gaston: Except when party crashers showed up uninvited! Or when competing suitors tried to sweep girls like Marie off her feet (pokes fun at Marie).

Alphonse: Well, this one is invitation only. We are not going to let anyone in without their invitation. (To audience) Everyone has their invitation right?

Gaston: I can be the security!

Rose: Are you all going to come? (Assume they say yes).

Marie: Oh. I’m so excited! We’ve even got live music lined up! The two fiddlers from next door have been practicing. They want to start doing public performances, but they are kind of shy. They are going to use our *bal de maison* as practice!

Gaston: Where are we even going to have this thing?

Rose: Well, during the hot summer it would take place outside in the front yard or on the *galerie* (hold up vocabulary poster). Can you say that with me? Gall-er-ee. *Galerie* is the French word for porch. So, when it was hot they danced on the porch.

Alphonse: Otherwise, if it was rainy or cold, the *bal de maison* took place inside. Host families like ours pushed aside all of the furnishing in the living room to create an open dance floor.

Marie: Well, we better start getting ready for the *bal*. We need to make sure there is enough room for everyone to dance.

Rose: And I need to start cooking the gumbo.

Alphonse: Oh. She knows the way to my heart. A good gumbo!

Gaston: There’s going to be lots of dancing, French speaking, foot stompin’ Cajun music, and at the end of the night everyone gets to eat!



Rose: I'm even going to make some delicious refreshments like coffee and fresh lemonade.

Marie: House dances like this went on for years and years, from the time the Acadians arrived in Louisiana – that's from the 1760s all the way to the 1930s. That's almost 200 years of good timing.

Alphonse: *Bals des maisons* were eventually replaced with something called a dance hall. They still have dance halls today where people go to pass a good time. They've got Pat's, Whiskey River, and many more.

Rose: Marie, you need to get back over here so I can finish sewing your dress. If you want to look your best, you need to stay still so I can measure you.

Marie: I need to make sure my pretty white gloves and jewelry are still in the *armoire* (hold up vocabulary poster). Can I wear that tomorrow too?

Rose: Of course, sweetheart. If you're going to find a suitor, you need to look your absolute best.

Alphonse: I'm starting to think y'all enjoy torturing me.

Gaston: Dad, she's on her way to being an old maid. We have to find that girl a man!

Marie: (To audience) Hey. I've got an idea – since you all are coming to the party, we should teach you a dance!

Gaston: Oh which one are we going to teach them, sister? They have the Cajun jig, the shuffle, the two-step, the polka, the waltz (imitates dancing).

Marie: We can teach them a few so they can stay and dance all night!

Take some time to teach a line dance or the two-step, whatever you feel comfortable with.

Alphonse: All right everyone. You are going to be closely supervised. All of us parents and elders keep a close, close eye on you youngsters.

Gaston: Yeah, me too!

Marie: Pipe down, Gaston!

Alphonse: Anyway. Here are the rules. Women: you cannot leave from inside the house without your family. It is greatly looked down upon. No sneaking outside with your potential suitor because you could bring shame to your family.

Rose: Yes, us women stay inside the whole night.

Alphonse: Us men go inside to dance with the ladies. When we don't feel like dancing we can go outside and play cards or drink and visit with each other on the *galerie*.

Rose: Us women stay inside and socialize. We don't go outside until it's time to leave with our entire family.

Gaston: Ok. Enough with the rules. I want to dance.

Marie: Time for the *bal de maison*!



- Rose: This art form of dance, music, and entertainment was driven by social interaction. Acadians had that special *joie de vivre* and wanted to enjoy life just as hard as they worked.
- Gaston: The impact of the *bal de maison* was huge. It was the number one source of entertainment for Acadians. It evolved from invitation-only house parties into dance halls.
- Alphonse: The lasting impression of Cajun dance and music that was created these *bals* still have a presence in Cajun culture today.
- Marie: They shaped the cultural heritage that we are so proud of today!
- Everyone: Thanks for coming. *Le bal est fini* (The dance is over)!

Anchor Lesson

While at Vermilionville, spend time in the Mouton or the BeauBassin House which are typical Acadian houses and imagine all the furnishings pushed back against the walls and try to see early Acadians in the house and how they would dance and socialize with one another. Talk to the artisans in the houses to have more details on *bals des maisons*.

Also, go inside the Performance Center where a *bal du dimanche* (Sunday dance) is held every week in the afternoon, from 1PM-4PM with a live band on stage.

Post-Visit Activity

After the Vermilionville visit, have your students interview the elders in their family to see what they know about *bals des maisons* and try to find more information about them.

Evaluation

Teacher will evaluate students on what they learned about the *bals des maisons* during a whole-class discussion after they interview their family members.



You're invited to the *Bal de Maison!*

- Who:** All of the isolated frontier families
Entire families (parents, grandparents, children).
- What:** Neighborhood folk dance/house dance
Music provided by amateur musicians
- Where:** Family homes across rural Acadiana
During the summer – parties took place outside on the *galerie*
During cooler months or rainy weather – parties took place inside the house in the largest room
- When:** Every Saturday night from the late 1760's until the 1930's
- Why:** Main source of entertainment
Birthdays, holidays, weddings, *joie de vivre*



Document #2 - Vocabulary words

Write the following five words on big index cards or posters. Use one side to write the word and the other side to write the definition.

Use them throughout the skit to emphasize what they mean.

Bal de maison: *bal* means ball or dance. *Maison* means house. House dance

Fais dodo: another name for a Cajun dance party. Translation = go to sleep

Joie de vivre: joy for living or joy of life

Galerie: porch

Armoire: a wardrobe cabinet that Acadian women kept in the family, in which they stored special handmade dresses, gloves, and other jewelry they owned



