

The "Other America": *Looking at Appalachian and Cajun/Creole Resources*

by Angela C. Leeper

Appalachia is that somewhat mythical region with no known borders. — James Still

The Wolfpen Notebooks: A Record of Appalachian Life

To hikers, Appalachia is a series of mountain chains that extend from Quebec, Canada, to Alabama. To the federal government's Appalachian Regional Commission, established in 1965, it signifies impoverished counties from New York to, yes, the deltas of Mississippi. To historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists, Appalachia means the southern part of this expansive mountain chain, including areas in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia. The term *Appalachians* usually refers to the ancestors of Scottish, Irish, English, Welsh, and German immigrants who settled in this region and, isolated geographically, economically, and politically from the rest of the country, developed a unique culture.

Like African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, modern Appalachians must define—or redefine—their culture in the wake of an ever-growing homogenization of U.S. identity as well as stereotypes created and perpetuated by the media. This is no easy task when, according to Dwight Billings, editor of *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes*, the nation sees the region as "the 'other America': "Appalachia may likely have replaced the benighted South as the nation's most maligned region."¹ Dr. Patricia D. Beaver, director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, also identifies the problem as "the popular, persistent, and pernicious images of Appalachia as a land of isolated, odd, backwoods and backward, violent yet passive, white, conservative people, resistant to change and in need of outside help and direction."²

A selection of children's and adult (which can be shared with children and teens) literature that focuses on Appalachian culture is featured in this article. Several limitations must be noted. The selection of titles is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list. It does include award-winning and commonly acknowledged "representative" writers. With a few notable exceptions, the books were published within the last decade. Finally, as is the case with literature from other cultures, a preponderance of the books derive from folklore.

As is also the case when studying other cultures, readers need to place the individual stories in the context of the broader culture. An overwhelming majority of children's literature on Appalachia portrays white protagonists, even

though, as Beaver contends, "[Appalachia] is also home for Catholics and Jews, Buddhists and Taoists, new age spiritualists and atheists, whose origins are not only Scots-Irish, English, German, and Welch, but also African, Russian, Greek, Polish, Italian, French, Chinese, Korean, Middle Eastern, [and] Central American." She adds, "Historiography from the frontier period into the late twentieth century has tended to simplify and even erase diversity and render invisible the complex mosaic that has resulted in contemporary Appalachia."

Readers also need to be aware of the time period and themes in Appalachian children's literature. Many authors set their stories in the past, particularly in the early twentieth century and the Depression era, and express such themes as family, home, community, rural life, ingenuity in times of economic or natural disaster, independence, nature, and a strong sense of place. While many writers and scholars acknowledge these elements as accurate, respectful reflections of Appalachian culture, others, like Gary Schmidt, believe that they sustain "the myth of Appalachia" in which "over and over again the elements of the myth come together to suggest that this is a world which is beautiful and eventful and close and simple and filled with conceivable potential for adventure." He does concede that it is these elements that also "make the world of Appalachia as it is pictured in children's literature so appealing."³

While a review of the research yields scholarly analysis of issues and resources related to Appalachian literature for children (albeit a scant amount compared to other American cultures), almost nothing appears concerning Cajun literature for children. Although Glenn R. Conrad, director of the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, does not see the Cajun culture as being maligned by popular media, he does recognize the perpetuation of stereotypes, such as clothing, lack of shoes or boots, and speech patterns, in children's literature. Like Schmidt's perception of "the myth of Appalachia," Conrad notes that "what's left of the culture is generally regarded by outsiders as quaint or different."⁴

What can be confusing for outsiders is the term "Cajun" itself. Four different strains of francophones combined to create what we think of as "French" Louisiana today: the French who settled Louisiana during colonial times, the Acadians who were forced to flee Nova Scotia by the British and from whom we derive the word "Cajun," refugees from the Haitian revolution who settled in Louisiana, and the French who came to the area in the nineteenth century to flee political and social unrest in their own country.⁵ To outsiders, Cajun usually carries the connotation of these francophone back-

grounds; however, modern Cajuns, because of marriages with other cultures, also derive from such racial and ethnic groups as Spanish, English, Scottish, Irish, German, African, and Native American.

The term “Cajun” is also used in a liberal sense by some outsiders when the term “Creole” is more accurate. Coined by Portuguese colonists to indicate New World slaves of African descent, the term “Creole” came to refer to anyone born in the New World, whether of African or European descent. As with other ethnic groups, Creoles married into Cajun families and were assimilated into the culture. According to Conrad, “out of deference to the white Creoles of New Orleans, we usually use the term ‘Creole’ for them.”⁶ However, individuals of mixed descent often refer to themselves as “Creoles” and/or “Creoles of Color” to emphasize their multiracial identity.⁷

Similar to the annotated Appalachian resources for children and adults, a selection of Cajun and Creole literature features recommended titles published within the last decade. And like currently published Appalachian children’s literature, a significant amount of Cajun literature draws from folklore. Readers should note that most of the Cajun resources for children contain characters of French heritage, with little reference to other ethnic groups that have been assimilated into the Cajun culture. Again like Appalachian literature, Cajun children’s literature tends to take place in the past and in picturesque swamps and bayous, which can be seen by some as maintaining the culture, or by others as maintaining the stereotype of remote, backwoods people. Characters of Creole heritage are an extremely rare find in children’s literature, and a distinction between these two related peoples is even rarer.

As children study the United States and all of its cultures and subcultures, they should be exposed to Appalachian and Cajun/Creole resources and learn how these peoples continue to define themselves and maintain their cultures. To reduce Appalachians, Cajuns, and Creoles to mere isolated communities is, to Beaver, a tragedy that “is a life minimized, a culture dismissed, a future without choices, all because of a linguistic and historical misunderstanding that may occur in the classroom.”⁸

REFERENCES

- 1) Billings, D. B.; Norman, G.; and Ledford, K., eds. (1999). *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky.
- 2) Interview with P. D. Beaver, July 19, 2002.
- 3) Schmidt, G. (1992). *The Mythic Dimensions of Appalachia. Many Faces, Many Voices: Multicultural Literary Experiences for Youth: The Virginia Hamilton Conference*. Fort Atkinson, Wis.: Highsmith Press.
- 4) Interview with G. R. Conrad, October 22, 2002.
- 5) Interview with G. R. Conrad, October 22, 2002.
- 6) E-mail from G. R. Conrad, November 7, 2002.
- 7) *Encyclopedia of Cajun Culture*. www.cajunculture.com.
- 8) Interview with P. D. Beaver, July 19, 2002.

Children’s Titles

Anderson, Joan. *Pioneer Children of Appalachia*. New York: Clarion, 1986. Unp. Photos by George Ancona. ISBN 0-89919-440-0.

Black-and-white, quaint photographs of historical interpreters from Fort New Salem, a living history museum in Salem, West Virginia, bring to life the fictional story of the Davis family in the early 1800s. Making soap, weaving baskets, hunting rabbits, preserving food, dipping candles, spinning flax, trading goods, husking corn, quilting for a bride-to-be, and dancing to fiddle music are all part of a day’s work and play in this Appalachian family. Their clothing, homes, town, geography, tools, and food are all well portrayed through the photographs, and colloquial expressions throughout the text augment the book’s charm.

Bates, Artie Ann. *Ragsale*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Jeff Chapman-Crane. ISBN 0-395-70030-2.

This Saturday is a special one because Jessann, her sister, mother, grandmother, aunt, and cousin are all spending the day at ragsales in their small town in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky. Rather than buy new items at stores, these resourceful females sift through boxes, racks, and shelves to find clothing and household objects that are still in good, useable shape. The ragsales are not only an opportunity to find a bargain but also occasions to socialize with family, friends, and the community. Thoughtful and extremely realistic illustrations portray this once significant twentieth-century tradition.

Bial, Raymond. *Mist over the Mountains: Appalachia and Its People*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. 48 pp. Illus. with photos by the author. ISBN 0-395-73569-6.

Breathtaking photographs of the people, land, and historic homes of Appalachia prove that “Appalachia is not just a place but a culture.” Bial introduces the first Appalachians—the Cherokee—as well as people of European descent who came to settle the area. Text and images reflect the natural beauty of the area and the importance of tradition, self-reliance, family, religion, music, storytelling, and folk art. While presenting Appalachia as a culture, Bial delves into outsiders’ misconceptions and why they may have formed. There is additional historical information on the lumber industry, coal mining, and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, who brought attention to poverty in this region.

Gravelle, Karen. *Growing Up in a Holler in the Mountains*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1997. 64 pp. ISBN 0-531-11452-X.

Gravelle effectively shows 10-year-old Joseph Ratliff and his family as typical Appalachians, individuals who share the modern conveniences of the rest of the United States

but who also retain the traditions and beliefs of their ancestors. In addition to profiling Joseph in his home in Stephens Branch, Kentucky, the author describes Native Americans and early settlers who inhabited the Southern Appalachian region, means of employment, the area's natural resources, the history of coal mining, storytelling, religion, arts and music, and recreational activities. The issue of stereotypes surrounding Southern Appalachians is addressed as well.

Hall, Francie. *Appalachian ABCs*. Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1998. Unp. Illus. by Kent Oehm. ISBN 1-57072-087-8.

This primer of Appalachian culture uses rhyming text to introduce such terms as dulcimer, farmer's market, mills, opossum, quilts, and Virginia Reel for every letter of the alphabet. Beautiful colored pencil borders present the azalea, rhododendron, sneezeweed, Virginia creeper, and other mountain flowers, which are also arranged alphabetically.

Hicks, Ray and Salsi, Lynn. *The Jack Tales*. New York: Callaway, 2000. 40 pp. Illus. by Owen Smith. ISBN 0-935112-58-8.

Jack Tales originated in Europe and were transformed when settlers brought them to the Appalachian Mountains. Regional settings, dialect, and customs are at the heart of these tales, which feature Jack, a young man who sets off to seek his fortune. He is sometimes foolish, sometimes clever, and sometimes a trickster, but always lucky enough to get out of whatever unfortunate event he has gotten himself into. This oversized book comprises three stories: "Jack and the Northwest Wind," "Jack and the Bean Tree," and "Jack and the Robbers." The text is a transcription by Salsi of award-winning storyteller Hicks's own versions of the tales. What makes this work exceptional are Smith's exaggerated illustrations, reminiscent of Thomas Hart Benton, and the accompanying CD with Hicks's narration of the tales.

Additional recommended *Jack Tale* variants include:

Birdseye, Tom. *Look Out, Jack! The Giant Is Back!* New York: Holiday House, 2001. Unp. Illus. by Will Hillenbrand. ISBN 0-8234-1450-7.

Compton, Kenn and Joanne. *Jack the Giant Chaser: An Appalachian Tale*. New York: Holiday House, 1993. Unp. Illus. by Kenn Compton. ISBN 0-8234-0998-8.

Davis, Donald. *Jack and the Animals: An Appalachian Folktale*. Little Rock, Ark.: August House Publishers, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Kitty Harvill. ISBN 0-87483-413-9.

Haley, Gail E. *Jack and the Bean Tree*. New York: Crown, 1986. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-517-55717-7.

Haley, Gail E. *Jack and the Fire Dragon*. New York: Crown, 1988. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-517-56814-4.

Haley, Gail E. *Mountain Jack Tales*. New York: Dutton, 1992. 131 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-525-44974-4.

Johnson, Paul Brett. *Fearless Jack*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books/Simon & Schuster, 2001. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-689-83296-6.

Hooks, William H. *Snowbear Whittington: An Appalachian Beauty and the Beast*. New York: Macmillan, 1994. Unp. Illus. by Victoria Lisi. ISBN 0-02-744355-8.

Before leaving his log cabin in the Smoky Mountains to make a trip to town, a father asks his three daughters what they would like as a gift. While the older two demand silk gowns, the youngest, Nell, requests a Christmas rose, a rare find as the snow begins to melt. When the father does find and pluck the flower, his fate is sealed. He must give a great white bear, the owner of the garden as well as a castle, the first daughter who meets him at the gate. The first to welcome back her father, Nell must accompany the bear to his castle, where he turns into a handsome young man. Bewitched for stealing Christmas roses, Snowbear Whittington suffers days as a bear and nights as a man unless someone can break the spell. With love and magical help from an old woman, Nell returns her beast to his rightful beauty. Airy watercolor illustrations that float in the mist and fog of the mountains attain a mystical quality.

Hooks is the author of *The Three Little Pigs and the Fox* (New York: Macmillan, 1989. Unp. Illus. by S.D. Schindler. ISBN 0-02-744431-7), which is also recommended.

Houston, Gloria. *My Great-Aunt Arizona*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Unp. Illus. by Susan Condie Lamb. ISBN 0-06-022607-2.

From blab schools to lard buckets to snow cream, this beautiful picture book is not only a tribute to Houston's Great-Aunt Arizona, but also a lesson in how life used to be in the rural Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Young Arizona attends a one-room schoolhouse, always reading and dreaming about faraway places. After studying to be a teacher, she returns to the same schoolhouse to teach children for 57 years. Although the vivacious, imaginative Arizona says she has visited faraway places "only in my mind," she encourages her students to experience the world for themselves.

Houston is also the author of these recommended books:

Littlejim. New York: Philomel, 1990. 176 pp. Illus. by Thomas B. Allen. ISBN 0-399-22220-0.

Littlejim's Gift: An Appalachian Christmas Story. New York: Philomel, 1994. Unp. Illus. by Thomas B. Allen. ISBN 0-399-22696-6.

Littlejim's Dream. San Diego: Harcourt, 1997. 231 pp. Illus. by Thomas B. Allen. ISBN 0-15-201509-4.

The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree: An Appalachian Story. New York: Dial, 1988. Unp. Illus. by Barbara Cooney. ISBN 0-8037-0299-X.

Lambert, Paulette Lewis. *Evening: An Appalachian Lullaby.* Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart, 1995. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 1-57098-012-8.

The beginning of this rhyming text and Lambert's adaptations that follow derive from an actual Appalachian lullaby. Bold colors accentuate green fields, blue mountains, a purple dusk, and an indigo evening filled with gold fireflies, while farmyard and wild animals mimic two rambunctious brothers who finally ease into bedtime. The landscape, chosen animals, and the father's fiddle playing give this simple picture book a distinct Appalachian flavor.

Lyon, George Ella. *Mama Is a Miner.* New York: Orchard Books, 1994. Unp. Illus. by Peter Catalanotto. ISBN 0-531-08703-4.

Split-page watercolor illustrations establish visual parallels between a little girl's day above ground and her mother's job down in an Appalachian coal mine. Mama faces darkness, injury, and even death, but she does so willingly to help pay the family's bills. Her dedication to the family also carries over to their evening meal. This little girl's admiration for her mother is occasionally interrupted by song-like, rhyming quatrains that replicate the pulse of the mine. The overall effect is a book that realistically portrays modern-day Appalachia.

Lyon is also the author of the recommended book *Come a Tide* (New York: Orchard Books, 1990. Unp. Illus. by Stephen Gammell. ISBN 0-531-08454-X), which describes the impact of a flood on an Appalachian family.

Mills, Lauren. *The Rag Coat.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1991. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-316-57404-4.

Although eight-year-old Minna's family cannot afford a coat for the young girl, Minna does not mind and in fact relishes being bundled up by her father in a burlap feed sack and one of her mother's quilts on wagon rides to church. The arrival of summer brings both the death of Minna's father from miner's cough and the anticipation of starting school, but Minna cannot attend without a coat. When the Quilting Mothers, who help Minna's mother sew quilts to sell, hear of her plight, they set to work on a patchwork coat made from all their scraps and turn out a coat bursting with colors just like Joseph's amazing one. Although her classmates ridicule her "new" rag coat, she remembers that people are the most important beings in life and that each scrap of fabric contains all their stories. Compassionate watercolors illustrate this tribute to community and resourcefulness.

Poulsen, Kathleen Phillips. *Apple Doll.* Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 2002. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 1-57072-222-6.

Just before the first big frost of fall, young Samantha and her brother pick apples from their tree, giving the biggest, reddest one to their grandmother, who carves a face out of

it to make an apple doll. It takes a while for that apple to shrink and harden, and in the meantime, there are apple pies to bake, corn to pick and shuck, floors to sweep, and even games to play with the leftover apple seeds. When the head is ready, Sam's grandmother shows her how to make the eyes, hair, body, and clothes, and explains how these dolls were originally made and clothed by her ancestors. An apple rhyme and pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations lend a feeling of yesteryear to this family continuing the mountain traditions of the past. The book comes with directions for making apple dolls and patterns for their clothes.

Rylant, Cynthia. *Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds.* San Diego: Harcourt, 1991. 24 pp. Illus. by Barry Moser. ISBN 0-15-201605-8.

Rylant's lyrical text and Moser's watercolors, which reflect the Depression era, convey the quiet, simple, yet meaningful life of Appalachians. In this unnamed hollow, the people are coal miners, churchgoers, dog-lovers, hunters, canners, and thinkers, and "like anyone else, they're sensitive about words," like being called "hillbillies." Rylant and Moser, both native Appalachians, have created a sensitive, respectful snapshot of Appalachian culture.

Rylant, Cynthia. *When I Was Young in the Mountains.* New York: Dutton, 1982. Unp. Illus. by Diane Goode. ISBN 0-525-42525-X.

In her first picture book, Rylant reminisces on her early childhood in the mountains of West Virginia, where her grandfather worked in the coal mines and her grandmother served hot cornbread and fried okra. A trip to the bathroom meant a walk to the johnny-house; an afternoon swim meant a dark, muddy swimming hole; and a bath meant pumping the well for pails of water to fill tin tubs. Despite what may seem like a "simple" life in the mid-twentieth century, Rylant expresses her appreciation for her Appalachian homeland. Goode's illustrations, which won her a Caldecott Honor Medal, reaffirm the affection among Rylant's family and community.

Rylant is also the author of these recommended books:

But I'll Be Back Again. New York: Orchard Books, 1989. 80 pp. ISBN 0-531-08406-X.

The Relatives Came. New York: Bradbury, 1985. Unp. Illus. by Stephen Gammell. ISBN 0-02-777220-9.

Silver Packages: An Appalachian Christmas Story. New York: Orchard, 1997. Unp. Illus. by Chris K. Soentpiet. ISBN 0-531-33051-6.

Sloat, Teri. *Sody Sallyratus.* New York: Dutton, 1997. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-525-45609-0.

This Appalachian folktale centers on baking soda, a staple of pioneer Appalachian homes because of its versatility. When an old man, a little girl, a little boy, and their pet squirrel get a hankering for biscuits, the old woman sends the boy to the store for sody sallyratus, an older term for bak-

ing soda. Even though the old woman reminds him not to dawdle in the berry patch, he can't help himself and meets a bear that eats him. With the previous family member never returning, each remaining family member sets out for the sody sallyratus, but meets the same fate, until only the squirrel is left at home. By tricking the bear, the squirrel saves the family and all their baking soda, enough to make a big batch of biscuits. Autumnal-colored illustrations offer a whimsical view of the animals in the region and how people lived there generations ago.

An additional recommended *Sody Sallyratus* variant is:

Compton, Joanne. *Sody Sallyratus*. New York: Holiday House, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Kenn Compton. ISBN 0-8234-1165-6.

Still, James. *An Appalachian Mother Goose*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1998. 55 pp. Illus. by Paul Brett Johnson. ISBN 0-8131-2092-6.

From "Hey diddle diddle,/The cat played the fiddle,/ The cow sang ballads to the moon" to Jack Pratt and his wife for whom "if baked opossum was on the table/They both ate as long as able," these Appalachian variants will amuse any reader or listener who knows the original Mother Goose rhymes. This collection of nursery rhymes finds its origin in the Appalachian blab schools, one-room schoolhouses in which children learned through choral repetition and twisted traditional nursery rhymes to incorporate elements of their own locale. As a result, these rhymes include such regional vocabulary as pokes, coppers, taters, and spits, all of which are defined in footnotes.

Wells, Rosemary. *Mary on Horseback: Three Mountain Stories*. New York: Dial, 1998. 53 pp. Illus. by Peter McCarty. ISBN 0-8037-2155-2.

Inhabitants of the Kentucky Appalachian Mountains in 1923 lived mostly in isolation and poverty, without medical attention. Mary Breckinridge traveled on horseback throughout the region, dispensing medicine and compassion to all the mountain families, and created the Frontier Nursing Service. Three short stories based on true events pay tribute to Mary and reveal how this heroine of rural health care touched the lives of three different families. The tender and sensitively written text also documents the Appalachian way of life in the early twentieth century, a life still untouched by modern advances.

Adult Titles

Billings, Dwight B.; Norman, Gurney; and Ledford, Katherine, eds. *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1999. 350 pp. ISBN 0-8131-2099-3.

Robert Schenkkan's 1992 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *The Kentucky Cycle*, captures the failure of the American dream. Its setting—Appalachia—strikes a chord in authors, scholars, and activists from the region who believe that the play only perpetuates the negative stereotypes associated with the area. In this collection of essays, writers respond directly and indirectly to the play. They identify and challenge historical representations of Appalachians, literary sources of contemporary stereotypes, and assertions of population homogeneity; compare personal experiences to stereotypes; and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and stock images of activism in the region past and present. The editors note that the essays are not intended as defensive reactions to Appalachian stereotypes but rather as means of confronting American ideology and developing a sense of identity and empowerment.

Davis, Donald. *Jack Always Seeks His Fortune: Authentic Appalachian Jack Tales*. Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1992. 217 pp. ISBN 0-87483-280-2.

Most readers have heard of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, but few know the oral tradition behind this story and other Jack Tales. Davis, a renowned professional storyteller, offers a very brief history of how these tales arrived with European settlers of the Appalachian Mountains and evolved over time, taking on the settings, dialogue, and beliefs of the area. Whether the fool or trickster, and whether assisted by magic or his own perseverance, Jack is always a winner and always uproarious in this collection of 14 tales. Although these tales appear in print, Davis strongly encourages readers to use these versions as the basis for their own retellings.

Davis is also the author of these recommended books:

Barking at a Fox-Fur Coat. Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1991. 206 pp. ISBN 0-87483-141-5.

See Rock City: A Story Journey Through Appalachia. Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1996. 247 pp. ISBN 0-87483-448-1.

Southern Jack Tales. Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1997. 217 pp. ISBN 0-87483-500-3.

Isbell, Robert. *The Keepers: Mountain Folk Holding on to Old Skills and Talents*. Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, Publisher, 1999. 129 pp. Illus. with photos by Arthur Tilley. ISBN 0-89587-180-7.

Although modern technology threatens traditional Appalachian culture, there are individuals who carry on the skills of the past. Fifteen vignettes bring to light an herb gatherer, chair maker, food canner, storyteller, storekeeper, blacksmith, needlewoman, and other artists and artisans from the Virginia-Tennessee-North Carolina borders. Isbell describes the way the art or craft was accomplished by old-

timers and how and why it is carried on today, letting the individuals tell part of the story in their own words. Isbell's narratives make it clear that these mountain folk are not merely holding onto a special talent but are keepers of an entire culture.

Olson, Ted. *Blue Ridge Folklife*. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1998. 211 pp. ISBN 1-57806-022-2.

Williams, Michael Ann. *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1995. 216 pp. ISBN 0-87805-792-7.

Williams proclaims, "Culturally, it is impossible to distinguish where the Smokies end and the Blue Ridge begin"; therefore, together, these titles provide a thorough presentation of these Appalachian "subregions." Part of the Folklife in the South Series, these volumes relate the historical events that influenced the Appalachian culture, folk traditions and how they have been perceived within the last century, authentic folklife vs. touristic portrayals, misperceptions from outsiders, and modern-day Appalachia. Of particular interest in *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife* is the concentrated coverage of the Cherokee and their influence on the Appalachian culture, an aspect of the culture rarely addressed.

Still, James. *The Wolfpen Notebooks: A Record of Appalachian Life*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1991. 178 pp. ISBN 0-8131-1741-0.

"God sent the very strongest people to live in these here mountains. Otherwise they couldn't of stood it," is just a sample of Appalachian sayings and stories that Still overheard and amassed in his notebooks, published here for the first time. The topics covered range from "Sparking Material" (courting and marriage) to "At the Dinner Table," "Mountain Horse Sense," "Weather," "Superstitions," "The Nature of Man," and "Rooted and Grounded in the Word" (religion). Some entries may not be appropriate for young children, but adults alike will find these down-home musings thoughtful, entertaining, and in many cases true. An interview with Still, which first appeared in *The Foxfire Book*, will introduce this prolific Appalachian writer to unfamiliar readers. And for readers who are not "sharp tacks," a glossary defines regional expressions.

Wigginton, Eliot. *The Foxfire Book*. New York: Doubleday, 1972. 384 pp. ISBN 0-385-07353-4.

The Foxfire Book, the first in what has become a series, is a collection of articles originally produced by Wigginton's high school students in Rabun Gap, Georgia, for a class magazine. Based on interviews with relatives and neighbors, the articles cover such traditional topics as building a log cabin, soapmaking, moonshining, churning butter, preserving vegetables, hog slaughtering, predicting the weather, faith heal-

ing, and planting according to zodiac signs. Other interviews comprise recollections, recipes, and folklore. Because of their simple conversational style, fascinating subject matter, and accompanying black-and-white photographs, the series has become the epitome of information on Appalachian culture.

Additional recommended *Foxfire* books include:

Page, Linda Garland and Wigginton, Eliot, eds. *The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Cookery*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992. 327 pp. ISBN 0-8078-4395-4.

Page, Linda Garland and Smith, Hilton. *The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Toys & Games*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993. 204 pp. ISBN 0-8078-4425-X.

Wigginton, Eliot, ed. *A Foxfire Christmas: Appalachian Memories and Traditions*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1996. 144 pp. ISBN 0-8078-4618-X.

Cajun/Creole Books _____

Children's Titles

Appelt, Kathi. *Bayou Lullaby*. New York: Morrow, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Neil Waldman. ISBN 0-688-12856-4.

A father's soothing rhyming lullaby, set to a Cajun cadence, likens a little girl's bedtime to that of the creatures of the bayou. Specific regional vocabulary makes this lullaby distinctly Cajun. Neon blues, purples, greens, and yellows against the black, "chocolat" water highlight the cypress trees, bullfrogs, alligators, fireflies, and crawdads amid the glow of the full moon and the porch light.

Artell, Mike. *Petite Rouge: A Cajun Red Riding Hood*. New York: Dial, 2001. Unp. Illus. by Jim Harris. ISBN 0-8037-2514-0.

This new take on a traditional favorite is a lively one, with hilarious watercolor illustrations and rhyming text in a Cajun patois. In a pirogue and with her cat, TeJean, alongside, Petite Rouge Riding Hood runs into Claude, an alligator, on her way to take her sick grand-mere some boudin, gumbo, and shrimp etoufee. After learning where Petite Rouge is headed, Claude races ahead and disguises himself as the grandmother. But Petite Rouge is quick to notice his big snout and teeth, and clever thinking on the part of Petite Rouge and TeJean and a bottle of hot sauce make the gator bolt back to the swamp.

Bial, Raymond. *Cajun Home*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 48 pp. Illus. with photos by the author. ISBN 0-395-86095-4.

Bial's stunning photographs of early Cajun homes and

crafts and the Louisiana bayous adorn this history of the Cajun people and culture. After explaining the forced removal and relocation of the Acadians, the author provides details about traditional methods of gathering and preparing food, transportation, homes, clothing, dances, courtship, death rituals, and family and community structure. Great attention is given to other cultures, such as African and Native American, which were blended into the Cajun culture, and to popular misconceptions of Cajun people. Bial includes many Cajun French terms and pronunciations, which give readers another flavor of the culture.

Doucet, Sharon Arms. *Fiddle Fever*. New York: Clarion Books, 2001. 166 pp. ISBN 0-618-04324-1.

Felix LeBlanc lives in an isolated Cajun community in 1914, and the drudgery of helping his father farm is interrupted when his uncle, 'Nonc Adolphe, a drifting musician, returns to the area. Captivated by his uncle's fiddle playing, Felix yearns to learn how to play. But when his Maman, afraid Felix will follow the same path as his uncle, forbids even the mention of the word fiddle, the teen crafts his own fiddle out of a cigar box and teaches himself how to play. Recognizing her own determination in Felix and his place in a lineage of fiddle players, Maman finally accepts the boy as the family musician. The backdrop of this historical novel, based on musician Canray Fontenot, encompasses the traditional food, homes, dance, language, medicine, and Mardi Gras festivities of the Cajuns. Doucet is the wife of noted Cajun musician Michael Doucet, founder of the group Beausoleil.

Doucet, Sharon Arms. *Lapin Plays Possum: Trickster Tales from the Louisiana Bayou*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. 64 pp. Illus. by Scott Cook. ISBN 0-374-34328-4.

In Doucet's retelling of three familiar folktales, Lapin the rabbit continues to outwit the wolf-like Bouki. Whether cheating the wolf out of crop after crop, rum cake, a barrel of butter, a mule and wagon full of gumbo, or well water, Lapin's small stature yet great wit makes him more than equal to the large, bumbling Bouki. Readers will recognize the plots, such as the rabbit's tar baby dilemma and briar patch escape in "Lapin Tangles with Tee Tar Bebe," as variations of *Uncle Remus* stories. These versions trace their roots back to West African stories brought to Louisiana by slaves, and while the African-American influence is apparent, so too are Creole and Cajun components through the tales' setting, language, and cadence. In addition, the setting—bayou fields rather than swamps—is noticeably different from most Cajun children's literature. Cook's exaggerated representations of the characters and the predominant use of browns, golds, and yellows make readers appreciate the hot Cajun summer and Lapin's accomplishments.

Gravelle, Karen and Diouf, Sylviane. *Growing Up in Crawfish Country*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1998. 64 pp. ISBN 0-531-11535-6.

Bayous, fiddle music, Mardi Gras, community dances, and crawfish are all part of the stereotypes of Cajun culture, but in this examination of three children from Eunice, Louisiana, Gravelle reveals that being Cajun is more than good food and good times—it's a way of life. These children note the importance of maintaining their culture, particularly their nearly lost Cajun French language and efforts that are being made to revive it. The author also provides an excellent account of the Acadian settlement of southwestern Louisiana and how Cajun ancestors took in music, language, and other elements from neighboring Germans, Spaniards, Africans, African Americans, and Native Americans to enrich their own culture.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Mardi Gras: A Cajun Country Celebration*. New York: Holiday House, 1995. 32 pp. Illus. with photos by Lawrence Migdale. ISBN 0-8234-1184-2.

This is not the Mardi Gras hoopla of New Orleans but a celebration with a Cajun community. Hoyt-Goldsmith begins with a brief history of Cajuns and why they relocated to Louisiana, emphasizing throughout the book that Cajuns are average Americans with special traditions and that although they are primarily of French descent, the Cajun culture borrows from many other cultures. The bulk of the text is told in the first person as the experiences of Joel, a Cajun boy. Joel first explains the Mardi Gras holiday and follows with the importance of costumes, music, food, and special events. Photographs of Joel's family at home, brightly colored costumes, and the Mardi Gras Run capture the vivaciousness of this community and holiday.

Kroll, Virginia. *Sweet Magnolia*. Watertown, Mass.: Charlesbridge, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Laura Jacques. ISBN 0-88106-415-7.

The diverse flora and fauna of the Louisiana swamps burst forth in brilliant illustrations that also show a contemporary black family of Cajun and Creole descent. Now that Denise is eight years old, she can leave the city to visit her grandmother, who lives in a traditional Cajun home along a bayou. Because Denise's grandmother works as a wildlife rehabilitator, she is exposed to many new creatures, including an injured painted bunting that she helps nurse back to health and to which she gives the special name Sweet Magnolia. Denise's lesson in respecting wildlife also becomes a time to learn about Cajun culture. When she must find a *lagniappe*—"a special bonus"—to share with her family, Denise combines both opportunities.

Reneaux, J. J. *Why Alligator Hates Dog*. Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Donnie Lee Green. ISBN 0-87483-412-0.

This old Cajun story blends *pourquoi* and trickster tales to explain why Alligator hates Dog. Dog, never afraid of M'su Cocodrie, taunts Alligator every night from his cabin's front porch: "Arhooo, M'suuu Cocodrieee, come and get me. IF

YOU DARE!" Not wanting to cause any trouble with Man, Alligator can show his anger only by thumping his tail, snapping his teeth, and hissing, and he dreams of turning Dog into mincemeat.

One day Dog chases Rabbit and ends up "snout-to-snout" with Alligator. Dog cunningly convinces Alligator that his jeers are really cheers for "Come and get it," and he persuades Alligator to follow him up to the cabin for supper. Once on the porch, Dog quickly barks for Man, who chases Alligator back to the swamp. Now Alligator waits patiently for Dog, only his big eyes visible above water. Expressive illustrations with large, bold strokes, especially those of Alligator, create the perfect dark bayou setting for this amusing tale.

Thomassie, Tynia. *Feliciana Feydra LeRoux*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995. Unp. Illus. by Cat Bowman Smith. ISBN 0-316-84125-0.

Feliciana, "the tail end" of the LeRoux family and Grandpa Baby's favorite, always gets what she wants from her doting grandfather—until alligator hunting season arrives. A girl who carries a pecan baby doll, Feliciana is turned away when her grandfather and all the male children set out for the swamp. But this stubborn, spunky girl sneaks out of the house, proves her worth by rescuing Grandpa Baby from a hungry alligator, and takes pride in the alligator feast that the whole neighborhood enjoys. Tynia Thomassie, a native Cajun, weaves Cajun dialogue and cultural references into this tall tale set to the cadence of Cajun speech. Light-hearted illustrations that portray Feliciana's high energy also provide clues to specific regional vocabulary. This picture book is the first of several Feliciana adventures.

Thomassie, Tynia. *Cajun Through and Through*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000. Unp. Illus. by Andrew Glass. ISBN 0-316-84189-7.

Animated illustrations make this story a lively romp through the Cajun bayou when Remington, Ti-Boy and Baptiste's cousin from the city, pays them a visit. "Like a shrimp out of water," Remington finds the gumbo too rich, the water too brown for swimming, and eating crawfish too disgusting. When Ti-Boy and Baptiste doubt Remington's true Cajun heritage, the city-raised boy proves himself by diving into the murky bayou to save Ti-Boy's fishing rod and ending up with a great catch. Regional dialogue, sprinkled with French Cajun sayings, boosts the energy of this tale.

Walter, Mildred Pitts. *Ray and the Best Family Reunion Ever*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002. 119 pp. ISBN 0-06-623625-8.

Living in California, 11-year-old Ramon is unable to see the rest of his Creole family who still live in Louisiana, but a family reunion offers the perfect opportunity. What promises to be a joyful occasion becomes complicated by the news that Ray's father's father, Gran-papa Philippe, will also be attending. Told that he is the spitting image, physically and temperamentally, of his grandfather, the boy wants nothing

more than to meet this estranged family member. From Philippe, Ray learns not only about his ancestors' involvement in the Haitian revolution but also about the rarely discussed marriage of a French landowner and an African slave, which explains the variations of skin, eye, and hair color within his family. Philippe's painting of a black crucifixion, however, causes the family to reevaluate its feelings toward race, take pride in its rich culture, and heal old wounds. Adult assistance may be necessary to help explain the story's details and sensitive issues. Coretta Scott King Award-winning author Walter includes a glossary of Creole words and a family tree to aid comprehension.

Other Recommended Cajun Folktales:

Amoss, Berthe. *The Cajun Gingerbread Boy*. New York: Hyperion, 1994. Unp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-7868-0114-X.

Soper, Celia. *Cajun Folktales*. Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1997. Unp. Illus. by Patrick Soper. ISBN 1-56554-257-6.

Salley, Coleen. *Who's That Tripping over My Bridge?* Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2002. Unp. Illus. by Amy Jackson Dixon. ISBN 1-56554-890-6.

Adult Titles

Ancelet, Barry Jean; Edwards, Jay D.; and Pitre, Glen. *Cajun Country*. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1991. 256 pp. ISBN 0-87805-466-9.

Touting itself as "the broadest survey of traditional Cajun culture ever assembled," *Cajun Country*, part of the Folklife in the South Series, lives up to its claim. The comprehensive, scholarly, yet accessible text provides a frame of reference for modern Cajun culture by explaining how early traditions influenced today's Cajun life. A thorough examination of French migration to Nova Scotia, Acadian displacement, settlement in Louisiana, and the "creolization" of the colony leads into a look at Cajun lifestyle, occupations, family organization, religion, medicine, law and justice, architecture, food, music, games, and oral traditions. The most significant aspect of this work is the attention given to the survival of the Cajun culture and its great diversity, which ultimately go hand in hand. Despite numerous attempts to wipe out their culture, Cajuns thrive because of their adaptability and loyalty to their core values.

Pitre, Verne. *Grandma Was a Sail-maker: Tales of the Cajun Wetlands*. Thibodaux, La.: Blue Heron Press, 1991. 135 pp. ISBN 0-9621724-5-6.

After an introduction to the history and culture of Louisiana's Lafourche Parish, Pitre recalls his Cajun wetlands childhood in 30 short essays. Pitre's boyhood spanned the late 1920s to the early '40s and included many experiences shared by other children of the Great Depression. What sets


his recollections apart from others of the same time period is their attachment to Pitre's environment. Family and community are also at the forefront of Pitre's vignettes, as he remembers spending winters on a houseboat while his father trapped pelts, watching paddle-wheel boats, riding the ferry to school, eating his grandmother's delicious food, dancing all Saturday night at Lee Brothers' dance hall, and cutting sugar cane in 1942 while men were off at war.

Pitre continues his storytelling in *Corn Shucks, Spanish Moss, & Feathers: More Tales of the Cajun Wetlands* (Thibodaux, La.: Blue Heron Press, 1993. 79 pp. ISBN 0-9621724-9-9).

Reneaux, J. J. *Haunted Bayou: And Other Cajun Ghost Stories*. Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1994. 164 pp. Illus. by Wendell E. Hall. ISBN 0-87483-384-1.

When the Acadians settled in Louisiana, they brought with them their ghost stories, which were handed down through generations via storytelling. In this collection of stories, Reneaux retells three traditional Cajun folktales and offers 10 "new" tales based on her family, personal experiences, and other stories either overheard or passed down to her. Readers will notice that superstition and morality (particularly the lack thereof) play a pivotal role in each selection, such as "The Fifolet," in which the cure for a village's attack by swamp gas is cayenne pepper; the *gris-gris*-filled pourquoi tale "Why Onions Make Us Cry"; or "The Grinch," in which a grinch frightens those who venture down lovers' lane. Like

early Grimm fairy tales, a few of the stories involve subjects (such as a witch who pulls toes off of bad children and an indifferent father who unknowingly eats his children) that may not be appropriate for younger children. Reneaux prefaces each selection with notes and personal reflections.

Reneaux is also the author of the recommended book *Cajun Folktales* (Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1992. 176 pp. ISBN 0-87483-283-7). 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela C. Leeper is a librarian/educational consultant for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Her bibliographic article, "Beyond Fairy Godmothers and Glass Slippers: A Look at Multicultural Variants of Cinderella," appeared in the September 2002 issue of *MultiCultural Review*.

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