Johnette and Scott
Krewe of Kids: Mardi Gras for Children
Educational Guide, Grades K-5

About the Performance



Did you know that Mardi Gras is a family event? Throughout the Carnival season, families dress in costume, prepare special meals, and attend the most spectacular parades in America. Music is everywhere. The *Krewe of Kids* presentation (named for the "krewes" that stage the parades) includes Johnette's book songs “Who Got the Baby in the King Cake?” and “Chef Creole,” in which children sing about the culinary centerpiece of the Carnival season, as well as “Bamboula Rhythm,” which teaches the rhythmic foundation of much Mardi Gras music. This culturally-immersive presentation ends with a second line parade, and the classic song “Mardi Gras Mambo.” Children dance and sing along with all the fun!

About the Artists

Musician and author **Johnette Downing** performs all over the world. Her passion for roots music and for sharing music with children, in the way her parents had shared it with her, led Johnette to her career as “the Musical Ambassador to Children” and the “Pied Piper of Louisiana Music Traditions”. Johnette is the 2017 Louisiana Writer Award recipient and has received 22 international awards for her 30 books and 12 recordings for children, including a 59th Grammy Award Participant Certificate.

Three-time Grammy Award winner **Scott Billington** has performed internationally on harmonica and produced over 100 albums of roots-oriented music. Awards include the Sweet Soul Music Award (Italy), the Keepin’ the Blues Alive Award (Memphis), and the Offbeat Lifetime Achievement Award (New Orleans). In recognition of his work in Louisiana, Scott was appointed a Louisiana Colonel by Governor Edwin W. Edwards.

Program Learning Goals

1. To broaden awareness and understanding of Louisiana culture and traditions
2. To explore a wide variety of musical genres that comprise Louisiana roots music
3. To understand simple words in French and Spanish

Essential Questions

1. What elements make up a person's culture?
2. How does music tell the story of a culture?
3. How can music help us to express ourselves?

Vocabulary

- **Mardi Gras:** French for “Fat Tuesday,” it is the final day of celebrations and festive eating before the start of the Christian religious period called Lent
- **Krewe:** the organization that stages a Mardi Gras parade
- **Bamboula:** a West African rhythm and the foundation of much of New Orleans music
- **Mambo:** a Cuban rhythm that was adapted by New Orleans musicians
- **King cake:** a cake served at Mardi Gras decorated with green, purple, and gold sprinkles with a small, plastic toy baby hidden inside. The person who finds baby has to give the next party and buy the next cake!
- **Beignet:** a sugary doughnut treat

Key Facts and Context for Students

All About Louisiana

Louisiana is a state in the southern region of the United States. Its neighbors are Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Over 4,600,000 people live there!



Louisiana also borders the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico, so there are many swamps and other types of wetlands. This habitat is home to a variety of frogs, birds, fish, plants, and trees.

The culture of Louisiana includes a mixture of French, Spanish, Native American, and West African food, music, language, and art. Many people speak multiple languages and celebrate the diverse traditions and customs of the people in this state.



What is Mardi Gras?

Celebrations and festivals held in the darkest days of winter have been a part of many cultures throughout history. Mardi Gras is period of merriment before the quiet days of Lent, as we await the arrival of spring. Mardi Gras is not only a day, but a season that is filled with parades, costume balls, and special foods such as king cake. The colors of Mardi Gras are **green**, **purple**, and **gold**. School marching bands are one of the signatures of a Mardi Gras parade, with a spot for each student. New Orleans Mardi Gras draws on American, European and African influences. The season is celebrated by people from all walks of life!

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about Louisiana and its culture? What would you like to know?
- What instruments do you know? How are they played? What type(s) of music do they play? What kinds of musical ensemble(s) are they part of?
- Why would a city decide to hold a weeks-long party in the middle of winter? What other festivals or holidays can you think of that mark the passing of the seasons? What foods or rituals does your family use to celebrate special occasions?

Pre-Performance Activity: Bamboula Rhythm

Learning Goals:

- To explore Louisiana music and culture
- To identify New Orleans cultural elements

Materials:

Map of the United States and/or Louisiana, YouTube video:



YouTube video: "Bamboula Rhythm"
by Johnette Downing and Scott Billington

Directions:

1. On a map of the United States, find Louisiana. Identify Baton Rouge, the state capital, and New Orleans, which is featured in this activity. Are students familiar with Louisiana or New Orleans? What do they already know?
2. Watch the video “Bamboula Rhythm” by Johnette and Scott.
3. Discuss what students observed in the video. What instruments are featured? What are the people wearing? Talk about how New Orleans is famous for street parades. What do students notice about how people are moving, marching, dancing, etc.?
4. Play the video again and explore how students can move their bodies to the music. Can you clap to the beat? Stomp? Dance? Pretend to play one of the featured instruments and have a parade around the classroom to the music!

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about New Orleans and its culture? What words did you hear and learn for the first time?
- What instruments did Johnette and Scott use in their performance? How were they played?
- What was your favorite song from the performance? Why?

Post-Performance Activity: Who Got the Baby in the King Cake?

Learning Goal:
To explore another element of Mardi Gras culture through an iconic dessert

Materials:
Paper, crayons/markers/colored pencils, YouTube video:



[YouTube video: "Who Got the Baby in the King Cake?" by Johnette Downing and Scott Billington]

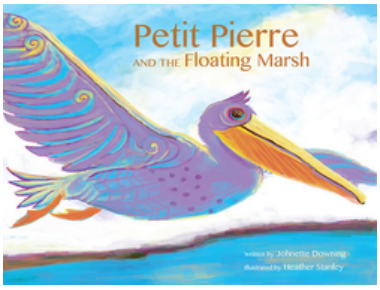
Directions:

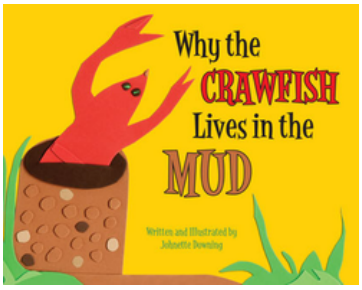
1. Reflect on Johnette and Scott's performance. What did students notice, see, and hear?
2. Tell students that in addition to music and dance, food is an important part of a culture. What kinds of foods are important to students' cultures?
3. Watch the video "Who Got the Baby in the King Cake?" by Johnette and Scott.
4. Discuss what students learned in the video and from the performance. What is a king cake? Why is there a baby in the king cake? Have students ever had this cake before?
5. Draw a picture of a king cake and/or Johnette and Scott. Be sure to include the Mardi Gras colors of purple, green, and gold!
6. Share students' pictures with the class and ask each student to share something they learned about New Orleans Mardi Gras culture from the performance.
7. Play the video again and invite students to have their own Mardi Gras parade like at the end of the performance!
8. *Optional: celebrate Mardi Gras in your classroom with your own king cake or cupcakes! Hide a jelly bean and give a prize to whichever student finds it.*

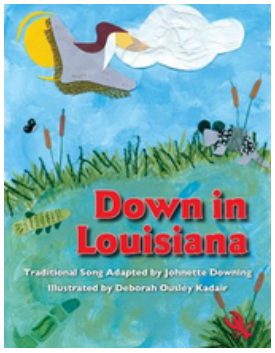
Further Resources

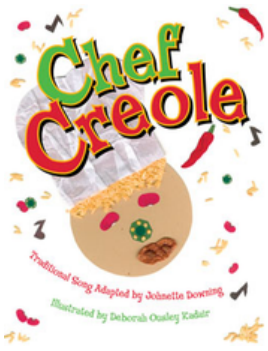
- [Johnette and Scott Artist Website]
- [Mardi Gras New Orleans]: includes information about Mardi Gras parades, history and traditions, FAQs, photos, and videos
- [Educational Music Resources from the Preservation Hall Foundation]
- **Featured books by Johnette Downing:**















- **Additional recommended books:**
  - Andrews, Troy: *Trombone Shorty: A Picture Book Biography*, Abrams Books for Young Readers (2015)
  - Cline-Ransome, Lesa: *The Story of the Saxophone*, Holiday House (2023)
  - Kimmel, Eric: *A Horn for Louis: Louis Armstrong--as a kid!, Random House Books for Young Readers (2006)*
  - Marsalis, Wynton: *Squeak, Rumble, Whomp! Whomp! Whomp!: A Sonic Adventure*, Candlewick Press (2021)
  - Pardo, Juan: *When the Morning Comes: A Mardi Gras Indian Story*, Pelican Publishing Company (2019)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Music

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (M.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (M.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (M.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (M.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (M.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (M.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (M.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (M.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)



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Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science

K

- Topic 1: Civics: classroom citizenship (HSS.K.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: connections among places (HSS.K.T2)
- Topic 3: History: shared traditions (HSS.K.T3)

Grade 1

- Topic 1: Civics: communities, elections, and leadership (HSS.1.T1)
- Topic 2: Geography: places to explore (HSS.1.T2)
- Topic 3: History: unity and diversity in the United States (HSS.1.T3)

Grade 2

- Topic 2: Geography and its effects on people (HSS.2.T2)
- Topic 3: History: migrations and cultures (HSS.2.T3)

Grade 4

- Topic 1: North America: geography and map skills (HSS.4.T1)
- Topic 4b: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today: The Southeast (HSS.4.T4b)

Grade 5

- Topic 4: The growth of the Republic (HSS.5.T4)
- Topic 5: Slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all (HSS.5.T5)



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Curricular Connections, continued

World Languages Standards

Communication

- Engage in, negotiate with, and improvise with cultural norms, etiquette, and nonverbal cues. (S.4.e)

Linguistic Cultures

- Analyze and evaluate variations among products and practices and how they relate to perspectives in multiple cultures and communities. (S.5.a)
- Analyze and evaluate the contributions of various cultural influences in the development of identity. (S.5.b)
- Investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of culture through comparisons of diverse target-language cultures and their own (S.6.a)

Lifelong Learning

- Research, analyze, evaluate, and hypothesize about diverse perspectives and distinctive viewpoints found in authentic materials from target-language cultures. (S.7.b)
- Apply cultural and linguistic skills to participate in the school, local, and global community (S.8.a)

