

As a Cajun Schoolboy

~Shared by Mr. Leroy David, Baton Rouge, LA, with Christine Pyle

Mr. Leroy David, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, tells this story of his experiences as a Cajun schoolboy:

When Leroy was about six years old, he began to attend school. His teacher was a good teacher and real nice, but Leroy only spoke Cajun French, and the teacher only spoke English. The teacher started teaching the ABC's and gave the students an assignment. Leroy didn't understand what she said, so he just made marks on his paper and turned it in. She got mad and gave the paper back for him to redo it.

Since he still couldn't understand her, he thought, "If I make the lines darker, she'll be happy." So he darkened the lines on his marks and turned it in. This time the teacher was so mad she pulled at her hair, but she explained the assignment again. Finally, Leroy understood and did it correctly.

This time, the happy teacher returned Leroy's paper with three stars on it.



Mr. Leroy David's experience wasn't uncommon for many young Cajun schoolchildren who had difficulty speaking English. After all, French was their native language and was spoken in their home. In 1915, the State Board of Education mandated suppression of the French language in classrooms and children were punished for speaking French. Sadly, because educators discouraged it, many Cajuns were forced to transition to English, and the number of native French speakers in Louisiana decreased.

Fortunately, there are now programs that work to revitalize the Cajun French language, such as the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, which began in 1968, and other French Immersion programs that have been providing instruction in Louisiana schools since the 1980's. In a 2006 report, Louisiana had over twenty public schools with French Immersion programs!