Zulu Coconut: An Object Biography

NEW ORLEANS CULTURAL STUDIO | LESSON 66 | GRADES 6–8 | CULTURE & SOURCES

Context before technique

The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club’s coconut is an iconic hand-decorated Carnival throw connected to Black civic history.

Whose story is being told?

Teach this lesson through identified New Orleans institutions and, where possible, community-authored testimony. Name the people, places, and historical context in your examples. Explain what remains unknown or contested.

Responsible artistic engagement

Discuss racist performance histories with age-appropriate care; never reproduce blackface or caricatures.

Visual permissions

Do not download photographs or artwork from source websites for public display unless permission or a valid license is confirmed. A live research link is not a license. The included lesson illustration is original conceptual artwork and not historical evidence.

Starter research sources

Louisiana State Museums: Zulu history

https://louisianastatemuseum.org/exhibit/tramps-kings-100-years-zulu

HNOC: History of Carnival throws

https://hnoc.org/publishing/first-draft/throw-me-somethin-mister-history-behind-new-orleans-mardi-gras-throws

Louisiana Visual Arts Benchmarks

Louisiana Department of Education arts standards (official PDF)

Discussion prompts

- Who created or maintains this tradition, space, or object?
- What do outsiders often overlook?
- Which images would require permission, and whose voices are missing?

Teaching note

These starter sources support inquiry, not a complete ethnography. Prioritize up-to-date local perspectives and appropriately compensated cultural partnerships when possible.