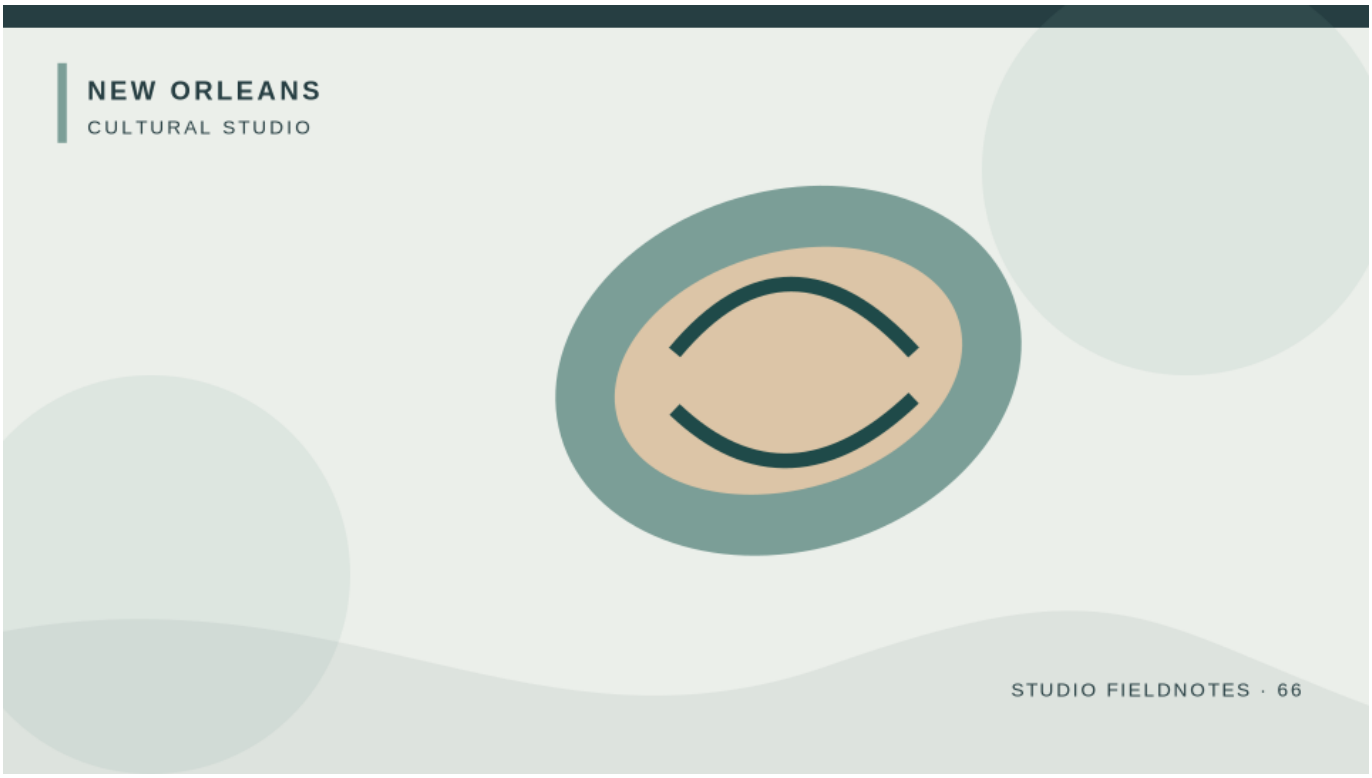
Zulu Coconut: An Object Biography

NEW ORLEANS CULTURAL STUDIO | LESSON 66 | GRADES 6–8 | TEACHER GUIDE



The artistic problem

Use institutional sources to analyze a decorated Zulu coconut as an artifact; design a museum label and an original alternative commemorative object.

Inquiry & goals

Can a small object tell a complicated history?

- Students can demonstrate object drawing, typography, interpretation.
- Students can produce an artifact label with evidence and an original object design.
- Students can explain one culturally grounded decision and make one visible revision.

Instructional frame

Grade band: 6–8 | Suggested duration: 5–6 lessons · 50–60 minutes | Suggested materials: Drawing, collage, paper, colored media.

Louisiana visual arts standards (grade-cluster benchmark references): VA-CE-M1, VA-CE-M3, VA-CE-M5, VA-AP-M4. Use the relevant grade-level cluster, particularly for Grades 3–5.

Community and cultural context

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

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

Success criteria

- The work responds to the artistic problem with an identifiable student-authored idea.
- The selected techniques are visible and purposeful: Object drawing, typography, interpretation.
- A source or cultural context is acknowledged accurately without appropriation.
- At least two alternatives were generated before the final choice.
- One revision is visible and the artist explains what changed.

Studio sequence: 10 purposeful moves

01 ENGAGE Show two contrasting, attributed local sources. Ask what students notice and what they should not assume.

02 INVESTIGATE Students gather visual evidence and identify who made it, what it is for, and whose voice is represented.

03 SKILL STUDIO Model the targeted techniques: Object drawing, typography, interpretation. Demonstrate a choice, not a model image to copy.

04 GENERATE Students develop at least three distinct thumbnail responses to the investigation.

05 PLAN Compare ideas against audience, meaning, technique, and cultural care; select or combine one plan.

06 PRODUCE Build the work: An artifact label with evidence and an original object design. Conduct a mid-workshop conference with visual evidence.

07 CRITIQUE Peer feedback: identify a design choice that works, a question about meaning, and one specific improvement.

08 REVISE Make an observable change to strengthen communication or craft; photograph before and after if appropriate.

09 PRESENT Display with a caption naming source context, intent, and choices. Keep student consent central.

10 REFLECT Explain strongest choice, a changed decision, what the source taught, and a next growth target.

Checkpoints and prompts

- Entry: What do we know about this specific New Orleans history, and how do we know it?
- Middle: Can the viewer see the design decision you intended?
- Exit: Which source and revision changed your interpretation?

UDL and access

Offer multiple ways to plan (sketch, spoken notes, physical mock-up, digital tools); use large-print image descriptions and high-contrast examples; allow written, recorded, or conference-based reflection. Honor religious, identity, bereavement, and trauma-related opt-outs where relevant.

Extension

Invite a community partner or cultural institution to critique the interpretation, with appropriate preparation, permission, and compensation where possible.

Materials and rights

Use school-safe tools and school-approved media. Attribute source materials and respect photographic, artwork, interview, and museum-image permissions. Student artwork must remain original. This packet uses original abstract teaching illustrations, not replicas of regalia or historical documents.