

THE ADVOCATE

A children's book festival, with a French twist: My French Book Fest opens in West Baton Rouge



Children and families can visit the West Baton Rouge Museum this Thursday through Saturday for My French Book Fest, a celebration of youth literacy in French that features a book fair as well as music and art festivities.

My French Book Fest, which in previous years was offered only in New Orleans, will highlight French authors from around the world and encourage kids to engage with French in their daily life.

"For students, I want them to know that French is not just some language that we use in the classroom, and then as soon as you step out the school doors, you switch back into English," museum educator and tour guide Andre St. Romain said. "I want them to know that French is useful in Louisiana."

In addition to buying books, visitors can attend concerts and art exhibitions. Bruce "Sunpie" Barnes and the Louisiana Sunspots, described as a blend of zydeco, blues and Caribbean music, will play from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday. On Saturday, Ashley Orlando will sing and play ukulele in a French jazz set from 2 to 4 p.m.



Displays at the West Baton Rouge Museum feature art from "Capitaine Acadie," the French comic strip.
Tonya Wyandon, courtesy

Each day of the festival, the museum will also have art from the comic strip "Capitaine Acadie" on display. Jacques Baran, Cultural Attaché of the Consulate General of France in New Orleans, said the comic strip tells the story of a superhero from Acadia.

The exhibition will be interactive.

"Students find it really, really exciting, and it's a fun way to approach literature," Baran said.

Festival hoped to expand access to French children's books

Louisiana has 45 French immersion schools, according to the consulate. Baran said when he first arrived in Louisiana, he noticed many schools did not have access to French literature, despite the Francophile history of the state. That led him to launch the first My French Book Fest in 2022 in New Orleans.

"Literature plays a really important role in language acquisition, but it also plays a crucial role in development," Baran said. "We see it as a tool for personal growth. And of course, it's also the simple joy of reading."

During the festival, the museum will offer tours in French in addition to regular tours. The book fair will be open in the main building at 845 N. Jefferson Ave. in Port Allen through operating hours, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

St. Romain said events like My French Book Fest are important because kids can make their own connections with the language and help keep it alive.

"I don't want people to think of it as a scholarly language that happens in the classroom, that you can leave behind when you leave school," St. Romain said. "I want it to live and breathe and keep going."