

FRENCH FOR LIFE: “BONSOIR, CLASSE!”

As students slide in their chairs and settle in, the delicious smells of dinner preparations waft from the French House kitchen. Delighting in the lake view on campus, a group of adult learners open their backpacks, take out their notebooks, and turn expectantly toward me. It is Wednesday at the University of Wisconsin’s French House, and a group of about 30 students are preparing for the evening class. Since 2012, for twelve weeks each semester, lively and motivated groups of adults have participated in weekly two-hour long French immersion courses. Some come for only a semester and then move on to other horizons, but *les fidèles* come back each season. These beginning and intermediate learners spend an hour participating in conversational, interactive activities in two different groups led by Andrew Irving,

mother with declining health. She looks forward to each Wednesday off as her chance to reconnect with her younger self, a footloose and fancy-free *jeune fille au pair* in 1970s Paris. Sitting next to her, the middle-aged widower takes copious notes. He has been enchanted with French since middle school, when, 50 years ago, the more popular choice was German. Another student tells me that he is learning French because he “wants to sing” when he speaks. A student whose sister is battling cancer lets me know that she practices speaking French every day with her cats. Entranced by the word *oiseau*, which she repeats over and over again, as if savoring a fine wine, she exclaims, “I sound just like Jeanne Moreau!” Next to her, an eighty-six-year-old adjusts the crackle of her hearing aid to better hear the group.

into French, a tongue they perceive as more beautiful, full of “luxe, calme, et volupté,” allows them to leave the ordinary or the painful behind, even if it is only for a brief time each week. For them, French conjures up a lover carrying a bouquet of flowers home on the *métro*, breaking off the tip of a freshly baked baguette, sharing a box of *macarons* with a friend over *un café*. Each week, they celebrate the beauties of the French language and the ways in which its rhythms have shaped their lives. In their third chapter, these students are not furred, but rather outward-turning, eager to learn and participate fully in life’s pleasures. In these ways, Wednesday evenings in French are magical.

If such a conversational group does not yet exist in your community, you

These students illuminate the importance of language and community in composing a well-lived life.

Director of the French House, myself, and often a graduate student from the Department of French and Italian. At the buffet dinner following each class, participants continue practicing their French side-by-side with other French speakers, university students, and community members.

As I have learned in the many years creating and teaching in this program, people’s love affair with French stays with them long beyond middle age, as does their memory of their first attempts at learning it. Their sense of humor is just as strong. For instance, in the middle of class, a retired attorney says, “Je parle français comme une vache espagnole.” “Une vache espagnole?” I repeat, grinning at the group. As we review the funny idiom, they laugh, nodding their heads in agreement. They are all here because, despite the diversity of their skills, they love French. But this group of students is not a typical undergraduate class; they are much more familiar with Jean Gabin than Jean Dujardin. And they come to class not because they have to, but because they want to. For example, the retiree I mentioned above is a full-time caregiver for her

She tells me that when people ask her why in the world she would start learning French at her age, she has her answer ready, “So I can speak French in my next life!”

As I get a glimpse into these students’ lives, I have come to realize that participants attend these classes to learn French, but they also come for much more. Many of them are going through something difficult in their lives, and stepping through the doorway of *La Maison Française* takes them to a different place. Sometimes the most effective therapy is meeting with a group of like-minded people in the tireless pursuit of learning the *futur proche*. For them, French class is a distraction, a space of companionship, healing, or bonding over a common goal. It is a haven in a chaotic world in which an hour of practice or *vire-langues* are distractions from everyday existence. Concentrating on something brand new or revisiting an old skill interrupt the stresses of the ordinary and leads to a more fulfilling life.

These students illuminate the importance of language and community in composing a well-lived life. Shedding their quotidian English and slipping

can always start one by connecting with local resources. In larger cities, the *Alliance française* or programs at a college or university may offer this opportunity. In smaller communities, conversational French groups can be started through the public library, a local café, or Meetup.com, which has French language groups worldwide.

Vive le français—et vive l’apprentissage à tout âge!

Sage Goellner

University of Wisconsin, Madison
[sage.goellner@wisc.edu]

REMINDER TO FDLM SUBSCRIBERS

If you move, you need to inform *Le Français dans le monde* directly. The AATF cannot keep track of and communicate these changes. Send an e-mail to [address@frenchteachers.org] to notify the AATF of your new address, AND send any address changes for *Le Français dans le monde* to [fdlm@fdlm.org].

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

RESURRECTING *LE CADAVRE EXQUIS*

In need of a no-tech activity for my students on a day the Internet was not working well, I remembered a game from when I first began teaching over 35 years ago: *le cadavre exquis*.

I cut blank copy paper in two, lengthwise down the middle, making two long strips and giving one to each student with the instructions to write their name on the top and fold it to the back of the paper. Then they exchanged strips with another student. If the paper is folded forward instead of backward, it doesn't work (everything will be upside down and the sentence will read from bottom to top of the paper).

Since we were practicing the *passé composé*, the second student added a verb in the *passé composé*, third person singular, and folded the paper to the back twice (so the person receiving it cannot see what was written), and they exchanged papers (each time with a different student than before), and successively added: *à* + a place, *avec* + another person, *soudain* + a number and a noun, another verb in the *passé composé* third person plural, *et enfin* + another verb in the *passé composé* third person plural, time expression or adverb.

Results were something like this: *Mark a dormi au stade avec Beyoncé. Soudain trois oranges ont dansé et enfin ils sont sortis à minuit.*

The paper was returned to the person whose name was at the top, and everyone read his/her adventures with great glee, reading them aloud to each other and commenting.

I had them do a think-pair-share-square (each time they picked the best of the two stories) and share the best-of-four result with the class. I noticed that they corrected each other's grammar and spelling during the sharing, since it would be shared with the whole class (another bonus).

This can be done with any verb tense. Doing it in the future, for example, would result in a "fortune" for that person. Feel free to add in adjectives,

famous people, teacher's names, etc. – anything that will be high interest or humorous.

Here's a twist on the above one for *passé composé/imparfait*: ALL VERBS IN PAST TENSE, third person singular

Name,
Describe looks
What was s/he doing? Where?
Suddenly + verb
Person's reaction (emotion) *et*
Person's reaction (action)
Puis + action verb
Enfin + action verb
Person's reaction (emotion)

This could also be done for an invent-an-animal, using drawings: first the head (fold back but leave just a bit of the bottom of the next showing so the parts join up well) then the upper body and arms or wings, then the belly with tail, then the legs (four drawings.) When this is given to a fifth student, they open the paper, name this new animal, and describe it. (Note: this could also be good for a unit on the comparative/superlative). Then do a museum walk-type exhibit and have students read and rate them.

Here is a link to a class that did this as a comic strip: [<https://bonjourfle.com/2016/01/08/cadavre-exquis-embd/>]

You might also like to share the history of the game with your students. The technique of *le cadavre exquis* was invented by the Surrealists in the early 1920s, based on an old parlor game. André Breton, one of the founders of the Surrealist movement, said it started in fun but became playful and eventually enriching. He played it at the house of some friends, along with fellow Surrealists Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Prévert, and Benjamin Péret. The name came from a sentence produced when they first played the game: "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau."

Deborah Blaz,
Angola High School (IN)
[dblaz@msdsc.us]

AATF EXCELLENCE IN FRENCH AWARD

The AATF has established a new award to recognize French students at all levels. This will allow teachers to reward students in each year of French study or multiple students in a given class. It will also allow teachers at the elementary or middle school levels or in community colleges to recognize their students. The AATF Outstanding Senior in French Award (see Web site or November issue) is still available for one exceptional senior student each year at the high school or university level. Nominations must be made by a current AATF member.

To qualify for the award, a student must:

- have demonstrated excellence in the study of French;
- be currently enrolled in French;
- have demonstrated commitment to the study of French by participating in extracurricular activities related to French which may include but are not limited to the *Grand Concours*, study abroad, National French Week activities, or French Club, Pi Delta Phi, tutoring;
- be a non-native speaker of French;
- be nominated by an AATF member.

Students will receive a certificate acknowledging their award and a press release to distribute to local media; and a congratulatory letter will be sent to the principal or dean. The registration fee for the award is \$25. For an additional \$10 fee, students can also receive an *Armes de Paris* medal.

There is no deadline for this award. The nomination form is posted on the AATF Web site. Nominations can also be made through the online store. Address questions to [sra@frenchteachers.org].

MARTINIQUE AATF CONVENTION

July 18-21, 2018