Back to the literary texts?

* From grammar-translation to communication oriented class

Reflecting upon the use of literature for language learners raises a paradox: is literature really welcomed in a language class? Or to state it differently, if the grammar-translation oriented approach is less and less frequently the one chosen by teachers, can literary texts still be of any help in class?

As Jean Marie Schultz recently wisely underlined, “grammar-translation” approaches were focusing on literature (5). Literary texts have, to a certain extent, been assimilated to this teacher-centered approach of the past. In the eighties, as “communicative approach” became the motto of most of the language programs, literature was excluded from class and replaced by “authentic” documents and “realia” such as TV programs or train schedules. Schultz sums up this historical movement while stating that “[…] with the rise of the oral proficiency movement and the development of communicative methodologies, which emphasize speaking skills in real-life practical situations, the focus on the literary text fell into disfavor” (3).

Yet, back in 1985, Claire Kramsch asked for a rethinking of the use of literature, arguing that “[c]ommunicative approaches to language teaching and the […] focus on oral proficiency [were] calling for a reassessment of the use of literary texts in the language classroom” (356). That shift of orientation took some time to be enacted. Literary texts had suddenly to be seen, not as cold closed pieces of art, but rather as some widely opened cultural clues. Literature was still nevertheless often considered as too difficult for beginning students. Students would hence often have to take four semesters of French before reading a literary text. They were then lacking not only the meta-language necessary to analyze a text, but also the simple knowledge of how such a
piece should be read. At the beginning of the nineties, many French language books reintroduced literary texts. These texts were nevertheless often not well connected to classroom discussions.

It is only in the second half of the nineties, as Diana Frantzen remarks, that “some teachers and scholars have recognized the value of introducing literature at the lower levels of instruction, while acknowledging the challenges that using literature entails” (110). Yet, as she argues, literature was still rarely considered as an authentic document. Daniel Shanahan was one of the few scholars to note, in 1997, that literary text could be used at the earliest stage of a language program to help “developing communicative competence in the language learner.” (166) An historical loop was then finally closed: literature and communication were not anymore seen as oxymoron. As Schultz points out, even the “recommendations set forth in the recently published Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the Twenty-First Century (1999)” are asking for an integration of more literature in the language curriculum (4). Literature is not any longer an enemy of language and it is even “officially” regarded as important in the language classroom.

This “language/literature dynamic” (4) underlined by Schultz is still to be questioned and thought through. The recent publication of the Issues in Language Program Direction “SLA and the Literature Classroom: Fostering Dialogues”, edited by Virginia M. Scott and Holly Tucker is a sign of this new reflection. Literature and language class are not anymore disconnected: dialogue is not only possible, it is a necessity. How could a foreign language literature class forget about the jewel of language? And on the other hand, how can a language learner become a possible literature student if he does not marvel himself in front of a single literary text?

Without giving some answers to these rhetorical statements, the question asked in 2002 by Stacey Katz is the one we should ask ourselves: “how […] integrate the teaching of literature into the modern foreign language classroom where teacher-centered activities are discouraged and communication among students is paramount [?]” (155). This paper and its appendix are an attempt to answer Katz’s question.

* Literature as “work of art”
In 1995 James Davis, Rebecca Kline and Allan Stoekl presented “an examination of how undergraduates in French define the term literature.” (653). The results of this study of 129 students showed that many of them saw literature as art. This is both a positive and a negative thing for a language class: art is indeed cultural, and very likely to fulfill our students “taste” for “images”. But art is sometimes also seen as too “high culture” and “untouchable” for the students. Students from the study indeed also pointed that literature is something defined by scholars, professors and specialists, hence a distant “unfamiliar” item very unlikely to concern them. Teachers have once again to bring their stone into the never-ending debate between low and high art partisans. If a long poetic graffiti on the walls of a Parisian subway station can be seen as “art”, is it also “literature”, and do we want to present it to our students as so?

In 1985, Kramsch wisely reminded us that “[t]he respect for the text as a work of art to be appreciated in accordance with an established aesthetic canon and put back into the historic and cultural conditions of its creation, discourages the reconstruction of the text necessary for its appropriations by the reader.” (358). What can we do then to “tear apart” our students’ fossilized notion that a literary text is art, and is hence not accessible? A few activities around the text might help, which will show later on in this paper.

The idea that teaching literature as art is necessary less adequate to students is not shared by all the critics. Many recent studies have indeed reflected upon the way a scholar - whose passion is literature – could successfully teach a language. According to Debra Popkin’s 1997 article, “[i]ntroducing literature early in the curriculum offers many benefits: classes will be more exciting since professors will be teaching the literature that they love; students will probably catch some of that enthusiasm […]” (22). Students in languages class could indeed benefit from the teacher’s interest. Yet, this idea remains questionable, as enthusiasm is not something you can just “give” to someone, nor is it certain that both students and instructor will share the same literary tastes…

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*Literature as culture*

Rarely considered as so, literature is a cultural artifact of a society. When the communicative approach was avoiding literary text to use realia - seen real “cultural” creations – it was letting on the side the whole literature. However, as Shanahan has pointed out, a “complex coding of culture […] is embedded into” literature, giving “literary language” a real “power” (167). This power of literature is very likely to actually help students in their language learning process. David Shook noted in 1996, that the difficulties induced by literature “can become opportunities for learning and expansion not only for language but also for development of the learners’ C2 framework” (206). Beyond the grammar of the text, there hence is culture, which is the part we want to teach our students.

In 1998, reflecting upon the relationship between language and culture - and particularly on what is defining a community of language users - Kramsch described literature as “material culture”. She particularly underlined the fact that “[l]anguage is not a culture-free code, distinct from the way people think and behave, but, rather, it plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture, particularly in its printed form” (8). A literary text then carries along with it its own context: the language of the reading we want our students to focus on is culture in itself and we don’t necessary need to bring the author’s biography, nor to give our students a historical background. All these elements are indeed, to a certain extent, embedded into the text.

Most recently, Virginia Scott and Julie Huntington’s main argument is very similar to Shook’s. They point out that “a literary passage can serve as an ideal means for activating affective awareness and cognitive flexibility, and by extension, C2 competence” (624) They further define literature “as an expression of both personal and cultural phenomena” (624). If literature can be not only connected to the target culture, but also to some “personal” elements, it is necessary to introduce it often in the classroom. Students are indeed more motivated whenever an exercise or a part of the lesson is asking them to share some personal ideas or experiments. If we can manage to show them that a text is a phenomenon coming both from a culture and from a person, who might share their ideas or not, the reading can be a success. The text can become the “starting point” for a whole class discussion: instead of being teacher oriented and focused on the reading competency, it can turn the session into communication between students, and develop their speaking skills!
*Helping students understanding a text*

Despite the fact that literary texts are both art and culture brought into the classroom, they cannot be blindly “given” to students as so. Even if students indeed don’t need a cultural background, reading is always too overwhelming to have us let them be all alone in front of a long, unfamiliar piece of writing. Literature is useful in the language class only to the extent that it is properly prepared by the instructor. It is a time consuming thing for the teacher, but it is worth it. In days where he/she is lacking time, the instructor should never just “give” a text to students: these extra non-planned minutes of a lesson can be used for games or “devinettes”, never for literature!

Scholars have several wise ideas on how to make students appreciate and understand a literary text. According to Kimberly Nance’s 1994 article, the instructor should help students “experience what makes us so passionate about literature – the moment of insight when we draw a connection for ourselves” (167). Nance even calls these moments “epiphanies”. Even though I concur with her statement that “[o]ur students face a challenge that is linguistic as well as literary” (168), I have hard time linking it to her idea of “epiphany”. Just like enthusiasm, this type of feeling is not easy to transmit to someone, except of course if you turn your class into a type of sect or of new church where everybody has to share a same ideal. I would love my students to get these wonderful “moments of insight” that are mine, but I’d actually rather see them talk, discuss and be interested in the text. Trying to share an epiphany seems to me way to “teacher oriented” and Nance is forgetting that individuality and personalities of students play an important role in the classroom dynamic.

If we want to bring literary texts in the classroom, we have not only to introduce and contextualize them properly, but we also need to make a choice. Which text should we indeed choose, keeping in mind that it has not only to be accessible, but also “relevant”? Davis, Kline and Stoekl consider that linguistic simplicity should be what the instructor mostly focuses on. They nevertheless add that “[…] in addition to being linguistically simple, selections chosen for students who are beginning to read literature in a foreign language should have an unambiguous, easily identifiable narrative voice, and should preferably treat some aspect of the target culture” (661). The literature we want to introduce in the language class at a beginner level should indeed be in adequacy with the students’ knowledge. I remain skeptical as far as Davis and co’s
“culture” is concerned: if a text is really literature, it is necessarily a cultural artifact and it cannot do anything but “treat some aspect of the target culture”!

Katz’s definition of a nice way to incorporate literature in the language class appears as more opened than the one from Davis and his team. She points out that “[t]he successful integration of literature into the curriculum relies on the selection of intellectually challenging, interesting works with which students of all levels can interact.” To do so, she explains that “[t]he theme and topics should be complex, yet the language of the texts should not be difficult.” (157) Works and texts do indeed have to be simple in their language, but we can bring complex topics in the classroom, if there are appropriate, and if they are a nice way of provoking discussions and reactions among our students.

Popkin is mentioning another important thing to consider when we are choosing a text to integrate in the class: “For auditory learners, we must never forget the beauty and musicality of the French language, which is the reason why many students opted to learn French in the first place.” To fulfill this fascination with the nice sound of French, she recommends “that the instructor read the opening passage aloud, emphasizing the sounds and rhythm”, as she adds further that “[a] dramatic rendition of each text will greatly enhance its appeal” (23). Even if we should try not to mix our students competencies (i.e.: a text is to be read!), a nice theatrical reading of it can be a possible closure for a class session. And I agree that the “language” should be, if not nice, at least harmonic and possibly “musical”.

But to help our students understand the text, we of course need to “surround” it with the same type of pedagogical devices we would use for listening comprehension: like any reading included in the language classroom, it needs to have pre reading and post reading activities. As Frantzen argues “[i]nstructors can help students overcome their linguistic and cultural shortcomings and thereby help them to understand the text better” (112). The teacher’s role is hence the one of a “provider” and he gives to the students the elements that can help him overcome his fears and his gaps. Furthermore, we do not necessarily need to give the students grammar and vocabulary to go along with the texts: on the opposite, the text can be a pool for exercising the students’ previous knowledge. Frantzen indeed wisely points out how “[r]esearch has demonstrated that authentic reading materials, in addition to their well recognized value as input, can serve as one type of meaningful context in which to practice and present structures and vocabulary.” (110)
While looking for a proper text to use scarcely with my class, I first of all had to decide which “genre” I would focus on. Since very few people actually read poetry in France (even though, paradoxically, there are more and more poems published!), I purposely chose not to orient my researches toward versifications. I could have looked for theater plays, since they seem to be very interesting to integrate into a language “communicative” classroom. Still I tend to think that –just as songs are made to be listened to-, theater plays need to be either seen or acted. Since I was running out of time and had to follow the syllabus the closest I could, theater was not an option. As a result of this reflection on “genre”, I opted for “prose”. Even though textbooks more and more wisely introduce literary texts (see Paroles and Sur le Vif), the editorial process is so long that they cannot present many pieces of recent contemporary literature. If we want to use modern texts in the classroom, we should then introduce them by ourselves. The choice made below is hence the conclusion of my searches. It is a subjective choice, voluntarily oriented toward pedagogy.


Un An is a short novel of 111 pages, with no chapters and no parts indicating separations or changes of ideas. The whole story is an ellipse that comes back at the end to the situation of the first page. It is intriguing, suspenseful and is presenting some areas of France that are not that often in novels.

The heroin, Victoire, is spending one whole year away from Paris, in St Jean de Luze, then in the Landes forest before going home and realizing that nothing really happened. The incipit of the novel is a good representation of its style and of its mood: « Victoire, s’éveillant un matin de février sans rien se rappeler de la soirée puis découvrant Félix mort près d’elle dans leur lit, fit sa valise avant de passer à la banque et de prendre un taxi vers la gare Montparnasse. » (7)

The whole story is narrated at the third person, in the voice of an omniscient narrator. Nevertheless, the reader is not given clues, and the end comes as a surprise. The tenses used are mostly only the imparfait and the passé-simple. The level of the story (vocabulary, structure of
sentences etc...) makes it readable for a public of French 76 (even though sometimes the vocabulary might be a little “slang” for the students).

Culture in this book is sensible everywhere: in the description of the people on the train, in the lady who rents the house in St Jean de Luz to Victoire, in the cartes Michelin used by Victoire in her bicycle trip towards Mimizan (even though she then prepares a budget in Franc!), in the people she interacts with when she becomes a SDF, from the hotel Formule 1 to the streets of little villages. The author himself -Jean Eschenoz- is part of this culture as he received the “Prix Goncourt” in 1999, and is a novelist rather “médiatisé”.

A lesson with the book should be based on precise “maps” from the areas. Activities with students could evolve around things such as taking the train, renting a house, preparing a bicycle trip, staying at a hotel, discussing about SDF etc... Since the story is totally open ended, students can then be asked to discuss together and explain what has happened. The heroin is so “malleable” into her environment that she is crossing and interacting with all the social classes and sides of the French population. This is hence a good way to give the students an idea that is for once not too stereotypical: a society is just not one thing, but several! Moreover, students can be induced to produce dialogues as they are never any dialogues between the characters, and everything is in “style indirect”:

Tout le temps que Noëlle Valade avait parlé, Victoire dans les interstices livra le moins d’informations possible sur elle-même. Non par méfiance particulière, en tous cas pas seulement, mais telle était son habitude et Louis-Philippe, souvent, le lui avait reproché. Mais Victoire est ainsi : comme il faut bien parler quand on rencontre du monde, elle s’en sort en posant des questions. (19)

Here, students could for instance have not only to rewrite the landlady’s speech, but also to create and imagine the questions that Victoire has asked.


I would call Stallone a short story, but since the author purposely named this 53 pages book “novel”, it should be so. Stallone has been a “hit” in France as soon as it was out (hence, it is published by Gallimard!), and everybody was talking about it on the radio and on television. You probably can still find old articles or interviews that could be a good follow up
activity to the reading. This modern story is a good way of showing connections between French and Americans: Stallone can become an icon in both societies, similarly influenced by the power of media.

Even though Lise, the heroin, is dying at the end of a cancer, students will not be too shocked as her death is not the end of all the hopes. The novel is indeed mostly about confidence. Lise’s life is changed by Stallone’s *Rambo III*, as it gives her the strength to finally try to make her dreams come true. The back of the book presents an extract that can sum-up this whole “intrigue”:

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Désormais, elle irait voir tous les films de Stallone.
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Tous. Elle n’en raterait aucun. Elle en faisait aujourd’hui le serment.
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Et elle n’attendrait pas qu’ils passent à la télévision. Non. Elle irait les voir en salle, elle paierait sa place.
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Elle lui devait bien cela. Car c’était grâce à lui que sa vie allait changer. (23)
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Life goes very fast, but it is a nice one, as the *Stallone III* helps Lise react and change everything: going back to study at twenty five years old, learning how to box… Along the novel, Lise goes from success to success, becoming a medical doctor, finding the man of her life and raising two nice sons.

I would integrate this novel to a French 63 class, at the moments where they learn about movies. It is a good story to help students “keep up”, and to help them fulfill their dreams. It is also bringing in vocabulary about jobs, medical profession (sickness, etc...), family relationships (she has problematic relations with her parents), love story (when she meets Jean) etc… The vocabulary is usually simple, as is the structure of the sentences. Passé-simple, imparfait and conditionnel are the tenses used most of the time. The text also presents a few short dialogues in present.

Several activities could be prepared to go along with the text: as it is so simple and short, it presents some empty spaces easily filled out by exercises. The beginning of the story is missing the real dialogues between Lise and her boss and between Lise and her parents: students could be asked to prepare these or to write the letters Lise could have sent to explain that she is going back to university. Since the heroin usually hides that she is going to watch a Stallone movie, students could also make up Lise’s excuses. The novel as well provides some
opportunities to create dialogues around tickets and times at the theater, to have group discussions about role models or redactions concerning stars students love.


This very short book of 91 pages is very poetically written and made out of some lyrical “short stories”. The extract on the back of the book is a good example of Bobin’s style:

Celle qu’on aime, on la voit s’avancer toute nue. Elle est dans une robe claire, semblable à celles qui fleurissaient autrefois le dimanche sous le porche des églises, sur le parquet des bals. Et pourtant elle est nue – comme une étoile au point du jour. A vous voir, une clairière s’ouvrirait dans mes yeux. A voir cette robe blanche, toute blanche comme du ciel bleu.

Avec le regard simple, revient la force pure. (85)

The reason I would integrate it to French 2, is that it is very simply “limpidly” written. The sentences are short, highly poetic, and most of them are written in present. There are a few imparfait and future in the text, but most of it is in the simplest tenses.

Born in le Creusot, the author spent all his life there. He is hence a writer far from Paris, a writer of the little things of life. Many of his texts are nearly mystical and evolve around death and life, matters that might be difficult to present to students. These matters are yet cultural facts that appear very similar in France and in America: instead of putting the stress on the differences, this reading could help showing some similarities. The text can then be seen as a nice poetical and rhetorical device, where language is a tool but not a cultural clue.

At a French 2 level, doing little parts of a book might already induce a few students to try to read the whole later on. It can give a “taste” of the writing, without overwhelming the students with too many new cognates.

The last short story, which title is given to the whole book, sums up love from the beginning to the end. It could really be used when students are learning about relationships in French 2. It introduces only one element of clothing “petite robe”, that could be thought as a cultural element (“la robe du dimanche”, “les fêtes de villages” etc…). It is scattered on 9 pages, each very short showing one phase of the loving process. Students could be asked to produce the voice of the muted one of the text: the woman in the white dress, who is always called on, but
never gets to speak. The whole text would be very easily illustrated with paintings and photographs that students could be asked to look for on the Internet.

Even though these short stories are highly accessible, they might yet not be the best way of producing good class interactions and activities. They are storied built on emptiness and silence and are made to be filled in by a “self”, not by a group. This might yet encourage the shiest students to read on their own. Moreover, these readings are a good “writing” support. Even though “pastiches” are a tough art, I think that students from French 2 could only benefit from learning to write like Bobin. As his sentences are clear and simple, they can easily reach a type of poetry that can enlighten them and motivate them to keep seeing French as a beautiful language before themselves producing beauty. This text is, furthermore, so lyrical that it needs to be read out loud and can seduce auditory learners.

One practical attempt

* Following the syllabus and integrating the text to the lesson

I chose the introduction of Bobin’s book [cf. Appendix I] as it was easier to integrate in the chapter I was doing with my students. I substituted an interesting essay on racism from Tahar Ben Jelloun given in the textbook, with a poetical extract on the inequalities in front of reading. I don’t think that this substitution was bad, even though Bobin’s text is “franco-français”, while Ben Jelloun would have been an opportunity to bring in some “francophonie” elements… But I really wanted to use my own text for once!

In the very little time I had (it was already nearly the end of the semester), I decided to use two days for the reading: the end of a Friday’s class, and the beginning of a Monday’s one. This way, directed well enough, students could have more time to spend on their own with the text. Friday’s session had to be planned well enough so that they were not be “on their own” and lost in the reading during the week-end.

* Activities used around the text

In a very “classical” way, I had prepared a pre-reading (see Appendix II) with a brainstorming directly connected to the lesson in the book. The powerpoint presentation of images was a good way to do a second brainstorm and to bring in some vocabulary that was to
be in the text. The vocabulary exercise was supposed to help them get the meaning of the most difficult words even before reading. I guess know that this vocabulary thing is a little bit decontextualized, and that images are a better way to bring in new words without having to “define” them. The “finding of the title” was a trick to have them do a fast pre-reading and get a general picture of the text. Since this was a group work, follow up could help each and every one get different points of view about the reading.

At home, students were asked to select one of the images posted on the blackboard, and to illustrate one part of the text (a sentence or a paragraph) with it. They knew they were going to be asked about their choice.

In class, on Monday, everybody had to explain and present their selection. In the post-reading activities (see Appendix III) there were a cloze exercise (to check both their reading and their understanding of the text), a more general question of understanding and discussion, and as a follow-up, and exercise connected to the vocabulary and grammar of the book were they had to pick a side and sustain their ideas with relevant explanations, and possibly with the use of the newly learned “subjonctif”.

* Expected/non excepted outcomes

During the pre-reading activities, students seemed to enjoy the images, and have been able to discuss them quite well. The vocabulary exercise was in fact too difficult for them to do in groups, but has been a successful class session. Even when they could not get the proper word, they have soon realized that it became easier and easier.

I was really positively surprised of their ability to create a title, in groups of two. They actually came up with ideas I would have never thought about, and that turned out to be very well. We compared these titles, and they looked happy of it. Someone had to write everything on the board, so it was also a good “spelling” exercise.

The homework with the images was really a success: the students’ ideas were way better than mine (see Appendix IV), so I did not show then my “storyboard” as I thought I would. I was very happy to see that most of the students were capable of explaining their choice in French, even though they were dealing with rather spiritual concepts.
The cloze exercise was a bit too long, so we did half of it. Very soon, the students realized how the text could be expanded with many other words. The most imaginative ones looked delighted by this “game”.

The discussion on “écrire” was probably too “high” for them. It did not really work (except for a few of them), so I moved on.

Finally, the group work on “sides” to pick and sustain, has been fun and nice. It was actually not anymore connected to the text but rather to the book. Yet, I thought it was a nice closure as the students had realized how numerous the dualities were in the text.

On the whole, my class has reacted rather positively to the experiment. They were less thrilled and excited than I thought they would be, but they are in no way a “mirror image” of me as a learner! I found laughable (as rather stereotypical) the fact that the girls seemed to enjoy the whole session way more than the boys.

* Amount of work on the side of the instructor

Compared to the two other big readings we did in class, this one was a lot of preparation: choosing the appropriate text to integrate it to the syllabus and to a lesson, finding the images on “google”, preparing the activities, creating the powerpoint presentation and then putting it on the blackboard etc… I yet do not regret any of this preparation because I have enjoyed teaching these two class sections a lot!

* Feedbacks from students

The biggest surprise of this whole attempt was to be found in the feedbacks I got from my students. Out of my class of fourteen, I have received seven answers - which is probably neither a relevant nor a significant pool. But I had asked them to reply to me on a voluntarily basis, and even though they were aware of why it was important for me, I did not want to force them to answer. I know that the replies I got through emails (cf. Appendix V) are representative of my best students: only six girls - who had fully participated during the two reading sessions – and one rather shy boy took the time to answer. These answers are hence not at all a basis on which I would build any theory of the integration of literature in a language class. Yet, they are important and interesting for me. To a certain extent, my students’ replies about literature are very similar to Davis, Kline, and Stoekl’s ones. This is worth noticing, as they were dealing with
students in literature classes, and none of the students who replied is so far majoring in English or Literature.

Most interesting for me was the fact that my students seem to have preferred the text I did not chose, did not particularly like myself and did not “contextualize” as well as I usually do – so much for the epiphany and the enthusiasm! Trying to understand “why” they liked it best and found it simpler than everything, I have come to the conclusion that they found the plot appealing and were also thrilled by the idea of reading a whole story.

Moreover, my students’ feedbacks have helped me remember that, whatever you do as a teacher, you always have to do it again and again, but always differently. These students are all so different in their likes and dislikes that you need to pick several very different types of texts throughout the whole year, so that each and every of them can find something appealing and motivating enough to be remembered.

* Conclusion

On the whole, this experiment was truly worth it: despite the fact that it was rather time consuming and not really a success, it has taught me a lot about my students and has also been a very good way of testing my “double” status of an instructor and someone who loves literature. I guess I can still be thrilled by books and think about ways of integrating them, but it is more realistic and not that bad to focus on the readings given in the book, and to find other possibilities of having them be a success in the class. Actually, I guess that the bottom line of this whole attempt is that your own passion is not connected to your students’: you have to find a way to have them smile and react without necessarily being yourself so.
Appendix I.


D’un côté ceux qui ne lisent jamais. De l’autre ceux qui ne font plus que lire. Il y a bien des frontières entre les gens. L’argent, par exemple. Cette frontière-là, entre les lecteurs et les autres, est plus fermée encore que celle de l’argent. Celui qui est sans argent manque de tout. Celui qui est sans lecture manque de manque. La muraille entre les riches et les pauvres est visible. Elle peut se déplacer ou s’effondrer par endroits. La muraille entre les lecteurs et les autres est bien plus enfouie dans la terre, sous les visages. Il y a des riches qui ne touchent aucun livre. Il y a des pauvres qui sont mangés par la passion de lire. Où sont les pauvres, où sont les riches. Où sont les morts, où sont les vivants. C’est impossible à dire.

Ceux qui ne lisent jamais forment un peuple taciturne. Les objets leur tiennent lieu de mots : les voitures avec sièges en cuir quand il y a de l’argent, les bibelots sur les napperons quand il n’y en a pas. Dans la lecture on quitte sa vie, on l’échange contre l’esprit du songe, la flamme du vent. Une vie sans lecture est une vie que l’on ne quitte jamais, une vie entassée, étouffée de tout ce qu’elle retient comme dans ces histoires du journal, quand on force les portes d’une maison envahie jusqu’aux plafonds par les ordures.

Il y a la main blanche de ceux qui ont pour eux l’argent. Il y a la main fine de ceux qui ont pour eux le songe. Et il y a tous ceux qui n’ont pas de main – privés d’or, privés d’encre. C’est pour ça qu’on écrit. Ce ne peut être que pour ça, et quand c’est pour autre chose, c’est sans intérêt : pour aller des uns vers les autres. Pour en finir avec le morcellement du monde, pour en finir avec le système des castes et enfin toucher aux intouchable. Pour offrir un livre à ceux qui ne le liront jamais.
Appendix II.

Avant de lire

1) Selon la loi française, « Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits ». La devise française et d’ailleurs « Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité ». La société française veut donc être égalitaire. Mais dans la réalité, tout le monde n’est pas toujours égal…

Qu’est-ce qu’une inégalité ? Qu’est-ce qu’une injustice ? Les hommes sont-ils toujours égaux ? Quelles sont les différences qui séparent les hommes ? Notez des exemples d’inégalités

2) * Observez les images de la présentation.
Que pensez-vous ? De quoi le texte va-t-il-il parler selon vous ?

Notez les verbes et le vocabulaire correspondant aux images…
* Quelles inégalités est-ce que ces images peuvent annoncer ?

* Utilisez les formules de la certitude et du doute (p. 506), pour dire ce que vous pensez au sujet de ces images et des inégalités.

3) Devinez les définitions en faisant correspondre les mots et leurs significations….

**Une muraille** * * Un truc de décoration sans valeur

**Manquer** * * Ce que l’on met dans un stylo pour écrire

**Une frontière** * * Ce sont des saletés que l’on jette à la poubelle

**Un plafond** * * Ligne/limite entre deux pays

**S’effondrer** * * Un rêve

**Un bibelot** * * Tomber, s’écrouler

**Un napperon** * * Une société inégalitaire avec des groupes, des classes

**Un songe** * * Au dessus des murs, souvent sous le toit d’une maison

**Le système des castes** * * Avoir besoin, ne pas avoir

**De l’encre** * * Un très grand mur

**Des ordures** * * Une petite nappe, souvent en dentelle

4) Lisez vite et silencieusement le texte distribué. Puis, par groupe de 3, discutez d’un titre possible pour ce texte. Notez ce titre au tableau, et présentez le à la classe. Pourquoi ce choix ?
Appendix III.

Pour continuer la lecture…

1) Quelle phrase ou quel passage du texte avez-vous choisi ? Quelle image avez-vous pris pour l’illustrer ? Pourquoi ce choix ?

2) Avez-vous bien lu ? Par deux, réécrivez cette partie du texte, sans le re-lire. Vous pouvez utiliser votre mémoire ou votre logique ! Attention, parfois, plusieurs réponses sont possibles…

Ceux qui ne ______________ jamais forment un ______________ taciturne. Les objets ______________ tiennent lieu de ______________ : les voitures avec ______________ en cuir quand ________ y a de ______________, les bibelots sur ______________ napperons quand il ______ en a pas. ______________ la lecture on ______________ sa vie, on ______________ contre l’esprit du ______________, la flamme du ______________. Une vie sans ______________ est une vie ______________ l’on ne quitte ______________, une vie entassée, ______________ de tout ce ______________ retient comme dans ______________ histoires du journal, ______________ on force les ______________ d’une maison envahie ______________ plafonds par les ______________.

2) « C’est pour ça qu’on écrit. »
Etes-vous d’accord ? Pourquoi est-ce que l’on écrit selon vous ?

* « Il y a les Blue Devils vs. les Tar Heels... mais aussi ? »
Par groupes de trois, discutez d’autres divisions de la société « en deux » et notez les !
* Choisissez un camp !

Utilisez le vocabulaire de la certitude, du doute et du jugement personnel (p. 506-507) pour préparer, en groupe de quatre, les arguments de votre groupe. Puis présentez-les à la classe.
« D’un côté ceux qui ne lisent jamais. De l’autre ceux qui ne font plus que lire. Il y a bien des frontières entre les gens. L’argent, par exemple. »

« Cette frontière-là, entre les lecteurs et les autres, est plus fermée encore que celle de l’argent. Celui qui est sans argent manque de tout. Celui qui est sans lecture manque de manque. »

« La muraille entre les riches et les pauvres est visible. Elle peut se déplacer ou s’effondrer par endroits. »

« La muraille entre les lecteurs et les autres est bien plus enfoncée dans la terre, sous les visages. Il y a des riches qui ne touchent aucun livre. Il y a des pauvres qui sont mangés par la passion de lire. »

« Où sont les pauvres, où sont les riches. Où sont les morts, où sont les vivants. C’est impossible à dire. »

« Ceux qui ne lisent jamais forment un peuple taciturne. Les objets leur tiennent lieu de mots : les voitures avec sièges en cuir quand il y a de l’argent, les bibelots sur les napperons quand il n’y en a pas. »
« Dans la lecture on quitte sa vie, on l’échange contre l’esprit du songe, la flamme du vent. »

« Une vie sans lecture est une vie que l’on ne quitte jamais, une vie entassée, étouffée de tout ce qu’elle retient comme dans ces histoires du journal, quand on force les portes d’une maison envahie jusqu’aux plafonds par les ordures. »

« Il y a la main blanche de ceux qui ont pour eux l’argent. Il y a la main fine de ceux qui ont pour eux le songe. Et il y a tous ceux qui n’ont pas de main – privés d’or, privés d’encre. »

« C’est pour ça qu’on écrit. Ce ne peut être que pour ça, et quand c’est pour autre chose, c’est sans intérêt : pour aller des uns vers les autres. »

« Pour en finir avec le morcellement du monde, pour en finir avec le système des castes et enfin toucher aux intouchable. »

« Pour offrir un livre à ceux qui ne le liront jamais. »
Appendix V.

1) Do you like reading in general? Why?

* Yes, I enjoy to read, mostly because it is a way (like we talked about in class) to leave behind whatever is going on in my life for awhile. I also like to read because it makes me think about new things and learn things I probably wouldn't have (for example other peoples' perspectives). I don't have very much time to read now though.

* Yes, I like reading in general. I especially like reading novels etc... because the stories can be fun, but I also like to read silly magazines and stuff to relax too.

* I love reading, especially fiction

* I generally like to read but only things that interest me. When I really like a book, it is very relaxing for me to read. I especially like reading outside when it is nice outside. I also feel like, after reading, I was forced to see something in a different perspective and I really like that.

* Yes, I enjoy reading when I'm interested in the topic.

* I like reading in general, as long as I'm interested in what I'm reading. It is a nice way to relax.

* Yes, I like reading in general. There are many reasons why I like to read - it basically sums up to enjoying the chance to sit down with a book and take some time out of my hectic day.

2) Do you like reading in French? Why?

3) What is your favorite reading so far in French class: “Le chandail de Hockey”, “L’Amant” or “Une petite robe de fête”? Explain your choice.

4) What do you think you have learned from this reading? (Culture, vocabulary, grammar etc...)?

5) What is “Literature” according to you? Explain. Are any of the texts we have done in class “Literature”? Why?

6) What do you think can help you to read more “easily” a French text? Is it rather some help with the vocabulary or with the grammar?

7) Do you like to read alone or in group? Is group-work helping your reading?

8) Would you appreciate working on poetry and/or on theater play in the French class?

1) Do you like reading in general? Why?
I like reading in French because ideas are presented differently and it's cool to be able to understand what is going on. Again, I think that just by virtue of living in an entirely different place that French writers will have different things to say than American, and I think that those are better read in French.

* Yes, I like the idea of being able to read in French but often times I feel like I'm not at the level where I am not frustrated by reading.

* Reading in French is good in general, but I prefer reading in class, with you, because often when I can't get stuff at home it's very frustrating.

* I do like reading in French because it's kind of like a puzzle. Sometimes and I like it when I see a word that is very similar to an English word that I know and, from that, I can determine what a sentence means. After reading something in French I feel like I accomplished and figured out something.

* I don't like reading in French. I never understand all the words in the sentence, so I always have to stop to look something up. Also, there are a lot of times when I can't understand the grammatical structure of the sentence I'm looking at.

* Sometimes, I often get a little lost when I don't see words I'm familiar with. I would like to understand it better; I would enjoy it much more!

* Not as much. It's much harder to read in French. One of the things I enjoy in general about reading is that it's easy for me to do.

3) What is your favorite reading so far in French class: "Le Chandail de Hockey", "L'Amant" or "Une petite robe de fête"? Explain your choice.

* I enjoyed both "L'Amant" and "Une Petite robe de fête," but I liked "Une petite robe de fête" the best. This was probably because I really liked being able to sort of understand the harder sentences, and because I liked the way the author put some of the the things he said, in a sort of poetic way with a lot of imagery. I also liked the message a lot.
* I liked the “Chandail de hockey” because I think it's easier to follow a story with a concrete plot when you're at our level.

* “Chandail de Hockey” was easiest, but I liked the last one best, and the images that went along with it were pretty.

* I liked "Le Chandail de Hockey" the best because I thought it was very cute and it reminded me of how I and my siblings behave towards sports. Like how we love sports and are so interested in what famous athletes are doing. The story was also very funny because the mother reminded me of my mother. Like she always wanted to do stuff to please her children but sometimes she did things that were a bit ridiculous.

* "Une petite robe de fête" was interesting. They all seemed relatively equal in comprehension.

* “Le Chandail de Hockey”. I understood more of it than any of the other stories.

* "L’amant is my favorite reading in French. I think it was the most readily understandable and the topic was relatively interesting.

4) What do you think you have learned from this reading? (Culture, vocabulary, grammar etc.)

* Possibly a little about culture, definitely some vocabulary, but mostly just some ideas. It was really nice to read something in French where we were reading it to learn about what it said more than the words or verb tenses used in it.

* I think these stories convey a lot about French culture, etc. and are always helpful in picking up new vocabulary and reinforcing grammar. However, I think the most important thing gained from reading these stories are strategies for how to approach texts in French and how to maximize our comprehension, even if we don't know all the vocabulary.

* The last reading had a lot of higher grammar. What sticks with me was the 'main blanche' part, which I take to mean some kind of expression for wealth. Also it was probably the most poetic thing I've
read yet in French, even through high school, and really the whole point of taking French I think is because it can be such a beautiful language

* I think that I learned mostly vocabulary.

* Mostly vocabulary, the grammar can get a little confusing when I come across something I haven't learned yet.

* Mostly culture, because I only learn grammar and vocabulary when I'm doing drills or practicing out loud in class.

* Mostly, I think I have learned about French culture from the readings. Maybe, also some vocabulary... but not as much because it's difficult to figure out the exact meaning of words in context.

5) What is "Literature" according to you? Explain. Are any of the texts we have done in class "Literature"? Why?

* I actually took another class where we spent a really long time arguing about this, and I haven't come to any conclusions myself. I guess writing that is written to share something or teach something to someone else (even though with some works like “The Diary of Anne Frank” this might not be intentional). I would consider the second two texts to be literature, not the hockey one. This is because the hockey one didn't have any far-reaching lessons that I noticed, other than some stuff about being grateful. The other two were much more creative and insightful.

* When I think of literature, I associate it with fiction, although I would agree that it could contain other forms of writing. With this in mind, I think the “Chandail de Hockey” is really the only thing that we've read that qualifies.

* Literature is something written with an expressed theme in mind, following established literary traditions or making new ones, something that can transcend particulars of place and time in which it was composed. We haven't read any yet I don't think and thank god!
* Literature to me is a long story which contains many elements that are interesting to talk about such as themes and interesting characters. The texts that we read in class, because of the lack of time we have had, aren't really long enough to be considered literature because there is not adequate time for the characters to develop like in a longer novel.

* Generally, I think of literature as some sort of famous piece of writing. Often artistically above average, and well known. The texts in class could be literature, particularly “l’Amant” and “Une petite robe de fête”. It is hard to judge reading in a second language, although I believe they were noted as well-known French pieces.

* I think of literature as any written information meant to teach a lesson. I think what we've read is literature.

* Literature is really any book published to serve a purpose, to be read. Generally, it applies to more story-telling than hard facts, but I consider almost any book literature. So, yes, all of our selections were literature.

6) What do you think can help you to read more "easily" a French text? Is it rather some help with the vocabulary or with the grammar?

* Generally I have the hardest time with vocabulary and I get frustrated when I need to look up lots of words. I like in the text how they have the definitions next to the words, and I would like that if the explanations were in French even more (like for this one how we thought of other words we could put in the spaces). I find that the grammar is easier to work out from the context, as long as you know the verb tense.

* I think just practicing will help. Maybe a couple more short stories? I don't know if using one text throughout the entire year would be as helpful because I think it would get old and it wouldn't feel like we were making as much progress.

* I think that it is both vocabulary and grammar but maybe more grammar. Sometimes if I don't know a word I can still figure out what a sentence means but sometimes there are different conjugations of verbs present in French text that I am not familiar with and that can be somewhat confusing.
* Mostly vocabulary. If I know the vocabulary I can usually understand the main ideas from the text. Grammar would also help, although I would consider vocabulary more imperative to understanding.

* Mostly grammar work: it is easy to look up a word you don't know, but hard to understand a sentence with a concept you don't know:

* Help with the vocabulary would be more helpful to me than the grammar.

7) Do you like to read alone or in group? Is group-work helping your reading?

* I like to read alone and discuss as a group. Discussing as a group helps me figure out things I didn't get by myself but I like to read alone so I have the chance to think to myself without getting distracted by what other people don't understand right at first.

* I like the group questions and activities that help us understand the reading— I think those are always helpful.

* I much prefer reading in a group, especially out loud

* I like to read things alone first and then be able to discuss with a group the things that I did not understand and important parts of the text that I didn’t think about a certain way

* In French class group reading can be helpful because some of us know vocabulary that others don't, thus we can help each other.

* I'm not really sure which I prefer. I think group work, because we can help each other with what we don't understand.

* I prefer to read alone. The group work is not helping my reading.

8) Would you appreciate working on poetry and/or on theater play in the French class?

* I haven't thought about it before, but I think theater plays would be really cool
because they have the conversational aspect which we get a little of through the Exchanges, but those are clearly a little contrived.

* I think the challenge with reading poetry or something at that level would not be in understanding the poem itself but in holding a conversation about it - I don't think I have the vocabulary to be able to express my thoughts on the themes, etc of a poem or play, which is one of the reasons why I like the short stories.

* I would love to do a poem!

* No opinion. It really wouldn't make a difference to me.

* I'm not very good at understand poetry in English so I feel it might be kind of difficult for me to understand French poetry. Theater play sounds like it could be fun and interesting though.

* Poetry would be a fun project!

* I think working on a theater play might be interesting. Poetry, however, I am not fond of reading in English, so I probably wouldn't enjoy in French.
Bibliography^4


^4 This bibliography, oriented towards the use of literature in the language class, purposely presents recent publications of the last ten years. For more information on older relevant publications, see Liskin-Gasparo and Nance’s bibliographies.