

A Student-Centered Cultural Approach for Teaching French Literature by Women

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Abstract: This article presents an interactive class that I developed to improve students' understanding of multiple perspectives and cultures and their proficiency skills in French as they discover works of women who write in French. My course emphasizes the integral link between French language, literature, and culture and provides multiple resources and summaries that a teacher might use to give students the background information to interact more knowledgeably with a text, and realize its pertinence to their current understanding of the world, and to their daily life as they develop their communicative skills in French. Each activity is explained as instrumental to a student's acquisition of a specific level of the proficiency skills in the 2013 *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements*.

Keywords: teaching – literature – gender studies – cultural awareness – French

This article focuses on an interactive class I first developed at my university in 2006 to improve students' proficiency skills in French as they discover the works of women who write in French throughout the ages and the relevance of this writing to today's world. In accordance with the 2013 *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements*, my methods and activities focus on performance and understanding multiple perspectives and cultures (3). This article thus draws on scholarship that addresses current ACTFL proficiency guidelines, and the teaching of writing, textual analysis, speaking, culture, and literature, to identify the proficiency skills that are targeted in each of my class activities and homework assignments for teaching a course on French women writers. My course emphasizes the integral link between French language, literature, and culture and provides multiple resources and summaries that a teacher might use to give students the background information to interact more knowledgeably with a text, and realize its pertinence to their current understanding of the world, and to their daily life as they develop their communicative skills in French.

In 2007, Scott Jaschik presented the conclusions of an MLA panel stating that the traditional model of language study followed by literary study must be jettisoned because the programs that train undergraduate majors and new Ph.D.'s have so much emphasis on literature that broader understanding of cultures and nations has been lost.

Many articles since have detailed the significance of specific courses in French and the innovations involved to make them pertinent to today's world. For example, as Sophie Marnette and Helen J. Swift report the results of a workshop devoted to teaching Medieval French in the UK, as our students are increasingly mobile and do not necessarily plan to become specialists in French, we must be more specific about what we wish to achieve in each class. They suggest that using and developing more online materials and exposing students to medieval texts in French encourages students to engage with broader contextual and conceptual issues and thus creates a link between today's world and its medieval precedent (81-82).

In a similar vein, Nancy Virtue holds that there is still a valid place for traditional literary content if it is taught with recent methods and multimedia-enhanced instruction in ways that break down the separation between language and literature (880-881). Her class, like my own that stresses performance, was held in 2006, but unlike mine, her focus was solely on Medieval French Literature and the performance of a single play. She explains the rationale for her approach as meeting the "five C's" of ACTFL's Standards of 1996, the promotion of communication, the integration of culture and language, the connections between language and content, the comparison between the students' first and second languages, and the establishment of communities inside and outside school walls (882).

As Simon Gaunt and Nicholas Harrison explain, in a prospective student's mind, relevance is linked to perceived attractiveness and to employability (110). If students could more easily notice their own progress in acquiring communicative skills in each language or literature class, they might be more eager to sign up for classes. One way to make them focus on their progress is for the teacher to articulate the skill that they are acquiring with each assignment, project or test.

The 2013 *NCSSLFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* provide Global Can-Do Benchmarks that help teachers and students target desired student-learning outcomes (4-5). For that reason, in what follows, I have articulated the skill targeted by each of my assignments and activities. In our curriculum, a student who studies an upper-level literature class would most likely have developed all of their speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills to at least an Intermediate High level. My desired learning outcomes for the class are thus to make them attain at least an Advanced Low rating in all categories. This means that in their interpersonal and presentational speaking capabilities, their goal would be to develop from being able to talk or write in general about familiar topics of everyday life to also talking or writing in paragraphs in an organized way and in some detail about familiar topics beyond everyday life. For reading skills, the target goal would be to improve from understanding the main ideas of texts in various time frames on everyday life, personal interests and studies to comprehending at least the main idea and some supporting detail in various time frames on a variety of genres and topics of some length. In listening skills, their objective would be to improve from understanding the main idea and a few details in messages and presentations on

topics of everyday life and personal interests and studies to comprehending the main idea and many details on a variety of personal and general topics of various time frames including the ability to follow lengthy descriptions and stories and to understand something unexpected.

Similar to Catherine R. Montfort, I advocate the study of excerpts of texts by French women writers as the most manageable way of encouraging students to interact with the variety of texts representative of French women writers. After a series of exercises, teacher-led discussions, and activities related to each text, Montfort asks her students to write their own literary analysis of the same text (624). My focus is slightly different as my primary goal in teaching literature is to encourage literary analysis and interaction that will be life altering and student-centered as students work on their analytic skills and abilities to speak and write in French. The teacher must be a facilitator and resource to involve students and to make them all participate. Like Nelson, I believe that this increased equality of participation promotes growth and development that allow students to make connections between all their classes more quickly. As their self-image improves, their learning becomes more involved (Nelson 1). Improving one's self-image and abilities to identify and analyze relationships between diverse subjects and cultures rapidly also makes one more marketable (Davidson 128).

This text and the assignments that I provide to study French literature using the NCSSEFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements as student goals offer a potential answer to two earlier studies citing deficiencies in the teaching of literature. Fein's 1986 study shows that colleges do not cover French literature adequately to train high school French teachers to teach it successfully (Fein 192-193; 195). The 2011 study of Nicole Mills suggests that TAs at the college level do not see the intersection between applied linguistics and literary study and are thus not effective teachers (75).

The appendices at the end of this article provide the specific instructions given for many of the assignments and the final project. The course text *Contre-Courants: Les femmes s'écrivent à travers les siècles* offers an overview of 46 French women writers and 71 texts and of their importance to understanding French and Francophone cultures. Nine units are covered, each organized by a different theme and introduced by a summary of history and literature that would introduce potential high school or college teachers to French literary history and analysis. One of the great advantages to using *Contre-Courants* is that most of the issues treated within are still pertinent to what women may and may not acceptably wear, say, and do within a given culture. Each excerpt in *Contre-Courants* is glossed and followed by questions authored by Mary Ann Caws, Nancy K. Miller, Elizabeth A. Houlding, or Cheryl A. Morgan to guide the students' reading and interpretation. During class discussions, to promote the development of a student's analytic skills, I provided additional background information for the excerpts and questions and asked the students, "How do these texts relate to what is happening in America, in France, and in French-speaking countries today?"

I agree with Marlies Mueller that students tend to read their own values into any text and that educators must prepare a student for culturally literate communications with the French that will improve relationships between the American and French-speaking cultures (21; 24). For this reason, I ask students to read current articles that we could discuss about women and the workplace, abortion rights, marriage, childcare, violence, and dress code debates in French-speaking countries. These articles may be in English for understanding similar articles in French would require Advanced High Interpretive Reading Skills on ACTFL's scale (38). Also useful are an in-class presentation in simple French and a discussion of the highlights of women's struggle for equal legal rights as provided by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, and Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen, who provide specific documents in translation that show societal efforts to keep women in subservient roles. For example, some commentators blamed the decline in the birthrate in France on women's emancipation (Bell and Offen 129-136). Such thinking led to the 1920 decrees creating special medals for mothers and making any advocacy of abortion punishable by six months to 3 years in prison and a fine of 100 to 3000 francs. (Bell and Offen 309-310).

Studying some good examples of reading a text in the context of its own underlying framework can also be helpful for developing job skills that require understanding multiple perspectives and cultures and exploring the relationship of a literary text to a value system of a particular society and historical period informed by history, sociology, and philosophy. Students also benefit from defining and discussing the meaning of literature in the classroom before they begin their study of French texts (Davis, Kline, and Stoekl 660). A multi-faceted literary analysis in English that I have used in class to help the students acquire pertinent vocabulary and to encourage them to apply what they had learned about analyzing literature in other classes to their readings in French is Charles Segal's in-depth study of Ovid's tale of Philomela and Procne. It reveals not only multiple ways of reading a literary text (drawing on a mix of reader-response, feminist, intertextual, deconstructionist, and psychoanalytic approaches), but also addresses an important myth that is often analyzed and rewritten in texts of many languages to defend women (Segal 258). In fact, Ovid's myth of Philomela and Procne has become noteworthy among scholars as a text that is misogynist in certain ways and yet very feminist in others. It is one of the first texts to be interrogated and recast by feminist literature and criticism (Joplin 28; Cixous 110). For example, Joplin identifies the inconsistencies and improbabilities in the storyline to argue that Ovid's ending focus on women's capacity for immediate violent revenge diverts a reader's attention from other messages in the tale. As the tongueless woman in the story has spent a year in seclusion patiently developing the skills and self-reflection to weave her story, the more important message is that art can be a powerful form of resistance for women (51). Vicki Mistacco, in contrast, reads Ovid's tale as proof of the patriarchal stereotype that a woman writer would speak only to prostitute herself or to unveil an act of violence or domination against women by the patriarchy (5-6). Women writers, she claims, retell

this myth and the murder of Itys to show women's efforts to break the patriarchal chain, first, by beheading its heir (symbolically destroying the patriarchy as head of society), second, by joining forces as women, and third, by refusing to remain in the roles of submission and fear traditionally assigned to women (Mistacco 13). Several other critics praise Ovid's myth as one of the first texts to present the horrors of rape for women and to show how such violence affects them emotionally and physically (Kahn 42-43; Segal 259; Marder 157; Salzman-Mitchell 146-7). Some even provide evidence that reading and discussing Ovid's tale of rape in a classroom setting has empowered young women who have been raped and helped them to talk about it and gain self-confidence (Kahn 43, 47-8, 55).

The summary of Ovid's tale is as follows: Procne marries Tereus, the King of Thrace, after her father, the King of Athens, awards her to him for his help in the war against Thebes. Five years later, at her request, Tereus goes to Athens to bring Philomela, her younger sister, back for a visit. During the journey, he rapes Philomela; then, to keep his crime secret, he cuts out her tongue, imprisons her, and later tells his wife that her sister died. Philomela reclaims her voice by weaving her story into a fabric that she sends to her sister as a message. Procne rescues Philomela, then slits her son's throat because he resembles his father too much. She and her sister then cut up her son Itys, boil him, and trick Tereus into eating parts of him. As Procne reveals what he has eaten, Philomela flings his son's bloody head at him. To escape Tereus's wrath, Philomela and Procne sprout wings and turn respectively into a nightingale and a swallow. Tereus transforms into a hoopoe (Ovid, 319-335).

Other authors also offer analyses of the intersections between perspectives and cultures that a teacher might present. Mistacco's overview of French-speaking women and the literary tradition, "Philomèle et les soeurs de Procne," clarifies that to be published, women were required to deny the importance of their writings (23). Expected destinies for female protagonists included marriage, death, or the convent (26). Historically acceptable themes for women writers have been maternity, love, and nature. Thus, from Marie de France onward, women writers have used double meanings, duplicity, ambiguity between orthodoxy and sedition, doubt between dissimulation and revelation, and a fluid notion of identity. Recurrent motifs that express the relationship between women and the literary tradition are modesty, the loss of a tongue (or language), subterfuge, weaving, deciphering, the nightingale and its song, the swallow, and flight.

In "The Queen's Looking Glass," Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also provide literary commonplaces that help students decode textual images. For example, historically, men claimed writing and painting as masculine arts performed (symbolically) by their penis, and denigrated any woman who wrote or created a work independently. This practice informs women authors' attempts to represent a symbolic female organ from which female creativity might flow. Male writers have so often characterized women as docile, dependent, and selfless angels or desiring, creative, and

independent monsters that women still struggle to escape these stereotypes of women. A woman writer must first dismantle the representations and discourses telling her that she cannot write anything worthy and is a monster if she fulfills her own goals and desires (4-18).

Gilbert and Gubar also illustrate the function of symbolic female angels and monsters within myths by including well-known sagas such as those of Adam, Eve and Lilith (Adam's first wife) (33-44). In legends from earliest times, Lilith was often viewed as the first *femme fatale*, a succubus, a spirit who seduces men and women alike and who visits men at night to steal their sperm to make demon babies, and her imagined existence has been used to justify many Jewish Orthodox customs that are designed to control women and keep them subservient to men (Bitton 130). In the 1970s, Jewish and other feminists started to rewrite their own versions of Lilith to claim her as the first feminist, the first woman who always has been equal to man (Osherow 71). Thus every bad girl in a work of art (even in Lady Gaga's productions) may be a possible rewriting of Lilith. European literature has featured Lilith since the Middle Ages and most notably in the works of the nineteenth-century authors, Victor Hugo, Rémy de Gourmont, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Anatole France, even before she started to figure widely in feminist texts of the 1970s (Bitton, 126). From the 1970s onward, Mirielle Righini, Françoise d'Eaubonne, Michèle Costa-Magna and Véra Memmi, Edith Vallée, Séverine Auffret, and Elisabeth Badinter are among the prominent French women writers who have reappropriated Lilith (Bitton, 130).

Due to Lilith's importance in various cultures, a teacher might also present or assign the following readings. As Michele Osherow explains, the myth of Lilith comes from a rabbinic "midrash" which is a type of literature meant to interpret Biblical passages. A well-known midrash, attributed to Ben Sira in approximately 1000 C. E. focuses on Lilith and explains why the first chapter of Genesis in the Jewish Old Testament states that God created man and woman simultaneously out of the earth (v. 27), whereas the second chapter of Genesis asserts that God created woman out of one of Adam's ribs to be his helpmate. (Osherow 70; Bitton 119). According to Ben Sira, the first woman, Lilith, thought that she was equal to Adam and refused to lie beneath him. Adam disagreed and tried to overpower her repeatedly so Lilith flew away to the Red Sea, where she had sexual relations with demons, and became known for stealing and harming babies. Although God sent angels to bring her back, she declined. Thus God gave Adam a new wife named Eve. According to some texts, Lilith returned to seduce Adam after he was married to Eve (Patai 221-224).

Jeffrey M. Hoffeld holds that the legend of Lilith also preoccupied Christian writers, such as Petrus Comestor, in the second half of the twelfth century, who provided Latin commentaries on the Bible. Some of these writings depict a jealous Lilith who, to help the devil, took on the form of the serpent who tempted Eve in the garden of Eden, which further inspired several representations of Lilith as the temptress-

serpent that we can see in amulets or charms of the past and on the base of statues of the Virgin Mary in early-fifteenth-century Northern France. (Hoffeld 432-33).

Raphael Patai claims that tales about Lilith or “Lilitu,” actually date from Sumerian legends of 2400 B.C.E. describing Lilith as a beautiful maiden, a harlot, and a vampire, who would never let go of a lover, but never really satisfy him. A Babylonian terra-cotta relief from the same time period shows a goddess-like figure of Lilith as slender, shapely, beautiful, and nude with wings, owl-feet and a cap covered by several pairs of horns. In northern Syria of the seventh century B.C.E., she appears on a tablet as a winged sphinx with an inscription suggesting that she is of danger to those in childbirth (Patai 221-222).

After presenting background information and providing references for additional reading, for the first unit of the course on the process of deciding to write as a woman, I asked students to write the first 250 words of their autobiography. This assignment combines the NCSSFL-ACTFL presentational writing intermediate mid-skill of writing an autobiographical statement for contests, programs, or a job or study application with the advanced task of drafting and revising an essay for school and the advanced high task of writing a family or community history (*Can-Do* 24-26). It also encourages students to consider how an author encodes limits into a text. During our next meeting, the students presented their compositions aloud. We discussed why they had all chosen a chronological structure that included date and place of birth, parents, a childhood memory, and in what way they were each talented or special in their presentations. Why, for example, didn't they start their autobiographical presentations with the moment they realized that they were talented or the deciding factor in their life thus far? To make them experience a woman writer's stereotypical dilemma, I then told them to rewrite their 250 words as though they knew that to be accepted, they did not have the right to be talented or intelligent in any way that did not include housework, cooking, making themselves into beautiful art objects, raising children, or making conversation.

The tests on the first two units combine the Intermediate High Presentational Writing ability to produce simple summaries about something learned and something researched and challenge them to attain the Advanced High goals of writing a position paper on something researched and writing an editorial piece to speculate on implications of an issue (*Can-Do* 26). Both tests were open book and consisted of two essay questions each to be completed at home. The first, worth 80 points was as follows:

Nous avons lu des extraits des plusieurs écrivaines dans la première section de notre livre de cours. Choisissez quatre sur huit des femmes suivantes et écrivez au moins un paragraphe sur chacune pour décrire son importance. Dans chaque paragraphe, il faut situer l'auteur dans son temps et son pays, il faut parler de ce qu'elle a écrit et pourquoi c'était

remarquable de l'avoir fait, et il faut parler de son originalité par rapport aux autres écrivaines: Marie de France, Christine de Pisan, Catherine des Roches, George Sand, Simone de Beauvoir, Françoise Ega, Nicole Brossard, Maryse Condé.

The second question, worth 20 points, was more open to interpretation and input from the daily lives of students: “Selon votre livre, quels sont les plaisirs et les angoisses d'une femme qui se voue à l'écriture? Comment ces plaisirs et angoisses ont-ils changé depuis le 12^e siècle?”

The second unit at-home test was designed to make the students reflect on why the writings of French women writers would be important to read today.

Choisissez une auteure de la section “En Famille.” Commentez et expliquez ce que vous avez compris et appris de cet extrait en donnant des exemples précis du texte et en citant le texte (l'extrait de l'auteure en question). Répondez aux questions suivantes dans votre explication:

- 1) Quel rapport y a-t-il entre les idées de cet écrivain et le sort des femmes dans le monde d'aujourd'hui?
- 2) De quelle façon est-ce que cet extrait peut vous aider à mieux vivre dans le monde actuel?

To encourage students to support their ideas more effectively and to be more involved with finding, deciphering, and presenting the background information that would give them more access to the target texts, I had our university reference librarian do a special class for my students on finding and using reference materials online and in our library. I also provided the following guideline:

Un bon essai sur une œuvre littéraire pour ce cours doit inclure les éléments suivants:

Une introduction

Au moins une phrase qui annonce le fil conducteur de votre essai

Plusieurs points ou opinions dont vous voulez convaincre votre lecteur

Au moins un exemple ou une citation pour soutenir chaque point ou opinion

Des notes ou références indiquant la page et l'oeuvre de chaque référence

Une bibliographie

Une conclusion

Une bonne réponse à une question d'essai ou d'examen va clairement reprendre les termes de la question, les définir, répondre à la question et donner des exemples précis pour soutenir chaque point.

Other successful tactics that promote student reading comprehension and writing production include the following. Translate more passages into English before continuing the in-class discussion in French. Share expertise about how to locate words, expressions and their translations on the Internet. Find a balance between having students work together in small groups, and having one large group discussion led by the teacher. Be ready to shift gears if either situation is not working.

Overall, students performed best when I told them to explore their texts as though understanding each text was essential to learning from history and to living better in contemporary society. For the section on “Corporalités” in which women writers explore new ways of representing the female body in relationship to other bodies and to writing, each group of two students had to interpret one excerpt or poem from Cixous, Albiach, Labé, Kristeva, Desbordes-Valmore, Beauvoir, Irigaray, Joyce Mansour, and Colette, and to present the meaning of their text based on the literary history behind it, the individual situation of its author, and the images and figures within. As further clarification, I provided the following instructions:

Pour votre présentation du chapitre “Corporalités,” je m'intéresse surtout à votre interprétation du texte dont vous êtes responsable. Je demande que vous répondiez aux questions dans *Contre-courants* ainsi qu'aux plus grandes questions, “Quel est l'intérêt symbolique de ce texte?” “Comment pourrais-je convaincre mon ami(e) qu'il faut absolument lire ce texte pour mieux comprendre la vie actuelle?” Vous avez le droit de vous servir des renseignements dans d'autres livres et sur Internet, mais ce sont vos idées sur le texte et votre façon de les expliquer et les soutenir avec des exemples précis de votre extrait qui sont les plus importantes. Écrivez une version de ce que vous voulez dire. Vous avez le droit de nous la lire pendant votre présentation si vous voulez.

This was useful as an activity because in seeking an explanation, students often consulted other texts at the library or online, and the stronger students motivated the weaker students to learn more. Giving extra credit for preparation in writing and allowing them to read what they had written resulted in better presentations, better French, increased student confidence, and quicker internalization of certain expressions in French.

Students also learned best from positive reinforcement for their performance. Studies by Stephen D. Krashen have shown that students are hypersensitive about being

corrected and that negative feedback often hinders their progress. For these reasons, I recommend the following. Praise in detail what has been presented well. Correct errors in French only if the errors were repeated several times and impaired communication. Request student reactions and questions before giving teacher feedback. Ask one or two questions to clarify points or encourage students to further reflection and interpretation. All of these tactics increased student confidence and eagerness to participate in class.

Having students rewrite and perform texts was a particularly effective activity that addressed both the Advanced Low Presentational Writing Skill of revising an essay or composition and the Advanced-Mid Presentational Speaking category of telling a story to a particular audience for dramatic effect (*Can-Do* 25, 18). As Margaret Haggstrom suggests, dramatizing literary texts helps students to analyze them and to communicate their interpretations in a playful manner while developing their speaking and reading abilities in French (9). Her research shows that students tend to wait for the teacher to announce the correct textual meaning (Haggstrom 7-8). Envisioning how to perform a text encourages freedom of textual interpretation. I thus have students do dramatic presentations of their particular text in groups of two or three for the section called "Histoires d'amour." Each group studies its text to decide which part of the reading to dramatize or rewrite into conversational scenes and which props to use. Students like to be filmed so that they can view and hear themselves afterwards; it allows them to gain confidence about what they do well and to learn more easily what they most need to improve. Examples of dramatizations that work well include rewriting Marguerite Yourcénar's "Feux" and performing it as a monologue by Phèdre; doing dramatic readings of poetry accompanied by music or dance, giving a Powerpoint with colors images, and an explication de texte; and the staging of Marie de France's "Les Deux Amants."

The section on marriage easily lent itself to an assignment designed to make students develop the Advanced Low Presentational Speaking Skills of presenting reasons for and against a position on a political and social issue and during a formal debate. This section culminated in a class debate of the pros and cons of marriage for a woman as explained in Appendix A. To help the students focus on the intellectual nature of creating arguments for debate, I found it useful to assign students to groups for or against marriage without knowing their feelings on it. One of my students volunteered to make a handout with French vocabulary and expressions to help students express opinions. I gave them 30 minutes in class to discuss with their groups, the arguments each would present during the allotted time. After the debate, each student was asked to send me an e-mail commenting on what had worked well and ideas for improving our in-class debate.

They liked the assignment for the following reasons. With this format, they could analyze a piece of literature, learn French debate rules and vocabulary, and discover facts on marriage in Francophone history and society today in a time-efficient way. The debate brought out the positive and negative sides of marriage both in the

literature and in French society today. Being assigned sides required them to explore a view of marriage that they had never seen before, and showed them that a story could be used to argue both sides. It encouraged them to ask their classmates questions about ambiguous points. Having a limited time to speak made them write down main points and citations that would guide them in their arguments, and help them to plan their speech and responses. Using the class period before the debate to meet with their direct opponent and their team to discuss their texts was very helpful. Overall, this was a “really fun” assignment that made them think about a text differently--it was easier to analyze because they had “a goal in mind.”

However, I would recommend the following during future uses of this assignment. Before starting the debate, find a debate in French on the Internet and transcribe the expressions used to ask questions or react to them. Spend class time before the debate day watching and commenting on the format and style of the debate. During the debate, give each speaker three minutes to speak without interruption. Then two questions will be asked, one by the direct opponent (specialist of the same textual excerpt) and one by another member of the direct opponent's team. The remaining time of the six minutes would be spent answering the two questions and making a concluding statement. In a class with less advanced students, allow students to have a preview of the main points of the opposite team so that questions may be prepared in advance and each student will have the chance to ask at least two questions during the debating period.

For the “Féminismes” section, the testing project combined the Presentational Speaking Intermediate High skill of presenting ideas about a famous person with the Advanced Low skill of presenting reasons for or against a position on a political or social issue (*Can-Do* 16-17). The preparation for this also requires students to practice the Interpretive Listening Advanced Low skills of understanding short presentations about people in history with following oral stories, recorded book summaries, and short excerpts from speakers (*Can-Do* 31). This testing assignment (found in Appendix B) was to reproduce the format of the former French television program that introduced newly published books of interest, *Apostrophes*, hosted by Bernard Pivot. Students first watched a video of a past *Apostrophes* program as a model for their version of the talk show, which would discuss the ten texts that explore representations of women in the section called “Féminismes.” Each student who played an author had to read the excerpts from her respective author, read about or view short films of the author on the Internet and attempt to develop a heartfelt understanding of that author’s worldview. Much like Bernard Pivot in the original *Apostrophes*, the student acting as host would have to skim all of the texts, underline key phrases and copy quotations. Websites now provide short films of numerous interviews by Pivot and lists of questions that he has asked in his show, *Bouillon de Culture*, that replaced *Apostrophes*. I told the host student to ask each author student to define and question the privileges of masculine authority, to state how she had contested these privileges in her writing, and to define her idea of woman. This

activity seemed to work best in groups of five that allowed for two performances, of approximately 40 minutes each.

For the unit, “Paroles and Politiques,” two different projects have worked successfully. The first works better with more advanced students and challenges students to perform at a Superior Level of Interpretive Reading (that of reading a position statement and understanding the references (*Can-Do* 39). The preparation necessary for the oral presentation encourages them to practice the Advanced Low Presentational Writing skill of writing summaries or annotations for a research project (*Can-Do* 25). The presentation part urges them to attain the Advanced Mid Presentational Speaking abilities of making a presentation on a subject of research and teaching a lesson to a particular audience (*Can-Do* 18). Assign the students partners and texts based on what you know about their levels and how your students work together. Then provide the following instructions.

Deux personnes vont travailler ensemble pour présenter chaque texte ou auteur à la classe. Pour chaque texte il faut faire un petit compte rendu du texte précisant les points essentiels et pourquoi c'est important dans l'histoire des femmes en France. Après chaque présentation des deux personnes, il faut poser à vos camarades de classe cinq questions sur les choses essentielles à retenir pour bien comprendre le texte ou l'auteur. Si vos camarades ne savent pas les réponses, il faut les expliquer ou les écrire pour assurer que tous comprennent les réponses.

The second project, a game similar to *Jeopardy* practices the Intermediate High-Advanced Low Presentational Skills requiring the reporting of ideas about historical events, people or issues and the Advanced Low Presentational Writing Skills of writing summaries for research projects. (*Can-Do* 16-17, 25). The questions have clearly right or wrong answers and limited time is allowed to answer each question. Every student had the responsibility of making up five questions with answers for one of the author's texts in the section. Those making questions for the same authors and texts had to consult with one another so that no two questions would be the same. The day of the competition there were two teams and a stopwatch. I asked the questions and watched the clock. Each person had a small whiteboard or paper and a bold marker. For every question that was asked, designated members from opposing teams had fifteen seconds to write the correct response without consulting anyone. If there was no correct response, another fifteen seconds were allotted for the members of each team to confer and to give a group response. If there was still no correct response, neither team received the point. This activity works best with questions that have a single factual answer.

For the final section “Passages,” on transitional moments in French women writers' lives, I asked the students to write texts on their own rites of passage, an

assignment which makes them reach toward the Advanced High Presentational Writing goal of writing entries in a reflection journal (*Can-Do* 26). Students surprised me with their honesty and their efforts to imitate the French texts by writing about such varied things as their first romance, their loss of virginity, the changes in their body from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, their first jobs, and the night their parents split up. One even presented her rite of passage in the form of a free verse poem shaped like a wedding dress and discussing the pros and cons of getting legally married.

The culmination of this course was the final presentation/final project that required students to practice the Advanced Mid Presentational Writing and Speaking skills of writing a research paper and presenting the research (*Can-Do* 26,18). Each student had to read a text by an author not studied in class, present that author in class, write a brief paper on that author's work, and grade his or her own work as explained in Appendices D and E. Overall, the final presentations revealed that the students had made good progress in speaking about French literary texts in context. Their self-evaluations confirmed the importance of positive feedback for they graded their own work much more harshly than reasonable for their level of expertise in French.

In conclusion, the activities provided for teaching French literature in this study encourage a broader understanding of French-speaking cultures and perspectives and develop a student's speaking, reading, writing, and listening communicative skills in French. The instructions provided could easily be modified for use with texts of other foreign-language literatures as well. Personalizing these homework and in-class projects to teach literature is an excellent way to create class solidarity, increase students' enjoyment of literature and decrease students' fear of reading, writing, and speaking in a foreign language. These guidelines offer several alternatives for helping students to understand the links between French literature and the globally diverse world that they will govern tomorrow.

Appendix A

Instructions pour le débat sur le mariage

Sujet pour le débat: "Une femme peut trouver son bonheur à l'intérieur du mariage."

Pour: six étudiants

Contre: cinq étudiants

Instructions: En travaillant dans les groupes ci-dessus, vous allez essayer de nous prouver pourquoi une femme peut ou ne peut pas trouver son bonheur à l'intérieur du mariage. Il faut soutenir votre position par des citations des textes dans la section sur l'amour de votre livre de classe et par des statistiques ou citations trouvés ailleurs sur le mariage dans les pays francophones.

Suggestions pour vous préparer :

En lisant chaque texte présenté dans cette section, demandez-vous de quelle manière il indique que le mariage est bénéfique ou maléfique pour les femmes. Notez vos idées.

Après avoir lu tous les textes, organisez vos idées. Est-ce que vous avez suffisamment de détails pour convaincre l'autre de votre position ?

Faites des recherches sur Internet ou à la bibliothèque pour chercher des statistiques ou histoires récentes sur le mariage en France ou dans des pays francophones pour renforcer vos arguments.

Retrouvez les autres membres de votre groupe et partagez vos idées. Organisez-vous pour que chaque membre ait quelque chose à dire sans répéter exactement ce que dit un autre dans le groupe. Il vous faut donc beaucoup d'exemples pour appuyer votre point de vue.

Appendix B

Instructions pour le programme "Apostrophes" pour la section "Féminismes"

Instructions pour les auteurs:

1. Vous êtes maintenant l'auteur que je vous ai indiqué.
2. Étudiez l'extrait de cet auteur pour bien comprendre les idées principales de l'extrait et pour être capable de parler aux autres de ce que vous (l'auteur) avez écrit dans cet extrait.
3. Faites des recherches sur Internet et dans les livres pour mieux comprendre votre auteur.
4. Préparez un discours de 10 minutes minimum sur les idées de votre auteur afin d'être capable de répondre aux questions du présentateur (notre Bernard Pivot).

Instructions pour celui ou celle qui joue Bernard Pivot, le présentateur:

1. Vous êtes maintenant le présentateur d'un programme littéraire comme *Apostrophes* du passé.
2. Vous allez lire tous les extraits de ce chapitre, soulignant et copiant des phrases dans chaque extrait qui vous ont frappé et pour lesquelles vous allez demander une clarification.
3. En plus, il faut demander à chaque auteur de 1) définir et interroger les privilèges de l'autorité masculine 2) dire comment elle a contesté les privilèges par ses écrits 3) définir son idée de la femme.

Appendix C

Instructions pour le jeu pour "Paroles et Politiques"

Chaque individu doit écrire cinq questions avec réponse concernant l'auteur et le texte dont il est responsable. Il doit y avoir deux questions avec réponse sur le texte et trois sur l'auteur ou vice-versa. Il faut rédiger des questions avec des réponses précises et assez courtes pour répondre en un mot ou deux phrases au maximum.

Les deux personnes qui formulent des questions pour le même auteur et le même extrait doivent se consulter pour être sûres d'avoir dix questions avec réponse différentes.

Nous allons avoir une compétition entre deux équipes avec toutes les questions formulées et avec des prix pour ceux qui gagnent.

Les points seront accordés de la façon suivante :

Il faut un chronomètre. Toute réponse doit s'écrire sur une feuille de papier ou un petit tableau blanc de telle façon que les autres lisent facilement la réponse de leur place. Pendant les quinze premières secondes, une personne de chaque équipe peut écrire la réponse. S'il n'y a pas de bonne réponse, je donne encore quinze secondes à chaque équipe pour trouver une réponse de groupe. Si personne ne gagne le point, le professeur donnera la réponse.

Appendix D

Projet Final

Ce qu'il faut faire pour votre présentation:

Choisissez un auteur et un des livres sur la liste ou une œuvre d'une autre femme écrivaine pas traitée dans notre livre. Vérifiez votre sélection avec moi.

Lisez votre œuvre une première fois. Prenez des notes en marquant soigneusement des pages ou sections sur ce que vous trouvez intéressant, ce qui vous fait penser à d'autres textes ou idées étudiés ou discutés dans le cours.

Faites des recherches sur votre auteur pour savoir sa situation, sa formation, sa classe sociale, les stéréotypes sur elle.

Analysez comment l'histoire personnelle de votre auteur se montre dans l'œuvre que vous avez choisie.

Analysez le reste de l'œuvre choisie par rapport à tout ce que l'on a étudié dans ce cours et par rapport à ce que vous avez découvert en faisant des recherches

**** Attention: Lisez avec l'esprit critique ce que vous trouvez sur Internet ou dans des livres. Il faut vous demander si votre source est fiable et perspicace. Il y a beaucoup de choses publiées qui montrent une vision assez limitée. Je vous demande d'avoir des interactions intellectuelles avec tout ce que vous lisez.

Relisez votre présentation quand vous l'aurez finie mais avant de la faire. Ecrivez-moi une lettre m'expliquant votre méthode de travail, les qualités et faiblesses de votre présentation et ce que sa préparation vous a appris. Dites-moi aussi quelle note votre présentation mérite et pourquoi.

Après avoir fait votre présentation, ajoutez un paragraphe à votre lettre pour parler des qualités et faiblesses de votre présentation orale, ce que cette présentation vous a appris sur vous-même, l'enseignement, etc. Dites-moi aussi quelle note la version orale de votre présentation mérite et pourquoi.

Ce qu'il faut faire pour votre dissertation finale:

Préparez votre présentation en notant bien tout ce que vous avez lu et cité pour le faire.

Faites votre présentation devant la classe.

Considérez les commentaires de vos camarades de classe et de votre professeur pour modifier certaines parties de votre présentation.

Perfectionnez votre français et votre style. Le style écrit est souvent différent du style parlé. Vérifiez votre grammaire et orthographe en vous servant des outils de votre traitement du texte.

Vérifiez que vos citations, vos références, votre ponctuation conviennent aux normes du style MLA.

Relisez votre dissertation quand vous l'aurez finie. Ecrivez-moi une lettre m'expliquant votre méthode de travail, les qualités et faiblesses de votre dissertation et ce que vous avez appris en la faisant. Dites-moi aussi quelle note votre dissertation mérite et pourquoi.

Appendix E

Œuvres et auteurs suggérés pour le projet final:

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Fettouma, Touati. *Le printemps désespéré: Vies d'Algériennes*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984. Print.

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Nimier, Marie. *Celui qui court derrière l'oiseau*. Paris: Sassier et Gallimard, 2005. Print.

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