

AP® French Literature Syllabus 3

Course Overview and Planner [c1]

First semester

First quarter

Pierre et Jean, Guy de Maupassant (Summer Reading)

Pierre et Jean, Guy de Maupassant

Moderato Cantabile, Duras

Second quarter

Selected *Fables*, Jean de La Fontaine

“Les animaux malades de la peste,” “Le chêne et le roseau,” “La mort et le bûcheron,” “Le loup et l’agneau”

L’école des femmes, Molière

Une Tempête, Césaire

Second semester

Third quarter

Candide, Voltaire

Poetry of Du Bellay and Louise Labe in the context of sixteenth century

“Heureux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage,” “Si notre vie est moins qu’une journée”

“On voit mourir toute chose animée,” “Je vis, je meurs: je me brule et me noye”

El Cid, Corneille (first half)

Fourth quarter

El Cid, Corneille (to the end)

Selected poems, *Les fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire

“Correspondances,” “Hymne à la beauté,” “L’invitation au voyage,” “Chant d’automne,” “Spleen” (“Quand le ciel ...”), “Recueillement” (From *Les fleurs du mal*)

Selected poems of Apollinaire

“Le pont Mirabeau,” “Les colchiques,” “Mai,” “Automne”

C1—The course is structured to allow students to complete the entire AP French Literature reading list in text form.

Grades are given for written formal *explications de textes* on selected passages and essays (175 to 200 words). The course is conducted almost exclusively in French. Occasional written quizzes consist of questions and grammatical exercises. Written work counts 60 percent of the grade.

C2—The teacher uses French almost exclusively in class and encourages students to do likewise.

Oral presentations assess ability to speak in French for five to 10 minutes on a subject. Occasional lab sessions for listening comprehension and speaking, memorization of poems, and oral participation are graded also. Oral work counts 40 percent of the grade. [C2, C6]

C6—Class discussion and essay writing in French are essential components of the course.

Midyear Exam: One third of first semester grade. Three-hour examination similar to the AP French Literature Exam and short grammatical exercises on usage of tenses (similar to exercises in the AP French Language Exam).

Grammar

There is very little time to teach grammar in this course, but several students take the AP French Language Examination as well the AP French Literature Exam at the end of the year.

French for Oral and Written Review (Carlut, Charles, and Walter Meiden. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993.) is used as a reference for independent work and for occasional exercises.

First semester

Students are asked to review irregular verbs in all tenses and usage of tenses with the six major points of difference between French and English (1. *imparfait/passé composé*; 2. tenses used with prepositions of time such as *depuis, pendant*, etc.; 3. usage of future after certain conjunctions; 4. tenses in *si* clauses; 5. infinitive after prepositions, except *en* and *après*; 6. subjunctive.)

Students practice with exercises on usage of tenses from the corresponding section in the AP French Language Exam. We stress the ability to use tenses correctly, both orally and in writing.

Second semester

Review of adjectives, adverbs, pronouns (personal, interrogative, possessive, demonstrative, and relative), and constructions with prepositions. Practice exercises on grammar from the corresponding section in the AP French Language Exam.

Explications de textes and essays are graded and marked with coded abbreviations. Before returning written work, I present a brief summary of mistakes most often found and to be avoided next time. Since they have skipped lines, students can write their corrections in class just above the underlined errors that have been identified. Thus they can become aware of recurring mistakes in agreements, ending of verbs, tenses, or particular grammatical structures. For content, students rewrite paragraphs at home, if necessary, once they have taken note of helpful vocabulary expressions.

Teaching Strategies

Textual analysis begins with a good reading of the passage aloud working, with questions in class and later at home. Occasionally students work in groups and report their findings to the class. Graded writing assignments range from paragraphs to more structured *explications de textes* with a few guiding questions. Sometimes after analysis and class discussion, to recapitulate in a very few minutes, we go around the room and each student states what he or she has found most remarkable in the poem or text in prose we discussed that day. [C3, C6] It does put the students on the spot, but it builds their confidence; it is remarkable that they are able to come up with good comments in an instant. I provide the students with a list of common terms in French used to discuss literary analysis, and encourage them to keep the reference list of terms handy whenever speaking or writing about a text: *le roman, le texte narratif, le récit, l'événement, la durée, la chronologie, la diégèse, le méta-discours, le lecteur, le narrateur, le narrataire, l'explication de texte, l'ironie, la métaphore, la métonymie, la comparaison, l'autoportrait, le discours narratif, l'auteur, le mode, le récit de paroles, le style indirect, le style indirect libre, le temps, l'allitération, and l'assonance.* [C4]

C3—The course teaches students the techniques of literary analysis.

C6—Class discussion and essay writing in French are essential components of the course.

C4—The course teaches students a basic vocabulary of critical terms.

Oral *explications de textes* [C3]

After the class has studied together two or three chapters of *Candide*, for example, each student gives an oral analysis of a chapter, in French. First the student must write on the board three characteristics he or she has chosen to develop to present the chapter. To help students organize their analysis, they can look at the list I prepared of such characteristics. This prevents relying on paraphrasing. (Such a list can be generated with different rubrics best related to the particular literary work that we are analyzing.) [C2, C5]

C2—The teacher uses French almost exclusively in class and encourages students to do likewise.

C5—The course includes close reading and extensive discussion of texts, with particular attention to character, theme, structure, and style, and to how these elements are related to overall interpretation.

The presentation must be convincing in drawing examples from the text, of course, and have a very short introduction and conclusion, which are often used to replace the chapter in the *conte philosophique*. It is followed by clarification of some points, questions, and discussion, always in French.

It is good to ask the presenter, before he or she concludes, if there is something else that has caught his or her attention and then help to fit it into the analysis.

CARACTERISTIQUES A CONSIDERER POUR L'ANALYSE DE *CANDIDE*

LE RECIT: rapidité, alternance de rythmes, parallélismes, contrastes, retour en arrière

LE POINT DE VUE—omniscient, focalisation externe (témoin extérieur, pas un héros), focalisation interne (un héros)

COMPOSITION (structure du chapitre)

LE COMIQUE: de mots, de situation, de caractère (Pangloss), de répétition et aussi:

- La distanciation par rapport au réel—naïveté de Candide qui juge Pangloss « le plus grand philosophe de la province, et par conséquent de toute la terre ».
- L'humour noir—On décrit des atrocités comme si elles étaient banales.
- Le procédé de « l'étranger »
- L'ironie
- L'auteur dit le contraire de ce qu'il pense: « un bel autodafé »
- L'antithèse ou l'antiphrase comme:
« Les Padres y ont tout, et les peuples rien; c'est le chef d'œuvre de la raison et de la justice. »
- L'hyperbole qui augmente ou diminue excessivement la vérité pour produire plus d'impression (voir ci-dessus « le chef-d'œuvre »)
- Le jeu sur les causalités—si Colomb n'avait pas attrapé la vérole on n'aurait ni le chocolat ni la cochenille
- L'effet obtenu n'est pas celui qu'on espérait—autodafé puis tremblement de terre
- La parodie—des romans d'amour (scènes de retrouvailles), des romans d'aventures, des romans picaresques
- Le contraste ou la surprise (une liste où le dernier mot ne va pas avec les autres)
- Le burlesque—la fesse coupée de la vieille

LA CRITIQUE—des fanatismes, de l'intolérance, des inégalités sociales, de la justice, etc.

LES THEMES DU ROMAN PHILOSOPHIQUE

- Le voyage, l'interrogation sur le monde (l'optimisme ou le pessimisme), la quête de l'amour et du bonheur

LE ROMAN D'APPRENTISSAGE (évolution du héros)

LES PERSONNAGES—stylisés, êtres de chair ou marionnettes

L'EXOTISME—la couleur locale

II. Learning to read and enriching students' vocabulary

1. Summer reading

2. Reading *Pierre et Jean*

Over the summer, students will be asked to read *Pierre et Jean*. Upon their return to school, we will engage in interactive discussions about Francophone literature first, and then discuss plot, themes, characters, and some passages of the novel. [C5]

Since they are reluctant to use a French/French dictionary, because the definitions often contain words they do not understand, I prepare, for each assignment, a list of words (about 15 to 20) that could present problems when reading. I email it to a student who has volunteered to give simple definitions of the words in French after consulting *Le Petit Robert*. The completed assignment is then sent back to me for review and correction. I make copies to distribute to the class, so that everyone can refer to it while reading the chapter assigned. Each student takes turns writing the definitions once, and has thus begun using a French/French dictionary. Occasionally a vocabulary quiz requires a review of the definitions. Ten words are then quoted in the context of the novel, and students are asked to substitute a synonym in the sentence, making all necessary changes in the syntax.

3. Reading poetry

When reading poetry, all the words must be understood in their context and students are urged to ask questions about meanings, if some are unclear. They come to see that the placement of words in the verse is crucial. The emphasis is given usually to a word at the beginning or the end of a verse. But in the sonnet VIII of Louise Labé “*Je vis, je meurs; je me brûle et me noie*” the key word is in the very center of the poem: “*inconstamment*.” Once the students have agreed that this is indeed the key word, the poem is easily explained. The lover is “*inconstant*,” unfaithful, he often leaves but only to return, and this provokes the intense suffering and great joy of the poetess.

When reading Apollinaire, it is helpful to remember that when the poet can no longer sustain the resurrected intensity of his emotions, he looks elsewhere. This explains the “*ruptures*,” the breaks, from the eyes of his beloved to the children coming out of school, in the poem “*Colchiques*,” or again from the fallen petals of fruit trees resembling the eyelids or the nails “*de [celle] qu’il a tant aimée*” to the caravan of the gypsies, in the poem “*Mai*.”

4. Reading plays

L’Ecole des Femmes is sometimes difficult to read for our students but they are sure to enjoy it anyway. The meaning is revealed in the *explications* of the scenes, and as for the monologues, we have everything to gain by looking at their structure and by requiring a bit of paraphrasing, if necessary.

C5—The course includes close reading and extensive discussion of texts, with particular attention to character, theme, structure, and style, and to how these elements are related to overall interpretation.

Creative work in French

In French schools, students have practiced *Reconstitution de textes* for a long time. I have used this method to encourage creativity in American students. Even in French II, for example, students have managed to write coherent stories in poems entitled “*Le Départ*” and modeled in form on Jacques Prévert’s “*Déjeuner du matin*.” They were to use as many intransitive verbs of motion as possible. Usually, the best poems did not come from the most outstanding students; they were projected on transparencies and their authors were pleased. It is not a small feat to be a recognized author in a foreign language!

One could also write on this pattern:

Heureux qui, comme (nom) (verbe) (complément)

Ou comme celui-là qui.(verbe)(complément)

Et puis (verbe) (adj.) de (nom) et de (nom)

(Infinitif) (prép.) (nom) (complément circonstanciel de temps)

Parts of Baudelaire’s poems lend themselves quite well to this kind of exercise. And of course, the *calligrammes* of Apollinaire can be a source for creativity.

Personal philosophy in conclusion

When students evaluate the AP Literature course, they always mention that they found the texts remarkably interesting. French literature is indeed very rich and beautiful, and while it is very helpful to resort to creative activities to keep the students interested, the real excitement comes from reading a beautiful text. Our students have become very dependent on visual images, but they must be reminded that the text can yield pleasure, especially if we know how to “open it” with a good *explication*. Moreover, literature is an image of life, but life is an image of literature. Literature affects us so profoundly that it transforms our lives.