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2011 Volume III: The Sound of Words: An Introduction to Poetry

Pêche, Poire, Papaye, Pastèque: Breathing Life into Building Vocabulary by Exploring and Writing Poetry in the French Classroom

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by Crecia Cipriano

Introduction

Students want to learn. In language classes, students want to learn how to say things. Both statements seem obvious, but I think as teachers, we sometimes lose sight of these truths and inadvertently stifle the innate curiosity our students possess. As language teachers, we need to teach vocabulary as well as sentence structure and grammar. Language is complex, and the rules governing conventions of speaking and writing are not always concise. So whether it is in the name of consistency or procedure, classroom management or time management, we make choices about what vocabulary to teach or not teach, what phrases to introduce or ignore, and these choices will invariably leave students wanting and needing more. And unless we introduce that vocabulary in a relevant and appealing context, providing students opportunities to explore and create with it, it will likely remain little more than indecipherable words on a page, incomprehensible utterances with little sticking power and even less purpose.

I want students to be confident in the vocabulary they are learning so that they feel empowered to use it. That means that when selecting vocabulary to teach, the list must be wide enough to hit most broad areas of interest, but narrow enough that we have sufficient class time to introduce and reaffirm the pronunciation and proper usage of each word. I use pronunciation practice to engage students in vocabulary; rather than passively repeating vocabulary in a dull drone, we enunciate actively, varying the voices we use, how softly or loudly we speak, and using hand movements to highlight sound elements. I also have students write out personalized phonetic spellings of vocabulary, to which they can refer when needed. By doing this, they begin to develop an understanding of the patterns and relationships between spelling and pronunciation of French words and word parts, at the same time as they are supplying themselves with a useful study and reference tool. During this time, the repetition helps to develop a foundation of sound memory from which students may comfortably proceed to the application of vocabulary in communicative contexts. That is to say, in addition to learning vocabulary for vocabulary's sake, this process of vocabulary acquisition also paves the way for more complex language usage and understanding.

Sometimes I provide supplemental vocabulary lists, with pre-printed pronunciation guides. This does indeed give students more options, more ways to say what they want to say. But no matter how expansive the list, or how carefully and thoughtfully selected, or how inclusive of student input, there will *always* be some word or

phrase missing; the list will always be in one way or another inadequate. And it will indeed remain lifeless unless students are adequately inspired to do something with it.

Not only do students need a reason to use what we teach them, but they also need an opportunity to contribute to the classroom learning experience. For some, a vocabulary list will be missing a particular expression, for others, the very fact that it is a pre-determined, finite selection of vocabulary will be its downfall. For those students who hunger to explore, to research, to be active agents in their own education, a list of choices provided by a teacher will simply not do. And for those students who do not currently demonstrate that hunger, well, this is where we start to nurture it in them, to provide them the tools and opportunities for inspiration that bring it to the surface.

In carefully laying out the groundwork for all, individual voices can get muffled if they don't have proper guidance in filling in the missing elements of communication for which they search. Or worse yet, that curious spark to discover and express could lose its glowing ember. So the task is to create a method for allowing students to explore and create, with enough structure to keep the focus on developing an understanding of the linguistic basics introduced, and enough freedom to experiment and construct their own linguistic understanding at individually-appropriate rates.

Enter, poetry. I have long used poetry and song as a way to engage students, to get them practicing memorization techniques that will help with vocabulary-building, as well as to teach them common sentence structures and speech flow patterns. But I have shied away from incorporating the *writing* of poetry in my language-learning lessons because of that beginner's tendency to want to express an English thought verbatim in a language that has vastly different linguistic rules and forms. The newly-acquired language just can't keep up with even a relatively short lifetime's worth of expressive possibility in an established language. And this is frustrating to a new language learner, who often takes it to mean a failing on his or her part rather than just the nature of all the steps involved in mastering a language.

After having been re-familiarized with some basic poetic forms and sound devices during the course of this seminar, I now endeavor to craft a unit that will provide enough structure and guidance for students to be able to focus on word exploration rather than complex thought expression, and that this will allow students to build vocabulary in an expressive *enough* context for excitement and enthusiasm to guide them in that pursuit. One big reason I use song and poetry in my classes is that it lightens the mood so that students feel more comfortable taking risks. As world language teachers, we are familiar with Stephen Krashen's "Affective Filter Hypothesis," which indicates that second language acquisition must occur in an environment of low anxiety. When a student is very self-conscious, nervous, or embarrassed, the affective filter goes up, the student hesitates or withdraws, and not much language learning happens. When the filter is down, the student is comfortable enough to take the risks necessary to practice communication, including making mistakes. Songs and poems help to lower that filter so that my students worry less about "messing up" because they are too busy, either having their own fun or else laughing at me as I ham it up to take the heat off of them! Either way, they are generally much more relaxed and receptive in this type of environment. Both song and poetry, as creative forms, honor the pursuit of entertainment and experimentation, which takes the emphasis off of perfection and the fear that often accompanies its pursuit.

In this unit, students will learn various techniques associated with the sound of poetry, as well as some simple poetic forms that will provide them a format in which to create poems organized around thematic vocabulary in the French language classroom. Students will classify and explore vocabulary on their own terms, according to their own preferences. They can then teach each other vocabulary that they have researched by sharing

their poems, which not only puts ownership into the hands of the student, but also opens up the door for some great insight (as students figure out the best ways to teach each other). This poetry creation process will fulfill my need to individualize the vocabulary acquisition process as well as supply a worthwhile reason for using that vocabulary.

Classifying vocabulary is a proven effective learning strategy. With this unit I can take students beyond charts and traditional graphic organizers to poetry as an alternative way to organize learning both graphically, through the written poem, as well as aurally, while voicing the poem. Students can cluster vocabulary within a poem according to theme, and then too according to gender. For example, consider as a line of poetry the title of this unit, *píche, poire, papaye, pastèque.* It means *peach, pear, papaya, watermelon* . In English, the words might not flow so smoothly, but in French, there is a definite rhythm; the first two words are one syllable, and the second two are two syllables (1). This creates a nice little chant that helps students to remember the words. They all start with the same "p" sound, and they are all feminine vocabulary items. By linking choice vocabulary through the poetic sound device of alliteration, and stringing that vocabulary together in a pleasing rhythmic pattern, we can take a concept that can be very challenging to second-language French-learners, like gender of nouns, and make it both easier and more fun to investigate (2). We are providing here a different way of organizing vocabulary and learning, the aural equivalent of the graphic organizer. Tapping into the way rhythm and rhyme aid memorization will give students needed support in vocabulary retention and conceptual understanding.

Although the strategies explored in this unit will prove useful across many languages and levels with certain adjustments, I am writing for a 5 th grade, first year French class.

Rationale

In New Haven, there is a well-established world languages curriculum for grades 7 and 8, but the 5 th and 6 th grade curriculum is very open. At my school, we focus on vocabulary acquisition and basic question and answer interactions to develop linguistic skills and fundamental language understanding. A big part of how I hook students is through the sound of the words; by over-enunciating and emphasizing the unique sounds of the vocabulary, I try to instill in students an understanding of the similarities and differences between French and English. I use a lot of cognates to build bridges to linguistic understanding, and stressing the sound of the words in French helps to reinforce that bridge. For example, the word *orange* is the same in both languages, but in French it is pronounced "oh- **rahnj** " instead of " **orr** -enj." When I emphasize the sound of the word, it sticks in students' heads better. And by stressing the sound of word parts (like *–ique* and *-eur* in French instead of *–ic* and *–or* in English) I hope to create a sound memory for students from which they can draw when they are learning or hearing new vocabulary.

This unit will provide students with opportunities to experiment with French vocabulary while embedding it into their knowledge base. I hope that it either nurtures the place in them that loves rhyme and song and sound or perhaps introduces them to that place through the practice of linguistic elements. It will also introduce basic dictionary skills, so that students may guide their own vocabulary acquisition process appropriately.

Be sure to talk with the Language Arts teachers at your school about what students already know, what things you can help reinforce, and areas of possible collaboration.

Poetry, Prose, and Prosody

Something created. The etymological origin of the word *poem* is curiously, pleasantly, vague. A poem, as distinguished from *prose* , is *not* straightforward discourse. There are many variations around the definition of what poetry is, but they all address an intention to convey emotion, ideas, or experiences, in a creative way that involves both word choice and elements of song, rhythm, meter, or beat.

In researching sound devices in poetry, the term *prosody* pops up all over the place. My inner word-root-hunter could not get over the relation I saw between the words *prosody* and *prose* . But the context-clue-sleuth in me quickly understood that prosody seemed to embody traits specific to poetry and not prose. There was also this issue of pronunciation; although it seems obvious that *prosody* should be pronounced with a long "oh" sound like *prose* , I kept hearing it said with a short o "ah" sound followed by an "s" instead of a "z" sound.

American early modernist poet Ezra Pound called prosody "the articulation of the total sound of a poem (3)." An online query results in definitions stating that prosody refers to the patterns of rhythm and sound used in poetry, as well as the rules that govern their usage; that prosody is the rules for writing poetry; the grammar of meter and rhythm of poetry; the patterns of stress and intonation in a language; the study of poetic meter and the art of versification; the study of sound effects (4). Incidentally, although discussions of prose writing do indeed refer to these elements of rhythm and sound, the term *prosody* is reserved for the realm of poetry. In fact, the closest English word-relative to *prosody* is actually the word *ode* , a lyric poem or a poem meant to be sung. So it is the *ODE* in *pros-OD-y* that connects us to the rules of sound in poetry.

In exploring the meaning of the term *prosody* , I am struck by the tension between noticing, studying, and appreciating the artistic sound of poetry, and a more formulaic approach which dictates rules and structures for poetry's sound. As I researched the concept of prosody in French poetry, this tension was tipped to the side of order and form. In this unit, we will not focus on the peculiarities of the classical rules of French poetry, as that will take us further from our goals at this stage, and would likely stifle rather than foster the creativity and open exploration being pursued. Instead, we will concentrate on noticing common sounds and making connections to vocabulary thematically, using poetic forms with which students will be at least somewhat familiar.

Rhyme and Rhythm as Mnemonic Devices and Bridges to a Multi-Sensory Approach

It was ancient practice to craft poems and ballads with repeated ending sounds so that they were more easily memorized (5). This is the reason we still remember the nursery rhymes we were told as children. Perhaps the usefulness of rhyme in terms of remembering can help explain why so often people over-articulate rhyme,

especially end-rhyme, in poetry. Most of us were taught to read with rhyming words, and I suppose there is some comfort in reading a rhyme even into adulthood. Not to mention the simple pleasure of discovering a rhyme-match, or of anticipating the end of a sentence based on the logical rhyming conclusion. In any case, the usefulness of rhyme is something that can be easily leveraged in the classroom to help students memorize vocabulary through poetry.

If rhyme is useful, comfortable, fun, then rhythm is, to paraphrase Mexican poet Octavio Paz, "magical." It is the *je ne sais quoi* of a poem, the mystery of how words mix and mingle to create an atmosphere, the way in which words grow off the page into a sensory sound garden. Rhythm is the reason we often know lyrics to pop songs we don't even like, and the reason I teach students boring but necessary things like conjugations and days of the week to familiar tunes. Technically speaking, rhythm is the "organization of sound patterns the poet has created for pleasurable reading (www.homepage.smc.edu...)."

While I don't think I know quite how to *teach* poetic rhythm, I can use it to engage students and show them how to honor the pronunciation of every word, to delight in the individual sounds formed when speaking words as well as the transitions involved in speaking words in succession, to experience rhythm as it shows itself, in a word, in a phrase, in a line. When practicing vocabulary, along with over-enunciation of the word I often highlight a rhythm to the word or phrase. For example, the phrase *je crois que (I think that)* is made up of an unstressed accent (a shorter sound) followed by a stressed accent (a longer sound) and then another unstressed accent, like *buh BUHH buh* . Intonation is also very important in French, and the stress of the accent often correlates to a rise or fall in pitch. So in practicing the vocabulary, I will sometimes snap or stomp or clap on the stressed syllable to drive home the difference, and students will mirror not just the sound but also often the physical gestures that I use to accompany the words. I will also use my hand to follow the peaks and dips in pitch, an update on the old bouncing yellow ball from childhood sing-along programs. These strategies help to connect the physical body to the mental thought process involved in our lessons.

Another way to get students present in the body-feeling of the vocabulary is to focus on the changes in the face when speaking new words. I prompt students to notice and feel the long "O" stretch in the face while saying *je CROIS que* , adding gestures that mirror the feeling, the hand moving from fingers pressed together closed to blooming open with a twist of the wrist. Not only does this try to get across the sensory connection between words and meaning, but it also helps to loosen students up. As previously indicated, I find it important to purposely overdo it. By telling and showing them that no one will look sillier than I will, it gives them freedom to really get into it and get the most from this multi-sensory practice. And heck, even when they think I'm being "corny" (usually not until 7 th or 8 th grade), they also see me smiling, enjoying myself and the language. This is something that cannot be taught or quizzed, but I hope it will help inspire a love of language and, if not that, then the permission and encouragement to be that into *something,* anything.

Sound Devices

Sound devices are tools that help the poet convey meaning or experience to the reader/listener. By enlisting sensory memories and reactions, the poet is able to draw the audience in on a deeper, more visceral level. Here the poem can be felt and related to in ways that it cannot be merely, bookishly, understood.

The expected and the unexpected are equal but opposite ways into a reader's core connection to a poem. When you hear something you expect, as when you discover a rhyme pattern in a poem and are able to accurately predict the right word that will best continue the pattern, it is as if you were in collaboration with the poet, like a co-author, or at least on the same mental wavelength as the poet. Conversely, when you hear something that you don't expect, as the poet chooses to break the pattern (or to keep the sound pattern but break with the established meaning via different word choice,) the unexpectedness of the poet's choice surprises and delights, and you are impressed with the incongruity of the choice and thus either the mind and skills of the poet or else the amazing versatility of language. In essence, these devices work in two distinct ways, tapping into either the wish for comfort, the familiar and known, that which is similar; or else the appreciation of a surprise, the exciting and unexpected, that which is different. As students develop comfort with the poetry-writing process, they can be guided to practice writing rhymes and crafting poems with elements that are expected as well as those that are unexpected.

A wonderful poem that can be used to this end is *Le cheval chante* by Surrealist poet Alain Bosquet [http://ecprim.lefuilet.free.fr/b.htm#bosquetcheval]. The title, *The horse sings* , demonstrates how each short line starts with a noun and is then paired with an unexpected verb action. In this poem, it is the brook, and not the horse, that whinnies, showing concrete examples of unexpected meaning to lead the way for students to think about unexpected sounds. Some of the words rhyme, some do not, and just when you think there might be a pattern, it is broken. The first three lines address sounds animals make, and 5 th graders love animals! (*Le cheval chante / Le hibou miaule / L'âne gazouille* or *The horse sings / The owl meows / The donkey babbles.*) After the fourth incongruity, the poet says to the reader "C'est bien, mon enfant: / joue avec les mots," encouraging the child/reader to play with words. The poem continues to describe objects with incongruous adjectives or actions and speaks of words as being friendly or biting. Both the format and the idea of being playful while combining vocabulary are well-suited to this unit.

Rhyme, Alliteration, Assonance, and Consonance

Rhyme is the broad category of sound devices that relates to sound "echoes," or a correspondence among sounds within poetry. We are perhaps most familiar with *end-rhyme* , that is, when the ends of lines of poetry rhyme or have similar sounds, as in *Muffet* and *tuffet* in the popular nursery rhyme: *Little Miss Muffet / Sat on her tuffet.*

Alliteration, also known as *head rhyme* or *initial rhyme* , is the repetition of initial consonant sounds or sound clusters, of stressed syllables in a stretch of writing. In the phrase "stressed syllables in a stretch of writing" for instance, the beginning "s" sound is repeated with the words *stressed, syllables,* and *stretch* . Two of those words share a further alliterative element as they begin with the consonant cluster sound "str" (*stressed* and *stretch* .)

Often the words whose initial sounds are stressed embody important characteristics or themes of the poem, and the stress draws attention to their importance. Alliteration can help in the memory process, as being able to narrow a word down to one that begins similarly to others in a section helps in word retrieval. It also can give a poem a musicality that can be very attractive. Alliteration appeals to that wish for comfort referred to in the previous section. Although overuse of alliteration is something to guard against in contemporary poetry, for our purposes, overuse is more or less the goal, as it will help students connect vocabulary without complex sentence structures they don't yet know.

Similarly, Pierre Brandao, in *Small Treatise on French Prosody* , differentiates between the French verbs *rimer*

and *rimailler* , the latter denoting a contrived work in which a word's rhyme sound often supplants precise shades of meaning, the former in which words and ideas marry into a cohesive work that adheres to rhyme rules organically. It is the difference between choosing a word because it rhymes and will do just fine in the line and choosing words that fit just right together to convey full meaning while also participating in a rhyme scheme. For example, in the classic nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty," *And all the King's horses and all the King's men* is followed by *Couldn't put Humpty back together again* . Well, the word *again* is actually redundant, as putting something *back* together already conveys the *again* -ness of the event, but it was added to maintain the rhyme.

As was addressed in the previous section, the ability to predict end-rhymes can draw a reader in by way of the comfort factor, but there is indeed a fine line between that and an overly obvious, simpleton's rhyme. No one wants to feel as if the rhyme has been dumbed down to ensure recognition. It is as if *rimer* is the goal, and *rimailler* the goal gone wrong. Yet, for our language practice purposes, the works produced herein will mostly, by design, fall in the land of *rimailler* . Our goal here is to explore and develop vocabulary through poem creation. Down the road, we can focus on poem creation via other linguistic goals.

Let's not forget about alliteration's siblings, consonance and assonance. Consonance is the repetition of those consonant sounds anywhere else other than at the beginning of words, and assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. These can be noticed either within a line, a stanza, or a whole poem. End-rhyme is a form of consonance.

To demonstrate assonance while visually exploring the way similar-sounding word parts can be spelled differently, see "Lesson Plan 2 - *Mon Petit Chat* and Assonance." This poem, about a cat that doesn't grow big because all it eats is junk food, is comprised of twelve short lines. Each line ends in the same vowel "ah" sound, and there are four other instances of the sound within the poem.

Maurice Caríme, the author of *Mon Petit Chat* , also wrote a poem called *Le hibou* which not only stresses the long O sound "oo" throughout the poem, mirroring the owl as main character both in the "oo" sound of *hib* ***ou*** but also the *hoo* sound the animal makes. It also teaches a grammar rule: Some *ou* ending nouns take an *x* in the plural and some do not. http://ecprim.lefuilet.free.fr/c.htm#caremehibou.

French Rhyme Rules

Below are areas of concern and things to consider that are particular to French poetry.

Masculine and Feminine Rhymes

Both French and English poetry feature masculine and feminine end-rhyme, also referred to as masculine and feminine ending. While French poetry counts syllables and English poetry differentiates between stressed and unstressed syllables, masculine and feminine end-rhyme in both schools of poetry pertains to the final syllable in a line. In masculine end-rhyme it is sounded or stressed, while in feminine end-rhyme it is unsounded or unstressed. In French poetry, this translates to a feminine rhyme ending in a silent, or mute, "e" with everything else being referred to as a masculine rhyme. WARNING: Masculine and feminine rhyme have absolutely nothing to do with the gender of any nouns in the line. I repeat, masculine and feminine rhyme have absolutely nothing to do with the gender of any nouns in the line. For this reason, although the concept

can be taught if so desired, I strongly recommend not using the technical lingo in the classroom. It will only further muddy the already difficult concept of noun gender for students.

In traditional French poetry, lines must follow some pattern of alternation between masculine and feminine rhyme, although there are several patterns from which to choose (M/M/F/F or its partner F/F/M/M; M/F/M/F or its partner F/M/F/M; M/F/F/M or its partner F/M/M/F.) These patterns can also be slightly altered (6).

Just to keep it interesting, of note is the potential for confusion with the term feminine rhyme, in English poetry, which is used to denote the rhyme of a two-or-more-syllable word, in which the first syllable is stressed and the rest are not (as in *happily* and *scrappily* or *hurry* and *scurry* .) Here, masculine rhyme is the opposite, with the first syllable unstressed and the rest stressed (as in *bemoan* and *dethrone* .) These terms are sometimes further simplified to indicate that the stress is on either the final syllable of a line (masculine) or else the penultimate, or second-to-last, syllable of a line (feminine.)

The Mute "E"

I like to tell my students that an "e" at the end of a French word "gives you permission" to pronounce the consonant before it, because final consonants are generally not pronounced in French. So that in the word *consonne* , for example, one can hear the "n" sound since the "e" gives you permission; without the ending "e", the word would be *conson* (as there would be no need to double the n, which is irrelevant to the pronunciation but notable all the same) and the "n" sound would only show itself as a slight nasal memory hanging in the air.

To my middle school students, these are odd rules that go against their natural instincts of pronunciation. So I consistently ask students why we do or don't hear certain letters, so that they may begin to develop an automaticity as regards French pronunciation. These concepts are being developed and solidified in my 5 th grade classes. So although I will incorporate the following poetry-specific pronunciation rules when we read and practice with established poetry, I will not teach this explicitly until 7 th or even 8 th grade.

Poetry Rule 1: When a mute "e" ends a word within the course of a line of poetry, and that word is followed by a consonant, then the "e" is no longer mute and must be pronounced (7). (As in the example of the title of this unit given previously, where *píche* would normally be pronounced "pesh" but because it is followed by a consonant in a line of poetry, it would be pronounced "pesh-uh.")

Poetry Rule 2: The same as rule #1, except it specifies that if the word ends in a silent final consonant or consonant blend *preceded* be a mute "e", then the "e" is no longer mute and must be pronounced.

Poetry Rule 3: A mute "e" followed by a vowel or silent "h" sound is never pronounced. Instead, it is *elided* as if creating a contraction between the two words. To explain *elision* , I tell my students that many rules of French language revolve around the desire to sound good, and that two vowel sounds together sound choppy and awkward, that they don't *flow* like they do when contracted. I over-exaggerate the choppiness of non-elided phrases and accompany them with semi-robotic body language, and use flowing hand gestures and silky voice to showcase how much better the phrases sound elided.

Poetry Rule 4: (Just to keep you on your toes) A mute "e" at the end of a line is never pronounced.

Poem Forms

The following are some simple poem forms with which students will probably already be familiar. This is really just a starting point, and as we encourage our students to explore and create, so can we explore different poem forms and create great new application opportunities for our students.

"Hello, Goodbye" Poems

These poems are super simple, and great for beginning language students! Just have students make a series of couplets in which the first line says "Hello" followed by a noun and the second line says "Goodbye" followed by another, related noun. You can play with this by having some use *Bonjour / Au revoir* and others use more casual forms like *Salut* and *Tchao/Ciao* . Note, since *salut* and *tchao/ciao* are used as both greetings and leave-takings, it will be important to check for that understanding when using them.

Use this poem form for practicing opposites. For example, when learning the weather, dates, and seasons, students could create poems that range from *Bonjour mars / Au revoir février* , with a very simple, non-rhyming connection between two consecutive months, to *Bonjour, printemps / Au revoir neige,* where there is no rhyme and ideas are connected by an understanding of what weather conditions occur in each season, to *Bonjour, il fait du soleil / Au revoir, il fait froid* which replaces the noun with a verb phrase to become a little more conceptually complex, and also has different rhyme correspondances to explore (*f* ***ait*** /so **leil** and *Au rev* ***oir*** /fr **oid**).

A note on definite articles: As we are personifying these nouns, they become names and as such, the definite article is omitted. Additionally, the definite article is omitted when addressing someone, as in *Bonjour, docteur X* and not *Bonjour, le docteur X* . This runs contrary to the general rule, which I strongly emphasize with my students, that they must always use the definite article, even where it is not needed in English. For example, we must say *J'aime le chocolat* and not *J'aime chocolat* . One way to make the distinction more clear is to capitalize the nouns, since we are personifying them. Then it would make more sense as to why the article is omitted. Students will enjoy examples in which you use their names to clarify that "We don't say *Bonjour,* ***le*** Tyrese or *Au revoir,* ***la*** Shelley, do we?"

Anaphora

With all of its *Bonjours* and *Au revoirs,* the preceding poem form employs a poetic device called *anaphora,* the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several lines. Although I wouldn't recommend introducing the actual term as such in the course of this unit, *anaphora* can certainly be used to write a variety of poems throughout this unit. Another example of anaphora can be found in the poem *Il était une feuille (Once there was a leaf)* by Robert Desnos [http://www.paperblog.fr/2682447/il-etait-une-feuille-robert-desnos/]. In it, the phrase *Il était* is repeated four times, each time it introduces a different part of a tree, and is followed by several short lines of description. This technique can be used to write poems that reinforce often-used phrases, like those expressing likes (*J'aime...)* or wants (*Je veux... / Je voudrais...)* . Opposing concepts can be paired, so that a line about a like can be followed by an opposite dislike. This technique can also be used to practice confusing vocabulary expressions like *J'ai mal à + body part* to express having a pain in a particular body part (as in *J'ai mal à la títe* for *I have* "*bad*" *in the head,* or *a headache* .) In this way learned vocabulary is also reviewed.

Sometimes you will find poems that you don't necessarily want to use in class but that model great techniques. There is nothing wrong with following a style that you notice but changing it to suit your needs. For example, Phillipe Soupault's *Donnez-moi* [http://ecprim.lefuilet.free.fr/s.htm#soupault] uses anaphora in repeating the line *Donnez-moi je vous prie (Give me please)* and following it with different (plural) items using the possessive adjective *vos (your)* . While I don't want to share this particular poem in class, I like the style and so I would create a poem template with a similar pattern. Just be sure that you acknowledge the original poem on any structure/direction sheet you create, to give credit where credit is due!

See the section on "Dictionary Skills and Writing Anaphoristic Poetry" for a way to use anaphora to teach and practice using English-French dictionaries.

Name Acrostics

A name acrostic is formed by writing one's name vertically down a page, and choosing an adjective beginning with each letter of the name that describes the person whose name is being used. It is clearly a more visual form and can be used to complement the other, more sound-based forms. These are good starting points, and good support tools for students who may be struggling with more involved poem forms. Depending on what stage of language acquisition students are at, this can be a great way to introduce and practice the French grammar rule that adjectives must match the noun in gender and number. At very early stages though, this will be too complex, and so to modify the form you can have students make a name acrostic comprised of nouns, like favorites within a category of words (favorite foods, for example). Students can color code their nouns to indicate which are masculine and which are feminine (and perhaps underlining those that are plural.)

Sometimes students will not be able to find something that starts with a letter that they actually like, so you can offer solutions like adding happy or sad faces after each item according to preference, and having students convey that feeling through recitation of the poem. Or you could teach phrases for *Yum (miam-miam!)* and *Yuck (beurk!)* to add after each item, which gives students real-world conversational conventions and fillers as well as adds a great element of fun. Or they could add familiar phrases like *J'aime /Je n'aime pas* applied appropriately according to language level (more advanced students could practice changing from the singular form of the word to the plural form when necessary, as in *Mangue – J'aime* ***les*** mangue **s** . Or the concept of direct object pronouns can be practiced be jumping to *Mangue – Je l'aime* or *Mangues – Je les aime* . For instances where no word in the category can be found, you can either have students use an unrelated word, or else you can think of a clever, fun phrase to substitute. For example, with a missing X-word, *Oh là là, pas de X! (Oh my! No X!)* or, borrowing from a children's song to teach French called *Comment t'appelles-tu?* you could use a nonsense phrase like *X – X- ah – bela – chambu* . Or students could simply repeat the letter several times (*X X X X.)*

For another variation on this form, instead of drawing from themed vocabulary, students can pull from all the vocabulary they know to choose nouns in any category with which they identify or that hold special meaning to them. This can also be used for dictionary practice. Later on down the line, the same poems can then be used to practice gender matching, as students can add adjectives to their poems.

Cinquains

A cinquain is a simple, five line poem made up of words rather than sentences, so it is a great form for this unit. There are different ways to write a cinquain, but for our purposes, I would stick to a clear structure, such as the following:

Line 1: Noun

Line 2: Two adjectives that describe the noun in Line 1

Line 3: Three verbs associated with the noun

Line 4: Four words (or a phrase) reflecting how you feel about the noun

Line 5: Either repeat the noun or replace it with another synonymous noun

Additionally, you can ask students ready for more of a challenge to consider the number of syllables in each line:

Line 1: 2 syllables

Line 2: 4 syllables

Line 3: 6 syllables

Line 4: 8 syllables

Line 5: 2 syllables

Dictionary Skills

Students often struggle with using French-English / English-French dictionaries. I will speak for myself and say that because it seems fairly intuitive, I sometimes forget that students need to be explicitly taught how to use them, and that they likely haven't ever used them before. Just because a student may have used an English dictionary does not mean that the usage of our dictionaries is understood.

So students will need to be taught about how French-English dictionaries work, including that they are split into two section, one for looking up French words to find the English, and the other for finding French words for what we want to say in English. I recommend passing out sticky flags for students to mark where the English-French section begins. Teach students the abbreviations that are used in your dictionary related to nouns and verbs, (that a little italicized *n* denotes a noun, an *m* indicates a noun that is masculine, an *f,* feminine, and a *v* denotes a verb.) Introduce the concept of multiple meanings and usages of a word, and that the first entry is not always the one we need. Model the process, with examples. Although this will likely be a consistently troubling concept for students, just keep at it. They need it!

Sidenote: For more help gathering class-wide vocabulary, consider using authentic French websites. You can do a search on google.fr (for France, or .ca for Canada, etc.) for theme categories to find useful informational sites. For example, when studying foods you can use a French nutritional website that lists calories in foods as a source of vocabulary, and students can explore the vocabulary options there in a new way.

Dictionary Skills and Writing Anaphoristic Poetry

As a means of establishing identity and ownership of this process, I suggest having students create a "My name is" poem. Using *Je m'appelle* to begin a succession of lines, students can include their name, but also other nouns and even verbs that they like or that they feel represent themselves. This can be the motivation behind using the dictionary and practicing those skills. I wouldn't add adjectives to the poem just yet, as that raises the whole masculine/feminine noun-adjective agreement issue; also, the poem will be more powerful without adjectives, as adjectives are the logical way to describe oneself, and we want to go outside of that proverbial box here. You can set requirements for the poem, including number of lines, noun/verb pattern (ie: alternate nouns and verbs, or something more complex like: end lines 1-6 with a noun, 7-8 with a verb, 9- your choice, and 10 with your name), rhyme scheme (as differentiation option for students looking for a greater challenge).

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan 1 – Introducing Poetry

These lesson ideas are designed to be applied within any unit of study. For explanatory purposes, I will model them here with food vocabulary.

--- Create a master list for teacher of unit vocabulary, broken down into nouns – masculine and feminine; expressive phrases; add-ons (*un peu* , *beaucoup* , etc.)

--- Create a master list for teacher of previously-introduced vocabulary that will be important in this unit. Although invariably a student will (pleasantly) use something you didn't anticipate, still try to anticipate the most likely candidates so that you can have support sheets for students who struggled with those prior phrases as well as craft opportunities for students who mastered those phrases to realize that they can be applied in this new context.

--- Introduce and practice vocabulary according to methods familiar to students, emphasizing word sounds

--- Students categorize vocabulary with graphic organizers. Some suggestions:

--- Masculine / feminine / nouns that start with a vowel so you have to memorize gender rather than remember *le* / *la*

--- Phrases that express like / dislike (use happy/sad faces to categorize)

--- Themed, as in these foods are fruits, these are vegetables, etc.

--- These graphic organizers will be used to write the poems, so depending on your goal, you will choose different end poems and so different graphic organizers.

--- In some cases, you may wish to introduce a poem that uses this vocabulary, in others, it may put students in a frame of mind to produce something more complex than what we are going for. Each unit will lead to different potential poems, and each class is different as far as what will work. In general, if you can find a children's song/poem or something that is very simple, then introduce it here. Otherwise, introduce the

somewhat more complex poems between units or within units for which you are not asking students to write poetry, to keep the distinction clear between poems written to convey depth of meaning and those written to explore vocabulary and aid in memorization. I have found that many Surrealist poets, with their bent towards nonsense and incongruity, often keep their poems simple. Of course some Surrealist poem topics are very much inappropriate for the middle school classroom, so read carefully!

--- Introduce a poem form and have students experiment with creating poems, using graphic organizers as a starting point

--- You can have students pair and share poems, offering corrections, suggestions, and acknowledgment of what works well. Students can do rewrites based on student and teacher feedback. The class can create a new poem based on pieces of individual poems. Students can recite for the class.

Sample resources:

A poem using end-rhyme that would go well with a food unit:

Pomme et Poire by Luc Bérimont

[http://www.les-coccinelles.fr/lienpage1/poesies/pommeetpoire1.pdf]

For a variety of songs and poems for children about food, see this website
[http://troispetitstours.over-blog.com/article-22486263.html]

Lesson Plan 2 - Mon Petit Chat and Assonance

Poem: *Mon Petit Chat* by Maurice Caríme http://ecprim.lefuilet.free.fr/c.htm#carememonpetitchat

Type the poem out in the largest size print that will allow you to have the whole poem on one sheet. Distribute two copies of the poem to each student. **Before** reading the poem aloud, have students underline all the words that **look** like they rhyme, just from looking at the spelling, on one copy. Although I have clustered the rhyming words in the list below, students will simply underline spelling-rhymes as they go without differentiation (8).

> J'ai / sais / jamais; chat / nougat / chocolat / rat; Orange / mange / étrange / Solange; petit / dit / grandit; aimant / Tante.

Then have students highlight the part of the word that rhymes; now they should color-code according to similar rhyme sound.

> J' **ai** / s **ais** / jam **ais**
> ch **at** / noug **at** / chocol **at** / r **at** / Or **a** nge / m **a** nge / étr **a** nge / Sol **a** nge / aim **a** nt / T **a** nte
> pet **it** / d **it** / grand **it**

Ask for observations students can make about the rhyme in this poem. Give them a little wait time, but if they seem stuck, ask them to identify the rhyming sounds and ask guiding questions around these ideas: that the *ah* sound is used much more than the *ay* and *ee* sounds, that there is more rhyme in the last words/syllables in each line, that it is the same *ah* rhyme in those last lines. Next, if a student hasn't already steered the conversation this way, ask if there are any other words that also match any of those three rhyme sounds and after class discussion, have students circle those rhyme sounds in the highlighter that matches the rhyme.

ah sound: ç ***a*** / l' **a** ppelle / p **as** / pourqu **oi** / j **a** mais
ee sound: *n* ***i*** / sour **is**
ay sound: no more, but there are some….
eh sounds: *c*' ***es*** t / étrange / **ai** mant / **et**

Students may not get all of the rhyme sounds at this point. That is fine. Coax them a little, allow them full opportunity to find them, but don't force it, as they may discover the rest when the poem is read aloud. Only now should you read the poem aloud to students. Be sure to enunciate and repeat it several times. Then ask if there are any words to be added to our rhyme groupings and make the additions according to the past procedure. Have students use the clean copy to clearly highlight all the similar rhyme sounds (using the draft copy as a guide). On a poster that can then be hung on the wall and added to, list all the different ways to write each of the sounds in the poem.

ah sound: ***at*** / **a** / **as** / **oi**
ee sound: ***it*** / **i** / **is**
ay sound: ***ay*** / **ais**
eh sound: ***es*** / **é** / **ai** / **et**

Ask why *chat* , for example, is pronounced *shah* and not *shatt* . [As indicated earlier in the unit, I emphasize the concept of silent final consonants, so this question can be asked with confidence that it will be answered correctly. Although I do speak in French about *les consonnes finales silentes* , I introduce the concept of "silent final consonants" in English, and I regularly ask that question in English, always emphasizing the rhythm inherent in the phrase, so that students connect the (difficult) concept with a particular sound (***SI-lent FI-nal CON-so-nant!)*** , which helps them remember the concept.] Here be sure to mention the difference between stressed and unstressed vowel sounds, so that students recognize that *appelle* starts with the *ah* sound but that it is not stressed as in ***AH-pell*** but rather unstressed as in ***ah-PELL*** .

Finally, students can now practice the poem line by line via choral repetition. Lead them in over-enunciating each vowel sound. Have fun with this! Here you could break students into five groups (*ah, ee, ay, eh,* and "other") and have the class read the poem part by part; also, students can stomp or clap in accordance with each rhyme sound as the recite.

Lesson Plan 3 – Experimenting with Rhythm

This year, my 5 th graders learned a repetitive French children's rhyme called *Un éléphant se balançait* . [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_poetry] Students broke themselves into groups, and I asked them to practice the song, which they had memorized, according to whatever rhythm they wanted. The tune that was included on the website was difficult for me to remember, and I knew they could come up with something better than I could! This was a fairly accidental moment that led to a great new process. Each group brought such enthusiasm and originality to the verses that students were so excited to weave them all together. They enjoyed seeing what their classmates had done with the same song they themselves used. These multiple renditions of a piece can be a powerful motivator, creating a process that honors each student's unique strengths and gifts. Here the drummer and the dancer find a way to shine alongside the aspiring actor, the young girl who likes to play clap games and the student no one knew could sing so well.

As long as classroom procedures and expectations are clearly set, you can let students break into groups, get a little loud, and do their thing! Be sure to give students a warning when their noise level rises too high or their focus starts to turn from the task at hand. But by warning, I don't mean an enthusiasm-squashing *waarr-ning* , but rather a kind and gentle reminder, allowing students the opportunity to develop an understanding of where boundaries are for this type of task as well as to make positive decisions in order to meet expectations. Of course, if boundaries continue to be crossed, then the activity must end for the day, but do clearly re-explain to students your expectations and that as a class you will try it again tomorrow. I like to think of it as being "firm yet forgiving," so that if expectations are not met after a few chances today, then we move to something else more structured, but we can certainly try again tomorrow with the proverbially clean slate.

This process will continue over a number of days (regardless of behavior) and you can decide if it will be a concentrated, fully focused time, or if you will spread it out over a longer amount of time by using partial class periods.

After a degree of brainstorming and practice time has passed, let students know that they will be performing for the class. It is important to stress that this is a work-in-progress, and that there are still going to be lots of things that need to be ironed out. That this is a feedback practice and not a finished performance. The goal is to de-stigmatize the idea of performing in front of the class, so if we perform when no one is polished and perfect, we can start to get more comfortable with performing and each other. Instruct students about the difference between constructive feedback that is specific and helpful versus subjective opinions and criticism. I like to remind students that the goal is improvement, so comments need to be not only specific but also considerate. Vague comments like *That was great!* or *I didn't like it!* don't help anyone know what in particular was successful or unsuccessful, what exactly worked or did not and why. And vague negative comments just make people feel bad. Maybe some people make some improvements from simple criticism, but the best improvements are made when specific guidance and feedback is given. It is important that students learn that they need not agree with or "like" everything, but that they share feedback considerately and respectfully, with the goal always to offer guidance that will help the student improve. I model this heavily and consistently, as it is not necessarily intuitive for students.

In culmination, students can perform their variations, either in class, for another class, or at an event to which parents are invited.

Resources – Reading List - Websites

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http://www.abcteach.com/free/h/howto_cinquain.pdf

This is a nicely explained resource for writing cinquains.

http://www.alcor.com.au/french_rhyming_dictionary.asp

French online rhyming dictionary, in which you can specify the number of rhyming letters desired.

http://bbfrenchtranslation.com/prosody-in-french-translation.html

This helps clarify differences in English and French prosody.

http://ecprim.lefuilet.free.fr/

If you type in a letter of the alphabet and then *.htm* after the forward slash in this web address, you will get a variety of poems by authors whose last name begins with that letter. For example, for a poem by André Breton, type http://ecprim.lefuilet.free.fr/b.htm. These poems are great to use in the classroom, as they are compiled on a blog for parents, teacher, and students at a public elementary school in France.

http://www.etudes-litteraires.com/prosodie.php

A great resource for a French explanation of prosody, including details and analysis concerning the different meanings certain vowel and consonant sounds generally convey in French.

http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/ca/geddes.pdf

A comprehensive glossary of poetic terms.

http://homepage.smc.edu/meeks_christopher/SOUND%20DEVICES%20USED%20IN%20POETRY.htm

Another helpful glossary of sound device terms.

http://www.ielanguages.com/frenchphonetics.html

Useful resource when addressing and introducing words with similar sounds but different spellings in French.

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rhyme

Explanation of rhyme, including difference between rhyme in English and rhyme in French.

http://www.poesiefrancophone.com/conseils_prosodie.htm

French explanations of prosody and poem forms.

http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/home.do

This website is chock full of information, including lots of poems, information on poets, a section for teachers and one for students, historic recordings of great poetry, and an expansive glossary of poetic terms. Although it does not address French poets, it has a feature with which one can browse poems by form or theme, which can help the teacher get examples to increase his or her own understanding.

http://phonologique.wikispaces.com/

A Slideshare slideshow resource on French and phonics.

http://www.poesie.net/enfants/index.html

French website where children submit their own poetry. It is interactive and playful and full of great, simple poetry examples for our students!

http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/formsofverse/furtherreading/page2.html

Great, detailed breakdown of different types of rhyme.

http://www.sc.mahidol.ac.th/sclg/sllt/Constructivism__singhanart_.pdf

The section on "Characteristics of Constructivism" gives a nice bulleted list that supports what we are doing in this unit.

http://www.suite101.com/content/poetry-in-foreign-language-classes-a44904

Here are examples and explanations of the poem formats treated in this unit.

http://theapple.monster.com/training/articles/2785-3-5-finding-rhyming-words-in-a-french-poem

This is lesson plan for finding rhyming words in French poetry. Notable is something done in the shared reading section. Although I have used color-coded cards to show different rhyme sound endings and to make posters gathering these sound words, what I haven't done is what is suggested in step 8, that the teacher associate a color with a word sound and actually *replace* the letters with just the color, to further drive the correlation home.

http://troispetitstours.over-blog.com/article-22486263.html

A French collection of children's songs and poems themed around food vocabulary.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_poetry

Although clearly not the final source for anything, I find the information about French poetry explained quite clearly; this can help give a surface knowledge that helps determine what to research further.

/curriculum/units/2009/2/09.02.06.x.html

This is a curriculum unit I wrote a couple years back that is relevant to the current unit, called "Poetry and Differentiated Instruction in the Middle-School French Classroom.

/curriculum/units/2003/3/03.03.05.x.html

A language arts teacher at my school wrote this curriculum unit, called "Making Connections Across the Curriculum through Poetry." There is great information here as well as an idea of how you can collaborate with your language arts teachers.

/curriculum/units/2003/3/03.03.04.x.html

Another curriculum unit offering explanations of different poem forms and ideas about teaching poetry, called "Presenting Poetry to Children: Poems that Delight and Excite to Write!"

Resources – Reading List – Books

Attridge, Derek. *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction.* Cambridge: CUP, 1996

This text can help provide needed background on the complexities of poetic rhythm.

Brandao, Pierre. *Petit traite de prosodie* . As found at: http://spafenlorraine.unblog.fr/files/2008/12/prosodie1.pdf

Very helpful. See for writing on rich rhymes.

Brandin, Louis and Hartog, W.G. *A book of French prosody, with specimens of French verse from the twelfth century to the present day (1904).* As found on the Internet Archive. http://www.archive.org/details/bookoffrenchpros00branrich

This source is rich with detailed explanations of traditional French poetry conventions, and it includes a variety of examples. These traditional conventions are generally much more strict than what we will be applying in this unit, but this is a great resource to build teacher knowledge.

Appendix – Implementing District Standards

New Haven follows the 2005 Connecticut World Language Curriculum Framework, which is in turn based on the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996), as well as recent research findings in world language education. The framework is composed of six domains: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons among Languages, Comparisons among Cultures, and Communities. Although this unit will touch on all domains, the linguistic analysis of, listening to, and recitation of poetry in the unit most clearly address the following domains:

World Language Content Standard 2 –COMMUNICATION (INTERPRETIVE)

Students will understand and interpret spoken and written language on a variety of topics.

Students will understand and interpret French poems and songs.

World Language Content Standard 3 – COMMUNICATION (PRESENTATIONAL)

Students will present information, concepts, and ideas to listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Students will recite and sing both original and established songs and poems.

World Language Content Standard 5 – CONNECTIONS (INTERDISCIPLINARY)

Students will reinforce and expand their knowledge of other areas of study through the world language, and vice versa.

Students will make linguistic connections between French and English word parts, spelling, and vocabulary, through learned and written songs and poems.

World Language Content Standard 6 – CONNECTIONS (INTRADISCIPLINARY)

Students will acquire and use information from a variety of sources only available in the world language, using technology, print, audiovisual, media, data and human resources.

Students will read and recite songs and poems written in the target language, found online (print/video/audio) and in books, from established poets as well as new and emerging young poets who post works online.

Endnotes

(1) It should be noted that if the phrase were part of a traditional poem, the rules of the *silent e* (the *e muet* en français) would dictate that the first two words would actually be spoken as two-syllable words (pe-shuh, pwah-ruh) and the third as having three-syllables (pah-pie-yuh).
(2) To continue the poem, students could choose one item they like and one they do not, and use those phrases we have already learned to comment on them. Example: *Píche, poire, papaye, pastèque / J'aime les píches, je déteste les pastèques.* They could complete the next line with other feminine food vocabulary items starting with a different letter and repeat. Or else they could choose four "p" foods that are masculine and repeat.
(3) http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/479409/prosody
(4) http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/ca/geddes.pdf ; www.google.com; www.univsource.com; http://www.jerichoschools.org/hs/teachers/lfischer/apvocab.htm; www.google.com; http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=prosody; http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/479409/prosody
(5) Information on rhythm and rhyme, as well as all other sound devices, gathered from: http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/ca/geddes.pdf; http://homepage.smc.edu/meeks_christopher/SOUND%20DEVICES%20USED%20IN%20POETRY.htm; http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/formsofverse/furtherreading/page2.html
(6) Information on alternation of end-rhyme from Brandao, pages 4-10.
(7) All rules from Brandin, Chapter 1, pages 2-3.
(8) *Eye rhyme* is the term used to indicate a rhyme that is so due to spelling but not in pronunciation. Usually this is because the pronunciation has changed over time (like *love* and *prove* .) I use the term *spelling rhyme*

instead because these words do actually rhyme.