

## A Call to Teach the Dangers of Racism in the French Classroom

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Recently, after having had the wonderful pleasure of reviewing Alain Guédé's *Le chevalier de Saint-George* for the *French Review*, as well as having previously reviewed some of the instructional materials on the life and music of Carole D. Fredericks (produced by Tralco-Lingo Fun) for both the *French Review* and the *NECTFL Review*, I was inspired to find new ways to address the best means possible of incorporating more in-depth and relevant lessons on racism into my French classes. As the nations of the world's economies becomes increasingly interdependent and currently struggle with recession, it is essential that we as teachers of all disciplines strive to cultivate among all our students human kindness and the basics of consideration toward our fellow man or woman.

At the 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention of the AATF in San José, CA, Anne Jensen gave a session on racism. As I was unable to attend her session, I contacted her to ask her a few questions about her work with teaching about racism with her advanced students. Anne was incredibly generous with her time, including sending me her outstanding PowerPoint from her session presentation. I share below with all AATF members her answers to my questions as well as lesson plans based on Anne's PowerPoint presentation that interested members may adapt to serve their individual teaching needs and goals. The lesson plans, which include my annotations, reflect the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning and are intended to be interdisciplinary in nature so that, if possible, French teachers may collaborate with their colleagues in English, History, and Social Studies.

One such possible collaboration would be in the month of January around the time of the Martin Luther King holiday.

### **1. How did you come to teach about racism with your advanced students?**

My husband is African-American and as a mixed-race couple, we faced some prejudice when we first got together. When our son was born, there were several times when people who didn't know us well thought he was adopted. When he was in elementary school, I always made a point of introducing myself to his teachers. For some reason once they met me, their attitude toward my son changed. People would often say to me, "Your son really does look like you." It was as though they assumed that my son should only look like my husband and not me.

In addition, my students were always curious about my husband, my son, and me, and for this reason I thought it was important for them to think about how racism evolves and what we can do to change people's attitudes. My students come from a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Even though Palo Alto is a very tolerant community, there is still a need for students to think about the causes of racism and what can be done to combat it.

When I met Connie Fredericks-Malone, she shared with me more information about her sister Carole Fredericks and her music. I decided to incorporate more about Carole's life in my unit as well.

I have developed a unit of approximately three weeks that centers on the theme of racism vs. tolerance in France and in the world in general. I have prepared a PowerPoint presentation and given it at several conferences. Interested French teachers can contact me about the specifics of the PowerPoint presentation.

### **2. How do your students respond to the unit?**

The final project (as explained in my PowerPoint presentation) is a chance for students to create a personal reaction to the unit in which they express their feelings. Some of them have had personal experiences of prejudice against themselves. Yet others have family members who are prejudiced. Others do research on the organization *SOS Racisme* in France. Others use their musical and dramatic skills to express their feelings for the acceptance of diversity. Many students tell me that this is their favorite unit of study.

### **3. What are your best teaching tips and advice for your fellow teachers who would like to teach a unit on racism?**

The most important thing about teaching a unit like this is to have already built a good rapport with students. I could not do a unit of this depth with lower-level students.

However, I prepare the students in lower-level classes by discussing differences in eating habits, customs, traditions, and teaching students that everyone has different ways of living, eating, and looking at the world. By the time they get to my AP class, they have already had a good background in critical thinking. During the time we spend on this unit, I ask students to do a lot of journal writing and self-reflection so that by the time they do their final project; they can really be honest about what they think. I am very confident about what I do in class and that helps make this unit a success. Anytime a teacher is unsure about what he or she is doing, students pick up on weaknesses and do not respond well.

#### **4. What are some follow-up units to complement the unit on racism?**

We do a unit on the Holocaust, focusing on the occupation of France during World War II. I use the documentary *La France Divisée*, an excerpt from Joseph Joffo's *Un Sac de billes* as well as the film *Au revoir les enfants* by director Louis Malle.

#### **5. What cross-cultural implications and/or inferences can be drawn for U.S. students after having done a unit on racism?**

American students often don't realize that racism exists all over the world. They know that the Civil Rights movement happened in the 1960s in this country and that there are organizations such as the NAACP, but they often don't think that racism exists in other countries. We talk about the fact that in France, North African immigrants (from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) face the most discrimination. We discuss the fact that every society has some group that ends up suffering from discrimination.

#### **6. How interdisciplinary is your unit on racism?**

This unit is important for my students because it links to their study of the Civil Rights movement in U.S. history, literature they read in English classes, and other important themes in government classes. In general, this unit really helps students develop their critical thinking skills and view the world in a different way.

#### **7. What elements do you incorporate in the unit?**

As described in my PowerPoint presentation, I include a literary text, a collection of poetry; music by Fredericks, Goldman, and Jones; an article about Harlem Désir and the movement *SOS Racisme*; and YouTube interviews from the *SOS Racisme* website.

#### **8. What supplemental resources would you recommend to teachers?**

I would recommend that French teachers see the movie *Le Gône du Chaâba*, based on the autobiography of the same name by Azouz Begag. I use an excerpt of the book in my class. It is called "Une humiliation mémorable." Azouz Begag was the son of illiterate Algerian immigrants who grew up in Lyon. He was the only member of his family to go to lycée and then on to university. He eventually got a doctorate in sociology

and was named “Ministre d'Égalité.” However, he stepped down when Sarkozy was elected because he was so discouraged about the renewed conservative and almost xenophobic views of the political right in France.

### **Sample Lesson Plan: A Study of French Authors, Musicians, and Organizations Combating Racism**

#### **Day One: Setting the Stage**

- Write the word *racisme* on the board.
- Ask students to make a list of groups or individuals who have suffered from discrimination in this country.
- Have students brainstorm reasons why prejudice happens.
- Ask students to write a journal entry discussing prejudice they have witnessed in their own community (for example, at school or in the neighborhood).

#### **Day Two: *Une humiliation mémorable***

- Ask students to share with a partner a story from a time in their lives when they were really humiliated. Why did this happen?
- Give a brief introduction to the author, Azouz Begag, his life story, the history of colonization in Algeria and its aftermath, and his book *Le Gône du Chaâba*.
- Ask students to read the text and prepare comprehension questions for the following class period.

#### **Day Three: Discussion of *Une humiliation mémorable***

- Play a recording of the text, or have students take turns reading it aloud.
- Break students into groups and ask each group to summarize and interpret a portion of the text, focusing on Azouz Begag’s experiences in school and the prejudice he faced.
- The last line of the text is: « Je me sentais fort comme un buffle. » Ask students to write a journal entry explaining when they were very proud of something they did. Ask volunteers to share their entries by reading them aloud to the class.

**Days Four and Five:** French African Poetry (Five comprehension questions and eight poems follow immediately below after these four initial set of directions and added note. For each of the eight poems, I have indicated either a web address where one can find the poem or have listed a bibliographic reference for a collection of poems in which the poem can be found.)

- Read aloud the first poem in the packet for students, using props and being very dramatic.
- Lead students through each question, showing them how to analyze the poem.
- Divide students into groups and give them the rest of the period to prepare their presentations to the class.
- The next day, each group presents a poem. Make sure that the theme of each poem is clear to students.

N.B. With my students at Canisius College, I have tremendous success in using *Diversité: La nouvelle francophone à travers le monde* by James Gaasch and Valérie Budig-Markin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000. ISBN: 978-0-395-90933-1.). This intermediate reader and francophone anthology is broken down into the following five sections: La souffrance et l'éloquence; L'aventure et l'amour; La culture et la différence; Le couple et la crise; and La révolte et l'espoir. Each section provides an overarching thematic introduction and each literary excerpt or poem also has an introduction that provides background information on the author, his or her home country, and items of significant cultural importance, in particular, that of the ensuing difficulties of being a former colony and of racism.

### **Questions de préparation pour mieux lire des poèmes africains**

1. Lisez le poème à la classe avec une interprétation dramatique. Soyez imaginatif pour faire « vivre » le poème!
2. Expliquez chaque strophe du poème avec le nouveau vocabulaire.
3. Quels vers sont très importants dans le poème? Quelles images sont importantes? Analysez le style du poème.
4. Quel est le message du poète dans ce poème? Quelle philosophie explique-t-il?
5. Est-ce que le poète exprime un message africain ou un message universel?

N.B. When analyzing the style of the poems with my students at Canisius College, I paid particular attention to capitalization, spacing, and punctuation. This was especially important, for example, in Bernard B. Dadié's *Femmes!* and in Birago Diop's *Souffles*. In addition, *Qui es-tu?* by Francis Bebey is an especially good poem for reviewing the geography of Africa. Finally, my students and I were in complete agreement in the opinion that M'baye Gana Kébé's *Belle ronde* is beautifully suited for introducing younger children (for example, middle school levels) in a tender and sensitive manner to talking about the different races of people that are found in the world around us but also that the poem is so powerful, it is appropriate for all levels of discussion.

***Petit Oiseau (Paul Niger)*** [Available on on-line at < [http://ugtg.org/article\\_63.html](http://ugtg.org/article_63.html)>]

Petit oiseau  
Petit oiseau qui me chantes

L'amour du pays natal  
Je te porterai à manger les graines que je choisirai  
Et qu'il te plaira de croquer  
Petit oiseau qui me chantes  
L'amour du pays natal  
Petit oiseau qui m'amuses,  
Je t'enseignerai la musique  
Et toutes phrases que tu diras  
Tu les auras apprises de moi.  
Petit oiseau qui m'amuses,  
Je t'enseignerai la musique.  
Petit oiseau qui te tourmentes,  
Je consolerais tes chagrins  
Et t'apprendrai la vraie sagesse,  
La sagesse de mes anciens,  
Petit oiseau qui te tourmentes,  
Je consolerais tes chagrins.

***Impossibilité (Birago Diop)*** [Diop, Birago. *Leurres et lueurs: poèmes*. Paris: Présence africaine, 1967: 15.]

Je voudrais vous dire des choses si tendres,  
    Vous murmurer des mots si doux,  
Que seules les fleurs mortes peuvent entendre  
    Car c'est tout ce que j'ai de vous.

Je voudrais vous confier mon rêve de folie  
    Mon beau rêve si insensé  
Hanté par le spectre de la mélancolie  
    Où viennent sombrer mes pensers.

Je voudrais vous dire pourquoi mon âme pleure  
    Quand tout aime et refleurit  
Pourquoi elle gémit à la fuite de l'heure  
    Qui part sans apporter l'oubli.

Je voudrais vous dire comment je vous adore.  
    Hélas je ne le pourrais pas  
Et c'est en mon rêve qui s'envole à l'aurore  
    Que je dois le dire tout bas.

**Femmes (Bernard B. Dadié)** [Dadié, Bernard Binlin. *Légendes et poèmes*. Paris: Seghers, 1973: 247.]

Femmes du Silence et du Murmure,  
Femmes des Larmes et de Lutte,

Femmes du Refus, de la Colère,  
De l'Orage et de la Foudre,

Femmes de l'Accalmie et du Sourire,  
Femmes de l'Abandon et du Mensonge,

Femmes du Rire, de la Caresse  
et des Cœurs accordés

Femmes de la Séparation et de l'Adieu,

Je vous aimerai toujours.

**Sèche tes pleurs (Bernard B. Dadié)** [Dadié, Bernard Binlin. *Légendes et poèmes*. Paris: Seghers, 1973: 244–245.]

Sèche tes pleurs Afrique!  
Tes enfants te reviennent  
dans l'orage et la tempête des voyages infructueux.

Sur le ris de l'onde et le babil de la brise,  
Sur l'or des levants  
Et la pourpre des couchants  
des cimes des monts orgueilleux  
Et des savanes abreuvées de lumière  
Ils te reviennent  
dans l'orage et la tempête des voyages infructueux.

Sèche tes pleurs, Afrique  
Ayant bu  
À toutes les fontaines  
d'infortune  
et de gloire,  
Nos sens se sont ouverts  
à la splendeur de ta beauté  
à la senteur de tes forêts,  
à l'enchantement de tes eaux  
à la limpidité de ton ciel  
à la caresse de ton soleil

Et au charme de ta verdure emperlée de rosée.

Sèche tes pleurs, Afrique!  
Tes enfants te reviennent  
Les mains pleines de jouets  
Et le cœur plein d'amour.  
Ils reviennent te vêtir  
De leurs rêves et de leurs espoirs.

**Souffles (Birago Diop)** [Diop, Birago. *Leurres et lueurs: poèmes*. Paris: Présence africaine, 1967: 64–66. Also, available on-line at < <http://www.lekti-ecriture.com/contrefeux/Souffle.html>> or <http://www.scribd.com/doc/27574399/Souffles-Birago-Diop>]

Écoute plus souvent  
Les Choses que les Êtres.  
La Voix du Feu s'entend,  
Entends la Voix de l'Eau,  
Écoute dans le Vent  
Le Buisson en sanglots  
C'est le Souffle des Ancêtres.

Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis:  
Ils sont dans l'Ombre qui s'éclaire  
Et dans l'ombre qui s'épaissit,  
Les Morts ne sont pas sous la Terre;  
Ils sont dans l'Arbre qui frémit,  
Ils sont dans le Bois qui gémit,  
Ils sont dans l'Eau qui coule  
Ils sont dans la Case, ils sont dans la Foule:  
Les Morts ne sont pas morts.

Écoute plus souvent  
Les Choses que les Êtres.  
La Voix du Feu s'entend,  
Entends la Voix de l'Eau,  
Écoute dans le Vent  
Le Buisson en sanglots:  
C'est le Souffle des Ancêtres morts  
Qui ne sont pas partis,  
Qui ne sont pas sous la Terre  
Qui ne sont pas morts.

Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis:  
Ils sont dans le Sein de la Femme,



Ils sont dans l'Enfant qui vagit  
Et dans le Tison qui s'enflamme.  
Les Morts ne sont pas sous la Terre:  
Ils sont dans le Feu qui s'éteint,  
Ils sont dans les Herbes qui pleurent,  
Ils sont dans le Rocher qui geint,  
Ils sont dans la Forêt, ils sont dans le Demeure,  
Les Morts ne sont pas morts.

Écoute plus souvent  
Les Choses que les Êtres.  
La Voix du Feu s'entend,  
Entends la Voix de l'Eau,  
Écoute dans le Vent  
Le Buisson en sanglots.  
C'est le Souffle des Ancêtres.

Il reedit chaque jour le Pacte,  
Le grand Pacte qui lie,  
Qui lie à la Loi notre Sort,  
Aux Actes des Souffles plus forts  
Le Sort de nos Morts qui ne sont pas morts,  
Le lourd Pacte qui nous lie à la Vie.  
La lourde Loi qui nous lie aux Actes  
Des Souffles qui se meurent  
Dans le lit et sur les rives du Fleuve,  
Des Souffles qui se meuvent  
Dans le Rocher qui geint et dans l'Herbe qui pleure.  
Des Souffles qui demeurent  
Dans l'Ombre qui s'éclaire et s'épaissit,  
Dans l'Arbre qui frémit, dans le Bois qui gémit  
Et dans l'Eau qui coule et dans l'Eau qui dort,  
Des Souffles plus forts qui ont pris  
Le Souffle des Morts qui ne sont pas morts,  
Des Morts qui ne sont pas partis,  
Des Morts qui ne sont plus sous la Terre.

Écoute plus souvent  
Les Choses que les Êtres  
La Voix du Feu s'entend  
Écoute dans le Vent  
Le Buisson en sanglots  
C'est le Souffle des Ancêtres.

*Qui es-tu?* (Francis Bebey) [Available on-line at <  
<http://membres.multimania.fr/migral/afriqui.html>>]

Qui es-tu?  
Je suis Mamadi, fils de Dioubaté.  
D'où viens-tu?  
Je viens de mon village.  
Où vas-tu?  
À l'autre village.  
Quelle importance?  
Je vais partout, là où il y a des hommes.  
C'est ainsi ma vie.

Que fais-tu dans la vie?

Je suis griot, m'entends-tu?  
Je suis griot, comme l'était mon père  
Comme l'était le père de mon père.  
Comme le seront mes enfants  
Et les enfants de mes enfants.

Je suis griot pour vivre comme aux temps anciens  
Des feux de joie et des danses rituelles  
Et chanter les hauts faits du vaillant guerrier  
Et la bonté du riche  
Qui laisse son miel couler dans maalebasse  
Et son mil joncher le sol de ma case.

Je suis griot, m'entends-tu?

Je suis griot comme du temps où nos pères  
Ouvraient le cœur à la naissance du jour  
Et l'hospitalité au voyageur inconnu  
Attardé sur la route de la nuit.  
Je suis descendant de Diéli,  
L'homme à qui son frère donna  
Sa propre chair et son propre sang  
Pour déjouer la faim terrible  
Dressée sur le sentier brûlant de la forêt  
Comme le masque menaçant du squelette de la mort.

Je suis enfant de Guinée,  
Je suis fils du Mali,  
Je sors du Tchad ou du fond du Bénin  
Je suis enfant d'Afrique.  
Je mets un grand boubou blanc,

Et les blancs rient de me voir  
Trotter les pieds nus dans la poussière du chemin ...  
Ils rient?  
Qu'ils rient bien.  
Quand à moi, je bats des mains et le grand soleil d'Afrique  
Et je chante, et je danse,  
Et je chante, et je danse.

Mamadi, fils du Dioubaté,  
Gardien des traditions de tout un monde,  
Troubadour de l'Afrique de toujours,  
Conteur, danseur, chanteur  
Tout au long de la vie.  
Viens me sortir de mon savoir venu d'un autre monde  
Parle-moi de l'Afrique d'autrefois  
Et sa sagesse proverbiale,  
Chante, danse, chante, danse.

***L'homme qui te ressemble (René Philombe)*** [Available on-line at <  
<http://www.bonaberi.com/article.php?aid=1624>>]

J'ai frappé à ta porte  
J'ai frappé à ton cœur  
Pour avoir bon lit  
Pour avoir un bon feu  
Pourquoi me repousser?  
Ouvre-moi mon frère! ...

Pourquoi me demander  
Si je suis d'Afrique  
Si je suis d'Amérique  
Si je suis d'Asie  
Si je suis d'Europe?  
Ouvre-moi mon frère! ...

Pourquoi me demander  
La longueur de mon nez  
L'épaisseur de ma bouche  
La couleur de ma peau  
Et le nom de mes dieux?  
Ouvre-moi mon frère! ...

Je ne suis pas un noir  
Je ne suis pas un rouge  
Je ne suis pas un jaune

Je ne suis pas un blanc  
Mais je ne suis qu'un homme  
Ouvre-moi mon frère! ...

Ouvre-moi ta porte  
Ouvre-moi ton cœur  
Car je suis un homme  
L'homme de tous les temps  
L'homme de tous les cieux  
L'homme qui te ressemble! ...

***Belle ronde (M'baye Gana Kebe)*** [Gana Kébé, M'baye. Colombes: poèmes pour enfants. Dakar : Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1979: 27.]

Des bras noirs,  
Des bras blancs,  
Des bras rouges,  
Des bras jaunes,  
Quelle belle ronde  
Autour du grand monde!

Des bouches noires,  
Des bouches rouges  
Des bouches blanches,  
Des bouches jaunes,  
Chantent à l'unisson  
L'hymne qui entraîne leur ronde!

Tournez, tournez  
Enfants noirs, enfants blancs  
Tournez, tournez.  
Enfants rouges, enfants jaunes,  
Votre ronde, votre ronde  
Est la plus belle du monde!

### **Days Six and Seven: *SOS Racisme***

- Brainstorm with students about organizations in the United States that have been formed to combat racism.
- Project on the screen the symbol of the organization *SOS Racisme*.
- Show students the website and pictures of the founder of the organization, Harlem Désir.

- Have students read an article about the beginnings of the organization and respond to questions, available on the *SOS Racisme* website (<<http://national.sos-racisme.org>>).
- Explain to students that many actors, singers, and public figures belong to the organization and why it is still necessary in France today.
- Ask students to listen to *SOS Racisme*, available on YouTube. For example, interviews that are readily available are with Harlem Désir and with soccer players from the French national team.
- Ask students to explain what the *SOS Racisme* symbol found immediately below means to them and what it may mean to the young people of France today.

SOS Racisme

<http://national.sos-racisme.org>



N.B. In my FRC 323/324: Topics in Conversation I/II: “French and Francophone Cinema: An Art Form for Understanding French and Francophone Culture, History, Politics, and Social Problems” courses at Canisius College, we have successfully explored the issue of racism via feature-length films, including:

- 1.) *Indigènes* (2006) by Rachid Bouchareb
- 2.) *C'est dur d'être aimé par des cons* (2008) by Daniel Leconte
- 3.) *Le Chant des mariées* (2007) by Karin Albout
- 4.) *L'Ennemi intime* (2006) by Florent-Emilio Siri
- 5.) *La Fille du RER* (2008) by André Téchiné

### **Day Eight: Fredericks, Goldman, and Jones**

- When students arrive in class, play the CD version of the Fredericks, Goldman, and Jones's song, *Si j'étais né en '17 à Leidenstadt*.
- Show a short PowerPoint of background of this group and their importance for social justice issues in France.
- Play the song for students again, using a cloze activity to have students focus on the words.
- Divide the class into small groups and make them responsible for a particular stanza of the song.
- Ask students to report to class what they understood or did not understand so as to ensure a rich discussion.

### **Day Nine: Fredericks, Goldman, and Jones**

- Show DVD version of *Si j'étais né en '17 à Leidenstadt*, and ask students to think about the message portrayed by the visuals and music.
- Have students write in their journals their own responses to the *Si* clauses posed in the song.
- Show DVD version of the second song, *Peurs*.
- Distribute song lyrics and put students in small groups to discuss why people are afraid of each other. Finish class by having small student groups report back to the entire group what they learned from each other.

N.B. Recently released by the Carole D. Fredericks Foundation, Inc. is *An Interview with Carole Fredericks: DVD, Guide and Transcription* (Canandaigua, NY: 2010). It is a rich and touching collection of fifteen interview segments that give insight into Fredericks' reasons for moving to France to pursue her music career, despite having had limited exposure to the French language, as well as her frank perspective on life in France as an African-American emigrant of Senegalese descent.

### **Final Project**

- This is an opportunity for students to personalize what they have learned and share with the class.
- Students have many choices for the assignment and time in class to work on their project.
- Show some examples, whether personal or ones created by previous students, to inspire students about what is possible.
- Allow approximately two days for project presentations and listening to stories shared by students.

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## Reference Cited

Guédé, Alain. *Le chevalier de Saint-George* [Achères, France: Dagan Jeunesse; and, Toulouse, France: MAT Éditions (Collection Nouveaux Héros), 2008, specially imported to the United States by the Carole D. Fredericks Foundation, Inc.]