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Pictures Tell the Story -- From Caves to Comics: Using Images from French History to Motivate Reluctant Language Learners

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Introduction

Is a picture really worth a thousand words? Can pictures truly tell a story? And, if so, can pictures be used to motivate students to feel a connection to a language and a culture? If image, rather than text, was the vehicle of vocabulary building and instruction, would my students be more receptive to speaking and learning in French? Would those images, portraying themes of danger and exploration, epic battles, fantastical creatures, and thrilling adventures engage and interest students who see little need to learn another language and who lack curiosity for what they perceive as foreign and different? This curriculum unit, using iconic images from French culture – the Lascaux cave paintings, the Bayeux Tapestry, the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries, and *Tintin* and *Astérix* cartoons – will strive to answer those questions.

My middle-school students, mostly boys, tend to be logical-spatial learners rather than linguistic-auditory learners. They are highly interested in technology; and, for most, playing video games is their favorite activity. They are not very motivated to learn another language, especially if it requires memorizing vocabulary and learning grammar rules. They see little use in taking notes and would rather use their phones to take a picture of the board than actually write anything down themselves. Writing practice and exercises using new vocabulary and grammar, even as few as eight French sentences, represent a chore and, in their words, "too much writing" for a forty-five minute class period. However, despite this reluctance to write, their notebooks are covered with drawings and doodles.

Because my students are so visually oriented, I intend to use high-interest iconic French images to teach vocabulary and action verbs to motivate them to speak and write more frequently in French. This connection of French words with images would also support the national guidelines for world-language teachers to immerse their students in the target language (in my case, French), rather than use English translation as the vehicle for teaching French. I will initiate this project with students in my sixth-grade Exploratory French classes. If students are introduced to vocabulary through images from the beginning of their language exploration, they might be more open to an immersive approach to the district curriculum as they enter into seventh- and eighth-grade Level I French classes.

Background

When I was a middle-school student, the prospect of learning another language meant the opening of a new world of options – the possibility of future travel, of communicating with people with a different perspective, of understanding another culture from the inside, of experiencing a different way of living, and even of "inventing" a new French personality, a less shy, more adventurous version of my seventh-grade self. (My French name, Lisette, seemed to belong to someone who was outgoing and worldly.) My introductory French classes consisted of memorized dialogs and verb conjugations, writing exercises, translations, and many, many notes – it was the heyday of the audio-lingual method. The method of instruction and the requirements for students were not so different from those of other subject area classes taught in my school – teachers instructed, students took notes and answered questions. This didn't seem boring – we were used to memorization and to spending most of our class-time writing. The fact that we were working – speaking and writing – in a different language made it challenging and engaging.

Now, student engagement is the challenge I face on a daily basis. I teach middle-school French at the Engineering and Science University Magnet School (ESUMS), an interdistrict STEM magnet school in New Haven, CT. My students, mostly boys, are either from the inner-city or from the surrounding suburban districts. Parents, especially those of boys, are attracted to our school's small size (80-90 students per grade), along with the STEM theme and a hands-on approach to teaching. This reflects research supporting the belief that smaller schools benefit student achievement, engagement, individualized attention, and interaction with teachers. [1] The gender disparity in the school population (ratio of boys to girls) is evidence of the national trend of girls having less confidence in their math and science abilities (but not less ability) and less interest in pursuing careers in these fields. [2]

The focus at ESUMS is on engineering, which is a core academic class, along with science, mathematics, language arts, and social studies. These classes emphasize problem-solving, collaborative group work, and hands-on learning activities. World languages, although a district academic requirement for middle-school students, are scheduled as "electives" rather than core subjects at my school. As such, my students assume that there will be little class- or home-work, that the focus of the class will be "exploring" and talking about the language rather than writing and conversing *in* the language, and that little or no effort will be required of them. Instead, many of these students, who often excel in their science, engineering, and math classes, find that French is a difficult course for them, requiring study and frequent practice. They have little or no experience with memorization, not having grown up as I did with reciting multiplication tables, to say nothing of verb conjugations.

Even before my training as a language teacher, I realized that academic exploration of literature, detailed grammar study, and memorized dialogs do not lead to fluency. Walking into a shop in Paris, during my junior year abroad, I discovered that the ability to analyze and dissertate on a French text was no help when trying to do something as simple as buying a spoon. (What was the word for spoon? Had I ever learned that? How could all those years of study desert me in my moment of need?) Whereas my language instruction was based on repetition, rote memorization, replacement drills, and, later, on advanced grammar, linguistics, and literary analysis, what I really needed was the ability to communicate with actual French speakers – to use the language that I had spent so much time and effort learning.

The New Haven district curriculum is a task-based, contextual and communicative approach to language

instruction. Vocabulary and grammar are taught in the context of situations that students may encounter in conversation – talking and writing about themselves, their families, their homes, their towns, their likes and dislikes, and their activities. The focus is on communication – understanding and being understood. My students think this means listening and, occasionally, speaking in French, but not writing. Talking with classmates in very basic conversations might be an entertaining and sometimes productive practice. Yet, in order to move beyond a few simple phrases, students need to learn and master additional vocabulary and grammar. As with all good instruction, there must be a balance: some things just have to be memorized for ease of retrieval so that students can begin to create with language; some things just have to be written down to be committed to long-term memory. (A recent article in *The New York Times-Science Times* stressed the importance of handwriting to retaining information learned. [3]) With this curriculum unit, I hope to help students lose their resistance to note-taking and to replace their tendency to translate back into English everything they learn in French by relating vocabulary instead to pictures, literally tapping into their impulses to doodle. The artwork has been chosen to appeal to students raised on graphic novels and video games.

Rationale – Literature Review

Visual Learning

The use of high interest visuals to support literacy improves student engagement and retention of vocabulary. Australian scholars, Marietta Rossetto, a lecturer on languages and effective strategies for learning, and Antonella Chiera-Macchia, a specialist in language curriculum writing and development, investigated the use of comics to improve the writing of secondary students in a beginning Italian class. [4] Their article, "Visual Learning is the Best Learning," explains that students were introduced to images and typical phrases from a familiar cartoon series, *The Simpsons* . After watching a video of the series in Italian, students worked in small groups to create their own comics in Italian. Students were highly engaged in the writing project, working cooperatively in Italian, without resorting to use of dictionaries to translate phrases. The students used their collective knowledge to produce coherent stories; some even reported that they were thinking in Italian while working on the task. The study concluded that "the combination of written and visual texts, through a popular culture entry point, in this case, comics, can engage learners." [5] In *LibrarySparks* magazine, librarian Megan Schliesman supports the use of this medium. Her article, "So Many Books...So Little Time," states that "comic books...and graphic novels can engage young readers in multiple ways, enriching their understanding and comprehension, as well as their fluency in terms of both traditional and visual literacy." [6]

In "Image as Language," Susan Britsch of Purdue University provides guidelines for teachers working with English language learners to use photographs for content learning, second-language development, and image-reading, since "language is not learned through words alone." [7] These strategies are transferable to all language learners, since words – whether in English or in a world language, whether written or spoken – "constitute highly abstract systems of representation." [8] According to Britsch, we think in visual images, not language symbols, since "vision developed before words." [9] However, written text is the primary way language is conveyed in the classroom, with images relegated to the status of mere illustration. This poses challenges for new language learners and ignores the learning styles of visual or kinesthetic learners. Britsch notes that images are now being repositioned in both screen and printed pages to a place of equivalent importance to that of the language text. [10] The use of images in language learning can increase the proficiency of students

beyond their existing capabilities.

Michael D. Bush, in his article "Facilitating the Integration of Culture and Vocabulary Learning," reinforces the importance of visual input, referencing an observation made by the poet Simonides around 500 B.C. that "words are the images of things." [11] As support for the use of pictures to strengthen vocabulary, Bush quotes the seventeenth century writings of John Amos Comemius, who stated, "Words should not be learned apart from the objects to which they refer." [12] Images also increase the cultural awareness of students in foreign language classes. The use of authentic materials builds "cross-cultural understanding by integrating language learning with the learning of culture." [13] As the article shows, American students learning the French word *pain* may have the image of store-bought, factory-produced soft sliced white bread, resembling nothing like the fresh-baked, hand-made, crusty, crunchy *baguette* a French student would buy at the local *boulangerie* . Teachers should create a library of up-to-date authentic images for vocabulary support to avoid translation and to give students a current cultural framework of the countries studied. As Bush states, "by using images to provide context, meaning would be present to facilitate learning." [14]

Learning Styles and Millennial Learners

My focus on visual learning and literacy in building vocabulary and engagement for my French students is based on my assessment of them as primarily visual learners. Language learning involves complex skills, student engagement, and motivation. Lack of success in language classes often occurs when teaching does not align with student learning preferences. According to Richard M. Felder in "Learning and Teaching Styles in Foreign and Second Language Education," students experiencing a mismatch of learning styles "tend to be bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course, and may conclude that they are no good at the subject and give up." [15] This description applies to a number of my middle-school students, especially the boys. Inattentiveness leads to off-task English conversations, disruptive behavior, and interruptions of learning for all students. Effective instruction should be balanced between information presented visually and material presented through written or spoken explanations to reach all students regardless of the preferences of the instructor. Felder suggests teaching new material in relatable contexts, balancing concrete information (grammar) with conceptual information (contrast and compare), balancing structure with open-ended conversational and cooperative activities, and making liberal use of visuals to illustrate and reinforce the meanings of vocabulary words." [16]

The importance Felder places on visual support aligns with research on millennial learners. In "Essentials for Engaged 21 st -Century Learners," author Virginia Jones writes that "millennial learners absorb and process input in nonlinear ways and rely heavily on visual cues to process the input." [17] They scroll through images, click though websites, multitasking while they carry out assignments. However, while millennial learners may "excel at producing results in a very literal manner…they do need time, support, and guidance" to explore material in a deeper, more abstract and creative way. [18] Using authentic visual and audio content, such as YouTube videos, virtual tours, and interactive websites, will allow students to be immersed in the culture and language, creating, collaborating, and communicating as they learn.

Importance of Art Education

In "Visual Thinking Strategies = Creative and Critical Thinking," the authors Mary Moeller, Kay Cutler, Dave Fiedler, and Lisa Weier demonstrate how art is used to promote memory and improve critical thinking. The communication skills of students at Camelot Intermediate School in Brookings, South Dakota were

strengthened using visual thinking strategies (VTS) while discussing art. [19] VTS uses three simple questions to focus student observation and thinking about an artwork: "What is going on in this picture?" helps students consider the artwork in an open-ended manner; "What do you see that makes you say that?" requires students to support their observations; and "What more can you find?" suggests that students look more deeply to find features in the image to contemplate and discuss. [20] "VTS encourages storytelling as students attach actions or experiences to the characters in the image, thus animating the art," a process that has beneficial effects on student writing. [21] The writing process improves "because students spend time thinking about their ideas." [22] Critical thinking improves as students employ inductive and deductive reasoning to make decisions about the artwork. They examine evidence in the paintings, make connections to prior knowledge, and explore possible causes and effects for choices made by the artist. Teachers have also noted improvements in students who normally struggle to work in or speak in front of a group. Using art and VTS has enabled those students to share their ideas and appreciate the varied opinions of their classmates.

Further support for using culturally significant French art to foster engagement and vocabulary learning is found in "Art and Memory: An Examination of the Learning Benefits of Visual-Art Exposure." [23] The research in this study conducted by Rosier, Locker, and Naufel at Georgia Southern University suggests that "art education can benefit students' education by increasing their learning and memory." [24] Although exposure to the arts is considered beneficial by most Americans, arts programs are not considered an educational priority and are often subject to budget cuts. Subjects, such as English and mathematics that can be assessed in standardized tests, are emphasized in our schools. However, as shown in this article, exposure to the arts improves students' attitudes toward school and develops skills shared with the sciences: observation, envisioning, reflection, expression, and exploration. English language learners involved in arts-education programs showed more improvement "in mathematical achievement and language learning than those who were not involved in arts-education." [25] Involvement in these programs "may have provided more opportunities for students to actually apply mathematical concepts, as well as become comfortable with expressing themselves in English." [26] The researchers at GSU concluded that engagement in visual art and creativity (drawing or viewing artwork) benefits verbal memory and processing.

Boys and Literacy

There is a disproportionate ratio of boys to girls in my school. Of twenty-four students, my French classes typically have fewer than five girls. With such a disparity, I need to adjust my teaching style to the support learning styles and interests of the many boys in my classes.

Even though twenty-first century skills emphasize collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving, reading and writing achievement are still of prime importance in the classroom. In their article, "Boys' Hidden Literacies – The Critical Need for the Visual," Rowsell and Kendrick note that "practices that embed literacy (e.g. play, art, video games)" are not valued at school "because teachers do not define these activities as literacy." [27] This is how my students spend their free time! The article describes how reluctant writers, through the use of illustrations, developed and improved their abilities to create narrative. Students used images as their source of inspiration and the starting point of their storytelling; details in the illustration transform into adjectives in the text. Developing written assignments that "blend words with image" could increase student interest and motivation while exploring narrative voice and purpose. [28] This interplay of image and text has implications for world language classes, as engaging students through the use of high interest images could elicit description and elaboration in both spoken and written French.

Flashcards, PowerPoints, images from clipart, textbooks, and examples of authentic text and images from French websites and media sources are all regularly used to introduce and review vocabulary based on my students' preference for visual over linguistic cues. However, once new words are introduced, there comes a point at which note-taking becomes necessary, when students have to transform the visual into text. Using the techniques described by Rowsell and Kendrick, could student notebooks become more like illustrated graphic novels and, thus, more motivating and engaging for my students?

Strategies

This curriculum unit will not only explore how pictures can aid in language acquisition, but also how they can tell the story of a civilization. Students will use simple French vocabulary and language expressions to describe the images and research, in English, to discover what the artwork reveals about French history, culture, symbols, and practices. Students will compare and contrast pictorial stories of French civilization from pre-history through the twentieth century: from cave paintings to tapestries to comics.

The unit plan has been developed for sixth-grade Exploratory French students; however, it may be adapted to more advanced levels of language proficiency and cultural exploration. As there is no mandated district curriculum for Exploratory French, I am able to create curriculum for my sixth-grade students, often collaborating with their classroom teachers to develop units that reinforce the core curriculum through French. Currently, sixth graders create sequenced graphic stories in their language-arts classes. My "picture writing" curriculum unit will align with their language arts instruction on narrative order, strengthening the students' concept of beginning, middle, and end through a visual medium while expanding their global and cultural awareness and introducing them to basic French vocabulary and simple phrases.

Students will use technology to discover and explore the caves and tapestries and to create their own versions of the Bayeux Tapestry and other artworks. They will use mapping skills to explore the geographic regions of France represented by the artworks studied. Students will discuss how the art was created and how the evolution of materials or "technology" affects how we tell stories. They will also explore the purpose of the artwork and, if possible, who created the artwork. Students will reflect on the technology they would use to tell their own stories and how that would differ from the unit's artwork.

Students will make connections to innovations in science, engineering, and technology that help to prevent deterioration of the cave paintings from exposure to contaminants and to restore and preserve the delicate textiles of the tapestries. Replica caves now allow visitors to explore "faux Lascaux" without risking further damage to the original paintings. Videos on the official websites of these masterpieces allow students to view restoration and re-creation efforts "virtually" first-hand. Connections will be made to language arts as students discuss why there is such a prevalence of French words in the English language (cognates) and how words evolve.

During this unit, students will explore the techniques used in the artwork. This hands-on component will be taught primarily in simple French with the use of gestures and demonstration. Students could create a mural of cave drawings, a streamer-cartoon of an historical event, a simple tapestry project, or a cartoon strip. At the conclusion of the unit, students will create a pictorial story in the style of one of the artworks studied in this unit. Their three tapestry panels will depict a beginning, middle, and end to their story. In oral

presentations, students will describe and answer teacher and peer questions about their tapestries. Pictures Tell the Story -- From Caves to Comics is intended as an interdisciplinary curriculum unit that celebrates the strengths of my students, using images to reinforce their language learning.

Images from Caves to Comics: Artworks and Classroom Activities

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At the start of the curriculum unit, students will be asked a series of questions about how stories are told – through words alone, written on a page or in a book, recited, or told through illustrations? They will discuss and give examples of various ways of telling a story, including those using new technologies, such as digital stories and applications like Talk'n Photos, Storybird, and Book Creator. Students may be greeted at the start of class with related cartoons, projected on the board, from websites such as Cartoonstock.com to generate motivation and engagement. Several images on this site are directly connected to the cave paintings and the Bayeux Tapestry. [29]

The Lascaux Cave Paintings

I plan to introduce this curriculum unit to my sixth-grade students early in September, not long after the start of school. This coincides with the anniversary of the discovery of the Lascaux cave paintings, September 12, 1940, and starts students off relating French words to illustrations instead of English translations. [30] Using illustrations in text, video, and internet resources, students will learn the words for various animals and colors and begin their "pictogram" note-taking (French vocabulary accompanied by sketches).

The Lascaux Cave is located in the Dordogne region in southwestern France, an area known for its rich prehistoric cave art. What set Lascaux apart was the state of preservation of the cave paintings when, in September, 1940, four teenage boys explored a previously sealed passage and discovered the immense underground galleries covered with colorful animals, birds, and hunters. Although word spread quickly of the boys' amazing find, world events intervened and Lascaux was closed due to World War II. In 1948, the cave was opened to the public. Despite having maintained their color and brilliance for over 17,000 years, the cave paintings began showing damage from exposure to heat and humidity. In 1963, after only fifteen years, the cave was closed. Twenty years later, a replica of the Lascaux cave was created to allow the public to view this magnificent example of our prehistory. [31]

Various theories exist about why prehistoric artists painted Lascaux. The paintings may have been a historical record of the animals and their behavior; they may have been illustrations of legends and stories important to these unknown artists and their society, or given inspiration for a successful hunt. A recent article even suggests that the cave paintings were ancient cartoon illustrations. [32] Whatever the reason for their creation, the Lascaux paintings provide a well-preserved glimpse into the lives of our ancestors.

Suggested Classroom Activities

I will introduce my students to Lascaux and the cave paintings through a picture-walk, using Emily Arnold McCully's picture book, *The Secret Cave: Discovering Lascaux.* [33] Instead of the printed, English text, we will "read" the pictures accompanied by my simple, condensed French adaptation of the story. (See Appendix 1.) Students will begin to make connections to French vocabulary for animals and action verbs as we describe the

discovery of the long-sealed cave. Using images from the official Lascaux website, student drawings, and other sources, we will create flashcards and, later, a mural of the animals and figures depicted at Lascaux, with students writing descriptive labels in French. Resources, such as *How to Draw France's Sights and Symbols* , will help students to create replications of the Lascaux cave paintings. [34] Students will experiment with a powder-blowing technique used by the cave painters to "sign" their work on the mural. [35] Further exploration of the official website of the Lascaux cave will allow students to go on a virtual tour of discovery of the cave paintings, using French vocabulary to describe what they see. [36]

Students will learn simple action verbs to describe the pictures, e.g. *la vache rouge court* – the red cow runs. They will imitate the motions depicted as they are learning the words, using total physical response (TPR), a tool for teaching language through actions. [37] Students will assemble several images from the cave into a sequence that they can narrate in simple sentences. To construct sentences, they will use basic expressions such as: *il y a* (there is), *voici/voilà* (here is/there is), and *c'est* (it is). They will be introduced to sequencing expressions to help them narrate their stories in the proper order: *d'abord* (first), *au début* (at the beginning), *ensuite* (next), *puis* (then), *après ça* (after that), *à la fin* (at the end), and *finalement* (finally).

Students will take a virtual tour of the Lascaux Cave and locate specific animals pictured on a worksheet. They will locate Lascaux and the Dordogne region on a map of France. Working with a partner, students will use flashcards of animals from the cave paintings to play a matching and slapping game, (e.g.: call out an animal, touch/slap correct picture). They will use adjectives of size and color to describe various animals. Students will assemble and label sequenced images to tell a story. Students will work in pairs, asking and answering questions to describe images from the cave paintings. Together, the class will describe scenes – from single words, progressing to nouns with adjectives, short phrases, and simple sentences. (See Appendix 3, Figure 1.)

The Bayeux Tapestry

Students will move from prehistoric France to a pivotal time in French history – the Norman Conquest – as depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry. This sequence is logical as it relates to the school calendar, as the tapestry story ends on October 14, 1066 with the Battle of Hastings. It also transports students from southwestern France to the northern coast, continuing their discovery of the diversity of the country's geography and culture. Students will locate France and England on the map, as well as the English Channel/ *la Manche* and Normandy (Bayeux) and Sussex (Hastings).

The Bayeux Tapestry more closely resembles a long cartoon strip than an actual tapestry. Stretching nearly two hundred thirty feet in length and only twenty inches high, it is an embroidered linen record of the invasion of Great Britain by Guillaume de Normandie – William the Conqueror. Named for the town in Normandy on the northwestern coast of France where the epic tale begins, the Bayeux Tapestry follows the far-from-smooth transfer of power from the dying English king Edward to his Norman cousin William. King Edward sends his brother-in-law, Harold, to tell William that he will be the next king. While in France, Harold swears allegiance to William, but once back in England, he is crowned king when Edward dies. William gathers his army and sails to England to claim his throne from Harold.

The tapestry was made in about 1070, only four years after William was crowned king of England on December 25, 1066, possibly commissioned by William's half-brother, Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux. [38] Researchers debate whether the tapestry was made in England or France. Whether the tapestry is propaganda – depicting William's victory from the French perspective – or historically accurate is, again, a subject for debate, dependent, perhaps, on which side of the Channel (or *la Manche*) one is. It does, however,

give a contemporary insight into life in the eleventh century.

Suggested Classroom Activities

The tapestry is filled with action – soldiers and kings, scenes of battles, animals and ships – that will encourage description and classroom discussion. The images of pitched battle between William's and Harold's forces should have enough action to appeal to my video-game loving students. Embroidered in wool on nine linen panels stitched together, over six hundred people, fifty dogs, two hundred horses, and forty ships populate and animate the fifty-eight scenes that recount the victory of William over the traitorous Harold during the three years culminating at the battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066. [39] Students will follow a simple "story walk" through the major scenes of the tapestry and will be asked to make predictions – what will happen next? They will explore the tapestry in depth using museum websites, reference books, and even an animated YouTube video of the historical "cartoon." [40] Building on vocabulary and expressions practiced with the cave paintings, students will describe the animals, colors, and actions that they see. When creating their own tapestry stories, students may decide to change the outcome of the battle and discuss what changes that might make to history.

Discussion of the tapestry's historical setting will include connections to language arts and cognates as students explore the linguistic result of Norman-French influence in England for nearly three hundred years. The success of William's quest for the throne helps explain the vast number of words English has borrowed from French. French became the language of power relegating English to secondary status. It is estimated that over a third of English words come from French, essentially giving our students a "head-start" as they begin their language learning. [41]

Students will continue the individual, paired, and group activities used with the Lascaux cave paintings – naming, describing, and developing French sentences. (See Appendix 3, Figure 2.) They will use technology to sequence and create their own re-telling of the Norman Conquest. Several excellent websites provide thumbnails and paneled segments of the tapestry that can be manipulated by students to create a new version of the Bayeux epic. [42] Students will use interactive tools and images from the website of Britain's Bayeux Tapestry at the Reading Museum to create a "Bayeux comic strip" using French vocabulary – an individual tapestry Bayeux Tapestry slideshow. [43]

Students will read or listen to descriptions of scenes from the tapestry and match the pictures to its description (class and paired activity). Scenes from the aforementioned Reading Museum website will be matched with mixed-up French captions. (See Appendix 2 for sample French sentences.) Students will discuss storytelling through sequential pictures and rearrange a series of tapestry scenes based on chronological clues given in French. They will draw and label an ending for the Bayeux Tapestry, which ends abruptly with Harold's death. Students will share their ending with the class, describing the scene in simple French.

Students will mark the length and width of the tapestry in a hallway. Perforated computer paper or a blank paper roll can be used to create a student-drawn condensed version of the Bayeux Tapestry with simple French captions.

The Lady and the Unicorn Tapestry

Qui est-elle? Quelle est l'histoire? C'est un mystère. Who is she? What is the story? It is a mystery, or rather, several mysteries. The six tapestries, collectively named *La Dame à la Licorne* (The Lady and the Unicorn), are

considered by many to be the greatest works of medieval art. Yet the artist responsible for creating these fifteenth century masterpieces remains unknown. One piece of this puzzle has been solved. Based on clues in the tapestries, art historians have concluded they were commissioned by the Le Viste family: the flags in each tapestry bear the family coat of arms; [44] the lion represents the family's town of origin – Lyon; and the unicorn, as the symbol for speed, refers to " *viste* " [*vite*] meaning "fast" in Old French. [45] Where the tapestries were made is uncertain – most likely they were woven in the workshops of northern France, the Netherlands, or in northern Belgium [46] based on "cartoons" (full-sized drawings) by an unknown Parisian artist. [47]

The biggest mysteries remain unsolved: Were the tapestries meant as a gift? If so, to whom were they given? What did they commemorate? And most of all, what do they mean? Art historians agree that the first five panels of the tapestries represent the five senses: in *Sight* , the lady holds a mirror; in *Hearing* , she plays a musical instrument; in *Smell* , she weaves a garland of flowers; in *Taste* , the lady takes a sweet from a dish; in *Touch* , her one hand holds the flag, the other touches the unicorn. It is the sixth panel of the tapestry series that is most mysterious. The tapestry bears the inscription " *&AGRAVE; Mon Seul Désir* " ([To] My Only Desire). The motto is ambiguous. Is it as a declaration of love or does *désir* signify regret as in the Latin desiderium? Is the lady, seen putting away her necklace, giving up pleasure, maybe for a simple charitable or religious life? [48] Or, could this panel represent an idea, common in French writings of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, of the heart or the intellect (mind/spirit) as our sixth sense? [49] That there is no definitive explanation of this sixth panel will allow students to form, discuss, and defend their own meanings for the final tapestry of the series. At their elementary level of French language development, a discussion of the meaning of this panel would be conducted in English. However, the interest such a discussion would generate could serve as motivation for further inquiry and engagement in their studies of French.

The Lady and the Unicorn tapestries are in the permanent collection of the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Unlike the narrow embroidered Bayeux Tapestry, the tapestries are large wall hangings woven of silk and wool. The six panels range in size from over ten feet to twelve feet high by over nine feet to fifteen feet wide. [50] *Sight* is the smallest, while *My One Desire* is the largest. In each panel, a medieval lady is depicted in the center of the tapestry. She stands on a deep blue oval against a red backdrop, both of which are populated with animals and strewn with flowers and plants. Flanking her in the tapestries are fruit trees and a lion and a unicorn bearing red standards with three crescent moons against a blue diagonal stripe. In four of the tapestries, the lady is accompanied by her young handmaiden.

The tapestries have recently undergone a major two-year restoration and have been installed in a newly-designed room of the Cluny Museum, their home for over a century. [51] The Lady and the Unicorn tapestries owe their preservation primarily to two prominent French writers of the nineteenth century. In the mid-1800s, both Prosper Mérimée and George Sand separately learned of a collection of spectacular, but deteriorating tapestries at the château of Boussac in central France. [52] Recognizing their beauty and their historical significance, despite their disrepair, Mérimée and Sand entreated the French government to remove the neglected tapestries from the château. (Mérimée heard that there were other tapestries once, but the former owner had "cut them up to cover carts and make rugs out of them.") [53] Thanks to these writers, the Commission des Monuments Historiques of the French government intervened to preserve these medieval masterpieces and purchased the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries in 1882. [54]

Suggested Classroom Activities

Students will be introduced to the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries using the series of questions at the

beginning of this section. The students will be divided into five groups, each being assigned a tapestry depicting one of the senses. (The sixth, most enigmatic tapestry would be saved for a whole class discussion at a later time.) Students would be asked to make observations about their tapestry. They would work together, negotiating in French to notice, name, and describe everything they can, using expressions that they have learned during this unit. In English, students would next discuss what they think is going on and try to determine what the tapestry is about. Students could even suggest a title for their tapestry. Each group would share their observations and interpretations, so that students realize on their own that the tapestries depict the five senses. Once students have described what they can in French, new vocabulary will be introduced using images from the tapestries to illustrate the unicorn, lion, servant, lady, etc. This technique of closely observing artworks before interpreting them is described by Friedlaender and Friedlaender of the Yale University School of Medicine and the Yale Center for British Art in their article, "Art in Science: Enhancing Observational Skills." [55] This method serves as a means to enhance communication skills, as students use descriptive language to convey what they see. It also strengthens their observational skills, forcing them to focus on details.

The final tapestry would be introduced separately following this development of vocabulary and meaning. Students would be asked to make detailed observations, in French, of what they see in the tapestry. They would be asked for interpretations and opinions. How does this fit with the other five tapestries? What do you think it is about? What might it mean? Students would have the opportunity to present their opinions, along with their "supporting evidence," i.e. anything they noticed in the tapestry. Students will try to use French for their observations, if not for their opinions. Once the class has shared their ideas, students could be told that this is the final, unsolved mystery of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries. The class could discuss some of the theories and vote on which they think is the most likely explanation, whether that of a scholarly art historian or that of one of the students. In his book, *Pictures for Language Learning* , Andrew Wright contends that opportunities for students to express and debate opinions strengthen their language acquisition and development. [56]

Students will participate in the individual, paired, and group activities previously described to increase their ability to use French for descriptions. (See Appendix, Figure 3.) Students will be able to use vocabulary from the cave paintings and Bayeux tapestry to describe the colors, activities, and animals in the unicorn tapestries. They will be introduced, through tapestry images and flashcards, to new vocabulary: lady, unicorn, lion, monkey, flowers, etc. The tapestry panels themselves will be used to introduce students to the vocabulary of the five senses.

Students will compare and contrast the Bayeux and unicorn tapestries (style: embroidered or woven, border or no border, plain background or millefleurs background; purpose: historical record or enigmatic decoration; size: banner or wall mural). Students will also watch a YouTube video about the recent restoration of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries. [57] They will mark out the size of the Lady and Unicorn tapestries and compare the dimensions to the Bayeux Tapestry.

Students will make connections to their English vocabulary, building understandings of what words mean in different languages and how they evolve into the words and meanings we use today: *cartoon* , originally meaning a full-size design for a painting, mural, or tapestry; from *carton* (French) or *cartone* (Italian) referring to the heavy paper stock on which the drawing was made – evolving into our meaning of a comic drawing. [58] Knowing the French word, *tapis* , for rug can help students make a connection to *tapisserie* (a rug for the wall) which conveys the idea that people used tapestries for warmth as well as for decoration – more like a mural that could be moved from one home to another to cover the cold stone walls. They would also notice how the

English word, tapestry, relates to *tapisserie* from which it derives.

Students will match descriptions to pictures on the board and will work in pairs using unit vocabulary to describe a tapestry panel as completely as possible. They will use flashcards to match actions to vocabulary on board. Students will categorize images from all three major artworks studied – grouping by color, animal, action, media, etc. They will increase their geographic awareness of France and its European neighbors mapping the cities and regions where the tapestries were woven, discovered, and currently installed.

Les Bandes Dessinées: French Language Comics – Tintin and Astérix

Jumping to the twentieth century and, finally, to artwork that can be attributed to its creators, students will finish this unit learning about two of the best-known French language *bandes dessinées* (comics): *Tintin* and *Astérix* . While students may not be familiar with these characters, they will be immediately comfortable with the medium of cartoons and graphic novels. The *bandes dessinées* , some dating back to before television and movies, let readers explore worlds of excitement, adventure, and mystery.

On January 10, 1929, a young Belgian reporter, named Tintin, and his faithful dog, Milou (Snowy, in the English version) were introduced to the world the Belgian children's magazine, *Le Petit Vingtième* . Their first "assignment" was titled *Les Aventures de Tintin, reporter du Petit Vingtième au pays des Soviets. Their creator was the Brussels-born cartoonist, Georges Remi, known since the age of seventeen by his pen-name, "Hergé" (the French pronunciation of his inverted initials). Over the next fifty or more years, Tintin and Milou traveled the world, sharing twenty-three adventures. When Hergé died in 1983, at the age of seventy-five, he left a final adventure unfinished. He named no successor as he expressly wished that no other illustrator continue* Les Aventures de Tintin. Hergé, who, at fourteen years old, illustrated a magazine for the Belgian boy scouts, is considered one of Europe's most influential cartoonists. He was known for his precise, clean illustrations, a technique known now as the Ligne Claire (Clear Line). In addition to Tintin, Hergé created and illustrated numerous other cartoon characters. [59]

Astérix le Gaulois (Asterix the Gaul) was introduced on October 29, 1959 by French writer, René Goscinny and his partner, illustrator Albert Uderzo (French-born of Italian parents) in the first issue of their magazine, *Pilote* . *Les Aventures d'Astérix* follow a fictional hero of village in Ancient Gaul and his companions as they battle the invading and occupying forces of Ancient Rome. For nearly ten years after this debut, Goscinny and Uderzo collaborated on Astérix while each also worked on other projects. In 1968, however, Uderzo devoted himself entirely to illustrating Astérix albums. The two created twenty-three albums of Astérix adventures until Goscinny's death at age fifty-one during a stress test. Since that tragic event, Albert Uderzo continued alone to write and illustrate the Astérix stories. It was announced in 2012 that the new team of artist, Didier Conrad and writer, Jean-Yves Ferri would take over for a retiring Uderzo. In October of 2013, the thirty-fifth album in the Astérix saga, *Astérix chez les Pictes* , was published. [60]

Suggested Classroom Activities

Students will be introduced to these iconic *bandes dessinées* through albums in both French and English. They will use observational techniques with the French versions of these adventures: describing what they see and naming the colors, characters, animals, and actions that they have learned in French. Students may work with partners to "read" the pictures together. While the language may be difficult, the illustrations will enable them to make guesses or even to invent their own stories. Students will gain increased geographic awareness mapping the global adventures of *Astérix* and *Tintin* . Discussions of the Roman occupation of Gaul portrayed in the Astérix adventures will strengthen students' connection to their social studies courses while giving them

the historical context, even if fictionally based, for the evolution of the French language and civilization from this Latin influence.

Both *Astérix* and *Tintin* are still protected by copyright and their images are not available in the public domain for reproduction here. Images are easily found online for individual use and the books in these series are readily available in libraries and bookstores, in both French and English. The official websites for these *bandes dessinées* , listed in the Internet Resources of the Bibliography, provide lists and descriptions of the titles. Adventures to share with students might include *Tintin en Amérique* and *Le Secret de la Licorne* (recently released as a feature film), as well as *Astérix le Gaulois* and *Astérix chez les Belges* (the last story written by René Goscinny). Titles could also be chosen to use in conjunction with social studies units.

Unit Assessments

Throughout this curriculum unit, students will be informally assessed on their interpretive understanding and mastery of vocabulary. Students will listen to descriptions of various artworks – cave paintings, tapestries, cartoon albums – and choose the corresponding label or sentences. They will read descriptions of different scenes from the tapestries, and then put the pictures in the correct order of events.

The classroom activities will act as informal interpersonal assessments. As a more structured assessment, students will take turns playing a French guessing game with classmates, describing one out of a series of tapestry panels pictured, while their partner tries to match the description to corresponding picture. Each student would gain points for correct guesses, indicating comprehensible input and output – the speaker used enough language and vocabulary to be understood, and the listener understood enough vocabulary to correctly identify the picture. Students would take turns describing multiple scenes. Classmates would be encouraged to ask for clarification, allowing students to use French expressions and vocabulary to negotiate for meaning. The guessing game would be created using print and online sources and would feature a variety of scenes – differing colors, backgrounds, animals, settings, humans – to enable students to practice vocabulary and expressions from the entire unit.

Students will create, as a final presentational assessment, three panels of a cave painting, tapestry, or cartoon following a narrative of their own devising, in the style of one of the artworks studied. The panels would be sequenced to show a beginning, middle, and end and be captioned in simple French sentences (or as a differentiated assessment – labeled in French). The panels could be original images or manipulated versions (digital or drawn) of artwork studied in this unit. Students should show their understanding of the visual components of the artwork they are replicating, i.e. a tapestry in the Bayeux style would be "embroidered" in basic colors on a plain background with borders of animals or plants, while panels in the style of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries would feature a central figure in a richly-colored background that is vibrantly populated with flowers and animals. They may also use characters from the Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées Tintin* and *Astérix* for their projects. Students may use online comic strip creators or other digital applications to tell their sequenced story. Students would follow a project rubric listing language requirements as well as choices of style, activities, and characteristics of the elements. The project rubric would evaluate how well students were able to replicate the style of their chosen artwork, rather than assessing their artistic ability. If possible, collaboration with the art teacher would be ideal for this unit and assessment. More important than the students' creative ability is their ability to communicate in French. The scoring rubric will focus on language usage and mastery, as well as on the narrative and appropriate style of the story panels.

Conclusion

The works for this curriculum unit were chosen for their importance in terms of French civilization and for their ability to spark the curiosity and interest of beginning French students. Their strong graphic qualities will allow students to use images to support language learning and storytelling. Each work, with the exception of the cartoon albums, has elements of mystery and risk in its history, from the unknown artists who created them to their potential loss through exposure to harsh environments, even to their chance discoveries, especially in the case of the Lascaux cave paintings and the deteriorating and neglected unicorn tapestries in a château in central France. Students will learn about the importance of preservation techniques to guard the treasures of the past to enable us to learn about long-gone civilizations. This could also lead to discussions of what stories the students would tell and how they would preserve their history for future generations. Students will make connections to core curriculum, strengthening their understandings of geography, history, science, and language arts. The visual interest of this unit should help students be engaged and motivated in their language development, increasing their understanding, verbal expression, and interest in improving in the study of French.

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However, there is a link to an educator's guide (in French) to the tapestries, with internet resources provided: http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/media/documents-pdf/dossiers-enseignents/dossier-enseignants-musee-de-cluny-tapisserie-2012.pdf

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Appendices

Appendix 1: French adapted text for picture walk of selected illustrations from *The Secret Cave: Discovering Lascaux* , written and illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully:

1.Un jour, Marcel Ravidat et son chien, Robot, découvrent un grand trou. Peut-être ça mène à un trésor secret ?

2.Marcel invite ses trois amis d'explorer le grand trou près d'un arbre tombé.

3.L'un par l'autre, les quatre garçons descendent le trou.

4.Ils continuent d'explorer le long d'un tunnel mystérieux. Ils cherchent le trésor.

5.Au but du tunnel, il y a un passage étroit.

6.Ils trouvent une grotte secrète. Sur les murs, il y a des animaux : une vache rouge et un renne ; les chevaux et les taureaux. Qui sont les artistes ? Quand et comment font-ils ces peintures ?

7.Le prochain jour, les amis continuent leur exploration de la grotte.

8.Ils descendent avec une corde. Les murs peints sont allumés par une lanterne.

9.Sur les murs, il y a un homme oiseau blessé et un bison et beaucoup d'autres animaux.

10.Ce n'est plus un secret ! Les autres enfants voudraient explorer la grotte.

11.Les quatre amis parlent de la découverte avec leur professeur.

12.Tout le monde du village admire les peintures anciennes dans la grotte. Quelle merveille ! Il y a des taureaux blancs et noirs, les rennes, les chevaux, les bisons, et les vaches.

13.Les quatre héros deviennent gardiens du trésor de la grotte secrète de Lascaux : Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Georges Agnel, et Simon Coencas. (Et n'oubliez pas le chien, Robot.)

Appendix 2: French adapted text to accompany selected website illustrations of the Bayeux Tapestry (sequencing activity accessed July 2, 2014 from: http://www.bayeuxtapestry.org.uk/activities/bayeuxtap-sequence.pdf)

1.Voici le roi et un soldat.

2.Il est sur un cheval.

3.Les soldats vont en bateau.

4.Voici une bataille.

5.Il y a quatre bateaux et quatre chevaux.

6.Le roi parle aux soldats.

Appendix 3: These examples show the progression of student responses from simple words and phrases to complete sentences to describe the cave paintings and tapestries.

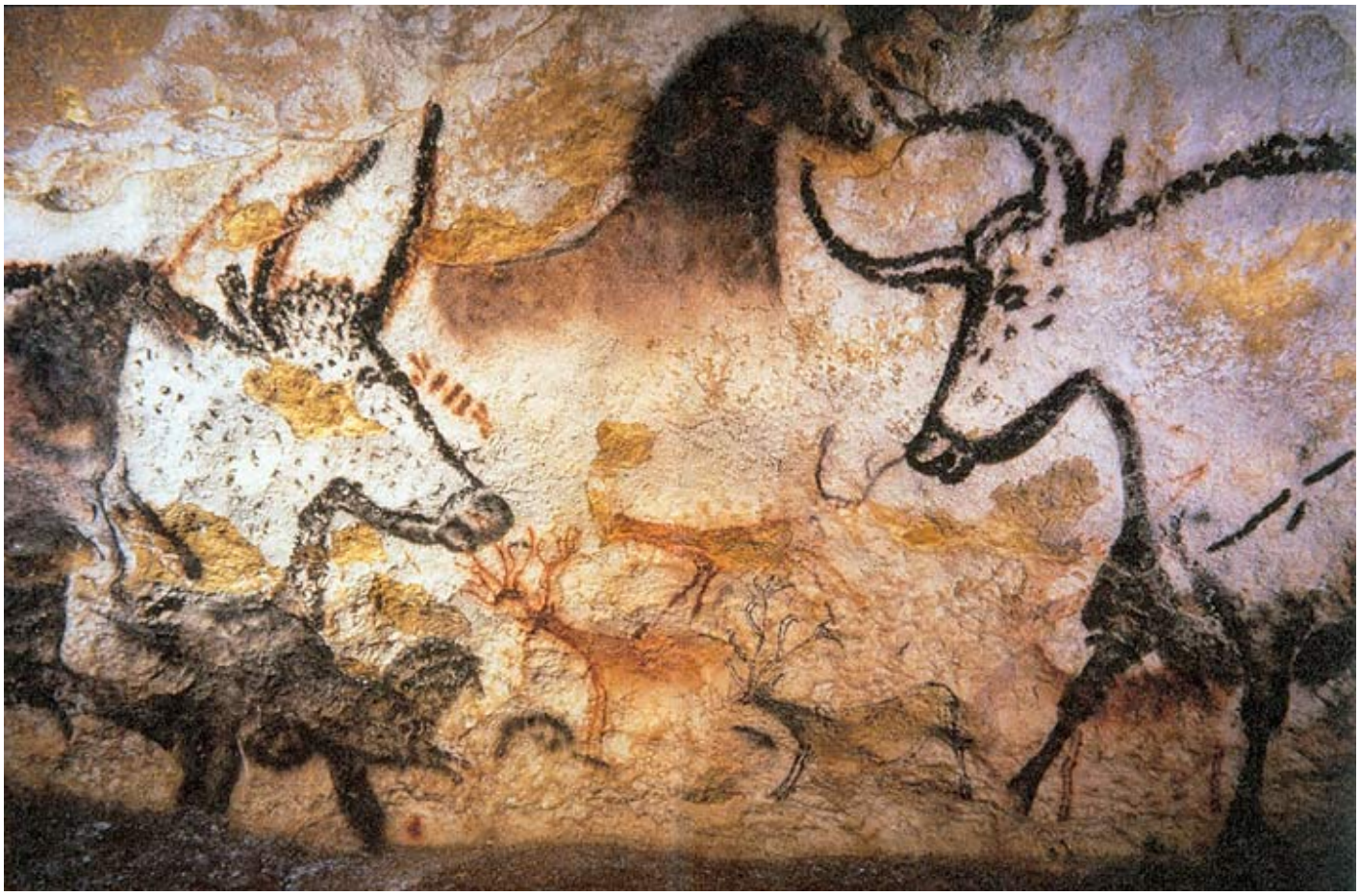

Figure 1. Using the Lascaux cave paintings for descriptions:

Qu'est-ce que vous voyez ? (What do you see?)

un taureau

deux taureaux blancs

les rennes marron

Voilà un cheval noir.

Il y a deux grands taureaux blancs.

Sur les murs de la grotte, il y a des animaux.

(Image accessed July 14, 2014 from:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/Lascaux_painting.jpg)

Figure 2. Using the Bayeux Tapestry for descriptions:

Qu'est-ce que vous voyez? (What do you see?)

trois hommes

deux épées

sur une chaise

Ils s'appellent Odo, Guillaume, et Robert

Voici le roi – Guillaume de Normandie.

Il porte une tunique rouge. .

Odo porte une tunique grise. Robert aussi.

Il y a trois hommes sur une chaise.

(Image accessed on July 14, 2014 from:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/95/Bayeuxtapestryodowilliamrobert.jpg)

Figure 3. Using the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries for descriptive observation:

Qu'est-ce que vous voyez? (What do you see?)

rougebleu

une dameune jeune fille

un lionune licorne

des animauxdeux drapeaux

des fleursdes arbres

la musiquela dame joue

La robe est bleue et rouge.

Elles sont blondes.

(Image accessed on July 14, 2014 from:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/The_Lady_and_the_unicorn_Hearing.jpg)

Appendix 4: Implementing District Standards (World Language and Visual Arts)

This curriculum unit responds to the five goal areas of the national world-readiness standards for learning languages – the five "C"s: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. [62] It is specifically focused on the national and state Communications standards for students to communicate effectively in more than one language in all three communication modes. This unit aligns with the first, second, and third content standards of the Communication Objectives from the Connecticut World Language Curriculum Framework. [63]

The unit primarily responds to Visual Arts Content Standard 4 from the Connecticut Arts Curriculum Framework: students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures. However, it also aligns to Visual Arts Content Standard 1: students will understand, select, and apply media, techniques and processes. [64] Students will imitate the artwork of this unit, creating cave paintings, tapestry designs, and comic strip panels.

Notes

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1. Tiffany Cain, "Research Talking Points on Small Schools."

2. Diane F. Halpern, et al., "Encouraging Girls in Math and Science," overview.

3.

4. Marietta Rossetto and Antonella Chiera-Macchia, "Visual Learning is the Best Learning," 37.

5. Ibid., 39.

6. Megan Schliesman, "So Many Books...So Little Time," 2.

7. Susan Britsch, "Image as Language,"113.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 114.

11. Michael D. Bush, "Facilitating the Integration of Culture and Vocabulary Learning," 728.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 731.

15. Richard M. Felder and Eunice R. Henriques, "Learning And Teaching Styles," 21.

16. Ibid., 28.

17. Virginia R. Jones, Ph.D., "Essentials for Engaged 21st-Century Learners," 17.

18. Ibid., 18.

19. Mary Moeller, et al., "Visual Thinking Strategies."

20. Ibid., 57.

21. Ibid., 58.

22. Ibid., 60.

23. James Tyler Rosier, Lawrence Locker, Jr., and Karen Z. Naufel, "Art and Memory."

24. Ibid., 265.

25. Ibid., 266.

26. Ibid., 267.

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