

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING
Course Portfolio for French 520:
Introduction to French Literature I
(19th-20th Centuries)

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I. Portfolio Purpose

A. Goals and objectives of the portfolio

I chose to create a portfolio for this course primarily to help me improve the overall course structure and my teaching of multiple skills (linguistic, analytic, integrative, comprehensive) while allowing students to apply those competencies in a logical manner. I first taught this course in the Spring 2005 semester and it will continue to be my responsibility throughout my career at K-State. Because it is a foundational course to the French major, I am particularly concerned that the content be taught as effectively as possible. I will also use the course portfolio in my tenure review file, and I intend to use this experience as a model for the modification of future courses such as the Commercial French course I teach every other year.

B. Personal reflections on the course

1. Major objectives

My goals in teaching this course are multiple. Beyond expecting students to attain general period and genre knowledge, I require students to use their critical thinking skills to draw connections between French literature of the 19th and 20th centuries and literature, art, philosophy, and history from other world regions and languages. I also want students to gain confidence in basic poetry analysis (form and content) and to acquire a technical vocabulary that allows them to analyze both poetry and prose in the French language. This is clearly a lot to ask at once of students, yet it is imperative that they gain all of these skills in this course or in combination with Introduction to French Literature 2 if they plan to continue their studies in French literature.

2. Approaches to attaining objectives

In 2005 I used a genre-based approach. The first third of the course focused on poetry and poetry analysis from the 19th to 20th centuries progressively. We then read two plays from the early 20th century and ended with longer fiction works (short story and novel) which progressed again from 19th to 20th century. This approach assumed that the students would benefit from the separation of genre and the repetition of overall themes in literature. What I discovered was that students found poetry to be inaccessible and unpleasant when concentrated together. As poetry occupied the first third of the course, it also raised student anxiety about literature in general.¹ One of the primary

¹ See Stephen Krashen's research in second language acquisition on the affective filter that explains this anxiety Krashen, S. D. (1981). "The 'Fundamental Pedagogical Principle' in Second Language Teaching." *Studia Linguistica* 35, no. 1-2 (1981): 50-70.

assignments in the course is an *explication de texte*, the literary analysis of a poem in this case. Students felt comfortable with poetry by mid-term, but wrote very poorly, both grammatically and in content. The one advantage I perceived from this approach was that once students began the short fiction and drama segments of the course, they found the texts to be comprehensible. In spite of this, by compiling all of the poetry at the beginning of the course, many of the students were immediately alienated by the course content and it was a struggle to recover their confidence. Another difference: in 2005 I chose to use a coursepack for short texts, a novel, and a play. Students gained integrative and period information through lectures.

This semester I chose to follow a chronological approach and accompanied the play and novel with an anthology. My lectures were based on the content of the literary texts presented in the anthology, but I allowed the editorial commentary to complement my lecture notes. This additional support provided in the anthology proved to be effective in aiding student learning. Students used the editorial notes, for example, in written assignments and exams, even when they were not specifically discussed in class. As the course was taught chronologically, we approached poetry in several phases. For example, I taught Romantic poetry, and then after a few weeks working on Realist short fiction, we returned to Symbolist and Dada poetry). My intent was to isolate and then layer the analytical skills and technical vocabulary students would need to complete the literary analysis papers and presentations.

In addition to this change, I created discussion question handouts. This idea came from a student from my Spring 2005 class. Ideally these questions would be available the day before the text was to be discussed in class. This would allow students to frame their reading and would guide them in textual comprehension. However, because the anthology offered its own set of study questions, I found that it was sufficient to provide my handouts during class time to guide small-group discussion. There were usually many more questions than time allowed us to discuss, but students retained and used the guides as study sheets (See Appendix B for sample questions on George Sand's *La Mare au Diable*).

C. Questions for readers to address when reviewing the portfolio

When teaching this course in 2005, I was quite pleased with the students and the format of the course. Student assignments and grades, however, reflected that many of the students had difficulty acquiring the multiple skills and knowledge presented and then found it even more difficult to immediately apply those

skills. Some students expressed in the course evaluation that they felt alienated in the classroom (due to the classroom structure and size which prevented shyer students from participating), even though I complemented oral participation with written journal assignments specifically for this purpose. As a result, I created a stricter structure for the journal assignments this semester (see Appendix A, syllabus). Some students also felt that the written exams did not reflect their level of understanding of the course materials. I am particularly concerned with the difficulty of asking students to apply multiple newly acquired skills, and yet, they need to use these skills immediately in order to thrive in the upper-division courses. This semester I worked to break down the competencies and to focus on one skill at a time, where possible, in order to then help students layer the skills in more complex assignments. Reviewer suggestions for the isolation of analytical skills while approaching the same breadth of literature presented in my syllabus are greatly appreciated.

II. Course Design

A. Description of course and its context

Introduction to French Literature I (FREN 520) is a required course for the French major while the French minor requires either Introduction to French Literature I (FREN 520) or II (FREN 521). The course covers major literary movements and authors in France and the Francophone world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries including the major genres of poetry, theater, short story, and novel. The course also meets the University General Education requirements (<http://www.k-state.edu/uge/>).

Course catalogue description:

FREN 520. Introduction to French Literature I. (3) The reading and discussion of major works of French literature from the early nineteenth century to the present. Pr.: French 516 (Readings in French) or equiv.

From the syllabus: "Introduction to French Literature I" will provide an introduction to the reading and analysis of the major works in French literature from the 19th and 20th centuries. Taught chronologically, the course will cover poetry, theater, and fictional prose (short stories and novels) from major authors such as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Baudelaire, Hugo, Balzac, Sand, Zola, Breton, Sartre and Camus. This course will provide models for analyzing poetry and prose using the French *explication de texte* and *pastiche*.² This course fulfills both the French major and minor requirements for the 500-level literature course as well as it meets UGE requirements.

B. Description of students

French 520 has a normal enrollment ranging from 15 to 24 (the course cap is set at 20 but as the French program grows, we generally permit more students than the cap allows). This class had 17 students, which is an ideal number. Students ranged from advanced first-year to fourth-year, and 12 (70%) of the 17 students were majors or minors, with the others exploring a potential concentration in French or International Studies.

Almost all of the students had completed the basic French language program (French I-IV) and the majority of them had also already taken the prerequisite 500-level course in French Readings that prepares them for this course. Approximately one-quarter of the students had studied or traveled in a Francophone country and about one-half of the remaining students intend to do so before graduation. A problematic aspect of this course was that the students' linguistic competency varied greatly from the

² Both genres will be explained in the "Evaluation Methods" section of the portfolio.

intermediate-low to the advanced plus levels as established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).³ A large number of the students had secondary majors in areas such as business, mass communications, and secondary education and most of the students brought broad knowledge from other fields in the humanities such as English Literature and Art History into this class. This class had two international students with native languages other than English or French, and one student who was raised in Francophone Africa by Anglophone parents.

C. Summary of course goals and learning objectives

In combination with Introduction to French Literature II, this course teaches a technical vocabulary, general knowledge of the major movements in French literature, and an introduction to literary analysis. Students are equally expected to draw on their knowledge from other literature courses taught in their native language to analyze texts.

As stated on the syllabus, the student objectives of the course are to

- broaden your general knowledge of French literature of the 19th and 20th centuries;
- make connections with other disciplines and other world literatures and arts of the same time periods;
- acquire a technical vocabulary for literary analysis that will equip you for upper division literature courses;
- learn to use the *explication de texte* and *pastiche* analysis models for critical text analysis;
- make presentations that demonstrate interdisciplinary connections to texts and contribute to the learning of your classmates;
- participate in class discussion and journal activities in which you react to texts;
- complete two course papers will focus on the analysis of form (in poetry) and style (in prose); and, maximize your spoken and written skills in the French language.

D. Place of the course in broader department and university curricula

One of the main objectives of this course with regards to the French curriculum is to prepare students for the upper-level

³ Available at <http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm>

(700) courses that primarily focus on period literature and literary theory/criticism. The curriculum for the French section at KSU is being revised to offer a wider range of culture courses, but at present the program remains heavily based in literature. As such, French 520 provides students with the foundations necessary to succeed in other departmental offerings. For the majority of students, Introduction to French Literature I is the first course in which they must write a literary paper in French and it is also their first contact with complete literary works in French (having only prior been exposed to excerpts).

III. Teaching Methods

A. Pedagogical approach

1. Class structure and course activities

Each class generally opens with a student presentation on an author, period, theme, or text related to the reading assignment for that day. The class will then progress into a short lecture-style presentation of background information about the author or movement, emphasizing information from the student presentation and supplementing that information. We then move to a discussion question that requires students to draw on their own opinions and experience and to relate these themes to the texts being studied. For example, while studying Existentialism and Jean-Paul Sartre's concept that "hell is other people," I open class with a small-group discussion of the students' conception of hell, the images that are evoked, and its representation in other literatures. This allows students to warm-up in the target language (French), which is sometimes a difficult task, and it allows them to make personal connections while opening the discussion to the literature at hand.

The discussion question generally leads to comprehension-type questions. This year those questions were provided on handouts (see Appendix B). Students worked in small groups to summarize the plot, define the characters, etc. Students might also practice counting syllables and identifying rhyme schemes during this part of the course. Then beyond comprehension questions, the discussion handouts asked the students to make broader connections between the particular text being studied and others of the same genre or period, etc. After small-group discussion, we return to whole class discussion to clear up remaining questions and to allow students to express their opinions and observations of the major points in a text.

This structure allows students to contribute to each other's learning and encourages them to make connections between their background knowledge and the newly acquired information. It also assures both linguistic and content comprehension. Because of the sometimes large size of this course, much of the discussion takes place in small-groups and then opens into a quick review in whole-class discussion. Students frequently work with partners to provide a comfortable environment for expressing themselves. This also maximizes the amount of interaction they can have in the foreign language.

Because this course serves as a preparation for advanced French literature but also bridges the gap between language and literature, my focus is often on the language aspects of the course: 1. Students learn to read lengthy texts; 2. Comprehension of the reading assignments is emphasized; 3. Students receive credit for language and content on most assignments and exams.

2. Course materials

This year I chose to accompany the normally taught play and novel with an anthology rather than using a coursepack of poetry and short stories. This proved to be a good decision as the accompanying analysis provided another resource for students to prepare for presentations and exams. The chosen anthology also provided a lexicon of literary analysis terms.

Below is the list of texts which were supplemented by student presentations and my own lectures and lecture notes, available to students on K-State Online (see Appendix C):

- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Huis-clos*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.
- Camus, Albert. *L'Etranger*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.
- Berg, R.-J. et Fabrice Leroy. *Littérature française : Textes et contextes, Tome II*. Hoboken, NJ : Wiley, 2001.

3. Evaluation methods

a. Participation and journal

One of my primary goals in the class is to encourage students to communicate about the texts they are reading. Participation is crucial in evaluating students' progress and understanding of the reading assignments. The oral part of the participation grade is composed of attendance, whole class discussion, small group discussion, homework and quizzes, and general preparation for class. Students will fail the participation grade and eventually the course if they have too many absences (See syllabus, Appendix A).

Because I understand that some students do not feel comfortable speaking in class (in English or in a foreign language), I also attribute 5% of their overall grade in the class to written journals. These assignments allow students to reflect on reading assignments and to prepare for in-class discussion. Last year I had not developed guidelines for these assignments and I received amorphous contributions that were difficult to evaluate because of my lack of precision. This year I required students to write 4 entries by midterm and originally planned to request an additional 3 at the end of the semester. Each entry was to be typed and 250 words minimum. These requirements were modified at the end of semester, and I explain this under "evaluation of participation" below.

To encourage participation this year, I provided in-class discussion question handouts. As compared to the results in this course in the Spring 2005 (when discussion questions were only

available on the overhead projector), I noted marked improvement in student participation and preparation for exams. The visual support of the language and subsequent note taking during small group discussion and lecture reinforced the language and content. My peer review partner, Joye Gordon, pointed out in an observation report that the handouts were effective but that the overhead transparencies accompanying lectures were very difficult to read. While I posted lecture notes on K-State online in both Spring 2005 and Spring 2006, I found that the addition of discussion question handouts in class also encouraged students to prepare their reading assignments in a more consistent matter.

b. Papers

Because this course aims to teach students analytical and linguistic skills for literary criticism, students are also required to write two major papers in this course. The first paper is a practice of the French genre called *explication de texte* which requires students to contextualize a work and to make a detailed analysis of vocabulary, style, and form. Students perform several practice *explications* in class before beginning the writing assignment. The paper is then peer-edited for structure and content before it is submitted. The second writing assignment is a *pastiche* in which students imitate the writing style of a major French author. Students either rewrite a passage or add an additional "chapter" to a work as they practice this imitative assignment. This is also a peer-revised paper.

Explication de texte:

The *explication de texte* is a typical assignment in French schools. It is a highly structured paper that combines the formal analysis of a passage or poem with a thematic investigation. While students in France are quite familiar with this type of assignment, it is often intimidating to Americans. Nonetheless, it is an integrative assignment that, when completed properly, gives students great insight into a text and generally allows them a great sense of mastery over the text in question. As part of this assignment, students journal on their poem selection, then come to class for peer-editing of their rough draft (a process for which they receive credit), and then produce the final paper including the draft and peer-editing comments. Extra credit (2% of this assignment) is available for completing supplementary peer-editing.

In the Spring 2005 course, I gave the students the option of choosing the poem they would analyze for this assignment. This proved to be difficult for the students and for me as a reader and grader because of the wide variety of choices (sometimes students changed their poem even a few days before the assignment was due) and because of the difficulty of structuring an *explication* of a poem that we did not discuss at length in class.

One of my colleagues who taught this class before me had all of his students analyze the same poem - one that was quite well known. I found it problematic to limit students to this point, and I also discovered that there were a number of *explications de texte* available online for this particular poem.

This year I selected three poems and allowed students to choose. Each poem was taught in class, to varying degrees. *Les Djinns* by Victor Hugo and *Le Lac* by Alphonse de Lamartine, for example, were discussed at length during class time and students completed the basic formal analysis (rhyme, rhythm, etc.) of the poem in class. To my surprise, the majority of students opted for the analysis of *L'Albatros* by Baudelaire which was the shortest of the three. The three texts proved to be a manageable selection for me to grade, and it allowed some students an opportunity to collaborate. Student N. commented that during the peer-editing process she gained new insight into her selected text because she and her partner had chosen the same poem but had taken an entirely different approach. After reading her partner's work, she was able to go back to her own with a fresh eye and reconsider several aspects of the poem.

Pastiche

The second major writing assignment is another French-styled paper called a *pastiche* in which the students imitate the style of an author and either recreate a scene from a work from another point of view or they may add a passage to the work. In this case, students were to recreate Albert Camus' style in *L'Etranger* while remaining consistent with his philosophy. This assignment relies a great deal on creativity, and requires the analysis of style rather than form.

c. Presentations

Presentations allow students to practice both speaking and listening skills, and allow me to evaluate students' comprehension of material as well as their comprehensibility. There were three presentations this semester. The first focused on an author or movement that we were studying at the time of the presentation, the second (which was weighted far less) was the performance of a scene from Sartre's *Huis clos* (*No exit*) and the last was an oral *explication de texte* of Camus' *L'Etranger* (*The Stranger*). The combination of assignments allowed students to emphasize their strengths in organization, creativity and interpretation, comprehension of literary structures, and finite analysis of texts. For each presentation students had the option of working with a partner or alone. This option helps students feel less anxious about performing in front of the class.

Presentation 1: Author/movement

Grading Criteria: Content 10, Effort 5, Vocabulary 5, Grammar 5, Comprehensibility 5

Students sign up for this presentation very early in the semester, with the first presentation being given this year on the seventh class meeting. Presentations continue throughout the semester (the last one took place the class period before the second presentations began). In the past I have been able to allow students to use PowerPoint presentations, which I had hoped to include in this portfolio. Because of technological problems in my classroom, this was not a possibility this year. Instead students used posters which were impossible to read from the back of the classroom and often difficult to see even in the front row. Students often passed images around the classroom while they were speaking. This was especially frustrating during one presentation when a student made an excellent oral presentation on 19th Century Romantic art and its connection to literature. We were unable to observe the details in the paintings as she pointed them out. Instead we had to wait until it was our turn to see the images, and by then she had moved on to another point. (See Appendix F for presentation guidelines.)

Presentation 2: Explication de texte - Camus

Grading Criteria: Content/Effort 10, Analysis 10, Comprehensibility 10

This assignment is created to assure that students have mastered the *explication de texte* by completing the analysis of a prose excerpt of their choosing from Camus' *L'Etranger*. Because we spend so many class periods on this text, there is ample time for the presentations, and students benefit from their classmates' interpretations of the text. Students were given a detailed description of this assignment asking them to identify the theme or subject of the passage they chose, the tone, the context, the point of view, and an analysis of the vocabulary. This was followed by sample questions they could use to develop the explanation of the passage. Because this assignment is a technical analysis, I did allow students to use their notes, but again verbally discouraged them from reading the presentation. Likewise, to encourage the emphasis on analysis, I gave more points for "comprehensibility" and did not break this down into grammar and vocabulary as I did for the first presentation.

d. Exams

Mid-term

The mid-term exam (written entirely in French) consisted of the definition of movements or periods in the 19th century, finite poetry analysis with a choice of poems (both were studied in class), author, movement and text identification, an essay explaining the difference between two movements and requesting

specific examples of each, and a short question about the students' favorite text read that far. This last question was designed for my own understanding of students' preferences and was graded quite leniently.

Final

The final exam is not comprehensive, but includes the definition of movements or periods of the 20th century, the identification of major texts, movements and authors, comprehension questions regarding the texts, a short essay relating philosophy to the two major texts read (the play and novel), and an *explication de texte* of a passage from *L'Etranger* (both selections were discussed in class). There were also three bonus points available.

B. Rationale for teaching methods

Participation is essential in a foreign language classroom to assess students' progress both with the language itself and with the content of the course. As much as possible, I try to create a student-centered classroom. What this means for a pure language class is that students produce the language approximately 80% of the time, while my direct input occupies about 20% of an ideal class period. A literature class, however, requires the professor to lecture at very least as a supplement to reading and class presentations. For me a good balance of student-teacher input in FREN 520 would be 60% student and 40% instructor input.

To achieve this goal, I rely heavily on the communicative approach of language teaching which creates real and meaningful contexts in which the students can express themselves. Often this is as simple a task as asking realistic and meaningful discussion questions such as displayed in the sample discussion questions in Appendix B in which I ask students to discuss the following question in small-groups:

Quelles valeurs sont importantes quand on cherche un partenaire ? Est-ce que cela doit être différent si c'est un deuxième mariage ? et si on a des enfants ?
(Which values are important in seeking a partner?
Should these values be different in a second marriage?
And if there are children involved?)

Students are then able to relate personal experience to the content of the texts they read, which further reinforces their comprehension and retention of the material.

As mentioned above, students in foreign languages are often confronted with a certain anxiety level attributed to the new language. Prior to beginning this semester, I solicited my

partner, Joye Gordon's input on creating a positive learning environment and expressed my concerns that many students are afraid to participate in a foreign language. She replied in a memo, "The question may be how you can foster an environment where students are encouraged to make mistakes, to get sloppy when it comes to speaking in the class. That's a tough one seeing many students are uncomfortable talking in class in their native language." In order to lower the affective filter, as Stephen Krashen labels it, I do not take grammatical accuracy into account during class discussion and I prefer to allow students to discuss questions in small groups or with a partner before whole class discussion begins. This helps students who are slow to participate develop questions and responses to contribute ahead of time. I have also observed that students feel more comfortable asking questions of their peers than immediately seeking my explanations. I circulate in the classroom during these small group discussion periods and students then find it generally less stressful to ask me questions that remain or that they would not want to discuss in front of the entire class. I often receive specific questions related to vocabulary and textual interpretation during this time.

Another tactic I employ in moving the classroom production towards the students is to have them collaborate on presentations and peer-edit both of their papers. This allows students to gain new knowledge from each other in the target language and to view alternate models of production in a relatively safe or non-stressful environment.

One goal for which I have had some difficulty finding an appropriate methodology is the isolation of skills, especially as this relates to literary analysis. This course requires the students to layer multiple skills such as 1. comprehension of oral and written French, 2. comprehensible output (written and spoken) in French, 3. acquisition of new technical terminology, 4. acquisition and retention of content related to authors, movements, and periods, 5. application of new terminology to texts, 6. comprehension of characters and basic plot, and 7. complex analysis of form and content.

The best method I have been able to apply this far is to neglect skills 1 and 2, except by giving credit for these in presentations and papers, and to repeat the application process of terminology at several points during the course. Skills 4, 5, and 6 are structured into each class period, but I find it difficult to ascertain student progress in classroom work alone. It seems that often what students understand and complete in the class is not the same as what they are then able to produce on their own in presentations and written papers. One possibility for controlling or gauging this development would be to include in-class writing assignments in the future.

To reinforce skill 7, students complete a variety of types of analysis (of poetry and prose) both in and outside of class. These skills are tested on both the midterm and the final exam and are the source of the first paper and the second major presentation. Although sometimes surprising to students, strong oral participators are frequently weak writers and vice versa. Through a combination of oral and written assignments, for example the journals and in-class participation grades, I am able to assess students with different strengths in a more fair and balanced manner.

IV. Analysis of Student Learning

A. Analysis of particular assignments and students

The students in this class were particularly successful, and in the end I had a high grade distribution as compared to the Spring 2005 course. In Spring 2006 three students received Cs and the fourteen others received As and Bs (the course median was a B+ and course average was a B). I chose to track four students for the portfolio: one French major and three non-majors. Of the non-majors, one had a declared minor in French and the other two majored in sciences and were considering a French minor. **M.** and **R.**, both non-majors, had similar backgrounds, strengths and weaknesses - one received an A and the other a B. The other two students, **E.** and **N.**, have very diverse backgrounds. One majored in the sciences and did not feel prepared for this course but received an A. The other was a new French major and a non-native English speaker who came to this course from French IV (Intermediate French 2). She received a B in the course. I purposely did not choose the three strongest students in the class, or the three weakest, because none of them is characteristic of the majority of French students at the 500-level. Because the value of my teaching approach is perhaps best assessed at the juncture of A and B students (good students who have the potential of excelling), of the students I selected, two received As and two received Bs. Each set (**M.** and **R.**, **E.** and **N.**) had equal potential with particular strengths and weaknesses that are typical at this level. Through evaluating these four students, I will be able to see where my own attention to students' difficulties is lacking and where I can organizationally and perhaps dynamically improve my teaching.

Students, background, strengths and weaknesses:

R. (Finance, French Minor) - creative comprehensive skills, lack of participation but spoken French is relatively good, lack of extra effort until end of the semester

M. (Biology and Natural resources) - written expression is average but her work is consistent and provides thorough answers and information; strong in memorization, reserved in participation

N. (French) non-native English speaker, struggles with language but consistent in work and preparation, very conscientious and attentive, reluctant to participate in class, poor spoken French
E. (Microbiology) - written and oral expression is weak grammatically, but she is eager to participate and often goes beyond requirements because of her enthusiasm for the language, very sharp finite analytical skills, work was less consistent towards the end of the semester

Participation:

Journals 5% and in-class participation 10%:

R. Journal - A, Participation - B+ (often inattentive, and rarely volunteered for whole class discussion but did participate in group work)

M. Journal - A, Participation - A- (participated well in small-group discussion and often volunteered in whole class discussion)

N. Journal - B, Participation - B (always prepared for class but did not often participate in whole class discussion, very active in group work)

E. Journal - A, Participation - A- (active whole class participator and group leader small groups, consistently prepared and insightful)

Evaluation of Participation:

In general, students performed better on the journals (provided they were complete) than in class participation. Neither grade incorporates grammar; rather these grades focus on the quality and quantity of responses. I attribute the higher success on journals to several factors, the largest being that students are able to complete journals on their own timescale and are under no immediate pressure to perform in front of their peers for these assignments. The in-class participation grade also included a quiz and a homework assignment, as well as reductions for unexcused absences.

Towards the end of the semester I ascertained that students were not using the journal assignments as planned. Rather than writing them throughout the semester as they found interesting subjects in their reading to which they could react, the majority of the class (if not all the students) waited until the last few days before the assignment was due to write the entries. For this reason I decided to make the last three entries optional (no students had begun writing the last journals by the last week before finals). The only student to complete the second journal, **E.** wrote an excellent entry explaining her point of view in her second paper.

Papers:

1. Explication de texte

R. - *Les Djinns* - difficulties with vocabulary, lack of explanations, vague statements, syntactical problems, lack of specific examples from the poem, literal translations ("Hugo a payé beaucoup d'attention à la forme de "Les Djinns."), interesting conclusion. Grade: B (content B, Vocabulary/Grammar B, Analysis B)

M. - *L'Albatros* - repetitive style, lack of transitions, problematic syntax, lack of citation, vocabulary choice (ligne v. vers and then "line", "pattern"), interesting ideas not backed up by citations or not developed. Grade: A- (content: A/A-, Vocab/Grammar A-, Analysis B+) Note: **M.** wrote considerably more than the other three students.

N. - *Le Lac* - misconjugation and tense mistakes (major mistakes in grammar), lack of source for information, adjective v. noun or adverb forms, genders of nouns (major mistake), vocabulary sometimes difficult to understand (atypical mistakes due to linguistic background), general and/or simplistic statements, lack of transitions, lack of precise examples from text, syntax, lack of connections between form and content. Grade: B (content: B+, Vocab/Grammar B/B-, Analysis B)

E. - *Le Lac* - lack of agreement, gender mistakes, vocabulary, (fewer mistakes than **N.** but less writing), lack of development of certain ideas, raises interesting questions and ideas that could be developed. Grade: A-/B+ (content: A-, Vocab/Grammar: B/B+, Analysis A-)

2. Pastiche

R. had the creative idea of writing this pastiche from the perspective of an invented child of the main character, who then takes on certain characteristics of his father. His work was well revised with only minor mistakes in tense and syntax. I was pleased with this paper and it stood out as one of the best in the class. I commented that his work was well thought out, creative, and written in a very appropriate style. Grade = A (content=A, Grammar = A-, Style = A)

M. had a variety of basic mistakes (spelling, conjugation, etc.) in her text, including a missed contraction in the title. She wrote from the perspective of Meursault, the main character's neighbor, who had lost his dog. My comments pointed out lack of transitions, need for elaboration on certain points, incorrect

expressions that were difficult to understand, and in the end I wanted to know the philosophical question, "Why does Salamano justify himself so much?"

Grade = B- (Content = B-, Grammar = C+/B-, Style = B/B-)

N. although a French major, did not have the same linguistic background as the other students in the class, and this showed in her paper. Although she revised her work after peer-editing, many basic mistakes remained. **N.** wrote from the perspective of Marie to explain her decision to get engaged to Meursault in spite of his clear indifference towards her. The explanation contained many engaging and creative elements, but several issues remained unclear to me at the end of the paper. My comments throughout the paper were related to grammar, especially tense, and I also pointed out places that were unclear. At the end I noted, "Your pastiche raises even more questions for me although you have very interesting ideas."

Grade = B (Content = B, Grammar = C+, Style = B+)

E. like **R.** had a creative idea. She wrote from the perspective of Meursault's lover, Marie, but dramatically and fundamentally changed the sense of the work by exploring the possibility of Meursault giving Marie a sexually transmitted disease. Meursault when confronted was completely unresponsive (as he is in Camus' text) and Marie kills him in a fit of rage. My comment to her was, "This is an interesting idea and I like that you've recreated the indifferent attitude of Meursault. What would Camus' philosophy be in this situation? How would you explain Marie's laughter in the rest of the text?" My main concern was that **E.** completely ignored the idea that murder is a senseless act in *L'Etranger*. That and the many problems with tense and prepositions in the paper made this a less successful paper than **R.**'s. **E.** did write an excellent journal entry explaining her choice of this text for which she received an A+.

Grade = B (Content = B/B+, Grammar = B/B-, Style = B)

Evaluation of Papers:

Note: I reduced the length of paper requirements to 3 1/2 pages for the *explication de texte* and 2 pages for the pastiche in order to accommodate students having difficulty with the language.

I would expect students to perform better on the second paper because it is shorter and creative, and requires a different set of analytical skills than the first. Three of the four students I selected, however, did not improve. Although this is a literature course, and content and style or analysis comprise two-thirds of the grade, clarity of expression is a major factor in the successful completion of this assignment. In the case of **N.**, her grammar grade changed from a B/B- to a C+. **E.**'s grammar grade also decreased from a B/B+ to a B/B-. **M.** shifted from an A- to a C+/B- in this category as her final paper was poorly revised. I attribute the decrease in grammar to the end of

semester pressures in this and other classes. While these three students were less conscientious in revising their work, **R.** increased his effort in the course dramatically in the final three weeks. His grammar score increased from a B to an A-.

Analysis and Style are the most complex skills involved in these assignments and essential to students' success in future courses. The grades for **R.** and **N.** improved while the grades for **M.** and **E.** declined. Of note here is that the two science majors had more difficulty with the stylistic analysis involved in the more creative writing assignment. Often students do not recognize that their strengths can transfer from one assignment to the next and in the future I will encourage such students to apply their analytical skills to the creative assignment.

Presentations:⁴

Presentation 1: Author/movement

Grading Criteria: Content 10, Effort 5, Vocabulary 5, Grammar 5, Comprehensibility 5

R. Topic = Jean-Paul Sartre. Grade - B, 25.4/30

Short presentation which added little to the textbook or from my presentation of the author. The entire presentation was read directly from notes and included several false conjugations and made up words. **R.**'s pronunciation, however, is quite good, and his presentation was easy to understand.

M. Topic = André Gide. Grade - A-, 27.25 /30

Good content and effort with a natural style and no reading from her notes. She was very easy to understand but had several false expressions in French. In general it was a very good presentation consistent with her other work in the course.

N. Topic = Existentialism. Grade - B, 25.2/30

Good level of content and a very interesting presentation analyzing art of the period, but she read from notes. Pronunciation is often difficult to understand and she scored 3.7/5 (a C) in Comprehensibility. She also made mistakes mixing noun and verb forms such as "peintre," "peinture," and "peindre" (painter, painting, to paint).

E. Topic = Albert Camus. Grade - B+, 26.8/30

Very good content and effort, but she read her presentation and was somewhat difficult to understand because her reading hindered pronunciation.

⁴ (Note: None of the four students chosen worked together as partners for any of the presentations)

Presentation 2: Explication of Camus

Grading Criteria: Content/Effort 10, Analysis 10,
Comprehensibility 10

R. Grade = A- (27.2/30), read the presentation but had a solid analysis and sufficient content.

M. Grade = A- (27.3/30), her presentation was a little difficult to follow because her style was slightly choppy, but her analysis was strong and the content was sufficient.

N. Grade = C (23/30), very difficult to understand (6.5/10 for Comprehensibility) and this made the presentation difficult to assess for content and analysis.

E. Grade = B+ (26.5/30) content was reasonably good but the analysis was lacking, which is quite uncharacteristic of this student's work. She was, however, easy to understand because of her natural presentation style and this boosted her grade.

Evaluation of presentations:

I will need to be more clear in the future that students' grades are lowered for reading their presentations. I say this in class and post it on K-State online (saying explicitly that reading notes is not allowed) with the assignment information (see Appendix F), but this is not stated in the syllabus, and throughout the semester students watch and model each other, assuming their classmates are correct.

I thoroughly enjoy student presentations, but I remain uncertain about several aspects. I have not been able to evaluate how much the other students in the course benefit from or learn from their classmates' work, and I am unsure how to help students improve in areas such as "comprehensibility" which was a major factor in **N.**'s grade in both of her presentations.

As with the papers, it is difficult to assess if the timing of the presentations is as much of a factor in student success as the actual task. Also like the papers, I would expect the *explication* to be more difficult than the first presentation, yet **M.** and **E.** had consistent grades, **R.** improved at this task, and **N.**'s grade was lower, perhaps due to the linguistic difficulty of the literary analysis.

Exams:

Midterm

I did not retain copies of all four students' mid-term exams, but I do have **M.**'s copy and a few others. Of those I will use **A.**'s for contrastive purposes.

M. Grade = A (Breakdown: 14.5/15 on the poetry analysis, 13.5/15 on defining movements, 14/14 on text identification, 7/7 on author identification, 4.5/5 on comparison of realism and naturalism, and 3/3 on the favorite work and why.)

M.'s answer to the text she enjoyed the most:

"J'ai aimé lire 'La Mare au Diable' par Sand. L'histoire était intéressante et je pouvais relater à Germain. Il a perdu sa femme et il était triste. J'ai perdu aussi mon copain dans un accident. Je me suis souvenue mes émotions après son mort. Comme Germain, j'ai dû trouver une nouvelle vie. Je respecte Germain pour penser des enfants. L'histoire était bonne pour moi."

(I liked reading "La Mare au Diable" by Sand. The story was interesting and I could relate to Germain. He lost his wife and was sad. I also lost my boyfriend in an accident. I remember my emotions after his death. Like Germain, I had to find a new life. I respect Germain for thinking of his children. The story was good for me.)⁵

My only comment: "C'est très triste, alors! Ça devait être difficile à lire." (This is really sad, then! It must have been difficult to read.) Her sentences are not nearly as complex as I would like to see at this level. There is a marked difference between her work and the top students in the class. In the future I may consider including syntactical and grammatical complexity in the grading of content, but for now I am mainly concerned that students demonstrate their knowledge of the main points. **M.** clearly cites the work, the author, the main character, and the parts of the plot that she liked, hence she received full credit.

A., a Secondary Education major with an emphasis in French who received a C- on this test wrote:

"Mon oeuvre préférée était Facino Cane parce-que j'ai compris tous l'histoire et aussi il était un oeuvre intéressant pour moi lire. J'aime que Fachino Cané avait une vie très grande. Je n'aime pas quel que chose qu'il fait mais il était plus intéressant lire."

(My favorite work was Facino Cane because I understood the whole story and also it was an interesting work for me to read. I like that Facino Cane had a very great life. I don't like something that he did but it was more interesting to read.)

I awarded a generous 2/3 points, as the intention of the question was to help me assess the students' preferences, although the student did not give the author or any details of the text and had multiple spelling mistakes.

⁵ I have only translated for content and have not included grammatical or vocabulary mistakes.

Final exam

R. Grade = 97% A, Performed at a superior level on author, movement and text identification (i.e. areas that can be memorized and in which he did not perform as well, according to him, on the mid-term). Short and long essays were perfect (5/5 and 10/10) but he had some trouble with character explanations and literary analysis (contrary to what he speculated about his work). His response, while thorough, to this analysis demonstrated that he may have missed some of the main points of the text.

M. Grade = 92% A-, Superior performance on author, movement, and text identification. Her essays were consistently good and well-developed but not perfect (4/5 and 9/10).

N. Grade = 78% C+, Performed well on areas author, movement, and text identification. Her essays were very short and vague and she received 4/10 on one of the longer essay questions.

E. Grade = 86% B, Performed above average on author, movement, and text identification with some small mistakes. Results on essay questions were inconsistent (3.5/5 on short essay, 9/10 on longer essay, and 17/20 on literary analysis largely due to creative ideas that were underdeveloped).

Sample questions (General knowledge of literature, defining a literary movement)

Qu'est-ce que la Négritude et qui est un auteur important au mouvement?

(What is the Negritude movement and who is an important author ?)

R. "La Négritude veut montrer la vocation poétique propre de l'âme noire. Elle est caractérisée par une universalité. Elle ne désigne pas un groupe ethnique. Léopold Senghor" (Negritude wants to show the poetic calling that belongs to the black soul. It is characterized by a universality. It does not indicate an ethnic group. Léopold Senghor)
Grade = 2.5/3, Comment = "'une universalité', Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? (What do you mean by 'universality'?)"

E. "La Négritude est un mouvement par les Africains où ils révèlent leur poésie propre de l'âme noire. Senghor" (Negritude is a movement by Africans where they reveal their poetic belonging to the black soul. Senghor)
Grade = 2/3, Comment = "Comment? (How?)"

Qu'est-ce que le Nouveau Roman et qui est un auteur important?

(What is the Nouveau Roman (new novel) and who is one important author ?)

N. "Le Nouveau Roman est une reaction contre le roman traditional qui est tipifié par Balzac. Ils pensent que l'engagement personnel est plus important que celui de literature. Le chronologie est souvent chaotique. Duras." (The Nouveau Roman is a reaction against the traditional novel that is typified by Balzac. The chronology is often chaotic. Duras.)
Grade = 3/3, Comment = "Bien (Good)"

Evaluation of Exams:

Although I would expect the final exam to be more difficult for students than the midterm, **R.** improved his grade. The other three students, however, decreased: **M.** only slightly decreased, **N.** decreased from an A- to a C+ and **E.** decreased from an A+ to a B. The class average final grade was a B-, and the average midterm grade was a B. Both had a B median. This demonstrates to me that my final exam was either slightly more difficult than the mid-term or perhaps caused more anxiety in students because of its length and the added end-of-term stress. It is not possible for me to say with any certainty whether my teaching influenced student success on these exams or if students varied their effort towards the end of the semester.

R. earned a B on the mid-term and wrote me an email at the end of the semester pointing out that the majority of difficulties he had with the test were related to text and author identification, which he perceived to be memorization activities. He suggested that it would be more fair to base the majority of the test on comprehension styled questions rather than fill in the blanks. After considering this comment, I can appreciate his ability to integrate the larger concepts from the course and apply them in analytical tasks, but I also believe it is important to be able to identify the texts, authors, and movements, as one of the course goals is to teach general knowledge of French literature. Some students excel in these "memorization" type tasks. I might consider, however, a better way to or a more integrative way to test this knowledge. If reviewers have suggestions, I would appreciate feedback.

B. Analysis of grades and trends

From these examples, I ascertain that students generally understand the concepts that I find essential to their understanding of French literature, yet their linguistic ability and the combination of skills (literary analysis) remains their largest stumbling block. If students cannot master the target language, it is nearly impossible for them to master the analysis of texts. For the three weakest students in the class, the level of their linguistic expression was a great hindrance. They were

sometimes unable to understand class lectures, felt uncomfortable speaking in class, and found it difficult to understand the texts, let alone express opinions or analyze them. I have no real solution for this problem, as one of the students (**A.**) was also my student in the Fall 2005 semester. She does not appear to have linguistically progressed from one class to the next, and she openly acknowledges her own lack of preparation for the course.

Of the three strongest students in the course, participation, oral and written production, and literary analysis began strong and continued to progress throughout the semester. I should note that one of the three strongest students in the class received a B in the course due to late assignments that he neglected to peer-edit.

Some of the variability in students' grades is also related to pressures in other classes and timing during the semester. **E.**, for example, participated heavily in the beginning of the semester and performed well in spite of her linguistic difficulties. The second half of the semester, however, became hectic for her, and her work seemed to decline somewhat, even though she remained engaged in the subject. **R.** serves as a counter example to this trend. He did not work intensively at the beginning of the semester, but increased his efforts towards the end and made a concerted effort to earn an A in the course. His participation in class did not dramatically improve, however, and in the end, although he was very close, he received a B.

C. Evidence of student learning and progressive development

Student presentations, papers, and exams demonstrated that all of the members of the class were able to acquire the general knowledge required in this course. No student failed any of the major evaluation categories, although there were 2 Ds on the final, two Ds on the mid-term, and nothing below a C for the rest of the assignments. Students were also able to apply basic analytical frameworks to both poetry and prose. The level of their ability to do this, however, was extremely varied. All students have individual strengths and weaknesses, and I believe my grading categories account for these differences.

As evidence of student progress in the course, we can evaluate the *explication de texte* on the final exam. I gave students a choice of two passages from *L'Etranger*, both which were discussed in class. The first option came from the last paragraph of the first chapter of the book as Meursault returned to Algiers from his mother's funeral, and the second option came from the last paragraph of the book in which Meursault confronts his eminent

execution. Students were asked to comment on the theme, tone, context, point of view and the use of vocabulary. At this point in the semester, this was the fourth formal *explication de texte* they performed.

The four students I tracked for this portfolio had no apparent background in the *explication de texte* genre before taking this class. To demonstrate acquisition of this skill, I will evaluate **E.** and **N.**, the two students who had the most difficulty with the French language and the weakest preparation for this course. Both students selected the second passage.

N. scored 12/15 on analysis and 3.5/5 for grammar, making her overall grade on this section a C+. **N.** correctly identified the context of the passage with great detail. She also selected several vocabulary words that are relevant to understanding Camus' style, but she did not show the connection between the words and the tone of the text. Instead she wrote, "Ici, il souhaite quelque chose en future," (Here, he wishes for something in the future) which does not make sense in the context of Camus' philosophy. She continued her analysis saying that Meursault wishes to escape to another world where there are no social rules or common sense. In fact, Camus was demonstrating those elements in the present world through the figure of Meursault and it would not be accurate to suppose that Meursault wishes to escape. Another statement **N.** made that troubled me was, "Il est pied-noir, il n'a pas des emotions..." (He is Pied-Noir, he has no emotions...). **N.** took risks in her analysis, but her statements were not supported by the context, tone or vocabulary of the text. She did, however, correctly identify the tone.

E. scored 13.5/15 on analysis and 3.5/5 for grammar, for an overall grade of B on this section. In spite of the grammatical mistakes that made the analysis sometimes difficult to follow, **E.** correctly identified the subject, context, and point of view of the passage. She made correct observations about the text ("Je pense que l'idée est de la philosophie de Camus"—I think that the idea is Camus' philosophy), but she did not demonstrate links between the texts and her analysis. She also had some difficulty addressing the tone and the overall meaning of the passage. Her conclusion, "Aussi, il souhaite qu'il y a les spectateurs, c'est un desir pour les autres" (Thus, he wishes that there are spectators, this is a desire for others) is an interesting observation, but she does not address Meursault's desire for the hatred of the spectators.

Both exams demonstrate that these students have acquired the essential skills for the *explication de texte* but have not yet integrated the elements together to make a complete analysis. This is a skill I believe students will develop with further practice, and I might need to evaluate whether it is reasonable to expect students to do so at this level. Other students in the

class did, however, learn to integrate content and analysis for this activity.

Another indicator of effectiveness in this course was the progressive participation of certain students. As stated at the outset, one of my major goals in teaching is to create a comfortable environment for students to express themselves in the target language. While there are always certain students who readily volunteer (such as **E.**) and others who remain quiet (**N.**), others begin to participate more as they begin to relax in the class atmosphere (like **M.**). Journals are especially useful in tracking students' progress as they choose the topics and interact personally with the texts. In his first journal **R.** wrote about Flaubert's *Un coeur simple* in which he focused heavily on his opinion of the text. In his fourth journal, however, he began using citations to explain character development and demonstrated Zola's technique in *L'Attaque du moulin* integrated with plot summary. This demonstrated the beginning of **R.**'s ability to apply multiple analytical skills.

D. Attainment of learning objectives

According to the goals stated on the syllabus, students clearly succeeded in broadening their general knowledge of French literature of the 19th and 20th centuries as demonstrated in their homework, quizzes, and exams. Their presentations demonstrated their ability to connect this newly acquired knowledge to other disciplines, but I believe in the future I can push them further towards this goal. Exams also demonstrated that they acquired the technical vocabulary for literary analysis and learned the genres of *explication de texte* and *pastiche*. Their mastery of these models remains varied, but all students demonstrated ability to perform the basic elements of these tasks both in exams and papers. Through the implementation of written discussion questions and creating a student-centered class environment, I was able to help students maximize their spoken French. Not listed on the syllabus was the goal of combining multiple skills to integrate content and analysis which is evoked in writing assignments and the second presentation. Many of the students did acquire this skill and most were in the process of developing it at the end of the semester. With further practice of literary analysis in French, each of these students should be able to apply their new skills with confidence.

V. Reflection

A. Anticipated Alterations to the Course

Feedback from the evaluations indicated that some students still felt lost and afraid to express their confusion. Although I cannot overcome the diversity of students' backgrounds in French, I can continue to encourage students to transfer their comprehension, organizational and analytical skills into the target language. By more overtly expressing my openness to questions and by verbally demonstrating my sensitivity to students' difficulty with the material, this may alleviate some of their anxiety.

In the future I would also like to reorganize time usage so that the class follows a more logical sequence. This semester I started class with student presentations to allow nervous students to then concentrate during the remainder of the class. The class would transition better, however, if we began with small-group discussion of introductory questions and then moved into student presentations. It would also allow the presenter a chance to warm up in French before speaking to the class. In order to assure that students pay attention to each other, class would then transition into more small-group discussion related to the presentation. This is a more time consuming approach, but valorizes student production. Although students in this class were reluctant to ask questions of each other after presentations, in other courses I often attribute part of the presentation grade to the discussion generated. This may be one way of increasing student engagement in their peers' presentations. I will also strive to provide a laptop computer and data projector in the classroom on a daily basis for student presentations and my lectures.

Another necessary adjustment is the assignment of journals on a periodic, perhaps biweekly, basis rather than in blocks. This will require students to reflect as they progress in their reading and will better demonstrate that progress in their reflections. To that end, I will also consider reducing the number of authors covered or reduce the length of reading assignments at the beginning of the semester to allow students to concentrate on individual poems. I also plan to give small analytical homework assignments related to the building blocks of analysis. For example, I may ask students to come to class with the meter and rhyme scheme prepared for the assigned poem. This will help further isolate skills and help me track students' individual progress. I will also consider implementing a few short in-class writing assignments related to the weekly reading assignments which will help me assess student comprehension and to better understand their interactions with the texts.

B. Analysis of Portfolio Effectiveness as Evidenced by Instructor

The portfolio process has been revealing in that I am able to assess that my students have met the major objectives of the course, in spite of my concern for their ability to apply multiple skills at once. The layering of skills was not a crucial factor in grading and students who had not yet mastered the integration of new knowledge with analytical skills were at least on the path to developing that capacity.

Although class observations were difficult because my mentor and peer review partner do not speak French, Gordon was able to give me positive feedback on the course structure and student interaction. My partner expressed that she observed good camaraderie among the students and that the class environment was conducive to learning. This is always one of my primary objectives because the language can be an enormous obstacle to student participation in such a course. I knew from past experience with this course that the students are often linguistically under prepared for this course and added to these limitations, many of them do not have the background in textual analysis in their native languages that is required for success. In order to make the class more conducive to interaction in the target language (French), they must first feel comfortable in the classroom environment. I attribute this positive environment to the methodologies I employ.

As a result of the careful restructuring of the class this semester for the purpose of this portfolio, I did not hear the same loathing of poetry students often expressed in the Spring 2005. In the course evaluations, however, I received one comment that the student would have liked to spend more time on individual works because she found the reading load too heavy at the beginning of the semester. This is a comment that I plan to address in future semesters. Nonetheless, separating the literature into periods rather than genres allowed the students to progressively apply their new skills and students seemed to survive the "difficult" poetry better than in the previous year. I believe this progress is also the result of adding an anthology and implementing discussion handouts.

Most importantly, what I have learned from this process of reflecting on my course, materials and students, and by interacting with both my mentor and partner in this project, is to pay close attention to students' individual strengths and weaknesses and to accommodate their learning styles, even in a literature course. Because I carefully considered and significantly altered the course structure this semester, I reduced student anxiety and enhanced the learning environment. By assessing my own strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, I

was able to communicate more effectively with individual students and became more sensitive to my students' diverse needs.