

SMALL GRANT AWARD FUNDED NATIONAL FRENCH WEEK ACTIVITIES

Who could pass up the chance to put French in the spotlight? Not I! Especially out here in sunny, and largely Spanish-speaking, Southern California. National French Week provided the perfect opportunity to highlight our programs and our students, and I know several teachers went out of their way to provide an activity for each day of that week following the themes printed in the *National Bulletin*. I organized three activities, and the students still talk about them so I know they made a difference.

The first activity was the easiest to organize. A group of students had lunch at a local French restaurant run by a couple from Provence. I have used this restaurant several times for groups, so I know the owners well. Prior to our arrival, I contacted them, and we decided on a menu, the date, time, and price. It is preferable to do lunch because dinner is so expensive. Students pay in advance when they return their permission slips. In this way, students have invested in the event and are less likely to back out at the last minute. Obviously, it also helps me give the restaurant an accurate count for the group reservation. Normally, about 20 students are interested.

Our next activity was the first-ever French Club film party. Students love to watch movies (they don't seem to care what language the movies are in), but I don't have time to show them in class. In honor of National French Week, our French Club had its first film party (we did another one in spring semester and hope to continue to do two a year). We picked Friday night for our event. Students agreed to bring snack foods. We held the party in my classroom, but you may choose to do this in a larger venue if more students are interested and food is not a problem. Students arrived at 6:30 p.m., many of them armed with pillows, blankets, and bean bag chairs (who says you have to sit at the desks?). We played contemporary French, Canadian, and African CDs and set up the food table while waiting for the rest of the group to arrive. Between 7:00 and 7:30, everyone got their snacks and settled down to watch the movie *Jean de Florette*. This activity has obvious difficulties stemming mainly from administrative and parental concerns regarding the nature of French movies. I send home a letter summarizing the movie with the permission slips and invite parents to preview it (from the video store or my collection) before their students watch it. I have never had any problems. I showed the movie *Les Visiteurs* at another film party, but I had a version without subtitles, so while students understood the gist of the story, they did not notice the more questionable jokes or language.

Our final activity in celebration of National French Week was a day-long celebration of French language and cultures involving students from all over the area.

I applied for and received a Small Grant from the AATF earmarked to fund the highlight of our week, the French Club Conference. This "conference" is really an immersion day designed to bring area French students together in a social setting. Although they spend the day entirely in French, they do not do any of the activities they normally associate with French class. This event was intended to bring French out of the classroom and into the more natural setting of a party, complete with food, party games, and entertainment.

About 70 students from three schools came to our campus on Sunday morning. They came with pencils, dictionaries, a picnic lunch, and their teachers (chaperones are always needed). They found the Pavilion decorated with balloons in colors representing France, African countries, and Mardi Gras; posters from all over the French-speaking world; and large flags of more than 20 French-speaking countries. Contemporary French music greeted them.

First, we played Twister in French. In order for several people to play, I purchased multiple copies of the game. The winners from each team played a final match to determine who would be named champion.

Next came the student presentations. Each school had been asked to prepare one skit or song, in French, to share with the group. This was one of the most entertaining parts of the program.

After the skits, we played musical chairs while a live band provided West African music for the activity. Again, a champion was named.

Next the entire group was divided into teams of 12 to visit the "game stations" where they found Scattergories, 7 familles, Mancala, *Loto de l'histoire française*, Hangman, and Quiddler waiting for them. Each team went to a different station where a game was set up for them to play. One teacher was assigned to each table to explain the rules of the game (often modified to make it possible to play in French). Mancala is not a language game but is a very popular game thought to have originated in Africa. It provides a culturally authentic break from the stress of having to produce French. Students had about 15 minutes to play a game before changing stations. They got to play three of the games before it was time for lunch.

Lunchtime was more than just a chance to replenish one's energy; it provided natural group-setting conversation. Although students brought a picnic lunch, we

provided beverages (including Orangina) and dessert (French tarts and *bûches de Noël*).

After lunch, the students returned to the game stations to try the remaining games. Then there was a show featuring Tahitian dancers and a duo of Cajun musicians. These professional groups were hired, along with the African music group, using the funds from the grant.

The final activity was a scavenger hunt. Students were divided into teams of six (they were intentionally grouped with people from different schools). Each team received a list of objects to find and a box to put them in. Creativity was encouraged! They were given one half hour to find as many of the items as they could. When creating the list, I purposefully included everyday items whose names are not normally taught in class, so students found their dictionaries a useful tool for this event.

At the end of the day, the distribution of prizes was held, followed by a raffle. Prizes, such as pens, pencils, buttons, folders, and notepads, all with French expressions printed on them, were purchased through Carlex or Teachers' Discovery.

Next came the payment of the *contraventions*. Teachers wrote the names of anyone, including other teachers, who spoke a language other than French on these coupons which were placed in a bag. Names were drawn to see who would have to "pay." In one instance, payment consisted of a group of six singing "Frère Jacques." Another pair of students had to read "Va t'en, grand monstre vert," a French translation of a silly children's story. One group dressed up in silly costumes that we provided and danced to French rap. A final group had to compose and recite a poem in French (they were the first ones picked and worked on their masterpieces while the others "paid").

Overall, the day was a success. Many other activities are possible. If you do not receive funding for such an event, you can simply charge for admission. Previously, I had organized a French Club Conference, using roughly the same guidelines, and the students paid admission of \$6 each. This allowed us to buy food, supplies, and prizes. The admission fee did not leave enough money to provide professional entertainment, but that is not necessary and may not even be feasible depending on your location.

If you have any questions about the activities mentioned here, feel free to contact me.

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