

INTEGRATING CONTEMPORARY ALGERIAN R & B MUSIC IN THE FRENCH CLASSROOM

"How can you make a great class even better?" asked my principal during a post-observation conference. "Music!" I responded. It seemed logical, since many of my honors students at Kings Park High School (NY), a suburban school located on Long Island, were talented musicians. Little did he know that I was a bit apprehensive about doing this. Playing music had been prohibited in a previous district. Only textbook CDs were allowed and immensely disliked by the students.

I was ecstatic to find an open minded administration who allowed me to have unblocked status on the Internet. I searched for contemporary Francophone music with clean lyrics that I could use in various ways with my students. New, young, emerging French-Algerian female

countries. Since this is an intermediate class, the first letter of each place was given to them to facilitate listening comprehension in class. Then they had to categorize these places into French cities, Francophone countries in Europe, French-speaking countries in Africa, and other French speaking Polynesian countries.

CHANSON: "Il Avait Les Mots" by Sheryfa Luna³

I used this song to reinforce the imperfect and present perfect tenses in my intermediate and advanced classes. I simply removed all of the fifty verbs from the song and had students listen several times to replace the verbs in the correct forms. The subject matter of the song was also discussed in an AP class during a

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Works Cited

- ¹*Daughter of Keltoum*. Dir. Mendhi Charef. DVD. First Run Features, New York 2001.
- ²Kenza Farah. "Je Représente." *Avec Le Coeur*. CD, 2008. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdMF1tElgbs]
- ³"Au Coeur de la Rue." *Avec le Coeur*. CD, 2008. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZjAgsDGwYC]
- ⁴Sheryfa Luna. "Il Avait Les Mots." *Sheryfa Luna*. CD, 2007: Universal Licensing Music. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=usqc3tknSfa], [www.lyrics.com/avait-les-mots-lyrics-sheryfa-luna.html]

"How can you make a great class even better?"

R & B vocalists such as Kenza Farah, Sheryfa Luna, and Zaho kept resurfacing to stimulate my interest. They were a steep contrast to the Algerian women I had seen portrayed in the movie *La Fille de Keltoum* (2001) by Mehdi Charef where a young woman returns to Algeria from Switzerland in search of the mother she had never known. I wanted my classroom to be inclusive of the Francophone world, to reflect my state's curriculum, and to emphasize multicultural lessons. I found these artists to be perfect for my students to relate to because they are their contemporaries.

While reading the 19th-century novel *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo in an AP class, two songs helped me bring the setting of Medieval Paris to life.

CHANSON: "Au Coeur de la Rue" by Kenza Farah¹

In order to practice for the AP speaking portion of the exam, students were given two questions to prepare within a short time frame. I wanted them to demonstrate the following understandings: social class and ethnicity similarities and differences between people of Medieval Paris and contemporary life in France.

CHANSON: "Je Représente" by Kenza Farah²

Students completed the lyrics with the missing fifty-five geographical locations, most of them Francophone cities or

unit on Personal Relationships. Ideally, in a language laboratory or computer lab setting students may work at their own pace. Youtube [www.youtube.com] also has this same feature for Internet use.

CHANSON: "La Roue Tourne" by Zaho⁴

This song can be used in a low intermediate class to reinforce regular and irregular verbs in the present indicative. The lyrics are easy to comprehend. Additionally, a comparison with the "Roue du Pilon" scene when discussing the protagonist Quasimodo in *Notre Dame de Paris*⁵ was also made in a more advanced class. In this scene, Quasimodo is placed in the pillory, a round wooden framework, similar to a wheel on a post with holes for the head and hands. He is exposed to public scorn in the main square as punishment for a slight misunderstanding with a policeman. In Medieval Paris, the location for such mockery was *la Place de Grève*.

In conclusion, these budding artists and their music have made teaching and learning French very stimulating for my classes. Most students were very receptive to them. Some students even downloaded their favorite songs onto their personal Ipods. Hats off to the R & B singers of Algerian origin! May they continue to enlighten a spark in my students!

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⁴Zaho Tunisiano. "La Roue Tourne." *Dima*. CD, 2008: Down Lo, Capitol Music, une division d'EMI Music France. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=roLkw3PSE]

⁵Hugo, Victor. *Notre Dame de Paris*. Aschehoug Dansk Forlag A/S, Easy Classics. Denmark, 1997.