

THE GENDER DILEMMA



For our youngest FLES students (elementary school), an explanation of the gender of nouns is totally unnecessary. First-, second-, and third-grade French students simply learn the appropriate article as part of the noun; it is all one sound to them (*le crayon, la chaise*). However, at about fourth grade, students want to know why there is a *le* and a *la* with the nouns. A hilarious class discussion came about when an indignant fourth grader stomped her foot and complained about having to bear the burden of a “masculine” nose (*le nez*) on her “feminine” head (*la tête*), which led, of course, to retaliation from the boys who declared injustice having to have a “feminine” leg (*la jambe*) attached to their “masculine” foot (*le pied*). The complaints continued until we had the entire body portrayed on the board. The drawing below was a result of the gender battle!

I discovered, however, that this drawing provided an effective visual, especially for students dealing with learning differences whose ability to retain the concept of masculine and feminine was a real challenge. Many of us have tried different colors to help students differentiate masculine and feminine nouns, since the rules or guidelines about spelling have so many exceptions. I had much greater success using this drawing for all new vocabulary, not just for the parts of the body. I started by giving the picture with the vocabulary listed on each side, and as the students grew older, they added the vocabulary in a column next to the picture themselves. The visual memory helped all of the students, not just those with learning challenges. Enlarge the drawing below and give it a try!

Do you have other gimmicks to help reinforce the gender of nouns? Send your ideas to Elizabeth Miller, 74 Tuscaloosa Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027; e-mail: [mmemiller@aol.com]; fax: 650-342-7623.

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féminin

la tête
l'oreille
la dent
la langue
la bouche

l'épaule
la main

la jambe



masculin

les cheveux
les yeux. l'oeil
le nez
le cou

le bras
le doigt

le genou

le pied