

EXPLORING QUÉBEC: *HIER, AUJOURD'HUI, DEMAIN*

To understand the culture of Québec today and the possibilities for its future, one must begin with understanding its past. During the AATF Summer Research Seminar in Québec, this was achieved by allowing the participants (among whom I was delighted to be counted) to speak with historians and sociologists, to visit museums and monuments, and to explore the streets of *vieux Québec* and *vieux Montréal*. Having encountered the cultural history of Québec firsthand, we were better able to understand the current cultural trends and the nuances of the debates about Québec's possible future as a sovereign nation. The challenge for us, as educators, is to find a way to try to replicate this experience of exploration and discovery for our students in our classrooms. One way to do so is by creating classroom activities that capitalize on the wealth of information and activities available on the internet. The following activities are intended for upper-level French students enrolled in civilization or literature courses or advanced conversation courses.

Hier

Begin by offering your students a brief overview of Québec history and by introducing Québec's dictum "Je me souviens." Brainstorm its many possible meanings: what is it that one remembers about the past? Is it merely historical facts or is it also moments of daily life? Then, point your students to one or more of the Internet games proposed by Québec's *Musée de la Civilisation* [<http://www.mcq.org/jeux/index.html>]. These interactive games are designed to teach history through the process of exploration and discovery and require only good reading skills, some persistence, and a little computer savvy. The game "La Quête de l'amulette" focuses on the cultures of Native American Indian groups, or *autochtones* as they are now called, such as the Cris, the Atikamekews, and the Kanien'kehakas. The game "Ciel! Mon bateau..." leads players through a European explorer's first encounter with the Americas and his travels through *Nouvelle France*, from Québec to Louisiana. A third game, entitled "Les Québécoises ont aussi fait de l'histoire," introduces players to common objects used by women in daily life in Québec during the 19th and 20th centuries. The objects, part of the museum's "Mémoires" exhibit, are clues to deciphering the names of famous Québécoises. The three games, used together, offer a panorama of the history of Québec and can lead to further classroom discussion about each of the three eras in question.

Further, in the museum Web site's "Histoire" section [<http://www.mcq.org/>

<http://www.mcq.org/histoire/index.html>], you will find authentic historical documents that may be used as supplementary course readings. "Il était une fois...des filles venues de France" is a letter written from Sieur Jean Talon to Monseigneur Colbert concerning the 17th-century "Filles du Roi" who were sent to help populate New France. The section "Il était une fois...un incendie" contains documents written by an engineer describing the fire at the *Seminaire de Québec* in 1701 and offers a glimpse of 18th-century life in Québec. Finally, the section "Musiques du Québec à l'époque de Julie Papineau" introduces students to 19th-century composers and to the "Rébellion des Patriotes" in 1837, in which Julie Papineau's husband, Louis-Joseph Papineau, was a key figure. If these readings are too difficult for your students, another site offers a glimpse into Montréal's history. The "Vieux Montréal" site [<http://www.vieux.montreal.qc.ca>] presents a visually interesting, interactive tour of historical sites in old Montreal with short explanatory blurbs about each major site.

Aujourd'hui

The complexity of Québec's contemporary culture is not easily understood outside of its historical context. Once students have learned about the cultural history of Québec, they can begin to explore its current situation, which can be centered largely around the question of identity. Who are the Québécois? How can language express a cultural identity? How do *anglophones*, *francophones*, *autochtones*, and *allophones* (those whose native language is something other than English, French, or Native American Indian languages) together create today's multicultural Québec? How have immigrant populations enriched the cultural landscape of the region? As the concept of multiculturalism is at the core of many of the current debates about Québécois identity, it deserves exploration. The Québécois Internet exhibit "Métissages," which is linked through the more global "Musées et Millénaire" Web site project [<http://www.museo2000.org/mumi/fr/index.htm>], offers a variety of different ways of exploring the concept of *métissage*, presented from different viewpoints, including biological, cultural, linguistic, and social.

A related aspect of Québécois identity is the question of Québec's Americanness. As North Americans, do the Québécois share an "American" or "New World" identity with U.S. Americans, Caribbean and Central Americans, and South Americans? The exhibit "Identités américaines," also linked through the "Musées et Millénaire" project

[<http://www.museo2000.org/mumi/fr/index.htm>], explores this topic by offering personal histories of average Americans and by challenging the viewers to formulate their own understanding of what it means to be American. Though this site does not deal uniquely with Québécois culture, it can be used as a springboard to discussions about cultural identity in Québec. For a more focused presentation of Québécois identity, the exhibit "Fou du hockey" in the "Histoire" section of the *Musée de la civilisation* [<http://www.mcq.org/histoire/index.html>] allows viewers to explore Québec's most famous winter sport. The exhibit includes a forum in which participants discuss topics such as the Americanization and the commercialization of the sport, as well as "l'anti-hockey," bringing the topic of sports into a discussion of the similarities and differences between Québécois and U.S. Americans in the North American context.

Lastly, explore Québec's current cultural climate through newspaper Web sites. Ask students to choose a city in Québec or a section of the news that interests them and to track news stories on the Web concerning that city or aspect of the culture. The major French-speaking Canadian newspapers can be found through the Cyberpresse Web site [<http://www.cyberpresse.ca>]. Ask students to summarize what they have read or to create a mock television news broadcast in class.

Demain

What will the future hold for Québec? Although the *souverainistes* were defeated by the *fédéralistes* in previous referendum votes on the question of independence, the idea of sovereignty is still bubbling in the hearts and minds of the Québécois. During the AATF seminar in July 2001, we encountered this spirit of debate about the future of Québec at every turn. In August, the president of the *Parti Québécois*, Bernard Landry, made the following statement: "Il y aura un Sommet des Amériques à Buenos Aires en 2005. Cette fois, je veux qu'on y soit comme peuple libre" ("Landry espère que le Québec devienne souverain d'ici 2005" *Le Droit* 12 août 2001). Armed with their knowledge of Québec's past and having explored its present, ask your students to debate the future of Québec. Will Québec become independent by 2005? Why would attending the Summit of the Americas as an independent nation be an important milestone? It's time to draw on our knowledge of the past and the present in order to debate the future. Two Web sites that may be useful in formulating debate strategies are the site of the "Parti Québécois" [<http://partiquebecois.org/>

programme_preface.phtml] and the site of the “Conseil pour l’unité canadienne” [http://www.ccu-cuc.ca/index_fr.html]. Each offers information concerning the agendas of the *souverainistes* and the *fédéralistes*, and links to other sites concerning the question of Québec’s possible future independence from Canada. Divide students into groups and ask them to explore these sites in order to find information that will allow them to hold an informed debate of the issues in class. Follow up your in-class debate with further monitoring of the Québécois press for breaking news. Interested to see if their future predictions will unfold, you will have instilled in your students and built into your curriculum not only knowledge of Québec’s past and familiarity with its present, but also concern about its future—an interest which, with any luck, will extend beyond the boundaries of your class.

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WEB SITES

Conseil pour l’unité canadienne: [http://www.ccu-cuc.ca/index_fr.html]

Cyberpresse: [<http://www.cyberpresse.ca>]

Musée de la Civilisation de Québec (click on “jeux” or “histoire”): [<http://www.mcq.org>]

Musées et Millénaire: [<http://www.museo2000.org/mumi/fr/index.htm>]

Parti Québécois: [http://partiquebecois.org/programme_preface.phtml]

Vieux Montréal: [<http://www.vieux.montreal.qc.ca>]