

### **Information Literacy Activity, Facilitator: Devan Baty**

For this activity, workshop participants were given the lyrics, both in the original French and also translated into English by Baty, to the song “Si les Gaulois avaient su” by Francis Bebey. They also heard a performance of the song by the artist.

Lyrics available on the following website:

[http://www.bebey.com/documentation/textes\\_et\\_extraits/documentation03c.htm](http://www.bebey.com/documentation/textes_et_extraits/documentation03c.htm)

(The song is available for purchase on Itunes.)

They were then presented with the following “mock” assignment, which they were asked to discuss in small groups:

*Imagine yourself as a student in an undergraduate French course entitled “Cultures of the French and Francophone World.” You have just been given the assignment to prepare a brief 3-5 minute presentation in order to lead class discussion about the following song. The presentation must shed light on how this cultural artifact is representative of both French and African cultures.*

Initial questions to ponder in small groups:

- 1) What in this song are you curious about? What is confusing?
- 2) To make meaning of the song, what information do you need to know?
- 3) Where are you going to begin looking for information?

Group discussion ensued about the following reflection questions:

- 1) What did it feel like to be a student presented with an unfamiliar text/textual performance?
- 2) What possible pedagogical interventions do you feel would make this a more approachable assignment for students?
- 3) How might an assignment like this be embedded in a course to make it a worthwhile cultural literacy activity?

Take-away points provided in the form of a hand-out to session participants:

**So what was the point of this activity, anyway?**

1. To put ourselves in the place of our students, dealing with the unfamiliar.
2. To think about the necessity of providing support for readings and other assignments in the foreign language/lit/culture classroom in appropriate ways at appropriate levels.
3. To put into question the idea that some texts are only appropriate for certain levels—rather, dense and culturally rich texts can be incorporated at all levels of the curriculum, but the assignments we give to our students and the kinds of questions that we ask should be appropriate to the level of the class.

Beginning and intermediate-level students benefit from being provided with facilitating tasks that contextualize a text. Prior orientation to the who? what? where? and when? of a text can help alleviate their frustration. What kind of genre are they dealing with? In what communicative situation would they expect to encounter this genre? Who is the intended public? Etc.

Advanced-level students also benefit from this orientation. They should, however, be held more accountable for making sense of texts without as much support from their professor or consulting librarian. Presumably, they will have been prepared by this point to know how to formulate and pursue the answers to their own questions.

The challenge is providing our students with just enough support along the way so that they are not overly dependent on our help when confronted with a challenging cultural artifact (be it a text, an image, a song, or whatever) but are, rather, empowered to work through their own cultural alienation as independent learners and seekers of information.

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To learn more about the process and necessity of creating facilitating tasks for reading assignments in the foreign language/literature/culture classroom, see Remapping the Foreign Language Curriculum: An Approach through Multiple Literacies. Janet Swaffar and Katherine Arens. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2005.

For background cultural information on this song by Francis Bebey, see “Revisiting ‘nos ancêtres les Gaulois:’ Scripting and Postscripting Francophone Identity,” by Jan Gross in The French Review, Vol. 78, No. 5, April 2005, pp 948-959.

Website with lyrics to Francis Bebey’s song, which is available for purchase on iTunes:  
[http://www.bebey.com/documentation/textes\\_et\\_extraits/documentation03c.htm](http://www.bebey.com/documentation/textes_et_extraits/documentation03c.htm)