**Creative Multilingualism Programme: Session 2**

**Reading Workshop: French and Francophone Poetry**

* **Introduction**

**Poem : ‘Chant song’, by Jacques Prévert**

* Teacher to insert poem here. Can be found at: <https://lesbellesphrases264473161.wordpress.com/2009/08/03/chant-song-jacques-prevert/>

**Discuss:**

1. Which lines consist of one word followed by its translation ? [Write up answers]
2. Can you find any pairs of words that sound similar – that rhyme, or echo one another in some way?
3. Can you spot any puns? Are there any instances where the sounds mean different things in the two languages?
4. Can you find any other interesting features?

**What are the effects of the above?**

1. How does the use of both French and English seem to drive the composition of the poem?
2. Why do you think the poet uses the two languages to address the girl he loves?
3. What does it suggest about the relationship between the two languages? Could this also be a love affair between languages?

* **Multilingual Poetry and Postcolonialism**

What about when the meeting between the two languages is the result of colonialism - and this meant the violent imposition of one language and culture on another?

* Explain a bit about the history of colonialism in Algeria.
* Policy of assimilation.
* Language politics in Algeria.
* Example of Assia Djebar – explain who she was and what she was writing about.
* Her different ways of thinking about the French language: spoils of war, stepmother tongue, veil.
* How can she write so as to show presence of the other language - or does she just have to record its absence?

**Present to the class:**

**Poem : from *Poèmes pour l’Algérie heureuse* (1969), *by* Assia Djebar**

* Teacher to insert poem here. Can be found at: <https://academic-oup-com.eres.qnl.qa/fs/article/67/2/216/519062>

Translation:

[My poetry is just murmurs

The voice of a robin or the sound of copper

Flee my Arabic mask full of holes

Even when I weave a few French words

I find again my foreign language.]

**If there is time:**

**Poem : ‘L’Exilé’, by Assia Djebar**

* Teacher to insert poem here. Can be found at: <https://www.assolapres.fr/danielle-catala-et-abdelmadjid-kaouah-du-coeur-et-de-lame/>
* **Martinique in the Carribean**
* Another example comes from Martinique in the Caribbean. Explain the different status of Martinique as a DOM.

Tell the students a bit about Aimé Césaire.

* Anticolonial poet and thinker, also Mayor of Fort-de-France.
* Wrote about slavery and about what was wrong with the French colonial project: oppression, exploitation, racism, hierarchical thinking.
* He was uncomfortable with Créole culture, but nevertheless his work is highly multilingual and intercultural.
* Also very passionate about the role and power of poetry – poetry compared to an ‘insurrection’, for example.

**Poem : Mot Macumba, by Aimé Césaire from *Moi, Laminaire* (1982)**

* Teacher to insert poem here. Can be found at: <http://www.unjourunpoeme.fr/poeme/mot-macumba>

**Glossary:**

macumba – a Brazilian term meaning ‘musical instrument’ or ‘magic’

couresse – a type of grass snake

caïman – a kind of crocodile seen in South America

Shango – the African god of storms

* **Discuss the following questions:**

1. Which lines contain references to religion (to saints)?
2. Which line tells us that a word can help us cross a river?
3. In which line does the poet imagine crossing the desert with a word?
4. Where does he talk about ‘iguana words’?
5. Where does he associate words with shadows?
6. In which line does he refer to ‘the dolphin word’?

* **Translate the whole poem together. Then discuss the following:**

1. In which lines do you think words are associated with authority?
2. Where are words associated with movement or travel?
3. In which lines are words associated with nature?
4. Do words ever seem dangerous in the poem?
5. In which lines are the words not usual French words?

Translation:

[the word is the father of the saints

the word is the mother of the saints

with the word ‘grass snake’ you can cross a river full of crocodiles

sometimes I trace a word on the ground

with a word you can cross the desert in a day

there are words like sticks for swimming to push away the sharks

there are iguana words

there are subtle words, these are words like stick insects

there are shadowy words that wake with sparks of anger

there are Shango words

sometimes I cunningly swim on the back of a dolphin word]

* **General discussion questions:**

1. What kinds of things do words enable the poet to do?
2. Why do you think he uses unusual words?
3. What do you make of the poem’s title?
4. Why do you think he refers to the God Shango?
5. How would you describe this kind of French?
6. What is the relationship between the language and the kind of world he’s describing?
7. What’s the effect of the repetition of ‘mot’?

Finally, encourage students to discuss more general themes such as language, culture, place, etc.

Tell the students a little about Réné Depestre

* Depestre is a Haitian poet, also an activist. Lived in exile in Cuba for a long time. Needed to escape successive dictatorships in Haiti. Was actually arrested and imprisoned in 1946 before he was sent into exile.
* Doesn’t see himself as an exile, but as a nomad with multiple roots. Lived in a lot of different places across the world, but still committed to Haitian culture.

**Poem : ‘En Fils Créole de la Francophonie’, by Réné Depestre**

* Teacher to insert poem here. Can be found at: <https://www.poemes.co/en-fils-creole-de-la-francophonie.html>

* **Discuss the following questions:**

1. Which line is about the hills?
2. Which line is about festivals and carnivals?
3. Which lines are about food? What foods can you spot?
4. Which line is about redressing the problems of the past?
5. Where are they drinking rum?
6. In which lines does the poet mention religion?

**Translate the whole poem.**

Translation:

Ours are the hills of ancient *marronnage*, ours are the coves and the blue hills the sovereign trees in flower in the very middle of the cyclone!

Ours are the beaches of black rum by the light of the moon the friendly stars looking on the sea, dazzling in a friendly way! Ours are the dancing parties which offer a last glass of punch to our dead!

Ours is the frenzied carnival the cock fights the catholic festivals well integrated with Voodoo libertarians of the table and the bed!

Ours is the elevation of the seventh heaven

Of the taste of sweet potato and manioc

Of black beans and dion-dion rice

Of malangas and pâté of cod

Of fish and banana plantain

Mischievously on the alert

Nicely spiced dishes!

Ours is the freedom to live in hiding from the outrages of the past: the white time of spit and of chains on our feet and our souls and our hands with no horizon, the angels burning with lemon.

* **Discuss the following questions:**

1. Where can you find references to the natural world?
2. Where is the poet talking about possession?
3. Where is he talking about freedom?
4. Which lines have words that don’t look French to you?
5. When are these words associated with the natural world? When are they associated with food?

* **Discuss the following questions:**

1. Why do you think the poet repeats this form ‘à nous’?
2. Why do you think the natural environment is important?
3. Why does he make so many references to food?
4. What do you make of the title of the poem?
5. What is the effect of all the exclamation marks?
6. Why do you think he varies the length of the lines?
7. What is the effect of the local dialect words?

Finally, encourage students to discuss more general themes such as language, culture, community, etc.

* **Present a poem in Verlan from the Banlieue (if there’s time)**

**Poem : ‘Double culture’, unknown**

Teacher to insert poem here. Can be found at:

<http://docenti.unimc.it/valentina.tarquini/teaching/2016/16687/files/documenti-corso/poemes-en-verlan>

**Glossary :**

J'neco ap – je ne connais pas

la Marseillaise – French national anthem

manger ses fraises – habiter, vivre

Au deblé – bled (ici village algérien)

robeu – beur

céfran – français

cefran – France

kéblo – bloqué

séca – cassé (ici j'ai envie de partir)

tchav' – quitté

vétrou – trouve

chelou – louche (ici c'est bizarre)

un djez – un Algérien