

Haiti in the French Classroom

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Why should we teach about Haiti?

1. The US has a long history with Haiti, and is currently implicated through NGOs and government participation. Summary of Haiti's history:

- Inhabited by the Taino (called Quisqueya and Ayiti)
- Settled by Christopher Columbus (called Hispaniola)
- French colony (called Saint-Domingue)
 - Violent slavery –mostly men, average African lived only a few years on the island
- Revolution leading to independence (1804)
- Instability, violent leaders, debt to France
- Official US Occupation (early 20th century)
- Instability, violent leaders, debt to international community
- Official UN Stabilization mission (since 2006)

2. Haiti is francophone. French has traditionally been used in Haiti, and it is currently in use in education, the government and any professional setting. The majority of the population doesn't speak French fluently but is able to understand it because their native language, Haitian Creole, is mostly derived from French vocabulary. Class and access to education divides the French speakers from the Creole speakers, and French has often been the language of oppression (by slave owners and by elite) and is not especially loved by many Haitians. However, the structure of the society where French speakers hold more power than people who speak uniquely Creole means that Haitians are forced to learn French to have access to money and education.

I found that French helped me to communicate with people in a professional setting, but was most valuable as a base on which to build Creole skills. Creole is used in all daily informal interactions. This is a unique situation and it is important to emphasize Creole and not to imply that to be francophone means that everyone communicates in French.

Some sentences in Creole:

Je voudrais du riz. -> *Mwen vle diri.*

Est-ce que vous allez aller au marché pour acheter de la nourriture? ->

Eske ou prale marche achte manje?

Tous les professeurs nous ont donné un examen. ->

Tout profese yo te bay nou yon ekzamen.

Je -> *Mwen*

Tu -> *Ou*

Il, Elle -> *Li*

Nous -> *Nou*

Vous -> *Nou*

Ils, Elles -> *Yo*

Proverbs referring to French:

- *Bonjou se paspò ou* (Bonjour est votre passport – You have to speak French to have opportunities)
- *Li pale franse* (Il parle français – He is tricking/lying to you)

3. Haiti is rarely in the media for reasons other than poverty, disaster, political instability, violence, and aid work. By being exposed to other information about Haiti, youth will be better able to process these images and the news they hear.

What can we teach? The following is a list of resources and ideas grouped by themes.

General Information on Haiti:

<http://www.pih.org/pages/ihsj-issue-haiti>

<http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Haiti.html#b>

News:

I recommend *Le Nouvelliste*, a very reliable newspaper. <http://lenouvelliste.com/index.php>

School:

I can think of two approaches to discussing school in Haiti. One is to examine the difficulties. Approximately half of Haitians manage to go to school during their lifetime – mostly this is just for a few years while they are children. There are very few public schools, and the private schools are mainly for-profit and low quality. The Ministry of Education ensures that examinations are carried out (for diplomas), but does not have a functioning way of ensuring quality of teachers and instruction, nor funding for these things. For more information, I recommend a very comprehensive Norwegian study:

<http://www.fao.no/pub/rapp/20188/index.html>

Another approach is to show students what school is like, as we often do with French schools. Here is a description of the Haitian education path:

<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/598/Haiti-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html>

A topic of interest when discussing school is Creole itself, since kids are beginning to learn to read and write in Creole in schools. There is hope that it may one day become the primary language of instruction. (See the next section.)

Creole:

The Creole language is essentially a mix of French vocabulary with grammar derived from a family of languages spoken along the coast of Benin and Togo (where many slaves were captured). Also many words were taken from the African languages or from English. These tend to be very common words like “thing” (*bagay*) and “now” (*kounya*), but the more academic or professional the conversation, the more the words resemble French.

Here are some websites featuring proverbs (very important in Haitian culture):

<http://www.ngohaiti.com/translate/tiki-index.php?page=Haitian+Proverbs>

http://www.konbitkreyol.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100:haitian

<http://www.haiti-reference.com/arts/culture/proverbes.php>

There are 32 sounds in the Creole alphabet, which are represented by 32 letters (a group of roman letters that makes one sound is considered one letter), and the choice was made to use a more Anglophone alphabet, rather than to represent the sounds with their French equivalents. For example, “travail” in French is written as “*travay*” in Creole. “Lecture” is “*lekti*”; the letter k is taken from the English alphabet, and the spelling reflects a slight change (or simplification) in pronunciation from the French word. Refer to the Appendix for a chart of the 32 letters of the Creole alphabet (this is a chart that I created for Creole

literacy courses I taught in Haiti), a list of verbs, and a lesson that I also used when I was learning. There is a small collection of Creole lessons on youtube that can help to understand how similar the words sound to French and decipher the grammar. It could also be a fun way to teach numbers!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0Ao1XDtWZE&list=PL7197A3C979CE77E0>

Music:

Two typically Haitian styles of music are *zouk* and *konpa*, which can be heard often on the radio. All types of music from the francophone world can be heard on the radio in Haiti (Celine Dion, Michèl Sarkou, etc) as well as hiphop and pop from the U.S. I recommend listening to *konpa* in the classroom with an Internet radio station (*Konpagroove* is good) and iTunes also has one Haitian radio station called *Kiskeya*, which you should also be able to listen to online. <http://www.shoutcast.com/radio/Kompa>

<http://radiokiskeya.com>

My favorite Haitian band is *Boukman Experyans*. Their music tends to talk about freedom and issues in Haiti, and their name evokes the legend of Dutty Boukman who is known for leading a religious ceremony that sparked the slave revolt leading to Haiti's independence (the story is hotly debated). You can find *Boukman Experyans* on iTunes, and on youtube. They also made a song recently for Carnival 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEC-nXGvz3Y>

There is a famous song called *Ayiti Cheri*, which has been interpreted by many singers. Here is the music video for the latest version, which shows scenes of daily life in a market in Haiti and at the Carnaval festival. <http://www.afrokanlife.com/videos/stevy-mahy-feat-james-germain-haiti-cherie-video/>

You can find a large variety of music at the site *Muzik Lakay*. You'll notice that very few Haitians sing in French.

<http://www.muziklakay.com>

Food:

On the subject of food, there are two major aspects that come to mind. First we can look at the recipes that are popular, and the foods that are grown in Haiti:

<http://www.timoun-kote-ayiti.com/recettes.html>

<http://www.unepumedanslacuisine.com/2011/12/bananes-pesees-dhaiti-banan-peze/>

<http://www.pyepimanla.com/juillet-aout-2010/cuisine/soupe-joumou.html>

<http://myhaitiankitchen.blogspot.ca/2010/09/pikliz.html>

Second, we can address the issue of malnutrition and poverty that is often portrayed in the media. Haitians generally eat one meal a day (around 2pm), and fill themselves up with carbohydrate-rich foods like rice and beans, spaghetti, corn flakes, and root vegetables (yams, manioc). The island is rich in fruits and avocados, and the mountains provide an ideal growing climate for producing enough food to feed the country. However, poverty, politics, and (ironically) food aid from the US has made it difficult to survive as a farmer in the past few decades. Therefore, many Haitians have moved into slums in the city and rely on imported, low quality, food. Food Aid articles:

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/11/subsidizing_starvation?page=full&wp_login_redirect=0

<http://www.publicintegrity.org/2012/01/11/7844/haitian-farmers-undermined-food-aid>

Surrounding Port-au-Prince are very fertile mountains where people live and produce small amounts of food that they load into trucks or in baskets on their heads, then they descend the mountain (a 1-3 hour walk) to sell them in the streets in the city. At the end of the day they climb back up the mountain with an empty bucket.

Sugar cane is produced in the countryside and sold on the streets. People eat it raw by peeling the bark off of the stalk, biting a chunk off, chewing and sucking out the sweet juice, and spitting out the woody pulp. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKvF7nUuNIY>

Health:

In Haiti, there are no public systems for removing garbage, treating wastewater, or providing clean water. In the city, waste is burned or dumped into canals, and water is purchased (at high prices) from private vendors who sell either from a water truck or by the jug at a small store. Water is generally treated with chlorine or other bacteria-killing chemicals and/or boiled before consumption. Many people have heard about recent cholera outbreaks, especially associated with tent camps and flooding. Partners in Health, an American NGO, has posted some training materials online (in Creole) for teaching Haitians about cholera, which can help students understand the problem of cholera in Haiti: <http://www.pih.org/publications/entry/community-health-worker-cholera-training-manuals>

Holidays:

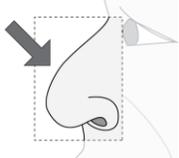
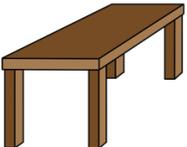
Here is an accurate page that lists the holidays celebrated in Haiti: <http://www.haiti-reference.com/calendar/index.php?mo=8&yr=2012>

Whenever I ask Haitians about their holidays, I get very vague and mixed answers – another effect of incomprehensive schooling. But the average Haitian should be able to name a few facts about the leaders of their independence, such as Toussaint l’Ouverture (his holiday is April 7th), and Jean-Jacques Dessalines (his holiday is October 17th). There are many religious holidays, where Christianity and Voudou overlap sometimes. The religious holidays (especially All Saints Day and the Day of the Dead) are issues of debate, so I would not be able to capture them well here.

The consensus among the Haitians that I met seems to be that there are two important holidays, which unite the entire country regardless of religion or education:

- Independence Day – January 1st. Haitians celebrate at home with their extended families and neighbors by eating the Soupe Joumou (see food section for recipe). This soup is made with a gourd that, the story goes, slaves were forbidden to eat but always smelled. So eating the soup represents the freedom and pride that Haitians associate with the slave revolt, and it is also supposed to bring good luck for the year.
- Carnaval (Kanaval)– days leading up to Ash Wednesday. It really seems that all of Haiti is in celebration mode for Carnaval. Some parades include dancing and celebrating; others include intense mourning and displays of emotion (such as for fake funeral processions). Popular Haitian musicians will make a song specifically for Carnaval, and will debut that song at their Carnaval concert. Luckily you can find these songs online easily. There is a facebook page for Carnaval 2013; this is a national celebration that moves locations every year. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Carnaval-National-2013-Haiti/403531959732880>

APPENDIX
 Tout lèt kreyol yo (32):

 anana a	 ansent an	 bebe b	 chat ch	 dwèt d	 epe e
 èg è	 en en	 flè f	 gita g	 hey h	 inifòm i
 janm j	 kafe k	 lanp l	 manman m	 nen n	 bilding ng
 oraj o	 òf ò	 ous ou	11 onz on	 moun oun	 pòm p
 radyo r	 sèl s	 tab t	8 uit ui	 vag v	 wout w
 yanm y	 zwazo z	<p>Précision :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> « e » qui se prononce comme « é » en français. « en » qui se prononce comme « in » en français. « h » qui s'emploie seulement dans quelques mots, et il se prononce comme le « h » anglais <p>Il faut prononcer chaque lettre dans le mot.</p>			

Common Verbs (note, verbs are not conjugated):

Pale	speaking, talking
Di	saying, telling
Koute	listening
Tande	hearing
Gade	looking, watching
Wè	seeing
Renmen	loving, liking
Bezwen	needing
Vle	wanting
Ka	being able to / being capable to
Bay	giving
Pran	taking
Fè	doing, making
Chita	sitting (down)
Kanpe	standing (up)
Kouche	lying down
Dòm	sleeping
Leve	getting up, lifting
Li	reading
Ekri	writing
Aprann	learning
Eksplike	explaining
Repete	repeating
Konprann	understand
Ale	going
Vini	coming
Soti	leaveing, going out, being from
Rete	staying, living
Viv	living
Chèche	seeking
Jwenn	finding
Mande	asking, begging
Manje	eating
Bwè	drinking
Mache	walking
Kouri	running
Kondui	driving
Touche	touching
Santi	feeling, smelling

Past (passé compose): Mwen te kondui.

Past (imparfait): Mwen tap kondui.

Present: Mwen kondui. / Mwen ap kondui.

Near Future: Mwen pral kondui.

Future: Mwen ap kondui.

Conditional: Mwen ta kondui.

Negative: Mwen pa kondui.

Osève chak epi chwazi mo ki ka konplet fraz la dapre chak imaj:



1-

(chèz/tab) Sa a se yon



5-

(kay/avyon) Sa a se yon.....



2--

(kabann/tab) Sa a se yon



6-

(lanp/anpoul) Sa a se yon.....



3-

(biwo/frijidè) Sa a se yon



7-

(machin/bekán) Sa a se yon



4-

(kay/tant) Sa a se yon



8-

(chèz/televizyon) Sa yo se

Reponn ak fraz konplè dapre imaj la :

1- Kisa sa a ye?

.....



2- Èske sa a se yon chèz?

Wi, sa a se yon chèz.



3- Kisa sa yo ye?

Sa yo se



4- Èske sa a se chèz?

Non, sa yo se pa chèz.

Kisa li ye ?



Reponn kesyon pi devan yo dapre enfòmasyon ki ant parantèz yo :

1- Ki kote òdinatè a ye? (nan biwo a)

.....

4- Ki kote chèz la ye ? (bò tab la)

.....

2- Ki kote kabann nan ye ? (nan chanm nan garaj la)

.....

5- Ki kote machin nan ye? (nan garaj la)

.....

3- Ki kote bekán nan ye ? (devan kay la)

.....

6- Ki kote liv yo ye? (sou biwo a)

.....

Questionnaire Example:

l'Art de/de la/du/des _____

- 1) Quels types d'art existent chez toi? (Par exemple : le film, la sculpture, la peinture, la tissue, le théâtre, la danse, la musique, etc)

- 2) Comment/Quand vois-tu de l'art dans la vie quotidienne ?

- 3) Quelles sortes de choses fais-tu rarement (ou jamais – mais tu sais qu'elles existent) pour apprécier de l'art ?

- 4) Choisissez UN médium d'art. Expliquez les valeurs culturelles que représente ce type d'art.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in Haiti: (A non-extensive list.)

Prosjekt Haiti (Norwegian) <http://www.prosjekthaiti.org>

Partners in Health <http://www.pih.org>

SOIL <http://www.oursoil.org>

Engineers without Borders <http://www.ewb-usa.org>

J/P Haitian Relief Organization <http://jphro.org>

Further Reading:

Akey, Julie Peters. *Haiti, My Love*

Beaubrun, Mimirose. *Nan Domi: An Initiate's Journey into Haitian Voodoo*

Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Danticat, Edwidge. *Krik? Krak!*

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Farming of Bones*

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker*

Danticat, Edwidge. *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti*

Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*

Farmer, Paul. *The Uses of Haiti*

Farmer, Paul. *Haiti after the Earthquake*

Katz, Jonathan. *The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster*

Schwartz, Timothy. *A True Account of Christian Missions, Orphanages, Food Aid, and Drug Trafficking*

Wilentz, Amy. *Farewell Fred Voodoo.*