



TEACHING FRENCH IN THE PRIMARY AND ELEMENTARY GRADES

ACADEMIC AND SPIRITUAL PURPOSE BEYOND THE MERELY UTILITARIAN

Learning a foreign language in early childhood gives the gift of life-long facility with language.

In primary and elementary school, learning foreign language establishes a model for the learning of any other foreign language life-long. The global community and global economy our children enter mandate knowledge of the world and its languages and cultures for successful and useful service. Success in propagating the Gospel depends much upon competency with languages. In kindergarten we begin foreign language instruction with this purpose but also with an eye to augmenting and enriching the overall classical curriculum our children enjoy from the earliest years. This leads to the question, why French is the language of choice in the primary and elementary grades?

1. French language is closely akin to English through the Norman Invasion of England in 1066 giving English a rich vocabulary 60% of which is rooted in French and Latin.
2. That 60% of English vocabulary represented by French and Latin derivation embodies much of the abstract and ornamental vocabulary of English while the Anglo-Saxon derivation embodies most of the concrete and commonplace vocabulary. The two aspects give English versatility and a broad range of expression useful to a reasoning, Biblical mentality.
3. French is the second most commonly-taught second language in the world (after English).
4. French and English are the only languages spoken as a native language on 5 continents.
5. French is one of the official working languages in dozens of international and diplomatic organizations including NAFTA, NATO, Red Cross, UN, WHO, WTO, International Olympic Committee and Interpol.
6. In the primary and elementary grades when children are learning to read and are developing English skills in writing and speaking, the teaching of French enhances the mastery of English.
7. French as a second language is useful in scholarship to the future study of a wide range of disciplines including medicine, science, philosophy, theology and literature.
8. There is a strong link between France and America on the timeline of American Christian liberty:
 - a. France produced two of the writers who most influenced and were most often quoted by the Founding Fathers, John Calvin and Montesquieu.
 - b. France was instrumental in both strengthening the Revolutionary Army and in winning the decisive battle at Yorktown. France gave substantial loans throughout the Revolutionary War. France was the first nation to recognize the sovereignty of the U.S.A.



- c. The Huguenots, French Protestants who fled persecution, populated our colonies with craftsmen, tradesmen, artisans and leaders (Paul Revere) and built strong communities.
 - d. Our history of liberty owes much to the French who produced a symbol to memorialize that debt—the Statue of Liberty, conceived by a Frenchman, Edouard LaBoulaye, who declared, “True liberty is the daughter of the Gospel!”, and sculpted by a French artist, Bartholdi. There are ten miniatures of the statue displayed throughout the city of Paris.
 - e. Many U.S. localities have a strong French heritage because of the Louisiana Purchase, Arcadian settlers of Canada and Louisiana, French explorers, French traders and French missionaries.
9. French language has long been the language of diplomacy worldwide as well as the vehicle of much of the wealth of Western culture and civilization through its philosophers, painters, musicians, theologians and literature. French cathedrals and monasteries preserved the Gospel and the Bible through the dark ages.
10. Teaching French in elementary grades gives students the following advantages:
- a) It enhances the mastery of English through an experience that is mainly audio-lingual and fun during the tedious stages of learning English reading and writing.
 - b) It gives the learning-a-foreign-language experience a melodious and beautiful vehicle that establishes a precedent for all future foreign language learning while illuminating the aspect of English that is most useful for reasoning and effective communication.
 - c) It offers stories and historical anecdotes that enlighten the history of our liberty.
 - d) Its history exemplifies God’s providence in using nations to bring about America’s Christian liberty.
 - e) It provides students with a language that well prepares them for future scholarship in many fields as well as membership in a global community.

“Children who start to learn a foreign language early in life can better understand their native language as they become conscious of the existence of language as a phenomenon. Their cultural outlook is wiser than that of monolingual children who often believe that their own culture, their language and their customs are the only ones that matter in the world. The introduction of a foreign idiom into the child’s world helps him to develop tolerance toward people different from him and in the long run contributes toward international understanding.”

(Renzo Titone, *Bilingual Education as a Big Game*)