
Blood, Elizabeth and Yasmina Mobarek. ***Intrigue: Langue, culture et mystère dans le monde francophone.* 2nd edition.**

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007. ISBN: 0-13-221378-8. Includes: Textbook with 2 Audio CDs, *Student Activities Manual* with 2 audio CDs, *Instructor's Resource Manual*, Video.

I was extremely interested in adopting *Intrigue* from the moment it appeared on the market in 2004, knowing that it was organized around an on-going narrative, somewhat like the earlier prototypes of *French in Action* (Capretz, 1987), *Destinos* (VanPatten et al., 2002), and *Débuts* (Siskin et al., 2003). What interested me even more was that many exercises, even those designed to practice grammatical structures, were not only story-based, but actually added new information to the main story. Having taught with these materials for almost a year, I am still very much taken with this dimension of *Intrigue*, which is communicative in the sense that it provides real information exchange, as well as by the intelligence and complexity of the textbook's narrative and cultural content.

The textbook contains ten chapters, including an interlude in the middle offering a list of characters and a chronology of story events that is especially useful for students coming into the second semester without having taken French in the first. The story involves a Quebecoise graduate student, Claire Plouffe, who is writing a dissertation on what she believes to be an undiscovered novel by Choderlos de Laclos. Her pursuit of the manuscript takes her on a series of adventures in Louisiana, Haiti, Paris, North Africa, Martinique, Senegal, Switzerland, Provence, and Quebec. The other main character, Jean-Louis, makes her acquaintance and follows her trail on his own mission to purchase the manuscript for a Parisian bookseller. The main story line is recounted in fairly long (two-page) written conversations at the beginning of each chapter, and further developments in the story are contained in exercises, readings, and audio materials. The two audio CDs accompanying the textbook contain readings of *expressions utiles* and additional dialogues between various characters in the story. These dialogues often add essential information to the ongoing story but can be skipped on occasion without detriment. Chapter themes include topics such as travel, work, cooking, dress, family, music, the press, politics (including the more unusual subject of separatist movements in the Francophone world), ecology, arts, health, sports, traditions, and modernity. Each chapter contains supplementary readings relating to the main story, such as e-mail messages and letters, in addition to longer literary excerpts from works by Proust, Ronsard, Maupassant, Assia Djebar, Molière, Victor Hugo, Patrick Chamoiseau, Rousseau, Mme de Staël, Alphonse Daudet, and Monique Proulx, and of course Laclos (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*). Composition writing is presented in three stages, including brainstorming ideas in spoken interaction with classmates, as part of a process approach.

Strong points of the materials include, first and foremost, the continuity and contextualization afforded by the ongoing narrative. Secondly, the cultural con-

tent of numerous highly readable, interesting short texts in the margins is rich, touching on such topics as New Orleans (pre-Katrina), the Haitian diaspora, ethnic diversity, the Vietnamese population in Paris, the DOM-TOM (overseas departments and territories), the EU, and regionalism in France. Perhaps the most impressive materials, however, are the intelligent and highly workable exercises. For vocabulary, the authors have written thought-provoking matching and *chassez l'intrus* exercises, and *vocabulaire personnel* exercises in which students construct lists of vocabulary of personal import to them. The discussion questions introducing chapter themes (e.g., *Quels aspects des actualités vous intéressent le plus? Avez-vous jamais essayé de créer une oeuvre d'art? Quel est votre plat préféré? Connaissez-vous des artistes français?*) are effective in eliciting interesting classroom talk. To accompany the opening conversation in each chapter, *d'accord/ pas d'accord* exercises are short, oriented toward getting the gist and main ideas of a complicated text, they elicit students' interpretation of the characters' motivation. The grammar exercises provide yet more text and context relating to the story of Claire and Jean-Louis. Lastly, for purposes of oral practice, each chapter provides dialogues — off-shoots of the main narrative — containing a variety of response options for students to read aloud. While some of these dialogues are long and difficult for students to handle, the idea of the exercise is appealing.

Grammar explanations for the most part are quite short (e.g., “The future tense (*le futur*) is used to describe events that will occur at some future date,” p. 240), with relatively few examples; however, this scarcity is doubtless less intimidating for students than lengthy explanations or lists of rules would be. And, to the authors' great credit, in a number of cases the use of grammatical structures is illustrated in a textual environment. For example, the relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, *dont*, and *où* are highlighted within a narrative text, a humorous version of *Le petit chaperon rouge*.

Each chapter of the *Student Activities Manual* contains three sections. *Activités orales* consist of multiple choice exercises practicing comprehension of language functions such as apologizing, disagreeing, giving one's opinion, and complaining or conversational strategies like interrupting or obtaining clarification. There is also a dictation exercise. *Activités écrites* are exercises on vocabulary and grammar, including the unusual and welcome feature of exercises that recycle grammar structures from previous chapters. Every chapter has a useful multiple choice culture quiz and composition topics on cross-cultural comparisons and literary readings. The third and last section comprises very well thought-out *activités audiovisuelles*, including pre-viewing elicitation of students' background knowledge, profiles of interviewees, multiple choice comprehension checks, exercises on grammar and vocabulary, and personal questions on the interview topic.

The video in the textbook package contains interviews with a variety of French-speaking informants residing in the Boston area who speak about their own backgrounds and what they miss about their country of origin, and offer their views on politics, family, and other topics. Some of the interviews are quite long, but they can be viewed in segments. It is refreshing to listen to the differ-

ent versions of French (in terms of accent, grammatical accuracy, and fluency) offered here, and to hear both native speakers and speakers of French as a second language. Nevertheless, many of my students and I agree that a filmed version of the story of Claire and Jean-Louis would be the ideal video component for this textbook.

The *Intrigue* Website (*Cahier électronique*) has a number of excellent components, such as self-check revision exercises for vocabulary and grammar, Web-based cultural activities, and ideas for service or experiential learning and community or classroom events. The *Instructor's Resource Manual* offers teaching suggestions, answer keys, audio and video scripts, and a test bank with two tests for each chapter. There is no audio component for testing purposes.

Weak points of the materials include the lack of color photographs or graphics in the textbook, the difficulty and length of opening dialogues, and the *Comment dire* sections, which are lists of *expressions utiles* offering students many choices but no explanations or translations. There is no recorded version of the opening conversation in each chapter, and the dialogues in the *A l'écoute* sections are quite long and sound like tapescripts being read. Thus there are no samples of natural conversation in the materials, since the video consists primarily of monologues. Lastly, the debate topics (for example, sovereignty and separatist movements, bilingual education, or human rights) and scenarios for oral interaction suggested in the textbook are quite difficult for intermediate-level students.

In a written survey of forty-seven students using *Intrigue*, the overwhelming majority (forty-one) gave high marks to the cultural content of the textbook, many explicitly commenting on the positive feature of learning more about areas other than France. Most students found the on-going story of Claire Plouffe to be of considerable interest. Grammar presentation and exercises also received positive evaluations from most. Many found the Website review exercises useful. Students were more divided regarding the interest and accessibility of readings, video material, and audio exercises.

One student characterized the difficulty and interest of *Intrigue* as a strength:

I really like this text. It's different but the format is much more engaging as opposed to the mechanical, predictable format of other texts that put me to sleep. If you're still trying to teach Basic French, then I think this text is not optimal. If you want to push students to understand better, and be more entertained, then I think this unique textbook is perfect.

For a course meeting three times weekly, there is much more material than one can use, but it is good to have so many choices. *Intrigue* is long on text, culture, story, and meaning. The care and intelligence with which it has been written are extraordinary

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