
Mitschke, Cherie. *Imaginez le monde sans frontières.*

Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2008. ISBN: 1-60007-158-9. Pp. 501. Includes: Student Activities Manual (SAM=Workbook/Lab Manual) and Answer Key, Lab Audio Program MP3s, DVD (films), Instructor's Resource CD and DVD set, Testing Program, Test Generator, Instructor's Annotated Edition, Supersite (*imaginez.vhlcentral.com*) powered by MAESTRO.

The main objective of *Imaginez le monde sans frontières* is to “provide students with an active and rewarding learning experience as they strengthen their language skills and develop their cultural competency” (Preface). This new intermediate program offers a smooth transition between first-year and second-year French texts. It features a flexible lesson organization designed to meet the needs of diverse teaching styles, institutions, and instructional goals. By presenting and rehearsing situations similar to the ones encountered in real life, and by adopting an interactive, communicative approach, it expands students' reading, speaking, listening and writing skills. The textbook is correlated with authentic, short-subject films used as a starting point for discussions and accompanied by a wide range of pre- and post-viewing activities.

Imaginez is composed of ten chapters divided into several sections: *pour commencer* (presentation of new vocabulary in thematic lists), *court métrage*

(video program and accompanying activities), *imaginez* (texts and interactive activities related to Francophone countries), *structure* (grammar explanations and exercises), *culture* (cultural readings followed by questions), and *littérature* (authentic literary selections from Francophone authors). In order to emphasize the idea that French is an international language capable of creating an international linguistic community *sans frontières*, the author has introduced a wealth of historical, cultural, and literary information about various Francophone countries and about the specificity of their cultures. Moreover, an excellent section, titled *A fond la sono* and included in each chapter, introduces various musicians and songs by them that are thematically related to the chapter's vocabulary. Next to familiar names like Céline Dion, students will also learn about less familiar singers such as Natasha Atlas, Indochine, Paris Combo, or Les Nubiens. Many additional resources and activities related to the musicians are available on the Website. Another interesting aspect of this program is the inclusion of *La galerie de créateurs*, which ties language learning to other disciplines and highlights important cultural figures ranging from writers, fashion designers, and film directors to dancers and sculptors. Supplemental grammar explanations, *Fiches de grammaire*, included at the end of the textbook, build on concepts introduced in each lesson and provide additional concepts for review and enrichment. Each chapter features authentic short films from a variety of Francophone countries that relate to the chapter themes. The films provide a springboard for students to learn more about the cultural themes and language presented in the chapter.

Imaginez comes with a wide range of ancillaries, such as the Instructor's Resource CD and DVD set, Student Activities Manual (SAM=Workbook/Lab Manual) and Answer Key, Lab Audio Program MP3s, and film collection DVD. Particularly innovative is the Supersite, a brand-new language learning system specifically developed for this program and powered by the groundbreaking MAESTRO engine. Totally interactive, with MP3 audio files and video files, it allows students to access auto-graded activities and exercises with feedback for practice. For instructors, the Website provides a useful course management system that provides tracking, grading, and monitoring of student performance. The Web Student Activities Manual contains the Workbook and the Lab Manual and is also powered by the powerful MAESTRO engine.

For the most part, I liked the selection of topics presented in *Imaginez*. Rather than talk about the clothes, weather, and other typical subjects found in other textbooks, the author chose to introduce various challenging aspects of everyday life, great for discussions, conversations, or group work. Among the themes selected are: *la justice et la politique*, *le progrès et la recherche*, and *le travail et les finances*. Lists of vocabulary followed by synonyms and other interesting lexical notes introduce each theme. Occasionally, I found that the vocabulary was not entirely up-to-date. For example, in the chapter devoted to personal relations and civil status, the list of new words and expressions includes *le mariage*, *l'union libre*, and *le divorce*, but there is no mention whatsoever of *PACS* or the corresponding verb *se pacser*. Given that *PACS* has become such an integral part of French culture since 2001, this omission is rather surprising, especially for a book published in 2008. In other chapters, however, the vocabulary is current, comprehensive, and well chosen for the intermediate level.

The author's goal was to create a user-friendly learning environment. Consequently, the textbook has a fresh, magazine-like design. It incorporates excellent page layout and use of colors, typefaces, and other graphic elements as an integral part of the learning process. Lesson sections are color-coded, and the textbook pages are visually dramatic, featuring pictures, drawings, realia, charts, word lists, and maps of the French-speaking world, all designed for both instructional impact and visual appeal.

Imaginez will no doubt motivate and inspire intermediate French students. Because of the program's innovative nature and flexibility, it will provide a unique and compelling learning experience. The user-friendly and video-integrated approach, the presentation of the language embedded in a Francophone cultural context, and the treatment of vocabulary and grammar as tools for effective and successful communication will prepare students to interact and communicate in French in real-life contexts.

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Publisher's Response

Vista Higher Learning thanks Professor Andrzej Dzedzic for his generous review of *Imaginez: le français sans frontières*, a program that demonstrates our commitment to modern language education. We believe that the purpose of language learning is more than an academic exercise; one learns a language in order to effectively communicate and participate in the modern world. By creating a connection not only to the language but also to the *authentic cultures* of the language, we create an opportunity for relevant language use.

Vista Higher Learning's main objective has always been to build both passion and practicality into the process of learning a language. By embracing authentic Francophone culture — both historical and modern — students feel a strong connection to the French language, helping them develop a sense of the language's value. Professor Dzedzic recognizes this when he points to the text's "wealth of historical, cultural, and literary information about various Francophone countries and the specificity of their cultures."

The text, combined with innovative online teaching and learning tools, makes *Imaginez* a clear alternative to traditional language learning programs. It is designed to engage students as they build their language skills and broaden their understanding of the diverse cultures of the Francophone world. Through the integration of authentic short films that tie together culture, literature, and language, students using *Imaginez* embark on a unique and rewarding learning experience that prepares them to interact and communicate in French in real-life contexts.

Because Vista Higher Learning exclusively publishes language programs, our focus is sharply directed. This specialized approach is appreciated by instructors and students alike: since its introduction last year, *Imaginez* has become the most successful intermediate French textbook published in more than a decade.

Janet Dracksdorf
President
Vista Higher Learning
