

Beyond the Metropole: World Art and Literature in French

Funded by the Association of University Professors and Heads of French + (AUPHF+), Beyond the Metropole was a 3-month mentoring programme for 16-17 year olds from Northern Ireland interested in pursuing the study of French at university level. The programme was designed to at once expose students to literary material which is generally under-studied and give them an idea of what studying French at university might look like. The students were divided into two groups of five and six and attended online weekly sessions, alternating between language and literature. In addition, two sessions were dedicated to preparing an application for university.

In the literature sessions the students covered a diverse range of texts written by people from beyond the metropole including Aimé Césaire, Chantal Spitz, Tahar Ben-Jelloun, and Assia Djebar to name a few. Students engaged closely with the material, drawing connections between aspects of language and the text's wider socio-political context. At the end of the programme students were asked to produce a short piece of writing about one or more of the texts covered in the sessions which they all completed to an extremely high standard.

Meanwhile, in language sessions students worked on oracy and translation skills, completing short pieces of writing and preparing presentations in French which they would discuss in sessions. This part of the programme was led by two students from Queens' University Belfast, Clíodhna and Toni, who organised and ran the language sessions incredibly successfully.

The programme culminated in a final event (photos below) which took place at Queens' University mid January. All the students, Toni, Clíodhna and I attended the event and we had the pleasure of also having Professor Maeve McCusker from Queens' and James Davies-Warner, the Admissions and Outreach Coordinator at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge in attendance. Professor Maeve McCusker delivered a fascinating academic session exploring identity, ethnicity, and the relationship between the overseas departments and the metropole. This was followed by a Q&A led by me, Toni, and Clíodhna, after which we had a celebratory lunch. All students received a book to encourage them to continue exploring the themes covered in the programme.

It has been a pleasure working with such dedicated and motivated students on the highly important and prevalent area of postcolonial studies. The students developed their oracy, critical thinking skills, and language ability, as well as their expression, confidence, and I sincerely hope, their passion for the study of French.

By Sadie Berry-Firth

Feedback from the students:

"I think these sessions have really broadened my horizons and removed the rose-tinted glasses which cloud my view of the history of France - it's not all fashion, art and romance."

"I think the sessions in general have been just right in pushing the barrier to extend knowledge but all in a comfortable non pressurised sense"

"I also love their styles of teaching as it doesn't feel like school where we are simply being told what to do and learning what we're being taught, but it feels a lot more relaxed, less stressful and interactive than school"

“Sadie and Toni have a great method of teaching especially when overcoming the barrier of teaching online. They teach in a way that brings the session alive and interactive.”

“Just wanted to say thanks again for all your effort over the past few months - having someone who is genuinely passionate and excited about what they’re teaching makes the world of a difference in inspiring the same in others. As well as expanding my knowledge and understanding of the mostly forgotten and hidden aspects of France’s dark colonial history, I really did have a lot of fun and have benefited so much from what you’ve told us about applying to uni and life at Cambridge. So SO grateful for this experience - you have made such a special impact on all of us”

