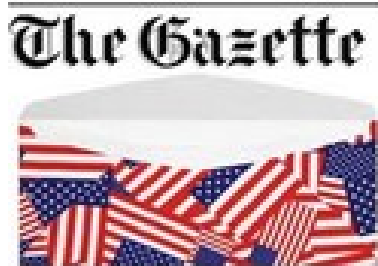


<http://lyc-george-sand-la-chatre.tice.ac-orleans-tours.fr/eva/spip.php?article407>



An Assistant's Experience in France

- Archives du Blog - Espace international - The English Gazette -



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I had never been to France before this year.

Being a student of languages, I had always wanted to go, but my parents preferred Florida for our summer holidays, and convinced me that the Disneyland in Orlando was much better than the one in Paris, and, as they didn't speak French, going to America would make everything much simpler.

I had also been to Spain, the Canaries and the Balearic Islands multiple times, with friends, family and school, so the Iberian Peninsula held no mystery for me, and when it came to decide where to go for my year abroad, I decided that **France would be a nice adventure**. I had originally planned on doing charity work in an Ecuadorian orphanage, but my university wasn't keen on that. So I happily settled on France, and looked forward to it with excitement and apprehension ; my big adventure was about to begin.

I arrived in La Châtre on the 25th of September 2010, my experience of the French language confined to books and university classes, and my teaching experience extending to a week of showing ten-year olds how to say "bonjour."

I quickly learned that my ten years of studying French had not prepared me in the slightest for the reality of living in a town in the middle of France, where **the only people who spoke English were the teachers at the lycée**. I was thrown in at the deep end, my first day at school spent in the staff room surrounded by new faces, rapid French (only a quarter of which I could understand) and at the canteen, where I received a number of concerned comments about why I wasn't eating. I didn't know the words for "jetlag" and "overwhelmed," so I smiled and said I just wasn't hungry.

The next seven months have passed in a blur.

I've found my use of language improving daily (thanks to helpful corrections from students if I misspelled a word or pronounced something wrong), I got used to the routine and the slower pace of life here, and I believe I have learned a lot, in terms of language, culture and life. I can still remember the first day here - how nervous and overwhelmed I felt that I was living in France - and I can't believe how far I've come since then.

I hope the students I spent time with enjoyed our lessons.

We have studied a wide range of things :

- [-] Finn MacCool, the legendary Northern Irish giant who, according to the stories, created the Giant's Causeway and the Isle of Man ;
- [-] robots and their potential influence over our lives ;
- [-] what it means to get older ;
- [-] Michael Jackson and **Thriller** ;
- [-] the Spirit of Adventure

[-] and the smoking ban in the UK.

We have also learned the difference between "What ?" and "Pardon ?",

which English swearwords are appropriate for the classroom and which are not, and that **Joan of Arc and Bob Marley are, in fact, dead, and have been for a while.**

I have also learned the correct use of the subjunctive in everyday life (something my French teachers have always been unable to clarify), a few "blagues" that I had to explain in detail to my joke-loving father, and what is involved in a traditional French Christmas dinner.

I am extremely grateful for the experience I have had in La Châtre ;

I have seen and done so much I never thought I could, and learned many things. I hope I've been **a good ambassador for Belfast**, and been a help to the English department here ; they have certainly welcomed me, supported me and made me feel useful and wanted, as has everyone else I have encountered.

For the gracious hospitality I have been shown by the faculty and the students, I want to say thanks.

I won't pretend there haven't been difficult times, or days where I missed my family and wanted to go home, but the good far outweighs the bad, and I am so glad I decided to come here, instead of the Ecuadorian orphanage. I think this is where I was meant to be, and I am certain that my time here has improved my language, professional and life skills, as well as being personally enriching and enjoyable.