# Using poetry in the French classroom

**workbook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jacques Prévert</th>
<th>Victor Hugo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Jacques Prévert" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Victor Hugo" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Baudelaire</td>
<td>Moi</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Charles Baudelaire" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Moi" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Content

a) Creative writing

- Shape poetry
- Comparison poems
- ‘Si…’
- Rhyming

b) Fun with existing poems

- Jaques Prévert
- Baudelaire
- Valentine’s day

Sarcophage des Muses (c. 160 avant notre ère). Musée du Louvre

‘Calligramme’ par Appolinaire.
http://fr.wikipedia.org/

Portait de Charles Baudelaire
A) Creative writing

Shape Poetry

Shape poetry or concrete poetry at a very basic level can be as simple as writing a word expressively.

How would you write the word ‘seul’ (lonely) and why?

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How would you write the word ‘seul’ (lonely) and why?

Now try to create your ‘word-art’ for ‘seul’ in the box below.
Finally, think of some of your own words and look them up in a dictionary. Then carefully draw your FRENCH shape poems in the box below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible words (English)</th>
<th>French translations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>
You can also make your own shape poem by writing a combination of words in a certain shape. To be successful at this task, ensure that the shape of the poem matches the words you have chosen and perhaps gives the reader a clue about the deeper meaning or overall theme of the poem.

Have a look at the examples below, made by 7 pupils:

♥ chéri ♥ ♥ bisou♥
♥ mon amour ♥ ♥ mon petit lapin ♥
♥ tu es ma raison de vivre ♥ nous ♥ des fleurs ♥
♥ des chocolats ♥ amour ♥ Cupidon ♥ une carte ♥
♥ un coeur ♥ un cadeau ♥ Vénus ♥ toi et moi ♥
♥ nous allons si bien ensemble ♥
♥ Je ne rêve que de toi ♥
♥ bonbons ♥
chou
♥

Which shape has this pupil chosen to present his poem in?..............................................
What have the chosen words in common?.................................................................
What do you think this poem is about?.................................................................
origine temps tôt début pure commencer
naissance enfance croître plus grandir
heure premièrem ent avant d’abord
aller un moment partir après
innocence la jeunesse
adolescence
mature
un
moment
tard retard plus tard
adultes parents grands-parents
petits-enfants bout terminer finir
perdu fin Chronos destination arriver
dernier définitif maladie angoisse mort

Which shape has this pupil chosen to present his poem in?.................................
What have the chosen words in common?............................................................
What do you think this poem is about?...............................................................
What do you notice if you read the poem from the beginning to the end? Do the words change slightly in meaning? If yes, how?.........................................................
.................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................
Which title would you give this poem?..................................................................
Now try to think of some words and shapes yourself.

If you were to write a poem about the earth, which shape would you choose?

If you were to write a poem about a prison, how would you represent this?

How would you visually represent a poem about war?

If you were to write a poem about Egypt, and the chosen shape was a pyramid, which French words would you use to fill the shape? Try out your draft version of the poem in the pyramid below.
**Now think of your own shapes, themes and words:**

Theme:........................................................................................................................................

Possible shapes:..........................................................................................................................

Possible words:............................................................................................................................

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In the frame below, draw your shape poem in pencil and try to add the words you have chosen within the shapes. Try this first in pencil and make your neat version afterwards.

Or check out the below website, which will help you compose your concrete poem online. Note that you will need to type in your own words and drag them across. You can print your sample afterwards.

Comparison Poems

Comparisons also offer a good starting point when writing your own poem in a foreign language. If you think about it, many famous poets often use comparisons and metaphors in their writing. A metaphor is a comparison without ‘as’ or ‘like’. A comparison will contain the word ‘comme’ in French.

Comme= as/like

Try to think of a person you know and like. Can you think of some adjectives which would describe this person well?

Eg.

Fort comme........un lion..........................
Intelligent comme..................................
Bavard comme......................................
Fou comme.........................................

Now try to find creative comparisons for each adjective. Follow the example.
Your turn. Think of a person and find suitable adjectives:

Now try to find creative comparisons for each adjective

...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...............................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................
...................................................comme.............................................................

Finally, write the name of the person in the box above and you have a basic comparison poem. Of course, you can do the same thing for your pets, your home town, a teacher you remember (for positive of negative reasons) etc.
A second comparison poem example is based on comparatives such as ‘more than’, ‘less than’ and superlatives (‘most’, ‘best’).

Do you remember how to compose comparatives and superlatives in French?

**Astuce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLUS.........que</th>
<th>MOINS.........que</th>
<th>AUSSI.........que</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More .....than</td>
<td>Less......than</td>
<td>As..............as</td>
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</table>

Now look at the examples of the following poems, made by year 9 students. The pupils were asked to write a poem about someone they admire, using comparatives and/or superlatives.

Grand-mère

Tu es plus amusante que Russel Peters
Tu es plus généreuse que Bill Gates
Tu es plus sage que le Dalai Lama
Tu es mon héroïne!

Tu es plus protectrice que Mère Thérésa
Tu es plus forte qu’une lionne
Tu es plus jolie que la lune
Tu es une vraie amie!

Notice that the subject of the poem is feminine, so the adjectives have a feminine ending.

Notice the structural pattern: 3 comparatives followed by one predicate.
Your turn. Who do you admire?....................................................

Which 6 adjectives could you attach to this person?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>French translation</th>
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</table>

Who or what else can be attributed these adjectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ex.</th>
<th>intelligent</th>
<th>Einstein</th>
<th>Tu es plus intelligente qu’Einstein</th>
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Now your poem
‘Si...’

Rudyard Kipling once wrote the famous poem called ‘If’. So, why not use his idea and compose a French poem with the title ‘Si’. This title usually works well in the context of (unrequited) love, but you could apply it to any theme of choice.

In order to write the following poem, you need to have a firm grasp of the imperfect and the conditional tenses. Do you remember how to use these tenses?

**Imperfect tense:**
- **Stem:** Nous-form present tense minus -ons
- **Exception:** ETRE → stem = ét
- **Add:** –ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient

**Conditional tense**
- **Stem:** Stem of the future tense (~infinitive)
- **Exceptions:** check future tense exceptions
- **Add:** –ais, -ais, -ait, -ions, -iez, -aient

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**Title:** ‘Si’

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Si...

Si j’avais......une voiture....................., je.......te conduirais partout................

Si j’étais....cascadeur...............,..., je..................................................................................

Si j’habitais....en Chine...............,..., je..................................................................................

Ma fleur, ma déesse, mon amour.

---

Si.................................,..., je..................................................................................

Si.................................,..., je..................................................................................

Si.................................,..., je..................................................................................

Ma........................., ma........................., ..........................

---

Repetition of addressing the beloved one

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Main clauses
in the conditional tense.
Now think of some things you are not, have not, rule not etc. Think of which infinitive you will need to use in French and then find the imperfect tense verb form for each of those verbs. This part of the poem is all about you and the situation you are not in. (eg. *If I were rich* – but I am not)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Imperfect tense form</th>
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</table>

Then think of what you would do in case you were in the situation mentioned by the si- (or if-) clause. Write the French infinitives in the left column and then change the infinitives to the conditional verb forms in the right column. This part of the poem is all about what you would do to/for your loved one, only if things were different (Eg. *I would buy you a new car*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Conditional form</th>
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Now it’s only a matter of combining both clauses together and adding some descriptive details to make everything more poetic. This is a good opportunity to refresh your grammatical knowledge regarding adjectives (adjectival agreements) and to improve your dictionary research skills. Don’t be afraid about trying out new things, this is poetry after all. Also, remember to add a concluding romantic address to your sweetheart at the end of each stanza.
Now your poem
**Rhyming**

Rhyming in a different language is actually a lot more difficult than may appear at first sight, which is why the online rhyming dictionary can be useful.

http://rime-en.fr/

To be able to rhyme, you must pronounce things correctly, so don’t forget to check the pronunciation of difficult words in a dictionary, if you can read the phonetic alphabet, or through www.forvo.com if you can’t.

Remember that the most common rhyme we use in poems is end rhyme (so we focus on the ending sounds of the words).

Now try to find rhyming words through the use of the online dictionary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>beau</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>danse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>géographie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensemble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>école</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tard</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>amour</td>
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</table>

Now play around with a range of genres to make funny, silly or beautiful poems. The websites below are in English, but they may give you inspiration on how to get started.

http://www.gigglepoetry.com/poetryclass/limerickcontesthelp.html

http://www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons/
B) **Fun with existing poems**

**Jacques Prévert**

Jacques Prévert is one of the more accessible poets for foreign language learners, because some of his poems manage to express more complex themes through the use of relatively simple language.

The poem discussed below is ‘Déjeuner du matin’, but ‘Familiale’ is also a very accessible poem. The activities below are suggestions only. On the web, there are many additional resources available.


Le poème *Déjeuner du matin* vient du livret ‘Les Paroles’ et a été publié en 1946.
Déjeuner du matin

Il a mis le café
Dans la tasse
Il a mis le lait
Dans la tasse de café
Il a mis le sucre
Dans le café au lait
Avec la petite cuiller
Il a tourné
Il a bu le café au lait
Et il a reposé la tasse
Sans me parler

Il a allumé
Une cigarette
Il a fait des ronds
Avec la fumée
Il a mis les cendres
Dans le cendrier
Sans me parler
Sans me regarder

Il s'est levé
Il a mis
Son chapeau sur sa tête
Il a mis son manteau de pluie
Parce qu'il pleuvait
Et il est parti
Sous la pluie
Sans une parole
Sans me regarder

Et moi j'ai pris
Ma tête dans ma main
Et j'ai pleuré
a) Put the pictures in the order of the poem.

b) Cut up the pieces of poetry and try to put the text in the correct order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Il a mis le café</th>
<th>Dans la tasse de café</th>
<th>Il a mis le lait</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dans la tasse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sucre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avec la petite</td>
<td>Cuiller</td>
<td>Il a tourné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a bu le café</td>
<td>au lait</td>
<td>Et il a reposé la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tasse</td>
<td>Sans me parler</td>
<td>Il a allumé Une Cigarette \ Il a fait des ronds</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cigarette</td>
<td>Fume</td>
<td>Il a mis les cendres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avec la</td>
<td>Dans le cendrier</td>
<td>Sans me regarder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parler</td>
<td>Sans me parler</td>
<td>Il s'est levé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a mis</td>
<td>Son chapeau</td>
<td>sur sa tète</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a mis son</td>
<td>pluie</td>
<td>Parce qu'il</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manteau de</td>
<td>pleuvait</td>
<td>Et il est parti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pluvait</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sous la pluie</td>
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</table>
c) Language features of the poem

The language of this poem is fairly simple. Why do you think this is the case?  

Do you think the poem would be better if it contained many ‘flowery’ adjectives? Why (not)?  

The poem contains many examples of simple sentences in the perfect tense. Can you find one example?  

‘Pleuvait’ refers to the past, but it is an imperfect tense rather than a perfect tense. Why is the ‘imparfait’ used and not the passé compose?  

Now circle or highlight all the perfect tense constructions in the poem.
Then organise the perfect tense constructions of the poem in the grid below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perfect tense with ETRE</th>
<th>Perfect tense with AVOIR</th>
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</table>

Do you remember how to form the perfect tense with AVOIR?

- To make the perfect tense, you need two important parts.
  - A) The auxiliary verb (helping verb): AVOIR
  - B) The past participle of the verb you want to put in the past

The second element is a ‘past participle’. Ex: I have ran 5 km; He has swum in the Olympics.

**How do we make them?**
- a) Take the infinitives of the verbs
- b) Change their endings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- ER verbs</th>
<th>- RE verbs</th>
<th>- IR verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ é</td>
<td>→ u</td>
<td>→ i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And do you remember how to use the perfect tense with ETRE?

We usually use ‘AVOIR’ as auxiliary verb in the perfect tense.

- But, some verbs take ETRE as an auxiliary verb in the perfect tense.
- The tricky thing will be to know which ones they are

The Mrs Van de Tramp verbs take ETRE in the perfect tense.

- Mourir (to die)
- Rester (to stay)
- Sortir (to go out)
- Venir (to come)
- Aller (to go)
- Naître (to be born)
- Descendre (to go down, to get off)
- Entrer (to enter)
- Tomber (to fall)
- Retourner (to return)
- Arriver (to arrive)
- Monter (to go up, to get on)
- Partir (to leave)

Now be a poet yourself and try to add an additional stanza within the poem. It could be a descriptive one between the first and the last stanza (ie more descriptions of the scene) or it could be a continuation of the poem (in this case you may need to include what happens after, more action verbs). Please take care to use the same style as Jaques Prevert: simple perfect tense sentences which point out the essence (no abundance of adjectives, linking words etc)
d) Acting

Who is ‘il’ in relation to the narrator?.................................

From the very few pieces of information which you received about him, what kind of person do you think ‘il’ is? Why?.................................

How old do you think ‘il’ is?..............................................

Why did he leave? What happened? Will he come back?

Draw your impressions of ‘il’ in the box below and add a description in French.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Je pense qu’il est</th>
<th>aimable/mignon/sympa/intéressant/créatif/doué/marrant/beau/sportif/intelligent/cool/paresseux/différent/rigolo.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A mon avis il est/il est possible qu’il soit ...</td>
<td>grand/petit/de taille moyenne/gros/mince/musclé.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il a probablement</td>
<td>les yeux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il est possible qu’il ait</td>
<td>les cheveux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noirs/marron/blonds/courts/frisés/raides/bouclés/longs courts/mi-longs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now try to act out the poem in small groups. One person is the narrator (who reads the poem), the other people will act out the scene in the background.

e) Creative responses


  Use the website above to create your own visual artwork based on the poem.


  Use the above website to turn the poem into an artistic book.
Zimmertwins: http://zimmertwins.com/movie/frontpage

Create your own version of the poem by changing the setting and the main protagonists slightly, whilst keeping in line with the style of the poem (and its structural elements such as repetition etc). Then turn the poem into your own movie through the above link. Make sure to check out how the website works (and which actions you can choose from) before you start to create your movie.

Baudelaire

‘Charles-Pierre Baudelaire est un poète français, né à Paris le 9 avril 1821 et mort dans la même ville le 31 août 1867. « Dante d’une époque déchue » selon le mot de Barbey d’Aurevilly, nourri de romantisme, tourné vers le classicisme, à la croisée entre le Parnasse et le symbolisme, chantre de la « modernité », il occupe une place qui lui est propre dans l’histoire littéraire du XIXe siècle’

(http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Baudelaire)

Analyze the poem ‘L’albatros’ (below) and create your artistic response in a different medium (paint, 3D art, drama, music, etc).
Les Fleurs du Mal est un recueil de poèmes de Charles Baudelaire qui intègre la quasi-totalité de sa production poétique depuis 1840.

Œuvre majeure de Baudelaire, publiée le 25 juin 1857 et rééditée en 1861, Les Fleurs du Mal sont l’une des œuvres les plus importantes de la poésie moderne, empreinte d’une nouvelle esthétique où la beauté et le sublime surgissent, grâce au langage poétique, de la réalité la plus triviale. L’œuvre exerça une influence considérable sur Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé ou encore Arthur Rimbaud.’


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L’Albatros</th>
<th>The Albatross</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Souvent, pour s’amuser, les hommes d’équipage Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers, Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage, Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers. À peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches, Que ces rois de l’azur, maladroits et honteux, Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches Comme des avirons trainer à côté d’eux. Ce voyageur aîlé, comme il est gauche et veule! Lui, naguère si beau, qu’il est comique et laïd! L’un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule, L’autre mime, en boitant, l’infirmier qui volait! Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l’archer; Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées, Ses ailes de géant l’empêchent de marcher. — Charles Baudelaire</td>
<td>Often, to amuse themselves, the men of the crew Catch those great birds of the seas, the albatrosses, lazy companions of the voyage, who follow The ship that slips through bitter gulfs. Hardly have they put them on the deck, Than these kings of the skies, awkward and ashamed, Piteously let their great white wings Draggle like oars beside them. This winged traveler, how weak he becomes and slack! He who of late was so beautiful, how comical and ugly! Someone teases his beak with a branding iron, Another mimics, limping, the crippled flyer! The Poet is like the prince of the clouds, Haunting the tempest and laughing at the archer; Exiled on earth amongst the shouting people, His giant’s wings hinder him from walking. — Geoffrey Wagner, Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire (NY: Grove Press, 1974)</td>
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</table>
Valentine’s day

Valentine’s day is the day of poetry. You can create your own poems, of course, but why not use quotes of famous poets and authors to illustrate your cards and letters? See below a selection* of love quotes. Choose your favourite ones and include them in your Valentine’s card.

Aimer c'est donner raison à l'être qui a tort.
(Charles Péguy)

Aimer c'est la moitié de croire.
(Victor Hugo)

Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.
(Blaise Pascal)

Amour, amour, quand tu nous tiens, on peut bien dire : Adieu prudence !
(Jean de la Fontaine)

L'harmonie la plus douce est le son de la voix de celle qu'on aime.
(Jean de la Bruyère)

Les seuls beaux yeux sont ceux qui vous regardent avec tendresse.
(Coco Chanel)

La passion s'accroît en raison des obstacles qu'on lui oppose.
(Shakespeare)

Il y a dans la jalousie plus d'amour-propre que d'amour.
(François de la Rochefoucault)

Mais ce que fait l'amour, l'amour aussi l'excuse.
(Pierre Corneille)

L'amour n'est pas seulement un sentiment, il est aussi un art.
(Honoré de Balzac)
On a fait l'amour aveugle, parce qu'il a de meilleurs yeux que nous.
(Jean-Jacques Rousseau)

L'amour qui économise n'est jamais le véritable amour.
(Honoré de Balzac)

La femme que j'aime, la pluie ne tombe pas sur elle.
(Louis Chedid)

La courbe de tes yeux fait le tour de mon cœur.
(Paul Eluard)

Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches. Et puis voici mon cœur qui ne bat que pour vous. Ne le déchirez pas avec vos deux mains blanches. Et qu'à vos yeux l'humble présent soit doux.
(Paul Verlaine)

Je suis venu pour te voler Cent millions de baisers.
(Serge Gainsbourg)

Un baiser légal ne vaut jamais un baiser volé.
(Guy de Maupassant)

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