

FREN 111 –Inquiry

When I began taking French in high school, it was largely just to fill the language requirement, and because my brother had taken French before me, so I had some familiarity with the way it went in our school. Despite these meager expectations, French turned into a way to make myself more globally conscientious. My current French class, French 111, has focused on aspects of French that have allowed me greater range in using French to communicate with the world, an essential part of the Humanities. In this class, we have explored culturally significant events different from those that are relevant in the culture that I am immersed in on a daily basis. Through research, regular conversations in class, and reading French news stories, this class has set me up to learn about what is important to French and Francophone cultures.

French news outlets provide a window into what the French deem worthy of talking about on a consistent basis. Reports on French national and international athletics have allowed me to compare the sporting cultures in the US and France. Since sports are of vital cultural importance in many different places, trying to understand another society's athletic environment can be viewed as a critical part of humanities. People often tie themselves to their favorite teams or sports in general, and I believe that, for this reason, sports can serve as a valuable tool for connecting and building relationships with people who may seem otherwise far different. French news has also given me a glimpse of the French political landscape, which is definitely culturally relevant across the world right now. Conversations in class have also expanded my knowledge of French politics, which is especially important in today's internationally entwined world.

Simply by discussing French politics during class, I have gained insight on different political systems, while also becoming capable of analyzing political environments in the context of different societies and cultures. It is intriguing to look at the similarities in American politics

and the politics of many European nations, such as France and the United Kingdom.

Overwhelmingly, there has been a rise in right-to-far right political power, with conservative contingents wielding considerable power in the US and England – which each have a strong right-wing president and prime minister, respectively – and in France, where one of the leading political candidates has a platform similar to those of Donald Trump in the US and Theresa May in Great Britain. Learning a language other than one's own gives a person more opportunity to connect with people different from that person culturally, and peaceful communication often increases sympathy to those one may have previously not had the chance to try to understand. The project from this class that has perhaps most made me appreciate French culture was the research that we did on culturally important French figures, from history both distant and recent.

My research was on the life of French soccer star Zinedine Zidane. With parents from Algeria, Zidane is culturally significant not only because of his heroic play for the French national team in a series of international tournaments – such as the all-important World Cup – but also for his cultural identity. Zidane famously identifies himself as Algerian, French, an Arab, and Muslim, although he does not practice. Given how divisive Islamophobia has become in places that are predominantly white, Zidane's identity, coupled with reverence in which the French hold him, makes him an important figure in political and cultural relations. Learning about Zidane's life has been a valuable lesson in understanding how people can look past identity at someone they revere, but has also proved important in understanding how divisive identity can still be for some.

This class has presented me with many opportunities to understand and appreciate French culture. The effect of understanding the global political climate, other cultures important aspects, and identity in a bigger picture context is far-reaching. It is a nuanced culture, for sure,

and one that I hope to continue to learn about. It has inspired some of the interests I have for after college, and I will absolutely spend time in France and francophone countries around the world as much as I can in my life. The outwardly simple focus of this class – communication – is vital to living life every day. By increasing communicative skills in English as well as French, I know that I will be better equipped to make the world a better place than I was before studying French.