

LEÇON

1 Introduction

Welcome to *French in Action*! Before you enter the world of French language and culture and meet the French-speaking men and women whose activities form the plot of our story, before you watch the video programs, listen to the audio recordings, and plunge into the workbook and this textbook, take a moment to read the remarks that follow. They explain the goals of the course, its methods and components, and what we believe its value will be to you as a learner.

WHY FRENCH?

There are more than four thousand languages spoken on this planet. You are lucky enough to be a speaker of English, the world's leading language. You already have access to millions of speakers in hundreds of countries, to the thoughts and deeds of thousands of writers over the centuries. So why learn French?

The first and probably most important reason is that in a fast-shrinking world, French gives you access to a wide variety of peoples and cultures. More than 200 million people speak French worldwide. The Francophone (French-speaking) world includes some fifty countries across five continents; in thirty-two of them French is the first or second official language, and in many more it is widely spoken in daily life. French is the principal language of France, of

course, but it is also one of the official languages of Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada. It is the common language of several countries in the Caribbean (Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana) and in Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, Mauritania, Chad, Togo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Ivory Coast, to name only a few), and it is spoken extensively in the Middle East (Lebanon and Egypt). Along with English, French is one of the world's international languages. If you have a United States passport, notice the two languages in which it is written: English and French. Wherever you go in the

world, you will find educated men and women who speak French as a second or third language. A person who knows English and French is equipped to thrive in almost any country on earth.

Knowing French brings with it a new way of seeing, of listening, and of thinking. Much of the creative thinking that has shaped the Western tradition has been done in French. French opens the doors to the works and words of many of the world's greatest philosophers, scientists, musicians, painters, and writers. To read them in their own language is to grasp subtleties and beauties that too



"I'm going to France—I'm a different person in France."



"Don't tell anyone I asked... but why don't we have muskets?"

often disappear in translation. A number of great French writers are represented in *French in Action*: Jean de La Fontaine, Victor Hugo, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Marguerite Yourcenar, and many others. To encounter them and other French-speaking authors in their own language is to enter sympathetically into different ways of constructing and understanding the world, since the language itself mirrors perspectives on reality that are specific to the cultures that use it.

Some people are interested in learning French because of the long and close historical ties that exist between France and the United States. In fact, no nation other than England has played a more decisive role in the making of America. (Were you aware that the first Europeans to settle in North America were French Huguenots who founded a colony in Florida in 1564?) French explorers like Cartier, Champlain, Marquette, and La Salle led expeditions through Canada and the Great Lakes region, and down the Mississippi River; and French colonists settled vast areas of the North American continent. You might be one of the 9 million Americans of French descent, or live in one of the cities founded by French people: Detroit, Michigan; Fond du Lac, Wisconsin; Terre Haute, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri;

Baton Rouge, Louisiana; or Paris, Texas, among many others. French soldiers fought alongside the colonists in the Revolutionary War, and the treaty that ended that war was signed in Paris. Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first and most perspicacious commentators on the new nation; his *Democracy in America* is central to the study of American political history and one of the wisest books ever written about the United States. A French architect, Pierre L'Enfant, designed the layout of Washington, D.C. The Statue of Liberty, perhaps the foremost symbol of the United States, was a gift from France. And the French and Americans fought, and died, side by side in World Wars I and II. (More Americans are buried in France than in any country except the United States.)

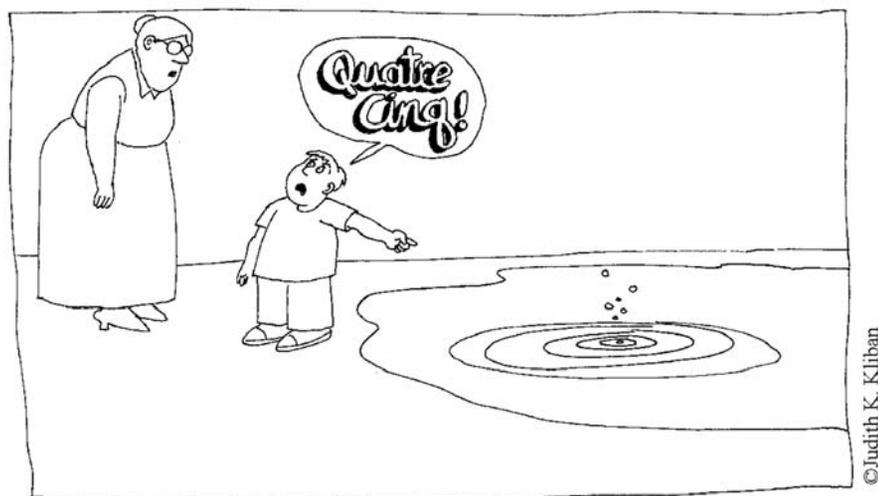
Many people have practical or professional reasons for wanting to learn French. They may be preparing for a career in international law or commerce (a French word), in the diplomatic corps (another French word), or in the world of fashion. France is the world's sixth-largest economy, and it is at the geographical heart of Europe, which is the world's largest market. Careers in business, science, technology, aerospace, and medicine routinely involve research, communication, and international collaboration in French. The smart card, fiber optics, HDTV, and touch-tone technology are all French inven-



tions. And France's TGV (*train à grande vitesse*) is the fastest train in the world.

FROM FRENCH TO ENGLISH (AND BACK)

It has been said that a person who does not know a foreign language can never truly know his or her own. Whatever your purpose, studying French will enhance your knowledge and control of English. The two languages, in fact, have much in common, and you may be surprised by the amount of French you already speak. If you have ever said "Very chic!" to a friend whose new clothes you admire, you were speaking French. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a barbed criticism and retorted with a gallant "Touché!" that, too, is French. How often have you wished someone "Bon voyage!" or "Bon appétit!?" (With French, you always have *le mot juste* at the ready.) Every aspect of English has felt the French influence, from soldiery ("curfew" = *couvre-feu*) to square-dancing ("do-si-do" = *dos-à-dos*). Your native English is full of French words and expressions; indeed, it has been claimed, not entirely in jest, that 60 percent of the English language is nothing but mispronounced French. It is a fact that ever since the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066, which led to a fusion of an earlier form of English with an earlier form of French, the two languages have shared thousands of cognate words, such as "curious" and *curieux*, "marriage" and *mariage*, not to mention "French" and *français*. Some words even returned to French after having migrated to English: the French command form *tenez!*



used to announce a serve in a ball game involving nets and rackets appeared in English as “tennis” in the fifteenth century; the French repossessed the word in the early 1800s and have been playing *le tennis* ever since.

Despite these many similarities, it can sometimes be difficult to recognize a French word that has been adopted by English. One reason this is true is that English speakers have habits of pronunciation that are quite different from those of the French. For instance, speakers of French tend to say each syllable of a word with the same intensity. Speakers of English, on the other hand, tend to stress one syllable—often the first one—and to skip over the others. So when French speakers say the word *capitaine*, they stress all three syllables equally: *ca-pi-taine*. But when English speakers appropriated this word they pronounced it in their own way, stressing the first syllable so much that the second syllable disappeared altogether: *captain*. The same thing happened to the French words *cabestan* (“capstan”), *compartiment*, and *gouvernement*, among many others.

French words that have crossed over to English can also be difficult to recognize because they are spelled differently. Differences in spelling often reflect differing ha-

bits of pronunciation, but they are due as well to the fact that many French words passed into English in the centuries ago and kept their original spelling in the new language, while the spelling of the French originals evolved over time. This is true, for example, of many words that now have a circumflex accent (ˆ). In modern French, the circumflex replaces an *s* that appeared in older forms of these words; in their English equivalents, that *s* is still present:

forest (*forêt*), haste (*hâte*), host (*hôte*), mast (*mât*), coast (*côte*), beast (*bête*), feast (*fête*). . . .

French words ending in *-é* and *-ie* often correspond to English words ending in *y*:

cité, éternité, bébé; biologie, calorie, envie. . . .

Many French words ending in *-eux* correspond to English words ending in *-ous*:

spacieux, envieux, cérémonieux, curieux, dangereux. . . .

French words ending in *-ier* often correspond to English words ending in *-ar* or *-iar* (*familier, particulier*) or to words in *-er* (*papier*).

Numerous French words ending in *-e* correspond to English words having no final *-e*:

soupe, classe, adresse, Arabe, architecte, artiste, cabine, calme, carotte, crabe. . . .

Other analogues:

- iel often corresponds to English -ial (*artificiel, partiel*)
- aque to English -ack (*attaque*)
- ait to English -act or -ect (*abstrait, parfait*)
- ice to English -ess (*actrice*)
- aire to English -ary (*anniversaire, ordinaire, culinaire, contraire, élémentaire*) or -arian (*autoritaire*)
- ique to English -ic (*fantastique, exotique*)
- ret to English -rete (*discret, concret*)
- ant to English -ating (*fascinant*)
- re to American English -er (*ordre, théâtre*)
- ant to English -ing (*amusant, intéressant*)
- eur to English -er (*boxeur*)
- ment to English -ly (*certainement, complètement, essentiellement, évidemment, exactement, finalement, généreusement*)
- eur to English -or (*conducteur, erreur, couleur, horreur, honneur*)
- é to English -ed (*décidé, équipé, fixé, forcé*)

All in all, then, there are many thousands of French words that are similar to English words, and this will streamline to some extent the process of learning French. Unfortunately, however, the fact that a French word and an English word are similar does not mean they are the same word; they aren't. Nor does it mean they refer to the same thing; they don't necessarily. When you come across a French word that sounds or looks like a word in English, you can for a moment entertain the possibility that the two are connected and that the things they refer to have some feature in common. But beware: although some English-French cognates do have essentially the same meaning (“rapid” and *rapide*, for instance), the resemblance of



Le Roi Kong

others may be quite distant, merely superficial, even purely coincidental. In fact, the majority of French words that resemble English words differ in meaning. “An injury” is a wound, for instance, but *une injure* is an insult. The French verb *prétendre* refers to making a claim or an assertion, not indulging in make-believe. (The English words “pretense” and “pretentious” are closer to the French original; a pretender to the throne is one who lays a claim, not someone who’s play-acting.) The *patron* of an establishment is its owner, never its customer. The verb *demander* is used to make a simple request, not just issue an ultimatum. Your *anniversaire* falls on the date of your birth, not the date of your marriage. And so on and so forth.

The result of all this is that you must not assume that a French word means the same thing as an English word because they happen to resemble each other. You may hypothesize—very cautiously—that there might be some relationship between their meanings, but you must then check your hypothesis by studying the context in which the word is used. Only the context can give you a valid insight into the function of a word in a given

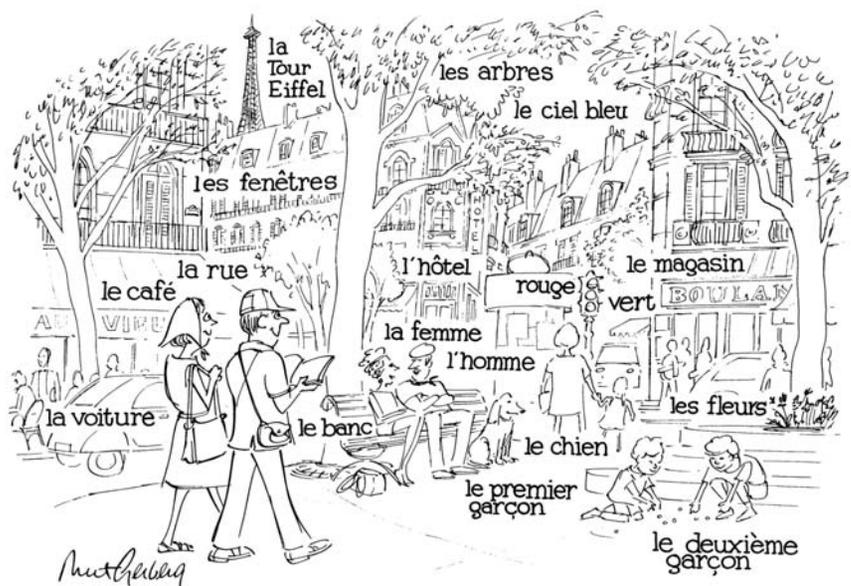
situation. In this course we will concentrate a great deal on the situations and contexts in which words appear; they are the real keys to meaning.

HOW TO LEARN FRENCH

Think for a moment about how a person learns a second language. One means—the oldest known to history—is total immersion. This is the “sink or swim” process, whereby immigrants, explorers, or students in a foreign country pick up the language. Without grammar books, textbooks, audio CDs, dictionaries, language laboratories, drill sessions, tutors, or teachers, people have learned second, third, or fourth languages from the book of life and the school of experience. The incentive is survival—strong motivation indeed—and the classroom is the world. That is one method, but it is neither the easiest nor the most efficient. In the sink or swim method, you would

learn what you needed in order to accomplish the chores of daily life, catch the drift of conversations, and make yourself understood. But you might never pronounce words properly, or progress beyond the speech level of a four-year-old, and you might never learn how to read anything other than street signs and labels.

Another method, one you may have already encountered in school, is the grammar-translation method, where you learn endless rules, memorize verb and noun forms in specific orders, and translate word for word from one language to another. Although this method has proven useful for languages that are no longer spoken (Sanskrit, Latin, classical Greek), it is next to worthless for learning a living language in which you must communicate with other people. When you meet someone on the street, for instance, in Paris, Dakar, or Montreal, and want to carry on a conversation, you don’t have the time to run through your verb forms: “Shall I have lunch? Will you have lunch? Will he or she have lunch? Shall we have lunch?” By the time you



Strolling through Paris for the first time, Judie and Gary discovered, much to their great delight, that they remembered more high-school French than they thought.

find the phrase you are looking for, your acquaintance will long since have left—to go to lunch. In actual conversations, the grammar book and the dictionary aren't much use.

French in Action employs a method that is almost certainly quite different from that of any other language course you may know. It gives you the advantages of the immersion method without its chaos by presenting native speakers in vivid situations and real settings. At the same time, this course structures the way you learn the language, so that you can learn efficiently. We are going to plunge you into the French language. You are going to hear more French than you can possibly remember. At first you may think you are about to drown. Relax! You won't. If in the beginning you feel confused, that feeling is perfectly normal and will pass. Rest assured that thousands have done what you are setting out to do. You will learn slowly at first, and you are not expected to understand everything. Little by little, things will become clearer, and then suddenly your knowledge of French will expand exponentially.

The method of this course is to begin with a flood of authentic French in authentic circumstances. The lessons are carefully constructed so that your knowledge of words, phrases, sentences, and situations will gradually build and you will assimilate the language. For example, in lesson 2, you will see and hear our heroine meeting different people on her way to her Italian class at the Sorbonne. You will see and hear her greet a newspaper vendor, several friends, a professor, and one of her aunts, and you will learn different greetings. By the end of the lesson, you will know how to greet people, how to ask how they are, how to say how you are, and how to take your leave—all in French. From



"I'm moving to France to not get fat."

lesson 2 on, everything you see and hear in the course will be entirely in French.

THE STORY, THE DIARY, THE TWEETS

French in Action is more than a traditional textbook providing grammar, exercises, and explanations. It is also a story, a tale of suspense in fact, and we invite you to follow the characters as they move through Paris, other cities, and the French countryside. Like all good stories, this one has a heroine, a Parisian university student whose name is Mireille Belleau. It has a hero, an American named Robert Taylor. The story has sketchy characters, such as Jean-Pierre, the pick-up artist, and eccentrics, such as Hubert de Pinot-Chambrun, the young nobleman who plays his aristocratic role to the hilt. It has

rivals in romance. It has chases. It has escapes. And it has a dark, shadowy character, the Man in Black, a man of mystery who lurks behind the scenes, silently and relentlessly following Mireille and Robert.

In each lesson you will find an excerpt or excerpts from *Le Journal de Marie-Laure*, the diary of another character of the story, Mireille's younger sister. Many of these excerpts are also followed by Twitter postings that Marie-Laure has tweeted. We have chosen these diary passages and selected tweets because they are often funny, because they reveal much about contemporary France, and because they are written in the off-duty, colloquial French of a young person. You may not understand everything in an excerpt, but if you try to get the gist of what Marie-Laure is saying, you will find you grasp most of it, and you may find it amusing. (See below, "How to Proceed," point 1.)

Above all, keep in mind that this is a tale we have invented just for

fun. The situations you will see are authentic, but the plot is actually a kind of send-up of soap opera. If you don't like the story, you will have the chance to reinvent it, to play with it, to rewrite it. You will have repeated opportunities to alter events, to recombine elements, and to tell the story in different ways in class, with a friend, or at home. All this will be part of the game of learning French.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Even though *French in Action* is based on a story, what you hear and see in the various situations that are presented is the real thing: you will encounter living French that has not been simplified or expurgated, the same French you might hear spoken among members of a family, among friends, on the street, on the radio, or on television. You will see and hear real French men and women, their customs, quirks, clothes, food, cities, homes. And you will see them as the French see themselves.

In the process, you may be startled by the contrasts between the world you inhabit and the world of the French. (Just remember, the French might be equally startled by you!) Since ours is a boy-meets-girl story, one contrast you may notice is that French behavior is different from American behavior in the area of relationships between men and women. Male-female relationships are of perennial interest in all cultures, French culture being no exception. In every society, relationships between the sexes are governed by expectations that are culturally conditioned. These expectations are taken for granted by the members of a society, but

an outsider unfamiliar with the society's cultural framework may not share its expectations, and may find the behavior in some way peculiar or questionable.

The relationships between people that you will see portrayed in *French in Action* reflect cultural assumptions and notions that are specifically French. But because these assumptions are not identical to American expectations in the same areas, the behavior they underlie may seem unfamiliar, even inappropriate. To take one example: in lesson 11, Jean-Pierre, the loser, tries to pick up our heroine, Mireille. In most cultures, including French culture, the pick-up artist is considered a social pest, and indeed Jean-Pierre is portrayed throughout *French in Action* in a negative light, rejected and rebuffed at every turn as a pathetic loser. He tries to strike up a conversation with Mireille, and he ends up striking out. The put-down comes from Mireille herself, who gets rid of him in a way that may seem to make little sense in terms of American cultural assumptions but that is wholly appropriate in the French cultural system: she totally ignores him. And it works.

Why does Mireille ignore Jean-Pierre's aggressive male behavior instead of telling him off? Isn't her silence a retreat into female passivity? While observers can disagree about how much of a threat Jean-Pierre actually is to Mireille in this episode, it is important to understand that her response to him is appropriate and effective in terms of her own culture. This is true in large part because silence has a very different social function in France than in the United States. Sociologists who study the two cultures point out that Americans use speech to maintain strangers at arm's length (making small talk about the weather, for instance), whereas in the French

cultural system the act of speaking to a stranger suggests the exact opposite: that the speaker wants to create a connection. This is particularly true when the situation involves physical attraction; from the point of view of French culture, a verbal acknowledgment of the other person's presence, even in anger, only sets up a relationship and encourages further communication. As a result, Mireille's silence, which to American eyes can seem passive, even acquiescent, is in terms of her culture the very best way to keep Jean-Pierre at bay.

One thing to keep in mind, then, as you explore *French in Action* is that the situations and relationships it portrays take place in the context of a specific culture. Although it is natural to want to form an opinion of the French from an American point of view, it is also important to perceive them as much as possible from their own point of view. We are different from the French, and the French are different from us, and that variance challenges us to extend our capacity for cultural understanding and communication. *So vive la différence!*

HOW TO PROCEED

A few essential points to remember as you begin your adventure in French.

1. As you watch the video programs and listen to the audio exercises, there will be no English translations to give you access to meaning. Try to catch the general meaning of the conversations and situations. Pay close attention to the story, look at people's expressions, get the gist of what they are saying, latch onto the context. Once you understand the thrust of a situation,

the meaning of various phrases will become clear. Above all, do not try to retain everything you hear; it's not really possible, and not necessary. Keep guessing, keep hypothesizing, and soon you will develop a crucial habit: going for the gist to make sense of conversations in which the meaning of some words will escape you at first.

2. Give priority to what you hear. Throughout *French in Action* your first encounter with both the story and the exercise materials will be aural. The point of this is to give you thorough familiarity with the sounds of the language without confusing you by stressing the way it is written.

The writing systems of French and English—the use of the Roman alphabet to indicate different sounds—are an attempt at representing spoken language by means of graphic signs (letters). Unfortunately, as you have undoubtedly noticed in English, there is no natural or logical correspondence between a letter and a sound that the letter represents. The system of notation is arbitrary. Take the word *business*. We do not pronounce it *bizeeness*; we say it as if it were written *bizness*.

Moreover, the correspondence of sounds and letters is not only arbitrary, it is unsystematic. George Bernard Shaw humorously proposed that the word *fish* should be spelled *ghoti*: *gh* to represent the sound /f/ as in *enough*, *o* to represent the sound /i/ as in *women*, and *ti* to represent the sound /f/ as in *nation*. If Shaw's sendup of English spelling seems farfetched, consider the different sounds of *ough* in the words *rough*, *bough*, *fought*, and *though*, or the pronunciation of *-ger* in *singer* and *danger*.

The way in which letters correspond to sounds in the French language is very different from the way they correspond in English. If you yield to the temptation to pronounce French as if it were English, what comes out of your mouth will bear very little resemblance to anything a speaker of French would recognize. Listen carefully to the sounds of French and train yourself to imitate them. When you work with the audio materials, cultivate the habit of responding out loud, as assertively as you can without bothering others. It's a kind of mimicry. As teachers, we are well aware that students love to mock their instructors by imitating their verbal habits. We tell our students that their French course is the only course they will ever take where they are encouraged to make fun of the professor.

3. Don't let English into the picture. We will not use English, because too often translation interferes with comprehension. Translating slows you down and actually gets in the way of understanding. And in any case, French is not just English with different words. You cannot simply replace a word in one language with a word in another. The standard English translation of *fenêtre*, for instance, is "window." But not all windows are *fenêtres*: not car windows

(*vitres*), store windows (*vitaines*), stained-glass windows (*vitreaux*), or airplane windows (*hublots*), and in any event the windows of most French houses open out casement-style rather than sliding up and down like American double-hung windows. Result: the mechanical replacement of one word by another often obliterates the cultural connotations that are at the heart of meaning. (If you have ever used a computer translation program, you know how hilarious the results can be.) So the lessons of *French in Action* will not give you the meaning in English of a French word or phrase. There is a glossary of French words with English equivalents at the end of this textbook, but you should use it only as a last resort, since it gives you words in isolation, deprived of their context. We will present words and phrases in various ways, in different combinations, and in different contexts so that you can arrive at their meanings by yourself.

To take a specific example, in lesson 2 you will hear and read the French phrase "Salut! Comment vas-tu?" If you were to look up each word in the dictionary and literally translate those four words, you would end up with a totally absurd sentence: "Salvation! How go you?" Clearly you will have missed the point. But listening to that sentence in context, seeing and hearing one young person greeting another, you can easily figure out, without opening a dictionary, that "Salut! Comment vas-tu?" corresponds in meaning and in style to something like "Hi, how are you?" You can reach that level of understanding without ever knowing that the word *vas* is a form of the verb *aller* and that the verb *aller* is often used in French in phrases where English uses the verb *to go* or the verb *to be*.

Let's take a closer look at how you can figure out the meaning of



an utterance by paying attention to the differences among several situations in which it occurs. In lesson 2 you will encounter a teacher saying, “Nous allons apprendre le français.” Since this teacher is uttering this sentence at the very beginning of a French course, he must be indicating what he or you will do. But you cannot be sure what it is. Now if you see a young girl looking at her schoolbook and trying to do her homework, and if someone says, “Elle apprend sa leçon,” then you will notice that the phrase *Elle apprend sa leçon* has something in common with the phrase *Nous allons apprendre le français*. You will also see a similarity between the classroom situation and the situation of the little girl doing her homework. Then when you hear the phrase *Il apprend à nager* and see a man copying the strokes he sees in a swimming manual, you will notice again the common element *apprend*. You cannot help being struck by the similarity between the last situation and the first two. And you should be beginning to have some notion of what activity the words *apprendre* and *apprend* refer to. Remember, do not let English enter into the picture. Resist the obvious translation. Associate the French words with the circumstances in which you have observed them, rather than with English words.

4. The activities of listening to a language, speaking it, reading it, and writing it all demand active skills. *French in Action* will require your active participation. To learn a language effectively, you must listen with full attention, and you must watch carefully. When you learn a new language, you are assuming a new role. Play it to the full! Participate actively by speaking out with the characters. When you listen to the audio exercises or watch the

video programs, copy what you see and hear. Copy with the sound of your voice. Copy with the shape of your mouth. Copy with your gestures. In the video lessons and audio exercises, there are interactive sections of dialogue where you will be given time to respond to questions as if you were one of the characters in the story. Answer clearly, at normal volume and tempo. If you do not have time to respond before the character speaks, simply speak along with him or her.

Do not try to invent new expressions, at least for a while, and above all don't think things up in English and try to translate them into French. Imitate what you observe. Use the ready-made sentences or phrases you hear. You will be encouraged to recombine these phrases. Both imitation and recombination are vitally important. The object is to be able to respond with an appropriate utterance in a given situation, even if it is something you have heard before and is not at all ingenious or clever.

Saying “Bonjour!” when you meet someone and “Au revoir” when you leave, answering “Ça va” to “Comment vas-tu?” or “Bien, merci, et vous?” to “Comment allez-vous?” might not be original or clever, but it is a big step forward. To be able to give the right response at the right time is a deeply satisfying achievement. Before long, you will build up enough vocabulary—and confidence—to personalize what you say. You will be able to recombine familiar elements into new phrases and sentences for new situations, take some chances, and say things you didn't know you knew how to say.

Have fun! And welcome to a whole new world!

USING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

As you begin working with this book, you will discover that in each lesson the text of the story segment is accompanied by a variety of illustrations. Inserted into the text itself you will see a series of photographs; these are taken from the video program and will help you recognize and remember key contexts and situations in the story. In shaded areas next to the text you will find other images (photographs, drawings, cartoons) and written examples of how words and expressions in the text are used. Their function is to help you understand the new material of the lesson without having to resort to English. As you read, you should get into the habit of going back and forth between text and illustrations, using the pictures and written examples to help you hypothesize about the probable meaning of words and phrases in the story.

To simplify this process, the story segment of each lesson has been divided into numbered sections. A key word or phrase that is explained in the shaded area will be identified by the number of the section in which it occurs. Quite often several words from the same text section are explained; when this happens, the same section number is repeated for each.

A caption under each photograph or drawing contains, in boldface, the key word or expression associated with that illustration. Frequently this caption is followed by further written examples that show how the word or phrase can be used in other, somewhat different contexts.