
Mary Anne O'Neil. *La France et la Francophonie: Conversations with Native Speakers*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. 172p.

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Joining Yale University Press publications of *Conversations with Native Speakers* in Spanish, Arabic, and Japanese, Mary Anne O'Neil's *La France et la Francophonie* is a long-awaited breakthrough in authentic materials available for conversational and intermediate French courses. This new addition includes a workbook and DVD of 92 video interviews with native speakers in spontaneous settings. The socio-cultural diversity of the video segments reflects the author's plan to interview a variety of French and Francophone speakers, a goal O'Neil successfully achieved by incorporating individuals from different age groups (adolescents, adults, and retirees), life occupations and professions (police officer, a seamstress, a grocer, an engineer, and a flight attendant), and regional locations (Paris and its outskirts and the Provence and Anjou regions).

Strategically organized into 20 chapters, the program covers a range of appealing, contemporary topics and addresses societal and personal issues that students and instructors can easily relate to, such as personal perceptions of one's regional and housing situations, professional occupations, leisure and sportive activities, and broader societal issues such as the role of women in France and the political life and contemporary problems of French society. One of the most attractive components of the DVD program is the sense of proximity and intimacy with the interviewees that the viewer experiences, an effect rendered by the close-up camera shots of the individuals expressing themselves in the stress-free environment of their homes. Such a casual environment allows them to be spontaneous and candid in their responses. In addition, the low affective filter rendered by the filming environment allows the viewers to be sensitive to the body language displayed by the interviewees and provides instructors genuine opportunities to incorporate cultural input into their language courses.

The workbook that comes with the video program is also well designed and user-friendly with specific grammar points identified in each interview, as well as a transcript and vocabulary glossary helping with the translation of common phrases, idiomatic expressions, and interjections. A section at the end of each script is reserved for sample comprehension and discussion questions. The workbook allows for a multitude of applications in and out of classroom settings and ultimately enhances the versatility of the video program, making it useful as a principal support for conversational courses and as an additional resource for intermediate French courses or an authentic databank of socio-cultural information for culture courses.

Culturally speaking, no pedagogical material intended for foreign language classroom instructions can render the “Frenchness” and Francophone identity of the speakers better than video testimonies. As these individuals describe peculiarities of their personal lives, the viewer is taken by the Provençal accent of a middle-aged woman discussing how she makes the traditional southern “ratatouille” dish and by the minute attention another woman from the Anjou region displays when recalling the preparation of the unctuous sauce “beurre blanc.” The viewer is equally captivated by the gustative affection a man from Quebec exults when describing the “poutine,” a peculiar fast-food concoction of French fries, cheese, and sauce. No doubt, instructors, as expert viewers, will be able to share easily the cultural genuineness of these interviews and illustrate their explanations with the numerous visual support materials provided: an aerial view of a “Maset,” an historical Southern countryside house; a snapshot demonstration of “Pétanque” by a retired officer recalling the origins of this French outside game in his Mediterranean region; or the daily routine of a young couple’s “épicerie” with video shots of the products of their downtown convenience and grocery shop.

Overall, Mary Anne O’Neil’s *La France et la Francophonie: Conversations with Native Speakers* is an innovative project with a well-produced video program that should provide French language instructors a realm of opportunities to bring inside their classrooms authentic conversational and grammatical materials with meaningful cultural input. Such a pedagogical approach should also help instructors, pedagogues, and specialized editorial houses rethink the intrinsic cultural value and learners’ motivation found in authentic materials for language course instruction. ✱