

Alexandre Jacqueau - Témoignage d'un soldat de la Grande Guerre

This is a living graph activity suitable for an able Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 group or an A level class. The lesson can be taught as a 'one off' or as one of a series of lessons having the First World War as their theme. When originally thought of, the intention was that the lesson would be taught to an able Year 9 class at the same time as they were studying the First World War from a British perspective in their History lessons.

Purpose

- To explore in French a theme which pupils are studying, or have studied, in History.
- To engage the interest of pupils in language learning by making the content of the lesson meaningful to teenage language learners.
- To give pupils the opportunity to read some authentic French and to work collaboratively to arrive at an understanding of its meaning.
- To provide a degree of challenge.
- To help pupils to understand that the study of French can go beyond the purely transactional.

Preparation

You will need copies of the graph and of the letters written by Alexandre Jacqueau to his wife. You will also need a digital image of the graph for projection. You may also wish to use images of Jacqueau and of the scenes in the trenches.

Managing the activity

Step 1: Explain to the pupils that the purpose of the lesson will be to help them to understand that the First World War had as great an impact on France as it did on Britain. In the course of the lesson they will read nine letters written by a French soldier to his wife. Working with a partner they will endeavour to plot on a graph the state of mind of the soldier at the time that he wrote each letter. At the end of the lesson they will be asked to justify why they have plotted the graph in the way they have.

Step 2: Background to the author of the letters.

Show the photograph of Alexandre Jacqueau on screen.



- Alexandre Jacqueau left Paris for the front in August 1914.
- He was married to Suzanne and had two children, a boy and a girl. Their names were Jean and Madeleine.
- He wrote to his wife on a very regular basis.
- Alexandre Jacqueau was killed in July 1915.

Step 3: To give some sense of life in the French trenches show the rest of the photos, which were all taken by Jacquau himself.

Step 4: Put the pupils into pairs. Hand out the letters and print-outs of Graph 1. One set of letters and one graph per pair. Ask the pupils to read the letters and to underline those parts of the letters which give the closest indication of how Jacquau felt at a particular point in time. After reading each letter each pair will come to an agreement as to where that particular letter should be plotted on the graph.

Debriefing

Ask one pair to come to the front of the class. Ask them to show what they have produced to the rest of the pupils using the on-screen image. Ask them to justify why they have plotted the graph in that particular way. Ask other pairs if they have produced a similar graph, always asking them to justify how they have plotted the graph by referring to what they believe to be the key elements in the letters.

A model completed Graph is included here (Graph 2).

Ask pupils what strategies they used to try to arrive at the meaning of the letters e.g. identification of cognates, focusing in on particular adjectives etc.

Follow up

- Using some of the language of Alexandre Jacquau's letters pupils could be asked to write their own 'Lettre du front'.
- Pupils could be asked to re-examine Jacquau's letters as if they were an army censor. Which bits might they delete?
- Pupils could be asked to undertake some research on the internet regarding the First World War e.g. key dates and battles, numbers of French soldiers killed, photos of the Battle of Verdun etc.