

September, 2007

Dear French students and parents.

I hope that you have enjoyed a wonderful summer and that you share my enthusiasm for the coming year. Bienvenue! Welcome!

To those of you new to our French language program, let me introduce myself. I am a native French speaker, with a Bachelors degree in French Literature and a Masters degree from the Sorbonne in Paris. I speak French in my home, and travel frequently to visit my family in Paris and Montreal. I have been teaching and translating French for more than 25 years.

Your children are fortunate that you have decided to expose them to a second language. Children who are able to hear and speak the sounds of a second language in early childhood have a tremendous advantage in later years. Although our class time is limited, those who continue more formal study when they are older, will find that they learn more rapidly, that their accent is more natural, and that their use of idioms is more fluent. When I meet my students who are taking Middle School and High School French, they tell me that their early lessons have put them at the top of their classes!

I strive to create an active, vibrant, classroom atmosphere, in which the children can enjoy themselves as they learn. I use English as little as possible. We start the day with greetings in French, a review of the date and day, and the weather and season, using pictures and acting to illustrate the French phrases. The children are encouraged to respond according to the methods of "total physical response" using their whole bodies to demonstrate their answers. I praise the children's responses in French, continually introducing new words that can be grasped in context.

Written French is not stressed in the early stages of language training, but the children do have an opportunity to become used to some of the conventions of written French in the form of puzzles, songs, and poems. As the children become ready, they are encouraged to read and write more. Each child will keep a folder of supplementary material. We are using textbooks both in the first and second levels. We will also be using games such as "spin the bottle" to choose a child to respond to a question or formulate a phrase, and flash-cards to teach the alphabet and simple written phrases. I encourage the children to speak without embarrassment, using simple themes from their everyday experience, such as greetings, colors, numbers, family, and food.

For reasons beyond my control, we do have students at various levels in some of the classes. I make a point of teaching each student at their personal level. The more advanced students are gradually challenged to use more adjectives and adverbs, and more complex sentences, introducing conjugation of verbs, gender, correct grammatical structure and French spelling. They may be asked to help the other children in drills or to take part in a dialogue with me, as an example to the other children.

I am looking forward to an exciting year with your children, and I hope that you will feel free to join us and share your thoughts with me!

A Très Bientot!

Orly Slobodkin

