

Can you translate a poem into French?

Session Leader Notes

You will need:

- Printed worksheets (blue worksheet)
- Access to computer, projector and sound to display Oxplore Challenge presentation
- Writing surface and pens

General pointers on this session:

- This session takes approx. 45 minutes to deliver.
- This session works well with group sizes from approx. 8 to 40 pupils. Pupils will need to be broken up into small groups. Small groups should ideally not contain more than 4 pupils per group.
- This session is designed to build the Oxplore Key Skills of critical thinking and analysis, creativity and adventurousness.
- This session is focused on MFL subjects but skills are transferrable across all subjects.

Session breakdown:

Suggested Timings (minutes)	Slide Content	Discussion Points/Notes
Prior to pupils entering room	Slide 1: Title : Can you translate a French poem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to Slide 2 as soon as pupils begin entering
From first pupil entering room to all pupils seated	Slide 2: Brain teaser (<i>Je commence par E, je finis par E et je ne contiens qu'une seule lettre. Qui suis-je ?</i>) (I start with E, I end with E, and I only contain one letter. Who am I?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils may start calling out ideas/discussing aloud.

0.00-1.00 (1 min)	Slide 3: Brain teaser answer (Une envelope! (an envelope!))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did anybody guess correctly?
1.00-2.00 (1 min)	Slide 4: Skills you'll be building today: Critical Thinking, Creativity, Adventurousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly introduce each skill, give more detail if this is group's first Explore Challenge • You could point out here that these skills are essential for careers and further study, and will help you in your GCSEs and A-levels.
2.00-3:00 (1 min)	Slide 5: Video part 1. Intro (00:43)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Part 1 Introduction. A transcript of this video is attached at the end of this document.
3.00-8.00 (5 min)	Slide 6: Translating a poem (Discussion Activity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct pupils to discuss in pairs or groups: What makes a poem different from other pieces of writing? • How will translating a poem be different from translating a newspaper article? • Why will you need to be creative? • Pupils can record their answers in their workbooks. • Some groups may require check-ins to keep on task. • Offer pupils the chance to share their ideas with the rest of the class
9.00-11.00 (2:00 min)	Slide 7: Video part 2 (1:34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Part 2. A transcript of this video is attached at the end of this document
11.00-13.00 (2 min)	Slide 8: Activity – What words do you know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils skim read the poem to spot words which look similar to English and write them down. • Pupils are encouraged to guess what the similar words mean. • Pupils can record their answers in their workbooks. • Pupils guess the meaning of 'hennisant'
13:00-15:00 (2 min)	Slide 9: Video part 3 (1:28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Part 3. A transcript of this video is attached at the end of this document
15:00-25:00 (10 min)	Slide 10: Activity – Build your translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils create a word for word translation of the poem in their workbooks. • Pupils can use the glossary to discover other words to add to their translation. • Pupils are encouraged to think about the main emotion in the poem. How would they describe it?
25:00-27:00 (2 min)	Slide 11: Video part 4 (1:40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Part 4. A transcript of this video is attached at the end of this document.
27:00-29:00 (2 min)	Slide 12: Discussion Activity – What did you notice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils discuss in pairs or groups: Did any of the words rhyme? • Are all the poems lines the same length? (Look at poem on worksheet for reference.) • Did they notice any other sounds or effects?

29:00-30:00 (1 min)	Slide 13: Video part 5 (00:33)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Part 5: A transcript of this video is attached at the end of this documents.
30:00-40:00 (10 min)	Slide 14: Final Activity – Refine your translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individually and in their workbook’s pupils re-work their translation for poetic effect (to resemble as closely as possible the sound, rhythm, emotion and concept of Desnos’ original poem.) • Teachers should be on standby to model this work if needed.
40:00-41:00 (1 min)	Slide 15: Action: Send Team Explore your scripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you would like to, please photograph pupils’ work and email it to us at exploreteach@admin.ox.ac.uk. There is no obligation to do this, but it is very helpful for qualitative evaluation purposes. Please do not include identifying information about pupils, e.g. crop/blur names. • Reference if needed: Did you know? Queen’s College at the University of Oxford runs an annual prize for poetry translation just for secondary school pupils. • Pupils may ask “Do people at Oxford really read it?”, the answer to this is yes, as it helps us to understand whether or not our programmes are helping people to develop their skills.
41:00-43:00 (1 min)	Slide 16: Have you practiced these skills today? Critical Thinking, Creativity, Adventurousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are asked to judge whether they have practiced each key skill. • You could ask pupils to carry out their self-assessment by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Closing their eyes and raising their hands if they feel they have practiced each skill ○ Giving a thumbs-up/thumbs-down to say whether they feel they have practiced each skill • If you are able to record how many pupils feel they have practised each skill, please email this to us at exploreteach@admin.ox.ac.uk • This is another good time to build academic self-concept by emphasising that these skills are important for your future, and will get stronger each time you use them.
43:00-44:00 (1 min)	Slide 17: Congratulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be a good point to gesture forward to future Explore Challenge sessions, or tally how many sessions the group has now completed if you are keeping count.
44:00-45:00 (1 min)	Slide 18: If you enjoyed this session, here are some subjects you may be interested in studying in the future...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here you can introduce areas of study for GCSE which this module relates to. • If you have additional time, this could be a useful jumping-off point for discussion about super-curricular opportunities available within your school/local area.

NAME:

DATE:

Can you translate a French poem?

Key Term: Surrealism

Surrealism is a style of art and literature inspired by dreams and hidden thoughts.

Translating a poem

Discuss in your pairs/groups and write down your ideas.

What makes a poem different from other pieces of writing?

How will translating a poem be different from translating a newspaper article?

Why will you need to be creative?

What words do you know?

Do you know any of the words in the poem?

Can you guess what any of the unfamiliar words might mean?

Write down the words you know and your guesses on your copy of the poem

Le Zèbre

Le zèbre, cheval des ténèbres,

Lève le pied, ferme les yeux

Et fait résonner ses vertèbres

En hennissant d'un air joyeux.

Au clair soleil de Barbarie,

Il sort alors de l'écurie

Et va brouter dans la prairie

Les herbes de sorcellerie.

Mais la prison sur son pelage,

A laissé l'ombre du grillage.

Glossary

ténèbres	darkness
pied	foot
ferme	closes
résonner ses vertèbres	shiver down its spine
hennissant	whinny
soleil	sun
alors de l'écurie	comes out of the stable
brouter	to graze
sorcellerie	enchanted
pelage	coat
l'ombre	the shadow
du grillage	the bars

Build your translation

On your own, using the glossary provided, produce a word-for-word translation of the poem.

Read through your translation

How would you describe the main emotion of the poem?

What is it about the poem that conveys this emotion?

Refine your translation

On the next page, there is space for you to refine your word-for-word translation, so that it reads well in English.

Can you reproduce any of the French poem's images or effects?

Hint: You will not be able to keep everything in your translation! For example, you might decide to change some words to make it rhyme in English, or you might forget about rhyme in order to better reproduce the imagery.

Refine your translation

Write your updated translation here.

CHALLENGE SKILLS

Tick the skills you have practised.

An icon for Critical Thinking featuring a pink brain at the bottom, a pink circle at the top, and a purple square on the right, all within a green circular background with white lines connecting the elements.

Critical Thinking

An icon for Creativity featuring a blue and purple firework exploding upwards, surrounded by colorful stars, within a green circular background.

Creativity

An icon for Adventurousness featuring a blue mountain range, a yellow compass, a blue torch, and a green notebook, within a purple circular background.

Adventurousness

French Poem Translation

The Zebra

The zebra, that shadow horse,
Lifts a hoof, closes its eyes
And with a joyful whinny
Sends a shiver down its spine.
Into the bright Barbary sun
it trots, leaving the darkness
Of the stable to graze
The enchanting grasslands.
But still on its coat the prison
Casts the shadow of its bars.

Can You Translate a French Poem? Transcript pt.1

00:00 Hello, my name is Holly Langstaff and I am a lecturer in French at the University of Oxford. I research and I teach French literature from the 20th and 21st centuries. I also run translation competitions for school students for the Translation Exchange at the Queen's College, which is where I am today.

00:17 Today you're going to translate a poem from French into English. This means that today you are going to be poets as well as translators, because you'll need to come up with creative solutions to make sure that your translation sounds as good in English as it does in French.

00:23 Before you start on your translations, I'd like you to take a minute to think about how translating a poem requires a different sort of approach to translating, say, a newspaper article or a text message.

Can You Translate a French Poem? Transcript pt.2

00:00 When we translate poetry, we are not just moving words from one language into another. We're also trying to reproduce the ideas and sounds of the original poem, because we want our translation to have a similar effect on the reader and listener in English.

00:15 The poem that we will translate today was written by Robert Desnos, who was part of a literary and artistic movement known as Surrealism, which developed in Europe after the First World War. After the First World War, Surrealist artists and poets wanted to change how people saw the world, to stop such a terrible conflict from happening again. They wanted to bring our dreams and unconscious thoughts into our experience of the everyday world, and they thought literature, poetry and art was a good way of doing this.

00:36 This poem was written by Desnos in the early 1940s during the Second World War, when Paris and most of France was under the control of the Nazis. Desnos was a member of the Resistance who fought against Nazi Occupation, and sadly, he was arrested as a political prisoner and deported to a concentration camp, where he died.

As you translate, you could ask yourself if there is any evidence of this wider context in the poem? Let's start by decoding the poem.

01:12 Take a minute to see if you can spot any familiar words in the poem. And can you guess what any unfamiliar words might mean? You can use words you know to help: for instance, the title of the poem is an animal. Once you've figured out what animal this is, can you guess the meaning of 'hennissant'? You might think about what noises this animal makes.

Can You Translate a French Poem? Transcript pt.3

00:00 Did you guess that the poem 'le zèbre' is about a zebra? The word is very similar in French and English, and you may have noticed that in the first line the zebra is described as a sort of horse (the French word for horse is 'cheval').

00:14 Some other words you might know from school are:

- 'le pied' (it can mean 'foot' but here of course it means 'hoof')
- 'les yeux' which means eyes.
- and 'le soleil' (sun).

You might have also spotted some words which are the same or very similar in English. So, those words are:

- 'ses vertèbres' which means vertebrae or the bones making up your spine.
- 'la prairie' (prairie or meadow)
- and 'la prison' which of course means prison.

I wonder if any of you spotted that that 'sorcellerie' looks a lot like sorcery in English? Well done if you did! It means witchcraft or magic.

00:53 And finally, did any of you manage to guess the meaning of 'en hennissant'? It sounds a bit like the action it names: neighing or whinnying – the zebra is neighing; the zebra is whinnying! I think I prefer whinnying because it sounds more like the noise a horse or zebra makes to me.

01:10 So, now it is time to translate the poem. You can use the glossary in your handout to help with this. Don't worry about making it perfect for now, we just want a word-for-word translation to understand what is described.

Can You Translate a French Poem? Transcript pt.4

00:00 Now that you have a literal translation, you know that the poem describes a zebra running out of its stable into the meadow to graze. But if you read your literal translation out loud, I bet it sounds a bit strange, like something you would never usually say or write in English.

00:07 But if you read your literal translation out loud, I bet it sounds a bit strange, like something you would never usually say or write in English. So, it's time to start thinking about editing your translation to better recreate the images, sounds, and effect of the original French. Let's start by thinking about how the poem sounds when we read it in French. I'll read the poem out loud now. As you listen, I'd like you to read the words on the page in front of you.

00:37 Le Zèbre

Le zèbre, cheval des ténèbres,
Lève le pied, ferme les yeux
Et fait résonner ses vertèbres
En hennissant d'un air joyeux

Au clair soleil de Barbarie,
Il sort alors de l'écurie
Et va brouter dans la prairie
Les herbes de sorcellerie.

Mais la prison sur son pelage,
A laissé l'ombre du grillage.

Can You Translate a French Poem? Transcript pt.5

00:00 Now that you've decoded the poem and thought about what it means, it's time to make your translation read as well in English as it does in French.

00:07 This means it's time to get creative. Your job is to translate the French poem into English. Remember that this means not only translating the meaning of the original poem, but also reproducing the poetic effects. You will not be able to keep everything in your translation. You might change some of the words to make it rhyme in English, or you might forget about rhyme in order to better reproduce the imagery.

00:31 Finally you can test your translation by reading the poem in English out loud.