

FRENCH AT MOUNT MERICI ACADEMY

General French Curriculum

A Sequential FLES (Foreign Language Elementary School) Program is used at Mount Merici Academy. It is approached as an introduction to a foreign language in lower grades K through two. A sequential development of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) begins and expands in grades three through eight, with an increasing emphasis conversational skills and grammar, and a cultural component that complements the thematic areas covered. Because of the time allocated to our course of study, moderate fluency can be expected of students who have been with our program for the full nine years.

Early levels of French begin with the basics, starting with the alphabet, numbers, days of the week, months of the year, colors and basic conversation. Constant, varied repetition of material is necessary in the study of any language, especially at the elementary level. Each lesson at every level begins with some basic conversational material.

In grades three and four, students acquire language via a storytelling approach known as TPRS: Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. There is no textbook involved, but rather lists of target vocabulary that students acquire via physical gesturing, the telling and dramatizing of silly stories, and the reading aloud of stories familiar to the students. In this storytelling method, vocabulary is not learned in list form, but rather acquired as it is used in context. Students are exposed to grammar at this level, but grammar is not taught explicitly.

Books are used in grades five through eight. The text used is a middle-school level book that is current in terms of vocabulary and culture. The grammar is presented in an interesting format that makes it easy and interesting to learn. The book stresses the importance of the oral component of foreign language study and therefore promotes a great deal of class participation.

Kindergarten Through Grade Two

Kindergarten, first and second grades meet once a week. The year begins with a look at the country of France: where it is in the world, the flag of the country and some basic geographical information. The alphabet, numbers, colors, days of the week, months, body parts, family vocabulary, food vocabulary, weather information and other basics are all taught at this level. Through the use of songs, games, color sheets, and basic conversation, the language is brought to life. Concepts are introduced sequentially, with listening and speaking skills highly emphasized.

Grades Three Through Eight

Grades three, four and five meet for 30 minutes, twice a week. This weekly hour gives the students a greater opportunity for growth in the language. The year begins with a look at the country of France. With each consecutive year of study, the country is considered in more detail, and the francophone world is also introduced. The grammatical content of the language study is also expanded accordingly, with a greater focus on grammar beginning in grade five when students begin using the textbook.

In grades three and four, the TPRS method, as referenced above, greatly develops aural skills and gives the students the opportunity to begin communicating in French in a very natural and fun way. Vocabulary is presented at the start of each “episode” (based on the Raconte-moi TPRS curricular series by Carol Gaab) and is (1) reinforced through conversational activities which help to make their experience more personal and (2) acquired through the creation, telling and dramatization of silly mini stories, culminating in an episode story about the misadventures of a rather bizarre cat.

Fifth grade begins working slowly in a textbook designed for middle-school level classes beginning a course of study akin to what we think of as French I. The book uses a highly effective mix of the four basic skills with cultural components throughout. Communication is immediately stressed, which gives the students the opportunity to build on the aural/oral skills they started developing in previous years. Grammar is presented very simply and is immediately reinforced with oral exercises to develop proficiency.

Grades six, seven and eight continue working in the same book begun in grade five. With each consecutive unit in the book, the students are led to continually build upon what was previously taught, to expand their cultural knowledge, to build confidence and proficiency in the language and to feel successful in their study of French. By the end of their nine years of the study of French at Mount Merici, most students should be able to move into a French II program or to study another Romance Language with relative ease and success in any of the area high schools.