

## Je T'aime ou Je M'aime?

(Do I love you or do I love myself?)

Although February 14th is a crazy day in American schools (sugar + love/not feeling love = many emotions and excess energy), it is also a great day to reflect on how we show our love to others and to ourselves. While words are essential for communication, as humans, we can also express our emotions through our actions. So while I sugar-up my students (I prefer to share the love with my colleagues or perk up a tired class), I also spend the time around Valentine's Day sharing how our gestures and acts are also meaningful.

I was inspired by the book Amour, How the French Talk About Love- Photographs and Stories by Stefania Rousselle (Penguin Books, 2020). An award-winning journalist and filmmaker, Rousselle

traveled throughout France in order to ask people one question, "What is love?".

So before discussing candy, gifts, and cutesy names for others, we pondered and shared about the people we love and who are important to us (friends, family, and animals) as well as HOW we show our love through certain actions. Returning to class today, we revisited this topic as well as writing our messages in French (lower-level students were given a guided sentence with which to begin) and shared them in the hallway.

I love to discuss the "Why" behind this type of activity. Not only were my students making connections with their lives, but also with their classmates. They were also exploring emotions and actions, taking time to create and be creative, taking time to reflect and express their feelings. This is challenging in our language classrooms since it is challenging to let go of

some classroom control. My answer is a resounding "Oui"!

My students have constant input in our target language: from myself, from the classroom walls with important vocabulary and signs, videos, music, and television shows. When they leave the classroom, that is their time to process all of the information. What I love to observe is when they have time, after processing, to create and use their input. Is the output perfect? No, but accuracy is not the purpose of these activities.

Students need opportunities to create without being judged and corrected, time to make sense of what they have been hearing and reading, and time to connect without having a grade attached.

The entire class period was not spent on this. These activities occurred over a few days, giving my students time to try and use newly acquired expressions, as well as discuss and write about

who is important to them. Relationship skills are essential and still developing, even at the high school level, so I take time to explore relationships and emotions from the perspective of actions. Valentine's Day in my French class is not about loving for one day, but about developing, learning about oneself, learning that it is ok to love oneself as well as others, and perhaps reflect upon what we would like from future partners and how to communicate that.

So yes, hearts and candy were involved, but so was mindfulness, self-compassion, compassion for others, creativity, and practicing our language skills. Love happens on so many levels.

Un gros merci à Stefania Rousselle

(<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/2197653/stefania-rousselle>,  
<https://twitter.com/stefrousselle?lang=en>)

Other activities for Valentine's Day that include target language production, mindfulness, culture, writing, and sugar!

1) Vocabulaire de la Saint Valentin (for the above described activity) and student work:

☐ Blog- Vocabulaire de la Saint-Valentin

☐ BLOG- student work- les actions d'amour

2) Les Bonbons de la Saint Valentin- using American or Canadian Smarties or M & M's.  
-For lower-level novice students- separate the colors, then discuss how many of each color they have, introduce comparison phrases (more than/less than/the same) while comparing quantities of each color.

-For all levels- have students choose categories to discuss for each color. When they pick a specific colored candy, each student can say whatever comes to mind about the topic or ask group members questions based on each topic. Fun, sugary,

and a bit interpersonal. If there are student allergies in the class, use squares of colored paper and put a few of each color in a paper or plastic bag.

Blog- Bonbons de la Saint-Valentin

### 3) Paris Love Locks (or the removal of love).

After discussing the phenomena of the love locks and where it has expanded in the world (perhaps locally), and what has become of the locks, I have students reflect upon: Pourquoi est-ce que tu t'aimes? Qu'est ce que tu aimes de toi? (Why do you love yourself? What do you love about yourself?) I have students write (in the target language) their reflection on the printed out locks (or let them be creative and draw their own), then "hang" the locks in a stairwell or on the wall. I also have done this virtually with students; having everyone add their "lock" to the slide presentation.  BLOG- LOCKs- vday