

# L'Esclavage au Sénégal: L'Ile de Gorée

**THEME:** CULTURAL CONTEXTS (HISTORY)

**LANGUAGE:** FRENCH

**STANDARDS:** COMMUNICATION 1.2 CULTURES 2.2 CONNECTIONS 3.1 3.2

## Time Frame:

One 50-55 minute class session

## Materials Needed:

- Photographs of *Ile de Gorée*, which must include photos of the rugged coast, the exterior and interior of the *Maison des Esclaves*, including a picture of the famous door through which sick slaves were thrown into the sea (see resources below for books containing such photographs)
- Sample messages from the Wall of Messages left by visitors of the *Maison des Esclaves* (provided)

## Description of Task

### Pre-Reading:

In order to activate students' background knowledge and to encourage them to begin to make some cultural comparisons, the teacher begins by showing the "pleasant" photos of the *Ile de Gorée* and asking the following questions. The teacher acts as a tour guide during this part of the pre-reading phase. Note the use of the conditional tense, which reinforces teacher's role as a guide, in the following questions:

Ça rassemble a une colonie de vacances, n'est-ce pas? (This seems like a great vacation spot, doesn't it?)

Voudriez-vous y visiter? (Would you like to visit this place?)

Que feriez-vous ici? (Nager, pêcher, planche à voile, etc.) (What would you do here? Swim? Fish? Wind surf?)

By asking these questions, the teacher begins to create a soothing, fun atmosphere which will encourage students to "trust" his/her lead. S/he continues by showing students a possible hotel. (Show students the picture of the *Maison des Esclaves*.) The teacher then asks the following questions:

### Level:

Intermediate-Low

### Purpose:

To provide students with the opportunity to explore the experience of Africans in slavery via a classroom simulation.

### Communicative Function(s):

Personal: Expressing one's thoughts or feelings

Referential: Understanding messages; paraphrasing or translating

Imaginative: Discussing and experiencing a simulation of an historical event

### Language Structure(s):

Past, conditional and present tenses; descriptive adjectives

### Cultural Aspects:

Historical account of experiences of people captured by slave traders and moved from their homes on the African continent

### Modalities:

Listening

Reading

Speaking

## NOTES

Aimeriez-vous rester à cet hôtel? (Would you like to stay at this hotel?)  
Ce n'est pas cher! (It isn't very expensive.)  
Voudriez-vous entrer? (Would you like to come in?)

The teacher can now simulate entrance to the hotel. The teacher could lead students to one corner of the room, making sure that they are uncomfortably crowded together. It is here that the “guide’s” tone changes. It becomes threatening and students are told they cannot move or speak. Turn off the lights in the room to make it seem more like the actual *Maison des Esclaves*. It is important to make sure that students respect the tone in the classroom that has now drastically changed.

Have students talk about the situation they now find themselves in. Ask the following questions to individual students—this is not a group discussion! (Note that the use of the conditional has now disappeared.)

Est-ce que vous êtes fatigués? (Are you tired?)  
Est-ce qu'il y a assez de place pour se coucher? (Is there anywhere to sleep?)  
Vous avez besoin d'aller aux toilettes? (Do you need to go to the bathroom?)  
Qu'est-ce qu'il y a à manger? (What is there to eat?)  
Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose à boire? (Is there anything to drink?)

Now turn on some of the lights and show the pictures of the interior of the *Maison des Esclaves*. You may wish to explain the following to students:

Que la jolie maison est vraiment La Maison Des Esclaves. Très jolie à l'extérieure, mais à l'intérieure les conditions étaient terribles. (This pretty hotel is really a holding place for slaves. It is very attractive on the outside, but inside the conditions are terrible.)

Que “les propriétaires” ont jetté les malades dans la mer. (The slave traders threw the sick into the sea.) [Show the picture of the special door through which sick slaves were thrown.]

Que le seul moyen d'échapper était de nager parmi les requins. (The only way to escape was to swim among the sharks.)

Show students a photograph of the Wall of Messages. Explain that the people who wrote these messages were visitors to the island and had a simulated experience similar to the students'. The messages students are about to read relate visitors' feelings after having visited the island.

### **During Reading:**

Students now receive a copy of sample messages from the Wall of Messages (provided). Students may work in partners to decipher meaning that is

coming through in the short notes. Allow students to ask questions about the vocabulary. Students should generate a list of descriptive terms that illustrate the tone of the messages.

### **Post-Reading:**

Discuss the meaning of the messages with the class. Have students report on their thoughts about the tone of the messages and the meaning they convey. Ask students to reflect about how they were feeling during their simulated “captivity” and how the messages might have influenced them if they had read the messages before their simulated visit to *Gorée*.

### **Assessment:**

The post-reading discussion acts as an assessment of students’ comprehension. The teacher could also ask students to express their thoughts and feelings about the class activity in their journals.

### **Extensions:**

#### ***Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:***

*For beginning levels:* Most of the discussion and simulation can occur in English. The teacher can assign individuals or pairs of students just one of the messages to read and derive meaning. Then these students can share their impressions (in English) with the rest of the class.

*For advanced levels:* Have students prepare a presentation on *Île de Gorée* to present to beginning level classes.

#### ***Other extensions:***

Have students write their own messages based on the simulated visit to *Gorée* and create a Wall of Messages in the classroom.

## References and Resources:

### Books that provide photographs of *L'île de Gorée*:

Delacourt, J. (1984). *Gorée, six siècles d'histoire*. Dakar Senegal: Edition Clairafrique.

UNESCO. (1995). *Gorée: Island of memories*. Paris. (ISBN: 9231023489).

### Excerpts from the Wall of Messages:

Thanks to Valerie Downing, former instructor in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Minnesota, for sharing her photograph of the Wall of Messages from the *île de Gorée*. Although the photograph did not copy clearly enough to include here, we provide typed versions of actual messages that are recorded on the wall.

### Other resources that should assist the teacher in carrying out this activity:

Ariabosse, S. (1986). *L'Afrique en Français* (African Outreach Series, no. 6). The Center for African Studies. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Galanti, M. (1984). *En Mouvement*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.

Paraire, P., & Welply, M. (1992). *Les Noirs Américains, depuis le temps de l'esclavage*. Paris: Hachette.

## Reflections:

Excerpts from the Wall of Messages  
L'Ile de Gorée, Senegal

Béni! Soit ce lieu qui me renvoie si souvent à mes ancêtres martyrs.	Quel long chemin nous reste à parcourir avant de devenir des hommes?
Si ces murs pouvaient parler?	Gorée --- un frisson--- sous le soleil---
L'Amérique serait-elle l'Amérique sans le peuple noir?	Merci à Ja NDIAYE, d'être la sentinelle vi- gilante auprès de la mémoire martyre des peuples noirs à Gorée.
Devant ces murs qui crient des larmes et du sang, chaque homme doit se rappeler que le chemin de la civilisation et des droits humains a été long, <u>et ce n'est pas fini</u> .	BLANC ou NOIR toutes les larmes sont salées
Une profonde émotion, un symbole de la dignité de chaque être, d'une dignité bafouée de Gorée---à AUCHWITZ	

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