



St Benet Biscop Sixth Form

Personal Development

French

1. Books

As well as your course texts there are some other “must read” books in French, ranging from the Asterix or Tintin comic books to classics such as St Exupéry’s *Le Petit Prince*.

There are all sorts of lists online to tempt you but here are a couple of examples:

Relatively easy to read

modern classic: *L’Etranger* – Albert Camus

poetry: *Calligrammes* – Apollinaire

classic novel: *Le Père Goriot* – Honoré de Balzac

short stories: *Contes de la Bécasse* – Guy de Maupassant

“Hygiène de l’assassin” by Amélie Nothomb

This book is written almost entirely in dialogue. The story consists of different journalists interviewing a famous novelist, Prêtextat Tach, who is dying. Tach, an obese, misogynistic monster of a man, is an unpleasant yet highly entertaining character. He makes a game of avoiding questions about his personal life and driving away his interviewers, among whom a contest develops to see who can dig up any interesting information on the novelist. The interactions between Tach and the interviewers make for fast and absorbing reading, and the mystery developing around Tach’s past and personality will keep you glued to the page.

“Un soir au club” by Christian Gailly

The protagonist of this drama, Simon Nardis, is a former jazz pianist and alcoholic who had to give up both habits to stay on the straight and narrow. In a single night, he breaks with years of abstinence and returns to his two loves. Written in sharp, snappy prose, “Un soir au club” reads like hot jazz and quickly draws you in with its seductive pace. Gailly often uses short sentence fragments for emphasis, which helps direct the reader’s attention to grammar and phrasing.

“Bonjour Tristesse” by Françoise Sagan

The plot centres on a teenage girl’s relationship with her womanizing father, and how his love life influences and becomes entangled with her own. It retains the fast pacing and quick gratification of a romance novel, but reads more like a soap opera condensed into novel form, and draws you in with charisma and personality.

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God intends us to be.*



“Pietr-le-Letton” by Georges Simenon

This novel by Simenon introduces Commissaire Maigret, who appears in many more novels and stories. By many, I mean more than a hundred. So, if you develop a taste for following Maigret through his methodical, character-rich investigation processes, you’ll have taken on an excellent habit for your French learning. The prose in this novel is still a little rough compared to the easy, relaxed pace Simenon developed in later works, but it familiarizes you with Maigret and Simenon in a story that takes the detective through a variety of locales in different social strata.

“Coule la Seine” by Fred Vargas

This collection of three mystery stories is a nice sampler to get you acquainted with another French detective, Commissaire Adamsberg, who appears in several Vargas novels. Vargas is a historian who incorporates her knowledge of history into her books, creating rich, eccentric characters who have the education necessary to make her plots play out in a satisfying way. Every native English speaker learning French at some point encounters doubts as to whether what they’re doing is really useful. For this reason, you may find

“L’Amant” by Marguerite Duras

This is a classic that is part of any basic education in French literature. Set in French colonial Vietnam, it tells the story of a young girl from a French family who becomes romantically involved with an older Chinese man. The plot is narrated from the detached point of view of a woman who is now much older and reflecting on the events related. The writing is hypnotic and simple to read. As in the case of Gailly’s “Un soir au club,” Duras often repeats words and events, which is good for poetic effect and great for learning.

“Adolphe” by Benjamin Constant

Another classic, this is a sparse moral and psychological drama. The story follows a young man who develops a relationship with an older woman. Narrated in the first person, “Adolphe” explores all of the inner misgivings and woes of the main character, who is highly self-analytical. The prose is mostly limited to Adolphe’s state of mind as well as his interactions with others, so the vocabulary and phrasing are efficient and fairly easy to follow despite the fact that the book was first published in 1816.

“Extension du domaine de la lutte” by Michel Houellebecq

Michel Houellebecq has become a highly controversial figure in France for writing characters with questionable social views and making offensive statements. Despite that, he’s someone to be aware of if you have any interest in contemporary French culture and literature. He’s a solid writer who can fill out your vocabulary on modern subjects such as dating, social politics, and the workplace. This is his first novel, and it encompasses and riffs on the dreariness of day-to-day societal existence in a way that comes across like Chuck Palahniuk’s “Fight Club” as told by Bill Hicks, but with a lot more French.

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“Les Yeux jaunes des crocodiles” by Katherine Pancol

This is the longest and most difficult book on the list, but also one of the most useful for learning French. If you find it intimidating, work your way through a few others first and try coming back to it. Pancol writes with a light, sympathetic touch about members of a modern French family who follow separate ambitions and interests while still striving to love and support one another.

Other interesting titles:

- **Le dernier jour d'un condamné – Victor Hugo**
- **Une vie – Guy de Maupassant**
- **L'Écume des jours – Boris Vian**
- **Antigone – Jean Anouilh**
- **La Princesse de Clèves – Marie-Madeleine de La Fayette**
- **Molière – Pièces de théâtre:**
 - L'école des femmes
 - Le malade imaginaire
 - Tartuffe
 - Le Médecin malgré lui
 - L'Avare
 - Le Bourgeois gentilhomme
 - Les Fourberies de Scapin
 - Les Femmes savantes
- **Madame Bovary – Gustave Flaubert**
- **Les Malheurs de Sophie – La Comtesse de Ségur**
- **Jules Verne – Nombreuses oeuvres:**
 - Voyage au centre de la terre
 - Vint mille lieues sous les mers
 - Le tour du monde en 80 jours
 - L'Île mystérieuse
- **Les Liaisons dangereuses – Laclos**
- **Le Diable au corps – Raymond Radiguet**
- **Le Zèbre – Alexandre Jardin**
- **Si c'est un homme – Primo Levi (not French, but studied a lot in French schools)**

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2. Press

Le Monde – great for seeing how the French press approach global topics, very high level of French! www.lemonde.fr

Le Figaro – news magazine, www.lefigaro.fr

L'Express – news magazine, www.lexpress.fr

Paris Match – news/gossip, www.parismatch.com

News in Slow French www.Newsinslowfrench.com limited amount of free content but well worth listening to, various subjects (arts & culture, science & technology, world news, politics) read in much slower than normal French, making it easier to follow.

L'Obs – weekly news magazine, www.nouvelobs.com

Puzzles and wordsearches www.notretemps.com

Wider, outdoor magazine, www.widermag.com

Onze Mondial, football magazine, www.onzemonial.com

Sport & Vie, general sports, www.sport-et-vie.com

Elle, fashion magazine, www.elle.fr

3. Online Video

YouTube:

Imagiers.net: quizzes, vocabulary, grammar.

Frenchpod101.com: short videos of vocabulary and random phrases followed by a short quiz. Radio talk show format structured around everyday dialogues.

JeFrench.com: very simple format, quite random topics from pronouns to conjugation.

Thefrenchguy3000: this is a hilarious channel led by a guy who is NOT in fact French. Random anecdotes, enthusiastic, entertaining.

The Radio Lingua Network: On this channel, CoffeeBreakFrench! the user learns with Anna, the student, who is instructed by Mark, the teacher. This duo is so enthusiastic and helpful as they situate each lesson in different parts of Paris.

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Un gars, une fille – *about the funny situations a couple have to go through, very amusing.*

Plus belle la vie – *a very famous French soap set in Marseilles.*

TV5: www.tv5.org

France 2: www.france2.fr

TF1: www.tf1.fr

Netflix – *type “French” into search engine and a large number of programmes are available, alternatively you can choose your favourite show and change the audio to French.*

Canal Plus – *Lots of their shows are available online. Watch Le Petit Journal, Le Zapping, Les Guignols, Le Grand Journal.*

Don't forget DVDs in French – ask your teachers / visit the school library where you will find lots of options!

4. Television

TV5 – *international French speaking countries channel.*

M6 replay – *can be found on web, it has most of M6 channel programmes on repeat.*

5. Radio

France Info: *news programme, www.france-info.com*

RFM: *bit like Radio 2, www.rfm.fr*

NRJ: *bit like Radio 1/Capital/Virgin, www.nri.fr (note the pun on how it's pronounced in French NRJ – énergie)*

6. Apps

Many of the newspapers and radio programmes have apps you can download for free as well as learning apps such as: Duolingo and FluentU.

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