
REVIEWS

Kimberlee Campbell. *Échos: Cultural Discussions for Students of French*.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 150p.

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Échos: Cultural Discussions for Students of French provides a modern upbeat resource for students and teachers of French language and of the Francophone world. The text is designed to provide a springboard to discussions surrounding cultural identity and diversity specific to the Francophone world for even the most novice-level student of French language. Although many instructors may be deterred, as I was, at first glance by the presence of four chapters presented in English, after a thorough review, this text appeals on a variety of levels.

The text is organized into two main sections addressing the general themes of “Self” and “Other,” leading the students on a path of discovery of their own cultural identities and values as well as of cross-cultural attitudes. The two sections each contain five “Discussions,” two of which are presented solely in English. In order to provide the instructor more flexibility according to teaching styles and levels, Campbell has included an appendix containing corresponding supplementary texts in French for each of those presented in English. Each “Discussion” is comprised of two parts: an “Image” and a “Text.” Each “Image” section includes the full-color image itself. An Algerian 50-dinar note and a bronze plaque from the Edo dynasty (now Benin) are two examples. In addition to the image there is an “Information” section providing historical and cultural background, a series of questions, “Regardons de plus près,” inviting the student to a deeper geographical and cultural analysis of the image, followed by a suggestion for further research and reflection, “Par écrit.” Each “Text” includes its own “Information” providing historical and biographical background for the reading, all of which are nicely glossed and well-chosen for relevance, variety, and length. Two pre-reading activities, “Et si c’était moi” and “À première vue,” engage the student in self-examination that encourages cross-cultural comparisons as well as direction in the reading of the “Text.” The short readings are followed by a series of comprehension questions—“Avez-vous compris?”—and post-reading discussion topics—“À votre avis”—that bring the topic of the reading to the personal level for the student, as well as a final suggestion for a research project.

In the preface to *Échos: Cultural Discussions for Students of French*, the author presents the text as “a holistic approach” to the teaching of French culture (vii).

Indeed, it is a multidisciplinary approach (“fine arts, anthropology, sociology, or history”), combining readings and images from throughout the Francophone world with ideas for discussion, writing, and research based on the complexity and diversity of French or Francophone identity (vii). Suggested as a compliment to the typical first-year program, this text could potentially be required for the first-year student and used as a supplement throughout a French program consisting of two years. The readings, as well as the pre- and post- reading activities solely in French, may prove too difficult for the true beginner, whereas the chapters presented only in English may not work well with many instructors’ teaching philosophy. Perhaps rather than a supplement to a first-year sequence, *Échos: Cultural Discussions for Students of French* would be more appropriate for an intermediate to advanced conversation and or composition courses, providing excellent thematically and culturally cohesive and relevant content to the often content-deficient courses. The addition of a section or appendix containing references to resources for the student, such as web sites, especially in relation to the suggested topics for further research, would enhance the value of the text as a resource for the student. Despite a few minor weaknesses, it is an appealing and innovative text that will remain in my sight and on my desk while I try to discern the best way to implement it in my teaching.