

Hope for Haiti

Amid the unspeakable devastation in Haiti and the tragic images which continue to flood our TV and computer screens, there are a few positive elements—global solidarity, “Doctors without Borders,” and a resurgence of the French language and Francophone culture, especially music and art, of this country now without a voice. Television anchors Katie Couric (CBS) and Anderson Cooper (CNN) both apologized profusely for not speaking better French during their interviews, but at least they made an effort. Most of the other commentators relied on translators except for ABC’s Diane Sawyer, whose fluency and accent made us proud. For our students, the media coverage of the earthquake has sadly put Haiti in the forefront, but it has also heightened their awareness of the importance of studying French and giving back to others in need.

Jean-Dany Joachim: Poet Laureate

Boston is home to the third largest community of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. One member of this community, Jean-Dany Joachim, a native of Port-au-Prince, moved to the U.S. two decades ago. He attended UMass/Boston and studied French with Brian Thompson, President of the AATF Eastern Massachusetts Chapter. Elected Poet Laureate of Cambridge for 2009-2010, Jean-Dany has presented several workshops on Haiti for our chapter. Now an ESL teacher at Bunker Hill Community College, Jean-Dany writes in French, Creole, English, and Spanish. His poems have been published in many anthologies and literary magazines. Ironically, he was scheduled to return to Haiti the day after the earthquake struck to attend a conference. Instead, he wrote this tribute, which although emotionally raw, ends with a ray of hope. When I received it by e-mail, I knew I wanted to share it with my classes and my AATF colleagues. May these words inspire your students to keep Haiti in their hearts.

Classroom Activities:

1. After calling on students to read aloud each stanza, put students in groups and ask them to make a list of verbs, nouns and adjectives which describe what happened during the earthquake. Compare lists of each group.
2. Continue with a list of Port-au-Prince landmarks which are cited.
3. Ask students to identify the poet’s friends and family members who are mentioned and suggest their relationship to him.
4. Change groups and ask students now

to list phrases and images of hope and renewal.

Classroom Discussion:

1. Which religious components of the poem lead you to believe in the poet’s faith in the future?
2. We see the poet go through three stages in this poem: denial, acceptance and hope. Where does each stage begin and end?
3. Besides the verb “j’attends,” there are many vocabulary words and phrases which are repeated throughout the poem. What is the purpose of this repetition? How does it make the reader feel?
4. Which images are the most dramatic and why?

Writing Assignment:

1. Write a ten-line stanza beginning with “j’attends....” in which you express your feelings for the people of Haiti and your wishes for the future of their country.

Project:

1. Assign students a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Hommage à Haïti” with images from Haïti and quotes from Monsieur Joachim’s poem. Students may also choose to design a collage instead of the PowerPoint presentation.

Webquests:

1. Research on the Internet the names of the 3 hurricanes which hit Haiti in 2008, the dates they came, and the destruction they caused.
2. Trace the path of each hurricane. Report your findings to the class.
3. Google the poet, Jean-Dany Joachim. Read his biography and some of his other poems. Introduce him to the class using the information you found online and photos.
4. Research “Les Médecins Sans Frontières” who have taken such an active role in the medical care of the earthquake victims. Give a brief history of this organization and explain how doctors can be a part of it and where else in the world they are stationed. Present your report to the class.

The Poet and AATF in 2010:

AATF members who will be attending the ACTFL Conference in Boston in November will have the opportunity to meet Jean-Dany Joachim who will be part of a 3-hour workshop, entitled “Nouvelles Voix de la Francophonie.” This workshop, organized by the Eastern Massachusetts AATF Chapter, will be sponsored by

MaFLA. *Vive l’esprit haïten!*

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UN SIMPLE HOMMAGE AUX AMIS, À LA FAMILLE ET AU PAYS.....

La terre tremble
Les maisons tombent
Les cris s'étouffent
Dans les décombres
Mon coeur se fend
J'attends

J'attends un cri rebelle
Pour me redonner l'espoir
J'attends mes pleurs
Qui résistent encore
J'attends les mots qu'il faut
Et la musique aussi
Des mots que Magalie ne lira pas
Et la chanson qu'on ne chantera pas ensemble
J'attends

J'attends que les images
Disparaissent dans ma tête:
La cathédrale qui court
Pour éviter de tomber
Des anges qui s'agrippent
Au Sacre-Coeur pour empêcher sa chute
Le palais national qui d'un bond
Se relève et reprend sa place aux champs de Mars
Port-au-Prince qui se réveille de sa sieste
Pour voir qu'il n'était question d'un simple cauchemar
J'attends

J'attends de pouvoir enfin dormir
J'attends d'écouter la voix des miens
Lasirèn qui rit, et qui espère
Mon frère Pòl qui parle de résurrection
La voix calme de Lo qui me rappelle ses parents
J'attends un signe dans la petite maison bleue
À la cinquième avenue Belosse
J'attends le dernier décompte
Le dernier nom
Le dernier appel téléphonique
Le dernier bilan

J'attends que le sang sèche
Que le dernier cadavre soit couvert
Et que je fasse le dernier signe de la croix
J'attends
J'attends pour enfin accepter

Que pour de vrai ça a eu lieu
Que ma terre a tremblé
Des maisons sont tombées
Les miens sont meurtris
Et leurs cris étouffés
J'attends

J'attends pour enfin accepter
Que c'est ce même espace
Que les ouragans ont devasté
Ce même coin de notre planète
Que les inondations ont ravagé
Oh, notre terre que ma mère portait dans son coeur

J'attends de comprendre
Comment combler ses vides
Tous ces noms effacés
Tous ces souvenirs
Tous ces projets
Et cet après-midi qui s'est trop vite changé
En profondeur de la nuit...

J'attends la main qui touchera les âmes
J'attends le mot juste pour reprendre la marche
J'attends l'espoir qui renaîtra
J'attends le prochain lever de soleil
La première fleur à paraître
J'attends de pouvoir enfin pleurer
Pleurer une rivière avec la foule et me libérer
Pleurs de morts
Pleurs de mots
De musique et de silence
Pleurs de terre qui tremble
De maisons qui tombent
Et qui étouffent les cris
Pleurs de joie à venir
Et pleurs de résurrection
Mais j'attends

J'attends désespérément
Le premier vol
Qui m'emmènera vers les miens
J'attends

J'attends.....

Jean-Dany Joachim