



# French Writers: Transformations in French & Francophone Society from 1945 to the Present through the Eyes of Novelists

## Course Details

Course Designator & Number: MONT 3026

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: Paul Rogers, PhD

## Course Description

Through the lens of literature, this course explores the changes in French society from the period of the Second World War to the present day. Beginning with the trauma of the Nazi occupation, students will look at how French literature over the years has served as a mirror on society, reflecting cultural, social, and political evolutions. Students will examine key moments in France's history that have left a mark: the period of Nazi occupation and the conflict between collaborators and resistance fighters (as portrayed in Tatiana de Rosnay's *Sarah's Key*), France in Indochina and the underpinnings of its postcolonial legacy (Marguerite Duras's *Sea Wall*), the cultural revolution of May 1968 (Annie Ernaux's *The Years*), evolving family models and changing visions of the world in the 1980s (Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*), social upheaval and exclusion from the 1990s to the present day (Edouard Louis's *Ending Eddy*, Michel Houellebecq's *Platform*, Mounia Meddour's *Papicha*). Recent texts and film will engage with an exploration of contemporary France around issues such as francophone multiculturalism, societal unrest (the yellow-jacket movement) and the terror attacks (Marie N'Diaye's *Ladivine*, Jacques Audiard's *Un Prophète*, Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables*, Emmanuel Leconte's *Humour à mort*—the Charlie Hebdo attacks), but also France's continuing mission to promote literature through the *Prix Goncourt*. The course aims to provide students with tools for understanding a culture through an exploration of its creative artifacts.

## Course Objectives

The goal of the course is to provide students with tools for analyzing literature as a cultural product or reflection of French and Francophone society from a variety of perspectives (cultural studies, sociological, historical, etc.). In their examination of these works, students will learn how to develop a critical and nuanced analytical approach that takes into account the multiplicity of contexts in which these literary works emerged. Developing an awareness of a writer's artistic and stylistic choices will also be essential. Finally, by studying these works, students will acquire an understanding of the culture of the country and the specific community in which they are immersed.

## Methodology

- Students will be expected to engage with readings before each class meeting and prepare regular presentations and written assignments. Deploying critical thinking skills and structured reasoning will be of paramount importance in these assignments.
- Students will be asked to read novels, excerpts of novels, and short stories outside of class in preparation for in-class discussion and analysis. Learning to examine the stylistic choices of a writer and compose structured argumentative essays will be a key component of the methodology.
- During each class session, interactive lectures will provide students with essential historical, sociological, and cultural context for studying these works.
- This course is writing intensive. It is paramount that students acquire strong writing skills to effectively analyze cultural artifacts/documents within the framework of a liberal arts curriculum. Writing is at the core of the academic experience and is the responsibility of every member of the academic community. By participating in the production and interrogation of the discourse in the field of French studies, students progress in their understanding of the discipline. Over the course of the semester, students will complete a variety of writing assignments, including, 8-9 essays (each essay will be between 1-4 pages long), and one 8-10 page final research/analysis paper/dossier. The instructor will provide the students with regular feedback, focusing on essay structure, grammar, and stylistics. Students must correct at least three of their assignments, taking into account the instructor's feedback on their first version, and hand in corrected versions to thereby improve their grade. The student's initial version will include commentary and suggestions for structural/analytical changes as well as indicate grammatical and stylistic errors.

## Required Reading / Materials

- Cole, Alistair. *French Politics and Society*. Routledge, 2017.
- Kepel, Gilles and Antoine Jardin. *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Kidd, William and Sian Reynolds. *Contemporary French Cultural Studies*. London, UK: Routledge, 2000.

- Hénaut, Stéphane and Jeni Mitchell. Histoire de France à pleines dents. New York, NY : Flammarion, 2018.
- Rouso, Henry and Nicolas Beaupré. Les Grandes Guerres (1914-1945). Paris: Editions Belin, 2012.
- Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle and Christian Delacroix. 1945-2005: La France du Temps Présent. Paris : Editions Belin, 2014.

## Core Works

- Ben Jelloun, Tahar. The Sand Child. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- De Rosnay, Tatiana. Sarah's Key. Saint Martin's Griffin Press, 2008.
- Duras, Marguerite. The Sea Wall. Harper Collins, 1986.
- Ernaux, Annie. The Years. Seven Stories Press, 2017.
- Houellebecq, Michel. Platform. Vintage, Reprint Edition, 2004.
- Submission. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015.
- N'Diaye, Marie. Ladvine : A novel. Knopf, 2016

## Supplemental Materials

- Journal: French Politics, Culture, and Society
- Joseph Losey, Mr. Klein
- Rithy Panh, The Sea Wall
- Gilles Paquet-Brenner, Sarah's Key
- Mounia Meddour, Papicha
- Jacques Audiard, Un Prophète
- Ladj Ly, Les Misérables
- Emmanuel Leconte, Humour à mort
- Euronews Special documentary on France's 'gilets jaunes' movement
- News sites (in English): [en.rfi.fr/france](http://en.rfi.fr/france), [france24.com/en](http://france24.com/en), [thelocal.fr](http://thelocal.fr), [jacobinmag.fr](http://jacobinmag.fr)

# Grading

## Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

## Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation in class	10%
Essays	45%
Exposés	15%
Final oral presentation	15%
Final research paper	15%
<b>Overall grade</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Assessment Details

### Participation

Attendance and active participation in class is very important to your success in this course. Students should be present at all classes and come prepared to discuss the readings as outlined in the syllabus.

### Essays

Students will complete between 8 and 9 essays / written assignments; each essay will be between 1-4 pages each, and based on one of the topics of the course provided by the instructor. The topics of these assignments will be directly related to the readings or the novels at the heart of the current unit being studied. Examples of topics might be an analysis of one of the works of literature or a comparative study of how one of the works studied complements sociological findings elaborated in one or more of the articles assigned as course readings or in the course lectures. Written assignments should aim to include an average of 3 citations per page. Students will be asked to include references (the nature and number of these references will vary depending on the type of assignment, 3-4 sources is a rough estimate). The instructor will provide the students with regular feedback, focusing on essay structure, grammar, and stylistics. Students must correct at least three of their essays, taking into account the instructor's feedback on their first version, and hand in corrected versions to thereby improve their grade. The student's initial version will include commentary and suggestions for structural/analytical changes as well as indicate grammatical and stylistic errors.

## **Exposés**

Students will complete between 1 and 2 oral presentations over the course of the semester. Presentations should last between 5 and 7 minutes and provide a springboard for class discussion. Students will be asked to present their analytical work to the rest of the class; an example might be a critical analysis of a passage from Annie Ernaux's novel *The Years*. Students will be asked to include references (the nature and number of these references will vary depending on the type of assignment, 3-4 sources is a rough estimate).

## **Final written paper**

Each student will write an 8-10 page research paper, to be handed in during the last class meeting. The student should choose a topic related to the course material that they wish to explore in greater detail and share with the rest of the class. Sample topics include: a critical analysis of one or more of the literary texts studied over the course of the semester or a critical historical and analytical exploration of some of the contemporaneous events, noteworthy individuals, or societal paradigms that formed a part of the backdrop for the creation of the literary works studied. By the halfway point of the semester, students should begin to have an idea of the approach they would like to take and consult with the instructor to narrow down their topic. Students should include roughly an average of 3-4 citations per page and use between 6 and 9 outside sources (this is an estimate and will depend upon the topic chosen).

## **Final presentation**

During the last class meeting, students will present the research they undertook for their final written paper to the class. The goal of the presentation is to introduce the class to the research in as interesting a manner as possible. To that end, students are encouraged to use slideshows, handouts and as interactive an approach as possible; students should avoid simply reading their paper. At the end of their presentation, the student should have questions prepared to involve the listeners and be prepared to organize and moderate a group discussion. (15-20 min.)

# Course Content

## Unit 1

### Course Introduction: French society, permanence, & change

- Introductory lecture—course objectives; presentation of the syllabus
- In-class, diagnostic writing assignment
- Reading: Reynolds, Siân. “How the French present is shaped by the past: the last hundred years in historical perspective.” *Contemporary French Cultural Studies*, Chapter 3.
- Introduction to the novel: *Sarah’s Key*

## Unit 2

### France during WWII

- The Nazi occupation of France profoundly altered French society, leaving deep wounds that can still be felt to the present day. The conflict between those who collaborated and those who resisted the occupation remains a source of conflict and tension.
- Lecture
- Novel : Tatiana de Rosnay’s *Sarah’s Key* and Analytical essay
- Reading: Welch, Edward. “Objects of Dispute: Planning, Discourse, and State Power in Post-War France. *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 36, No. 2, Summer 2018: 103-125.
- Reading: Andrieu, Claire. “Women in the French Resistance: Revisiting the Historical Record.” *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 2000.

## Unit 3

### France during & after WWII

- How does France remember the second world war and the horror of events such as the Vel d’Hiv Roundup in July 1942? This session will explore memory and different authors’ attempts to come to terms with suffering and comprehend inhumanity.
- Lecture
- Novel: Tatiana de Rosnay’s *Sarah’s Key*

- Discussion and film excerpts from Joseph Losey's *Mr. Klein*

## Unit 4

### The End of the Colonies: Indochina, Algeria

- How does contemporary France remember the colonial period? Marguerite Duras's *Sea Wall* depicts the contradictions and fragility of postcolonial memory. What were the socio-cultural effects of Indochina or Algeria's independence wars on mainland France? Long considered a taboo subject, literature and the arts have persistently led the way in seeking to come to terms with the deep wounds left over by these wars.
- Lecture
- Novel : Duras, Marguerite. *The Sea Wall* ; Analytical essay
- Reading: Miller, Jeannette E. "A Camp for Foreigners and 'Aliens': The Harkis' Exile at the Rivesaltes Camp (1962-1964). *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 31, No. 3, Winter 2013.
- Analytical essay

## Unit 5

### What happened in May 1968?

- Political crisis, De Gaulle, and youth revolutions—from the Quartier latin to the countryside, the advent of strikes, occupations, and *assemblées générales*. Annie Ernaux's autobiographical novel, *The Years*, takes the reader on a captivating, cinematic, journey through her formative years and provides a unique vision of the disruptive time period of late 1960s France.
- Lecture
- Novel: *The Sea Wall* and introduction to Annie Ernaux's *The Years*
- Reading: Christofferson, Ball, David. "The Tracts of May." *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring 2010.

## Unit 6

### France in the 1970-1980s

- Economic Crisis, France's suburbs, *La Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*. The emerging question of religion in French society. Change and revolution in the home: New social constructs.



- Lecture
- Novel : Annie Ernaux's *The Years*
- Reading: Kidd, William. "Frenchness: constructed and reconstructed." *Chapter 12, Contemporary French Cultural Studies*.
- Analytical essay

## Unit 7

### France in the 1990s

- *Blocages* in the high schools, le Pacs (le Pacte civil de solidarité), the end of the Cold War. Societal shifts depicted in *The Years*.
- Lecture
- Novel: *The Years*
- Reading: Beale, Helen. "French public culture: places and spaces." Chapter 11, *Contemporary French Cultural Studies*.

## Unit 8

### France in the 1990s

- Forgotten France : disenfranchised youth, multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and the French social model. Ben Jelloun's work, *The Sand Child*, explores the specific tension that can emerge at the intersection of culture, religion, and language.
- Lecture
- Novel : Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*
- Analytical essay

## Unit 9

### France in the 2000s

- This session will explore French and Francophone regional identity and aspects of the culture including minority languages and cuisine (UNESCO has recognized *la gastronomie* as a world intangible heritage). Students will learn how former French colonies such as Morocco or Algeria interface with the culture of contemporary France.
- Lecture

- Novel : Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*
- Reading: Lamont, Michèle and Nicolas Duvoux. "How Neo-Liberalism has transformed France's Symbolic Boundaries?" *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 2014.

## Unit 10

### France in the 2000s: Social unrest & the rise of the far right/the crisis

- Understanding France's *banlieues* : segregation, ethnicity, identity. Persistent rifts in French society. Michel Houellebecq, simultaneously lauded and excoriated, presents a disturbing and controversial vision of society in his writing- examples from *Platform* and *Submission*.
- Lecture
- Novel: Excerpts from Houellebecq's *Platform* and *Submission* and introduction to Marie N'Diaye's *La Divine : A Novel*
- Reading: Ross, George. "Myths and Realities in the 2006 'Events.'" *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 24, No. 3, Winter 2006.

## Unit 11

### France in the 2010s: Terror & « Etats d'urgence »

- Understanding the lead-up to the terror attacks; the cultural phenomenon of Charlie Hebdo. Marie N'Diaye's mysterious work, *Ladivine*, adventures into the poetic spaces between identity and memory and recounts the challenges that some cultural groups face in present-day France. Exploring the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in 1990s Francophone Algeria, Mounia Meddour's film *Papicha*, provides a unique perspective on the origins of a movement that subsequently took hold in parts of mainland France.
- Lecture
- Novel: Marie N'Diaye's *Ladivine : A Novel*
- Film: *Papicha*, time permitting (excerpts)
- Reading: Thompson, Christopher S. "From *Black-Blanc-Beur* to *Black-Black-Black?* "L'Affaire des Quotas" and the Shattered Image of 1998" in 21st-Century France. *French Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 33, No. 1, Spring 2015.
- Reading: Neffati, Imen. "Charlie Hebdo and the Gilets Jaunes." *Jacobinmag*. July, 2019

## Unit 12

### France in the 2010s: Economic strife & insurrection

- As France struggles to recover from 2008's Great Recession, public outcries against social inequality are growing in strength. Persistent, haunting visions of police brutality on news sites have been burned into the French collective consciousness. N'Diaye's *Ladivine* provides an insistent voice for the forgotten while Ladj Ly's recent film (2019) *Les Misérables*, seeks to depict the tensions between police and inhabitants of the *banlieues*. Parallels and divergences with the current social strife and the "yellow jackets" movement will be explored
- Reading: Bruneau, Ivan, Julian Mischi and Nicolas Renahy. "Rural France in Revolt." *Jacobinmag*. March 2019.
- Novel: Marie N'Diaye's *Ladivine: A Novel*
- Euronews documentary on the Gilets Jaunes from December 17, 2018.
- Film: *Les Misérables* ; excerpts and discussion

## Unit 13

### France in the 2010s: Hope & future prospects

- Where does France stand in the 2020s? What can literature teach us about the current social climate?
- Lecture
- Oral presentations and discussion
- Course conclusion

# Policies

## Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

## University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

### Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

### Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).