

Discover Paris with Jules Verne

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In 1863, Jules Verne wrote a novel that was rejected by his editor, P.J. Hetzel, for being too outlandish. Discovered in an old trunk by Verne's great-grandson in 1989, the manuscript proved to be a goldmine. Set in the 1960's, the novel could be more realistically cast in the 2000's. It was finally published in October 1994 by Hachette as *Paris au XXe siècle*, and now lends itself for use in American high school and college classrooms, particularly for students at the intermediate and advanced levels. The book may be purchased at a reasonable price through such vendors as Amazon (www.amazon.com).

The purpose of this article is to provide lesson plans. Each plan represents one day, which may be modified according to class needs. By using this text in a class conducted entirely in French, the goals are for students to improve their reading skills, increase oral proficiency by conversing daily and teaching a chapter, develop writing skills by compiling chapter summaries similar to *Spark Notes*, and gain cultural knowledge of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century France.

Lesson 1: Introduction to the novel

Goals for language skill and content: To comprehend the novel's setting, know what to look for while reading the novel, discuss Verne's fantasies and correlate them with today's reality.

Warm-up:

Watch [video by Lionel Louche/Gabriel Metz](#) to create a sci-fi atmosphere

Watch the video explaining Verne's works, "[L'exposition Jules Verne](#)", 2005.

Preview:

- A. Ask the students what inventions and technological changes they have seen in their lifetimes.
- B. As a contest, have student groups list inventions since the mid-1800s. The group with the most inventions wins.
- C. Ask students if there are any science-fiction addicts in the class who know of Verne (Kline). Many may know *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and *Around the World in 80 Days*. Show pictures of some of his books, asking students to describe what they know.

Lesson:

Have students start reading an [article by Dr. Guy Spielman](#), 2008, from Georgetown University:

They should also read the [Wikipedia article](#) on the novel.

Students are ready to discuss:

1. Why was the novel rejected by his editor?
2. How was the manuscript discovered?
3. Why do you think readers would be interested in this book today?
4. According to the articles, what did Verne predict that has already come to pass?

Goals: To know what the expectations are for the oral presentations and compare Paris in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

Warm-up:

Students break into pairs, where they share what they learned from the articles.

Preview:

Show the front cover (s) of *Paris au XXe siècle*, asking the students what they see and what that might represent (Collie and Slater).

Lesson:

A. Explain that the students will be teaching a chapter of this book. The teacher will teach the first four chapters to model the procedure. The teacher distributes requirements for the project and vocabulary glosses for the first four chapters. Students read through the novel at home (at least two chapters a day), trying to understand the story in context by using a “top-down approach” as much as possible. In order to aid comprehension, students reread the chapter the night before it is discussed in class.

B. Explain that the students will also keep a reading journal in French.

C. Read the first few paragraphs of the book aloud so students can clearly situate themselves in the novel (Kramsch). Brainstorm what will happen in the story (Omaggio).

D. Point out the exact location of the action on a Paris map while explaining how Verne presented the future in relation to his own time period. Show a timeline of events.

Closure:

Students do sustained silent reading until the end of the class period and continue reading for the next day.

Lesson 3: (Chapter 1) *Société Générale de Crédit instructionnel*

Goals: To meet the major character, Michel, discuss Verne’s dichotomy between industry and the arts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and start discovering Paris.

Warm-up:

In pairs, students use a laminated map of Paris and its metro to find the Champ de Mars, the site of the awards ceremony, as well as the metro stop, la station du chemin de fer de Grenelle. (Collie and Slater). Students then share what they felt was important in the chapter about the “Société Générale de Crédit instructionnel.”

Preview:

Show a PowerPoint of Paris with pictures of the Eiffel Tower and the surrounding area. Pictures will be used frequently throughout the study of Verne’s novel, making it more relevant.

Lesson:

A. Ask the whole class what the “Société Générale” is and what Verne might be implying here. How is Verne’s system of education similar (or not) to today’s American or French system? Briefly explain today’s French system.

B. What do the students know about the French government? Why did Verne predict “Napoléon V”? Briefly explain French history from the nineteenth century to the present, using a time line. Note that Verne wrote the novel when the USA was fighting the Civil War, when Hugo was writing *Les Misérables*, and when Manet was presenting “Déjeuner sur l’herbe” at the Salon des refusés.

C. Ask the following specific questions for understanding:

1. How was Michel’s school funded? By whom? Why?
2. Do you see Verne’s humor in his statements about the textbook publisher, Hachette?
3. Name the most important subjects in school. How is Verne criticizing or mocking education?
4. What languages did the students study/not study? Why? Why not?

D. Have the students pantomime parts of the story, pointing out who some of the characters were or could be equivalent to in Verne’s time. For example, *le ministre des Embellissements de Paris* would be the equivalent of Haussman, the minister responsible for the Paris Opera and the remodeling of Paris in the mid-1800s. Read the narration, stopping from time to time for explanations, questions, or student comments. Two people will do the dialogue between Richelot and Huguenin, while two other students play the award recipients, and the rest play the audience. Why are the two men in the audience so important? Guess ahead (Collie and Slater)!

E. What changes and inventions does the orator mention about Paris since the nineteenth century? Does Verne have a sort of editorial comment at the end of the talk when he says “praise of the present, detriment to the past” (Beck)? What was the irony in the awards given to the recipients?

F. Ask the students to explain what happened in the evening after the ceremony and why they think that the administrative council was so happy.

Closure/Homework:

Have students download maps of Paris this evening. Students are to read Chapter 2, paying attention to the descriptions of Paris in relation to Michel's return home, using the maps.

Lesson 4: (Chapter 2) *Aperçu général des rues de Paris*

Goals: To continue studying Paris of the two (or three) centuries through Michel's thoughts and feelings.

Warm-up:

In pairs, review previous day's discussion. Incorporate a review into each day's warm-up. Students then discuss what Michel did after the awards ceremony, where he went and why. Share his impressions. How would they feel in the same situation? Why?

Preview:

In order for students to familiarize themselves with Paris, give every two or three students a laminated Paris map and two erasable overhead pens. The students draw Verne's metro based on his own description. Locate the suburbs mentioned by Verne. Then, trace Michel's return home with another color.

Lesson:

A. Compare their metro maps. Compare Paris' real monuments and highlights from what Verne imagined. How close was he? What remains from his time? Verne mentions the construction of the metro, which was actually built in 1900. Verne refers to the London underground, which was constructed in 1863.

B. Ask the students to describe how Verne's metro system works and then compare it with today's, teaching them how to use the metro.

C. In new groups, have students identify two important inventions since Verne's time, with a short description of each item. Does anyone know who invented them? Ask the students to list all the predicted inventions Verne cited in his novel, writing the name of the inventor and the date of the original creation if possible. Some are mentioned in the editor's notes in the back of *Paris au XXe siècle*. Place a list on the board and continue adding to it daily.

Closure:

Ask if the students feel Verne's predicted twentieth century lifestyle is realistic for today. Why or why not? Do they agree with Michel's impressions? How does what Verne describes fit into popular novels of today?

Homework:

Students read Chapter 3, taking note of the descriptions of Michel's family members and drawing a family tree in their journals.

Lesson 5: (Chapter 3) *Une famille éminemment pratique*

Goals: To understand Michel's priorities versus his family's priorities and compare them with those of today's society.

Warm-up:

Play [Céline Dion's "Blues of a Businessman"](#) as students enter the classroom.

With the maps, the students locate where Michel lives and works. They also share any new inventions mentioned in the chapter.

Preview:

In groups of two or three, students are to draw a relationship web, using circles (Beach, Appleman and Dorsey) between various characters and Michel. Some character names may simply be written on the web for now. Identify how each person is related to Michel and write his/her personality traits according to Michel (Collie and Slater). Then, project a web with the students sharing their insights.

Lesson:

A. Ask if any students have jobs. What happened when they first applied for the jobs and then when they started working? Share their experiences and compare them with Michel's.

B. Students describe the company, "la Société des Catacombes" showing Verne's humor or irony. Tell them about the catacomb visit at the Place Denfert-Rochereau.

C. Verne discusses the artists and the art of the twentieth century by describing Michel's uncle. What does he mean by his description? Do the students know anyone like that? Near the end of the chapter, Michel's uncle gives a long discourse to Michel. What is his attitude towards artists? How is that relevant today?

D. Projecting the words of Céline Dion's "Blues of a Businessman," play the song again, asking the students what relationships they see between her song and Michel's thoughts. How could Verne be expressing some of his own personal feelings through Michel?

Closure:

Ask the students how they would spend their free time before beginning a new job like Michel. Have them guess what Michel will do (Omaggio).

Homework:

Students read the next chapter, taking note of the authors and the works mentioned by Verne. They also write a paragraph summary.

Lesson 6 (Chapter 4) *De quelques auteurs du dix-neuvième siècle, et la difficulté de se les procurer*

Goals : To intertextualize with canonical nineteenth-century authors and discover Michel's favorite pastime.

Warm-up: Students enter class to [Céline Dion's "Oxygène."](#)

In pairs, they share their paragraphs through peer editing. Ask the students to read some of their partners' paragraphs to the rest of the class. Then, collect the paragraphs, later making copies of the better ones, so the students can choose the one they like best.

Preview:

Ask the students what they like to do in their free time. And Michel? Students figure out how Michel arrived at the Rue de la Paix, after leaving the Société.

Lesson:

A. Students name the books and authors Michel is looking for and see if they are familiar with any of these or other works. They will especially be interested in *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo.

B. Ask students to tell what was so amazing to Michel in what he saw at the bookstore and why. Compare that with today in France and the USA.

C. Students can easily act out the first scene in the chapter. Ask them if they see any of Verne's humor and satire here, concerning his contemporaries and their works, such as:

1. Hugo (1802-1885) *Notre Dame de Paris, Les Orientales*
2. Balzac (1799-1850) *La Comédie Humaine*
3. de Musset (1810-1857) *Les Premières poésies*
4. Lamartine (1790-1869) *Les Méditations poétiques*
5. Paul de Kock (1793-1871) «moqueur des milieux bourgeois dans ses romans»-
le Petit Larousse) He was a non-canonical author.

D. Continue tracing Michel's steps with one person using the classroom map as others read aloud. When the modern novels are cited in the reading, play Céline Dion's "Oxygène" and/or ["Stressed Out" \(Stressé\) by 21 Pilots](#) with subtitles in French.

How do these relate to Michel? How do they relate to young people in today's world? How does *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury fit here?

E. Ask students to compare Verne's library and the "salle des lettres" with the libraries they know. Mention la Bibliothèque Nationale and the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information in the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

F. Make a "fiche" from the text for the students to fill out while they are acting. How does the librarian fit into the "relationship web"? Why is he overjoyed to see Michel, but hesitant to keep in touch with him? Why would Verne have his part of the library be classified a "cemetery"?

G. In this chapter, ask the class what the relationship is between science and art and if there is a conflict between the two today. Students discuss their thoughts in small groups and then with the whole class.

Closure and homework:

Students research one of the above-mentioned canonical authors and find some of their literary extracts. The students choose their texts to share with their classmates the next day.

Lesson 7: The canonical works read by Michel

Goals: To discover canonical nineteenth-century French Literature and see why Michel appreciated it.

Warm-up: Students find others who have the materials by or about the same author and form groups.

Lesson: Students share their readings in groups. One person takes notes and another person shares important information about the author and the extracts with the rest of the class. Ask students to recommend readings they liked (Kline). Spend more time on the excerpts student enjoyed. Read them aloud or play a youtube.com or podcast recording a few times—especially if they are poetry—before each student is given a copy. Alternatively, act it out (Kramersch).

Closure/Homework:

Students have a quiz the next day. After the quiz, students will work on their chapter presentations, which they will also start the next day. Meet with the students individually to answer any questions.

Lesson 8:

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Lesson 9 and following:

The presentations begin in chapter/numerical order. Those chapters without presenters will be treated as passive reading days (Collie and Slater), discussing them only if there are questions. After the final presentation on the last chapter (17), the students will discuss in groups their opinions of the book, using the following list of guide questions:

Questions:

1. What do you think about the book *Paris in the Twentieth Century*? Would you have rejected it like Verne's editor? Justify your response.
2. Concerning technology, did Verne go too far? Justify your statement. What else is there now?
3. At the end of the book, Michel is without hope and homeless. How could someone resolve this problem?
4. In our society, there is often a lack of hope in people. What can we do to help them? What do you do when you feel hopeless? What do the characters do in some of the novels you have read?

5. List a few difficult circumstances in Michel's life. How would you have reacted? Would you have felt the same in the same situations?
6. If Verne were alive today and you could speak to him about anything, what would you ask or say to him?
7. Since you just read a science fiction novel, think about your future. List as many changes as you think will happen in the next 50 years.
8. What are the women in the twentieth century like according to Verne? What are they like now? Are his ideas about modern women true? Why or why not?

The students will then share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

The teacher may also give a written test with some of the discussion questions and information from the class presentations.

As their final assignment, the students will create a story on their or someone else's life in fifty years (Billet), including inventions they consider possible and descriptions of life in general. The main character could be an older Michel or someone totally removed from his world. It could also be autobiographical. It is the student's science fiction. The stories will be shared with peer groups and some with the whole class. Encourage the students to keep their stories, so that in fifty years they can see how close they were to reality!

Teachers and students alike can be motivated to reflect on the past, the present, and the future by reading Verne's novel. Maybe some students are the "Vernes" of the twenty-first century!

If you are interested in receiving a PowerPoint and much more detailed lesson plans, please email HUDSONA@DICKINSON.EDU to request them.