

# Using Forensics to Learn Foreign Languages

by Debbie Supplie & Mary McClosky

For many high school students a foreign language class is about as welcome as a lunchroom wedgie. It requires thinking, recall, and the application of the grammar. It takes time and effort and there's often little immediate application to the students' lives. We see this every day in our classes. Most students are only taking French and Spanish at our high school because they're required to have the credit. Rarely does anything of interest happen to them in class, and for us it's often frustrating to watch bright kids fall behind because they don't care. That all changed a few weeks ago when the forensics teacher at our school came to us with an idea.

He suggested a crime scene mystery we could do with our students that would involve foreign language. He wanted to know if we would translate an interview with a suspect into either Spanish or French, and then ask the students to solve the mystery. We agreed, eager for a way to motivate some of our more lethargic kids.

The mystery he gave us involves a robbery and four suspects. Two speak English, and the other two speak either Spanish or French. One of the four is clearly guilty, but only if one has all the pieces of the puzzle, i.e. they understand what all four of the suspects are saying. The students were intrigued and excited.

One of our teachers in college noted that, "dilemmas make you speak." If you have to use a bathroom you'll learn how to ask it's location in a hurry. If you're hungry or want something very badly it's the same. The students wanted to understand what half of the suspects were saying, and they were suddenly very interested in remembering the past tenses of the verbs we'd studied. They were also immediately interested in pulling out verbs and trouble words from the sentences and translating those. But some students were more in a rush to solve the crime than to translate the statements.

This led to some interesting conspiracies being proposed because the student doing the partial translation only had part of the story. Other students worked through the entire statements and a heated discussion ensued. The longer they argued we noticed more and more students turning to the passages with interested eyes so they could weigh in.

The exercise was engaging and exciting to the students. We plan to do this sort of thing again, but with a twist. To help them develop auditory skills the next mystery we use will feature four class members reciting or reading their parts to the class. The rest of the students may ask questions, but may not see the written text. This will push the actors to understand their parts to a greater degree if they have to be able to answer questions about what they just said.

We've decided other mysteries will be incorporated in future classes from time to time, both in a written and spoken format because of how engaged the students were. They had a dilemma, and all of them thought they had something to add to the discussion. Another idea would be to require them to hold their discussions entirely in the foreign language. We're looking forward to getting the students involved as we develop other ways to blend mysteries and French and Spanish.

# Forensics in World Languages

We need your help!

The scenario: Police arrive at the corner of Wilshire and Main Street in the small town of Huevo Grande, Arizona, to find people standing around the outside of Herman's Sporting Goods store. A small crowd surrounds four men who are all looking defensive and a little angry. Herman, the owner of the store, has just been taken away in an ambulance. Someone in the crowd says the store was robbed and Herman assaulted. Can you figure out who the guilty party is based on their interviews?

Suspect #1, Allen Johnson, 32. "I arrived a few minutes ago and was planning on buying produce across the street from Herman's. I saw suspect #3 walking away from the store in a hurried manner as he kept looking over his shoulder at Herman's store. I don't know him, but I do know suspect #4 and I know he's been arrested before. I think the two of them are friends. If you want to find the guilty party, talk to them."

Suspect #2, Steve Walsh, 28. "I was in Herman's a few minutes before it was supposedly robbed, but I'm in a hurry so I came out counting my change. I paid for a pack of tennis balls with a \$50 bill so I was trying to stuff them into my pocket before any of the neighborhood gangs saw me. The thief must have hit Herman right after I left and then gone out the back because I didn't see anyone follow me.

Sospechoso #3, Manuel Ortíz, veintidós años de edad. «Yo estaba esperando a mi hermano, Roberto, cuando yo vi al sospechoso número dos salir de la tienda. Él tenía mucho dinero en las manos y trataba de echarlo todo a los bolsillos. Yo esperé a que viniera Roberto y al final me decidí entrar a la tienda Herman sin él y, en ese momento, encontré a Herman en el suelo. Yo no tomé el dinero, no señor.»

Sospechoso #4, Roberto Ortíz, diecinueve años de edad. «Yo estaba en el callejón detrás de la tienda tratando de llegar por un shortcut, pero allí había un gran basurero bloqueando la puerta de atrás. Yo llegué tarde porque tuve que ir alrededor - por toda la cuadra. Cuando por fin llegué y entré a la tienda, Manuel estaba hablando por teléfono, Herman estaba en el suelo, y la cajera estaba abierta. Si Manuel dice que él no tomó el dinero, yo le creo.»

¿A quién debe el policía agarrar?

# Forensics in Foreign Languages

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The scenario: Police arrive at the corner of Wilshire and Main Street in the small town of Oeuf Grand, Quebec, to find people standing around the outside of Herman's Sporting Goods store. A small crowd surrounds four men who are all looking defensive and a little angry. Herman, the owner of the store, has just been taken away in an ambulance. Someone in the crowd says the store was robbed and Herman assaulted. Can you figure out who the guilty party is based on their interviews?

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Suspect #2: Steve Walsh, 28. "I was in Herman's a few minutes before it was supposedly robbed, but I'm in a hurry so I came out counting my change. I paid for a pack of tennis balls with a \$50 bill so I was trying to stuff them into my pocket before any of the neighborhood gangs saw me. The thief must have hit Herman right after I left and then gone out the back because I didn't see anyone follow me.

Suspect # 3 – Marcelle Richaud, 22 ans. "J'attendais mon frère Raoul quand j'ai vu le suspect #2 en train de sortir du magasin. Il avait beaucoup d'argent dans ses mains et il essayait de remplir ses poches avec cet argent. J'attendais que Raoul arrive et finalement j'ai décidé, sans lui, d'aller dans le magasin d'Herman et c'est quand j'ai trouvé Herman ar terre. Je n'ai pas pris de l'argent.

Suspect #4 – Raoul Richaud, 19 ans. «J'étais dans l'allée derrière le magasin. J'essayais de prendre un raccourci, mais il y avait une très grande boîte à poubelle qui bloquait la porte derrière le magasin. J'étais en retard car il fallait que je fasse le tour du quartier. Quand je suis arrivé à l'intérieur du magasin, Marcelle était au téléphone, Herman était par terre et la caisse était ouverte. Si Marcelle a dit qu'il n'a pas pris l'argent de la caisse, je le crois.

Can you figure out who should be arrested?

Teacher note: the culprit is Suspect #2 who was trying to make it look as though either Suspect 3 or 4 were guilty.