

Mots de nos invités **From our distinguished guests**

Welcome winners, parents, devoted teachers. Welcome to our distinguished guests: Mauril Bélanger, MP for Ottawa-Vanier, Mrs. Carol White from the Office of the *Commissaire aux langues officielles*, James Shea from Canadian Parents for French. Welcome to the Superintendents from both *the Ottawa-Carleton District and Catholic schoolboards*, and to all of you involved in and committed to this very special experience of learning a second language.

It is special—it is also difficult, and certainly challenging. We all know that, don't we! All those hours spent studying in class and out, being taught, trained, and encouraged to express yourself in a language other than the one you were born and raised to speak.

Frankly, you couldn't have done that alone, and I would like to commend your committed and encouraging parents, and thank your devoted teachers who year after year have put together the very best material and activities to get you to learn, talk and enjoy yourselves, in that order, or better yet all at once, in French.

What a challenge it must have been when you knew only very basic French...

What an even greater challenge it must have been for those of you who, in Core French, had to express your thoughts on Does technology simplify our lives?, as you had to do in this year's *Catégorie I composition*.

I praise the effort that each and every one of you has put into this challenging task! And I raise my hat to all of your teachers, especially those in CORE French; it is not easy to lead your students to such success from that level!

We all agree that knowing more than one language is “awesome,” teen-speak for what I would personally call beneficial. Our global village commands that we master more than one language, since there is no better way to interact with people than by communicating with them in their own language.

It is through language that we get to know people, befriend them and build trust so we can work together to better our world.

Yes, of course, English is a great language of communication around the planet, and for this reason, it is worth expending every effort to improve your command of it. But French is also spoken widely, and really in the most incredible places—in Canada, in the USA and of course outside North America, in Europe, in Asia, in Africa. Speaking French in Senegal will get you much further than speaking English. Speaking French in Chicoutimi and in Gaspé will definitely open all the interesting doors.

This is why you must pursue this learning experience, in spite of the fact that you may think that you have “arrived,” you are bilingual, you have learned everything that there is to be learned. Not yet!

Learning and maintaining a language is a process of development, enrichment and commitment “Higher, Further “ is a concept that is well known to the Carleton community. Carleton’s support for the French Regional Concours is a natural outgrowth of our commitment to excellence and quality. This is why you should take French when you get to university, because taking French throughout university will open many new doors. Here at Carleton, the French Department exposes its students to literature, linguistics, and translation. We offer courses in Teaching French, courses in French Cinema, French Media, and yes, we do have courses on French Grammar, most interesting ones I am told.

So, what now? What after the Concours?

Quite frankly, more hours, days, and months of learning French. Not just because there is more to be learned, but also because the process of learning a language expands your thinking abilities, your critical mind, your capacity for analysis. In many ways, university is like learning a language: the more you learn, the better you get. This is the untold but obvious secret of language learning. And of learning in general.

Richard Van Loon
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