



THE LANGUAGE DETECTIVE

CHASING THE COGNATES

Timing: 20 min.

Format: individually, in pairs, small groups or whole class

Prior knowledge needed: none

Language specialists reckon that at least 1 in 4 English words is derived from French.

Though the common origin of some words in both languages is not always obvious anymore, it is sometimes very clear, especially in written form, and can be a precious help in picking up French words .

Play the language detective game and see how many cognates you can find in these fables.

Level 1 : In 'The Raven and the Fox' find the French words for 'Perched', 'master', 'beak', 'flatterer', 'lesson', and 'doubt'.

In 'The Grasshopper and the Ant', find the French words for 'morsel', 'grain', 'interest', and 'dance'.

Level 2 : In 'The Raven and the Fox', find 6 cognates.

In 'The Grasshopper and the Ant', find 4 cognates.

To go the extra mile...

- 1) The translations chosen are literal enough that you could ask the children to find the match for many words or phrases in the other language.
- 2) Cognates look the same but sound different in French and English. Using what they already know about French pronunciation (or guessing if they haven't got any notion of this yet), ask your pupils to suggest how to say the words that they have found and then use an online pronunciation checker (such as howtopronounce.com or

voicenotebook.com/prononce.php) to see who got closest to the correct sound. (you will need Google Chrome and the Google Speech Recognition engine for voicenotebook.com)

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Le corbeau et le renard

Jean De La Fontaine

Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché,
Tenait en son bec un fromage.
Maître Renard, par l'odeur alléché,
Lui tint à peu près ce langage:
Hé! Bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau.
Que vous êtes joli! Que vous me semblez beau!
Sans mentir, si votre ramage
Se rapporte à votre plumage,
Vous êtes le phénix des hôtes de ces bois.
A ces mots le corbeau ne se sent pas de joie;
Et, pour montrer sa belle voix,
Il ouvre un large bec, laisse tomber sa proie.
Le renard s'en saisit, et dit: Mon bon monsieur,
Apprenez que tout flatteur
Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute:
Cette leçon vaut bien un fromage, sans doute.
Le corbeau, honteux et confus,
Jura, mais un peu tard, qu'on ne l'y prendrait plus.

The crow and the fox

English Translation © Richard Stokes

Master Crow, perched on an oak,
Was holding a cheese in his beak.
Master Fox, lured by the scent,
Spoke more or less like this:
'Good day, my dear Sir Crow,
How smart you are! How debonair you are!
In truth, if your song
Be as fine as your plumage,
You are the phoenix of these woods.'
At this, the crow grew wild with glee;
And to display his minstrelsy,
He opens a big beak and drops his booty.
The fox snaps it up, saying: 'My dear sir,
Learn that every flatterer
Depends on an audience to live at ease.
This lesson is doubtless cheap at a cheese.'
The crow, shamefaced and in troubled state,
Vowed to be tricked no more – a little late.

La Cigale et la Fourmi

Jean De La Fontaine

La cigale, ayant chanté
Tout l'été,
Se trouva fort dépourvue
Quand la bise fut venue.
Pas un seul petit morceau
De mouche ou de vermisseau.
Elle alla crier famine
Chez la fourmi sa voisine,
La priant de lui prêter
Quelque grain pour subsister
Jusqu'à la saison nouvelle.
«Je vous paierai, lui dit-elle,
Avant l'août, foi d'animal,
Intérêt et principal.»
La fourmi n'est pas prêteuse;
C'est là son moindre défaut.
«Que faisiez-vous au temps chaud?
Dit-elle à cette emprunteuse.
—Nuit et jour à tout venant
Je chantais, ne vous déplaie.
—Vous chantiez? j'en suis fort aise.
Eh bien! dansez maintenant.»

The grasshopper and the ant

English Translation © Richard Stokes

The grasshopper, having sung
All summer long,
Found herself most destitute,
When the North Wind came.
Not a morsel to her name
Of either fly or worm.
She blurted out her tale of want
To her neighbour Mistress Ant,
And begged her for a loan
Of grain to last her
Till the coming spring.
'I shall pay you', were her words,
'On insect oath, before the fall,
Interest and principal.'
Mistress Ant is not a lender—
That's the last thing to reproach her with!
'Tell me how you spent the summer?'
Was what she asked this borrower.
'Night and day, to every comer,
I sang, so please you ma'am.'
'You sang? I'm overjoyed.
Now off you go and dance!'