As a teacher of French on the university level, I had looked in vain for a very long time for what I would consider a challenging intermediate-level textbook for introducing students to major Francophone authors. What I was looking for was a textbook that would: (1) present literary texts with a serious, in-depth approach, but at the same time would engage the students in an intriguing and playful way—a work that would allow the students to develop an analytical and critical approach to literature, but also provide them with activities that would be fun and interesting, and (2) present Francophone authors’ texts in a true cultural context in order to help our American students to see—to the greatest extent possible—the French language texts in the same way that the French and other Francophones see them.

The answer came from speaking to Carol Herron, of Emory University, and Colette-Rebecca Estin, a professor from the French university system—my colleagues in earlier pedagogical work. We came upon the idea of expanding upon some work that Professor Herron had already done in an intermediate-level French reader entitled *Vignettes* (Harper and Row, 1984). To accomplish the goal of “enculturating” American students and giving them the above-mentioned “shared experience” would require, we concluded, an approach that would be a true melding of French and American pedagogies. To that end, we decided to construct a textbook that would combine American and French approaches to the teaching of French language, literature, and culture.

As had been the case with Professor Herron’s *Vignettes*, we draw from twentieth-century Francophone texts, in order to present our students with literary works dealing with issues of their own world and their own time. One of our chief goals, from the beginning, was to provide students with a method for understanding and interacting with today’s world with its great technological resources, its challenges, and its global character that become more and more pronounced each day. We hoped to provide them with a means of exploring such questions as (1) how identity can be defined, especially in a time of rapid transformations brought on by scientific advances such as genetic engineering, and (2) how human and humanistic values may be retained in the modern world.

The final result of our efforts is *Identité, Modernité, Texte*. We believe that this textbook contains the particular qualities we had always hoped for and that we have managed to achieve all of the goals we set for ourselves at the beginning of our project. The experience of putting together the textbook was a truly enriching one for all of us. Part of the process involved sharing points of view related to sensitivities inherent in the two cultures (what might shock or be offensive). Even the title of our work presented a problem for Dr. Estin. It took some convincing on our part to overcome her analytic doubt of a term like “Identité.” We often had to amend each other’s assumptions when venturing too far into territories unknown. This was also one of the most enlightening and fascinating aspects of our intercultural collaboration.

Constructing the grammatical component of the textbook was one of the most challenging aspects. Here we believe that we achieved a true meeting of the minds. We spent many hours coming
up with just the right grammar presentation that would satisfy both French and American grammarians. Our work on this aspect of the textbook gave us a great deal of satisfaction as a genuinely international experience. One delightful aspect of our work together was sharing certain helpful hints for mastery of French grammar. Dr. Estin encountered for the first time the mnemonic MRS. DR. VANDERTRAMPP (to recall which verbs are conjugated with être), and we were equally delighted to learn that the French rely on similar phrases: “Où est donc Ornicares?” We share these with the students in our grammar presentations in Identité, Modernité, Texte.

To test our methods and materials, we conducted a pilot study in my intermediate-level French class in the fall semester of 1999 at Oxford College of Emory University. I was very pleased with the results of this trial run. The interaction of all aspects of the materials—linguistic, textual, and cultural—exceeded my expectations. Dr. Estin was able to participate directly by e-mail, fax, and phone conference. We even managed to set up a video-teleconferencing session between my students in Georgia and Dr. Estin at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The melding of the varying national teaching traditions gives us hope of filling a genuine need for new approaches to French studies in American universities. We believe we have accomplished something quite unique that will make a true contribution in the area of French studies and serve as an example of international cooperation. We continue to consider our work as an ongoing project, and have been and remain open to suggestions regarding presentations and layout of our materials as well as methodology. We invite those who use our work to give us the benefit of their opinions on Identité, Modernité, Texte.

In the formulation of Identité, Modernité, Texte, each of the authors contributed different insights gained respectively from our many combined years of foreign language teaching. Dr. Herron’s original work, as mentioned above, served as a springboard for our undertaking. My own contribution derived from my experience in teaching twentieth-century French literature and civilization for the past twenty-odd years. Dr. Estin brought to the table of our joint endeavor not only her years of teaching French as a foreign language on the university level, but also many years of experience in new theories of playful learning that she has put into practice over the years in schools in France. From our perspective, our collaboration was a very good mix: Dr. Herron is more “modern” in her pedagogical approach. I am more of a traditionalist, whereas Dr. Estin uses experimental pedagogy (although she is an agrégée des lettres classiques, a mark of great distinction in the French educational system, one of the most rigorous in the world).

As a further comment on our collaboration, in creating Identité, Modernité, Texte, we have invested of ourselves. As academics, we concentrate on objectivity in our approach to teaching, but it was Dr. Estin (who has the most objective formal training among us) who insisted on the importance of subjectivity in drawing out the best in students as they learn to negotiate their way through their studies—as well as in their world. Her role in this project is best expressed in her own words. “Identité, Modernité, Texte représente pour moi la synthèse de capacités et d’aspirations que j’ai développées successivement au cours de ma vie” (“Identité, Modernité, Texte represents for me the synthesis of knowledge, experience, and aspirations that I have developed successively throughout the course of my life”).

MATTHEW W. MORRIS