



Sample Feedback about a meeting with our pen pals in New Trier High School, 2020-2021

We had the opportunity to meet our American pen pals from Chicago online. At first, the teachers separated us into groups of four, two French students and two American students. I was in a group with B., C., and E.

We talked a bit about Covid vaccination. We exchanged on what we are going to do next year. C. wants to do a four-year college in political science and B. wants to go to a four-year college in health science. With E., we tried to explain what was a « prépa » to them. Besides, we found out that they did not have philosophy courses. We also talked about what we had done during the last lockdown. We talked about the sports we practice. B. does fencing and C. cross-country. E. and I do dancing. Then, we talked a bit about books. However, C. had trouble connecting so I did not understand everything. Then, we joined the rest of the students and the two teachers again. The teachers asked some students from both high schools to sum up quickly what they had learnt during the group meeting. I really enjoyed the meeting in a group of four because it was easy to talk and share our opinions with the others; however, I wished the last part of the meeting had rather consisted in another activity in smaller groups to talk with other students. It was my first time doing this and it was really funny. I discovered a new culture and it is an experience that I would like to do again sometime in the future.

Last Thursday I did something that I had never experienced before! We made a virtual trip to an American classroom. Everything was like a true trip. As if we had been through the customs... We had to prepare our own questions and be ready to answer theirs. And we also suffered from jetlag or was it just lag this time, I don't remember =). But we learned a lot from it. Do you know that Americans don't know *Money Heist (La Casa de Papel)*? It's surprising, isn't it? Besides, with our Americans pen pals we spoke about several clichés that they have seen in *Emily in Paris*. They thought we always wear berets... I didn't expect that. Never mind, they explained to us that they had been learning French for 5 or 6 years, and, to be honest, we understood each other pretty well. The conversation went so swimmingly that I forgot to ask their names. One of them could speak Korean, Japanese, English and now French!

Unfortunately, we had to leave early because it was their last French class of the year and their teacher wanted to finish the year properly, with a little retrospective of what they had done. All in all, it was too short but it was an intensive experience!

On Thursday, we had the opportunity to communicate with our American pen pals. At the beginning, we were all in the same virtual room where the two teachers presented the unfolding of the meeting. Then, we were dispatched in groups of 4 students, 2 French ones and 2 American ones. During the meeting, we talked about our high school, why they had chosen the French section, and the stereotypes that one country has about the other. It was very interesting and rewarding to have a foreign perspective about various subjects. At first, it was really intimidating to be in front of both classes reunited and I noticed that nobody wanted to begin so I gathered all my courage and spoke in front of everyone. Although I was not really sure of my capacities, it was really challenging so I am glad I did it. Then, small groups were formed and I was amazed because it never got awkward and I think we got along really quickly. I am really grateful for meeting them because, although I stammered several times, it was such a great exercise and it was really cool to learn more about new people and new cultures. Besides, both American girls were so friendly and smiley (despite their masks)!

At first, I was really afraid of being questioned by the American teacher and speaking in front of the whole group. However, when we joined our separate groups, it felt much easier. Although we didn't really know how to start, the conversation got underway thanks to the questions we had prepared. We talked about shows or movies we suggested, about the vaccine, the courses we had and the future studies we considered. We tried to swap languages, between French and English; they were better at French than I expected. In the end, it was a really great experience, and it is a shame we couldn't speak more or with other people. In the last part, however, I hoped I would not be asked to give my feedback! I was also surprised about how extrovert the Americans were and how they easily spoke in front of everyone without problem.

Last Thursday we had a zoom meeting with students from an American High School. We had already shared videos before meeting them but we didn't really know each other. We met at 6 p.m. for us and 11 a.m. for them. For them it was a special class, it was their very last French lesson of High School. We first got into the lobby where we could see everyone. Both teachers introduced themselves and their high schools. Then we were split into groups of 4 students, 2 from Camille Claudel and 2 from New Trier. I and S. had some technical trouble at first but we eventually managed to exchange with the two American girls. We talked about our student life, what classes we take, how the COVID crisis is handled, etc. We discussed about our future, especially the different paths a French student can take. According to them, it's pretty different in the United States. We also talked about places to visit near our hometown. From what I remember, Chicago seems to be a nice place to visit, it has a lot of cool museums and restaurants. At the end we chatted a bit about politics and how we perceive Donald Trump in France. After this little exchange we were asked to join the big room again to share what we had talked about. Overall, this experience was really great, I found it a bit short but we couldn't do otherwise. I learned a lot about the American education system, Chicago and its surroundings. I also realized a few things about American culture: for example, talking about politics is way less taboo.

On Thursday, we met our pen pals from New Trier High School through a Zoom call. The students from both schools were divided into small groups to chat and ask each other some questions about culture, school, travelling, and even a tiny bit about politics. We learnt that although they don't have many holidays throughout the year, their summer holiday lasts much longer, and it was already their last class of the year. Asking and answering questions while switching from French to English felt really exciting! But I wish our discussions had lasted longer because it was really fun and enjoyable, and we didn't even have the time to talk about all the suggestions we had prepared. Ten out of ten, I would recommend and do it again!

On Thursday we had a videoconference with the pen pals that we have known for a year. I really enjoyed the interaction and it was nice to meet them even if it was not in real life. At first, it was intimidating but the Americans started the discussion by asking E., C. and I if we would like to visit the United States and if so, which city in particular. We talked about Miami, New York and other fascinating cities and then I asked them why they had chosen to learn French and they told us about their interests in France. Returning to the common room allowed us to give our impressions of this meeting and to share our discoveries and I found that cool.

During the first lockdown in March 2020, we had had an insight of their daily life through their videos. We had had the opportunity to see their school: it was impressive, it welcomes 4 000 students. In return we sent them our videos. We had created our clips in groups, which made it more entertaining, especially during the first lockdown. We showed them Camille Claudel from outside so they had an idea of what it looks like, our daily life as French students and our interests (I talked about my favorite TV show). This year, we also made a video, but this time,

showing what a typical day in high school looks like. In addition to academic interests, it allows us to keep a memory of our high school years.

On Thursday, we had the occasion to meet them on a zoom meeting. I dreaded that it would be awkward and that we would have nothing to talk about. But we had made a list with all the questions that we could ask and the subjects that we could discuss, which made it more reassuring. Once we entered the virtual meeting, we were divided into groups of four. We started by introducing ourselves. I learnt that it was their last day of high school. We talked about what we wanted to do in the future and our activities. The conversation was natural and I was surprised by their level in French, it was impressive. Everyone was involved in the conversation and I felt very comfortable. We had no trouble understanding one another, despite the language barrier and the internet connection. We found that we had common points, we also asked them if they had stereotypes about French people. I really enjoyed sharing about our culture and learning about theirs. I realized that even if we are from different countries, we have a lot in common.