

# **Entre les Murs**

*(The Class)*

Written by  
Laurent Cantet, Robin Campillo and François Bégaudeau

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INT. CAFÉ - DAY

The first morning of the new school year.

In a Paris café, leaning on the bar, FRANÇOIS, 35 or so, peacefully sips coffee. In the background, we can vaguely make out a conversation about the results of the presidential election. François looks at his watch and seems to take a deep breath as if stepping onto a stage.

EXT. STREET - DAY

François comes out of the café. Across the street, we discover a large building whose slightly outdated façade is not particularly welcoming. He walks over to the imposing entrance that bears the shield of the City of Paris in wrought iron and beneath which we read "JAURES MIDDLE SCHOOL". On the opposite sidewalk, coming from the other end of the street, a small group of teachers hurries towards the entrance. François hears them joking.

VINCENT

He's a really great guy, not the back-slapping type but...

François greets them in passing.

INT. CORRIDORS - SCHOOL - DAY

We discover the school's deserted corridors. Through the doorway of a classroom, François sees a few cleaners who, in a very calm atmosphere, clean the tables and line them up neatly, wash the windows... A short distance further on, a man in overalls applies one last coat of paint to an administrative notice board.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Around the principal in the meeting room, the teachers, old or new, introduce themselves briefly, as in a casting session.

HERVÉ

Hello, everybody, I'm Hervé. I've been at the school three years now. I teach sports. I'd like to welcome all our new colleagues. The students can be tough but they're good kids. There you go.

OLIVIER

Hello, everybody, I'm Olivier. I teach physical science and I've been here for 4 years.

PATRICK

I'm Patrick and I teach multiplication tables, and occasionally mathematics! I've been at this school for a number of years.

ANNE

Hello, I'm Anne. I used to work in the Lyon suburbs, in Bron to be precise, and I teach English. I'm looking for my new colleagues. Hello...

ISABELLE

Hello, I'm Isabelle...

ANNE

Pleased to meet you. Hello...

CHRISTIANE

I'm Christiane...

FRÉDÉRIC

I'm Frédéric, I teach history and geography and I used to work out in the suburbs of Paris, in Aulnay-sous-Bois if anyone knows it. I'm happy to be in the city now.

JULIE

Hello, I'm Julie, the year supervisor. I'd like to welcome you all and wish you a good year.

ALINE

Hello, I'm Aline, I'm the cook and I'd like to welcome you all.

VINCENT

Thank you, Aline.

GILLES

Hello, everyone. I'm Gilles, I've been teaching mathematics for many years now. I'm retiring at the end of this year. I'd like to wish the new arrivals plenty of courage.

FRANÇOIS

I'm François. I teach French and I'm starting my fourth year here. Welcome, everybody.

Then the principal hands out the timetables, eliciting a few sighs of satisfaction or disappointment.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

In the staff room, a new arrival listens to the succinct comments of an older member of staff, OLIVIER, on the different students in a second-year class as he runs through a list.

OLIVIER

Nice, nice, not nice, not nice at all..  
He's nice, not nice, watch him, not nice at all, nice, not nice, she's not nice at all.

INT. CLASS - DAY

The children noisily enter the class as François looks on. The students take their places in general confusion, the girls on one side, the boys on the other. They show each other their new gear: pencil cases, brand-name exercise books... François, clearly used to this kind of agitation, raises his voice.

FRANÇOIS

All right, all right, all right! Hey, hey, hey! Calm down now! Stop stirring things up there and remove your hood, please. You two back there, there's a place here. One of you comes up front.

Things start to calm down.

FRANÇOIS

Right, let's get one thing clear from the word go... Hey! I want to get this clear from the start. We waste five minutes lining up outside, five coming up, five settling down: fifteen minutes out of an hour. Do you realize what fifteen lost minutes means? With twenty-five hours a week and thirty weeks in the year, we lose thousands of minutes. In other schools, they do a full hour. Imagine how far ahead they get in a year. Figure it out!

KHOUMBA, a girl with long hair in the style of Diana Ross, speaks up without raising her hand first.

KHOUMBA

We never do an hour!

FRANÇOIS

Put your hand up to speak. What is it?

KHOUMBA

We never do an hour. You always say that.

FRANÇOIS

What do you mean, "we never do an hour"?

KHOUMBA

Teachers say we do an hour's class but we never do.

FRANÇOIS

Yes.

KHOUMBA

We never do an hour's class. We start at 8.30 and finish at 9.25. That doesn't make an hour.

FRANÇOIS

All right, it's fifty-five minutes. Thanks, that's an important point.

KHOUMBA

But we never do an hour. Stop saying other schools do an hour. They don't either.

FRANÇOIS

All right, all I'm saying is that we waste time. Like right now. To start with, take out a sheet of paper, fold it in two so that it can stand on the edge of your desk clearly and, using block capitals, write your full name on it.

While BOUBACAR sluggishly obeys, WEY, in the front row, translates the instructions into Chinese for his neighbor and shows her how to do it. A few rows behind them, ESMERALDA, Koumba's friend and neighbor, butts in.

ESMERALDA

Why do we have to write our names?

FRANÇOIS

So I can get to know who you are.

ESMERALDA

But you know us!

LOUISE

We had you last year.

FRANÇOIS

Esmeralda, I don't know if you've noticed, but half of the kids here are new. So it can help. Be happy. This way, people will know your name.

ESMERALDA

I'm not doing it.

FRANÇOIS

Cut it out.

ESMERALDA

I won't if you don't.

FRANÇOIS

Ah, you have a point. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Mr. Marin.

ESMERALDA

Ms. Marin.

BOUBACAR

Hey, are you a marine?

SOULEYMANE

He wiped you out, that's wicked.

FRANÇOIS

Very funny.

BOUBACAR

He didn't wipe you out, he busted you.

FRANÇOIS

Come on, it shouldn't take so long. You should be a lot quicker. Five minutes to write a name. That's ridiculous!

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

SOPHIE, in passing, offers a biscuit to RACHEL and François who is sitting nearby.

SOPHIE

A biscuit for the first day?

FRANÇOIS  
I'm okay, thanks.

ANNE  
I wouldn't mind one.

SOPHIE  
Rachel, a biscuit will buck you up.

RACHEL  
Thanks.

INT. CLASS - DAY

On the board, François writes the words that the students haven't understood in the text that they are studying. A slightly affected student raises his hand.

FRANÇOIS  
All right... "Witty". That's a word we'll try to explain later. Are there any other words in the text that you don't understand? Burak.

BURAK  
The word "condescension".

François notes the word on the board, just under other more or less complicated words. He turns to the class.

FRANÇOIS  
The word "condescension", yes, that's a complicated word. Do you have any idea, Burak, what that might mean? Any idea at all?

BURAK  
A vague idea but I'm not sure.

FRANÇOIS  
You're not sure? All right, we'll talk about that later then. Yes, Damien?

DAMIEN  
"Argentite".

FRANÇOIS  
Argentite. What does that mean?

DAMIEN  
It's people who live in Argentina.

FRANÇOIS

Right, exactly, the inhabitants of Argentina.

ESMERALDA

Wow, what a moron! Wicked!

FRANÇOIS

Argentites and Argentitesses... No, of course not. Damien, who lives in Argentina?

DAMIEN

The Argentites.

FRANÇOIS

No, you know that's not right, you watch soccer on TV. Argentina's players are called...

DAMIEN

Footballers.

SOULEYMANE

Oh, what a big kid!

A discreet-looking student raises her hand.

FRANÇOIS

Let's move on. Any other difficult words in this text? Henriette? Is there anything that you didn't understand? I imagine there is.

HENRIETTE

"Henceforth".

FRANÇOIS

"Henceforth". Thanks for the prompt, Samantha. All right! I think that will do. Let's take a look at these words. All right. "Austrian"... Wey was the one who picked the word "Austrian". Yes, Esmeralda.

ESMERALDA

I mean, we all know what "Austrian" is. People from Austria.

FRANÇOIS

Okay, but Wey doesn't know and, well, Austrian isn't really...

ESMERALDA

Maybe, but he's the only one, everyone else knows!

FRANÇOIS

Okay, we get the message. You didn't know "misleading", so you're not really in any position to talk about all that. We agree on that?

ESMERALDA

Yes, but everyone knows what "Austrian" means! It's easy.

FRANÇOIS

Look here, nobody's perfect. Besides, "Austrian" is not a very important word. It refers to someone from the land of Austria, which is a pretty tiny country. We can live without the word. For example, can anyone name a famous Austrian?

Not one hand is raised.

BOUBACAR

Mozart. "Wolfgang" Amadeus Mozart.

FRANÇOIS

What do you call him?

BOUBACAR

"Wolfgang" Amadeus Mozart.

FRANÇOIS

He could have been "Wolfgang" maybe if he were English, not Austrian. Mozart was Austrian, yes, but do you know any other famous Austrians? So, basically, Austria could vanish from the map and no one would notice. But, seriously, it's a country south of Germany. So check a map, Wey. You'll see where it is. Souleymane, can you note the words too, like everyone else?

François' blatant insincerity inspires a few collusive smiles in the class. Wey is delighted to have understood that his teacher is joking.

SOULEYMANE

I forgot my things.

FRANÇOIS

And no one can lend you some paper so you can do it?

SOULEYMANE

No, it's okay, I'll do it at home.

FRANÇOIS

You'll do it at home. Sure you will. That's your approach. Not a stroke of work in class and everything done at home.

SOULEYMANE

I'm serious. Don't worry, it'll be okay, it'll be okay... Thanks.

Souleymane, convinced that he has had the last word, seems fairly pleased with himself. François turns to the list of words on the board again.

FRANÇOIS

All right, let's move on to "succulent". "Succulent" is a word that we'll try to guess the meaning of. What's in "succulent"? Suck...

BOUBACAR

Suck off!

ESMERALDA

Jerk.

FRANÇOIS

Very funny, Boubacar. Very witty indeed.

SOULEYMANE

He should be sent out for that, sir.

FRANÇOIS

I'll give you a sentence with "succulent". Bill enjoys a succulent cheeseburger.

On either side of the word on the board, he writes a sentence: "Bill enjoys a succulent cheeseburger." And he underlines the word "succulent". A voice speaks out behind him.

CHERIF

Cheeseburgers are crap, they stink.

FRANÇOIS

Who said that?

RABAH

Cheeseburgers are the best.

CHERIF

I said it. Why a cheeseburger?

FRANÇOIS

Well, since you say they stink, that means you think cheeseburgers aren't succulent.

CHERIF

I don't care, but cheeseburgers are crap.

FRANÇOIS

All right, but what I mean is, what I just said about cheeseburgers should have made the penny drop.

Those who know become more and more impatient.

ANGELICA

Sir, sir, what does that mean?

FRANÇOIS

What does what mean?

ANGELICA

The penny thing...

FRANÇOIS

"To make the penny drop." That should make the penny drop. No one knows the expression?

STUDENT (O.S.)

A clue.

FRANÇOIS

That's it. If the penny drops, it means you're given a clue. When I say if Cherif thinks cheeseburgers stink, it means he doesn't think they're succulent, that should help you see what "succulent" means.

KHOUMBA

What's with the Bills?

FRANÇOIS

What bills?

KHOUMBA

Not bills, the name Bill.

ESMERALDA

Bill and Ben.

KHOUMBA

You always use weird names. Why don't you use...

FRANÇOIS

It's not a weird name. A recent US President was called Bill, remember.

KHOUMBA

Why don't you use Aïssata or Rachid or Ahmed or...

ESMERALDA

You always use whitey names. It's wicked.

FRANÇOIS

What names?

ESMERALDA

Honky names.

FRANÇOIS

What's a honky?

ESMERALDA

Honkies, Frenchies, frogs.

François seems a little put out, as if he had been trying to avoid this kind of discussion.

FRANÇOIS

You're not French, Esmeralda?

ESMERALDA

No, I'm not French.

FRANÇOIS

Really? I didn't know.

ESMERALDA

Well, I am French, but I'm not proud of it.

FRANÇOIS

Fine, I'm not either, actually.

ESMERALDA

Wiped him out!

FRANÇOIS

Neither am I, in fact, I'm not proud to be French either.

KHOUMBA

Why do you use these names then?

FRANÇOIS

Khoumba, if I start choosing names to suit your different ethnic origins, it'll never end.

KHOUMBA & ESMERALDA

But change them a bit...

STUDENT (O.S.)

Yeah, Bill, Ben, Bob...

KHOUMBA & ESMERALDA

Change them a bit.

FRANÇOIS

So what do you suggest?

KHOUMBA & ESMERALDA

Er, Aïssata...

STUDENT (O.S.)

Mamadou, Bintou...

KHOUMBA & ESMERALDA

Fatou. No, Aïssata. Aïssata!

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

In the depths of his locker, François finds a mandarin orange that seems to have been there for some time.

Frédéric comes to sit down next to François, a coffee in his hand.

FRÉDÉRIC

Excuse me. Do you have class 4/3 in French?

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I'm the class supervisor too.

FRÉDÉRIC

Do you already know what book you'll be reading?

FRANÇOIS

No, I haven't decided yet.

FRÉDÉRIC

Because in history, I'll be starting with the Ancien Régime. If you want to link into that, what kind of books are there?

FRANÇOIS

Well, there's the Enlightenment but that's tough for them in their year.

FRÉDÉRIC

How about Voltaire? Is he tough?

FRANÇOIS

Well, he's not easy.

FRÉDÉRIC

I don't know. "Candide" is an easy read..

FRANÇOIS

Not in their year.

FRÉDÉRIC

"Zadig"...

FRANÇOIS

Yes, maybe, but it'd be tough.

INT. CLASS - DAY

François has bags under his eyes and seems to be having a bad day. Behind him, on the board, a verb is conjugated in the imperfect tense. The verb endings have been underlined.

The whole class, silent, works on an exercise. François seems to be miles away. His weary gaze sweeps over the class. All of a sudden, he speaks.

FRANÇOIS

Okay, in 20 seconds, we correct it.

BOUBACAR

No, sir, please! We haven't finished.

With some sweeping gestures, DALLA asks Rabah, in the opposite row, for the time. Rabah starts to reply with equally exaggerated gestures. François seems to snap out of his daze and answers curtly.

FRANÇOIS

We can't spend two hours on the imperfect. Dalla, you can ask me for the time if you want.

With an involuntary wink, she signals to NASSIM whose pen has leaked over his jacket. François, on discovering the scene, raises his eyes to the heavens in exasperation.

NASSIM

Sir, this crap pen keeps leaking! It's getting on my nerves.

FRANÇOIS

Who has a handkerchief for...

Rabah takes a tissue out of his pocket and stands to take it to Nassim.

RABAH

Me!

FRANÇOIS

Rabah, Rabah... Ask before you stand, okay.

Rabah sits back down.

RABAH

May I?

In passing, Rabah trips over his neighbor's bag and stops himself from falling by grabbing Juliette's shoulder, sprawling over her exaggeratedly. She pushes him away roughly.

FRANÇOIS

Yes. Gently, okay.

BOUBACAR

The perv! He touched her tits! The perv!

FRANÇOIS

Come on, just give him the handkerchief! Boubacar, spare us your comments.

SOULEYMANE (O.S.)

Goddam pedophile! You big kid!

ESMERALDA

Sir, sir...

FRANÇOIS

Okay, okay... Quiet!

SOULEYMANE (O.S.)  
 You ain't got a chick or what? You need  
 to press up against chicks, Rabah!

FRANÇOIS  
 Hey, take it easy!

Only Esmeralda doesn't burst out laughing. She seems  
 bothered by something. As she thinks, she ends up asking  
 her question.

FRANÇOIS  
 (to Esmeralda)  
 Yes...

ESMERALDA  
 Sir, why do they say the imperfect  
 indicative?

SOULEYMANE (O.S.)  
 If you want chicks, let me know, I'll  
 give you contacts.

François seems happy that Esmeralda is so motivated. He  
 speaks to her with gentleness.

FRANÇOIS  
 Quiet, Souleymane! All right, Esmeralda,  
 why the indicative?

She raises her eyes to the heavens.

ESMERALDA  
 You're pushing it! If I knew, I wouldn't  
 ask!

FRANÇOIS  
 I can imagine. How about the others? Does  
 anyone know why we specify the imperfect  
 indicative? Why not just the imperfect?  
 Nassim.

NASSIM  
 Do you mind if I go wash my hands  
 because...

FRANÇOIS  
 Go on, wash them and get it over with.

STUDENT (O.S.)  
 He's gonna visit the corridors.

FRANÇOIS  
 Make it quick!

STUDENT (O.S.)

He'll be back in a week! I'm going with him!

FRANÇOIS

All right, enough! If we talk specifically about the imperfect indicative, that means it's different than another imperfect. Which imperfect is that? Agam?

AGAM answers calmly.

AGAM

The imperfect subjunctive.

FRANÇOIS

Exactly. The imperfect subjunctive. Can anyone give me an example of the imperfect subjunctive? I don't believe it, Koumba, go on.

KHOUMBA

Hold on, I may be wrong...

François gives her an encouraging smile.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I think so too.

KHOUMBA

I were.

FRANÇOIS

I were. Of course, from the verb "to werr"?

KHOUMBA

No, I were... I don't know.

ESMERALDA

I wuz.

KHOUMBA

No, I were, you were, you were, they were...

FRANÇOIS

All right. That's not bad but you use it wrongly. You vaguely recall the imperfect subjunctive. Imagine I say: "He insists that I be" - let's say - "in shape." What is "be" in that example? Eva?

EVA

The present subjunctive.

FRANÇOIS

Very good. For the imperfect subjunctive, we follow the sequence of tenses and use a past: "He insisted..."

BOUBACAR

He insisted... he insisted that I be.

FRANÇOIS

"He insisted that I..." Koumba?

KHOUMBA

Were.

FRANÇOIS

Were, yes!

ESMERALDA

You really think I'll tell my mom. "He insisted that I were'd been in shape?" And that she'll understand?

FRANÇOIS

Not "I were'd been". Learn to use it before you start complaining.

ESMERALDA

He insisted that I were'd been in shape.

FRANÇOIS

"That I were in shape". Use the sequence of tenses.

ESMERALDA

But no one says that in real life, it's true, it's true!

KHOUMBA

I was right! "I were"!

FRANÇOIS

All right, will you let me answer the question that you asked me? If you care.

ESMERALDA

Yes, you may.

FRANÇOIS

The first thing I notice is, before mastering something, the imperfect subjunctive, you're already telling me it's no use. Start by mastering it, then you can call its use into question.

ESMERALDA

Sir, why are you criticizing us?

FRANÇOIS

What?

ANGELICA

They're right, it's not the way people talk now, that's the way they talked in the old days. Even my gran didn't say that.

BOUBACAR

Or your great granddad. It's from the Middle Ages!

FRANÇOIS

No, it's not from the Middle Ages and for starters

BOUBACAR

It is!

ESMERALDA

Of course it is!

KHOUMBA

It's bourgeois.

ANGELICA

Tell me, when was the last time you heard someone talk like that? When was the last time you heard someone talk like that?

FRANÇOIS

Yesterday, with friends, we used the imperfect subjunctive...

(he is briefly interrupted by  
jeers)

All right, all right... Can I reply?

BOUBACAR

Yep!

FRANÇOIS

I'm ready to talk this over, but calmly. All right, it's true not everyone talks that way. In fact, people who do are pretty rare, I'll grant you that. I'd even say only snobs use the imperfect subjunctive.

ANGELICA

What's a snob?

FRANÇOIS

Snobs are slightly affected, slightly precious people who tend to put on airs.

He makes an precious gesture with his wrist. A student's voice rises up from the back of the class, convinced that he has found the answer.

BOUBACAR

Homosexuals?

This remark makes François smile.

FRANÇOIS

No, not homosexuals. You can be affected and refined without being homosexual, Boubacar. In any case, what I see is that this register may seem formal and a bit affected and even bourgeois. But the important fact is these different registers exist as I keep telling you, and as I shall carry on telling you, I think. You need to be able to use them all: familiar, current, formal, oral and written. Move between them and use them all. Yes, Lucie?

LUCIE

How do we know what's for written and what's for oral?

FRANÇOIS

Why is a word more for one register than the other? Normally, that's something that you pick up as you go along. You need to use intuition.

DAMIEN

What's intuition?

FRANÇOIS

Intuition is when you can't use thinking.  
When you can't really... It's not knowing  
but more like sensing something. That's  
it. Intuition is when you sense things.

DAMIEN

What if you don't sense them?

FRANÇOIS

If you don't sense them, well... You gain  
intuition by using the language. That's  
when you learn to distinguish almost  
automatically between oral and written  
styles.

BOUBACAR

Sir, Souleymane wants to say something.

SOULEYMANE

Shut your mouth! Shut it!

FRANÇOIS

What does Souleymane want to say?

BOUBACAR

But... please... okay... say it!

FRANÇOIS

What is it? What? Calm down!

BOUBACAR

If he says it, you'll tell.

FRANÇOIS

Cut it out! No fighting!

SOULEYMANE

I'll whop you!

BOUBACAR

Go ahead, bro, just quit playing the  
tough guy!

François is surprised to see Souleymane, who has been  
talking with his neighbor for the last few minutes, with  
his hand raised.

FRANÇOIS

Souleymane, what's wrong?

SOULEYMANE

I'll whop you one!

FRANÇOIS

Boubacar, turn round. Boubacar, turn round. What is it, Souleymane?

SOULEYMANE

Nothing.

Boubacar, who seems to know what his friend's question is, takes over from him.

BOUBACAR

Say it, bro.

FRANÇOIS

Apparently something is up.

BOUBACAR

Don't send him to the principal if he says it.

SOULEYMANE

If I tell you, I'm good for Guantanamo!

François takes an obvious pleasure in pushing Souleymane who, himself, is having fun upping the stakes.

FRANÇOIS

No, no.

STUDENTS

(as one)

Guantanamo, Guantanamo, Guantanamo!

SOULEYMANE

Forget it, I'll be tased.

FRANÇOIS

No, you won't be "tased", as you put it.

SOULEYMANE

No, no, no.

FRANÇOIS

What is it? You have a question?

SOULEYMANE

Yep.

FRANÇOIS

So ask it.

SOULEYMANE

It's too wicked. It's too wicked!

FRANÇOIS  
No, it's not too wicked.

SOULEYMANE  
But it's the pits for you.

FRANÇOIS  
Look, now we've come to this, just ask  
it!

SOULEYMANE  
I have your word?

FRANÇOIS  
Hurry it up!

SOULEYMANE  
I don't know... This is what I heard, okay?  
I didn't say it but I heard... People say  
you like men. I didn't say it!

FRANÇOIS  
Who says that?

SOULEYMANE  
Well, just people, see...

FRANÇOIS  
Really?

SOULEYMANE  
They say Mr. Marin likes men and all  
that.

Different reactions in the class. We hear laughter and  
cries of surprise. François smiles as if he had been  
expecting this question sooner or later.

FRANÇOIS  
Okay. So others say that, not you?

SOULEYMANE  
No...

FRANÇOIS  
No, you're not interested?

Souleymane squirms on his chair, smiling awkwardly.

SOULEYMANE  
No, I don't give a damn.

FRANÇOIS  
So why ask the question then?

SOULEYMANE

It's for the others. I'm a spokesman.

FRANÇOIS

But the question doesn't interest you at all?

SOULEYMANE

I don't give a damn. If you like men, fine.

FRANÇOIS

Exactly!

Unwilling to back down now that he has come this far and perhaps basking in the prestige that he is acquiring with the rest of the class, Souleymane insists:

SOULEYMANE

So is it true or not?

FRANÇOIS

So you are asking me!

SOULEYMANE

Homosexual isn't an insult, sir. It isn't an insult.

FRANÇOIS

You say it isn't but it seems to be a problem for you. You find it odd, men liking other men.

SOULEYMANE

Maybe it is, I don't know. But is it true or not?

FRANÇOIS

No, it's not. Feel better now?

SOULEYMANE

Yeah? Sure.

FRANÇOIS

Sorry to disappoint you. That's how it is.

Souleymane simply pouts dubiously.

ESMERALDA

Wiped him out big time!

FRANÇOIS

All right, if Souleymane doesn't mind,  
now he's settled his hang-ups, let's get  
back to the imperfect indicative.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

From a high angle, we see the students horsing around  
during the break. Souleymane is taking photos with his  
cell phone.

SOULEYMANE

Change the pose, change the pose! Yeah,  
like that! Not bad. Go on, move. Hey,  
what are you doing?

KHOUMBA

Cut it out, please!

SOULEYMANE

What's up? Who asked you? Look at your  
mug!

KHOUMBA

Hey, give me a break, it's fucking okay!  
Take these jerks, then we'll see.

SOULEYMANE

Go on, show me your backs. Yeah, one  
more, go on.

ESMERALDA

Wow, that's a classy display.

SOULEYMANE

You bet!

KHOUMBA

Got one for me?

SOULEYMANE

You can't afford it.

KHOUMBA

How much is it?

SOULEYMANE

Too much.

KHOUMBA

Stop thinking I'm broke like you.

INT. CLASS - DAY

Justine comes up to the board, looking a little worried. Her classmates stare at her as if she were climbing the gallows. She hesitates for a second but then picks up the chalk and takes the plunge. She starts declining a verb, making a mess of it, then hurriedly erases the word that she has just written. The suspense is perceptible. Justine ends up turning to François.

ANGELICA

Hold on, that's not it.

KHOUMBA

She screwed up there. She thinks it's a regular verb.

ANGELICA

No, the verb's "swim". Swimmèd.

FRANÇOIS

Quiet!

ANGELICA

I swimmèd.

LOUISE

Justine... Swummed!

FRANÇOIS

Justine, work it out yourself.

BOUBACAR

Swammed!

KHOUMBA

Swummed. That's better, it mixes the two!

BOUBACAR

It's swammed, it's swammed!

ANGELICA

That's not it!

BOUBACAR

It is!

RACHEL

She put swemmed.

STUDENT

Shut up! Swammed is...

BOUBACAR  
Try swommed!

FRANÇOIS  
All right, thank you, you can sit down.

SOULEYMANE  
You big kid! Swommed!

FRANÇOIS  
Let's see...

RABAH  
She can't write!

FRANÇOIS  
She can't write? Can you, Rabah?

RABAH  
You bet!

FRANÇOIS  
Go on then. Conjugate it properly.  
Correct her.

RABAH  
First, swimmmed.

FRANÇOIS  
No, carry on. Cut it out, the rest of  
you!

RABAH  
Swammed.

FRANÇOIS  
Wrong again.

SOULEYMANE  
He sucks.

RABAH  
Just kidding. That's not what it is. It's  
not like that.

FRANÇOIS  
So what is it?

RABAH  
S.W... Without an "I".

FRANÇOIS

Right, no "I". Why make fun of Justine, when you can't do any better than she can?

RABAH

I can.

FRANÇOIS

At least Justine got off to a good start...  
(to the rest of the class)  
That's enough now!

ESMERALDA

What's up, sir?

FRANÇOIS

Can I explain something to you?

RABAH

It's swammed.

FRANÇOIS

What I'm seeing here, is that you can't focus for more than 20 seconds, like 3-year-olds. People aged 13, 14 or 15 like you're supposed to be... If I ask a question, they should answer fast and then we waste no more time.

KHOUMBA

Your kidding around goes too far!

FRANÇOIS

Not at all, I don't think I go too far.

KHOUMBA

Everyone thinks you go too far. Sorry but...

ESMERALDA

I think so too!

FRANÇOIS

Just a second, Koumba. Everyone thinks so or only you think so?

ESMERALDA

No, everyone!

FRANÇOIS

Speak for yourself for once.

KHOUMBA

Everyone thinks so and I think you push it too, I mean, what is this?

FRANÇOIS

I'm ready to cut you some slack and leave you right where you are...

ESMERALDA

Teach is spitting hate!

FRANÇOIS

...but you'll never get anywhere!

KHOUMBA

That's no reason to push it too far!  
That's no reason to push it too far!

FRANÇOIS

It is. That's exactly why, the reason I just gave you.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

Vincent bursts into the staff room that is particularly calm today. He sits down and starts to complain.

VINCENT

I'm sick of these clowns! Sick of them! I can't take any more! They're nothing, they know nothing, they look right through you when you try to teach them. They can stay in their shit! I'm not going to help them. They're so basic, so insincere, always looking for trouble. Go ahead, guys. Stay in your crap neighborhood. You'll be here all your lives and it serves you damn well right! I'll see the principal and tell him I'm not working with 3/2 again. No more technology for the rest of the year. Too bad. It's been three months now and they haven't done a single thing! Have you seen them in the yard? It's like they're in heat! They're all over each other like animals. It's crazy! It's the same in class. Kevin spent a whole hour going... "duh, duh, duh." I've never seen the like of it in 5 years. Enough! No more. We're not animals. Sorry, I'm... It's dumb.

HERVÉ

Come on. Let's get some air.

INT. CLASS - DAY

It's cold outside. The students, in their winter clothing, seem very excitable. On their desks, we see "The Diary of Anne Frank". Some of them read the first few pages of it amid the general hubbub.

FRANÇOIS

One extract isn't a lot to read for today. No one did it? We're wasting a crazy amount of time here. Okay, let's read it or reread it then. Who wants to read? Great... Excellent work atmosphere today! Koumba, go on.

KHOUMBA

I'm not reading!

FRANÇOIS

What do you mean, you're not reading?

KHOUMBA

I don't want to read.

FRANÇOIS

So the class revolves around your desires now?

KHOUMBA

I don't want to read!

FRANÇOIS

I don't care if you don't want to read!

Koumba's sole reply is a sneering sound that immediately annoys François. He addresses the other twenty-four students as witnesses.

FRANÇOIS

What did Koumba just do? Wey?

WEY

Sneer.

FRANÇOIS

No, I meant her attitude. What did she show?

They all think hard.

BOUBACAR

Insolence.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, that's right, you're an expert.

KHOUMBA

You're standing there, all angrulo with me! What is this?

FRANÇOIS

I'm not, that's not true. And try saying it in French. What am I?

KHOUMBA

"Angrulo".

FRANÇOIS

Say it in everyday French, please.

KHOUMBA

You're wired at me.

FRANÇOIS

That's normal French?

KHOUMBA

You've got it in for me!

François is clearly spoiling for a fight and doesn't want to leave it at this.

FRANÇOIS

Not at all, I just want you to read. And I think I have the right to ask you to read, don't I?

KHOUMBA

No.

FRANÇOIS

You don't think so?

KHOUMBA

No. No one has read it and you're picking on me! What is this?

FRANÇOIS

Not at all, I'm not picking on you. I want to work and I've chosen you...

KHOUMBA

Yeah, sure, give me a break.

FRANÇOIS

And I have the right to as your French teacher.

KHOUMBA

Just drop it, I said! Drop it!

FRANÇOIS

Shut up now! We're listening!

KHOUMBA

Yeah, sure! No way, I'm not reading. You tell me to shut up, then to read. What is this?

FRANÇOIS

What's what?

KHOUMBA

Make your mind up! Think it through!

François has heard enough.

FRANÇOIS

All right, you can come see me after class and we'll talk it over. It won't be fun.

KHOUMBA

Yeah, great!

FRANÇOIS

You won't say that later. All right, Esmeralda, are you on strike too or can you read for us?

ESMERALDA

It's her life. I don't give a damn.

FRANÇOIS

Very good. In that case, will you read for us?

ESMERALDA

I'd be delighted to!

FRANÇOIS

All right, Esmeralda, we're listening.

While Esmeralda reads the extract, the other students listen more or less attentively. Koumba, on the other hand, seems as furious as before.

ESMERALDA

"Dear Kitty, I'm known as a bundle of contradictions. As I've told you several times, my soul is split in two.

(MORE)

## ESMERALDA (CONT'D)

On one side, my exuberant cheerfulness, my mocking approach to everything, my joy in life and my ability to take things lightly. By that, I mean not seeing any wrong in flirting, giving a kiss, embracing someone, or telling a tasteless joke. That side lies in wait, pushing back the other side which is more beautiful, purer and deeper. The truth is that no one knows Anne's better side and that's why most people can't stand me. I can be an amusing clown for an afternoon, but then everyone has had enough of me. So the nice Anne has never once been seen in company. But, in her loneliness, she always triumphs. My best to you. Anne Frank. Anne's diary ends here."

## FRANÇOIS

Anne Frank's diary ends here. Why? Because the police turned up at the rooms where Anne Frank's family was hiding and deported them all. Anne Frank died shortly after. That's what I asked earlier and what we've talked about several times already. When I read this, I learn about Anne Frank because she talks about herself and so I get to know her. When I ask you to write your own self-portraits, I'll expect the same. In other words, to learn things through your feelings. You can also talk about facts that will allow me to know you better. Yes, Lucie?

## LUCIE

What we write won't be as gripping as... as what Anne Frank wrote. Our lives aren't as gripping.

## FRANÇOIS

All right... Juliette?

## JULIETTE

Well, someone aged 70 could talk about their life, but we have nothing to tell at 13.

## FRANÇOIS

I don't know, at 14, 15 or even 13, you've had experiences.

JULIETTE

Less than a man or a woman aged 70.  
They've lived a lot more, they're nearly  
through...

STUDENT (O.S.)

They have more to pass on.

FRANÇOIS

It's funny. Basically, you don't think  
your lives are interesting.

ANGELICA

I don't know, sir. What do we do? We just  
come to school, go home, eat and sleep.

FRANÇOIS

Really? You come to school, eat, sleep.  
Fine. Okay, so the bare facts of your  
life are dull. But what you feel,  
Angelica, that's what's interesting.

ANGELICA

But that's my business.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, maybe, but I'm interested.

ANGELICA

Yes, but you're different.

FRANÇOIS

Why am I different? I perfectly normal.

ANGELICA

Because you're a teacher, that's why.

FRANÇOIS

But this isn't the teacher talking.

ESMERALDA

It's your job.

FRANÇOIS

You could say it's the human being.

ANGELICA

Okay, but well... I think you're only  
saying that to get us to talk and stuff  
but it's not true.

FRANÇOIS

Really? What isn't true?

ANGELICA

The fact that you're interested in knowing all that.

FRANÇOIS

So you think I'm lying, that I'm not interested in you at all and that I'm pushing at this to convince you it's interesting?

ANGELICA

No, it's not that but it's not as interesting as you say.

FRANÇOIS

Maybe I am exaggerating a little. It's only natural since you don't agree with me. But, deep down, I'm totally sincere. Why is it such a problem for you to talk about your lives? Boubacar?

BOUBACAR

Well, there's stuff... There's private stuff.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, of course. What could be hard to say about your private lives? Burak?

BURAK

Well, we may be ashamed to say certain things.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, it has to do with shame. There are things you find it hard to say and even harder to write maybe.

BURAK

Well, yes.

FRANÇOIS

And... in your life, your personal life, when were you ashamed?

BOUBACAR

You can be ashamed of a pal's mom.

FRANÇOIS

Ashamed of a pal's mom. Why? Because you find her ugly?

BOUBACAR

No, it's not that. For instance, Rabah's mom... She offered me lunch at his place but I refused because I was ashamed.

FRANÇOIS

You were ashamed to eat with Rabah's mother?

BOUBACAR

Yeah.

FRANÇOIS

Because you think she's unworthy of you?

BOUBACAR

No.

FRANÇOIS

I don't understand. Tell me why, Boubacar.

BOUBACAR

I'm ashamed to eat in front of her because I respect her.

FRANÇOIS

So, you never eat in front of people you respect?

BOUBACAR

No, it's not that. I mean, she's not my girlfriend!

FRANÇOIS

So you can only eat in front of your girlfriend? Tell me why, Boubacar. I'm interested.

BOUBACAR

I can't explain it. In any case, I'm ashamed... I always hang out with Rabah, so I respect his mom. I don't eat in front of her, that's all.

FRANÇOIS

So we'll know now that if Boubacar eats in front of us, it means he doesn't respect us.

BOUBACAR

No, it's not that! You can't understand. You can't understand.

FRANÇOIS

I can't understand, I'm not smart enough?

BOUBACAR

No, it's not that. You just can't understand.

FRANÇOIS

Rabah.

RABAH

The other week, I was at a party with nothing but Camemberters.

FRANÇOIS

Nothing but Camemberters?

RABAH

Yeah, like you.

FRANÇOIS

Remind us what a Camembert is.

RABAH

Someone who stinks of cheese.

FRANÇOIS

So you went to a party where everyone stank of cheese?

RABAH

They were all in suits and ties. I was in my baggies and got these weird looks.

FRANÇOIS

And you were ashamed?

RABAH

Yeah. Because of the looks.

FRANÇOIS

Basically, they were embarrassed in front of you and so you felt embarrassed in front of them.

RABAH

No, they weren't embarrassed. They looked at me like I was an E.T.

FRANÇOIS

I see.

BOUBACAR (O.S.)

But you are an E.T.!

RABAH  
"Why's that Arab here?"

FRANÇOIS  
Okay, so it was a race thing or something...

RABAH  
I don't know... I don't know. But the snacks were bacon-flavored.

FRANÇOIS  
So? Is that...

RABAH  
So I... abstained.

FRANÇOIS  
Right. Bacon, ham... Okay, I get it. Wey?

WEY  
Young people these days have no shame.

FRANÇOIS  
Young people now?

WEY  
Yes.

FRANÇOIS  
Like you, for instance?

ESMERALDA  
Gimme a break! Drop your briefs!

WEY  
You see, they have no shame. It's normal. Always normal.

FRANÇOIS  
Are you like them, Wey, or do you feel shame?

WEY  
No, I'm not like them.

FRANÇOIS  
You feel shame from time to time?

WEY  
Yes, shame for them.

ESMERALDA

Shut your mouth! I'll waste your ugly mug! You should be ashamed, looking the way you do.

FRANÇOIS

Hey! Hey! Anyone can speak but you stay polite, okay. So, Wey, why are you ashamed for them?

WEY

They have no shame. They yell, they hit each other. They make jokes, bother others. No shame.

FRANÇOIS

But, Wey, aren't you confusing shame and discipline? You find the others rowdy and impolite?

EVA

It can be shameful, sir.

WEY

Yeah. Yeah, that can be shameful too.

FRANÇOIS

All right.

LOUISE

You can be ashamed of your appearance.

FRANÇOIS

Absolutely. You can be ashamed of your appearance. Tell me, Louise, are you ever ashamed of something physical?

LOUISE

My ears.

FRANÇOIS

Your ears?

BOUBACAR (O.S.)

Can we see them?

FRANÇOIS

You're ashamed of your ears? What's wrong with them?

LOUISE

They stick out.

FRANÇOIS

You think they stick out. Okay, well, I think that covers it all. You have all you need to figure it out. Take out your exercise books. Note the following exercise for next Thursday. It's very simple: "Write your self-portrait." Remember a self-portrait isn't an autobiography. I don't want your life story. Describe yourself and your personality. We'll read them in class and see how we can use them. Don't forget.

STUDENT (O.S.)

Goodbye, sir.

FRANÇOIS

Goodbye. Hey, just a second, Koumba! You know I want to see you. Give me your report book.

KHOUMBA

Why?

Koumba tosses the report book at him, which he doesn't appreciate.

FRANÇOIS

You know why. No, give it to me. Politely. That's enough now. Put your photo on it someday. Is it normal to refuse to read when a teacher asks you to? Is that normal?

KHOUMBA

There's others in the class!

FRANÇOIS

Just because you're not the only one who screws up doesn't mean I can turn a blind eye to this. Does it?

KHOUMBA

Okay.

FRANÇOIS

What happened this summer? What happened during the vacation?

KHOUMBA

I didn't see you during the vacation.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I know you didn't. That's why this is a problem for me. At the end of the year in June, we'd gotten on pretty well together. You participated in class. Since September, since the start of this year, you're not cooperative, you keep sulking, you refuse to read, etc, etc... What happened?

KHOUMBA

I just don't like reading anymore. Can you hurry, please?

FRANÇOIS

No, I won't hurry! Explain. Why have things changed all of a sudden?

KHOUMBA

I can't stay a kid forever.

FRANÇOIS

So it's a kid thing to cooperate? So that's it.

KHOUMBA

I don't like reading anymore.

FRANÇOIS

Sure.

KHOUMBA

There's others in the class.

FRANÇOIS

Of course, when you work, it's... I'll give it back when I've finished. Okay?

KHOUMBA

But I'm in a hurry, my mom's waiting for me.

FRANÇOIS

Maybe, but I want an apology first. An apology for what you did. "I apologize for being insolent, sir."

KHOUMBA

Sorry. Okay?

FRANÇOIS

No, not "sorry". "I apologize for being insolent." Go ahead.

KHOUMBA

I apologize for being insolent, sir...

FRANÇOIS

No, "I apologize for being insolent." But be sincere. I want a real apology.

KHOUMBA

Can you hurry up, please? My mom's waiting. Maybe you have plenty of time...

FRANÇOIS

Your mother can wait. She's waiting for you to apologize. This is the ideal moment. I want a sincere apology that'll stand for the rest of the year. We won't go on like this.

KHOUMBA

I apologize for being insolent to you.

FRANÇOIS

More conviction!

KHOUMBA

Hey, come on... I'm not saying it 50 times!

FRANÇOIS

You two! What are you up to?

ESMERALDA

Nothing. We're waiting.

FRANÇOIS

Sure, sure...

KHOUMBA

May I?

FRANÇOIS

Hurry, I'm listening!

KHOUMBA

I apologize for being insolent. May I go now, please? Thank you.

ESMERALDA

You joker!

FRANÇOIS

Cut it out!

Khumba has spoken mechanically, with a total lack of conviction.

François ends up handing her report book back. She takes it and skips over to the door. Just as she is about to vanish off along the corridor, she turns to François and exclaims.

KHOUMBA

I didn't mean it.

ESMERALDA

You wiped him out big time! Way too wicked!

François leaps up from his desk but it's too late. The girl has already vanished off along the corridor, to the giggles of her friends. François kicks a chair in annoyance.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

It's night time. We are in the meeting room. The tables have been set out in a U-shape. Five or six teachers, a member of the school's administration, parents' representatives, two students (a boy and a girl from year four) are present.

PRINCIPAL

Two weeks ago, at the last meeting, the teachers suggested introducing a penalty point system for the students based on the driving license system. If students broke a rule, they would lose points. As it's the teachers' idea, I'll let them speak.

STÉPHANE

Since last September, we've noticed an increase in problems within the school. Punishment has no effect on the students. So we had the idea of a penalty system. The students would have, for example, six points each and, depending on the misdeed, they'd lose one or two points.

PARENTS' REP #1

And when they run out of points?

STÉPHANE

When they get down to zero, they go before the disciplinary committee.

PARENTS' REP #2

As a parents' representative, this is typical of the school's bad habits.

(MORE)

## PARENTS' REP #2 (CONT'D)

You always condemn the students but never praise them.

## SOPHIE

But they earn praise on their own. They do it with their grades, by moving up a class and we do it in staff meetings by encouraging them to work if their grades are below average. Then there's the honor roll, the congratulations... That all counts!

## BURAK'S MOTHER

In your system, you take away points for misdeeds but why not go further and give points to those who do good things?

## SOPHIE

Like gold stars!

## JULIE

I'm all for praising the students but if students collect points and end up with 34 points, say, that leaves room for all kinds of trouble we can't control.

## FRÉDÉRIC

Without going as far as these imaginary 34 points, six points to start with means they can cause trouble without punishment. I'm sorry, but losing a point or two isn't a real punishment. It can create a dangerous sense of impunity. For me, the idea's totally wrong-headed.

## PRINCIPAL

In that case, we could find a punishment where the students lose all their points in one go. But why bother with the points in that case?

## SOPHIE

That's the whole problem.

## PRINCIPAL

It's not simple.

## FRANÇOIS

You know, what you call a sense of impunity gives us room to maneuver. When you're dealing with punishments that are cut and dried, you can't adapt them to each case.

FRÉDÉRIC

No, I don't agree. The rules apply in the same way to all the students. They break them, they're punished. If not, why bother with rules?

FRANÇOIS

Maybe, but dealing with extremely strict rules creates the greatest tension. Take cell phones, for instance. We agreed on a rule that cell phones were not allowed in class. Well, sorry, but I break that rule because I realized it wasn't a problem for me. There's room to maneuver, to be tolerant.

FRÉDÉRIC

Sure, that's the reign of the arbitrary.

FARIDA

No, the law and the spirit of the law.

PRINCIPAL

Now then, I know we could talk all night but that's not possible. We have other topics to tackle. In particular, one vital issue, a very sensitive one, concerning the coffee machine that the teachers have asked to talk about.

SOPHIE

It's a sensitive issue, all right! Everyone agrees there's a real problem with the coffee machine this year. The price of a coffee has gone up from 40 centimes to 50 centimes. That may seem petty but since we drink several coffees a day at 8, at 10 or at 4 in the afternoon, it works out at a lot. So we've clubbed together to buy a coffee maker. That way, we can drink as much coffee as we want without having to count.

PRINCIPAL

Monsieur Pierre will be delighted to reply.

Monsieur Pierre, the bursar, starts speaking shyly. All the same, we can tell that nothing will stop him.

MONSIEUR PIERRE

Yes. First of all, I'd like to remind you that this machine was installed in 2001 to replace a machine that needed the intervention of an outside company for restocking, repairs, etc. It was very expensive and not at all profitable. We switched to the new machine which isn't profitable yet.

SOPHIE

I'm sorry to hear that!

Used to the bursar's endless speeches, the people present exchange embarrassed looks that Monsieur Pierre, his eyes glued to his notes, haughtily ignores.

MONSIEUR PIERRE

And so we increased the price of coffee by ten centimes to fifty centimes. There. The thing has to be economically viable.

SOPHIE

Isn't anyone shocked by this?

PRINCIPAL

It's clear and logical to me.

INT. MEETING ROOM & CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Gathered around a meager buffet, all the people attending the meeting sip champagne. François quickly slips out to smoke a cigarette in the yard.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

We find François alone, walking down a long, dark corridor as the sounds of the small party fade.

INT. STAFF ROOM - NIGHT

He pushes open the door of the staff room. Two CLEANING WOMEN who were chatting peacefully pick up their gear and apologize. François tells them that they can stay, but the two women have already slipped out into the corridor. François opens his locker and pulls out a pile of papers on which the mandarin orange is balanced. François puts the fruit back in the depths of the locker and automatically sniffs the first sheet before reading it. It's the work that he gave Khoumba as punishment.

We can just make out the title, written in block capitals: "RESPECT".

KHOUMBA (V.O.)

"Respect." #Adolescents learn to respect their teachers little by little because of their threats or the fear of having problems. For starters, I respect you and respect must be mutual. For instance, I don't say you're hysterical, so why do you say I am? I've always respected you so I don't understand why I have to write this. In any case, I know you have it in for me but I don't know why. I have decided to sit at the back of the class from now on to avoid any other conflicts, unless you come looking for them. I admit I can be insolent, but only if I'm provoked. I won't look at you again, so you can't say my look is insolent. In theory, in a French class, you talk about French, not your grandma, your sister or girls' periods. And so, from now on, I won't speak to you again. Signed Koumba.

INT. CLASS - DAY

Khoumba's voice continues over this next scene. While François is at his desk, the students work on their self-portraits with more or less care. Some have "The Diary of Anne Frank" open on their desks. Others daydream or chat in low voices. On the blackboard, we can read, "I work on my self-portrait". François goes from table to table, advising the different students.

FRANÇOIS

Why are you hiding it like that? What's wrong?

RABAH

It's a secret.

FRANÇOIS

A secret? It won't stay a secret for long. Esmeralda, why have you changed places?

ESMERALDA

No reason, I just wanted to.

FRANÇOIS

Is there a problem?

ESMERALDA

No, not at all. No problem. I just wanted a change of scene.

He turns to Koumba who immediately looks away.

FRANÇOIS

Okay, that's enough. Let's get to work.

BOUBACAR

No, sir, please! Please, sir!

FRANÇOIS

You're just copying what you did at home. You've had plenty of time.

BOUBACAR

That's right, that's right but, sir, we have to do it neatly here. Please!

FRANÇOIS

Esmeralda, we're listening.

ESMERALDA

Huh? I have to?

FRANÇOIS

Yes, absolutely.

ESMERALDA

My name is Esmeralda Ouertani, I'm 14 and I live at 9, Allée du Père Julien Dhuit, Paris 20, with my two parents and my three brothers and sisters. Later, I'd like to be a policewoman because people say all policemen are bad and so we need good ones. If not, I'd like to be a rapper and I'm a fan of Bakar, Médine, Younes, Marvin and Mafiak'l Fry. Otherwise, I like eating, sleeping and hanging out in the 'hood.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, or rather?

ESMERALDA

The neighborhood.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, so why don't you change it since you know how? When you write, you use the standard style. Don't wait until I correct you. Wey, go on.

WEY

All right. My name's Wey, I'm Chinese, I'm 15, I have two sisters, I'm the youngest. My hobby is playing video games, at least 4 hours a day. I find it hard using French correctly. It's so hard expressing myself that others don't understand me. That's why I don't communicate much. I hardly ever go out. Nothing much interests me outside. The environment doesn't suit me here since I'm allergic but I don't know what.

ESMERALDA

Allergic to yourself, that's why they can't find what you're allergic to!

FRANÇOIS

That's good, Wey. I feel that I know you better after hearing your self-portrait. That's the goal. To tell us things.

RABAH (O.S.)

It just happens to be good when it's him.

FRANÇOIS

What?

RABAH

His just happens to be good, not ours. Ours never are.

FRANÇOIS

No, not at all. If Wey's work is good, I congratulate him. And I'll gladly congratulate you if you've managed to do it well. That's the truth... In fact, Rabah, you can read us your self-portrait.

RABAH

No, I'm not reading.

FRANÇOIS

So how can I congratulate you if you don't?

RABAH

I don't need that.

FRANÇOIS

Well make your mind up!

BOUBACAR (O.S.)  
You want compliments.

FRANÇOIS  
Go on, we're listening.

RABAH  
My name's Rabah, I'm 14, I listen to rap.  
I love my village in Kabylia and go there  
every year. I like music, rap and slam. I  
have two brothers but I don't like  
school. I don't like tramps. I like  
Zidane, I like to talk and I like Psy 4  
de la Rime's videos. Go Marseille!

FRANÇOIS  
We can manage without Marseille.

ESMERALDA (O.S.)  
Go Paris, you mean!

FRANÇOIS  
We don't really need it in a self-  
portrait.

CHERIF  
Sir, he didn't read it all! He skipped  
two lines!

RABAH  
That's all! I read the lot!

FRANÇOIS  
Hey, cut it out!

RABAH  
Go, dude!

FRANÇOIS  
Boubacar!

BOUBACAR  
"I like to make love".

RABAH  
I never wrote that!

BOUBACAR  
"I like to look good for the women and I  
like summer to see girls' cleavage."

FRANÇOIS

Okay, all right.  
 (reactions from the other  
 students)  
 Why not, Rabah, why not?

RABAH

I never wrote that! I won't say who did.

FRANÇOIS

It looks a lot like your writing though.

RABAH

My writing? No way.

FRANÇOIS

It does. But there's no shame in liking  
 cleavage.

RABAH

Is this my writing?

François looks around the class. His gaze settles on  
 Souleymane.

FRANÇOIS

It's not a sin. Souleymane, stop rocking  
 and read your self-portrait. I'm curious  
 to hear it.

The adolescent, sprawled on his chair, sits up straight,  
 taking his time.

SOULEYMANE

Huh?

FRANÇOIS

No, not huh.

SOULEYMANE

I didn't write anything, sir.

FRANÇOIS

But I'm sure you did, I saw you writing  
 earlier.

SOULEYMANE

No, I wrote nothing.

FRANÇOIS

You did.

SOULEYMANE

Nothing!

FRANÇOIS

We're listening.

SOULEYMANE

I'm Souleymane. I have nothing to say about me because no one knows me but me.

After a moment's silence, François says ironically.

FRANÇOIS

(calming the jeers of the other students)

Okay, okay, enough... That's good. A bit long maybe. How come you can't make the effort that the others did?

SOULEYMANE

I don't like talking about myself, that's all.

FRANÇOIS

How come the others make the effort and you don't?

SOULEYMANE

Well, if they do, that's their problem. I don't talk about my life, okay.

FRANÇOIS

Really?

This leads to a little laughter. Esmeralda can't stop herself from making fun of Souleymane.

ESMERALDA

It's not that he doesn't want to, he just can't write, that's all!

SOULEYMANE

What's up, you cop? You want to be a cop and you're talking to me? Goddam cop!

ESMERALDA

I can live with it.

FRANÇOIS

All right, that's enough!

SOULEYMANE

Get lost, cop. Arrest guys instead of talking to me. Got your cuffs?

ESMERALDA

Chill, French guy.

SOULEYMANE  
Your breath stinks!

ESMERALDA  
Chill, okay.

SOULEYMANE  
Heard of Aquafresh?

FRANÇOIS  
Souleymane, Souleymane, there's no need  
to be offensive.

SOULEYMANE  
I can lend you a toothbrush if you want!

FRANÇOIS  
Okay, cut it out. Souleymane, you're a  
lot better at oral insults, you're great  
at that, but when it comes to writing,  
nobody's home.

ESMERALDA  
He can't even write his name.

Souleymane's sole reply is to point to a tattoo in Arabic  
that he has on his neck.

SOULEYMANE  
Zip it! What does this say?

ESMERALDA  
Go on then, the same old shit with your  
Koran.

Souleymane becomes indignant.

SOULEYMANE  
Shut your mouth. What's wrong with the  
Koran? I'll spare you my "shit" when you  
calm down!

ESMERALDA  
Go on, piss us off, that's from the  
Koran?

FRANÇOIS  
Hey, calm down.

SOULEYMANE  
It's the Koran so shut your mouth!

ESMERALDA  
Stop making this crap up!

SOULEYMANE

I'm not making it up!

François comes over and tries to see the tatoo.

FRANÇOIS

What's that tattoo, Souleymane? Why are you showing it to us?

ESMERALDA

He says it's from the Koran but that's not for sure!

SOULEYMANE

Shut your mouth!

FRANÇOIS

Hey, hey! What is it? What is that tattoo? Why are you showing it to us?

SOULEYMANE

It's nothing, it's nothing!

Boubacar comes to his rescue.

BOUBACAR

It means shut your mouth, shut your mouth!

SOULEYMANE

You shut your mouth! That's not what it means!

FRANÇOIS

So give us the right translation. Go on, tell us.

SOULEYMANE

I don't want to tell you.

FRANÇOIS

You show it in my class so you're going to tell us what it means.

Souleymane hesitates for a second.

SOULEYMANE

It says here, right here: "If your words are less important than silence, keep quiet."

BOUBACAR

That's what I said!

SOULEYMANE

No, that's not what you said.

BOUBACAR

Hey, Rabah, isn't that what I said?

SOULEYMANE

No, it's not what you said.

FRANÇOIS

Why isn't it the same thing that Boubacar said?

SOULEYMANE

I don't know. It's different. I think it sounds better.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, it's better put. Souleymane, if only you could write as interesting things on paper as on your arm, that would be great.

SOULEYMANE

Yeah, yeah, I think so too.

FRANÇOIS

That proves you can do it. Right, after these first few self-portraits, I'd like you to rewrite them and polish them, making sure you answer the questions that we listed at the start of class: what I like and don't like, my qualities and flaws, who I'd like to be...

(a knock on the door)

Come in!

PRINCIPAL

Good morning.

FRANÇOIS

Good morning.

The principal has come to introduce a new student, CARL, to the class. On seeing that the students aren't going to move, the principal sets them straight. They stand reluctantly.

PRINCIPAL

Stand up, please. Good morning. That goes for those at the back too. Come on, stand up. Chérif, did you hear me? Everyone has to stand. It's simply a way of greeting an adult.

(MORE)

## PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

It doesn't mean submission or humiliation. All right. Sit back down. I've come to introduce a new student. Carl. Try to make him welcome until the end of the year. Thank you. Goodbye.

François gestures to the classroom. As the principal goes back out, the new student sluggishly takes his place as the other students look on, intrigued.

## FRANÇOIS

Thank you. Goodbye. Carl, go sit in the third row, in that free place. Khoumba, can you move your things? Take a sheet of paper and a pen and try to catch up with the others. We'll talk after.

(the bell rings)

Don't forget the homework for Monday without fail. Let's finish with this. Goodbye. Carl, stay here a minute or two.

## STUDENTS

Goodbye. Adios, señor.

## INT. CLASS - DAY

As the other students leave the classroom, François signals to Carl to wait. The boy looks a little worried.

## FRANÇOIS

Welcome.

## CARL

Thank you.

Now that the other students have left, François adopts a more confidential tone.

## FRANÇOIS

I don't know if you know but I'm Mr. Marin, your French teacher and your class supervisor. So if there's a problem, you talk to me about it. I know who you are. I mean, I know why you're here. The principal told me but that doesn't matter. We'll start from scratch here, okay? It will all go well. You've seen that we... We're on self-portraits to be handed in next Monday. Maybe you could do one too. You know when the next class is?

Carl looks awkward.

CARL  
Monday, at 9.30.

FRANÇOIS  
Yes, Monday, at 9.30, very good. All right... And do you like French?

CARL  
Yes, like everyone, I guess.

FRANÇOIS  
That doesn't mean much. Okay, off you go.

CARL  
Goodbye.

FRANÇOIS  
Goodbye. You know what a self-portrait is, that's not a problem?

CARL  
Yes.

FRANÇOIS  
You're sure?

CARL  
Yes, have a good day.

INT. CLASS - NIGHT

One evening after the day's classes, François, sitting at his desk, sees the students' parents one by one.

We see a series of portraits of the students' parents. Some defend their offspring tooth and nail, others demand greater severity with their children and others still seem totally indifferent to what François has to say.

WEY'S PARENTS seem to be concentrating hard and hanging on François' every word but the looks on their faces show that they don't understand.

FRANÇOIS  
Good evening. Pleased to meet you.

WEY'S FATHER  
Good evening.

FRANÇOIS  
Sit down, please. Thank you for coming. I know it isn't easy. Well, we're very pleased with Wey. Very pleased indeed.  
(MORE)

FRANÇOIS (CONT'D)

All the teachers at the staff meeting said so. He's kind, he's pleasant... It's good to have him in class. And it's showing in his grades. We have... the usual good grades in mathematics. He's doing well there. 13/20. In French, we have a 9 here...

WEY'S FATHER

Not a lot.

Meanwhile, Wey's mother looks on, a big smile on her face. She clearly doesn't understand what is being said but has a vague impression that François is speaking favorably about her son.

FRANÇOIS

Well, he doesn't speak French very well yet but that's only normal. He talks a lot. He tells me about a lot of things. He talks about his computer. He's into that.

WEY'S FATHER

Yes, yes, always too late.

FRANÇOIS

You think he works too late?

WEY'S FATHER

Yes, too late, not sleep good. After, school not good. Eyes get sick after.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, his eyes... In any case, he may spend a lot of time on the computer but things are fine at school for now.

WEY'S FATHER

Yes, thank you.

FRANÇOIS

He works well and he doesn't seem tired.

WEY'S FATHER

Thank you.

Nassim comes next, with his FATHER

NASSIM'S FATHER

Nassim... I'd like him to do... He can go far. He has all he needs. At his age, I wasn't that lucky. I'm right behind him. Anything he needs, I get him, no problem.

(MORE)

NASSIM'S FATHER (CONT'D)

But he has to do right. It's true, things are good at home with him but I'd like him to keep on studying... and go far. Me and his mother, we'd like to be proud of him. That's what we ask of him.

FRANÇOIS

I think we all agree on what we need to do. It's crazy how alike you are.

NASSIM

We're lookers in the family, only natural.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, you're right.

The next parent is ARTHUR'S MOTHER.

ARTHUR'S MOTHER

So an adolescent who talks with his family, who has good grades, who has friends, even if he's a bit of a loner, he's an outcast? He's a boy who talks with adults, who exchanges with them. Maybe he doesn't with you but that means he's just a teenager trying to define himself, that's all. I was useless at school for years. I rejected the idea of making us fit in with the system. Do his black clothes bother you? The way he looks? I don't get it.

Then comes Burak's mother (seen at a meeting earlier), with her son.

BURAK'S MOTHER

I'd like him to go to the best, to Henri IV.

FRANÇOIS

Henri IV? Why do you want him to go there?

BURAK'S MOTHER

Because...

BURAK

Standards again... Henri IV is all she thinks about.

BURAK'S MOTHER

Because they have very high standards. A mother always wants the best for her son.

BURAK

Yeah, my mother's scared I'll feel lost in high school because the others went to fancy private schools and Dolto High isn't as demanding so...

BURAK'S MOTHER

It's a pity that the teachers, well, maybe not the teachers, I don't want to accuse anyone... but the school...

FRANÇOIS

Go on, accuse us. It's always a pleasure.

BURAK'S MOTHER

Why don't you try to push the better students a little harder, say? They get bogged down by other students who aren't as good.

BURAK

My mom makes stuff up. Dolto High isn't useless. She thinks private schools...

BURAK'S MOTHER

I didn't say useless, I said average. I didn't call it useless.

This stream of parents ends with Souleymane's mother, accompanied by her older son, aged 17 or so. He is the one who speaks since his mother doesn't understand a word of French.

FRANÇOIS

We talked about Souleymane a great deal at the staff meeting. Many teachers have complained about his attitude, which is very negative.

Souleymane's brother immediately becomes heated.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

Oh yeah?

FRANÇOIS

Many complain that he comes without his things. When he comes, that is, as he's often absent. He's often late too.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

Oh yeah?

FRANÇOIS

In any case, I think you know that.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

No, we didn't know. Souleymane tells us he works hard.

A brief conversation with his mother in Malian. Souleymane's brother becomes annoyed as he translates for his mother who also starts to get angry.

FRANÇOIS

Can you translate for me?

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

She... she doesn't believe it.

FRANÇOIS

There have been notes in his report book since September, three months now. Notes about the problems he was having.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

She signs them without knowing because she can't read, see.

FRANÇOIS

What about you? Do you read the notes too?

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

Yes, but I'm just his brother. You see?

FRANÇOIS

Okay, but you knew there was a problem?

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

No, I didn't know. Whenever I ask, he says things are fine.

FRANÇOIS

Do you see him work at home?

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

He stays in his room so...

FRANÇOIS

I see.

Another conversation in Malian. Souleymane's mother, as angry as before, starts talking curtly to her son. François looks at them in surprise.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

She says she doesn't understand the notes in the report book.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I realize that. In any case, you know the situation now. I'm telling you officially: there's a problem. You need to talk to him.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

Yes, I'll talk to him about it, I'll talk to him about it.

FRANÇOIS

Well, just having a... Maybe a conversation with his father could help too... it would be interesting.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

Yes, yes, I'll see, I'll talk to my father and see what we can do tonight.

FRANÇOIS

Okay, we're not settling scores. We just want to improve things.

He stands to say goodbye, shaking hands with Souleymane's mother, then with his brother.

SOULEYMANE'S BROTHER

Goodbye.

FRANÇOIS

Goodbye.

Another conversation in Malian. Souleymane's mother has already turned to leave.

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - DAY

The students wait in the corridor outside the computer room. Souleymane is showing the others some photos on his cell phone. We see views of his apartment and of him clowning around with his friends. His classmates are impressed by the quality of the photos but start laughing when they see a photo of Souleymane's mother, particularly tense and glum in front of the camera.

BOUBACAR

Is that your mom?

SOULEYMANE

You bet.

STUDENT

Shit, she's an ugly old crow!

SOULEYMANE

Shut your mouth, your ma's ugly, and so are you.

BOUBACAR

She sulking or what?

SOULEYMANE

No, she just hates photos. Me and my bro had pissed her off.

François comes up discreetly behind them and listens in on the conversation.

FRANÇOIS

Let's get started.

Boubacar, who has noticed François, calls out to him.

BOUBACAR

Hey, sir, look, Souleymane has brought photos for his portrait.

A little embarrassed, Souleymane looks away.

SOULEYMANE

Cut it out, my photos are crap, they suck.

FRANÇOIS

That's good! It's a great idea.

SOULEYMANE

Get lost you! Get your own cell!

François opens the door and the students rush over to the computers.

FRANÇOIS

Painters do self-portraits. Photographers too.

SOULEYMANE

Yes, but too bad, I'm no painter.

FRANÇOIS

I know that. All right, let's get started. Caps off, please. Hello...

EVA

I spend all my free time playing the guitar.

They are all busy typing up their self-portraits. Souleymane has taken out a cable and, crouching under the table, is looking for a free USB connector. François is a little worried

FRANÇOIS

If you're typing, hurry and finish to let the others type up their self-portraits. Souleymane, don't blow the place up!

SOULEYMANE

No, no, not right away.

FRANÇOIS

You know what you're doing?

SOULEYMANE

Yeah, yeah.

FRANÇOIS

Well, since you're a computer genius, you can put it all back after.

SOULEYMANE

Don't worry.

FRANÇOIS

I'm counting on you. Everything okay, Carl?

CARL

Yes, sir.

In another corner of the room, Carl is typing something up. He doesn't pay any attention to his classmates who treat him just as indifferently. François comes up behind him and tries to read over his shoulder. Carl immediately turns his screen away.

FRANÇOIS

I'm not allowed to see it?

CARL

No, not yet.

ESMERALDA

Sir?

FRANÇOIS

Yes.

ESMERALDA

How do you spell Lafayette?

FRANÇOIS

How do you mean?

ESMERALDA

Like Galeries Lafayette.

FRANÇOIS

Why are you mentioning that?

ESMERALDA

I go there often so I want to add it.

FRANÇOIS

That's weird. I mean, it's four metro stops from here. You never usually leave the neighborhood, that's a huge leap in one go.

Khoumba gets annoyed.

KHOUMBA

Hey, we're not hicks!

ESMERALDA

We're city kids!

FRANÇOIS

Really? You go into the center of Paris?

ESMERALDA

You bet!

KHOUMBA

I go everywhere. The 1st, the 5th, the 20th, the 12th, the 19th...

FRANÇOIS

Really? Why do you go to the 5th?

KHOUMBA

In the 5th, I go to see pals in high school. Near Luxembourg.

FRANÇOIS

I see. You go to the Luxembourg Gardens?

KHOUMBA

No, not the gardens, I said Luxembourg.

FRANÇOIS

You go to the country called Luxembourg?

KHOUMBA

No, the Luxembourg metro station!

François tries to changed the subject.

FRANÇOIS

All right. So you do get out and about.

(a beat)

I see you two have made up. That's good.

KHOUMBA

That's our business.

ESMERALDA

And not yours.

KHOUMBA

So, how do you spell Lafayette?

FRANÇOIS

Lafayette is L-A-F-A-Y-E-T-T-E. With a capital.

All of a sudden, things start stirring in Souleymane's corner. Souleymane has uploaded his photos and more or less added them to his layout.

BOUBACAR

Yeah, they're much better now!

SOULEYMANE

Much better.

BOUBACAR

She looks good.

François comes over and looks at the screen.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, that is a good photo.

Souleymane turns to the screen as if to check on what François is saying.

SOULEYMANE

Yeah.

FRANÇOIS

And now you could add a legend.

SOULEYMANE

A legend? Meaning?

BOUBACAR

Like a story or a tale.

FRANÇOIS

No, not that kind of legend. A caption under the photo like in newspapers.

SOULEYMANE

You mean, like in "Le Parisien"?

FRANÇOIS

Yes, like in "Le Parisien".

SOULEYMANE

Oh, right.

FRANÇOIS

What kind of legend could you put here? Who is this woman?

SOULEYMANE

My old woman.

FRANÇOIS

Meaning?

SOULEYMANE

My mother.

FRANÇOIS

Well, you could say she's your mother. Then you could explain why she's making this gesture of pushing away the photographer.

BOUBACAR

Him and his brother had just pissed her off.

SOULEYMANE

I'm not gonna write that!

FRANÇOIS

So why is she making that gesture?

SOULEYMANE

She hates photos.

FRANÇOIS

So write that. "My mother hates having her photo taken." That's a legend, see?

SOULEYMANE

Yeah, yeah.

FRANÇOIS

Then do that with all the photos and you're set.

SOULEYMANE

Yeah...

FRANÇOIS

Printed it all out?

SOULEYMANE

Yeah, yeah, I'm all set.

FRANÇOIS

Great. This is perfect.

Souleymane's photos emerge from the printer, perfectly laid out and captioned. François goes to pin them to the wall as Souleymane watches, suddenly intimidated.

SOULEYMANE

What are you doing now, sir?

FRANÇOIS

As you can see, I'm putting the photos up to get a global view. The others read out their self-portraits, so you're going to put yours on show.

Souleymane looks more like an intimidated child than ever.

SOULEYMANE

My photos suck, you know that.

FRANÇOIS

Not at all, they're very good.

SOULEYMANE

Sure...

FRANÇOIS

And when a student does good work, I let the whole class see it.

SOULEYMANE

You're just doing this to wind me up.

FRANÇOIS

No, I wind you up if I feel you can do better. This is good.

SOULEYMANE

That's bullshit.

## FRANÇOIS

If you've finished, come and take a look at Souleymane's masterpiece. Slowly. We'll straighten them after.

Souleymane, surprised at seeing his "work" on show like this, has the impression that he is naked in front of the whole class. The other students come over (only Carl continues to work on his text). They all make enthusiastic comments that Souleymane responds to with a great deal of false modesty. We can tell that he is both flattered and worried about revealing so much. As we hear the students' comments, the camera shows us Souleymane's photos in close-up: the members of his family, views of his neighborhood... he has often photographed himself too, occasionally in everyday situations, but also at times from a more narcissistic angle with close-ups on his tattoos.

INT. CLASS - DAY

## CARL

I like playing soccer. I like playing computer games. I like playing with pretty girls. I like vacations in the Caribbean. I like fries, zouk and dancehall music. I like watching MTV Base and I like my parents and my brother. I like my pals and staying up all night. I like the TV series on the slave trade. I like my 'hood. I like the series "Homeland Security". I like eating in restaurants and going wild. I hate people crying for no reason. I hate techno and tectonic. I hate guys and girls who show off. I hate visiting my brother in jail. I hate talent contest shows on TV. I hate politicians, the war in Iraq, Goths and skaters. I hate teachers who are too strict. I hate mathematics, racists and I hate Materazzi. I hated the Paul Eluard school and I like being here.

The class is perplexed by this whole declaration.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

In the staff room, Sophie discreetly takes a bottle of champagne out of her bag and pops it into the small fridge under the coffee machine. Behind her, the conversations are interrupted by the arrival of Julie, the year supervisor, who addresses the whole staff.

JULIE

Hello, I have something to say. Could you listen to me, please? Rachel, I have something to say. The mother of Wey, a student in 4/3, has been arrested. She was in France illegally. She has been picked up, she's in a holding center and may be tried next week. She could be deported back to China. I thought you should know as it's important.

CECILE

That's crazy, the family's been here 3 years now!

JULIE

Yes, I know but that's how it goes, wrong place, wrong time. The police turn up and she gets taken in.

FRÉDÉRIC

What about the father?

JULIE

The father doesn't have papers either but they're not bothering him for some reason. So, what I wanted to suggest, to start with, as lawyers cost a lot, we could do a collection and maybe even go to court to try to have some influence on the verdict.

Julie puts an envelope down on the main table so that everyone can add his or her contribution. Sophie, standing near the fridge, looks awkward.

FRANÇOIS

Will Wey have to leave too?

JULIE

Not for now but you never know.

A moment's silence. Sophie decides to take the plunge. She takes the bottle out of the fridge.

SOPHIE

Well, I feel kind of pathetic after that. I had something to tell you, but this isn't a good time.

ANNE

You've said too much now!

SOPHIE  
I'm pregnant.

VINCENT  
Yeah! That calls for a celebration!

FRÉDÉRIC  
Congratulations!

The news is greeted with enthusiastic exclamations. Someone takes the bottle from Sophie, someone else hands out plastic cups, while Sophie, clearly touched by their reaction, sits down as if she were about to give birth. Rachel hands her a glass of champagne.

RACHEL  
How far gone?

SOPHIE  
Two months. I'll only have a drop. Just a drop.

Vincent opens the bottle messily.

TEACHER (O.S.)  
Bravo, Vincent!

SOPHIE  
He's an expert!

VINCENT  
I didn't do it on purpose! Who shook the bottle?

ANNE  
Here, Sophie.

SOPHIE  
Thank you.

FRANÇOIS  
Any ideas about names yet? If it's a boy, say?

SOPHIE  
If it's a boy, I'd like to call him Enguerran.

VINCENT  
Enguerran?

SOPHIE  
Yes.

TEACHER (O.S.)

Seriously?

FRANÇOIS

It's good to give him a handicap in life.  
I mean, he'll have plenty of other  
advantages...

SOPHIE

Thanks a lot! I hope not. You all have a  
glass?

VINCENT

Just a second...

TEACHERS

Cheers!

They all raise their glasses. In the midst of this  
agitation, Sophie looks absent for a second. Then she too  
raises her glass to make a toast.

SOPHIE

Right, I have two wishes. I have two  
wishes. My first wish is that Wey's mom  
can stay in France. And my second wish is  
that my child will be as intelligent as  
Wey. Cheers, everybody.

EXT. YARD - DAY

We see a soccer match in the schoolyard. Carl seems to  
have found his place among his classmates. In fact, he is  
very sure of himself as he plays, monopolizing the ball  
with a great deal of ease.

Souleymane tackles him and make him fall.

SOULEYMANE

(to Wey)

Jackie Chan! Go for it!

(turning to look at Carl)

I didn't do nothing! I didn't do nothing!  
He just fell! He came at me, I never  
touched him.

PLAYERS (O.S.)

Hand! Hand! Thanks! Play, Souleymane!

SOULEYMANE

Fucking go for it!

A few minutes later, Carl dodges a tackle by Souleymane and scores.

CARL

What do you say now, Mali man?

SOULEYMANE

What's up, you Caribbean shit?  
Motherfucker! Let go of me, I'll waste  
the fucker! Caribbean fag! Let go of me!  
Shut your mouth! Go blow Thierry Henri,  
faggot!

INT. CLASS - DAY

As the class settles down, François explains the rules of the game to them.

FRANÇOIS

Stand there. Talk loud enough for them to  
hear and try to convince them. Go ahead.

Nassim is the first to react. He seems genuinely impatient to express himself. He harangues the class with a hint of provocation in his voice directed at Souleymane.

NASSIM

The Africa Cup of Nations will be starting soon. I'm glad Morocco's playing. It's the best team in the world in my opinion. The sick thing is that my pals, the Malians, aren't playing. It's tough for them. They weren't good enough to qualify. Morocco would have let them play on a friendly basis but 4-0 really hurts.

As he speaks, Souleymane simply nods his head, as if to say, "Go right ahead..."

FRANÇOIS

What do you mean 4-0?

NASSIM

Last time Mali played Morocco, they wasted them 4-0. But the weird thing is when Mali doesn't play, it's like all the Africans here aren't African. With each cup, they all go crazy but when Mali doesn't play, they keep a low profile. Weird.

FRANÇOIS

So, whether Mali plays in the Africa Cup of Nations or not, the Africans in this class feel more or less African. Okay. Thank you, Nassim. I get the feeling your words are directed at your neighbor, Souleymane.

SOULEYMANE

Morocco jerk's not even on my radar.

FRANÇOIS

Arthur is next. I see you have your notes, just like a politician.

ARTHUR

Exactly.

FRANÇOIS

Well, that's good. Speak up, Arthur.

ESMERALDA

You want a slap?

FRANÇOIS

Esmeralda, let him speak before you judge him.

ARTHUR

I want to defend the way I look because a lot of people say it sucks.

STUDENT (O.S.)

Right on, dude!

ARTHUR

I don't dis your clothes, so you don't dis mine. Clothes are freedom of speech. I dress how I want, you dress how you want, I say nothing to you, you say nothing to me. I dress like this to be different and not follow the others like sheep.

STUDENT (O.S.)

You're the sheep here!

ARTHUR

I feel better being myself and not being like others. I also think if there were 22 Goths in this class and one guy like you, you'd keep quiet then.

FRANÇOIS

Arthur, I think there's a contradiction in what you say. You want to be you. But are those clothes you? Those clothes are worn by a huge number of people.

ARTHUR

Most people who wear them are gloomy inside so we're all kind of alike.

FRANÇOIS

You're all alike, you're all gloomy, so that's not you.

ARTHUR

No, by being different.

FRANÇOIS

You're different and the same. Thank you for taking a stand and being brave enough to do so.

(a beat)

Boubacar, go on.

ESMERALDA

Boubacar, my pal!

FRANÇOIS

Quiet. Listen to him.

BOUBACAR

I've come up to reply to Nassim. He says that since Mali isn't in the Africa Cup of Nations, black Africans have no team to support. But he's forgetting one country, Ivory Coast. With an ace player, Didier Drogba. Yeah, Didier Drogba. Didier Drogba beats any Moroccan. He plays for Chelsea. What Moroccan plays in England? They're not up to it. I'm through.

FRANÇOIS

Thanks, Boubacar. I think that rectification was indeed... indispensable. Who wants to speak now? Carl, go on.

CARL

Actually, I'd like to say they're starting to piss us off with this Africa Cup. At break you're there, pissing us off with your cup. It hasn't even started yet...

BOUBACAR

Carl, I'll be polite with you. Sorry to interrupt, but tell me, what's your national team?

CARL

France.

ESMERALDA

Wiped him out!

CARL

Look at the players on the team.

BOUBACAR

Why don't you say you're French in that case? Why do you say you're Caribbean?

CARL

We are French. What's your problem?

BOUBACAR

Why don't you say...

CARL

Our Caribbean islands are French.

BOUBACAR

Why don't you ever say you're French instead of saying your Caribbean?

CARL

It's the same thing.

BOUBACAR

No, I don't think so.

CARL

Look at the players we have. Thierry Henri, Wiltord, Abidal, Thuram... Just look at them.

SOULEYMANE

Where does Diarra play?

CARL

Diarra won't ever play in Mali, bro, he's not crazy enough.

SOULEYMANE

Shut your mouth, pal, I'm telling you I'm not your bro! An ape like this jerk...

FRANÇOIS

No need to lose your cool.

SOULEYMANE

Look at him, new here and already the big shot. Shut your goddam mouth.

FRANÇOIS

We can talk calmly! This isn't a slanging match. It's a debate. Souleymane, watch your language.

SOULEYMANE

I'll get you, you Caribbean shit!

ESMERALDA

He's fuming!

Souleymane's sole reply is to give her the finger.

SOULEYMANE

Clam up. Go get fucked!

FRANÇOIS

Enough of your vulgarity!

ESMERALDA

Know where you can put that?

SOULEYMANE

(to François)

I ain't talking to you, man!

FRANÇOIS

No, I'm talking to you!

Esmeralda is splitting her sides.

ESMERALDA

But, sir, he doesn't know what he's saying, just forget it.

FRANÇOIS

(to Souleymane)

Hey, is that any way to talk to a teacher?

SOULEYMANE

(to Esmeralda)

Who are you talking to, dog-face? Shut your mouth!

FRANÇOIS

That's enough now. Just get your things  
and come with me.

SOULEYMANE

I'll fuck you all!

FRANÇOIS

Hey! I'm talking to you!

SOULEYMANE

Don't start yelling at me, okay.

(to Carl)

I'll get you, faggot.

FRANÇOIS

You just can't talk normally, can you?  
Nobody else moves.

SOULEYMANE

You calling me an ape? Fuck you, man!

I/E. STAIRS & YARD - DAY

They slowly come down the stairs. François is seething.  
The teenager drags his feet, forcing his teacher to come  
back up a few steps from time to time. The scene  
resembles a silent duel.

The crossing of the yard is just as laborious.

FRANÇOIS

Hurry it up! Move it!

The teenager stubbornly continues to advance at his own  
pace.

SOULEYMANE

Hey, get your hands off me!

FRANÇOIS

Aren't you sick of assing around?

These words have echoed around the yard. François then  
notices that the other students are pressing to the  
windows of the classroom, watching them and laughing.

Souleymane has noticed them too and stops to do up his  
shoelaces, just to show off. François tries to recover  
his calm but we can tell that he is still on edge. He  
waits patiently for Souleymane. After taking his time  
doing his laces, Souleymane sets off towards the  
principal's office again.

## INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Outside the principal's office, they look each other up and down one last time, then François knocks on the door. The principal tells them to come in.

PRINCIPAL

Hello.

FRANÇOIS

Sorry to bother you. I have a troublemaker who's been disrespectful in class.

Souleymane sits down almost instinctively opposite the principal's desk.

PRINCIPAL

I didn't ask you to sit down, Souleymane.

FRANÇOIS

I have to get back to my class, sorry.

PRINCIPAL

I'll see to this.

François leaves the room.

PRINCIPAL

Sit down now. All right, I'm listening. Will you tell me what happened? You think it's normal that a teacher should have to leave his class to bring you to the principal's office?

The teenager seems determined to remain silent.

## INT. CLASS MEETING - DAY

Around a table set out in a U-shape, the class meeting brings together all the teachers that work with the class, members of the school's administration and a parents' representative. As for the students, they are represented by Esmeralda and Louise who keep chattering together in low voices.

PRINCIPAL

"Results too uneven. Too much talking in class." Now let's move on to Louise, present here today.

VINCENT

The biggest disaster in the whole class.  
What can we do with you? No, good work!

PRINCIPAL

Always good, I'd say.

SOPHIE

Excellent and it's a joy having a student  
like her. We have to say so when it  
happens...

PRINCIPAL

So, shall we offer this young lady a  
commendation?

OLIVIER

I'm sorry, but I don't totally agree with  
you. She's relatively well-placed in the  
class from a numerical angle. But a  
commendation? There's room for progress,  
huge room for progress and I don't think  
her general attitude really merits a  
commendation.

FRANÇOIS

That's the problem with commendations.  
Are they purely numerical and  
mathematical or are they also to do with  
her attitude and behavior as top of the  
class?

VINCENT

Hold on, that means, to get a  
commendation, you have to be an excellent  
student and, at the same time, be a class  
leader? No!

PRINCIPAL

Please, please!

FRANÇOIS

A commendation carries a certain weight!

PRINCIPAL

So a commendation this term. Louise is  
intelligent and will realize she can do  
better to satisfy you. Now, Chérif. Our  
friend Chérif.

HERVÉ

I have a problem with Chérif. He's a kid  
with abilities, he could do well.

(MORE)

HERVÉ (CONT'D)

I could easily give him 17/20 but he spends so much time talking and disturbing the class, his average grade is poor. And that's a pity.

VINCENT

His behavior's irregular. He can be a disaster and you can't do a thing with him or he can be really good.

PRINCIPAL

So what do we put for Chérif? A warning about his work or his behavior?

SOPHIE

For me, behavior, not work.

RACHEL

In my class, it's more his work.

PRINCIPAL

It's more like a work problem, looking at his grades. Mathematics: 6. French: 8. History and geography: 9. English: 9.5...

ESMERALDA

(hurrying out, splitting her sides)

Excuse me!

PRINCIPAL

Science: 12. Music: 11.

FRANÇOIS

His grades are pretty low but I have the impression that it's more a behavior problem. Why don't we put that for now and say he can work harder?

PRINCIPAL

So I'll put, "Chérif can succeed as long as his attitude changes in relation to his work." Let's move on to Souleymane.

ANNE

Souleymane... Someone else can start.

Knowing smiles around the room.

PRINCIPAL

What do we say?

SOPHIE

Nothing good!

PRINCIPAL

What else?

FRANÇOIS

I think we already discussed him in the first term. We said it all. He has huge weaknesses, notably in written French. I don't think there's anything particularly new this term.

Esmeralda comes back in, having calmed down.

PRINCIPAL

Feeling better, Esmeralda?

ESMERALDA

Yes.

PRINCIPAL

I didn't know being class rep was such fun. We were talking about Souleymane.

OLIVIER

In relation to what François just said, he forgot his things most of the time this term and, I have to admit, didn't do much.

FRÉDÉRIC

But it's not just that, it's way beyond that. He's more and more unruly. He prevents the others from working.

Esmeralda butts in, raising her hand to speak.

ESMERALDA

May I say something?

PRINCIPAL

Yes, Esmeralda, if you put the biscuits away. Remember, you aren't allowed to eat in a classroom.

ESMERALDA

Well, his overall grade has gone from 6.75 to 7.25... So...

PRINCIPAL

Yes, but we're not discussing his grades but his behavior for now.

VINCENT

I have the impression we need to consider disciplinary action. His attitude's wrong.

ANNE

It's simple. Every other class, I throw him out.

PATRICK

I don't even throw him out anymore. He's only too happy when I do, so it makes no sense.

FRANÇOIS

I don't think disciplinary action will help because things will get really bad then.

FRÉDÉRIC

They're already really bad! It's gone too far. It's like he's mad at the others for being normal students.

PRINCIPAL

I'll remind you, Mr. Marin, you brought him to me only yesterday.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, but it was this year's first incident. He was disrespectful, so I had to set a limit. I did what I did but I don't think it will go any further than that. Since the start of the year, I don't have any real complaints, apart from yesterday.

FRÉDÉRIC

But our job isn't to make sure students sit quietly at the back and don't cause any trouble. We have to bring these kids out!

Esmeralda and Louise are amused by this lively discussion between two of their teachers. The principal looks as if he wants to take things in hand.

FRANÇOIS

I won't do that with threats or punishment. I'd rather stress his good work because some things interest him. He can come out with some pretty good stuff.

FRÉDÉRIC

Simply because he does something positive now and then, we let him sink and wallow in his hole and we do nothing? You just want to buy social harmony.

PRINCIPAL

That said, what do we say? What do we do? A warning?

FRANÇOIS

I don't think a warning's what he needs. Maybe we should say Souleymane has reached his limit because he's limited scholastically.

ESMERALDA (O.S.)

Shit, that's tough. He shouldn't say a thing like that!

Esmeralda and Louise pretend to be shocked by François' words but burst out laughing.

PRINCIPAL

Okay, that's all well and good but I'm dim and have a line to fill. What do we put?

Frédéric and François remain silent.

INT. CLASS - DAY

FRANÇOIS

Three rhymes, three rhymes per verse. What do you call that? Verses of three lines... Wey?

WEY

A tercet.

FRANÇOIS

A tercet, very good. And if there were four rhymes, Wey, what would it be?

WEY

A quatrain.

FRANÇOIS

A quatrain, it's easy. From "quatre", four. Tercet, three rhymes. Quatrain, four. How many syllables per line? Can you tell me that? Koumba?

KHOUMBA  
I know there are ten.

FRANÇOIS  
You know there are ten?

KHOUMBA  
Want me to show you?

FRANÇOIS  
Yes?

KHOUMBA  
"Noir dans la neig-e et dans la brum-e."  
That makes ten.

FRANÇOIS  
If you say, "Noir dans la neig-e et dans  
la brum-e," you have two extra syllables  
by counting the mute Es. Don't count  
them, they're mute. "Noir dans la neige  
et dans la brume," that makes eight. If  
we count precisely, underlining each  
syllable, we have "ils é-coutent" - I'll  
come back to that one - two  
octosyllables...

In the middle of the lesson, Rabah suddenly speaks out to  
talk about the previous day's class meeting.

RABAH  
Sir, there's a problem!

FRANÇOIS  
...and one four-syllable line. What is it?

RABAH  
11.47, that makes... 11.5?

FRANÇOIS  
Is 11.47 the number of syllables here?

RABAH  
Rounded up, I mean. No, it's my grade.  
It's down!

FRANÇOIS  
Can you tell me what that has to do with  
poetry?

RABAH  
They lowered my grade! 11.47 is 11.5.

FRANÇOIS

Who gave you your grade? You shouldn't have it yet, not until you get your reports.

RABAH

Esmeralda told me.

FRANÇOIS

Ah... So the class reps did do something after all, they passed on the grades.

LOUISE

Are you kidding? I took a load of notes!

FRANÇOIS

I got the impression you weren't really following the meeting.

Louise brandishes a book full of notes.

LOUISE

Hey, I wrote all this!

FRANÇOIS

Louise, I'm delighted. You've done a good job passing on information. Let's get back to this poem. The rule is to count in front of a consonant and not in front of a...

The two girls look at each other, outraged.

As François finishes writing a poem on the board, Souleymane, who doesn't want to leave things at this, butts in.

SOULEYMANE

Sir, sir, I have a question.

FRANÇOIS

What?

SOULEYMANE

I heard you really wiped me out at the meeting yesterday.

FRANÇOIS

Another remark about poetry, I see!

SOULEYMANE

No, I'm not talking about poetry.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I know you're not talking about poetry. What do you mean, "wiped you out"?

SOULEYMANE

I dunno. You wiped me out.

FRANÇOIS

Some people, not me, said if you carry on like this... Some teachers said if you carry on like this, you'll be in trouble, not "wiped out".

SOULEYMANE

Yeah, but that's revenge. I don't get it. Why do all the teachers go for revenge?

FRANÇOIS

What do you mean? What does it have to do with revenge?

SOULEYMANE

If you say stuff about me getting in trouble and all, that's revenge, right?

FRANÇOIS

Revenge has nothing to do with it.

SOULEYMANE

What do you mean, it's not revenge?

FRANÇOIS

Not at all...

SOULEYMANE

It is, it's revenge.

FRANÇOIS

We're not on the streets here. It's a warning. Our goal isn't revenge, it's discipline. Get the difference?

SOULEYMANE

I don't get it.

FRANÇOIS

When a judge sends someone to jail, he doesn't do it to get revenge. It's to help society run smoothly.

SOULEYMANE

I call it revenge, you just want to get revenge. You're rified with me.

FRANÇOIS

Are you out of your mind? You think all I care about is revenge? I wake up and say, "I'll get Souleymane today"?

Esmeralda reacts immediately.

ESMERALDA

You say you have other things to do but you insulted him yesterday anyhow. He really laid into you!

FRANÇOIS

No I didn't, absolutely not.

ESMERALDA

What was it he said, Louise?

Louise checks her notes and turns to Souleymane.

LOUISE

He said you were "limited". I underlined it, I was so shocked.

Souleymane is slightly dazed by this remark. He seems humiliated that such words should have emerged before the whole class.

SOULEYMANE

I'm what? I'm limited?

François, startled that Souleymane's feelings may have been hurt, focuses his anger on the two girls.

FRANÇOIS

Brilliant, brilliant... Esmeralda and Louise, what's your role as class reps exactly? You represent the students to help this class work or you stir up trouble between me and the students? What do you do exactly?

LOUISE

We just do our job, that's all.

ESMERALDA

Wicked! We report on the meeting.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, of course. I didn't realize. When I saw you sniggering at the meeting like that, I felt bad, you see? I felt bad for you.

(MORE)

FRANÇOIS (CONT'D)

It wasn't the place or time to do that.  
It didn't look very serious, quite  
frankly, okay?

ESMERALDA

Yeah, well nobody minded in any case.

FRANÇOIS

Oh, yes, they did.

ESMERALDA

Only you!

FRANÇOIS

No, no, Esmeralda, it bothered me and I  
think I can say it bothered the others  
too.

ESMERALDA

No, no, it only bothered you.

FRANÇOIS

Sorry, but laughing like that, in the  
middle of a class meeting, made you look  
like two skanks.

LOUISE

What?

Reactions from the class.

ESMERALDA

Have you just lost it?

STUDENT (O.S.)

That's bad!

LOUISE

Sir, you can't dump on your students.

FRANÇOIS

The word is "insult".

ESMERALDA

Have you lost it, insulting on us as  
skanks.

FRANÇOIS

No, no, you say "dump on" or "insult".  
It's either one or the other, okay.

ESMERALDA

Yeah, keep on talking.

FRANÇOIS

In fact, I never said you were skanks. I said that at one point in the meeting you acted like skanks. Understand?

CARL

Hey, sir, don't try to con us, you said skanks. That's too easy!

FRANÇOIS

No, no, I'm not trying to con you, I'm just explaining the difference. You understand what I mean?

CARL

No, no, I don't understand.

Souleymane, who has been seething since the start of the discussion, suddenly explodes.

SOULEYMANE

Sir, you don't talk to girls like that! What are you thinking of?

FRANÇOIS

Hey, you're going to tell us how to talk to girls, the way you talk to others! You always insult everybody!

SOULEYMANE

He wants revenge! The old teach is no use now, he wants revenge on the girls!

FRANÇOIS

No way! The noble knight riding to the girls' rescue won't wash, Souleymane!

SOULEYMANE

You don't talk to me, man! You don't talk to me like that, wacko!

FRANÇOIS

I told you before, show some respect for your teachers!

SOULEYMANE

I will if I want!

FRANÇOIS

I told you, you're heading for trouble unless you show some respect!

SOULEYMANE

Think you're tough?

FRANÇOIS

It's not about toughness, it's about discipline and respect!

SOULEYMANE

I'll take you anytime, man!

Souleymane starts putting his things away to avoid looking François in the eye.

KHOUMBA

Hey, cut it out, stop playing the big shot. Calm down! Stop playing the big shot.

SOULEYMANE

Stay outta this!

BOUBACAR

Souleymane, cut it out, bro!

Fearing that a fight is about to break out, François hurries over.

SOULEYMANE

Hey, don't touch me!

FRANÇOIS

You're crazy. You can't just walk out of my class! Are you nuts?

Souleymane stands, kicking over his chair that crashes to the floor, and walks over to the door. As he passes, Carl roughly grabs his arm.

CARL

Calm down, calm down!

SOULEYMANE

Let go of me!

FRANÇOIS

Stop it now! Enough! Where are you going?

SOULEYMANE

I said let go of me, fucker!

FRANÇOIS

Pathetic...

To break free of Carl's grip, Souleymane tries to hit him with his bag. He miscalculates and strikes Koumba's head. She screams as she lifts her hand to her eyebrow that starts bleeding.

KHOUMBA

Fuck...

Souleymane goes out as Koumba's blood forms a puddle on the floor at her feet.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

Close-up on a sheet of paper on which François starts writing: "Incident report, April 11, 2008". François is alone in a corner of the deserted staff room. He writes a few words, then breaks off, reads what he has just written, and puts his pen down.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

The principal reads the report attentively as François watches in concern. When he finishes reading, the principal remains silent for a second.

PRINCIPAL

So, what do we do? I think we need to convene the disciplinary committee, don't we? This is starting to add up. It begins with disrespect, then the fight, with a student injured, and finally he leaves the class without permission.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, but there was only one incident and it all spread out from there. One thing led to another, a chain reaction.

The principal stands and concludes:

PRINCIPAL

Well, what I can do is take a protective measure, since this is so serious, by suspending Souleymane for 48 hours. That'll give us a little time to reach a decision. Shall we do that? However, I need to see you tomorrow. Could you come to my office? That would be better.

FRANÇOIS

Goodbye.

PRINCIPAL

Goodbye.

François leaves the room.

INT. CORRIDOR & STAIRS - DAY

At the door of the office, Julie, the year supervisor, is waiting for him.

JULIE

François! I need a word with you. There's a rumor going around...

They continue their conversation as they head along the corridor to the yard.

FRANÇOIS

A rumor?

JULIE

Yes. Some students came to see me and told me... you insulted them in class.

FRANÇOIS

Who told you that? Louise and Esmeralda, was it?

JULIE

They told me you called them skanks and that led to the incident with Souleymane.

FRANÇOIS

And you go right ahead and believe them?

JULIE

Yes, well, no... That's why I needed to see you. You didn't mention it in your incident report so... yes, I wanted to know.

FRANÇOIS

I didn't mention it because I didn't mention it. What can I say?

JULIE

Did you do it or not?

FRANÇOIS

What?

JULIE

Did you...  
(she greets someone who  
passes)  
Did you call them skanks?

FRANÇOIS

Yes, but Souleymane's another matter!

JULIE

I know it had nothing to do with him. But word's getting around. People are talking. I wanted to let you know.

FRANÇOIS

Well, thanks for letting me know.

François has spoken absently because, out of the window, he has just spotted Esmeralda in the yard.

EXT. YARD - DAY

François hurries across the yard towards Esmeralda as if he were ready for a fight.

FRANÇOIS

Hey, you two. You complained about me to the year supervisor. Thanks a lot!

They step away from the other students. Esmeralda, caught off guard, stammers a little.

ESMERALDA

You're welcome.

FRANÇOIS

You could have talked to me about it, couldn't you?

Louise comes over to her friend and joins the conversation.

LOUISE

When a teacher complains about us, he sees the year supervisor, we can do the same thing, right?

FRANÇOIS

No, it doesn't work both ways.

He has raised his voice. A group has formed around them. We notice that Khoumba has a dressing over her eyebrow.

LOUISE

Of course it's the same. Of course it is.

FRANÇOIS

Absolutely not. What were you after by doing this?

ESMERALDA

We wanted to see you punished like us!

FRANÇOIS  
To see me punished...

ESMERALDA  
Yes.

FRANÇOIS  
You're going to get me punished?

ESMERALDA  
Yes, you insulted us, you get punished!

FRANÇOIS  
And where will that get you, me being punished?

ESMERALDA  
At least I'll have spoken out.

FRANÇOIS  
Great, that's a lot of use.

ESMERALDA  
I mean, do you even know what "skank" means?

FRANÇOIS  
That's not the problem because I never called you skanks!

ESMERALDA  
Yes, you did, you called us skanks. For me, skank means prostitute.

FRANÇOIS  
Not at all.

ESMERALDA  
It does.

FRANÇOIS  
For me, it doesn't mean that. It's nothing important at all, just a girl laughing stupidly. It's no worse than that.

Esmeralda turns to the circle of girls around her.

ESMERALDA  
Hey, skank means prostitute, right?

GIRLS  
You bet!

KHOUMBA

Will Souleymane get expelled?

François is caught off his guard.

FRANÇOIS

Of course not... but...

KHOUMBA

Will he get a disciplinary hearing?

FRANÇOIS

We don't know yet. It's a possibility.  
Stop yelling before anything's decided.

KHOUMBA

It's all settled anyway. We know that!

FRANÇOIS

It isn't. Why do you say that?

KHOUMBA

Because. It's always the same.

ESMERALDA

I's always the same!

FRANÇOIS

You know, you're in no position to talk.  
You're the one who got hurt during the  
incident.

KHOUMBA

So? He didn't mean it. There was a metal  
thing in his bag.

FRANÇOIS

Whatever happened, he blew a fuse and  
that's bad.

Carl butts in.

CARL

Sir, anyone can blow a fuse.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, they can, but they can calm down  
after too!

CARL

That's not so sure.

FRANÇOIS

You calmed down, right?

CARL

No.

FRANÇOIS

You're a lot calmer since you got here.

CARL

No, I haven't calmed down. You don't know me better than I know myself!

FRANÇOIS

All the teachers say your attitude is perfect now. So don't try to pretend otherwise.

CARL

So what's the idea? You think you've tamed me?

FRANÇOIS

No, it doesn't mean we've tamed you. But being sent here by a disciplinary committee helped you understand things, see?

CARL

It didn't help me. I don't understand your shit!

FRANÇOIS

In making that decision about you, maybe your old teachers wanted to help you and we'll do the same for Souleymane.

CARL

Sorry, but I say teachers who expel students are fuckers.

ESMERALDA

Right on!

FRANÇOIS

Bravo, you want to repeat that?

CARL

Yeah, they're fuckers.

FRANÇOIS

This is incredible. Everyone goes wild over some word I said. You say fucker and I shouldn't react?

CARL

I don't give a damn, they're fuckers!

FRANÇOIS

Cut it out!

ESMERALDA

Hey! You say skanks, we say fucker. You may not like it but it's the same. It's the same!

FRANÇOIS

First of all, the two words are nothing alike! And if you can't understand that a teacher can say certain things that students can't say, well... We'll never get anywhere!

KHOUMBA

We're not allowed to say nothing. We're not allowed to say nothing!

FRANÇOIS

Rubbish! You keep talking all the time! You never stop speaking!

CARL

Whenever we talk, you yell. What is this?

FRANÇOIS

Enough!

François, at a loose end, leaves the group.

INT. HALLWAY - CANTEEN - DAY

As he enters the canteen hallway, Koumba catches up with him. She is alone and looks worried.

KHOUMBA

Sir! Sir!

FRANÇOIS

What?

KHOUMBA

Tell me, will Souleymane get a hearing or not?

François, surprised by the emotion in Koumba's voice, turns to look at her.

FRANÇOIS

Give it a rest! You sound like you want him to. It fires you up.

KHOUMBA

Do you know what'll happen if he's expelled?

FRANÇOIS

He'll change schools.

KHOUMBA

No, he won't change schools.

FRANÇOIS

He will, it's automatic. It's obligatory. That goes for Souleymane too.

KHOUMBA

Do you know his father?

FRANÇOIS

I've seen him once or twice.

KHOUMBA

No, you don't know him! If Souleymane is expelled, his dad'll send him back to their village!

FRANÇOIS

Don't get overdramatic.

KHOUMBA

He'll go back to Mali!

FRANÇOIS

I think we all need to keep our heads here. It's okay, don't worry.

He walks away.

INT. CANTEEN - DAY

François comes into the deserted canteen. There are trays on the tables, the leftovers of lunch. He sits down in a corner. He looks a little lost.

We find him a little later smoking a cigarette as two WOMEN clear the trays away at the other end of the room, putting them on a trolley. On reaching him, one of them points to François' cigarette.

CLEANING WOMAN

You can't smoke here, sir.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I know, but since I was alone...

## CLEANING WOMAN

The rules hold for everyone.

François puts out his cigarette in a dirty plate. The woman takes the tray, glaring at him.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

François is with the other teachers, talking about Souleymane. Frédéric speaks up.

FRÉDÉRIC

Okay, you went too far with those girls. But we all screw up. It doesn't excuse what Souleymane did.

RACHEL

Listen, François, he's right. I saw Khoumba. Her face was all bloody. What he did is unacceptable.

SOPHIE

That's for sure.

FRANÇOIS

That's another thing, her bloody face... His bag hit her by accident. A split eyebrow bleeds a lot. That's all.

SOPHIE

You can't ignore it!

HERVÉ

Come on, François, don't take it to heart. You've seen how they talk to us?

FRANÇOIS

How's that relevant? Souleymane is going to get a disciplinary hearing and he'll be expelled.

SOPHIE

That's kind of logical.

FRANÇOIS

So let's talk about that. How many hearings were there last year? Twelve at least.

RACHEL

Not that many.

SOPHIE

Yes, he could be right.

FRANÇOIS

I know, I'm on the committee so I saw them all. An average of two a month, twelve in all, with an expulsion each time.

HERVÉ

Come on, the hearing is where we talk things over. Okay, so twelve students were expelled but maybe there was no other solution.

RACHEL

Twelve out of twelve means there wasn't much of a discussion unfortunately!

FRÉDÉRIC

But twelve out of twelve just means... when a student has a hearing, it's too late.

SOPHIE

Or that it was justified.

FRANÇOIS

Okay, things happen that lead to a hearing. But then what happens? What do we expect from a hearing?

PATRICK

There are all the prior stages. You know that, François. The pre-disciplinary committees, we inform the parents, the students are warned...

RACHEL

Not in this case.

SOPHIE

We've no time to.

ANNE

It's pretty rare.

FRANÇOIS

It's rare because we know we have this ultimate punishment that allows us to ignore the prior steps. And even if we did use them, the simple fact of expelling a student... I don't know, it's a disavowal of everything we have tried.

HERVÉ

Okay, but at the same time it's Souleymane's chance to justify himself.

SOPHIE

Sure! Students at hearings don't speak. They're scared. They're paralyzed.

François then decides to use what Koumba told him.

FRANÇOIS

Exactly. Let me sum this up. He'll get a disciplinary hearing, he'll be expelled and maybe even sent back to Mali.

ANNE

You're being overdramatic.

FRANÇOIS

No, I'm not. Students who know him better than any of us here, who know his father, say that he is likely to send him back to Mali after this.

PATRICK

Some kids are threatened with boarding school but it never happens!

ANNE

It can happen!

FRÉDÉRIC

Come on, a lot of parents spend their time threatening their kids with that. But you can't take it into account.

FRANÇOIS

Even if there's just a slight risk that a hearing could lead to him being sent back, I don't think I can take that risk. That's all.

SOPHIE

It's like when you hesitate over punishing a kid because when he goes home, once that door closes, he'll get a beating from his parents. We've all seen that. But we still have to punish them when they go too far. Whatever the consequences, which don't concern you.

FRANÇOIS

So I ignore that? I know punishment can have such a consequence but I turn a blind eye, I don't want to know, is that it?

SOPHIE

No, but I understand...

HERVÉ

Hold on a second. You can't take it into account in every case or you won't get anywhere. The violence, him being sent back... True, you have to consider it but after a while...

SOPHIE

No more Christmas presents... It happens, yes.

FRÉDÉRIC

Afterwards, it's a question of principle. We each have a role to play. We can't substitute ourselves for the parents.

FRANÇOIS

Sorry, but if I rewind the movie, it's a weird chain of events. It starts with reprimands when Souleymane starts screwing up, forgets his things, or talks back. We punish him. Again and again, until a disciplinary hearing leading to who knows what. Little by little, everything gets out of hand.

FRÉDÉRIC

Sure, if you look at it that way, it's really shocking. But, once again, the school won't be expelling Souleymane. He's been gone for a while.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

François leaves the staff room. He walks along the corridor, thinking.

EXT. YARD - DAY

The students start to form into their classes as they continue to horse about in the yard.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

François knocks on the door and comes in. The principal doesn't seem to be very surprised to see him.

PRINCIPAL

François... I didn't expect you so soon.  
Have you reached a decision?

FRANÇOIS

Well, I don't think I really have much  
choice.

He sits down a little heavily on the chair facing the principal. He doesn't say a word. The principal goes on in a kindly voice.

PRINCIPAL

By the way, Julie told me you had a  
heated exchange with two girls in your  
class.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, the two class reps but it happened  
first so...

PRINCIPAL

You apparently called them "skanks".

FRANÇOIS

Let's say that, yes.

PRINCIPAL

Well, that complicates things but the  
problem remains. I'd like you to mention  
it in your report. I don't want it used  
against us at the disciplinary hearing.  
Don't bother hiding it, just write it  
down.

FRANÇOIS

I understand.

PRINCIPAL

I'll let you go back over this before we  
launch the procedure.

FRANÇOIS

So I... I just need to add the...

PRINCIPAL

Yes, yes, but without going into detail.  
Does that suit you.

François shows no reaction.

FRANÇOIS

Okay.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

François, alone in the staff room again, rewrites his incident report.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

The tables have been set out in a U-shape in the meeting room. The people come in.

PARENTS' REPS

Hello. Hello, sir.

PRINCIPAL

Please sit down.

Souleymane and his mother sit on one side, with the two student representatives. The teaching staff sits on another side and the parents' representatives on the third side of the U.

François remains silent and tries in vain to catch Souleymane's eye. The boy, stubborn, stares at the principal who leads the debate, sitting between Julie, the class supervisor, and the bursar, Monsieur Pierre.

PRINCIPAL

(to Julie)

Can you take the minutes?

We fast-forward to the heart of the meeting as the principal reads from François' report.

PRINCIPAL

"Carl tried to reason with him and stop him. Souleymane broke free, swinging his bag that hit Koumba in the face. Then he left, insulting everyone and slamming the door. I didn't go after him because I needed to help Koumba whose eyebrow was bleeding." Those are the facts that led to today's hearing. Madame, it doesn't mean Souleymane is a bad boy. That's not what we're saying.

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

But, sometimes, a student in a class, through voluntary or involuntary behavior, can create an atmosphere that prevents the class from working and getting ahead.

(Souleymane translates)

Do you understand what we're saying?

FRÉDÉRIC

If I may say something, it's true that there had been a number of signs that should have warned us. We could have reacted sooner. But now we have to deal with an incident that is fairly violent and that's simply unacceptable. I'd like to know if you realize that, Souleymane?

SOPHIE

You see, we're not saying you're deliberately violent. The problem is you can't control what you say and what you do.

PRINCIPAL

Souleymane, we'd like to hear you. You're here to express your point of view. Go ahead.

SOULEYMANE

I don't give a damn. I've got nothing to say. Do whatever you want to do.

His mother says something in Malian. She seems to be telling him off for his aggressive reaction to the teachers' accusations.

PRINCIPAL

Excuse me...

Souleymane's mother continues to speak in Malian.

SOPHIE

Can you translate?

SOULEYMANE

She says I'm a good boy. I do my homework. I help my brothers and sisters with their work when I can. I always wash the dishes and help her when I can.

PRINCIPAL

Madam, we don't doubt that Souleymane is a good son. That's not the problem. I'd like to get back to his school record.

PARENTS' REP #1

Excuse me, but could we focus on the facts here? Firstly, I'd like to say that we're surprised to see the teacher involved in the incident on this committee. We find that highly irregular.

BURAK'S MOTHER

(another parents' rep)

It's true. It's odd to be both judge and litigant.

PRINCIPAL

First of all, Mr. Marin was elected to the administrative board as the teachers' representative. Moreover, I think that the incident that occurred in Mr. Marin's class doesn't involve the teacher directly.

PARENTS' REP #1

I'm sorry, but you mention some harsh words spoken by the teacher. Apparently, if I understand rightly, you used the word "skanks" to describe the class reps. And that's a problem.

FRANÇOIS

I did say that but it wasn't something that concerned Souleymane. I think he used the excuse of a rather heated exchange with those two students to express the bad mood he was in that day.

PARENTS' REP #1

He tried to defend them. So I feel that it's relevant.

François, awkward, prefers not to reply while Frédéric, annoyed, answers for him.

FRÉDÉRIC

I'm sorry, but absolutely nothing justifies being disrespectful to a teacher, insulting everyone and leaving a class without permission.

PRINCIPAL

Souleymane, do you have anything to say?

SOULEYMANE

I don't know. What can I say?

SOULEYMANE'S MOTHER

Sir, madame...

She then continues in Malian.

SOPHIE

Souleymane?

PRINCIPAL

What did your mother say?

SOULEYMANE

The same thing as before.

His mother says something else in Malian.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, Souleymane?

SOULEYMANE

She apologizes on my behalf.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Souleymane and his mother sit down on a bench in the corridor. They don't speak or even look at each other.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

In the meeting room, the vote is under way. Everyone taking part in the meeting drops a small piece of paper into a box that is passed around. Everyone is silent.

INT. CORRIDOR & MEETING ROOM - DAY

The year supervisor comes to fetch Souleymane and his mother who are still in the same position.

JULIE

You can come back in now.

They stand and follow her into the room. As soon as they sit down, the principal starts speaking.

PRINCIPAL

Madame, the committee has conferred and has decided to expel Souleymane from the school for good. You will receive the ruling by registered mail and have eight days to appeal. We shall do our best to find Souleymane another school.

Souleymane translates for his mother who stands and picks up her bag.

SOULEYMANE'S MOTHER

Goodbye, sir, madame...

Souleymane too stands and goes out with looking back as the principal continues to address him.

PRINCIPAL

Souleymane, come to see me before the end of the week, please.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Souleymane and his mother cross the yard to the exit. From the window, François watches them go.

INT. CLASS - DAY

For the students' final class, the atmosphere is relaxed. We can sense that the tension of the year has eased. The students are like actors after a show.

François invites the students to weigh up the past year: what they have learned, what they particularly liked.

LOUISE

Mathematical proportionality.

FRANÇOIS

This year, you learned mathematical proportionality. All right.

BURAK

I liked science.

FRANÇOIS

What you learned, not what you liked. If you liked it, you learned. So what did you learn in science?

BURAK

All about volcanoes, earthquakes, plates... Convergence and divergence, movement of the Earth's plates... It was fascinating.

FRANÇOIS

It interested you?

BURAK

Yeah.

FRANÇOIS

That's good.

BOUBACAR

Well, in mathematics, trigonometry,  
Pythagoras' theorem, Thalès' theorem...

FRANÇOIS

I'll stop you there. You can't sit there  
and brag you learned Pythagoras' theorem.  
Recite it for us.

BOUBACAR

If, in a triangle... two sides are equal  
to... If the square root... If the square of  
two sides is equal to the square... the  
square of the hypotenuse... then the  
triangle's a right-angled triangle.

FRANÇOIS

More or less, yes.

BOUBACAR

It's spot on.

FRANÇOIS

All right. If you say so, I believe you.

ANGELICA

In history, I learned about triangular  
trade. The fact that ships left Europe  
with manufactured goods that they took to  
Africa to trade for men who'd become  
slaves that they took to America to work.  
Then they took the money they made back  
to Europe. That's triangular trade.

CARL

Chemistry.

FRANÇOIS

What in chemistry?

CARL

Combustion.

FRANÇOIS

Okay and what's that?

CARL

Blending Fehling's solution and glucose.

FRANÇOIS

What do you get?

CARL

Heat up the test-tube and it changes color.

FRANÇOIS

What's the interest in knowing that?

CARL

The interest in knowing that? I dunno. Why teach it to us if there's no interest?

DAMIEN

Reproduction.

FRANÇOIS

What did you learn about human reproduction, for instance?

DAMIEN

Human reproduction... Well, the sperm gets into the ovum, then you wait 9 months, then you do a sonogram and then it comes out.

FRANÇOIS

The sperm does?

DAMIEN

No, the human being that's inside.

FRANÇOIS

Khoumba?

KHOUMBA

Me?

FRANÇOIS

Yes. That is your name?

KHOUMBA

Yes. In music, I learned to play the alto recorder... and in Spanish.

FRANÇOIS

You learned to play the recorder in Spanish?

KHOUMBA

No, in music, I learned to play the alto recorder. And I learned other stuff in Spanish.

FRANÇOIS

Very good. Can you say something to us in Spanish?

KHOUMBA

Llegan las vacaciones.

FRANÇOIS

And that means?

KHOUMBA

It's the vacation soon or the vacation's coming.

ESMERALDA

I didn't learn anything.

FRANÇOIS

You can't spend 9 months at school and not learn anything.

ESMERALDA

You can, I'm the living proof.

FRANÇOIS

You got something from the books we read.

ESMERALDA

Your books are shite.

FRANÇOIS

They're what?

ESMERALDA

They're useless.

FRANÇOIS

What about a book you read by yourself?

ESMERALDA

A book I read? Well, there's "The Republic". The book "The Republic".

FRANÇOIS

"The Republic" by Plato?

ESMERALDA

Yeah.

FRANÇOIS

You read that? How come you read that?

ESMERALDA

My big sister had it.

FRANÇOIS  
She does philosophy?

ESMERALDA  
No, law.

FRANÇOIS  
So what's it about?

ESMERALDA  
Well, there's this guy...

FRANÇOIS  
Socrates, his name's Socrates.

ESMERALDA  
Yeah, Socrates. This guy, he stops people in the street and he asks them: "Are you sure of thinking what you think? Are you sure of doing what you do?" And so on. After that, people start getting confused. They ask questions. The guy's too much.

FRANÇOIS  
What does he ask people about?

ESMERALDA  
Everything. Love, religion, God, people, everything.

FRANÇOIS  
It's good you read it.

ESMERALDA  
I know.

She hesitates, then adopts a mischievous tone.

ESMERALDA  
It's not a skank's book!

This remark elicits laughter from the students who were starting to get bored with this discussion about Socrates. There's an air of reconciliation in the air. The ringing of the bell creates a mood of general euphoria that François calms down.

FRANÇOIS  
Wait a second! Before you leave, here are your self-portraits. One by one. When you have yours, you can go. Each one of you in turn.

As an end-of-year gift, he hands out the book of self-portraits that he has had bound. The students are over the moon as they look for their own texts. A moment of intense pride. Koumba leafs through the pages of Souleymane's photos in silence.

KHOUMBA

Sir, this is really kind of you.

STUDENT (O.S.)

What is it?

FRANÇOIS

These are the self-portraits that you wrote and that we made up with the class photo and so on.

(to a student)

You don't have yours?

NASSIM

Sir, seriously, why did you put this here?

FRANÇOIS

You look good in it.

NASSIM

Cut it out!

FRANÇOIS

You're like a leader. Have a good vacation.

NASSIM

Thank you. You too.

The students hurry out. For the first time, Henriette dares to approach her teacher.

HENRIETTE

Sir?

François looks surprised.

FRANÇOIS

Yes? What is it?

HENRIETTE

I didn't learn anything.

FRANÇOIS

What? Why are you saying that? That doesn't mean anything.

The girl is edgy, on the verge of tears.

HENRIETTE

Earlier, all the others said they'd learned something. Compared to them, I learned nothing.

FRANÇOIS

Come on, you learned as much as them. They had to think hard too. It's not easy to remember what you learned off the top of your head like that.

HENRIETTE

But I don't understand.

FRANÇOIS

What do you mean?

HENRIETTE

I don't understand what we do.

FRANÇOIS

In French?

HENRIETTE

In everything.

FRANÇOIS

You can't say you don't understand anything in any subject. That's not true, it's...

HENRIETTE

I don't want to go to vocational school.

FRANÇOIS

There's no question of that yet. You're moving on to the next year. You'll have plenty of time to think about your future. Vocational school isn't an absolute certainty. It all depends on how you do next year.

With what she hopes is a discreet gesture, she dries her tears.

HENRIETTE

But I don't want to.

She goes out, leaving François alone and a little sad.

EXT. YARD - DAY

In the yard, we find the students, teachers and members of the administrative staff caught up in a soccer match. The adolescents are virtually hysterical at the idea of tackling their teachers.

CROWD  
(shouting during the game)  
Go! All together! All together!

INT. CLASS - DAY

The final shot shows the empty classroom, then fades to black.