

ADVANCED. POETRY #1. PRÉVERT – LE CANCRE



Le cancre

Il dit non avec la tête
 Mais il dit oui avec le cœur
 Il dit oui à ce qu'il aime
 Il dit non au professeur
 Il est debout
 On le questionne
 Et tous les problèmes sont posés
 Soudain le fou rire le prend
 Et il efface tout
 Les chiffres et les mots
 Les dates et les noms
 Les phrases et les pièges
 Et malgré les menaces du maître
 Sous les huées des enfants prodiges
 Avec des craies de toutes les couleurs
 Sur le tableau noir du malheur
 Il dessine le visage du bonheur.

Jacques Prévert, *Paroles*, 1946.



Jacques Prévert (1900 – 1946) is a French poet and screenwriter.

He wrote a lot of poems. Some of them are very famous : *Les feuilles mortes*, *Barbara*. His book *Paroles* (1946) has been a great success. Prévert's poetry is most of the time about life in Paris and life after World War II.

As Prévert often used a familiar language and a vocabulary easy to understand, as he liked to play with words, he's taught a lot in French schools nowadays. Some poems are learnt by very small kids, some other are studied by second grade students.

Some of his poems have been set in music and sung by very famous singers such as Yves Montand and Edith Piaf or later Serge Gainsbourg. Some have also been sung by Joan Baez or Nath King cole.

Prévert is also a famous screenwriter : he worked on very great films such as *Quai des Brumes* (Port of shadows, 1938), *Les Visiteurs du soir* (The night Visitors, 1942), or *Les Enfants du Paradis* (The Children of Paradise, 1945).



Jacques Prévert wrote a lot of poems about life school and kids who work with strict and boring teachers and wish for liberty.

Le Cancre is one of them. *Cancre* means « dunce ».

This poem is about a little boy who is unhappy at school. He has to work, he has to learn but he doesn't care, he's not interested by all these sentences, these figures, these dates the teacher want him to learn. And he finally rebels.



Cœur (masc.) : heart.
Etre debout : to stand.
Questionner : to question, to interrogate.
Rire (masc.) : laugh.
Rire : to laugh.
Fou rire (masc.) : fit of laughter.
Effacer : to erase.
Chiffre (masc.) : figure, number.
Date (fém.) : date.
Phrase (fém.) : sentence.
Piège (masc.) : trap.
Menace (fém.) : threat.
Menacer : to threaten.
Huée (fém.) : boo.
Huer : to boo.
Prodige : prodigy.
Craie (fém.) : chalk.
Tableau (masc.) : blackboard.
Malheur (masc.) : misfortune, unhappiness.

Bonheur (masc.) : happiness.
Dessiner : to draw.



This poem is about a little boy.

On le questionne = on questionne le petit garçon.

Le fou rire le prend = le fou rire prend le petit garçon.

Le is here a direct object pronoun. It replaces a masculine noun.

If this story was about about a little girl, we'd have : *la*.

On la questionne. Le fou rire la prend.

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