



// Permission to Speak:
Amplifying Marginalised
Voices Through Languages //

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Comics and language learning



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Comics and language learning

Comics are a great way to learn languages. When you read a comic in the language you are learning, you will probably be able to visualise concepts, stories and dialogues better than in a book. It is a more straightforward way to access the literature of the language you are learning; you can even read graphic novel adaptations of classic literature. You will find it easier to understand what is going on in the story, even if you don't understand all the vocabulary, because you will have the images to support you. And you will learn new words without even realising it!



3 languages, 3 graphic novels, 3 female authors

In this resource we have chosen to create language activities surrounding the themes of three graphic novels written by women. Female authors are still underrepresented (in France, 27% of comics authors are women), and, until recently, they were marginalised in comics competitions such as the acclaimed Festival d'Angoulême.

The French language 'bande dessinée', *Aya de Yopougon*, by Marguerite Abouet, talks about the life of Aya and her family and friends in Yopougon (or Yop City), a neighborhood of Abidjan in Ivory Coast. It's a non-stereotypical portrait of the Ivorian youth in the late 1970's, trying to emancipate themselves and change their country for the better.

The German graphic novel that we will study, *Madgermanes* by Birgit Weyhe, tells the story of Mozambique workers who were employed in Eastern Germany in the 1980's and suffered not only racism and great injustice, but also a feeling of uprootedness when they came back to Mozambique.

The Spanish graphic novel, *Gazpacho agridulce*, by Quan Zhou Wu, depicts in a very humouristic way the youth of the author in a town of Andalusia where her parents emigrated from China before she was born. She finds herself constantly oscillating between her parents' culture and Spanish culture, trying to find her place and identity in-between.

We find in these graphic novels the topics of home, identity and injustice, but also perseverance, courage, humour and resilience. It shows us that, wherever we come from, whatever language we speak, we all share the same human goal of finding our place in the world, finding happiness, and understanding who we are.

Activity:



The vocabulary of comics

Look up the definition of 'comics' and 'the graphic novel' and then fill in the rest of the table by looking up the translation of each word for your language, as demonstrated in the examples.

Help:

Search 'vocabulaire de la BD'/ 'vocabulario de los comics'/ 'Comics Vokabeln'.

English	Definition	French	Spanish	German
comics		<i>la bande dessinée ou la BD</i>	<i>el tebeo, la historieta o el cómic</i>	<i>der Comic oder das Comicbuch</i>
the graphic novel		<i>le roman graphique</i>	<i>la novela grafica</i>	<i>das Comicheft</i>
the page	one page of a comic	<i>la planche</i>	<i>la plancha o la página</i>	<i>die Comic Seite</i>
the panel	individual frame			
the gutters	the blank space between the panels			
the tier	one strip of panels (generally from 1 to 6)			
the speech bubble	a shape (often oval) containing the words spoken by a character			
the thought bubble	a shape (often resembling a cloud) containing the thoughts of a character			
the chain	It is the indicator underneath the balloon, to identify the person talking or thinking.			
the caption	A rectangle often at the top of a panel, containing narrative elements.			
the sound effect or onomatopoeia	a word in the panel representing a sound. E.g.: OOPS!			
the ideogram	a graphic symbol representing a thing or an idea (not a word!). E.g.: a light bulb if a character has a new idea			
the font	type of style and size of the letters			

French language section

Une bande dessinée française

Aya de Yopougon,
Marguerite About (writer),
Clément Oubrerie (illustrator)



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L'histoire

Aya de Yopougon est une bande dessinée de huit tomes, qui a été traduite en dix-sept langues. L'histoire se passe à la fin des années soixante-dix en Côte d'Ivoire, plus précisément à Yopougon, un quartier d'Abidjan. C'est l'histoire d'une jeune fille, Aya, très intelligente, tolérante et travailleuse, qui veut s'émanciper. Elle veut devenir médecin. Elle ne veut pas partir de la Côte d'Ivoire car elle préfère changer les choses là-bas.

Dans la BD, on suit la vie quotidienne d'Aya. On découvre aussi la vie de sa famille et de ses copines, Adjoua et Bintou.

L'autrice

Marguerite About est née à Yopougon en 1971. Elle est arrivée à Paris quand elle avait douze ans. À Paris, elle a découvert les bibliothèques et elle s'est passionnée pour les livres. C'est en 2005 qu'elle a publié Aya de Yopougon I, et ça a été un grand succès. About veut nous montrer la jeunesse africaine sans stéréotype.

Activity:



Find the translation in the text:

translated _____	was born _____
eight volume _____	libraries _____
at the end of the 70s _____	she got a passion for _____
a neighbourhood _____	she published _____
hard-working _____	a big success _____
doctor _____	African youth _____
we discover _____	without stereotype _____
the daily life _____	

Stretch:

traduis tout le texte en anglais

Activity:



Grammar questions:



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- 1) Why do we say 'en Côte d'Ivoire' and not 'au Côte d'Ivoire'.

- 2) What type of verbs are 'veut' and 'peut'?

- 3) Put 'intelligente', 'tolérante' and 'travailleuse' in the masculine form.

- 4) Write down all the reflexive verbs that you can find in the text.

- 5) Why do we say 'elle est arrivée' and not 'elle a arrivé'?

Activity:



Answer the following questions in English

- 1) When and where does the story take place? _____
- 2) How many volumes of Aya are they? _____
- 3) How many languages was it translated to? _____
- 4) What are three adjectives to describe Aya's personality?

- 5) What job does Aya want to do? _____
- 6) What are Aya's friends' names? _____
- 7) How old was the author when she moved to Paris? _____
- 8) When was the first book published? _____

Activity:



Les thèmes de la bande dessinée



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Il y a _____ de thèmes différents qui sont abordés dans les huit tomes. Ce sont des thèmes difficiles mais Abouet essaie d'en parler avec légèreté, depuis le prisme de la _____ quotidienne. Par _____, il y a le thème de **l'homosexualité** qui revient souvent. Un copain d'Aya qui s'appelle Innocent, va en France parce qu'il veut vivre son homosexualité plus ouvertement, mais il réalise que l'homosexualité n'est pas très acceptée en France non plus. Aussi, le _____ d'Adjoua est homosexuel, et doit le cacher. Quand son père l'apprend, il veut l'emmener au village pour le faire "guérir".

Les thèmes de **l'adultère et la polygamie** sont très présents dans tous les tomes. Par exemple, le père d'Aya a eu en secret deux _____ avec une autre femme, et Moussa, un autre personnage important, a presque épousé deux femmes.

Un autre thème important dans les derniers tomes, ce sont les **mauvaises conditions de vie pour les étudiants** à l'université en Côte d'Ivoire car, par exemple, les _____ étudiantes sont saturées.

On peut _____ que Aya de Yopougon est une bande dessinée féministe parce que ça parle du **machisme** quotidien et aussi de la difficulté pour les femmes d'avoir accès à **l'avortement**.

Fill in the gaps with the following words:

enfants dire exemple frère vie chambres beaucoup

Activity:



Translate to English some of the topics we can find in *Aya de Yopougon*. They are in **bold** in the text.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

Activity:



Research what 'nouchi' means and write your findings here.

Activity:



Lots of Nouchi words are used in *Aya de Yopougon*. *Try to match the Nouchi words to their English translation.*

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| un galérien | to dance |
| un génito | my mother |
| gazer | a party girl |
| une gazelle | a guy who does nothing |
| mon vieux | to go party |
| une gazeuse | my father |
| décaler | a married woman |
| le maquis | a cute girl, a girlfriend |
| une tantie | an auntie |
| ma vieille | a cute girl |
| une freshnie | a cheap open-air restaurant |
| une gardienne | a rich guy |

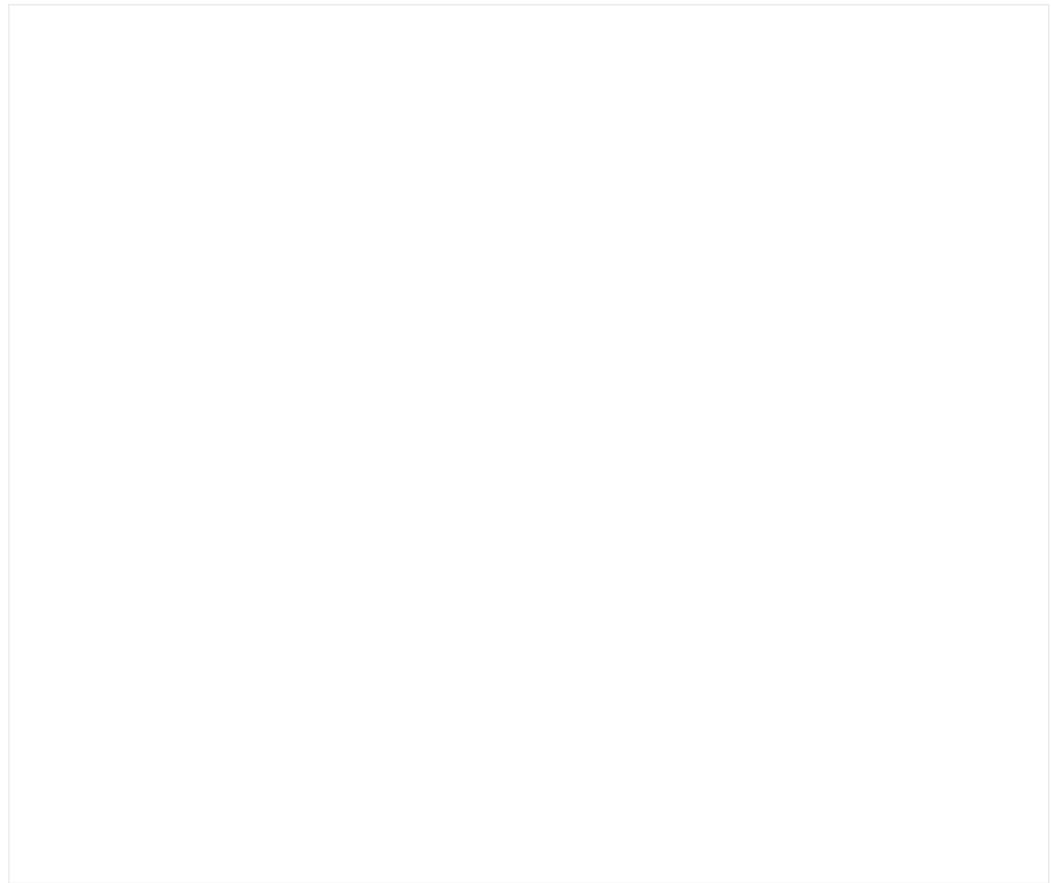
Check your
answers on
Quizlet.

Activity:



Follow the tutorial and draw Aya.

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/mVZPEI-ejiM>



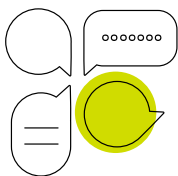
Further discussion

Watch these interviews of the author:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkOBDu1p5_A



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8g-UcTfRCs>



German language section

Ein deutscher Comicstrip

Madgermanes,
Birgit Weyhe

Die Geschichte

Madgermanes ist ein Comic über die 20.000 mosambikanischen Menschen, die Ende der 1970er Jahre als Vertragsarbeiter in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Ostdeutschland) beschäftigt waren. Die DDR benötigte Arbeitskräfte, und da Mosambik ein sozialistische Bruderstaat der DDR war, schlossen die beiden Regierungen eine Vereinbarung: Die Vertragsarbeiter sollten einen Teil ihres Gehalts in Ostdeutschland erhalten, während der andere Teil in Mosambik auf sie warten sollte, wenn sie zurückkehren. Der Autor führte Interviews mit einigen Madgermanes und fasste ihre gemeinsamen Geschichten durch drei fiktive Charaktere zusammen: José, Basilio und Annabella. Wir begleiten sie, als sie Mosambik verlassen, um in Ostdeutschland zu leben und zu arbeiten. Sie erlebten sowohl Aufregung als auch Desorientierung beim Kennenlernen der Lebensweise der Europäer. Sie freuten sich darauf, Abschlüsse zu erlangen, um zum Beispiel Architekten oder Ärzte zu werden, aber bald erkannten sie, dass sie nur hier waren, um körperliche Arbeit zu leisten. Außerdem wurden José, Basilio und Annabella jeden Tag in ihrem neuen, größtenteils von Weißen bewohnten Zuhause mit Rassismus konfrontiert.



Auch ihre Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen waren sehr streng. Die Vertragsarbeiter mussten nach dem Fall der Berliner Mauer nach Mosambik zurückkehren, weil ihr Vertrag endete. Es war sehr schwierig, zurückzukommen. Sie hatten einige ihrer Verwandten durch den Bürgerkrieg verloren, und alle dachten, sie seien reich. Aber das waren sie nicht, weil die mosambikanische Regierung den verbleibenden Teil ihres Gehalts nutzte, um ihre Schulden abzubauen.



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Seit 20 Jahren demonstrieren die Madgermanes jeden Mittwoch um 11 Uhr in Maputo, der Hauptstadt von Mosambik, um ihr Geld zurückzufordern. Madgermanes ist der Name, der ihnen gegeben wurde, als sie nach Mosambik zurückkehrten. Es bedeutet "Diejenigen, die aus Deutschland kommen" auf Shangaan, einem Dialekt aus Mosambik.

Activity:



Find the translation in the text:

contract workers

at the end of the 1970s

a socialist sister state

an agreement

their salary

when they came back

the author interviewed

three fictional characters

living and working

excitement and disorientation

the way of life

architects or doctors

racism

the fall of the Berlin Wall

they have demonstrated

to claim their money back

a dialect

Activity:



Grammar

Underline all the perfect tense verbs in the text. Write six of them here and translate them to English.



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Activity:



Answer the following questions in English

- 1) When did the Madgermanes leave Mozambique to East Germany?

- 2) What are the names of the three fictional characters?

- 3) What was it like for the Madgermanes when they arrived in East Germany?

- 4) When did the Madgermanes have to go back to Mozambique?

- 5) Why was it difficult when they came back to Mozambique?

- 6) What happens every Wednesday at 11 o'clock?

- 7) Where does the name 'Madgermanes' come from?

Activity:



Fill in the blanks in this text about the author of Madgermanes.

Die Autorin Birgit Weyhe wurde 1969 in München _____. Als Kind lebte sie in Uganda und Kenia. Zu Beginn ihres Comics erinnert sie sich an die _____, die sie hatte, als sie zum ersten Mal in _____ ankam. Sie beschreibt die Luft, die Farben, die Geräusche, die verschiedenen _____. Sie verwendet ähnliche Beschreibungen, um zu zeigen, wie Mosambikaner sich gefühlt haben _____, als sie zum ersten Mal in _____ ankamen. Für Madgermanes gewann Weyhe zwei _____ und wurde für mehrere Auszeichnungen nominiert.

Fill in the gaps with the following words:

**Ostdeutschland Preise müssen Empfindungen geboren
Uganda Sprachen**

Activity:



*Describe the picture with the man wearing a hat with a German flag and a tee-shirt with an inscription. What does the inscription mean?
Where do you think he is?*

Activity:



Here are some sentences in English about the characters in the comic.

Translate them into German.

- 1) José is shy.

- 2) José loves the snow.

- 3) José enjoys going to the cinema and library.

- 4) Annabella wants to be a doctor.

- 5) Basilio likes to go out and dance.

- 6) Basilio has a child with a German woman.

- 7) José, Annabella and Basilio all speak Portuguese.

- 8) They learn how to speak German.

- 9) They can eat meat everyday in East Germany but not in Mozambique.

- 10) Annabella obtains a work permit and becomes a doctor in Germany.

Activity:



The living and working conditions were very strict when the Mozambican contract workers arrived in East Germany. Here is a list of some of the rules.

Translate them into English.

- 1) Sie mussten Deutsch lernen.

- 2) Sie konnten die Arbeit, die sie wollten, nicht wählen.

- 3) Sie mussten körperliche Arbeit machen, die ihnen zugeteilt wurde.

- 4) Alle mussten im selben Hostel bleiben.

- 5) Nach 17 Uhr durften sie das Hostel nicht verlassen.

- 6) Männer und Frauen mussten getrennt sein.

- 7) Sie mussten Uniform tragen.

- 8) Wenn Frauen schwanger wurden, mussten sie abtreiben oder nach Mosambik zurückkehren.

- 9) Sie mussten akzeptieren, dass der größte Teil ihres Gehalts zurückgehalten wurde.

- 10) Nach dem Fall der Berliner Mauer mussten sie die Mosambik verlassen.

Activity:



Stretch:

Give your opinions about one of the rules.



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Activity:

Translate the list of what Mozambique workers had in their room when they first arrived in Germany:

- 2 Betten: _____
- 1 kl. Kommode: _____
- 1 Doppelspind: _____
- 2 Decken (Winter): _____
- 2 x Bettwäsche: _____
- 1 Tisch: _____
- 2 Stühle: _____
- 4 Handtücher: _____

Activity:

Do some research about Mozambique

- Hauptstadt: _____
- Ort: _____
- Sprachen: _____
- Anrainerländer: _____
- Bevölkerung: _____
- Religion: _____
- Regierung: _____
- Präsident: _____
- Wichtige Daten zur Entstehung des Landes: _____

Activity:



In German, describe the two flags.

Example: Die DDR-Flagge ist schwarz...



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DDR-Flagge



© Alamy/Westend61 GmbH

Mosambik-Flagge

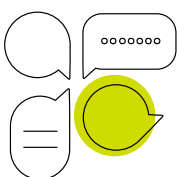
Stretch:

Say how you can recognise that these two states were sister socialist states.

Further discussion

Watch this documentary about the Madgermanes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URx4482nIV8>



Spanish language section

Un cómic español

Gaspacho agridulce,
Quan Zhou Wu



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La historia

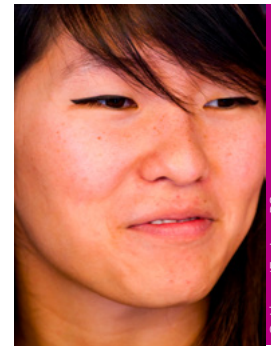
Gaspacho Agridulce (una autobiografía chino-andaluza) es un cómic muy gracioso y tierno escrito por Quan Zhou Wu. Trata de la historia verdadera de una familia china que vive en Andalucía. Efectivamente, los padres emigraron de China a un pueblo andaluz al borde del mar y abrieron un restaurante. Poco después, empezaron a tener hijos. Quan, la autora del cómic es la segunda hija de esta familia y cuenta su niñez y su adolescencia de manera humorística. La familia está compuesta de tres hijas y un hijo. Primero, la autora nos cuenta la niñez de las hermanas. Las niñas son muy descaradas y leemos sus tonterías pueriles con mucho encanto. Por ejemplo, ponen un huevo en una silla del restaurante chino para hacer una broma a los clientes. En otra ocasión tratan de hacer decir groserías en español a su mamá ya que ella no habla muy bien español. La mamá está harta de las niñas dado que prefieren la comida española a la china y utilizan sus nombres españoles más que los chinos. Por eso entendemos como lector que es difícil crecer con dos culturas y, con el paso del tiempo, las hermanas tratan de crear sus propias identidades. Segundo, las hermanas llegan a ser unas adolescentes un poco rebeldes, con historietas de amor, sin embargo, trabajan muy bien en la escuela. Paralelamente de sus estudios, tienen que trabajar en el restaurante para ayudar a sus padres y eso no les gusta en absoluto, no están interesadas en heredar el restaurante. Además, los padres quieren que se casen muy rápido en lugar de estudiar. No obstante, las hermanas quieren elegir sus propias carreras. A modo de ejemplo, Quan decide dedicarse al diseño e ilustración. Por añadidura, su hermana va a estudiar a los Estados Unidos. Entonces, vemos a las niñas creciendo y siendo más y más empoderadas con lo que quieren ser en el futuro. Al final, es una historia de crecimiento y de encontrar su lugar en la vida.



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La autora

Quan Zhou Wu (nacida en 1989) es una autora, ilustradora, novelista gráfica y diseñadora de producto digital. *Gaspacho agridulce* es su primera novela gráfica y salió en 2015. El tomo 2 se titula *Andaluchinas* y salió en 2018. También escribió *El gran libro de los niños extraordinarios* (2018) con Nuria Labari, *Gente de aquí, gente de allí* (2020), *La agridulce vita* (2023). Por otro lado, ha dado presentaciones sobre racismo e identidad en varias partes del mundo: por España, Estados Unidos, Suecia, China y Taiwán.



© Alamy/EnriqueP/Sans

Activity:



The below English words/parts of sentences can be found in the text in Spanish. *Write them down in the table.*

Inglés	Español
funny and tender	
true story	
at the seaside	
shortly after	
in a humoristic way	
the girls are very cheeky	
the mum is fed up with the girls	
they work very well at school	
it is difficult to grow up with two cultures	
they are not interested in inheriting the restaurant	
they want to choose their own careers	
more and more empowered	

Activity:



Answer the following questions in English

1) What genre is this comic? Circle two:

- fiction autobiography science fiction**
thriller comedy history romance

2) Where does the family live in Spain?

3) What business do they have?

4) How many children are there in the family?

5) What did the sisters do as a joke for the clients of the restaurant?

6) Why is the mum fed up with the girls?

7) What type of teenagers were the girls?

8) What type of career does Quan choose?

9) Where does her sister go to study?

10) What is the second volume after **Gazpacho agridulce** and when did he come out?

11) What type of presentations does the author do? And where?

Challenge:

Translate to English: 'gazpacho agridulce' – Why do you think the comic is called that?

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Activity:



Extract all the connectives and sequencers from the text and translate them to English.

Example: Poco después = shortly after

_____ = _____

_____ = _____

_____ = _____

_____ = _____

_____ = _____

_____ = _____

_____ = _____

Activity:



Match up the vocabulary related to food/restaurant that can be found in the comic.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. papas con huevo | A. sweets |
| 2. chuches | B. the macedonia (it's a type of salad) |
| 3. arroz tres delicias | C. pizza |
| 4. pollos con almendras | D. chicken balls |
| 5. pizza | E. rice three delicacies |
| 6. bolitas de pollo | F. lemon drink |
| 7. comida china | G. chicken with almonds |
| 8. bebida de limón | H. to clean the bathrooms |
| 9. entrantes | I. to be a waitress |
| 10. primer plato | J. starters |
| 11. agripicante | K. first course |
| 12. segundo plato | L. hot and sour |
| 13. montar las mesas | M. seafood |
| 14. postres | N. the second course |
| 15. macedonia | O. Chinese food |
| 16. limpiar los baños | P. to set up the tables |
| 17. marisco | Q. desserts |
| 18. ser camarera | R. to carry dishes |
| 19. llevar platos | S. potatoes with egg |

Activity:



Draw the family tree with the following characters:

Abuela Zhou

Mamá Zhou

Papá Zhou

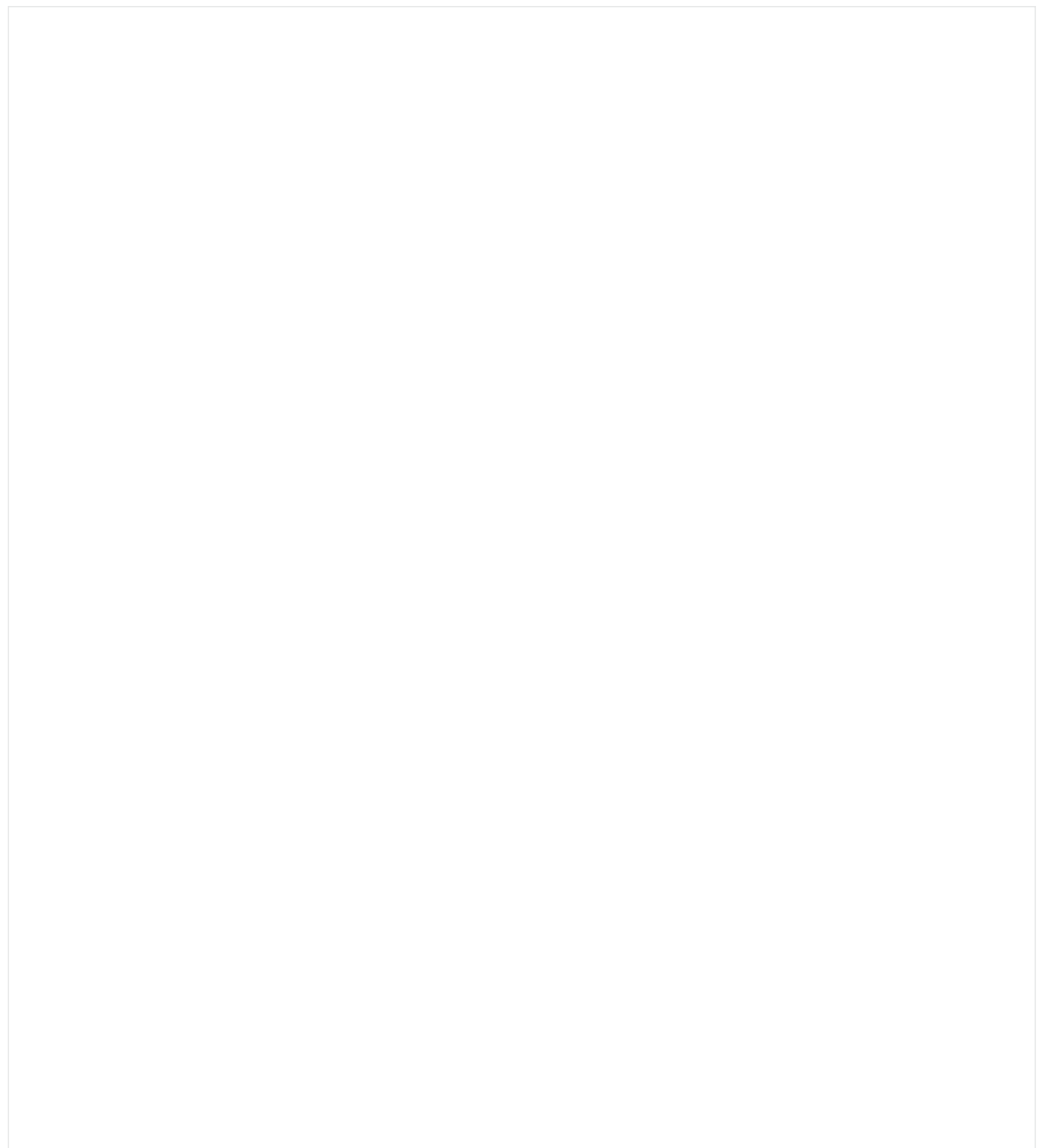
Tia Iñi

Hermana mayor (Fu/Cristina)

Segunda hermana (Quan/Margarita)

Hermana pequeña (La peque)

Hermano pequeño



Activity:



Translate to English.

1. Papá Zhou y Mamá Zhou querían un hijo pero primero tuvieron tres hijas.

2. Los padres hablan en un dialecto chino con sus hijos pero los hijos tienen que aprender el mandarín también.

3. El hermano pequeño jugaba mucho a los videojuegos.

4. La niñera de los niños se llamaba Dolores.

5. Mamá Zhou quiere que sus hijas se casen con un chino y no con un español.

6. Quan va a estudiar a Madrid y la hermana pequeña va a estudiar a Málaga.

7. La abuela Zhou llamaba regularmente a sus nietos.

8. Las hermanas tenían que hacer muchas tareas en el restaurante.

9. Mamá Zhou dice que las niñas son demasiado mimadas.

10. La familia iba a la iglesia china cada semana.

Tip:

Identify the tenses in each sentence before translating.

Activity:



These two Spanish traditions are mentioned in the comic.

Do some research on them and explain what they are in English.

Stretch:
Complete the activity in Spanish.



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El ratoncito:

Los reyes:

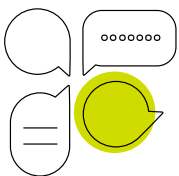
Further discussion

Watch these interviews of the author:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B72Cf_tfwY



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilugjlw9kNw>



About the author

Mathilde Hersart is a French and Spanish teacher born in France, currently working full time in a London school. After a 4-year career in the art market, Mathilde decided to become a Languages teacher and started studying for a PGCE at the Institute of Education (UCL). During her training year, she realized that she could teach MFL through art and culture, thus blending her previous career with her new one. With a strong interest in women in art, she is dedicated to enthusing this passion in her students, as she believes that art is not only a great way to remember new vocabulary but also a fantastic tool to immerse ourselves into the target language culture and history. Mathilde has also been a graphic novel fan since a young age and has been sharing this passion with her students through various projects, lessons, clubs or trips to the French Institute.

