

REVIEW OF *LA CHAISE BERÇANTE*

Title	<i>La Chaise Berçante</i> (The Rocking Chair; 2001-2002)
Platforms	PC/Mac
System requirements	Windows 95 or higher; 200 MHz; 64MB RAM; 8X CD-ROM Macintosh OS 8.6 or higher; 233 MHz; 64MB RAM; 8X CD-ROM
Publisher	Les Éditions 3D & CBC Radio Canada editions3D@telusplanet.net http://www.telusplanet.net/public/dddware/chaise/
Support offered	CD leaflet, Web site (see "Troubleshoot" section)
Target language	French
Target audience	those who enjoy French language and culture -- age 11 and up
Price	\$24.95 + GST (if applicable) + shipping and handling (rates are in Canadian dollars for Canadian customers, and in U.S. dollars for all others)
ISBN	n/a

Review by Lara Lomicka, the University of South Carolina

OVERVIEW

La Chaise Berçante CD-ROM is designed around a 15-minute animated film, CRAC.¹ This film provides a window into Quebec culture and language through the motif of a rocking chair. The producer, Frédéric Back,² indicates that rocking chairs are significant to the evolution of Quebec. In fact, this cultural artifact represents memories and changes, as well as traditional life and values. In the film, the rocking chair links the past with the present, recounting experiences throughout many years of history. For children in the film, the rocking chair also represents a place for dreaming and imagining -- it is transformed into a boat, a house, and even a train.



The perspective through which the story is told (the eyes of the rocking chair) is quite original -- the rocking chair provides viewers with a glimpse of rural life in Quebec. The story begins when a rocking chair is crafted as a gift from a man to his fiancée; the chair then become an integral part of their family life in rural Quebec. At the end of the story, it is rescued by a museum guard from the side of the road and finds a new home in a modern art museum.

CRAC made its debut in 1981 by producer Frédéric Back, known as both an illustrator and animator.³ After winning numerous awards, CRAC was incorporated into a language learning laserdisc package (Vi-Conte) in 1990 (Ledgerwood, 2002). Modifications to this program led to the development of the CD-ROM program *La Chaise Berçante*. A substantial amount of new content was added to 2001 edition.

The animated feature film is used as the basis for the development of vocabulary, listening comprehension, and cultural awareness in the CD-ROM package. Specific features of the program, such as the notebook, dictionary, a narrated legend in two styles of language, traditional music, and art all contribute to the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge.

KEY FEATURES

There are two menus that facilitate navigation in *La Chaise Berçante* (See Figure 1). First, the menu located on the bottom of the screen allows users to exit, return to the main menu, control the volume, access the dictionary, obtain help, or access their notebook.

The top navigation menu allows users to choose “CRAC” (view the film), “Application” (application exercises), “Culture” (additional cultural information), “Chasse-Galerie” (a legend narrated in French and Canadian French), “Diapos” (slides of places and things in Quebec), “Aide” (help), and “Générique” (credits).



Figure 1. Main menu of *La Chaise Berçante*

By clicking on “CRAC!,” users can view the 15-minute animated film (stop, start, pause, fast forward, rewind, and volume options are available). While watching the film, users can click on “narration,” which allows access to the text in order to follow along with the words, and “culture,” where additional cultural information can be found. Students might be curious to find out what a *bûcheron* is, read song lyrics, or have access to more information on festivals and people. “Application” provides different types of exercises (e.g., cloze, matching the term with the corresponding picture [with text or by listening to each word], listening comprehension questions, associations, grammatical exercises, and dictation style activities) for three different levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The “Culture” menu provides information on artists and art, songs (including lyrics and music), festivals, paintings, and dances (including video clips to illustrate). This area is indeed a rich source of cultural information for learners. In fact, as learners study a cultural product, such as this traditional story along with its art and music, they have opportunities to explore various cultural perspectives and gain a deeper understanding into the life and culture of the people of that time (Pesola, 1991).

Two other interesting features of the program include the “Chasse-Galerie” and “Diapos.” In the Chasse-Galerie, users find a narrated legend in traditional French and in Québécois French (called, “*Le Bucheron raconte*”). The CD-ROM explains that legends are often passed down through the generations by word of mouth. The Chasse-Galerie, a story about a canoe that travels in the sky, is one of the most well known legends in Quebec. As they listen to the legend, students can navigate easily from “standard” French to Canadian French. As in the animated film, CRAC, students have the option of displaying the text with which they can follow along. It should be noted, however, that this option is not available when listening in Québécois French.

When users access the “Diapos” area (see Figure 2) they are able to choose from a variety of slides (*Carnaval*, Montréal, Québec, and Canadian art from the film) and manipulate these slides into a virtual photo album. A music option is available for listening to as students decide on the slides to include in their album. Each slide can be enlarged. A search feature and a scavenger hunt option are available from this menu as well. Students can look for a word, based on categories or they can participate in a short scavenger hunt (essentially a comprehension quiz) on a particular topic such as the *Carnaval*.



Figure 2. *Diapos* and photo album

Two distinctive features located on the bottom menu are the *Carnet* and the *Dictionnaire*. The *Carnet* serves as the personal diary or writing space throughout their journey with the rocking chair. There is also assistance for typing accents provided for both PC and MAC (available through the “Aide” menu). Students may organize their work at the top of each page by writing their name, the topic and the page number. There is additional space in the body of the notebook to jot down personal thoughts, reflections, and stories. A yellow menu, although partially hidden behind the page of the journal, allows users to perform basic word process manipulations such as save, open, close, print, and so forth. The *Dictionnaire*

(which includes over 1,000 words) is quite extensive and entirely in French. In addition to a definition for each word and example phrases and/or sentences illustrating how it is used, this feature also provides synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and derivatives. By clicking on the sound icon, learners can hear the pronunciation of the word as well. The dictionary is an impressive feature of the program -- almost every word is glossed, and it is accessible simply by clicking on an unknown word.

EVALUATION

La Chaise Berçante is easy to install, navigation is simple, and the program is interesting and motivating for users. Although some menus offer the option of reading items in English, overall the French language dominates making this CD-ROM an excellent choice for advanced students or those in immersion settings. One distinct advantage of using a short animated film as a vehicle for language learning is that in it language is seen as a tool, not as an end in itself. It is rich in both content and language, exploring life and traditions of rural Quebec to today. *La Chaise Berçante* offers an engaging experience for students in that they can discover traditional Quebecois traditions and compare them to those of today (e.g., the carnival).

CRAC tells a story and provides a context, which serves as a vehicle for learning culture and language. Omaggio-Hadley (2001) has underscored the importance of teaching language in context and has attested to the benefits of contextualization in language teaching. Story-based approaches focus on the use of natural discourse and meaningful comprehension. Using this film, learners have access to longer samples of discourse and can then work more specifically on the parts (Shrum & Glisan, 2000).

While the video provides authentic input to assist in developing linguistic competence and cultural awareness, teachers should be advised to spend some time preparing and integrating previewing activities (Joiner, 1990). These types of exercises help to prepare learners for the task at hand; they can approach these tasks more easily, through advance organizers, when video work is in shorter segments. The function “*grands moments du film*” enables the viewer to jump to or to watch shorter segments, or selected scenes from the movie, so that the input becomes more comprehensible to students (Altman, 1989). This feature would be particularly helpful to teachers who wish to work on various segments of the movie over a period of time.

The exercises contained in the CD-ROM (“Application”) are generally structured and focus primarily on interaction between students and the computer. Direct feedback is provided, and students can repeat exercises as often as needed. Teachers who follow more communicative approaches, however, would need to supplement these materials with exercises that promote communication, interaction, and negotiation among learners.

After a thorough evaluation of this CD-ROM, *La Chaise Berçante* may not be particularly well suited for beginners of the French language. A substantial amount of work on specific vocabulary, even for beginners (e.g., the names of animals, tools for cutting wood), would need to be incorporated into previewing activities. At a minimum, students should have some background in French in order to be successful at minimal comprehension of the videotext and its accompanying cultural materials. I would also recommend that teachers unfamiliar with this program or its predecessor, *Vi-Conte*, take several hours to familiarize themselves with the different features so that in-class time with the software can be used in pedagogically sound ways. Having no prior experience with *Vi-Conte*, I found that some extra time was needed to become comfortable and proficient using them as intended.

Overall, *La Chaise Berçante* represents an excellent integration of culture and language in the form of story with cultural history. The animated film, music, and interviews are noteworthy additions to this program. The variety in content, style of exercises, and type of information make *La Chaise Berçante* an attractive way to learn about Quebec. This CD-ROM offers both an enriching and engaging experience for students, teachers, or anyone with an interest in Quebec.

NOTES

1. CRAC is an Oscar award winning animation (Best Animated Short Movie – 1982) and has won over 20 other awards. See <http://www.awn.com/gallery/back/filmo.eng.html> for a more detailed list.
 2. Frédéric Back was born near Strasburg, France in 1924 but has resided in Montréal since 1948.
 3. A short video clip is available on the CD-Rom showcasing an interview with Frédéric Back about his life, work, and interests.
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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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