

## ***First day of school***

Arriving in the “classroom” (which is simply a corner of the yard used as such), I realise that I have twice as many pupils than I had been told to expect. No school materials<sup>1</sup>, no tables, no books, just a group enthusiastically singing twenty metres away. I am amused at the thought of just how much improvising I am going to have to do.

I look at them, a gang of strapping men between 20 and 40 years old, silent and slightly awkward. They got up in unison to welcome me and now can't work out if they should sit back down or not. I introduce myself and the subject (vocabulary) and offer myself as their teacher. I talk to them about the strength of words, the beauty and the good fortune that lead us to be able to work together. In the end, the class lasted an hour in place of the 30 minutes that had been planned. When I finally stop talking, they mumble and grumble. The class can't be finished *already*?

They're even more annoyed when they realise that I'm only going to be able to give one class a week. “*If we are going to improve, we need to have classes every day*”. They're right, of course. But what can I say? Literacy classes are only planned for three times a week. “*But it's down to us! If we you agree to give us classes, we want to come every morning*”. I laugh, both surprised and touched. How many teachers have dreamed of such motivation? We reach an agreement; I will give them additional homework, but only to those who agree that they want it. They all wanted it although, that that stage, nothing surprised me any more. I was not even surprised that the homework that they gave back to me over the following two months was the most refined and the most focused that I had ever corrected.

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<sup>1</sup> The school material collected by the pupils of Notre Dame de la Sagesse was distributed the following day.