

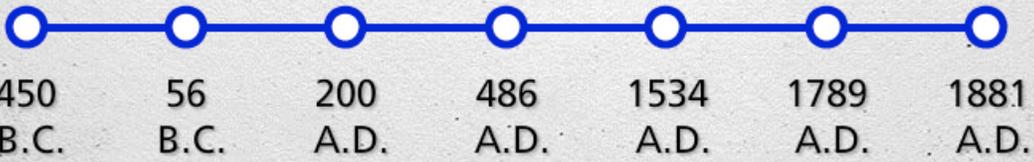
Module 1: Leçons préliminaires
Topic 3 Content: History of the French Language

Introduction

History of the French Language



In this interactivity, you will examine a timeline that highlights the main events resulting in the development of the French language and its spread across the globe. As you proceed through the timeline, click the star icons to learn more about the origins of French vocabulary.



450	56	200	486	1534	1789	1881
B.C.	B.C.	A.D.	A.D.	A.D.	A.D.	A.D.

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Pre-Roman France

Pre-Roman France



Location of Celtic culture in Europe during the 3rd century B.C.

A reconstruction of a Celtic settlement from the 1st century B.C.

Gaul is the name of a region in Europe that encompasses present-day France. It was inhabited by cultures who spoke various languages, but the dominant language family was Celtic. The French language today still has a few hundred words of Celtic origin.

450 B.C. 56 B.C. 200 A.D. 486 A.D. 1534 A.D. 1789 A.D. 1881 A.D.

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Modern French Words Derived From Celtic

1. Celtic *molton* → French *mouton* (sheep)
This also gives English the word *mutton*, or meat from a sheep.
2. Celtic *grava* → French *grève* (pebbly beach)
This also gives English the word *gravel*.

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Roman Conquest

Roman Conquest

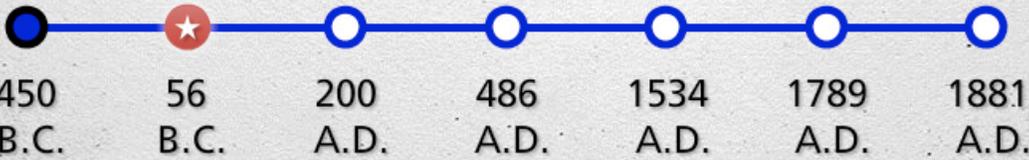


The extent of Roman territory in 40 B.C. under Julius Caesar



A Gallic chieftain surrenders to Julius Caesar.

In the first century B.C., Julius Caesar expanded the Roman territory across various parts of Europe. By 56 B.C., he successfully conquered Gaul after fending off invasion by Germanic tribes and defeating native Gallic tribes. Under the rule of the Roman Empire, the Latin language spread to Gaul and eventually replaced other languages already spoken there.



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Modern French Words Derived From Latin

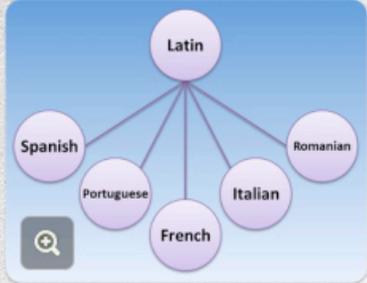
1. Latin *cantare* → French *chanter* (to sing)
2. Latin *panis* → French *pain* (bread)

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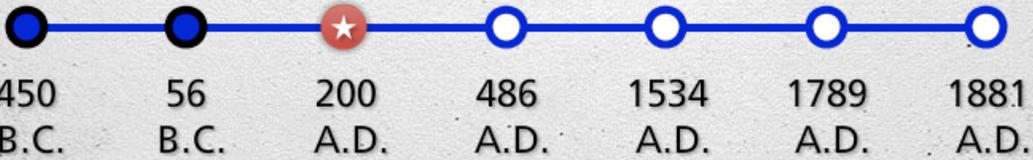
Emergence of French

Emergence of French



At its height, the Roman Empire extended over two million square miles and included much of Europe. The Romans carried the Latin language to these newly conquered lands, but over time the Latin language evolved in different regions independently. Each region's version of Latin gradually grew more and more different from the classical Latin spoken in Rome. Gradually these changing dialects gave rise to distinct languages.

The Latin spoken on the Iberian Peninsula became Spanish and Portuguese. Latin on the Italian Peninsula turned into modern Italian. In the Balkans, Latin developed into modern Romanian. And in present-day France, Latin gave rise to modern French. These five modern languages that evolved from Latin are referred to as Romance languages.



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Words Derived From Colloquial Latin

The Classical Latin word for "horse" is *equus*.
Compare this with the Colloquial Latin word for "horse" *caballus*.

Over time, informal spoken Latin eventually became the Romance languages, as you can see in the modern words below. Are they more similar to *equus* or *caballus*?

1. Spanish *caballo* (horse)
2. Italian *cavallo* (horse)
3. Portuguese *cavalo* (horse)
4. French *cheval* (horse)

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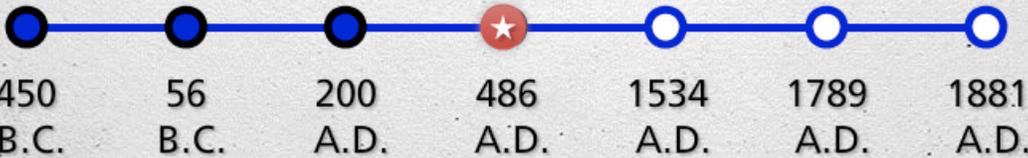
Influence of the Franks

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Starting in the 3rd century, numerous Germanic tribes once again invaded Gaul and eventually took control over the region from the Romans. The Germanic group that had the most influence over the development of the French language was the Franks. Their first Christian king, Clovis I, unified all the Frankish tribes in 486 A.D. His kingdom would eventually come to be known as Francia, or "Land of the Franks." This name would later give rise to the modern name of France.

Approximately ten percent of modern French words are derived from the Frankish language. Around five percent come from other Germanic languages, such as Old Norse and Gothic.



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Modern French Words Derived From Germanic Languages

1. Frankish *dansjan* → French *danser* (to dance)
2. Frankish *gardin* → French *jardin* (garden)

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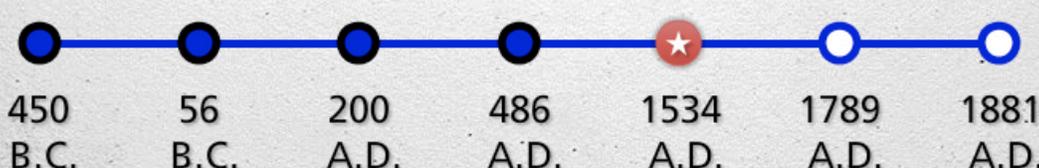
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Colonialism in the New World

Colonialism in the New World



In 1534, Jacques Cartier sailed from France to North America and claimed Gaspé Bay on behalf of France. He named this territory Canada, after the Iroquois word *kanata*, meaning "village." Although Canada would later fall under control of Great Britain before eventually gaining independence, French remains one of Canada's official languages, alongside English.



A horizontal timeline with seven points marked by circles. The circles are blue with white centers, except for the one at 1534 A.D., which is red with a white star. Below each circle is a year and a time period (B.C. or A.D.).

Year	Time Period
450	B.C.
56	B.C.
200	A.D.
486	A.D.
1534	A.D.
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Modern French Words Derived From the Americas

1. Taino *barabacu* → French *barbecue* (barbecue)
2. Arawakan *iwana* → French *iguane* (iguana)

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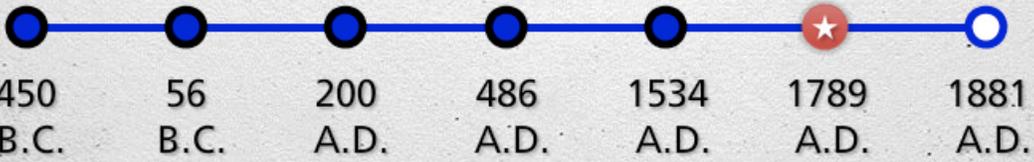
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French Language as a National Unifier

French Language as a National Unifier



At the time that the French Revolution began in 1789, France was the most populous country in Europe. Even though French had long been the dominant international language, less than fifteen percent of the French population were native speakers of French. Instead, the working class people who lived outside of Paris spoke primarily regional languages, as many as thirty provincial dialects. In an effort to unite the people against tyranny, there was a movement to make French the common language of the whole population, an endeavor that continued far into the 20th century. Although many of France's regional languages are still spoken today, French has secured itself as the preeminent language in France.



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Differences Between Modern French and Regional Languages of France

In the late 1700s, leaders began to worry that the people of France could not communicate with one another. Note the drastic differences in vocabulary between regional words and Modern French.

1. Alsatian *trenk* (to drink) | French *boire* (to drink)
2. Breton *boued* (food) | French *nourriture* (food)

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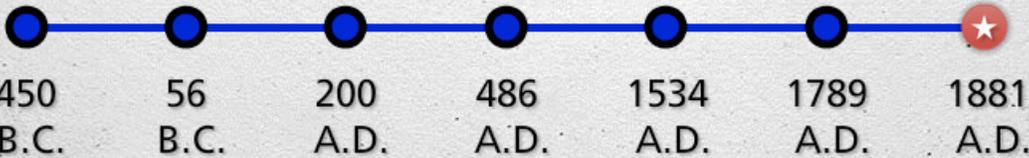
The French Legacy in Africa and the Middle East

The French Legacy in Africa and the Middle East



Students in Cameroon, 2014
Cameroon has over 200 languages, but 80% of the population speaks French.

The French had established trading posts in Senegal as early as 1624 and began controlling Algeria in 1830, but they did not accelerate their expansion into Africa until the late 19th century. Beginning with the conquest of Tunisia in 1881, France would move on to claim numerous regions of Africa and island territory off its eastern coast, competing with other European powers to claim as much territory in Africa as possible. Hundreds of thousands of Africans fought in both world wars in the 20th century, but most of France's African territories did not gain their independence from France until 1960 or later. French still serves as a standard language for communication in many of these nations today.



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Modern French Words Derived From Africa and the Middle East

1. Arabic *qutun* → French *coton* (cotton)
2. Bantu *mbanza* → French *banjo* (banjo)