

# MODERN LANGUAGES STUDY GUIDES

## FILM STUDY GUIDE FOR AS/A-LEVEL FRENCH

### Entre les murs

dir. Laurent Cantet

- ▶ Build accurate and detailed knowledge of the work
- ▶ Master specialist vocabulary
- ▶ Develop your analytical response and critical skills

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# Getting the most from this guide



This guide is designed to help you to develop your understanding and critical appreciation of the concepts and issues raised in *Entre les murs* as well as your language skills, fully preparing you for your Paper 2 exam. It will help you when you are studying the film for the first time and also during your revision.

A mix of French and English is used throughout the guide to ensure you learn key vocabulary and structures that you'll need for your essay, while also allowing you to develop a deep understanding of the work.

The following features have been used throughout this guide to help build your language skills and focus your understanding of the film.

## Activity

Various types of activities are found throughout the book to test your knowledge of the work and develop your vocabulary and grammar. Longer writing tasks will help prepare you for your exam.

## Build critical skills

These offer an opportunity to consider some more challenging questions. They are designed to encourage deeper thinking and analysis to take you beyond what happens in the film to explore why the director has used particular techniques and the effects they have on you. These analytical and critical skills are essential for success in AO4 in the exam.

## Answers

Answers to every activity, task and critical skills question can be found online at [www.hoddereducation.co.uk/mfl-study-guide-answers](http://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/mfl-study-guide-answers)

## les émeutes (f) riots

For every paragraph in French, key vocabulary is highlighted and translated. Make sure you know these words so you can write an essay with accurate language and a wide range of vocabulary, which is essential to receive the top mark for AO3.

## TASK

Short tasks are included throughout the book to test your knowledge of the film. These require short written answers.

## GRADE BOOSTER

These top tips will advise you on what to do, as well as what *not* to do, to maximise your chances of success in the examination.

## Key quotation

Key quotations are highlighted as they may be useful supporting evidence in your essay.

*Notre vie, elle est pas passionnante.*

(Justine)

Further quotations can be found in the 'Top 10 quotations' chapter on page 93 of the guide.



## 4 Themes

In the context of literary and film analysis, a theme is a topic or an idea on which an author or film-maker focuses their thoughts, their discourse or their work, or around which an action might be organised. Applying this to *Entre les murs* requires us to identify the topics which Laurent Cantet, through the various things he shows us in the film, would like us to reflect on.

You will have identified a number of themes in *Entre les murs*; here we will particularly concentrate on the following:

- living together
- inequalities in education

There are a number of secondary themes related to each of the themes above: see the mind map on page 46.

### Vivre ensemble

Le thème du « vivre ensemble » est particulièrement important dans *Entre les murs*, puisque l'on remarque que **le microcosme** de la classe et des individus qui la composent peuvent être vus comme un reflet non seulement du quartier où se trouve le collège mais aussi de la société française toute entière. Le vivre ensemble est une question clé pour la société française contemporaine, où l'on voit que les gens de cultures diverses, qu'elles soient ethniques, sociales, religieuses, ou autres, ont de plus en plus de mal à vivre ensemble. À l'échelle du collège d'*Entre les murs*, on voit ces mêmes tensions prendre forme, et souvent il faut gérer des affrontements de toutes sortes. Le collège en tant qu'établissement, bâtiment, joue bien sûr son rôle dans ce vivre ensemble.

**le microcosme**  
(= image réduite du monde, de la société)  
microcosm

### Qui sont les membres de cette classe ?

La classe est un lieu où on peut observer les interactions d'un certain nombre de personnes qui ont été mises ensemble sans qu'on leur demande leur avis, et qui vont devoir vivre ensemble entre 7 et 9 heures par jour. C'est un lieu privilégié pour exercer **l'intégration** et **le multiculturalisme**. Leur seul point commun au départ est leur âge. Il leur faut donc apprendre très rapidement à tolérer et accepter les différences des autres, ou alors on voit les interactions évoluer vers le chaos.

**l'intégration** (f)  
integration

**le multiculturalisme**  
multiculturalism

Ever since the education reform which put in place the '*collège unique*' (a single type of school for all students aged 12 to 16), young people who have in common only their year of birth have been taught together in order to prepare them for their life beyond school, in *lycée* followed by higher education, or in vocational



training, or in the world of work. So what we see in *Entre les murs* is a set of individuals who come with personal preferences, distinct hobbies, habits, various abilities and varying levels of enthusiasm or motivation, and a large spectrum of social and ethnic origins. They are, each and every one of them, a specific human being with all their background and baggage, and they have to manage to live together for a year because school has put them together to form the single entity Classe 4<sup>e</sup>3. Inevitably, all the personality aspects that have been brought together in that class are going to vie for space and recognition within the small physical and social space that has been allocated to them. This will lead, as we see often in the film, to confrontations, verbal or physical, but we also witness moments of harmony when the group suddenly has one aim and works together towards it: it might be writing in silence about a topic given by the teacher, or as a crowd wanting to bring the teacher down (for example in the school playground at the height of the tensions related to the 'pétasse' insult). You can find more details on the French education system in Chapter 2, 'Social and historical context'.



▲ In the school playground

## Confrontations

**l'affrontement** (m)  
**physique ou verbal**

physical or verbal  
confrontation

**les insultes** (f) name-  
calling

**le coup** punch

À cause des différentes personnalités qui se retrouvent dans un même espace et doivent se faire une place, un certain nombre de conflits, de plusieurs natures, se développent. Ces **affrontements** vont être physiques ou verbaux, ils vont aller des **insultes** jusqu'aux **coups**, intentionnels ou non, mais bien réels. Au-delà des attaques de front entre élèves, on peut aussi observer des rapports de force plus subtils, entre adultes et enfants, et entre enseignants et apprenants. Le film nous montre donc une microsociété où les rapports de force sont extrêmement importants mais aussi en perpétuelle remise en question, puisque chacun peut briller ou faire preuve de qualités ou de fautes diverses et variées.

The confrontations are numerous and can be sparked by the most minute things, sometimes just disruptive behaviour. Several types of confrontations can be identified in the film, or, in other words, the confrontations can be categorised in several ways.

The first type is the one-to-one confrontation, where two individuals are in conflict, for example that of Carl and Souleymane, which starts as physical confrontation in the school playground and moves on to be verbal in the classroom.

There are also small group confrontations, when friendship groups gang together to defend or support a friend who is involved in an argument, for example Esméralda and Khoumba against M. Marin, or Esméralda and Louise against M. Marin again, or the students of Moroccan origin against the students originally from Mali.

Lastly, in two instances, we witness the confrontation of a large group (more or less the whole class) and an individual: when M. Marin first uses the word *pétasse*, and the class is in uproar, then in the school playground when M. Marin confronts Louise and Esméralda about going to the pastoral director to complain about him. Here, we witness a power struggle between children and an adult, or it could be seen as scoring a point against the teacher, who is normally in the position of superior power, as holder of knowledge.

Interestingly, it is possible to add another dimension to the conflicts between individuals, or a group, and the teacher: the relationship and tensions between teenager and adult, and also the relationship between teacher and learner, i.e. the person who holds the knowledge and the person who needs the knowledge. Within the classroom, there is an almost permanent power relationship between adult and teenager, teacher and learner. In short, the struggle between teenager and adult mostly centres on rebellion against the undisputed authority exercised over the child, and the struggle between teacher and learner is located around the fact that knowledge is indeed power. The teachers already have it, which places them in a position of superiority, therefore students fight to assert some form of superiority over their teacher, or they have to negotiate cleverly in order to gain knowledge. You can see here the contradiction between the urge to rebel against the authority of the adult and the need to either fight for knowledge on a different parameter, or the need to control the instinct for rebellion in order to obtain knowledge from the holder.

These small instances show that all the individuals are different, but that these individuals have to live together, so they have to make the best of a (slightly) less-than-ideal situation and negotiate, consciously or subconsciously, the place of their individualities within the entity they form.

This last description could just as easily be ascribed to society in general, or towns, or other entities composed of individuals, as it is to the class of *Entre les murs*. It is particularly interesting in this film that the class should be multicultural and therefore, regarding the issue of living together, quite a striking and accurate representation of French society as a whole. It is a society where,

### TASK

1 Nommez et expliquez les différents types d'affrontements que l'on peut voir dans *Entre les murs*.

through immigration and other changes in the population, various communities are brought to live together (by mere circumstances or by deliberate policies), and although it can be and sometimes is harmonious and enriching, it is often difficult and riddled with tensions.

## L'importance du lieu (le collège) dans leur cohabitation

**l'échelle** (f) scale

**les règles** (f) rules

**s'en tenir à** to keep to

Les différentes **échelles** de lieu dans le film sont comme des poupées russes emboîtées les unes dans les autres : la classe → le collège → le quartier/l'arrondissement → la ville → le pays ; les niveaux plus larges sont construits à l'image du niveau le plus petit. De plus, *Entre les murs* se sert activement de l'espace minimal donné aux élèves pour renforcer l'idée que les élèves ne sont pas libres de faire ce qu'ils veulent mais sont obligés de vivre selon **les règles** d'une communauté. Puisque ces différents niveaux se représentent les uns les autres, il est intéressant de constater que l'on peut **s'en tenir à** filmer une classe, et tout de même parler des sujets qui occupent une société entière. De plus, dans sa dimension de bâtiment, le collège joue un rôle sociétal à part entière : garder les éléments encore frais, encore naïfs, loin de la société au sens large, jusqu'à ce qu'ils puissent y survivre, ou mieux, y vivre en harmonie avec les autres.

The location of the action is a specific classroom, within a specific secondary school, within a specific district, in Paris, in France. Although somewhat obvious, this is a fact worthy of note because Laurent Cantet, through *Entre les murs*, wanted to show, among other things, that the class and the *collège* are representations on a smaller scale of the bigger entities in which they are nestled. So the social make-up of the class is a small-scale representation of the social make-up of their district community, of the Paris area, and of France. So too are the interactions between the individuals that form this class.

On a more concrete or physical level, it is easy to realise that the filming location is very restrictive (once we have gone into the school early in the film, we are in the classroom 80% of the time, with rare escapes to the teachers' common room, or to the playground, or to other rooms of the school): if we add to that the title *Entre les murs* ('between the walls'), it is difficult to avoid a certain feeling of restriction of space, and by extension, of freedom, and to start thinking about the walls of a prison. Bearing in mind that school is somewhere where, although they seem to go there of their own free will (nobody is physically dragging them into the school), students are *obliged* to go: obliged by law, if nothing else. But ask many of them, and they'll say that if they were not obliged to go to school, they would choose to do anything other than go to school. In terms of a physical institution, school is different from prison only by the fact that students can walk in and out of it at will, and it is not meant for the punishment of misbehaviour.

### GRADE BOOSTER

Think of a few key shots that show most strikingly the restricted environment in which the students are confined. Have a description ready for inclusion in your essay, if relevant of course.



The putting together of people from incredibly varied horizons, the restriction of movement within the building, the social interactions and the power relationships (students/inmates among themselves as well as between students/inmates and teachers/prison staff) are, however, common to the two institutions.

## Les inégalités dans l'éducation

### Un collège difficile : pour qui ? pourquoi ?

Nous avons déjà vu la structure du système scolaire en France. Nous allons maintenant nous concentrer sur quelques aspects particuliers de ce thème, l'éducation, qui sont abordés dans le film : les difficultés que les enseignants peuvent rencontrer pour **enseigner**, mais aussi les difficultés que les élèves vont avoir à **apprendre**. Les premiers peuvent trouver leur mission d'enseignement difficile à accomplir, si les élèves auxquels ils enseignent ne sont pas intéressés ou motivés, ou si ces derniers ne comprennent pas pourquoi l'éducation est importante. À l'inverse, dans un contexte de classe peu attentive, même les élèves qui auraient pu vouloir progresser et réussir vont se trouver **ralentis**, donc désavantagés, par le rythme imposé par **les interruptions** problématiques en relation avec **la discipline**.

**enseigner** to teach

**apprendre** to learn

**ralentir** to slow down

**les interruptions** (f)  
interruptions

**la discipline** discipline

The synopsis of the film, including for the press release, states that François Marin teaches in a '*collège difficile*', a difficult secondary school. One tends to assume that this difficulty relates to the teaching, but it will be interesting to examine this difficulty from the learners' point of view. This section will explore the ways in which each side of the teaching/learning divide is affected by this difficulty.

### Qu'est-ce qui est « difficile » ? Les intentions confrontées à la réalité de la classe

From the point of view of teachers, an easy school must be one where they can achieve their mission of imparting knowledge to their students or leading their students to the understanding of concepts and ideas, and where minimum disruption happens during class time. But it does not mean that students cannot interrupt a teacher and ask questions: they just have to be relevant to the lessons. A secondary school where this description applies all of the time probably does not exist. There are, however, various degrees possible before being considered a difficult school. While not wanting to diminish the importance of the quality of the teaching, the smooth proceeding of a lesson is intricately linked to the students in the class: once upon a time, the teacher was the overall, unchallenged ruler of a classroom, and students who did not behave as they were expected or told to were harshly sanctioned. With the development of child psychology, conditions have improved in the classrooms

#### Key quotation

*Les élèves sont un peu difficiles.*

(Hervé, prof d'EPS)

and the students' personalities are allowed to be expressed in that environment. But sometimes this comes into conflict with the main aims of school: teaching and learning. This means that a school will be judged difficult if the students are more challenging than can reasonably be expected.



▲ M. Marin with students Souleymane and Boubacar at the computer

### Comment le film montre-t-il la difficulté d'enseigner dans un « collège difficile » ?

Probably the most obvious example is the level of noise and disruption to lessons that M. Marin has to deal with on a regular basis, which we see throughout the film. It takes a lot of classroom management skills, built up on the experience he has accumulated over the years, to deal with these frequent interruptions. We see that François Marin often 'goes' with his students' comments or questions and turns them into learning opportunities (e.g. the question about the imperfect subjunctive). However, when some of his students deliberately try to disrupt the course of a lesson, he tends to manage to deride their comments or make fun of them, thus cutting short the disruption and giving him the opportunity to refocus the attention of the class.

There are also, however, examples of serious disruptions and volatile situations: insolence and refusal to cooperate from Koumba, leading to a pointless argument and waste of time; general lack of work from the whole class, leading to homework having to be done in class, thereby wasting time; an argument that degenerates into serious insolence and disrespect to the teacher, followed by violent gestures which leave a student injured — all situations that disrupt the teacher's primary mission: to teach. Apart from the situations of violence, which clearly have no place in a school, it is difficult not to feel sorry for François Marin, who has to deal with the various attacks of his students: verbal only, yes, but still emotionally exhausting since they demand a response and waste learning time.

We are given a glimpse of other ways in which teachers respond to the challenges thrown at them every hour of the school day: the most dramatic one is that of the design and technology teacher, who comes out of his class and into the staffroom on the verge of tears and ranting about the appalling behaviour of one of his classes. The breaking of several social conventions (loss of self-control, crying in public) shows that teachers are sometimes pushed to their absolute limit, by a crowd that is against the teacher to start with, and determined to bring them down if they can spot the most minor weakness. As we see the other teachers listening in silence, we can guess that they have been there before and that no word of support will alleviate the distress.

Some teachers use humour to play down the difficulties of teaching: one maths teacher introduces himself, at the beginning of the year, as 'teacher of multiplication tables' (in principle, these should be known long before leaving primary school). But joking about the difficulties of the job is different from using humour to diffuse a difficult situation in the classroom. They are both coping mechanisms, the former to help keep up the morale over the long term, and the latter to nip a challenge in the bud and quickly move on.

To sum up, the reasons why teachers (and observers) might describe their school as 'difficult' are mainly disruption to lessons and antagonistic behaviour from their students, which interrupt their mission: teaching. But let's turn now to how these difficulties affect students.

## La difficulté est-elle seulement celle d'enseigner ?

It is impossible to ignore that difficulties with teaching in a given institution will lead to difficulties for the students with learning. *Entre les murs* gives us many examples of this: among others, the time wasted while M. Marin argues with Khoumba over her refusal to read; the students interrupting a lesson to ask questions related to their average marks or comments made about them by teachers; the teacher being interrupted and accused of favouritism (towards Wei) or white elitism ('*Bill mange un succulent cheeseburger*' episode).

Although, because of the students' age and immaturity, classroom disruption may sound fun to them and feel like a welcome break from the pressure of work, too much of it will inevitably lead to a shortage of time available to learn, to have contact with a teacher for help etc. This is unfortunately how the gap between good schools (and their studious students) and difficult schools (with their challenging students) keeps widening, and why mothers like Burak's want their children to go to *lycée* Henri IV, where, as a studious student, he would be able to study and learn as much as he wishes.

So, going back to the possible definitions of 'difficult', when this term is applied to a school, we have now seen that 'difficult' can qualify the way in which students can access knowledge and understanding if they are in a challenging and disruptive environment, as well as the difficulties teachers encounter in delivering the curriculum when they are faced with disruptive students or classes.

### Build critical skills

Pensez-vous que M. Marin est trop indulgent avec ses élèves ? Si oui, que devrait-il faire ?

### TASK

2 Pourquoi peut-on considérer qu'il est difficile d'apprendre dans la 4<sup>e</sup>3 d'*Entre les murs* ?

## Les échecs et les réussites

**l'échec** (m) failure  
**la réussite** success

**prendre en compte**  
 take into account  
**accomplir** to achieve

De nos jours, y compris à l'école avec les examens, les **échecs** et les **réussites** se comptent préférentiellement en chiffres clairs et tranchants mais peu représentatifs de la réalité à l'échelle de l'individu. Les échecs et les réussites prennent des formes variées dans *Entre les murs* : on peut voir la réussite d'individus à des moments précis, et la joie qui en découle, mais aussi, irrémédiablement, les échecs d'un système qui ne peut pas **prendre en compte** chaque individu et s'occuper de lui selon ses besoins tout particuliers. Les réussites du système dans son ensemble ne sont pas vues, puis qu'il faudrait retrouver les élèves de 4<sup>es</sup> dans le futur et voir s'ils ont **accompli** de grandes choses, pour eux ou pour le monde.

### Key quotation

*Vous pensez beaucoup à pénaliser, et jamais à valoriser.*

(Une parente d'élève)

*J'ai refusé ce système qui vous force à rentrer dans des normes...*

(La mère d'Arthur)

On the small scale of the school observed in *Entre les murs*, it is possible to identify several failures and successes of the system and of individuals.

We see M. Marin failing to rescue Souleymane from the downward spiral in which he has thrown himself; we see M. Marin failing to make the right judgement about what he can safely say to his class and avoid misunderstanding and conflict; we see him fail to get Khoumba to understand why her behaviour is unacceptable; we see some teachers failing to engage with their students, others failing to see what's truly important in education, others still plagued by disenchantment and dejection. We see Henriette voicing her worry that she has failed to learn the most minor thing over the year, and her fear of failing to make the grades to stay in general education.

It is, however, infinitely cheering to see that, despite the difficulties, big and small successes happen: Souleymane smiling embarrassedly when M. Marin praises his work and displays it for the whole class to see; the students all concentrating on the work they have been set, in silence so complete that you could hear a pin drop; every single student listening to an extract of Anne Frank's diary being read; the students producing some excellent pieces about themselves and what they like and do not like; little examples of learning happening, like the subjunctive, present or imperfect.

Finally, while we see that the school system has somehow failed Souleymane, in so far as nobody on the teaching/pastoral team has found out how to bring him back from the brink, Carl is an example of somebody who has gone beyond that failure and bounced back. He has been successfully integrated into the class and seems to be working well.

### Key quotation

*Le simple fait, finalement, d'exclure, c'est comme un désaveu (denial) de tout ce qu'on a tenté au préalable (previously).*

(M. Marin)



# Activités

## 1 Complétez les phrases avec les mots de vocabulaire appropriés.

Le **1** ..... dans lequel *Entre les murs* est filmé est clairement un milieu **2** ..... Dès le début du film on voit un homme qui marche dans une **3** ..... qui évoque immédiatement une **4** ..... plutôt que la **5** ..... Puis il rentre dans un bâtiment qui va se révéler être un collège, quand on entendra les personnages se présenter en parlant de la matière qu'ils enseignent. Pour le reste du film, le spectateur observe des jeunes dans le seul contexte de leur **6** ..... On apprend, grâce au livre qui est à l'origine du film, que le collège est situé dans le xx<sup>e</sup> **7** ..... de Paris, un **8** ..... populaire mais pas forcément **9** ..... (beaucoup moins défavorisé par exemple que les **10** ..... de Paris ou d'autres grandes villes), où les habitants sont originaires d'un grand nombre de pays. Ceci est reflété par les différentes origines des élèves de la classe de M. Marin, dont ils parlent parfois.

arrondissement  
banlieues  
urbain  
campagne  
défavorisé  
ville  
établissement scolaire  
milieu  
quartier  
rue

## 2 Le subjonctif. Dans *Entre les murs*, nous voyons M. Marin posant des questions sur l'imparfait du subjonctif à ses élèves. Nous nous en tiendrons au présent du subjonctif, mais après avoir révisé la formation et l'utilisation de ce temps dans votre livre de grammaire, écrivez la forme adéquate de chaque verbe entre parenthèses. Le temps est toujours le présent, mais le mode nécessaire peut être l'indicatif ou le subjonctif.

- 1 M. Marin pense que chaque élève (devoir) ..... écouter les autres.
- 2 Il est possible qu'Henriette (être) ..... envoyée en cursus professionnel.
- 3 M. Marin aurait aimé que Louise et Esméralda (se comporter) ..... de manière plus respectable au conseil de classe.
- 4 Il n'est pas certain que M. Marin ne (recevoir) ..... pas une sanction pour avoir insulté Louise et Esméralda.
- 5 La plupart des profs pense qu'il vaudrait mieux que Souleymane ne (venir) ..... pas en classe car il empêche les autres de travailler.
- 6 Le prof pose une série de questions pour que les élèves (arriver) ..... à leurs propres conclusions.
- 7 Je crois que les élèves (avoir) ..... beaucoup de potentiel, mais il ne semble pas qu'ils (vouloir) ..... l'exploiter.
- 8 Il insiste pour qu'ils (faire) ..... leurs devoirs quand il le leur demande.
- 9 Jusqu'à ce qu'il (commettre) ..... une erreur de langage et de jugement, le rapport entre M. Marin et les élèves était plutôt bon.
- 10 Il est facile de voir que les élèves (s'amuser) ..... bien lors du match de foot profs-élèves.

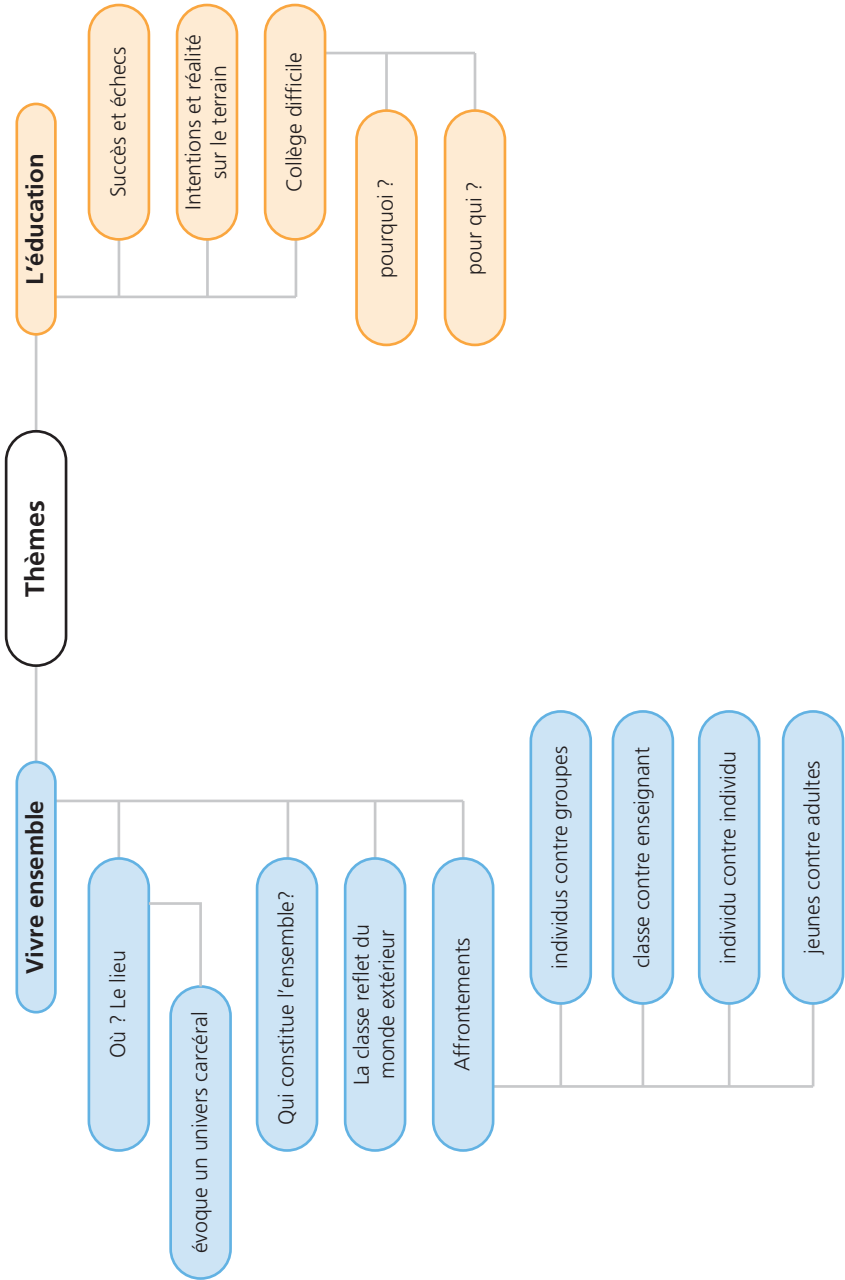
## 3 Où se passe *Entre les murs* ?

## 4 Quelles sont les caractéristiques de ce quartier ?

## 5 Dites en quoi la classe de M. Marin est un reflet du quartier en général.



# Thèmes



## Vocabulaire

Note: for vocabulary on education, see Chapter 2, 'Social and historical context'.

### La vie urbaine

**l'arrondissement** (m) district

**la banlieue** suburb

**le cadre/le milieu** surroundings

**en milieu urbain** in an urban environment

**le quartier défavorisé/déshérité** neglected area/neighbourhood

**un HLM** (a block of) council flats

**la ZEP (zone d'éducation prioritaire)** area where schools receive special funding because of high educational needs

**Paris intra-muros** Paris city (as opposed to Paris and its suburbs)

### L'immigration et le racisme

**attiser les passions/les tensions** to fuel passions/tensions

**le brassage des cultures** mixing of cultures

**conserver son identité culturelle** to maintain one's cultural identity

**le comportement raciste** racist behaviour

**les cultures s'entrechoquent** there is a clash of cultures

**éliminer toutes les formes de racisme** to eliminate all forms of racism

**entretenir des sentiments racistes** to harbour racist feelings

**les Français de souche** French people of French origin

**les Français naturalisés** naturalised French people

**les groupes ethniques minoritaires** ethnic minorities

**l'intégration des divers groupes ethniques du pays** integration of a country's ethnic groups

**la méfiance** mistrust

**la mosquée** mosque

**le patrimoine culturel** cultural heritage

**le préjugé** prejudice

**les règles alimentaires du Coran** Muslim dietary laws

**les règles vestimentaires** laws governing clothing/behaviour

**s'ouvrir à la diversité culturelle du pays** to be open to cultural diversity

**tenir des propos racistes** to make racist remarks

**la xénophobie** hatred of foreigners, xenophobia