

## Reading Guide


The Reading Guide is a way of keeping notes on *The Land Beneath My Feet* that will help you remember what you have learnt and will be an invaluable source for writing an essay on the play.

	<b><i>The Land Beneath My Feet</i></b>
Director	Philippe Chuyen
Genre	Historical, comedy, play, French, tragedy/tragicomedy
Plot summary	4 men play <i>pétanque</i> . As the game progresses, questions of identity and background arise as they discuss their conflicting perspectives and memories on the Algerian War.
Key Characters	Loule (Provençal)  Zé ( <i>pied-noir</i> )  Yaya (French. Algerian parents)  M Blanc (Parisian)
Setting and time period	Provence, terrain de <i>pétanque</i>  25 July 1995, the day of the terrorist attack on the St Michel metro station in Paris.
Key themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Algerian War</li> <li>– Identity (individual and national; who am I? What does it mean to be French?)</li> <li>– Friendship / conflict</li> <li>– Competitive memory – conflicting interpretations of history, often based on suffering and victimhood</li> <li>– Family memories and inherited responsibilities</li> <li>– The arc of history</li> <li>– Discrimination, racism, (in)justice</li> <li>– Ambiguity</li> <li>– Tragedy</li> </ul>
Session 6  Key moments and quotations	<p>5 - Loule comes on stage and turns off radio announcement of bomb attack – he isn't interested in this reminder of France's Algerian past.</p> <p>The characters are introduced. Zé, the <i>pied-noir</i>, is teased for having a short memory (<i>pieds-noirs</i> are renowned for not having moved on from the past). Yaya is teased for not being seen as fully part of French</p>


	<p>society. But it is clear that they are all friends, with the divisions merely highlighted as banter.</p> <p>6 - 'short memory' discussion around Zé (<i>pied-noir</i>)</p> <p>7 - Yaya – 'not me, Zé. I'm integrated just fine!' (A reference to his Algerian heritage and the need to assert his Frenchness)</p> <p>The men begin playing <i>pétanque</i></p> <p>When M Blanc arrives and asks to join he is treated as an outsider because of his accent, his brand-new boules and newly-built house, and his complaints about the cost of everything. He upsets Yaya by implying he isn't from 'here' and Zé hints at his upset at having been forced to leave Algeria and come and live in Provence.</p>
<p>Session 7</p> <p>Key moments and quotations</p>	<p>M Blanc continues to upset the others by referencing President de Gaulle's 'I have understood you!' speech.</p> <p>Loule is impatient to start the game.</p> <p>Discussion of Albert Camus, Zé's old neighbour, leads into talk of the war. M Blanc contends that it was not a war (merely 'events') but Yaya doesn't agree.</p> <p>Loule refers to M Blanc as M Brun (the outsider from a city to the north in Marcel Pagnol's famous plays. M Blanc is also an outsider from a northern city). M Blanc is offended and almost leaves. They persuade him to stay and play.</p> <p>20 – Loule tells how his Communist father supported Algerian independence: 'He campaigned for the independence of your damn country!</p> <p>Yaya – It's not my country.</p> <p>Zé – It used to be mine.'</p> <p>The characters struggle over who has the right to call a place their home.</p> <p>Mention of M Blanc's father but he pretends he knows very little about his time of service in Algeria.</p>
Session 8	<p>M Blanc and Zé disagree about whether History evolved naturally in a certain direction, or whether we construct History in retrospect, looking backwards at events to see a pattern. 'The right side of History' (21).</p>

<p>Key moments and quotations</p>	<p>Yaya suggests that French Algeria could have been a success if France had kept its promises of liberty, equality and fraternity.</p> <p>Yaya and Zé disagree about whether the <i>pieds-noirs</i> belonged in Algeria, having been there for 5 or 6 generations. Zé claims that the settlers built Algeria from nothing: ‘We invented a whole country, a whole culture!’ (23)</p> <p>Loule objects that the white Frenchman gets blamed for all the ills of the world.</p> <p>Zé nostalgically remembers his childhood in Algeria.</p> <p>Loule tells how his Communist father’s faith in ideas was destroyed by the fall of Communism and the Berlin Wall in 1989. He complains about all of the new arrivals in Provence; each of the other characters feels that he is complaining about them.</p> <p>Yaya highlights the horrors of war; Zé says that the <i>pieds-noirs</i> knew nothing about them.</p> <p>M Blanc admits that his father was not just a conscript; he was an officer in charge of a torture centre. Having been tortured by the Nazis in WWII, he found himself using the same techniques and couldn’t live with himself. He committed suicide 3 months after returning to France.</p>
<p>Session 9</p> <p>Key moments and quotations</p>	<p>Loule accuses Yaya of not loving France enough. Yaya asks how he is supposed to prove his allegiance?</p> <p>Yaya talks about why he might reasonably not love France: both his father (FLN) and his uncle (<i>harki</i>) were killed by the French. He explains that as a <i>harki</i> who fought in the French army, after the war his uncle was considered a traitor.</p> <p>On behalf of his father and for Yaya’s father and uncle, M Blanc asks Yaya’s forgiveness.</p> <p>Yaya tells of how he had to prove his parents’ French identity to France’s bureaucracy. Proof is impossible because they did not have ID cards in Algeria.</p> <p>Zé realises he would be in the same position, as the son of Jewish parents. Loule is surprised to learn that Zé is Jewish – it is another point of division.</p> <p>Loule expresses his frustration at how Provence has been changed by successive waves of new arrivals: pied-noir repatriates, Algerian immigrants, and rich Parisians building second homes. He feels he is losing his own culture, reduced to playing the part of a ‘traditional’</p>

	<p>Provençal person (compare this with people wearing kilts and playing bagpipes on Princes St in Edinburgh; is this 'real' Scottish culture?). 'He [Loule] turns into a figurine, trapped in the past.' Loule feels he is forced into playing a caricatured and outdated conception of Provençal culture in order to keep any of it alive.</p> <p>The other three characters feel that they are being attacked as the source of his difficulties.</p>
<p>Session 10</p> <p>Key moments and quotations</p>	<p>Zé points out that, unlike Zé, Loule still has his own homeland.</p> <p>Yaya says that Loule has a choice: become bitter at the changes he sees, or assert that Provence's history of changing cultures is his history. 'The Mediterranean flows through my veins, the blood of my forefathers...My land has a noble history, long and glorious, a history of resistance against tyranny, and has survived through it all! (42).</p> <p>Yaya points out that if the <i>pieds-noirs</i> had been open to learning new things, they might have been able to stay in Algeria, which would have become a harmonious multi-ethnic society: 'Algeria: a subtle mix of Muslims, Christians and Jews living together in peace, side by side, as equals. The most glorious and largest region of France...of the European Union!' (43)</p> <p>M Blanc wonders if that harmonious mix is possible now, in Provence: 'And what if this region you speak of already existed? Doesn't that same Algerian experience, that started way back in 1830, have every chance of succeeding here, in Provence, in the 21st century? Like it's been transplanted to this side of the Mediterranean?' (43)</p> <p>The close of the play sees the characters repeat the play's opening discussions, subtly altered to reflect the new harmony and understanding between them.</p> <p>Yaya's final line mentions 'Everything comes with time', an encouragement for M. Blanc given his poor performance in <i>pétanque</i>. It can be expanded to be a metaphor of what could be in Provence, again highlighting the more harmonious potential for the future.</p>

	Loule	
Image		
Name	Loule	
Origin/ethnicity	Provençal	
Clothing	Traditional, worn	
Accent	Provençal, more traditional rural/town than young city/urban accent	
Social status	<p>Labourer communist father</p> <p>Working-class background, blames others for the changes occurring in Provence</p>	
Relation to France	<p>Protective of Provençal culture, patriotic. But he struggles with the secret of his father's past: his father was a Communist who raised money for Algerian independence; the money paid for bombs to kill French soldiers.</p> <p>Anti-immigrant, anti-outsiders coming into the region</p>	
Relation to Algeria	<p>Resentful of the past, war and its impacts on his father and his region. Seen to be keen to ignore the past (see radio scene).</p>	
Angry at who and when? Why?	<p>Begins by not wanting to engage with the past. When this proves impossible he becomes frustrated.</p> <p>Angry towards the other three characters at various points who feel that he is attacking them.</p> <p>He feels that Provence is being changed by the influx of arrivals from elsewhere. He speaks against the influx of <i>pieds-noirs</i> (e.g. Zé), the arrival of immigrants from N. Africa (e.g. Yaya's parents) and the recent shift towards the wealthy urbanites buying up local land (e.g. M Blanc)</p>	


	Asks Yaya to prove his love for France.
<b>Key quotations</b>	<p>Wants to avoid talk of the past: Loule (<i>getting annoyed</i>) – ‘Whoa! Are we playing boules or fighting the war all over again?!’ (15)</p> <p>‘He campaigned against his own homeland... he transported suitcases full of cash from Paris down to Marseille and shipped them off to Algeria. He sent them dough so they could buy bombs to kill his countrymen. Lovely, right?’ (21)</p> <p>[Complaining about how Provence has changed; the others feel he is attacking them] ‘But little by little we’ve seen all and sundry turn up around here, you see?’ (27)</p> <p>To Yaya: Who are you speaking for now, then? Whose side are you on? (35)</p> <p>(speaking about himself, the man born in Provence): really, he doesn’t know what he’s made of anymore, his culture, his language, his accent, they’re all things off the telly or stuff he’s got from his ancestors. [...] So he stays in the shadows, closes himself off, shuts himself away...and bit by bit, he disappears...he’s slowly snuffed out! He turns into a figurine, trapped in the past. (39-40)</p>

	Yaya
Image	
Name	Yaya
Origin/ethnicity	French with Algerian parents, French citizen
Clothing	Younger, urban/city
Accent	His accent is from Marseille, and the area of Provence that surrounds it
Social status	Treated differently than others due to ethnicity – fewer privileges Lower-middle class. Second generation immigrant
Relation to France	French, born and raised. Double identity – connection to both France and Algeria  But others challenge that due to his parentage
Relation to Algeria	connection to both France and Algeria  Parents were Algerian  Defensive character
Angry at who and when? Why?	Anyone questioning his Frenchness: Loule, and the woman working for the town hall when he asks for a replacement ID card (38)  Annoyed at M Blanc for implying that he isn't from the region  Defends Algeria – challenging the views of Zé and M Blanc
Key quotations	See slides  e.g. Is Yaya seen as belonging in France?


	<p>Yaya – ‘Not me, Zé. I’m integrated just fine!’ (7)</p> <p>Yaya – ‘Ain't it obvious from how I speak?’</p> <p>Zé – ‘From ‘ow you speak, yes. From ‘ow you look, no.’ (11)</p> <p>Where is his homeland?</p> <p>Loule – ‘He campaigned for the independence of your damn country!’</p> <p>Yaya – ‘It’s not my country.’</p> <p>Zé – ‘It used to be mine.’</p> <p>What might have been in colonial Algeria:</p> <p>‘If only France had kept its promises, Zé! If it had stuck to its ideals of justice and progress.’ (22) There is the implication that things could have been different.</p> <p>Reasons why Yaya might hate France: – ‘My dad was in the FLN. The paras arrested him and we never saw him again. My uncle was a harki and he was killed when they stopped him boarding one of the boats...’ (35)</p> <p>The trap of proving French citizenship: ‘Three weeks ago, right, I lost my papers. [...]And when the day comes that they ask to see my papers, who knows, maybe they’ll send me over there? What a muppet I’d look. (38-9)</p> <p>What colonial Algeria might have been: ‘Algeria: a subtle mix of Muslims, Christians and Jews living together in peace, side by side, as equals. The most glorious and largest region of France...of the European Union!’ (43)</p>
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See below for Zé:



	Zé	
Image		
Name	Zé	
Origin/ethnicity	<i>Pied-noir</i> / settler background	
Clothing	Casual, reflects his age and game	
Accent	<i>Pied-noir</i>	
Social status	Not always welcomed, had to flee Algeria for France – resentment Privileges in Algeria, lost when moved to France	
Relation to France	He sees Algeria as having been his home and feels poorly welcomed in France.	
Relation to Algeria	Algeria was his ‘eternal home’, a lost paradise that he remembers nostalgically. Conflicted identity. Referring to Algeria: ‘We invented a whole country, a whole culture!’ (23)	
Angry at who and when? Why?	Being forced to flee Algeria  Anyone suggesting that the settlers knew about or were responsible for the injustice of colonisation or violence and torture in Algeria.	
Key quotations	‘A short memory? No, no, not me.’ (6)  Zé – ‘For us, our accent is all we’ve got left’. Loule – ‘Blimey, everyone’s a victim today!’ (12)  Zé – ‘It’s the past, but it never passes.’ (20)	

	<p>'The right side of 'istory? That doesn't mean a thing! 'istory always gets written afterwards, Monsieur Blanc.' (21)</p> <p>'It wasn't our 'ome? After five or six generations!' (23)</p> <p>'We were Algerians! What were we guilty of? Of feeling at 'ome? We invented a whole country, a whole culture!' (23)</p> <p>'blessed Algeria. [...]That was the land of my childhood, Yaya, and I shall cherish it forever.' (25)</p> <p>'Us Pieds-Noirs 'ave got nothing to do with all that...' (referring to Yaya's description of war crimes) (30)</p> <p>'There was us, the Pieds-Noirs, stuck in the middle of all of them 'orrors.' (34)</p> <p>'we weren't colonisers. We were just poor folks that got chased from our 'ome.' (22)</p>
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	Monsieur Blanc	
<b>Image</b>		
<b>Name</b>	Monsieur Blanc	
<b>Origin/ethnicity</b>	Parisian	
<b>Clothing</b>	All white, brand new boules, smart shoulder bag (cf. Loule's boules bucket). He stands out in his clichéd cote-d'azur outfit.	
<b>Accent</b>	<p>Parisian, gives his full title, posh accent, leads to him being mocked and coming across as an outsider. 'Hello chaps, excuse me...you aren't looking for a fourth by any chance?' (8)</p> <p>'the cochonnet' (v 'the jack' used by local characters)</p>	
<b>Social status</b>	Middle-upper class	

	<p>Rich - bought land and built a new house on it, but complains about the cost</p> <p>Outsider in this context [perhaps not used to that]</p>
<b>Relation to France</b>	Born and raised, protective of France
<b>Relation to Algeria</b>	<p>His father served as an officer in Algeria (previously a member of the Resistance in WWII when he was captured and tortured, fought in France's war in Indochina before serving in Algeria)</p> <p>In charge of an interrogation (torture) centre. Killed himself after.</p> <p>M Blanc tries to hide that family history at first</p>
<b>Angry at who and when? Why?</b>	<p>Annoyed at being picked on</p> <p>Keen to fit in, peacemaker</p>
<b>Key quotations</b>	<p>'It wasn't a war' - naïve (16)</p> <p>'He was on the right side of history'. (21)</p> <p>'My father was in charge of a villa'. (32)</p> <p>'my father fought for France, to protect its sovereignty, its territory, its ideals.... He was crushed by the chain of events. It overwhelmed him.' (33)</p> <p>'For what it's worth, Yaya, on behalf of my father, for your uncle and your father [...]: I ask for your forgiveness.' (38)</p> <p>(Responding to Yaya's vision of a harmonious colonial Algeria): 'And what if this region you speak of already existed? Doesn't that same Algerian experience, that started way back in 1830, have every chance of succeeding here, in Provence, in the 21st century? Like it's been transplanted to this side of the Mediterranean?' (43)</p>