

## Learning French

When he reached the end of the beach, Tom began to clamber over the rocks. At high tide the sea water had filled the nooks and hollows in the rocks, creating dozens of small pools when the sea retreated. Each rock-pool contained crystal clear water in which a variety of creatures were living.

Tom gazed into a large rock-pool, watching small fish and crabs darting amongst the sea anemones. He wished that he had a net like the one he'd had when he was younger.

"Bonjour," said a voice from behind him.

Tom looked around to see a girl of about his age, dressed in a bright yellow t-shirt and shorts. She was clutching a bucket in one hand and a fishing net in the other. "Hello," he replied.

"You are English?" asked the girl, but in a strong French accent.

"Yes," replied Tom. "You are French?" he asked, though he was sure he already knew the answer.

"Oui," replied the girl. "Je m'appelle Claire," she added.

Tom hadn't learnt any French before but he guessed that she must have just told him her name as, of course, he recognised the name 'Claire'. "I'm Tom," he said, pointing at himself.

"You must speak French!" she said in English, grinning at him.

Tom wasn't sure that he wanted to be bossed around by anybody but there was something about this girl that made him feel that he had little choice. The only problem was that he had no idea what to say or how to say it.

Seeing Tom's confusion, Claire pointed at herself and said again, "Je m'appelle Claire." Then she pointed at Tom.

He guessed that this was his cue to attempt his first ever words of French. "Je ... ma ... pell ... Tom!" he said, slowly and carefully.

The girl smiled widely. Tom wasn't sure whether she was making fun of him or whether she was highly impressed by his brilliant French.

"Tres bon, Tom!" she said, enthusiastically.

Tom returned her smile, now convinced that she was highly impressed. He was clearly a natural at speaking French, he concluded.