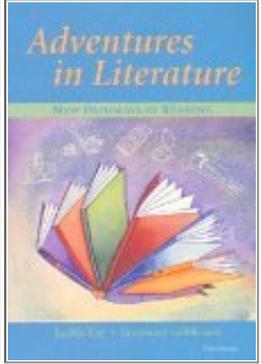


| <i>Adventures in Literature: New Pathways in Reading</i> | | |
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| Author: | Judith Kay and Rosemary Gelshenen (2004) | |
| Publisher: | Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press | |
| Pages | ISBN | Price |
| Pp. xi + 312 pages | 0-472-03006-X (paper) | \$22.95 U.S. |



As a professional educator who has worked in Japan for six years, I have often had difficulties locating reading texts both level and age appropriate for my lower level to intermediate level adult learners. Last year I discovered such a text, Judith Kay and Rosemary Gelshenen's *Adventures in Literature: New Pathways in Reading*, that I have since used as a supplemental text for an English Reading class I teach to first-year university students. It is a valuable resource that brings to the ESL classroom dialogue condensations of short stories from such classic authors as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Washington Irving, Oscar Wilde and O. Henry. The book presents the readings in easy to explain contexts and in a logical sequence where all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) may be engaged and challenged.

The book consists of fifteen chapters grouped under five major themes common to fiction in English: Courage, Secrets, Mystery, Personal Relationships, and Fantasy. Each chapter includes a three to four page dialogue written by Kay and Gelshenen based on a popular short story, followed by sixteen language building exercises. The exercises follow a standard pedagogical pattern progressing from pre-reading exercises, including vocabulary building and idiomatic expression checks as well as a section introducing each author, to reflective exercises meant to confirm students' understanding and provide opportunities to use the newly learned vocabulary and practice the grammar points.

In reviewing the dialogues the authors have created, I found them both true to the

original stories and appropriate for the targeted levels of ESL learners. I randomly selected vocabulary from various dialogues and after comparing it with the JACET List of 8000 Basic Words (2003), found that on average more than ninety percent of the words used fall within the top 3,000 most frequently used words in the English language, making the dialogues perfectly appropriate for beginner to intermediate level learners. While the potential benefit of dialogue practice is debated among many ESL teachers (Jones & Ono, 2000), I side with the authors when they comment, "We chose dialogues as a medium for students to explore literature because we have found that students feel comfortable while role-playing in a new language" (p. v). Since these dialogues are the heart of the book, specific exercises practicing role-playing are not provided, though the authors do suggest such activities would be natural. To me a particular strength of the book is its inviting more substantive dialogue practice than the average ESL textbook. Furthermore, these dialogues are complete, thematically centered entities, not simply random chunks of situational dialogue presented to learners in attempts to weakly bond some vocabulary with a context or serve as rote-memory exercises, as many poorer texts have done. It is hard to fault the text in its approach to second language acquisition.

Post-reading activities fall into two categories: reflective or comprehension exercises and grammar related exercises. Among the former type, exercises like "Understanding the story," "Reading between the lines," "Writing about the story" and "Talking about the story" seem excellent tools for the teacher to both assess learners' comprehension and their abilities to connect ideas from the dialogues to their own experience. In addition, there are great opportunities for students to engage important ideas of Western culture through reflective, cross-cultural tasks. I find it essential yet, at the same time, an arduous challenge to attempt to convey not only the functional aspects of English (grammar, pronunciation, etc.) to students, but also to effectively try to transfer the mind-set of the people who use the language daily. It is mainly in these reflective sections that the teacher gets help attempting to convey Western ways of thinking to students. For example, in chapter ten, *The Other Wife*, students are asked to "Pretend that Alice had the opportunity to speak with Mark's first wife. What questions do you think she would ask her?" (p. 194). Such practices require the students to 'think' like the character, to try to assume a Western mind-set, thus shedding light on cultural differences and creating an opportunity for cultural discussions. Although several reflective or comprehension exercises may prove difficult to lower-intermediate level learners, I generally find that their potential benefits considerably outweigh any difficulties that may be encountered.

I also like the extent and types of vocabulary building exercises provided. Namely, each chapter contains "Vocabulary Preview," "Using the Vocabulary," and "Journal Writing," where new terms and expressions are not just defined. Rather, the book guides students through problem solving exercises where they use their own intuition to discover the meaning of each word or phrase. While I appreciate the rewards from this approach, and wholeheartedly agree with them, I also have serious concerns about some students'

ability to succeed if this book is, in fact, used for any intermediate level learner. I found completing some of these exercises requires a slightly larger lexicon than many of my own students have. For example the "Vocabulary Preview" of the first chapter asks the students to "try to guess the meanings of the words in bold" in the narrative passage that sets the stage for the dialogue:

Mrs. Edwards lives in India. She is giving a dinner party for Colonel and Mrs. Bentley and other guests. Among them is Dr. Phillip Holbrook, a **scientist**. He has an excellent **reputation** for his knowledge of animal life. Another guest is a **liberated** woman named Hilary. The guests are arguing about the **reactions** of men and women to danger. Suddenly, Dr. Holbrook becomes **curious** when Mrs. Edwards orders her servant to fill a bowl with milk and place it on the terrace. (p. 4)

Many of my own lower-intermediate level students would experience considerable frustration merely attempting to decipher the part of speech of each new word, let alone work out an accurate meaning. However, upper-intermediate level students and above should find these exercises both challenging and stimulating.

I have only one additional criticism of this book worth mentioning. Prior to each reading passage, students are invited to "Meet the Author." Here a brief account of each author's life is provided, as well as a synopsis of what his or her writing was focused on. While students might be eager to know such details, their access to them might be limited by the level of these sections, a level not in accord with the rest of the book. More simplified writing could improve the value of these sections.

Outside the few reservations noted above for certain learners, I can highly recommend *Adventures in Literature: New Pathways in Reading*. For many ESL educators working in higher education, the shortage of quality reading materials both level and age appropriate for beginner to intermediate adult learners poses a serious problem. This textbook appears to meet the challenge splendidly. It is an excellent tool for the ESL instructor, and with proper planning and structuring, an ESL reading class guided with this text can be extremely productive, challenging and stimulating for all.

References

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