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## Focus on American Culture

Review by Lisa Maria Henschel,  
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FOCUS ON AMERICAN CULTURE. Elizabeth Henly. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1993. Pp. xiii + 144. Book/Video pkg. \$65.00.

*Focus on American Culture* is part of the ABC News ESL Video Library, an interactive, task-based integrated skills package targeted for intermediate adult learners. Each text comes with corresponding video segments from such ABC News programs as *Business World*, *Prime Time Live*, *20/20*, *Nightline*, *The Health Show*, and *World News Tonight*, providing authentic language (in actual situations) through current events oriented videos that are of interest to students and teachers.

The text is divided into four units: The Family in America, Work in America, Education in America and Trends in America. The topics, chosen by the author to represent four different aspects of the American lifestyle, provide a background for the development of analytical, communicative, and syntactic skills.

The chapters or "segments" in each unit are divided into five parts: Previewing, Global Viewing, Intensive Viewing, Language Focus and Postviewing. In Previewing, students try to uncover what the segment is about. This section helps to assess where students stand in regard to the subject content as well as introduce vocabulary that may be needed in order to understand the given segment. It also helps to gauge student reactions to the topic. Global Viewing encourages students' overall understanding of the subject matter through exercises and follow-up discussion where main ideas are stressed. Intensive Viewing focuses on specifics as students look and listen for details in activities such as note taking and cloze-style transcriptions of key passages. Language Focus develops vocabulary and idiomatic expressions as well as certain aspects of language structure. Finally, Postviewing wraps up the chapter with discussions, readings and other materials, bringing skills and content together for a cohesive whole.

As the introduction suggests, an interactive approach is desirable, with ideal conditions for use geared toward group involvement. Students are encouraged to learn from one another and interact. The teacher functions more as a facilitator, leading students through a series of exercises that encourage autonomous discovery learning. Many activities have been incorporated to reinforce interaction, such as discussion topics, team tasks and field work. With the exception of grammar, all skills are adequately covered.

Though the text and exercises are well designed and cover a wide range of skills assessment, the topic choices leave something to be desired. The segments covering

college entrance and bilingual education may be of general interest to second language learners; however, subjects such as "The Joys and Risks of the Daddy Track and "Mid-Life Moms" and the segment entitled "The Perfect Baby: A Follow-Up" which discusses *in vitro* fertilization might alienate students who feel insecure or shy about openly discussing such topics. Though disguised in a news-like format, these segments smack of sensationalism and display a bias toward "fringe yuppie" culture. Given our pluralistic society, this particularly narrow focus seems an odd way to introduce American culture. Even the cover, which features a baseball, seems out of context as there is no mention of sports whatsoever.

Despite the drawback of topic choice, Henly does a detailed job in her theme-based exercises, providing the student with a range of tasks in order to facilitate comprehension. Each segment provides running times for videos and VCR starting points. Henly has created an incredibly teacher-friendly text, as well as a format that might work well for independent study.

### About the Reviewer

*Lisa Maria Henschel is a graduate student majoring in TESOL at California State University, Los Angeles. Her main areas of interest are studies in literacy, especially visual literacy. She is also the managing editor of COAGULA, a bi-coastal, bi-monthly art journal.*

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