
More Reasons for Reading

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MORE REASONS FOR READING. Carrie S. Dobbs and Frank Dobbs. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Regents Prentice-Hall, 1992, pp.293. Paper, US\$14.50.

This textbook was written for low-intermediate to intermediate pre-college or university ELC students. Its purpose is to help students build nontechnical college-level vocabulary as well as develop skills necessary to read college-level materials

The book is divided into five main units: cultural anthropology, the human brain, non-western ideas, astronomy, and biographies. Each unit is again divided into three more specific chapters relating to the broad topic. These content-oriented reading selections are intended to give students a wide variety of topics about which they read. While they do offer many topics that could be interesting to students, however, they face the problem that all texts that include reading face: the student cannot choose readings according to personal interests or tastes. But these readings not only are set, they also often lack human appeal in their factual, objective style and tone.

In order to introduce students to the topic before actually reading a passage, small groups participate in a pre-reading discussion based on questions, ideas, pictures, and illustrations in the book. This gives the students an opportunity to orient themselves to the subject before encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or sentence structures, establishing necessary background schema that will aid in comprehension. The activities in these discussions vary and encourage students to think in a variety of ways about the passages they read, aided by relevant visual elements of the book.

When they have completed the pre-reading discussion, the students begin reading the actual passage. The author suggests in the preface to the book that the passage first be read aloud by the teacher while students follow along in their own books. This helps the students get through the passage at a good pace without allowing them to stop to look up difficult words, which can interrupt the natural development of ideas. It also gives the students a model of proper intonation, pronunciation, and junctures of sentence parts.

After the passage, each chapter is accompanied by exercises that include questions which may be answered by going back to the passage and scanning quickly for specific items, questions on vocabulary used in the passage, and a self-test to assess comprehension. Individual chapters then have exercises on structures and skills

relating particularly to that passage. These exercises lack variety from one chapter to the next, consisting of mostly fill-in-the-blank questions that seem to require verbatim answers found in the text or in the question itself rather than active student thinking. The exercises are also long, and may become tedious before the student completes them.

The exercise section in each chapter, however, ends with an accompanying writing assignment which encourages students to creatively think about the passage. It also allows the students to participate individually in the reading experience. For example, the writing assignment in Chapter 8, "Filial Piety or Reverence for Parents," asks the student to "write about the relationship between parents and children in your culture." Though the passages are not chosen by the students, this type of assignment can help them to feel like they are participating in the reading experience.

As the book goes on the passages increase in both length and difficulty, building on vocabulary and skills encountered in earlier chapters. This helps the students build up to more advanced skills; however, it again limits student choice in what is read by requiring all readings to be completed in the set order rather than according to what the student would like to read.

The pre-determined sequence and reading materials as well as the long exercises do not encourage innovation or creativity on the part of the student or the instructor. No suggestions for techniques and procedures are given, and no supplementary materials are mentioned that could help the lessons be more effective. In fact, little instruction is given at all except that which explains how the exercises are to be done. The role of the instructor, then, would be to model correct intonation and pronunciation and to guide the students through the chapters.

Perhaps some students and some instructors would like this approach to reading. The lack of a variety of reading materials from which the students can choose as well as a lack of variety in the forms of the reading exercises would make it difficult, however, to use in effectively teaching reading to those who are more individualized and like more flexibility in the classroom. Nontechnical vocabulary and college-level reading skills are focused on throughout the textbook, but its inflexible, repetitive form may actually give students less reasons for reading instead of more.

About the Reviewer

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