
Reply Requested: 30 Letters of Advice

Book Review by Glen Penrod

REPLY REQUESTED: THIRTY LETTERS OF ADVICE. Richard C. Yorkey. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1981. pp. 127. \$4.95.

Richard C. Yorkey uses a collection of letters to Ann Landers as the main reading text of his recent book, *Reply Requested: 30 Letters of Advice*. Each chapter begins with a different letter from the popular newspaper column.

After reading each letter, the students are required to complete a series of exercises which check their comprehension of the passage and help them understand the vocabulary and expression used therein. The students then discuss the letter-writer's "problem" and give their ideas as to what should be done in this and similar situations. In this process, the teacher is often required to explain cultural items, making the lesson more valuable and interesting.

After completing the exercises, students are asked to write their own reply to the letter as if they were Ann Landers giving advice. Toward the end of each chapter, Yorkey includes the reply "from the desk of Ann Landers." This gives the students a chance for further vocabulary building,

language practice, and discussion. To provide an additional listening exercise, someone could be called on to read the reply for the whole class with some discussion before the rest of the class turned to the page to read it for themselves.

One note of caution: the natural tendency for students when they get their hands on a textbook like this is to read through the letters and then the replies, skipping over the skill-building exercises. If the teacher could somehow convince the students not to "peek" or read ahead the reply to next week's letter, the self-revealing nature of the discussions would be a more meaningful and authentic learning experience.

All in all the book is an excellent teaching aid, and provides ESL students with an interesting way to learn English as it is actually used in real life situations. Yorkey even includes elements of sarcasm and expressions of displeasure to make the language authentic and current. This book gives good overall practice in reading, writing, and speaking, and can be adapted to provide students with different learning activities. I recommend *Reply Requested* as a true to life experience in American English and U.S. culture.