

Outsiders: American Short Stories for Students of ESL

Book Review by Linda H. Hess

OUTSIDERS: AMERICAN SHORT STORIES FOR STUDENTS OF ESL. Jean S. Mullen. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1984, pp. 233. \$8.95

Outsiders: American Short Stories for Students of ESL by Jean S. Mullen is a collection of short stories and two poems written by noted American writers. The text is designed to teach reading techniques that are necessary to the study of literature and also to develop and polish the writing skills that are appropriate for the college-level student. The text can be employed in an ESL reading course of one semester's duration with the class meeting for three fifty-minute periods per week.

Outsiders itself is neatly divided into twelve units. With the exception of the first unit, each contains a series of study questions, a review of a particular grammar point or a vocabulary study, a study of a particular literary term or writing strategy, class discussion questions, and, at the conclusion of each unit, a controlled writing exercise. Many of the exercises are couched in realistically contextualized language.

The first unit of the text is the introduction and guide to the readings found in the book. In addition, the introduction includes a list of literary terms and their definitions to familiarize the students with conventional labels to be used in class discussion and written assignments. The selections in *Outsiders*, all of which are set in the

United States, were chosen because they deal with actual "outsiders" who are trying to cope with their new life in America or because the characters are native Americans who feel alienated in their own society.

The author introduces ESL students to the study of literature through observation, inference, and imagination. Students are encouraged to think about what they see and to make reasonable inferences about what they observe. The course aims to make the connection between the students' deductions and what they already know. It encourages students to use their imaginations as a means to bridge the gap between their own experience and the experience of others.

Another feature of this text is the glossary of words and expressions that are important for the understanding of the stories: proper names of people, places and institutions, longer phrases containing several difficult or unfamiliar words, and certain nonstandard forms or dialect differences.

Outsiders is a straightforward look at contemporary literature designed with the ESL student in mind. Its clear-cut presentation, as well as its varied and diverse exercises should appeal to even the most hesitant readers in your class.

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