

To the Instructor

The Structure of the Book

Reading Themes and Skills is divided into six units and includes an introduction on the basics (parts of speech and vocabulary). The themes included are Eating Out/Eating In, In Style, At Home, In Shape, Out of This World, and It's the Weekend. The Answer Key (available at www.press.umich.edu/esl/tm) supplies responses to the various exercises that follow the reading passages.

Each unit is structured in the same way. A pre-reading exercise acquaints students with the theme and vocabulary specific to it and is followed by three reading passages. The first passage is from the newspaper feature/magazine genre. The second passage is a work of fiction: a fable, tale, short story, ghost story, or a humorous or romantic piece. The third reading is generally a first-person narrative from various genres: fiction, travelogue, diary, editorial, or confession. Each passage is followed by comprehension, vocabulary, and discussion activities. At least two **Skills Study** practices are included: scanning, inference, analyzing the title, finding the main idea, reflecting on what was read, and analyzing narrative voice. Pre-reading exercises build background knowledge, provide opportunities to discuss the reading theme, and practice predicting.

A **Focus on Parts of Speech** section appears in every unit. Each unit concentrates on one part of speech: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, article, preposition, pronoun, and conjunction.

Another recurring section is **Grammar in Context**, which introduces a specific grammar point: simple sentences, comparative adjectives, the irregular forms of the simple past tense, discourse markers for adding information, compound and complex sentences, and discourse markers for enumeration in writing. Each unit also features a vocabulary development segment with cloze exercises, vocabulary expansion drills, a word search, or a crossword puzzle.

Vocabulary Development

As students progress to more advanced levels of English, vocabulary presents a greater challenge to their writing. They need a broader vocabulary to sound more fluent and to become more confident writers. Developing a wider vocabulary through reading a variety of text types will positively affect students' writing. Increasingly, language concepts are abstract, and students are often required to

write on a wide variety of topics. This textbook approaches vocabulary development in several different ways: proficiency in identifying parts of speech, writing a list of vocabulary words specific to a topic, distinguishing between positive and negative connotation, using context clues when possible to help identify the connotation and meaning of words, and establishing word category clusters to improve overall comprehension.

Vocabulary building requires active interest and effort on the part of the student. Some instructors recommend that students keep a vocabulary journal or list in a separate notebook or as part of a larger notebook. This is a good idea. Students should certainly be encouraged to write down new words and to establish glossaries for certain key areas. At any rate, developing strong vocabulary acquisition skills is important to becoming a successful student, and students must develop strategies they can use in life when they encounter words they don't know. Words or phrases that are lower frequency, too specific to American culture, or specialty words are glossed alongside the readings.

Grammar in a Reading Context

Students must be acutely aware of grammar in both the reading and writing processes. Some grammar points, for example, are specific to a particular type of reading passage or genre. Students should analyze the grammatical concept introduced in each unit and apply it elsewhere in the book. In other words, after they have studied the concepts in the second unit, it is possible to require students to highlight descriptive, comparative, and superlative forms of adjectives in any passage in the book. In fact, repeat exercises reinforce the learning. The grammar exercises should probably be assigned for homework and may be corrected in class or in groups with the teacher analyzing specific problem areas suggested by students.

The focus of reading, of course, is not solely grammatical. It is the *awareness* and recognition of grammar points on the part of the students that is the main goal. The Introduction is a good review of the parts of speech. You can decide how much review your students need, of course. The activities in this unit may be used as a diagnostic.

Introduction to the Reading Passages

One of the overriding principles on which the selection of texts in this book was based was to expose students to American-based culture. In this regard, the subject matter is primarily American, with the exception of three fables that can be applied to any culture. In studying American English, students also learn American culture, and

these are topics that students will see again as they continue their academic study in the United States. In fact, attaining a cultural literacy is fundamental to language acquisition.

1: Eating Out/Eating In

This unit includes a pre-reading exercise on the many words formed from the English combining form *din-*. Point out the interesting irony with the word *dine*. People can *dine* in the *dining* room but not in a *dinette*. They can *dine at* a restaurant but not *at a diner*. Also indicate the various meanings of *dinner*: the mid-day meal, the largest meal of the day, or the evening meal according to time and place.

Reading 1.1, *Subs, Heroes, Grinders, and Hoagies*, introduces the concept of regionalism in the United States: The same food is served everywhere, but the names change according to the region or location. This is a good time to show a map of the country and to introduce the various regions. Ask students if any of them have traveled to these regions, and ask them to share their impressions. This is a great opportunity for students to open up as part of a non-threatening discussion. One of the reading skills exercises for this passage practices scanning for specific information. Make sure that they understand that scanning requires very specific eye movements, focusing only on the information requested.

Before reading *Dear Mom: A College Student's Letter Home*, find out how common it is for students from other countries to go away to college and live in dormitories. Depending on your students, this might be a new concept to many of them. Of course, international students can certainly relate to the specific theme of the passage: the fact that the food at school (or in the neighborhood) is different from the food cooked at home. Ask students what foods they miss the most from their country and what they like about American cuisine.

Reading 1.3, *Leftovers*, is both a history lesson and a humorous passage. Here students are asked to find one or two key events that typify an entire ten-year span and analyze events over the decades—an excellent way to encapsulate history. Ask students to try to decide which events and inventions were important for the 1990s and the 2000s (computers, cell phones, the war in Iraq). Then discuss leftovers. What is the class's opinion? Also, this is a good occasion to have students talk about mom's (or grandma's or even dad's) cooking. Are (were) their mothers excellent cooks? What makes a good cook?

2: In Style

In an age when fashion models are superstars and designers are known throughout the world, the concept of being in-style (in vogue) has never been more pertinent. In

America, though, this certainly has not always been so. If your class is held in a computer lab or students have access to computers, ask them to do online research on John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy. The reading *Style in America* is a living history piece. Ask students if the concentration on designer clothes and accessories is as strong in other cultures as it has become in America. What is their opinion about carrying bags and wearing shoes that bear the trademark logo of designers? Is it a sign that they have earned significant money or is it free advertising?

The Emperor's New Clothes, Reading 2.2, is a lengthy but accessible old fable. Give students extra time to read this one because it is most likely the longest piece that they will have read up to this point. Finishing it and understanding it should give them a great deal of satisfaction. Many students probably already know the story from their youth. You can introduce Hans Christian Andersen and his famous stories (*The Ugly Duckling*, *The Little Mermaid*). The themes of the story are powerful: the vanity of a political leader and the fear of the people to speak up. Is it true that political leaders often surround themselves with people who say yes all the time rather than telling unpleasant truths?

Reading 2.3, *Halloween: Customs and Costumes*, is an introduction to an ever-popular holiday. If you are using this textbook during the fall semester, you are likely to be approaching Halloween season just as you read the passage. Obviously, you should take advantage of the seasonal hysteria as a starting point for observation and discussion. Send students to the supermarket and around their neighborhoods to look for signs of the holiday. Even in the spring semester students should be able to recall what happened the previous October. In addition, it is likely that there is a similar holiday in their own culture, a day of the dead and/or a day on which people dress up in costume. This might be a good time for them to work in groups to discuss the various customs. Make sure the composition of the group is varied.

3: At Home

The first reading, *At Home with the Amish*, introduces a fascinating group of Americans. Again, if students are able, they should do online research about the Amish way of life. Or, this might present a good opportunity to take the class to the library to show students how to conduct research. Often librarians do this if you make an appointment a few weeks in advance. After students read the passage, suggest they watch the film *Witness*. Each social aspect indicated in the reading passage is illustrated visually in the film. Point out that when Harrison Ford (impersonating an Amish man) reacts violently to the boorish townspeople, it is explained, "He's from Ohio." This is a rather funny line. The film presents a dilemma at the end. Logically, the police officer should return to his home and world in Philadelphia. A romantic ending would have him remain with the Amish woman. This is a good topic for classroom debate.

The Adventures of a Maple Leaf: A Backyard Story is about the cycles of nature and the cycles of human growth. Ask students about their own relationship with nature, especially when they were children. Did they have a favorite tree or place in or near their house where they could observe nature? When did they come to understand the (cruel) ways of nature? The personification of the little leaf is quite poetic. Students should also discuss the symbolism of the story.

Tippy, the War-Hero, Reading 3.3, is a piece of exaggerated fiction. It starts out realistically and then progresses further and further away from actual possibilities. In this way it becomes humorous. Students will understand that exaggeration is an important part of family lore. Every time they tell (and hear) a family tale, it might become more distant from the real world. Discuss humor with them. Is the father in the story being cheap in not burying the hero in the veterans' cemetery or just practical? What about the way in which Tippy came to live with the family?

4: In Shape

The Super Bowl, Reading 4.1, discusses an American entertainment institution: it is the number one television program of the year and has been for many years. It is the source of great interest and has been one of outrage (recall the Janet Jackson incident). If you are teaching this book during the spring semester, make sure that students are aware of the game. It will take place just after the semester starts and certainly before they read this passage, but help them to understand all the hoopla associated with it. As they did in Reading 1.1, students will scan for specific information, in this case, numbers and dollar figures. They must also understand the organization of the passage through the Finding the Main Idea of a Paragraph exercise, an exercise that is repeated several times throughout the book.

Reading 4.2, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, is one of Aesop's most beloved tales, although this version includes many more adjectives and descriptive words than the original. Students will also focus on the grammar in the passage; a past-tense identification exercise follows the reading. The fable is long but very easy to understand because it is so visual. Ask students to narrate the story segment by segment, perhaps after constructing a chronological outline. Then spend some time on a discussion of the moral of the story. The tortoise is a model for all of us, especially language learners who might get discouraged by how long it takes to learn properly. It is the tortoise, though, who wins, and precisely because of its persistence.

Reading 4.3, *A Chance for Glory*, is another family saga, this time about a traditional game that presents an opportunity for greatness. Are there games associated with traditional holidays in the students' countries as football is with Thanksgiving in the United States? This story is tragic-comic: tragic from the point of view of good old number 84 and comic from the point of view of everyone else. It is important to

remember that the almost-hero is not a very likeable character. This is a good opportunity for discussions on the relatives they like least in their family and the one who has come the closest to achieving glory.

5: Out of This World

Students are generally fascinated with the topics discussed in this unit: ghosts, the supernatural, and the power of nature. *Ghosts in the White House*, Reading 5.1, takes a familiar place (perhaps the most familiar home in America) and makes it a stomping ground of spirits. Spend extra time on the pre-reading exercises for this unit. Some students will be reticent to express their beliefs but might be drawn out by a general classroom discussion on the subject of haunted houses and ghosts. They will also learn some history (in a backhanded way) about the White House and its famous inhabitants. Washington is a great city and an attractive tourist destination. Perhaps some of the students have been there. If so, they will be able to present their own ideas on the sites.

The fourth fable in the book (after *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *The Adventures of a Maple Leaf*, and *The Tortoise and the Hare*) is *Hanbu and Nobu: A Tale of Two Brothers*. This story introduces two noteworthy features: the contrast between two opposites and a choice of three different endings. In terms of comparison and contrast, sentence types are introduced here. One, of course, is the complex sentence of contrast. This might be a good occasion to bring writing into the reading class and have students write sentences or paragraphs of contrast. They could also review the grammar point introduced in Unit 3 (comparative and superlative adjectives). The three possibilities for the ending of the story allow students to see the link between character and plot. Which one is the most plausible? Which fits best with the characteristics of the evil brother? Which teaches the most?

The Vortex in Sedona, Arizona: A Trip out of This World, Reading 5.3, is an example of both travel writing and nature writing. Here it is important to stress the "sacred" as it relates to a natural setting. Students should be directed to recall a magical place similar to Sedona, one that perhaps has personal significance. In addition, the idea of meditation and visualization as a remedy for stress is powerful. The skills study exercise for this passage asks students to expand the reading themes into writing as they describe a place where they can renew themselves. This is a rather poetic assignment, so probably you should work with the class to develop a specific vocabulary to be used to define such a place.

6: It's the Weekend!

This chapter discusses some activities typical for Americans who work Monday through Friday. Of course, many students work, and because they are students, they

probably work all weekend, so they do not look at weekends as a time for relaxation but as a time for work.

In *Tailgating*, Reading 6.1, the twin concepts of college sports and tailgating might be new to some students because amateur athletics on a college level are arguably more popular in the United States than in any other country in the world. Direct students to specific television stations (ESPN and the many other cable television outlets for college sports, as well as Saturdays on the national channels) so that students can witness this phenomenon. The idea of tailgating too, with all its rituals, is a fascinating one. This might be a difficult passage for students because the concepts are so new to them, so an introduction is probably necessary. After they comprehend the importance of college sports and the price of a college education, discuss sports scholarships and amateurism.

Again, since one of the goals of the book is to present American culture in its many guises, the concept of do-it-yourself and fixer-uppers in *Handy People and Home Improvement Projects* might seem peculiar to many international students. Try indicating how much skilled laborers such as painters, carpenters, electricians, and roofers charge in the United States. Talk too about how many people gravitate toward doing this work themselves as much for economic reasons as for their own satisfaction. The situation might be different in your students' countries where labor probably costs a great deal less and where professionals might "lose face" if they are seen painting, sawing, and planting their own seeds. At any rate, one interesting aspect of *Handy People* is the structure of the passage, which alternates between general and specific. Indicate to students that this is a common structure for feature writing.

The focus in *Weekend Dog*, Reading 6.3, is on narrative voice. Here the narrator is a teenager who is talking about a wonderful gift. Students are asked to recall a similar moment in their lives. You might also talk of the importance of pets and find out if students share the feelings of the narrator in this regard.

I hope the readings and exercises fit well into your course goals and teaching style. If there are any questions or comments on the text, feel free to contact me through my publisher at esladmin@umich.edu.

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