

Introduction to the Teacher and the Student

Why?

This book was written to help eliminate the terrible frustrations felt by both adult ESL students and their ESL teachers. Many students have studied English for years in their countries, in the United States, or in another English speaking country, but they still have difficulty understanding a simple conversation, catching the words of a television program, comprehending the meaning of a newspaper ad, and understanding American culture. Those students have many unanswered questions about vocabulary and American culture and feel extremely frustrated, fearing that they will struggle with English for a long, long time.

This frustration is often due to large gaps of knowledge of the basic, common “core” vocabulary and simple idioms of everyday English. Those common words are known to every native-speaking two year old. Yet those words are rarely learned by adult ESL students, who are taught only “adult vocabulary.” Consequently adult ESL students often find themselves lost in common conversation and “simple” readings. Hand in hand with this problem is the fact that most ESL students were taught grammar rules first—almost in isolation from the natural language—with little chance to see how those rules really work in everyday, spoken English. Another problem is the great difficulty that nonnative speakers have in mastering the sounds, pronunciation, and intonations of English. Add to all these problems the fact that one cannot truly learn a language without also learning the culture. Not having been exposed to American culture, newcomers are often quite confused by both the extreme and the subtle differences between their native cultures and that of the United States. These differences cause embarrassment, misunderstanding, and lack of communication.

It is the purpose of this book to help bridge those gaps of vocabulary, idioms, and cultural awareness, easing the frustrations that students and their teachers experience.

How?

Following is an explanation of how this book will teach language and cultural fluency to foreign students.

Think about how all humans learn their native tongues. You would be surprised at the similarities in the nursery songs, lullabies, counting and singing games, rhymes, and stories found in all cultures. Although we adults think we

have forgotten them, those songs and stories remain deep within us, a fundamental part of us that helps to form our basic language patterns, our values, our culture. The songs and stories that we heard as infants and children taught us our language, its sounds and its rhythms. The stories taught us our grammar, the structure of our language and its irregularities, as well as our core vocabulary and idioms. And, as we grew older, the stories and songs taught us the values and traditions of our culture.

By the age of five, we humans are fluent in our native language, and, at the same time, as part of the same process by which we learned language, we have absorbed the basic values of our cultures—our sense of right and wrong. In adulthood, we remember neither learning language nor values but the early experiences that led to this learning remain deep within us. Because of this, references to the rhymes and stories of our childhood are used constantly and unconsciously in everyday adult conversation in all cultures.

Thus, this book. Using it, you adult ESL students will successfully learn the core vocabulary that you are missing, review concepts of basic grammar, reinforce the sounds and intonations of the English language, and, most important of all, learn the culture and values of the United States while having lively discussions in which you compare and contrast the traditions and values of different native cultures. The stories in this book are an important part of American literature, and they are fun, and thought provoking. What you learn will remain with you, increasing your fluency in American English and your understanding of American culture faster than more traditional approaches to learning English.