

Focus on American Culture. Elizabeth Henly. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1993. xiii + 144 pp.

Reviewed by
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Focus on American Culture is part of the *ABC News ESL Video Library*, an interactive, task-based integrated skills package targeted for intermediate adult learners. Each text comes with corresponding video segments from such *ABC News* programs as *Business World*, *PrimeTime Live*, *20/20*, *Nightline*, *The Health Show*, and *World News Tonight*, providing authentic language (in actual situations) through current events oriented videos that are of interest to students and teachers.

The text is divided into four units: The Family in America, Work in America, Education in America and Trends in America. The topics represent four different aspects of the American lifestyle and provide a background for the development of analytical, communicative, and grammar skills.

The chapters or "segments" in each unit are divided into five parts: Previewing, Global Viewing, Intensive Viewing, Language Focus, and Postviewing. In Previewing, students try to predict what the segment is about. This section helps to assess the students' familiarity and background knowledge with the subject content as well as introduce vocabulary that may be needed in order to understand the given segment. It also helps to gauge student reactions to the topic. Global Viewing encourages students' overall understanding of the subject matter through "True or False" exercises and follow-up discussions, facilitated by the teacher, where main ideas are stressed. Intensive Viewing focuses on specifics as students watch and listen for details in activities such as pre-outlined note taking with prompt questions and cloze-style transcriptions of key passages within specified time segments in the video. Language Focus develops vocabulary and idiomatic expressions as well as certain aspects of language structure in a contextualized manner. Finally, Postviewing wraps up the chapter with discussions, readings and other materials, as well as a final

team and an independent written task bringing skills and content together for a cohesive whole.

The introduction suggests an interactive approach to the use of the materials, with ideal conditions geared toward small group involvement. Students are encouraged to learn from one another and interact. The teacher functions more as a facilitator, leading students through a series of exercises that encourage autonomous discovery learning. Many activities have been incorporated to reinforce interaction, such as discussion topics on comparing cultures, team tasks, and field work. Grammar skills are theme-based and consist of fill-in and cloze style exercises. Though an excellent review of the segment content is achieved, it may not provide enough follow-up activities to use as a main text to reinforce grammar concepts. With the former exception, all skills are adequately covered.

Though the text and exercises are well designed and cover a wide range of skills, the topic choices are not ideal. The segments covering college entrance and bilingual education may be of general interest to second language learners; however, subjects such as "The Joys and Risks of the 'Daddy Track'", and "Mid-Life Moms" and a segment which discusses in-vitro fertilization might alienate students who feel insecure or shy about openly discussing such topics. Though disguised in a news-like format, these segments smack of sensationalism and display a bias toward "fringe yuppie" culture. Given our pluralistic society, this particularly narrow focus seems an odd way to introduce American culture. Even the cover, which features a baseball, seems out of context as there is no mention of sports whatsoever.

Despite the drawback of topic selection, the theme-based exercises are well conceived and written, providing the student with a range of tasks in order to facilitate comprehension. Each segment provides running times for videos and VCR starting points. Henly has created an incredibly teacher-friendly text, as well as a format that might work well for independent study.

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