

Frank, Christine; Rinvoluceri, Mario, and Berer, Marge. *Challenge to Think*. Oxford University Press, 1987, 80 pp. R21-95.

Provocative, amusing, controversial, baffling. Challenge to Think is a fascinating compendium of English language puzzles, problems, thinking games, questions and issues, to give intermediate students practice in vital language skills.

(Publisher's Comment)

Here at last is a book that offers a truly fresh and exciting approach to teaching English, and not only lives up to, but quite surpasses its blurb. Based on Edward de Bono's work on creative and lateral thinking, *Challenge to Think* functions by setting up cognitive crises: students are presented with baffling, challenging information which they have to make sense of by asking questions, sorting information, filling in gaps. The intellectual energy triggered by the exercises is in sharp contrast to the flabbiness and ennui elicited by traditional language exercises. Contrast, for example, any conversational exercise in a standard Speaking text with the following example from *Challenge to Think*:

Ask questions about the unexplained stories and find out what they really are about.

...

8. *A man walked into a bar in Texas. He asked for a glass of water. The barman pointed his gun at him. The man said, 'Thank you' and walked out.*

...

10. *A girl lies heartbroken on the floor. Beside her is a piece of wood. There is sawdust in the rubbish bin.*

...

19. *A man had his arms out through the sides of a telephone booth. The phone was off the hook. Outside the booth was a black bag on the ground.*

(p. 6)

Be warned! There is no teacher's guide. There are no 'right' answers. There is only maddening, tantalising, enigmatic information. Students are thus forced and motivated to interact extremely energetically with the information and with each other in order to resolve their intellectual anxiety and puzzlement. Meaningful, communicative use of the English language in considerable quantity is sure to result.

Other exercises in the Speaking section invite students to explain and discuss the relationship between two seemingly unrelated photographs; analyse all the possible causes and consequences of a number of factual statements (such as 'Scandinavian countries have high suicide rates', and 'Alcoholism among women is increasing', p. 17); criticize the design of everyday objects (such as a bathtub); and examine issues of context and meaning - how one statement can have several meanings depending on the context.

The Reading section gives practice in disentangling two stories and arranging the sentences of each in the correct order; and also has exercises in intensive reading, such as the following:

Read one sentence of the stories at a time, and then comment on what you have read.

...

6. *If you want a new car for the family then come along to the surgery and look at our latest discoveries. We have imported cars as well as a wide range produced in British kitchens. There are no vehicles here on display so just come along any time to see them. Alternatively you could phone and we'd be delighted to give you our catalogues personally. We are open from 3 a.m. - 7 a.m., seven days a year and are looking forward to buying from you the car you've been dreaming of.*

(pp. 33-34)

Other exercises include matching headlines and captions to newspaper articles, photographs, and cartoons. Logic puzzles and fairly complex philosophical issues (such as when is a lie not a lie) provide practice in critical reading.

The Writing section offers creative drills, crosswords, puzzles, games, visualization exercises, and story finishing. One story the student is asked to finish writing reads as follows:

SHOES

'How long've these been here, then?'

'Nearly six months, I reckon, sir', the warehouse man replied.

'Six months?' The customs inspector looked through his paper. 'Yes, they were unloaded last October. Yes, that's six months. No one's claimed them so we'll have to auction them.'

'Can't get over it, sir. 20,000 left-foot shoes ...'

(p. 80)

It is a long time since I have been so excited about a teaching aid. This book is not recommended for teachers who feel insecure about relinquishing the authority of the 'right' answer, or who have a prescriptive, formal approach to teaching English. For those teachers, however, who are both uncomfortable and bored with the unrealistic, non-communicative nature of many of the exercises in many ESL textbooks, and who would rather teach skills than content, *Challenge to Think* is an answer to a prayer. It is exciting as well as practical, and based on sound principles for encouraging mental flexibility - certainly the most original speaking and reading text to appear in years.

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