

# To the Teacher

## Audience

This book was written for intermediate-level English language learners in high schools, IEPs, community-based organizations, or community colleges who wish to improve their vocabulary and better understand some of the history, culture, traditions, and heroes of the United States. This book may also be useful in standards-based programs that encourage critical thinking, reflection, and reading with understanding. It also promotes education in civics.

## Reading and Writing Levels

Each unit is equal in its level of difficulty. Therefore, each unit can stand alone, and the units can be covered in any order. The readings are carefully controlled for length as well as difficulty of grammar and vocabulary. Each reading is approximately 500 words long and scores about 5.5 on the Flesch-Kincaid reading level scale. Grammatical structures include the simple tenses, the present and past continuous, the present perfect, and occasionally the past perfect, placing the text roughly at ESL reading and writing Level 4 (or intermediate level), as defined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines.

## Vocabulary

This text offers students the chance to encounter new vocabulary many times, from noticing to remembering, to producing it independently. Thought-provoking readings and carefully designed exercises keep students motivated to learn and practice new vocabulary.

Each unit consists of two parts. The first half presents the history and present-day customs of a major U.S. holiday. The second half features the biography of a famous American who has a connection to the holiday. Each half unit features five target words. These high-frequency words are central to the reading. First, the new words are introduced with their definitions as related to the context of the reading and are highlighted in a sentence. Word families are included to further broaden students' vocabulary base. These words are each recycled and practiced throughout that half of the unit through a variety of engaging exercises, moving from controlled to free practice.

The highlighted words in the first half of the unit also reappear in the second half of the unit for reinforcement. Words are reinforced methodically throughout the book if the chapters are used in the order presented here. However, teachers can start the book anywhere because each unit can stand alone in terms of context and level.

## U.S. Holidays and Select Biographies

Holidays are an engaging and natural way to involve language learners in U.S. civics, history, and culture. The history and values surrounding the holiday are highlighted by a biography of a historical figure who has a connection to the holiday. For example, New Year's Day becomes more interesting to students when they also learn about the New Year's tradition of American college football games and the great football player, Anthony Muñoz.

Learning about the kinds of people that Americans admire, what makes them significant in U.S. culture, and how they have influenced the culture helps students better understand some American values. In addition, students are asked to think about their own cultures and values. The holidays in this book were chosen to give students a varied look at U.S. history and its people, events, and values. The biographies selected represent a diverse range of American men and women, all of whom are honored or celebrated in U.S. society. Religious holidays were not selected, allowing the teacher to be sensitive to the faiths of students in the classroom.

## Unit Format

Each unit features a high number of vocabulary-strengthening exercises that ask students their opinions and ideas on a number of subjects. In each half unit, students complete about 12 exercises: five before reading the text and seven after the reading. At the end of each unit, there is also an individual project for students to complete. This will extend the student's understanding of some of the concepts presented in the unit. Students can complete the exercises individually, in small groups, as whole group activities, or as individual homework assignments.

Each half unit follows the same format:

- **Think about the Reading.** Students activate their background knowledge and schema through discussion questions about the topic and holiday.

- **Practice New Vocabulary.** Students begin with carefully controlled vocabulary exercises such as cloze, circling parts of speech, making opinions, short answer, and noticing the words in context. Then they move to freer response exercises.
- **Read about It.** By now, the target vocabulary will have been circled by the students. Students then read the account of the holiday or famous American. For added authenticity, biographies end with a quote from or about that person. Students are given the opportunity to discuss with classmates what the quote means to them.
- **Check Your Comprehension.** After the first reading, students re-read the text. This is followed by a short self-test to check understanding. The holiday readings are followed by a true/false exercise, and the biography selections are followed by an exercise that directs students to make corrections to sentences. Both of these comprehension checks focus on the content of the readings.
- **Think and Discuss.** This section allows students to share their opinions and experiences with the whole class, a small group, or a partner, as the teacher chooses. While these questions do not all focus specifically on the material in the readings, students will have become attuned to the topic through their reading. In addition, students will think about the connection between the holiday and the famous American presented in the unit. These questions will give students the opportunity to strengthen their responses by using the unit vocabulary.
- **Write.** Here students extend their content and vocabulary knowledge by writing a short paragraph about the ideas in the unit. These writing exercises can be done in class or as homework, or they can be assigned to students who finish the other exercises ahead of the rest of the class.
- **Complete a Project.** At the end of each unit, students are provided the opportunity to ask an American his or her ideas about one of the concepts raised in the unit. Students will conduct a short interview and then compile the information into a report that can be presented orally and/or in writing. This meaningful extension exercise allows students to further reflect on the concepts and vocabulary presented in the unit.