

*Journeys Near and Far 1 & 2: Reading and Responding Critically*. By Jessie M. Reppy and Linda Best. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001

Reviewed by Liz Flynn

*Journeys Near and Far: Reading and Responding Critically* is a two-volume reader designed for intermediate and high-intermediate ESL learners. Books 1 and 2 may be taught in subsequent courses, but would stand alone equally well. The set is a well-developed, solid addition to the growing array of cultural readers available to ESL educators.

Each book is made up of five chapters of three or four reading selections organized around a general theme. Prereading and preview activities appear before each selection; a short glossary, a cloze exercise, and open-ended questions for small group discussion follow.

The previews are particularly outstanding. Students examine the reading to discover as much as possible before they read, by looking at the title, author, source, and any pictures or charts. They then read the first and last paragraphs, skim the rest, and write down their impressions and questions. Unfortunately, the preview section appears only a few times in each book, so students have just three opportunities to do a guided preview before they are expected to do it independently.

Another useful activity is “Another Look at the Selection”, which invites students to delve more deeply into the ideas, language, or style of a reading selection. Typical questions ask why a piece was written in a particular way, ask students to identify and list certain structural or grammatical elements, or ask whether they agree with a statement or idea mentioned in the reading.

“Vocabulary Building” presents exercises along with learning strategies for students, including a vocabulary log. “In Your Words” asks students to write their opinions about specific parts of the reading selection. A minor problem with this activity is that it allows only limited space for students to answer questions that are often quite complex. The “Summing Up” activity helps students summarize class opinions, make inferences about the readings, and check whether all their questions have been answered.

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At the end of each chapter is an excellent “Reflecting and Synthesizing” activity that encourages students to make connections between all the readings in that chapter. This section includes discussion questions and writing prompts, some of which address how the issues in the reading selections affect students’ own lives.

Best and Reppy have brought together authentic texts from a range of sources, from Nelson Mandela to *Newsweek*, and from Robert Frost to the Consumers Union. The readings are selected on the basis of their interest to students, and the activities are designed to encourage students’ active participation in their own learning. Citing Freire and Vygotsky, the authors have not simplified the reading selections but have developed activities to facilitate students’ understanding of the texts. Among the interactive activities and assignments are a vocabulary log, reading journal, classroom debate, short answer and longer writing prompts, double-entry reading journal, and Internet research. Experienced teachers will be able to choose those activities most beneficial to their students.

The authors suggest that *Journeys Near and Far* is most appropriate for intermediate ESL learners in post-secondary academic programs, but the critical thinking skills demanded by the activities would also benefit pre-academic ESL students who are preparing to meet the reading and writing demands of college or community college classes. Pre-academic students might find some of the activity instructions complex and difficult to understand, especially in the second book, but this problem can be minimized with a teacher’s guidance and careful selection of activities.

Teachers will find *Journeys Near and Far* to be an engaging and versatile set of readers. The reading content, discussion questions, and writing activities will provide an interesting and enjoyable challenge to intermediate students in a reading or writing course.