

范东生/编著

# Reading for Ideas

## 英语经典 名篇阅读



東華大學出版社

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**图书在版编目(CIP)数据**

英语经典名篇阅读/范东生编著. —上海:东华大学出版社, 2004. 6

ISBN 7-81038-803-7

I. 英... II. 范... III. 英语—阅读教学—高等学校—教材 IV. H319.4

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2004)第 037854 号

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**英语经典名篇阅读**

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东华大学出版社

(上海市延安西路 1882 号 邮政编码:200051)

新华书店上海发行所发行 昆山亭林印刷有限公司印刷

开本:850 × 1168 1/32 印张:12.75 字数:356 千字

2004 年 6 月第 1 版 2004 年 6 月第 1 次印刷

印数:0001 ~ 5000

ISBN 7-81038-803-7/H · 165

定价:25.00 元

## Foreword

Stepping into the advanced stage of English reading, students will find that it is the interpretation of meaning rather than the study of difficult vocabulary and grammar that becomes the chief challenge. When I was choosing the materials for this reading textbook, which intends to develop students' ability of interpretation, the ability to gain the ideas, I did one thing for certain, that is, all the texts are very meaningful (or insightful) writings. Most of them have become classic in the Western literary world. So, I decided to name this text book 英语经典名篇阅读, or *Reading for the Ideas*.

Traditionally, reading has been regarded as a decoding process. The meaning of a text is assumed to have been encoded by its writer, and the reader is to just understand (decode) every word and every sentence and then catch the meaning, because it is believed that every word and sentence is purposefully put there for the particular theme. Students may be familiar with such a reading class: step one, the teaching of new words, the forms, the meanings, the collocations and connotations; step two, the teaching of some grammatically difficult sentences, the structure, the function, the paraphrases; step three, the teaching of the organization of the text, the relation between sentences, the function of certain paragraphs; step four, summarizing of all the above and finish. This approach to reading, with which the students deal with letters, words, and sentences in rank order, each step depending on the preceding one, is called "bottom up" approach. The belief behind it was that a general understanding depends upon a collection of all correctly understood small details. Yet, it is not uncommon that many students have also such experiences: they know most of the words, they also understand sentence structures, but they just cannot figure out the idea, or

the meaning of the material.

Later on, numerous evidences appear to tell that a good comprehension does not necessarily depend on the thorough understanding of every detail, and “top-down” model has been introduced and become popular since the 1970s. In classroom practice, teachers provide a similar background to the general content of the text, and try to trigger students’ previously stored knowledge and experiences in association. This model has widely replaced the “bottom-up” model. Top-down models assume that the reader gets the meaning by comparing his expectations with a sample of information from the text as he is constructing a meaningful whole.

In my opinion, “bottom-up” strategy has focus on word recognition and “top-down” strategy has focus on integrating background knowledge. Each has its advantages. We hear many reports that effective readers continually adopt a top-down approach to predict the probable theme and then move to the bottom-up approach to check their assumption by examining details.

Although we agree that both sorts of strategies are vital to skilled reading, students still cannot be guaranteed to find the meaning. This is because there is simply no fixed meaning waiting there to be recognized. Meaning is made out by the reader. It is right that the reader gets the meaning by means of word recognition, by sentence understanding, but what is more closer to the fact is, he/she constructs a meaning by using his own knowledge of the world, his own previous life experience and, even more importantly, his value system. In the process of understanding, each reader uses his/her previous knowledge and assumptions, both about the world and about the way in which the text is constructed, as an organizing principle by which the

new text information is made out. (Isn't it also many students' experience that a lesson is much easier to understand if it is about a subject they know well?)

Thus, the present textbook is organized in a way that students can get help both from linguistic understanding and from experience familiarization.

Each lesson is presented in such a structure:

1. A framing direction (Set up a Frame). This is to set up a frame for the interpretation. Students will have their previous knowledge and experience similar to the knowledge and experience in the text associated. In this way, some useful information is retrieved from students' long-term memory, and set there in their minds as the background. They are then ready to start framing an interpretation. With the help of a general guiding line, the possibility of wrong direction of understanding is reduced.

2. The text proper.

3. Words and expressions. Only some words that are in critical places in the text are explained, but not all the new words, because I believe that students can deal with most of the new words according to their word formation knowledge and the contexts.

4. Questions for thinking. All questions are open for discussion. During the reading (that is, interpretation), students might have multiple associations between what they are reading and their own world knowledge and life experience. Through the after reading discussions the extensive choices for possible ideas will be narrowed and a more reasonable understanding can be developed.

What I want to emphasize here is to call an attention to the last question of each lesson. It is a significant part. The question requires a conscious look at the process of the reader's understanding. How does he/she set up a frame for understanding;

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how does he/she make the decision on the relations between the details; how does he/she link some visions in the text with the pictures in his/her own life experience, etc. In one word, the question intends to help students to draw a meaningful experience from this lesson. In most cases reading interpretation undergoes without reader's awareness. A good reader should know his/her reading strategy, and keep aware of those elements affecting his/her understanding. In this way, he/she is surely going to be a more successful reader.

I should give my acknowledgement to the resources where these texts are taken from. Most of them are taken from *Dolphin Reader* (by Douglas Hunt & Melody Richardson, Daily Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987). Others are from *Story to Anti-story* (by Mary Rohrberger, Houghton Mifflin Company) and *Studies in Fiction* (by Blaze O. Bonazza, Emil Roy, Sandra Roy, Harper & Row Publishers Inc. ). Due to the tight time schedule, I have not been able to find the original publishers. Though the book will be only used for classroom teaching, I will welcome the contacts from the above-mentioned publishers.

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1. *Twins*<sup>①</sup>

E. B. White

**A** bout the author: Elwyn Brooks White (1899—1985).

As a leading American essayist and literary stylist of his time, White was known for his crisp, graceful, relaxed style. "No one can write a sentence like White," James Thurber once stated. White's stories ranged from satire to children's fiction. While he often wrote from the perspective of slightly ironic onlooker, he also was a sensitive spokesman for the freedom of the individual. Among his most enduring essays is *Once More to the Lake*.

From 1929 White worked for *The New Yorker's* weekly magazine, and remained in its staff for the rest of his career. White's favorite subjects were the complexities of modern society, failures of technological progress, the pleasures of urban and rural life, war, and internationalism. He was skeptical about organized religion, and advocated a respect for nature and simple living.

E. B. White died of Alzheimer disease on October 1, 1985 in North Brooklin, Maine. He was awarded the gold medal for essays and criticism of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Pulitzer Prize special citation in 1978.

**Set up a frame:** When materially developed to a certain stage, people would come to think about their position in this universe, their relationship with the nature. Often, children are closer to nature than adults.

On a warm, miserable morning last week we went up to the Bronx Zoo to see the moose calf and to break in a new pair of black shoes. We encountered better luck than we had bargained

① First published in *The New Yorker*, June 12, 1948.

for. The cow moose and her young one were standing near the wall of the deer park below the monkey house, and in order to get a better view we strolled down to the lower end of the park, by the *brook*<sup>1</sup>. The path there is not much travelled. As we approached the corner where the brook trickles under the wire fence, we noticed a red deer getting to her feet. Beside her, on legs that were just learning their business, was a spotted fawn, as small and perfect as a trinket seen through a reducing glass. They stood there, mother and child, under a gray beech whose trunk was engraved with dozens of hearts and initials. Stretched on the ground was another fawn, and we realized that the doe had just finished twinning. The second fawn was still wet, still unrisen. Here was a scene of rare *sylvan*<sup>2</sup> splendor, in one of our five favorite *boroughs*<sup>3</sup>, and we couldn't have asked for more. Even our new shoes seemed to be working out all right and weren't hurting much.

The doe was only a couple of feet from the wire, and we sat down on a rock at the edge of the footpath to see what sort of start young fawns get in the deep fastnesses of Mittel Bronx. The mother, mildly resentful of our presence and dazed from her labor, raised one forefoot and stamped primly. Then she lowered her head, picked up the afterbirth, and began dutifully to eat it, allowing it to swing crazily from her mouth, as though it were a bunch of withered beet greens. From the monkey house came the loud, insane hooting of some captious primate, filling the whole woodland with a wild hooroar. As we watched, the sun broke weakly through, brightened the rich red of the fawns, and kindled their white spots. Occasionally a sightseer would appear and wander aimlessly by, but of all who passed none was aware that anything extraordinary had occurred. "Looka the kangaroos!" a child cried. And he and his mother stared sullenly at the deer and then walked on.

In a few moments the second twin gathered all his legs and all his ingenuity and arose, to stand for the first time sniffing the

mysteries of a park for captive deer. The doe, in recognition of his achievement, quit her other work and began to dry him, running her tongue against the grain and paying particular attention to the key points. Meanwhile the first fawn tiptoed toward the shallow brook, in little stops and goes, and started across. He paused midstream to make a slight contribution, as a child does in bathing. Then, while his mother watched, he continued across, gained the other side, selected a hiding place, and lay down under a skunk cabbage leaf next to the fence, in perfect concealment, his legs folded neatly under him. Without actually going out of sight, he had managed to disappear completely in the shifting light and shade. From somewhere a long way off a twelveo'clock whistle sounded. We hung around awhile, but he never budged. Before we left, we crossed the brook ourselves, just outside the fence, knelt, reached through the wire, and tested the truth of what we had once heard: that you can scratch a new fawn between the ears without starting him. You can indeed.



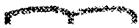
### Words and expressions:

1. brook 小溪
2. sylvan 栖息于森林的
3. boroughs 自治的市镇




### Question:

1. What are signs of natural life?
2. What are signs of civilization?
3. How is nature and civilization related in this paper? Are children closer to nature than adults?
4. Keep a journal and write down your experience in the process of understanding. For example, how did you



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use the introduction and question, how did you notice the contradiction (conflict) between civilization and natural beauty?

## 2. Pages from the Life of a Georgia Innocent<sup>①</sup>

Harry Crews

**A** bout the author: (1935— ) Harry Eugene Crews was born on June 7, 1935, in Bacon County, Georgia, USA. His childhood in the southern countryside left him a very strong influence over his worldview.

Joining the service in the 50's brought him into contact with the larger world, one he had read about in the few books he had managed to obtain.

When Crews graduated from the university, the Crews family moved upstate to Jacksonville, where he taught a year of Junior High English (Burt 1974).

In 1978, Crews published *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place*. *A Childhood* chronicles the horrors of his upbringing, the traumas of his early adolescence, and the attempts of an older Crews to reconcile, as an adult, his past.

It is noted by many critics that much of the mature critical attention given to Crews's novels centers on the individual's response to "outmoded lifestyles that conflict with postmodern urban values" (Robert Covel 1994).

**Set up a frame:** Disney movie that shows the life of a farm family is fantastic. Children love it and learn something about life from it. But what is in the eyes of a child who has personally experienced all those true and unforgettable life in the country?

Not very long ago I went with my twelve-year-old boy to a

① Originally published in *Esquire*, July 1976.

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Disney movie, one of those things that show a farm family, poor but God knows honest, out there on the land building character through hunger and hard work. The hunger and hard work seemed to be a hell of a lot of fun. The deprivation was finally so rewarding you could hardly stand it. The farm was full of warm, fuzzy, furry, damp-nosed creatures: bawling calves and braying mules and dogs that were treated like people. There was a little pain here and there but just so much as would teach important lessons to all of us. It sometimes even brought a tear to the eye, but not a real tear because the tear only served to prove that a family out in the middle of nowhere scratching in the earth for survival didn't have it so bad after all. Somebody was forever petting and stroking the plump little animals, crooning to them, as they were raised for strange, unstated reasons, but surely not to be *castrated*<sup>1</sup> and slaughtered and skinned and eaten. They were, after all, friends.

If somebody got sick, he'd just pop into an old, rattling but trustworthy pickup truck and go off to town, where a kindly doctor would receive him immediately into his office and effect an instant cure by looking down his throat and asking him to say Ah. No mention was made of payment.

As my boy and I came out of the movie, blinking in the sunlight, it occurred to me that Disney and others—the folks who bring you *The Waltons*, say, or *The Little House on the Prairie*—had managed to sell this strange vision of poverty and country life not only to suburbanites, while the suburbanites stuffed themselves with malt balls and popcorn, but also to people in little towns throughout the South who had proof in their daily lives to the contrary.

All fantasy. Now there is nothing wrong with fantasy. I love it, even live off it at times. But driving home, the reality behind the fantasy began to go bad on me. It seemed immoral and dangerous to show so many smiles without an occasional glimpse of the skull underneath.

As we were going down the driveway, my boy, Byron, said: "That was a great movie, huh, Dad?"

"Yeah," I said. "Great."

"I wish I could've lived in a place like that," he said.

"No, you don't," I said. "You just think you do."

My grandmother in Bacon County, Georgia, raised biddies: tiny cheeping bits of fluff that city folk allow their children to squeeze to death at Easter. But city children are not the only ones who love biddies; hawks love them, too. Hawks like to swoop into the yard and carry off one impaled on their curved talons. Perhaps my grandmother, in her secret heart, knew that hawks even then were approaching the time when they would be on the endangered species list. Whether she did or not, I'm sure she often felt she and her kind were already on the list. It would not do.

I'll never forget the first time I saw her get rid of a hawk. Chickens, as everybody knows, are *cannibals*<sup>2</sup>. Let a biddy get a spot of blood on it from a scrape or a raw place and the other biddies will simply eat it alive. My grandmother penned up all the biddies except the puniest one, already half pecked to death by the other cute little bits of fluff, and she set it out in the open yard by itself. First, though, she put *arsenic*<sup>3</sup> on its head. I—about five years old and sucking on a sugar-tit—saw the hawk come in low over the fence, its red tail fanned, talons stretched, and nail the poisoned biddy where it squatted in the dust. The biddy never made a sound as it was carried away. My gentle grandmother watched it all with satisfaction before she let her other biddies out of the pen.

Another moment from my childhood that comes instantly to mind was about a chicken, too; a rooster. He was boss cock of the whole farm, a magnificent bird nearly two feet tall. At the base of a chicken's throat is its craw, a kind of pouch into which the bird swallows food, as well as such things as grit, bits of



rock and shell. For reasons I don't understand they sometimes become crawbound. The stuff in the craw does not move; it remains in the craw and swells and will ultimately cause death. That's what would have happened to the rooster if the uncle who practically raised me hadn't said one day: "Son, we got to fix him."

He tied the rooster's feet so we wouldn't be spurred and took out his castrating knife, *honed*<sup>4</sup> to a razor's edge, and *sterilized*<sup>5</sup> it over a little fire. He soaked a piece of fine fishing line and a needle in alcohol. I held the rooster on its back, a wing in each hand. With the knife my uncle split open the craw, cleaned it out, then sewed it up with the fishing line. The rooster screamed and screamed. But it lived to be cock of the walk again.

Country people never did anything worse to their stock than they sometimes were forced to do to themselves. We had a man who farmed with us, a man from up north somewhere who had drifted down into Georgia with no money and a mouth full of bad teeth. Felix was his name and he was good with a plow and an ax, a hard worker. Most of the time you hardly knew he was on the place, he was so quiet and well-mannered. Except when his teeth began to bother him. And they bothered him more than a little. He lived in a shedlike little room off the side of the house. The room didn't have much in it: a ladder-back chair, a kerosene lamp, a piece of broken glass hanging on the wall over a pan of water where he shaved as often as once a week, a slat-board bed, and in one corner a chamber pot—which we called a slop jar—for use in the middle of the night when nature called. I slept in a room on the other side of the wall from him. I don't remember how old I was the night of his terrible toothache, but I do remember I was still young enough to wear a red cotton gown with five little pearl buttons down the front my grandmother had made for me.

When I heard him kick the slop jar, I knew it was his