

AMERICANA ARTICLES

1

Reading the Culture

Tacey Ruffner



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Foreword

Americana Artides invites intermediate-level English as a Second Language readers to discover some American values and beliefs. Through popular accounts, they meet ordinary people solving day-to-day problems as well as very special people who overcome social obstacles and achieve goals which, to the rest of us, seem extraordinary indeed.

"Anita Grabe got married to her second husband on her coffee break." So begins a short narrative about Anita and Tom, their wedding and their two-income marriage contract. Later we read about Andrea, "one of 47 fifth-graders who has a classroom job and earns a weekly wage." We read not only about Steve McQueen, but about Richard Carmona, a Harlem high school dropout who turned his life around to become a successful surgeon, and about Isabel Pepper, a sociology student at age 68.

Whether about immigrant, teenager, or senior citizen, *Americana Artides* brings to the ESL class a glimpse of the harsher side of life along with its more inspiring moments. Readers (and teachers) need not subscribe to all of the social, legal, economic, and technological statements contained in every article. But awareness that some members of American society hold some of these explicit and implicit values enables the newcomer to this country to move more easily through the psychological states of linguistic (and cultural) acceptance that Ruffner characterizes as "unbelievable . . . frustrating . . . believable."

This intermediate reader presents a tightly organized format: it is cyclical, it draws on inductive and deductive reasoning, it reinforces both mechanical and interpretive skills, and it draws on learning theory to develop scope and sequence. For the less experienced teacher it represents a total "package" of contextualized lessons with controlled vocabulary and syntax. For the experienced teacher it provides numerous chances for brainstorming, drawing inferences, and clustering to strengthen students' reading comprehension. A strong feature of this reader is the teacher's *Introduction*.

This is an integrated text in the fullest sense. It will go a long way to facilitate the intermediate learner's linguistic and cognitive development.

Not long ago in *The New York Times*, Clifton Fadiman wrote an essay entitled "The Classroom's Ubiquitous Rival: Pop Culture." In it he describes the "alternate life" which exists in "opposition" to traditional schooling. Although critical of popular culture, Fadiman acknowledges that: "This alternative life is a life; it is not a diversion, a hobby, an amusement. It offers its own disciplines, its own curriculum, its own ethical and cultural values, its own styles and language."

While some educators may regret its pull on today's students, others, like the author of *Americana Artides*, have looked to the alternative life in order to uncover patterns of

contemporary thought and attitude. Her intention: to encourage ESL students to examine some factors — some pleasant and reassuring, others unpleasant and disturbing — that comprise a separate reference system. She believes informed language learners will thus be better equipped to understand their new language and new culture. Those who adopt the text, I suspect, will applaud Ruffner's intention.

Carol Gurolnick Rossi
University of Santa Clara

These books are dedicated to my grandmother,
Nita Snow Grabe, 1903–1981.
 I could always count on her encouragement and support.

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Introduction

Americana Articles 1 and 2 have been developed for students of English as a Second Language at an intermediate level of proficiency. The goal is to present an integrated framework of the major elements of mainstream American culture. These elements tend to be taken for granted by most Americans, but cannot be assumed to be part of the operating framework of others. The readings are based on articles from American journals which exemplify the American linguistic and cultural environment.

The vocabulary and cognitive skills have been selected for their usefulness in everyday life as well as applicability in a school environment. *Volume 1* deals with concepts and vocabulary explicitly, and *Volume 2* continues the spiral, using the vocabulary implicitly. The adapted articles cover a wide variety of contemporary lifestyles, problems, and situations.

Each of the 5 units explores a different aspect of American experience. The 25 articles present students with current approaches to American issues and concerns. The concepts and vocabulary are learned within a cultural context which is consistently reinforced in references to the following general characteristics: independence; individualism; action; making choices; belief in change and progress; geographic and social mobility; living one's life within a future orientation; a sense of direct connection between hard work and success, and between money and success.

The articles have been selected with 3 requirements in mind: a high level of student interest, clear cultural content, and the potential for cognitive skill development. The primary goal in the classroom is active student participation. The students' interaction aids their development as fluent and effective readers and communicators. The choice of articles, their order in each unit, and the notional connections between the last article of one unit and the first article of the next have been determined by a combination of student interest and connections among ideas and cognitive skills.

The articles in these books are organized around 2 types of reading matter: narratives and general information extracted from newspapers and popular magazines. Both types of material presuppose some exposure to American culture, whether from previous reading or experience, either personal or media-based. As with any subject, the more one knows about it, the better one is equipped to understand and use it during the reading process and in real life.

The exercises which follow the articles focus on comprehension and analysis of the main ideas, vocabulary usage, grammar reinforcement, and cultural contrasts between the United States and other countries. The activities also provide ample opportunity for the students to enhance their skills in listening, speaking, and writing. The exercises have been designed to channel the students' enthusiasm and imagination into communicative, interactive language production.

Presenting the Information

Americana Articles has been developed to help students make connections across linguistic and cultural gaps. Students actively produce English as they communicate about a body of linguistic and cultural information. Each illustration contains cultural and grammatical clues which are linked directly to the information in the article. In discussing the illustration along with the article, and working through the exercises, students are challenged to communicate clearly, accurately, and comfortably.

With each article, students practice communicative and cognitive skills. In this way they learn: 1) how to inquire about information and relationships; and 2) how to use contextual information and logic to complement reading and oral/aural skills.

The oral "Brainstorming Questions" have been designed to bridge the gap between deductive and inductive thinking. Brainstorming is a technique which students use to generate a joint solution to a specific vocabulary, information, or cultural problem. The best description of brainstorming is that it is an approach which focuses on applied creativity.

The "Vocabulary" exercise can be done orally in one large group or several small groups. Each of the underlined vocabulary items has been selected because it contains intercultural problems in meaning.

The following techniques have been useful in encouraging students to analyze vocabulary:

- 1) Students can identify the part of speech of the item, in the sentence. For example, in analyzing *restaurant chain*, a teacher can ask, What part of speech is *restaurant* usually—noun, verb, adjective, or adverb? What part of speech is it in this particular context?

These questions help students understand that the meaning of a vocabulary item is related to its position in a sentence.

- 2) Next, the teacher asks for other possible semantically related words or phrases to help students develop accurate guessing, analysis and synthesis techniques:

T: What's another word for *restaurant*?

- Ss:
1. cafeteria
 2. coffee shop
 3. coffee house
 4. sandwich shop

T: What are the differences between *cafeteria* and *coffee shop*? What are the similarities between *cafeteria* and *coffee shop*?

As students work through the "Brainstorming Questions" and "Vocabulary," they have also had a chance to skim and scan the article in the process. "Questions for the First Reading" cue students to the time frame (past, present perfect, present continuous, or present) and events in the article. The next step is in-class reading of the article by the students, which can be done either orally or silently. The oral "Question after the First Reading" leads students to formulate a preliminary main idea of the article and stimulates discussion of other students' perceptions as well.

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“Questions for the Second Reading” focus on analyzing certain cultural factors. The “Comprehension Questions” clarify whether the information has been comprehended accurately. For example, the use of the present perfect tense in a given question leads to the use of the same tense in the student’s answer, whether oral or written.

“Finding the Main Ideas” focuses on each individual paragraph. “What’s the Writer’s Opinion?” facilitates small-group analysis and discussion of more implicit information. “Word Group Practice” stimulates the ability to make conceptual, schematic connections. “What Does the Pronoun Mean?” practices identifying pronouns and their referents, both one-word and idea-based.

“Word Forms” gives ample practice with formation. “Discovering Your Inferences” provides the students with the opportunity to integrate the information in the text, their reading skills, and their life experiences. “Discussion Questions” require analysis of relationships, assumptions, and implications. They also demand the expression of personal opinions and reactions, based on the students’ personal cultural criteria.

Note that all exercise types do not appear after every article.

The Teacher

As members of any cultural group, our normal sociolinguistic functioning is governed by our group’s cultural concepts and values. These concepts and values define and organize what we perceive as physical, social, legal, economic, technological, and linguistic reality. Americans need only an implicit, intuitive, and unconscious understanding of American cultural concepts and values. However, ESL/EFL teachers take on another role—that of cultural interpreter. This role requires awareness of the American culturally-defined conceptual system and how it functions in all facets of life. It is a teacher’s responsibility to facilitate a shift in students’ interpretation of American language and culture from initially “Unbelievable” (an interpretation according to the first cultural framework), to “Frustrating” (a midway transition point), to “Believable” (a cognitive understanding of the second cultural frame of reference).

The Student

An intermediate student should have a fairly strong ability to process information. At this level, the transition from concrete to abstract begins in earnest, developing higher-level cognitive skills. Since abstract vocabulary is vulnerable to a particular cultural context, its complexity tends to increase at a rapid rate and includes various attributes of and interpretations by the target culture. *Americana Articles 1* has been designed to introduce and access concrete-based thinking skills. *Americana Articles 2* carries the process forward into more abstract cognitive territory.

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UNIT

1

From Refugees to Computers

refju dʒiː

难民, 逃难者

Chapter 1

Brainstorming Questions - What Do You Think?

Vocabulary

The following sentences have the new vocabulary from this article. Do you or your student partner know what the underlined words mean? The words are followed by a word (synonym) or phrase (definition). These words or phrases have the first letters of the words in the complete spelling. Can you guess the missing letters? Each space is for one letter.

1. Like all Americans I dreamed of a suburban home (ne...).
2. The dream became true last November (bec...).
3. Nguyen headed South Vietnam's government (trai...).



Chapter 1

Ex-Premier's American Dream, Part One

Brainstorming Questions – What Do You Think?

First, look at the picture and read the title. What information do they give you about the article? Remember, sometimes there isn't enough information in the title and picture to answer the questions.

How many people are in the picture?
Are they the same person?

1 Vocabulary

The following sentences have the new vocabulary from this article. Do you or your student partner know what the underlined words mean? The words are followed by a word (synonym) or phrase (definition). These words or phrases have the first letters, but no the complete spelling. Can you guess the missing letters? Each space is for one letter.

1. Like all Americans, I dreamed of a suburban home. (near a city)
2. The dream became true last November. (became real)
3. Nguyen headed South Vietnam's government. (managed)

/sə'bʊrban/
/ˈvjet'naem/
越南

4. I was depressed when I got to San Francisco. (ve _ _ _ s _ _)
5. I was depressed when I got to San Francisco. (arr _ _ _ _ in)
6. After a few months, I was broke. (h _ _ no mo _ _ _)
7. I had no skills. (abil _ _ _ _ _ to do some _ _ _ _ _ well)
8. I couldn't find a job. (pa _ _ posi _ _ _ _)
9. The suicide rate among refugees is high. (percen _ _ _ _ _)



2 Questions for the First Reading

Read the following article without using your dictionary. Think about these questions as you read:

- What happened to Nguyen first?
- What happened second?
- What happened next?

1. Ex-Premier's American Dream, Part One

- 1 "Like all Americans, I dreamed of a *suburban* home." The dream came true last November, but none of it seemed possible 10 years ago. Mr. Ba Nguyen, 49, moved from an apartment to a house. Mr. Nguyen is the ex-premier of South Vietnam. He headed Vietnam's government before the Communists took over in 1975.
- 2 "I was *depressed* when I *got* to San Francisco, and after a few months I *was broke*. I had only a couple of thousand dollars when I *arrived*; I had no *skills*; and I couldn't find a *job*."
- 3 Some Vietnamese refugees have become *extremely* depressed in similar circumstances, and the suicide *rate* among refugees is *high*. But Nguyen thinks that about two-thirds of the 20,000 refugees in this area are already leading successful lives.

3 Comprehension Questions

Read each question carefully with your student partner. Answer the questions in complete, written sentences.

1. Who is Ba Nguyen?

2. How old is he?

3. When did his dream come true?

4. What did he do before he came to the U.S.?

5. When did he come to the U.S.?

6. How did he feel when he got to San Francisco?

7. How much money did he have when he arrived?

8. Is the suicide rate among refugees high or low?

9. How many Vietnamese refugees are there in this area?

4 Finding the Main Ideas

Complete the sentences with the main idea of each paragraph.

The main idea of the first paragraph is: _____

The main idea of the second paragraph is: _____

5 Word Forms

For this exercise, you may need to use a dictionary.

Noun Suffixes

Many nouns end in the suffix *-ment*. Example: *government*. What other nouns can you think of that end in *-ment*?

- 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____

Other nouns end in the suffix *-ance*. Example: *circumstance*. What other nouns can you think of that end in *-ance*?

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____

Adjective Suffixes

Many adjectives end in the suffixes *-ible*, *-able*, or *-ful*. Examples: *possible*, *successful*. What other adjectives can you think of that end in *-ible*, *-able*, or *-ful*?

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____

Adverb Suffixes

Many adverbs end in the suffix *-ly*. Example: *extremely*. Usually an adverb is a combination of an adjective + *-ly*. An adverb describes a verb. Usually there are no spelling changes. But drop the *-le* on words that end in *-ble*.

What other possible word forms are there for the following list? Look at the chart below:

	NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS
1. government	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. possible	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. extremely	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. circumstances	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. successful	_____	_____	_____	_____

6 Discussion Questions

What are the names of places that are near you in the United States which are: urban, suburban, or rural?

What are the names of the types of housing that are near you? Where do students live? Give some examples.

What are some possible reasons for refugees to go to another country? Give some examples.

Are computers a big business in the United States? Are they a big business in other countries? Why or why not?

Are two-paycheck couples usual in the United States? Are they usual in other countries?

Do families usually live close to each other in the United States? Do they live close to each other in other countries?

Would you like to have a lifestyle like Nguyen's? Why or why not?

Adjective Sentences

Many adjectives end in the suffix -able or -ible. Examples: possible, successful. Write other adjectives that you think of that end in -able or -ible.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Adverb Sentences

Many adverbs end in the suffix -ly. Examples: usually, suddenly. Write other adverbs that you think of that end in -ly. An adverb describes a verb. Usually there are no spelling changes. But drop the -e on words that end in -e.

What other possible word forms are there for the following base form? Write the form below.

ADVERBS	ADJECTIVES	VERBS	NOUNS
1. government			
2. possible			
3. extremely			
4. circumstances			
5. successful			

Discussion Questions

- What are the names of places that are new in the United States? Which are urban, suburban, or rural?
- What are the names of the types of houses that are new now? Where do students live? Give some examples.
- What are some possible reasons for students to go to another country? Give some examples.
- Are there any big businesses in the United States? Are there any big businesses in other countries? Why or why not?