

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

# Across Cultures

A READER FOR WRITERS



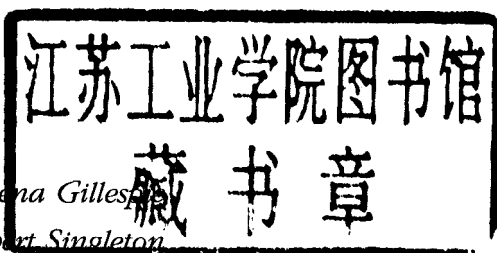
Sheena Gillespie ■ Robert Singleton

# Across Cultures



## A READER FOR WRITERS

Second Edition



*Sheena Gillespie*

*Robert Singleton*

Queensborough Community College  
City University of New York

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*To Ruth, Flo, and Helen; to Jay Ford; and to the Memory of  
Rachel Maria Asrelesky, a Victim of Pan Am Flight 103,  
December 21, 1988—Advocates of Crossing Cultures*

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# PREFACE FOR THE TEACHER

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*Across Cultures* is a reader that invites students to look beyond their own society and culture. The title embodies our guiding image of a reaching out—moving beyond the immediate and the parochial to an acknowledgment and acceptance of pluralism and diversity within and among cultures. In our usage, such reaching out does not mean blending or blurring or assimilating (or hybridizing, in the biological sense). The outreach we mean may be found first, in the selection of readings by authors from and about many countries: by North Americans writing about other cultures and about United States culture and subcultures; by members of ethnic subcultures in the United States, such as immigrants or their children, African-Americans, or American Indians, writing about the United States; and by persons from other cultures writing about those cultures. Second, this reaching out is encouraged by the text's apparatus, in aids to the student. "Perspectives" (quotations); chapter introductions; selection headnotes; the end-of-lesson trio "Interpretations," "Correspondences," "Applications"; and "Additional Writing Topics" are found in every chapter.

The second edition of *Across Cultures* includes two student essays per chapter, reinforcing our conviction that students do examine their own cultural interactions and are open to new ones. In Chapter 1, for example, Andrew Rein and Yael Yarimi recall mourning rituals for a family relative, while Brian Delaney and Juliet Wright evaluate their experiences with vastly different cultures. We have also included three additional selections in each chapter on topics suggested by users of the first edition.

The outreach implied by the title *Across Cultures* is an outgrowth of our understanding of the term *culture*. To define culture is a task not to be limited to a mere dictionary definition. Distinguished anthropologists A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn have devoted a sizable volume, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, to this topic. Their effort continues whenever anthropologists communicate. In assembling this textbook, we have found Bronislaw Malinowski's essay on culture in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (vol. IV), and Kluckhohn's 1962 essay, "The Concept of Culture," particularly useful. In those works these definitions appear: Culture is the "artificial, secondary environment" that human beings superimpose on the natural, and (from Kluckhohn)

Culture, then, is . . . that part [of human life] which is learned by people as the result of belonging to some particular group, and is that part of learned behavior which is shared with others. It is our social legacy, as contrasted with our organic heredity. It is the main factor which permits us to live together in a society, giving us ready-made solutions to our problems, helping us to predict the behavior of others, and permitting others to know what to expect of us.

From these definitions, then, these characteristics of culture follow: Culture is social, it is a human achievement, and human achievements are designed to serve an end or good; that is, the good of human beings. The world of culture is a world of values. Although the good may be immaterial—truth, beauty, honor, glory—cultural good must be realized in temporal and material form. Culture consists as much in conserving values as in realizing them. And finally, culture is pluralistic. It is society's attempt to realize a large number of values, some of them highly complex.

Today, travel across boundaries and continents—physical meeting of people from different cultures—is going on at a rapid rate. The rate of immigration to America approaches that at the turn of the century. “With an annual influx of 90,000 or more legal immigrants and an additional 40,000 or so undocumented aliens arriving each year, the proportion of foreign-born New Yorkers may pass the historic 1910 high of 40 percent within a decade,” writes Sam Roberts in *The New York Times* of July 22, 1989. “The latest group of immigrants is considerably more diverse nationally,” he says. These numbers and this diversity are reflected in our schools, especially those in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Antonio, and other cities, but also in smaller towns across the country.

When we look up from our daily newspapers and around at the faces of our students, we can see that this immigration is reflected in our students' diverse racial, ethnic, national, and cultural backgrounds—blacks, whites, Native Americans, Asians, Africans, and Hispanics. If ever a group of people faced the world's variety, it is today's teachers and students. As Mike Rose, associate director of Writing Programs at the University of California at Los Angeles and author of *Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared* (1989), writes:

Diversity. A word much in the news. A single word used to represent many kinds of students who are not from mainstream America: ethnic minority students, immigrant students, older students, students from the white working class. Both the popular media and our professional literature tell us about the problems and challenges a diverse student population presents to

colleges—to our professional training, our curricula, our institutional procedures.\*

And Ronald Takaki, professor of ethnic studies at the University of California at Berkeley, writes in the same *Chronicle* (March 8, 1989), p. 15:

The need to open the American mind to greater cultural diversity will not go away. We can resist it by ignoring the changing ethnic composition of our student bodies and the larger society, or we can realize how it offers colleges and universities a timely and exciting opportunity to revitalize the social sciences and humanities, giving both a new sense of purpose and a more inclusive definition of knowledge.

In the last few years we have heard much about cultural literacy. Without engaging in the debate about whether E. D. Hirsch overemphasizes education as information, we simply point out that Hirsch sees no conflict in cultural literacy and *multicultural* literacy: a large percentage of the items in Hirsch's own "Appendix: What Literate Americans Should Know"† relate to non-American or American minority cultures. Abraham and Isaac, Achilles, Africa, Afghanistan, the Alamo, Algiers, Allah, Ankara, Apaches, apartheid, and Aztecs are just a few of the A items.

Advocates of both cultural and multicultural literacy may complain that Hirsch's list is arbitrary, but who would wish it monocultural? The goal of this volume is to provide a sampler of today's vast cultural diversity. In doing so, we hope to promote an attitude of acceptance, even celebration, of that diversity and to suggest ways of probing correspondences, relationships, and mutual benefits therein. We do not attempt to—we cannot—hide the difficulties and suffering sometimes caused by cultural diversity, but we do believe these difficulties can be reduced when people know more about others and therefore are more accepting of them.

The selections we offer in *Across Cultures* cover a much greater variety of cultural trends than the table of contents indicates. For example, traditions, the subject of Chapter 1, naturally lead to questions of family life, the roles of women and men, the influence of feminism, class differences, and rituals and ceremonies of all kinds. Work, the subject of Chapter 4, leads to such related subjects as affirmative action, immigration, cultural displacement, family narratives, and definitions of success.

\*"Non-Traditional Students Often Excel in College and Can Offer Many Benefits to Their Institutions," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Oct. 11, 1989), p. B2.

†*Cultural Literacy* (1987), pp. 152–215.



## xviii PREFACE FOR THE TEACHER

The chapter on aspirations (Chapter 7) deals with many of these same subtopics, but seen from a different angle; it also focuses on the relationship between the individual and the group, mentors, and role models. The chapters are also interconnected in ways that the table of contents cannot indicate. For example, “work” exists within a matrix of traditions, relationships, education, choices, and aspirations. Hence our inclusion of “Correspondences” throughout the book. These questions ask students to make connections and draw comparisons between the “Perspectives” (brief quotations at the beginning of each chapter) and the selections in that chapter, between the selections within the chapter, and between the selections in different chapters.

Each chapter begins, as we have said, with “Perspectives,” brief provocative quotations that stimulate thought and discussion on the chapter topic. Next come the selections—myths, folk tales, essays, and short stories. Whereas many of the essays and stories reflect the seemingly endless—often tumultuous—changes in current events, our rationale for including myths and folk tales is to show culture in its conserving role. Although *Across Cultures* probably pays more attention to shifts in population and to political and economic changes around the world, these changes occur against backgrounds of centuries of history and tradition, of treasured stories of origins and beginnings that give direction to the current shifting allegiances. Such stories may actually revive and sustain some cultures.

The opening selections of each chapter are myths and folk tales that remind us of how culture sustains us. These stories are regarded as holy, as scripture, as culturally indispensable; they link time and the timeless. As N. Scott Momaday says of the storyteller in American Indian tradition: “[He] creates himself and his listeners through the power of his perception, his imagination, his expression, his devotion to important details. He is a holy man; his function is sacred.”

Helen Vendler, distinguished critic, professor of English at Harvard University, and past president of the Modern Language Association, pleads in her Presidential Address of 1980 for the implicit value of studying “myth, legend, and parable”:

It is not within our power to reform the primary and secondary schools, even if we have a sense of how that reform might begin. We do have it within our power, I believe, to reform ourselves, to make it our own first task to give, especially to our beginning students, that rich web of associations, lodged in the tales of majority and minority culture alike, by which they could begin to understand themselves as individuals and as social beings. We must give them some examples of literature, suited to their level of reading, in which these tales have an indisputable literary embodiment. All freshman English courses, to my mind, should

devote at least half their time to the reading of myth, legend, and parable; and beginning language courses should do the same. [*PMLA*, Vol. 96, no. 3, p. 350]

Cultural commentary in our text is direct and explicit. Each chapter includes one section on general American culture by an American writer, two or three selections by writers from diverse ethnic groups within the United States writing either on the experience of those groups or on individuals within them, and about five selections by writers from cultures elsewhere in the world.

A "Geographical Index" at the back of the book indicates the worldwide scope of these selections, the better to place American culture and its own diversity in a world context for comparison. Comparison or cross-examination is the purpose of the questions called Correspondences, which follow each selection. The Applications section provides writing and discussion topics and follows each group of "Perspectives" and each selection.

These activities call on the student to analyze cross-cultural similarities and differences and sometimes to place themselves at crossroads. Each selection is preceded by a biographical/cultural headnote and is followed by questions—Interpretations—which provoke thinking and discussion, probe comprehension, call attention to important rhetorical features, and help the reader relate the selection to the chapter topic.

We are again grateful to Joe Opiela, our editor, who enthusiastically supported the inclusion of student essays. Our special thanks to the following faculty at Queensborough who offered incisive criticisms and suggestions and assisted in obtaining student texts: Mary Bernardez, Virginia Cleary, Jean Darcy, Terezinha Fonseca, Gretchen Haynes, Allen Lanner, Elizabeth McGrath, Helene O'Connor, Tony Pipolo, and Barbara Witenko. We acknowledge our gratitude to Margaret Cavanaugh, Kathy Howard, and Marge Caronna for their generous assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.

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# PREFACE FOR THE STUDENT

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This book points toward possibilities hardly imagined in the world of your parents. Through business travel, tourism, governmental foreign aid, immigration, and an explosion in all kinds of communication, cultural interactions are occurring at a greater rate than ever before.

Old cultures, and even some not so old, like that of the United States, like to think, "We are the world." But once cultures cross—whether such meetings add to or subtract from the sum of their parts—they are never again the same: they can never again claim absoluteness, exclusivity, or monopoly. To promote such meetings, or crossings, is the purpose of *Across Cultures: A Reader for Writers*.

Whenever you read a newspaper or watch television, you are reminded that every aspect of your life—from politics and economics to music, the movies, fashion, sports, and education—is affected by developments around the globe. A tunnel is built under the English Channel from Dover to Calais and people in Gloucestershire pubs feel less like islanders. The Berlin Wall falls and Washington talks of a peace dividend. The U.S.S.R. has been replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.). The NATO and European Community countries must adapt to a non-Communist Eastern Europe and a united Germany. Tiananmen Square explodes and London steps up its attempts to evacuate a shaky Hong Kong. Only thirty-five years after the Civil Rights sit-ins in Montgomery, Alabama, approximately 7,000 African Americans hold public office in the United States, one of them the first black governor. The New World reverberates in the Old. Nelson Mandela walks out of prison in Capetown and credits world-wide sanctions with bringing hope to anti-apartheid forces in South Africa. Change begets change. Immigration to New York City approaches again its historic 1910 high of 40 percent. How do we meet such changes? Preparation for the redefinition of an educated person: An educated person is one who is culturally literate and appreciates, understands, and is tolerant of intercultural relationships.

Cultural meetings can occur in many ways. By culture we mean that "artificial, secondary environment" (Malinowski) which human beings superimpose on the natural environment. Wherever people make their mark on nature, they are creating a culture; a great deal of effort goes into a "creative conversation" about the value of these marks. A society expends a great deal of effort in attempting to conserve what it deems to be most valuable. Our first chapter, "Traditions," deals with such efforts. The remaining six chapters suggest some of the many ways in which cultural meetings

can occur: in the family and other relationships, in education, in our work, interactions, choices, and aspirations.

At the center of each chapter are readings on a common subject or meeting ground, but you are introduced to the chapter through a group of brief quotations ("Perspectives") to stimulate personal responses in journal entries and collaborative explorations in group projects. Each selection is introduced with a biographical headnote that places the author in a particular historical-geographical context. After each selection are two sets of questions: "Interpretations," to provoke thinking and discussion and to call attention to specific rhetorical features, and "Correspondences," to encourage comparisons of cultures. Accordingly, you will often be asked to compare selections within, between, and among chapters.

The first one or two selections in each chapter are myths or folktales. These stories show culture in its conserving role. The stories purport to explain a people's origin or trace their values to earliest times. Each chapter also has selections by authors from and about a variety of countries: by North Americans writing on other cultures or about United States culture and subcultures; by members of ethnic subcultures within the United States, writing about themselves (often as outsiders); and by foreigners writing about their native cultures. At least two selections in each chapter are short stories.

Several features of the book will help you to apply the readings to your study of writing. The "Perspectives" section can be used to stimulate journal writing. "Applications" questions provide structured opportunities for you to convey what you have learned to a wider audience than just your peers through more structured writing and discussion activities. The "Additional Writing Topics" at the end of each chapter require you to conduct interviews, engage in debate, take positions, or reach conclusions. And a "Rhetorical Glossary" defines terminology essential to any writing class.

When you look around your classes and your campus, you probably see a student body diverse in its many countries, classes, and ages. When *this* inclusive group says, or sings, "We are the world," they are right. This is the world of *Across Cultures*.

# CONTENTS

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<i>Rhetorical Contents</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface for the Teacher</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Preface for the Student</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<b>CHAPTER 1. Traditions</b>	<b>1</b>
AFRICAN LEGEND In the Beginning: Bantu Creation Story	6
<i>"In the beginning, in the dark, there was nothing but water."</i>	
QUICHÉ-MAYAN LEGEND In the Beginning: Quiché-Mayan Creation Story	7
<i>"Before the world was created, Calm and Silence were the great kings that ruled."</i>	
RUSSELL BAKER from Morrisonville (U.S.A.)	10
<i>"... a family is many generations closely woven."</i>	
JOHN KING FAIRBANK Footbinding (China)	18
<i>"... it is certainly ingenious how men trapped women into mutilating themselves. ..."</i>	
JACOB GRIMM and WILHELM GRIMM Cinderella (Northern Europe)	25
<i>"... the bird threw a gold and silver dress down to her."</i>	
NATIVE AMERICAN MYTH The Algonquin Cinderella (U.S.A./Algonquin)	32
<i>"... the wicked sister would burn her hands and feet with hot cinders. ..."</i>	
N. SCOTT MOMADAY The Way to Rainy Mountain (U.S.A./Kiowa)	36
<i>"Her name was Aho, and she belonged to the last culture to evolve in North America."</i>	
JOHN F. KENNEDY Remarks at Amherst College upon Receiving an Honorary Degree (U.S.A.)	42
<i>"Our national strength matters, but the spirit which informs and controls our strength matters just as much"</i>	
JEHAN SADAT from Life in the Villages (Egypt)	46
<i>"How miserable the women must be, I thought. I was wrong."</i>	

## iv CONTENTS

Yael Yarimi	Seven Days of Mourning* (U.S.A./Yemenite-Jewish)	54
	<i>" . . . I found myself torn apart between the home I am trying to establish with my American husband, and the great, rich and embracing tradition I have left in my land of birth."</i>	
Andrew Rein	Taxidermist's Funeral* (U.S.A.)	59
	<i>"What's this for?" I questioned. "Tradition," he answered. "Just wear it."</i>	
Shusha Guppy	from The Wedding (Iran)	61
	<i>" . . . she fell in love with him that night and loved him single-heartedly for the rest of her life."</i>	
Shirley Jackson	The Lottery (U.S.A.)	68
	<i>" . . . the whole lottery took less than two hours, . . . to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner."</i>	
Gish Jen	The Water-Faucet Vision (U.S.A./Chinese-American)	76
	<i>"I definitely wanted to be able to perform a wonder or two. Miracle-working!"</i>	
Joan Ackermann	The Charles River's Song Tells Me Back My Dreams (U.S.A.)	85
	<i>"A person from Cambridge is called a Cantabrigian, a word I never learned to spell until just now."</i>	
Michael T. Kaufman	Kissing Customs (Poland)	90
	<i>" . . . can't we make do with a simple handshake?"</i>	
<b>CHAPTER 2.</b>	<b>Relationships</b>	<b>97</b>
Chinese Folk Tale	Women (China)	101
	<i>"The simplest thing is to bottle up your wife."</i>	
Luke 10:29-37	The Good Samaritan (The Bible)	104
	<i>"But who is my 'neighbor'?"</i>	
Margaret Mead	Can the American Family Survive? (U.S.A.)	106
	<i>"There are those today . . . who doubt that the family can survive, and some who believe it should not survive."</i>	
Bruce Weber	The Unromantic Generation (U.S.A.)	117
	<i>"Today I'm . . . a little more rational about what to expect from love."</i>	
Francine du Plessix Gray	from Soviet Women Discuss Work, Marriage, and the Family (Russia)	128
	<i>" . . . if they hadn't found 'an adequate husband' by the age of twenty-six or so, they'd have a child 'by themselves'."</i>	
Black Elk	High Horse's Courting (U.S.A./Sioux)	134
	<i>" . . . there was a girl in the village who looked so beautiful to him that he was just sick all over. . . ."</i>	

JULIA ALVAREZ	El Doctor (Dominican Republic)	140
	<i>"Father groaned. I bent closer. I turned again. The room went back into economical dark."</i>	
JOHN GREGORY DUNNE	Quintana (U.S.A.)	151
	<i>" . . . we face . . . our daughter's decision to search or not to search for her natural parents."</i>	
DANIT WEHLE	Noah* (U.S.A.)	157
	<i>"My life changed drastically when I was fifteen years old."</i>	
PAUL COHEN	Alienation* (U.S.A.)	160
	<i>"After all, college was the best place to implement Phase Two of the plan—the 'Mrs.' degree."</i>	
JEHAN SADAT	from Growing Up in Cairo (Egypt)	163
	<i>"We were a Muslim family with a Christian mother."</i>	
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON	from White Tigers (U.S.A./Chinese-American)	171
	<i>" . . . I had to get out of hating range."</i>	
AMY TAN	Mother Tongue (U.S.A./Chinese-American)	178
	<i>"Lately, I've been giving more thought to the kind of English my mother speaks."</i>	
PENELOPE LIVELY	Grow Old Along with Me, The Best Is Yet to Be (England)	184
	<i>"Sex in the hedges and all that."</i>	
<b>CHAPTER 3.</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>191</b>
CROW LEGEND	The Creation of the Crow World (U.S.A./Crow)	195
	<i>"This land is the best of the lands I have made. . . ."</i>	
ARMANDO RENDÓN	Kiss of Death (U.S.A./Mexican-American)	198
	<i>"I very nearly dropped out, as so many other Mexican-Americans have, under the dragging pressure to be someone else. . . ."</i>	
NORMAN COUSINS	Confessions of a Miseducated Man (U.S.A.)	203
	<i>"But what my education failed to do was to teach me that the principal significance of such differences was that they were largely without significance."</i>	
PAULE MARSHALL	from Poets in the Kitchen (U.S.A./Barbadian)	207
	<i>" . . . they talked—endlessly, passionately, poetically, and with impressive range. No subject was beyond them."</i>	
RICHARD WRIGHT	Discovering Books (U.S.A./African-American)	216
	<i>"There was a huge library near the riverfront, but I knew that Negroes were not allowed to patronize its shelves any more than they were the parks and playgrounds of the city."</i>	

## vi CONTENTS

TONI CADE BAMBARA	The Lesson (U.S.A./African-American)	225
	<i>"And Miss Moore asking us do we know what money is, like we a bunch of retards. I mean real money "</i>	
LILIANA HEKER	The Stolen Party (Argentina)	233
	<i>"As soon as she arrived she went straight to the kitchen to see if the monkey was there It was "</i>	
GRETEL EHRLICH	Looking for a Lost Dog (U.S.A.)	239
	<i>"To find what is lost is an art in some cultures "</i>	
DORIS VILORIA	The Mistress of Make Believe* (U.S.A.)	243
	<i>"How many of you are ready to let your imagination take you off to distant mystical lands?"</i>	
MIKE ROSE	from I Just Wanna Be Average (U.S.A.)	246
	<i>"I cannot recall a young person who was crazy in love or lost in work or one old person who was passionate about a cause or an idea "</i>	
SOPHRONIA LIU	So Tsi-fai (Hong Kong)	251
	<i>"Today, twenty-three years later, So Tsi-fai's ghost still haunts me "</i>	
<b>CHAPTER 4.</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>257</b>
GENESIS 3:1-9	The Fall (The Bible)	261
	<i>"The serpent was more crafty than any wild creature that the Lord God had made "</i>	
CHIEF SMOHALLA as told by Herbert J. Spinden	My Young Men Shall Never Work (U.S.A./Nez Percé)	263
	<i>"Men who work cannot dream and wisdom comes in dreams "</i>	
LANCE MORROW	What Is the Point of Working? (U.S.A.)	265
	<i>"When God foreclosed on Eden, he condemned Adam and Eve to go to work Work has never recovered from that humiliation "</i>	
MARIO PUZO	Choosing a Dream: Italians in Hell's Kitchen (U.S.A./Italian-American)	271
	<i>"Illiterate Colombos, they dared to seek the promised land And so they, too, dreamed a dream "</i>	
WILLIAM OUCHI	The Competitive Edge: Japanese and Americans (Japan)	277
	<i>"Everything important in [Japanese] life happens as a result of teamwork or collective effort "</i>	
ANN PETRY	Like a Winding Sheet (U.S.A./African-American)	283
	<i>"He turned away from the sight of the red lipstick on her mouth that made him remember that the foreman was a woman "</i>	
STEVE OLSON	Year of the Blue-Collar Guy (U.S.A.)	292
	<i>"Nobody will respect us if we don't respect ourselves "</i>	

CAMARA LAYE	The Mysteries of My Father's Workshop (Guinea)	296
	<i>"Of all the different kinds of work my father performed, none fascinated me so much as his skill with gold "</i>	
RACHEL L. JONES	The Price of Hate: Thoughts on Covering a Ku Klux Klan Rally (U.S.A /African-American)	305
	<i>"I figured it would be difficult, but I didn't want it to change me "</i>	
LALITA GANDBHIR	Free and Equal (U.S.A /Indian-American)	311
	<i>"He was convinced that he would not get a job if Americans were available "</i>	
MICHAEL GNOLFO	A View of Affirmative Action in the Workplace* (U.S.A )	319
	<i>"The time is right for another step in the evolution of American Society "</i>	
SHARON Y. FRIEDNER	Procrastination* (U.S.A )	322
	<i>"Procrastination is the ability to look time in the eye and laugh "</i>	
GARY SOTO	Looking for Work (U.S.A./Mexican-American)	325
	<i>"I tried to convince them that if we improved the way we looked we might get along better in life White people would like us more They might invite us to places "</i>	
BHARATI MUKHERJEE	Jasmine (U.S.A /Trinidadian)	331
	<i>"He wasn't like a professor, not the ones back home where even high school teachers called themselves professor and acted like little potentates He wore blue jeans "</i>	
NICHOLAS LEMANN	The Cotton Picker (U.S.A.)	341
	<i>"The great black migration made race a national issue "</i>	
<b>CHAPTER 5.</b>	<b>Interactions</b>	<b>349</b>
SENEGALESE MYTH	The Falsehood of Truth (Senegal)	354
	<i>"Go tell the king that a man is here who can raise people from the dead "</i>	
JEWISH FOLK TALE as told by Moses Gaster	The Wise Rogue (Jewish)	357
	<i>"On the way to the gallows he said to the governor that he knew a wonderful secret, and it would be a pity to allow it to die with him, "</i>	
RICHARD RODRIGUEZ	Does America Still Exist? (U.S.A.–Mexico)	359
	<i>"Children of immigrant parents are supposed to perch on a hyphen between two countries "</i>	
JUDITH ORTIZ COFER	Silent Dancing (U.S.A.–Puerto Rico)	364
	<i>" for years, I've had dreams in the form of this home movie "</i>	



JULIET WRIGHT	The Drama of an Exchange Student* (U.S.A.—Jamaica)	373
	<i>"To my amazement I was not in such a bad position after all "</i>	
MICHAEL NOVAK	In Ethnic America (U.S.A.—Eastern Europe)	380
	<i>"Growing up in America has been an assault upon my sense of worthiness It has also been a kind of liberation . . . "</i>	
BRENT STAPLES	Black Men and Public Spaces (U.S.A./African-American)	387
	<i>"My first victim was a woman—white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties "</i>	
JIM FUSILLI	Opting for the Light (U.S.A.—Ireland—Italy)	392
	<i>"I want to be solely Italian, I had told myself, because Italians are wonderful—warm, gregarious, loving "</i>	
BRIAN DELANEY	An Indian/Irish Interaction* (U.S.A./Irish and Indian-American)	397
	<i>"These same traditions that tend to drive the Indian families living in America apart are the ones I wish I had more in my Irish-American upbringing "</i>	
RUSSELL HOWE	from A Life in Contrasts (Korea)	400
	<i>" . . . one surveys Seoul's cityscape conscious that this is a population made for the graces . . . of country life, yet inhabiting a megalopolis . . . "</i>	
RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA	The Englishwoman (India—England)	406
	<i>"She is eloping, leaving everything behind her—husband, children, grandchildren, thirty years of married life."</i>	
JAMES FALLOWS	A Few Pointers (U.S.A.—China—Japan)	417
	<i>" . . . less choice for individuals can mean more freedom and success for the social whole "</i>	
ALASTAIR REID	Digging up Scotland (Scotland)	423
	<i>"I am always trying on the country to see if it still fits, or fits better than it did "</i>	
MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA	Call Me Not a Man (South Africa)	429
	<i>"There are no greater thieves than these men of the law . . . "</i>	
<b>CHAPTER 6.</b>	<b>Choices</b>	<b>441</b>
SWAHILI FOLK TALE	The Wise Daughter (East Africa)	445
	<i>"Eat, you three fools "</i>	
MARSHALL GLICKMAN	The Zen Master, My Father, and Me (U.S.A.)	447
	<i>"A shocking bright purple lump the size of a baseball swelled from a sea of lavender and blue Why had I let myself be beaten?"</i>	

ROSA PARKS	<i>from A Long Way to Go (U.S.A./African-American)</i>	452
	<i>"Mr Meacham asked me what was the first thing I wanted to do in New York I told him, to see the Statue of Liberty "</i>	
PHAN HUU THANH	Not Too Young to Understand Communism* (South Vietnam)	456
	<i>"Aside from the sound of water beating on the sides of the boat, I heard prayers from many people "</i>	
RICHARD RODRIGUEZ	To the Border (Mexico—U.S.A.)	463
	<i>"They were men without women They were Mexicans without Mexico."</i>	
NADINE GORDIMER	The Moment Before the Gun Went Off (South Africa)	469
	<i>"The moment before the gun went off was a moment of high excitement shared through the roof of the cab, as the bullet was to pass, between the young black man outside and the white farmer inside the vehicle "</i>	
MARK MATHABANE	Passport to Knowledge (South Africa)	474
	<i>"To learn to express my thoughts and feelings effectively in English became my main goal in life "</i>	
PETER BERGER	A Tale of Two Moralities (Mexico—U.S.A.)	479
	<i>"It took a while for Manuela to grasp that every dollar of her savings had already been mentally spent by her relatives "</i>	
HANA WEHLE	The Impossible Became No Longer Unthinkable (Czechoslovakia—Poland)	486
	<i>"Auschwitz—a landscape so alienated from any culture ever known—seemed to be the end of the road for the three of them "</i>	
LEV TAGAYEV	No Sacrifice Too Great* (U.S.A.)	496
	<i>"Little did I know that star-crossed night how that simple news would change and rearrange my whole life "</i>	
HUGO LINDO	Translated by Elizabeth Gamble Miller A Train Ride (El Salvador)	500
	<i>"If he ran, they would surely go through his briefcase and consequently his mission would fail "</i>	
<b>CHAPTER 7. Aspirations</b>		<b>507</b>
IROQUOIS MYTH	Hiawatha, the Great Unifier (U.S.A./American Indian-Iroquois)	512
	<i>"Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon resolved to live among the people as a human being he took the name of Hiawatha "</i>	
INDIAN FOLK TALE	The Brahman and the Pot of Rice (India)	518
	<i>"Ah, that pot is indeed brimful of rice Now if there should be a famine, I should certainly make a hundred rupees by it With this I shall buy a couple of goats "</i>	