

keep in touch

A Students'
anthology of modern literature in English

Edited by

MICHAEL KNIGHT

Pergamon Press

04034388

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*A students' anthology of modern literature
in English*

MICHAEL KNIGHT

University of Stockholm



PERGAMON INSTITUTE OF ENGLISH

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Oxford · New York · Toronto · Sydney · Frankfurt

U.K.	Pergamon Press Ltd., Headington Hill Hall, Oxford OX3 0BW, England
U.S.A.	Pergamon Press Inc., Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, New York 10523, U.S.A.
CANADA	Pergamon Press Canada Ltd., Suite 104, 150 Consumers Road, Willowdale, Ontario M2J 1P9, Canada
AUSTRALIA	Pergamon Press (Aust.) Pty. Ltd., P.O. Box 544, Potts Point, N.S.W. 2011, Australia
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY	Pergamon Press GmbH, Hammerweg 6, D-6242 Kronberg-Taunus, Federal Republic of Germany

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First published 1981

First Pergamon Press edition 1985

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Keep in touch.

(Materials for language practice)

1. English language—Text-books for foreign speakers.
2. Readers—Literature. 3. English literature—20th century.
4. American literature—20th century. I. Knight, Michael. II. Series. PE1128.K415 1984 428.6'4 84-6338

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

—Knight, Michael, 19--

Keep in touch.—(Materials in language practice)

1. English language—Text-books for foreign speakers
2. Readers—1950—I. Title II. Series 428.6'4 PE1128

ISBN 0-08-031105-9

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Acknowledgements

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Faber and Faber Ltd., London for *Scaffolding*

The Estate of Elizabeth Taylor for *Flesh*

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Rosica Colin Ltd. and Bernard Lockwood for the photograph of *Alan Sillitoe*

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Introduction and Study Guide

Keep In Touch is an anthology of modern literary texts: short stories, extracts from novels and plays, poems and songs, mostly written since 1950. The authors include British, American and other English language writers.

The texts are accompanied by **Discussion Points** which usually progress from questions specific to the text: "What happened to whom and why?" on to a personalized phase: "Has anything like this ever happened to you?" and from there on to more generalized discussion on a wider theme: "Are there similar problems in our society?" Occasionally this will take the form of a role play or a debate.

The aim of the anthology is to build up the students' language skills, both receptive and productive, by giving them opportunities for discussion and composition. Without a broad vocabulary and good control of structures it is not easy to discuss a literary text, but one of the best ways of acquiring these skills is to study the texts carefully and then take part actively in a guided discussion. As Wilga Rivers says: "One of the most important functions of the language teacher is to create opportunities in the classroom for students to use their English." Literature can certainly help the teacher to create such opportunities.

Literature and Language Learning

In recent years literature has not played a large role in language teaching. This decline resulted partly from the criticism of literature-based methods of language learning. Literature is, after all, a special use of language and is thus not suitable for teaching everyday vocabulary and structures. Carefully controlled dialogues and other constructed texts provide a better basis, but often lack the interest value which is of vital importance for motivation – perhaps the most important single factor for effective language learning. To meet this deficiency the call has been for more "authentic texts", although these too have their weaknesses.

Literature is a form of authentic text which should not be ignored for the intermediate and advanced class. Above all, it has the power to capture the imagination, to involve and enthuse the reader, to give pleasure and enjoyment, and thus to raise motivation. Literature is essentially memorable. A remarkable character, a tense atmosphere, a beautiful description, a rhythmic phrase, the moment of truth – all such features increase the motivation to understand and the power to remember.

There is one condition. The language of the literary texts must not be too difficult for the learner. One way of solving this problem is to simplify them,

but the result all too often lacks the magic of the original. A better solution is to choose texts which, in the original, are relatively "straightforward". Hemingway, for example, often wrote in a powerful but simple style. It is also better to choose short texts. It should not be forgotten that length is as serious a barrier to the language learner as complexity. For this reason the short poem, in spite of its density of meaning, can provide excellent language learning material. Consider, for example, Robert Frost's **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**.

This anthology has been collected and edited with the help of the above criteria. The texts have then been arranged so that the simpler and shorter texts come first. They have also been grouped thematically, usually with one or more prose texts and a poem dealing with a particular human theme: marriage, Nature, school and upbringing, work and so on.

Presenting and Studying the Texts

If the anthology is to succeed in its aims, it is vital that the students study the texts closely. This will mean dictionary work, note-taking and a good deal of thought and concentration. Since the texts are relatively short, it is possible to use them all for intensive study; that is, for learning new words, phrases and structures as well as understanding and digesting the content. Much of the preparatory work can be done individually, either at home or in class.

The following sequence is suggested:

1. Brief presentation of the writer and his works by the teacher.
2. Introductory discussion of the title and some major questions to look out for. Brief survey of the discussion questions to establish learning goals.
3. Reading the text. The teacher may read part or even all of a short text, aloud. It is generally not recommended that the students read aloud in class long prose texts, since reading aloud is a difficult skill, which moreover only engages one student at a time. Words, phrases and short passages, however, may be read aloud for pronunciation practice. The poems, songs and plays are very suitable for this purpose. The first reading of the text should be followed by a second reading with intensive study of words, phrases and sentence structure.
4. Vocabulary study. For this, students will read two dictionaries, a good bilingual dictionary and an English dictionary. They will also need a note book to collect new words and phrases, linked words and opposites etc. Learning a new word actively means learning its meaning in context, its pronunciation, spelling and grammatical function. The best way to learn a new word is in a short phrase or sentence which illustrates its meaning.

Discussing the Texts

Many students do not know how to tackle a literary text. To help them, and to avoid repeating the same questions after each text, a check list of points follows that can be used for almost any literary text. It is suggested that the class follow this check list closely when studying and discussing the first few texts, in order to establish a basic technique for dealing with the later ones. These points end with a suggestion for written composition, perhaps in the form of a review or a summary of the discussion or a report on one particular aspect of the text. It is also useful to encourage students to write a log of their reading and learning experiences, in the form of a diary. This could be called "informal writing" and makes an excellent introduction to more formal composition writing.

Check List

1. Find out a little about *the writer and his/her background*. Each writer is briefly presented in a short biographical note, but you can find out more about him or her, if you like, by referring to an encyclopedia or history of literature.
2. Think about *the title*. Some titles are quite clear in meaning, others are puzzling or ambiguous, perhaps with several meanings.
3. Study *the setting*. *Where* does the action take place? *When* does it take place? What is *the social setting*: upper class, middle class or working class?
4. Study *the characters*, particularly *the main characters*. Who are they? What do they look like? What do they do for a living? What are their *relationships* with the other characters? What do they do – or not do?
5. Retell the story, *the plot*. What happens to the characters? What important events take place? Why are they important? How does the story begin and end? What is the *climax* of the story? Is there a happy ending? What will happen after the end of the story?
6. What *ideas* do you find in the text? Does the writer have a philosophy about life, *a message* that he or she wants you to think about? Is there *criticism of a social or political system*? What does the writer think about *personal relationships*: about family life, love, marriage, birth and death, town life and country life, and so on? Does he or she have an optimistic or a pessimistic *view of life*? Does he or she take life humorously or seriously?
7. Analyse *the style*. Is the text written as *dialogue, narrative, description* or *discussion*, or is it a mixture of all these kinds of writing? Is the style *formal* or *informal (colloquial)*? How are the sentences constructed? Are they long or short? (You can count the number of words.) Are they simple in construction (only using link words like *and, but, that*) or complicated (using several clauses

linked by words like *although*, *since*, *while* and other grammatical constructions)?

What about *the vocabulary*? Are the words short and simple or long and difficult? (You can count the number of letters: five is an average number).

Does the writer use a lot of *abstract* words, or mostly concrete words?

Does he or she use comparisons: *similes*, *metaphors* or *symbols*?

How is the story presented, from whose *point of view*? Is it through one character's thoughts, ears and eyes, a first person, "I" presentation? Or is it presented in the third person, so that you get to know everything about everyone – what is sometimes called "God's view"? Does the writer comment openly on what happens and on what the characters think and do, or does he or she keep in the background? What difference would it make if the story was presented from a different point of view?

What effect does the style have on you?

Finally, and most important of all, did you enjoy the text? What did you like about it, and what did you dislike, and why?

You will need to look very closely at the text to answer these questions – and that means that you will learn a lot of new English words; we suggest, in fact, that when you read a text, you mark and collect the words and phrases that will be useful for discussing it.

As a final stage, you might like to write down your thoughts in a kind of book review. This will really help your English.

Group Discussion

The class discussion can begin with a short summary of the text by the students. One way to begin is "... is about ...". Continue with the discussion questions, which generally follow the pattern given in the Check List. Some of these questions, for example on style, should probably be discussed by the whole class, with the teacher leading the discussion.

However, it is recommended that at least some of the questions are discussed in smaller groups. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it is more natural and less stressful to discuss in a group of 2–5 than in front of a large number of people. Secondly, in small groups students will get a better chance to say something. It will be helpful if one student in each group takes notes of what is said. Each group can discuss the same questions, or different questions can be given to different groups. After the group discussion (5–15 minutes) each group can report to the whole class. This rehearsal – performance sequence is also good for developing fluency and accuracy, and a comparison of reports will often lead to further discussion.

MICHAEL KNIGHT

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A Day Off

Anthony M. Hokororo

Anthony M. Hokororo was born in Tanzania, at that time called Tanganyika, and studied at Makerere College in Uganda and later in Canada. He is a teacher and a writer.

The kitchen at six in the morning was bright and cheerful, but Zale was scarcely aware of that, as she washed her breakfast dishes and laid a fresh place for Abdu. She noticed, instead, the freshly laundered curtains. Everything showed what a good housekeeper she was.

5 Abdu gave very little thought to such things. He liked comfort, a regular routine and familiar objects where he expected to find them. He took them for granted, going off cheerfully each day to his job at the carpentry-shop, coming back at night tired, but still cheerful, accepting Zale and the dinner she served him with the same equanimity with which he took over his big chair
10 and reading lamp, his pipe, and the *Tanganyika Standard*.

With one last look around, Zale tiptoed up to the spare room where she had laid out her new suit the night before. She dressed quickly, put on her wide-brimmed hat with a pink rose on it and picked up her plastic handbag.

At the door of the spare room, she paused to peer through a partly open
15 bedroom door. Abdu lay in a tangle of sheets, with one dusky arm over his head. He looked young and defenceless, with his flushed face and parted lips. Earlier in their marriage Zale could never resist kissing him awake at such moments. But now her mind registered only the fact that he was dead to the world and that he needed a shave.

20 Back in the kitchen, she quickly thumbed through the pages of a recent *Drum*, tore out what she wanted and thrust it into her purse. Then she scribbled a note for Abdu: "I've decided to take a day off," it said. "There's rice and meat in the cupboard if I'm not back for supper. Love, Zale." And then she slipped out the side way.

25 The ticket office was not open when Zale reached the station, so she had time to get her breath and tighten the elastic on her hat, which now and then slid back on her head, loosening the knot of her hair. She steadied it with extra pins, somewhat reassured by the face which stared back at her from the mirror which she kept in her handbag.

30 The office now being open, Zale stepped in briskly. "Dar, second class, please," she said, putting her money on the counter.

The ticket clerk was Saudari. He smiled as soon as he saw her. He had

earlier on pursued her but to no effect. Zale had never paid attention to men until Abdu came along.

"Goin' on a toot, baby?" he asked softly. "In such a fairy hat, too. Somebody ought to put a flea in Abdu's ear."

5 "You owe me twenty cents change," said Zale, rather stiffly, and turned in relief at the sound of the incoming train.

Once settled, with a seat to herself, she took out the page which she had torn from *Drum* and studied the heading: SOME WOMEN GET INTO GROOVES, ARE YOU ONE OF THEM? Then she read the article for the
10 fourth time. Such women, the article said, had only themselves to blame. For husbands had a way of just accepting unthinkingly what was done for them. That was why a wife ought to take a day off every now and then: do what she wanted to do and see what she wanted to see. The experience would be beneficial to her and to her family.

15 She put down the paper and sighed. The trouble was she had no idea what she wanted to do or see, at least she had not made up her mind as to what she was going to do, because for three years now her interests had been purely domestic. She was in a groove, no doubt, a household groove, and Abdu had reached the point of accepting everything without thinking, just as the article
20 said.

At ten o'clock the train stopped at her destination. Now for the first time she felt a quiver of excitement and wished she had made a definite plan for the day. The sun shone very brightly, but the wind blew gustily from the Indian Ocean. Zale clutched her purse with one hand, and with the other
25 steadied the big hat on her heavy hair.

From the station, she moved with the crowd across Acacia Avenue to Kariakoo, a large market place surrounded with Indian bazaars. Young people in Id El Fitr finery and with cameras swarmed in and out. The air was full of the sound of gay voices, and from the centre of the market-building
30 could be heard trickling water running on the freshly caught fish. The smell of oriental perfumes was almost intoxicating.

Zale stood, entranced. Then suddenly, a gust of wind sent her hat spinning towards one of the rows of shops. She ran after it, conscious of the shower of hair-pins, and of the knot of hair at the back of her head slipping lower and lower. The bystanders watched her, amazed at her beauty and amused
35 with her hat-racing. At that moment, a tall, elderly man stepped from one of the doorways, picked up the hat and held it out with a smile:

"Thank you," murmured Zale, struggling with the remaining hairpins, while he flicked the pink rose with an immaculate handkerchief. "Please, don't
40 bother," she added, in a confused state of mind.

"You're all excited, aren't you? Having a holiday from school, perhaps?"

He helped her put on the hat and then made her sit on a bench. As he sat beside her she noticed that he was not old, really. It was just because his hair had gone grey that he looked old.

5 The strange thing was that at that moment Zale did not at all feel disturbed by the knowledge that she was being "picked up," something – her Mama had often told her – no girl ever permitted.

"Not from school," she laughed. "I'm a married woman, but I've been here only once, and – well, there's an awful lot to see in a short time. I've got to go home by the three forty-five train."

He smiled. "What will you see first?" he asked.

"I've got a plan," she said firmly, and paused. "I – I guess I'll just have to take things as they come." It was then that she began to think she *was* being "picked up".

15 "There's the King George V's Memorial Museum," he said, "but it's too nice a day to spend indoors. How about the Mission Quarters, including the Cathedral?"

Her eyes widened. "A monastery!" But, her embarrassment forgotten, she listened very eagerly while he explained that it was a kind of museum. She hesitated, but only for a second, and then off they went.

20 As they were coming out of the Cathedral, Zale sighed delightedly. "I never thought that I'd be doing this," she said.

"The nicest things are the unexpected ones," her escort answered. "I found that out a long time ago; so I'm often in a receptive mood. And sometimes" – his eyes twinkled – "I even nudge at fate, speak to a stranger, buy a ticket to an unknown destination and do something I've always wanted to do and never have."

30 Zale nodded quickly. Now for the first time she remembered what she had always wanted to do. "I've always wanted to cut my hair," she said, "only I've never had the courage to do so."

"Hair is sure to grow again," he said, "not like a finger or an ear."

"Abdu might not like it," murmured Zale.

35 "Your husband?" he asked, and, when she nodded, said, "Well, you never can be sure about husbands until you confront them with the fact, can you?"

Zale remembered the article she had read that morning and found out that what it said was surprisingly similar to what her companion was saying.

He grew grave again. "I'm afraid I was cross with Kate for letting her hair grow," he said. "But I liked it later."

40 "Kate, your wife?"

He nodded.

They were now in the Rainbow Hotel where, as they talked over dessert and coffee, Zale mentioned the article that had inspired her day off, and that led to other things, so that before she knew it she had said enough about
5 Mama and her marriage to give her listener a fair knowledge of her life.

She told him that it was her Mama's sudden death five years before that had led to her marriage. She and Abdu had been living in the same house and after her Mama's death Abdu had watched her helplessly trying to keep the place in good condition. One awful night when Zale, having burnt the dinner
10 beyond salvaging, had announced between sobs that she could not go on, and proposed that the house should be sold, Abdu had quietly objected to the proposition. This was her home, he had said, and she must stay in it. He would see to that. Then, gulping once or twice, he had asked her to marry him. He was doing well at the carpentry shop and would be assistant master
15 the next year.

Zale had then wept in incredulous relief, grateful for his arm around her. Being married, she said, had been very great fun at first, looking after the house, making curtains and learning to cook. Abdu had shown himself to be quite a contented husband. "But," she concluded, "it seems that he is too
20 contented to – to –" She stopped, remembering the article in *Drum*.

"Husbands are always like that," he helped her out. "There comes that time when they take their wives for granted."

"By the way," he spoke again, "you haven't told me your name. Mine is Richard, or Dick if you wish."

25 "My name is Zale."

And then his own story followed.

"Kate and I were married when we were young," he explained, "years ago. We lived together in our childhood. We played together. We particularly like dancing, swimming and –" He hesitated.

30 The change in tone perplexed Zale. Presently he told her of the accident that had changed his life. Kate had been crippled so badly while playing that she had never walked again. Her husband, of course, could not give her the care she needed. Only qualified doctors could do that. He was then working as an office boy, but, finding the wages insufficient to maintain the family, he had
35 taken another job instead.

"It's a kaolin concern," he said, "and I've done well financially."

"But being away from her," said Zale, quite amazed at the story, "how can you bear it?"

40 "I suppose it's a sort of game I play with myself," he admitted, "finding bits of fun and beauty here and there to take to her. Like today" – he shot

mischievous look at her – “seeing the Mission Quarters and having luncheon with a pretty girl.”

As they went out of the hotel, the clock above the information booth struck the quarter.

“I’m afraid I must go,” said Zale, hurriedly. “Goodbye, Mr Richard, and thank you very much for the kindness. I’ll always remember how good you’ve been. It’s been a very beautiful day to me. Only that, all of a sudden, it’s – it’s over.”

“Beauty, Mrs Abdu, hasn’t anything to do with time,” he said. “A great deal can be crowded into a small space, you know.”

They shook hands and parted.

As Zale walked away, the idea suggested in the article once again came before her mind, and, encouraged by Dick’s words: “You never can be sure about husbands until you confront them with the fact,” she resolved to do what she’d always wanted to do – her hair, she must have her hair cut. There was a barber’s shop on the concourse. She ran off to find it. Luckily the place was empty. “King Salon” was at her service, and, in a wink, her gleaming head was lying on the floor. Experienced fingers snipped and shaped, fluffed and patted, and at 3:30 the barber stood inspecting his work with pride. She had no time to listen to compliments. She just smiled and placed a shilling in his palm.

She flew now, hat in hand, her heart pounding, afraid that she might miss the 3:45 train. With only one minute to spare she sank back in her seat and closed her eyes.

She felt as if she had been cast between two worlds, and was part of neither. Her mind still glowed with the memory of the day with Dick; and yet there was an excitement in the thought that she was on her way to Abdu.

When she entered the house, there was a silence long enough to make her wonder what questions she would have to answer, what words she could possibly find to tell Abdu everything that was in her heart. But when her husband appeared, all that she could say was, “You didn’t eat your supper, Abdu, and I fixed just what you like.”

“I wasn’t hungry,” he muttered. But his look of injured dignity struck a comic note, since he held a razor in his hand and one side of his face was fringed with lather. “I heard the train coming,” he went on. “Knew you’d be along, so –.” He broke off crossly. “Oh, the heck with it, Zale, who wants to eat alone?”

She smiled to herself, feeling suddenly older and wiser than he, for she had done what she had always wanted to do and what she had not had the courage to do before, and now he had confirmed a fundamental truth about husbands.

“OK,” she said, “we’ll have supper together.”

As they sat down to eat, Abdu said, in a husky voice, “You’re back and I’m glad. Only you seem different. I’ve missed you. Don’t go away again like that without warning me. It upset me, sort of – I can’t explain.”

5 Zale’s laughter had a catch in it. “All right, Abdu,” she said, “I promise not to.” And she turned away to hide the new secret knowledge in her eyes.

(from: *Origin East Africa*, Heinemann)

Discussion points

1. What does the title suggest? A day off what? Who is Zale? Why does she decide to go to Dar-es-Salaam? What in particular has put the idea in her head? What does she do there? What does she think of Dar, compared with her home? What words show her feelings about Dar?
2. What do you think about Richard? Who is he? Do you believe what he tells Zale about his life? Tell the story of Zale’s day off from Richard’s point of view.
3. What part does Zale’s hair play in the story? What symbolic meaning might it have? Was Zale right to take a day off? How does her husband react when she comes home? What “fundamental truth about husbands” does she have confirmed? How will Zale and Abu’s marriage be in the future, do you think?
4. This story is about a wife who takes a day off. How about husbands, do they have the same need to take a day off? A day off what? In what ways do men “let their hair down” and “have a fling”?
5. Do *you* ever feel a need to take a day off? What would you do if you could be quite free for a day? Who might object? Would you have a bad conscience about it?
6. What is Hokororo saying about marriage? Is he for it or against it, do you think? What do you think about marriage in your own country? What changes, if any, have there been in attitudes towards marriage? What changes or alternatives would you like to see in the future?