

A CASE FOR ENGLISH

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A CASE FOR ENGLISH comprises ten units (or cases) designed to provide practice in a number of skills for the intermediate and advanced student. The chief aim of the book is language activation and thus each unit involves the student in a number of language-using situations.

Basing themselves on the council of Europe's Threshold list of functions the authors put together ten separate units: each unit is centred on a topic or 'case'. In the first unit, for example, an oil tanker has run aground off the coast of England. The resulting oil spill is threatening the holiday resort of Helford. Students first hear a tape of a news broadcast giving us this information; a map of Helford leads them into a discussion of how to combat the problem. Then there is a conversation on tape between a reporter and the president of the society for the protection of birds. Some language practice is provided in the context of a worried would-be tourist enquiring about the damage to Helford, there's another listening exercise, and the unit ends with a role simulation in which the people of Helford meet to discuss the whole issue. There is also a small writing task.

A CASE FOR ENGLISH has some very attractive features to recommend it. Perhaps the most impressive component of the materials is the tape. The recordings are of exceptional quality - in the original version - and there is a range of accents; a Scotsman telling a policeman that he has actually seen the Loch Ness monster is told 'Oh come off it Angus; you've had one too many!' The tapes, in other words, provide an excellent resource of authentic-sounding lively listening material.

There are some excellent activation devices too: in the same unit on the Loch Ness monster students are put into groups of six. Five of them are given role cards (found only in the teacher's book so that they can be photocopied by the teacher) telling them that they have seen something in Loch Ness and what it looked like. They then tell the Police Inspector their descriptions which are, of course, different and he has to draw an 'Identikit' picture of the supposed monster. One can imagine this activity causing both hilarity and useful fluency practice.

There are some nice little 'mini role-playing' activities for pairs and in Unit 4, for example, a major English trial complete with Judge, lawyers, defendants and witnesses. Each participant is given a role card - again found in the teachers' book.

At some stage in each unit there are activities (often the mini role play) where 'useful language' is provided, consisting of various ways in which, for example, to defend yourself (How was I to know..... How could I possibly know..... I didn't mean to..... etc.). Perhaps a slight worry here is that the language is in no way contextualised and there is no indication of how each exponent is used.

A potentially more serious complaint about the course is the very nature of the situations and stories that the students are asked to get involved in. They are unmitigatingly English - or rather United Kingdomish if we take Loch Ness into account. If it's not oil tankers in the English channel, it's English court cases: if it's not a pop concert at Stonehenge it's trouble in the High Street. Of course some of the issues raised are universal (for example oil pollution, schoolboy exchanges, the small tradesman against the supermarket chain etc.) but the flavour from both the taped material and the activation activities is British. This is obviously a major disadvantage or a major advantage depending on where you stand on the issue of the cultural content of EFL materials. It is perhaps a pity that the authors did not mix their very English situations with others that were in some ways international: this is, of course, a common complaint concerning British-produced EFL material.

It would seem too, that the authors have missed the opportunity to exploit their excellent taped material. It is fairly varied, mixing conversations with news bulletins etc., and it is sad therefore that some questions designed specifically for listening-skill training are not included. In general, perhaps, too much is left to the teacher.

But A CASE FOR ENGLISH presents the teacher with a lively and challenging set of materials: in Mexico it would probably be safer to reserve it for advanced students; for them there is much to recommend the activities that comprise the course.

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