

Introduction

This photocopyable collection of “lessons” is intended for high-intermediate and advanced learners of English who are considering or are already involved in a higher education program. The “lessons” are presented as the author’s observations of events and people in contemporary daily life, and his conclusions on the meaning and significance of his observations. Most of his observations focus on everyday aspects of contemporary American culture.

Part One of the book includes 92 observations, and **Part Two** includes the conclusions. The challenge to the learner is to read the brief observation, think about what can be learned from the observation, and then discuss their conclusions with classmates. Ultimately, after discussing the observation, the learners can then compare their conclusions with the author’s in the second part of the book.

Essentially, the basic purpose of the book is to develop the skills of reading and thinking critically. This is not unlike reading a poem and then arriving at an interpretation of the poet’s message or reading a fable or folk tale and discovering the moral.

In addition to addressing the skills of reading, reflective critical thinking, and discussion, the lessons offer an opportunity to develop the learner’s vocabulary and gain additional insights into contemporary American culture.

In **Part Two**, in addition to the author’s conclusions, there are brief cultural notes and potential lexical challenges for each lesson. These notes and challenges may be useful in preparing for the lesson and/or summarizing the entire activity.

The User’s Guide on the next page describes a procedure for using the book.

User's Guide

Lessons can be used in a variety of ways, but a “standard” procedure is outlined below.

1. Photocopy a lesson (just the observation). They are printed two per page, and to prevent distraction, it is best to cut the page in half and give each learner only one of the lessons.
2. Have the learners look at and discuss the title of the lesson so that they will not begin the reading “cold.” Very rarely is any reading activity done without some schema/context that provides a general expectation of the content of the reading.
3. (*optional*) If the reading has some cultural content that might be confusing or that might possibly obscure the point of the lesson, it may be best to explain this cultural feature. For example, in Lesson Life 4, it might be helpful to explain to the learners that every state has its own license plate – a metal tag on the back (sometimes also on the front) of a car with the state’s name and often its motto (Live Free or Die) or nickname (Sunshine State).
4. (*optional*) Lexical items that could be troublesome are listed for each unit. (Most of them are beyond Pro Lingua’s word frequency list at the 2400 level). It may be useful to put them on the board and work with them before asking the learners to read. These items can also be the basis for a post-lesson vocabulary session.
5. Have the learners read the passage. In most cases this should not take much more than one minute. Then check for comprehension. It may be best to ask pointed WH questions rather than saying “Do you have any questions?”
6. Have the learners individually try to come up with a conclusion – and write it down on their lesson.
7. Have the learners in groups (3 or 4 work well, although learners can also be paired) compare and discuss their conclusions, trying to arrive at a “best conclusion.”
8. (*optional*) The groups can then compare and discuss their group conclusions.
9. Give the groups the author’s conclusions and have them discuss the similarities with and differences from with their own.
10. (*optional*) Whenever it is appropriate, the learners can write their own lessons and conclusions. These can be used in class following the procedure above. The copyable form on page 77 can be used both to encourage this writing and to limit its length.