

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS: A QUALITATIVE LOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Thousands of ESL teachers have picked up a text and have felt it to be inadequate, even if the grammar and vocabulary levels are well suited for the students' threshold level. While other texts may be beyond the learners' reach, however, due to the cultural content of the text, learners may find it useful and even enjoyable. This paper will seek to give insight into a text's authenticity or believability from the perspective of a its cultural content.

The theoretical underpinnings of this study lie mainly in schema theory (Bartlett 1932) and interactive reading models (Goodman 1967; Rummelhart 1977); the more readers know and understand about the outside world, the more effective they will be at applying Top-down reading strategies such as sampling, guessing, predicting, and confirming and directly benefit from a high conceptual development of the world against which to compare and contrast newly acquired textual information (Clarke 1980).

In light of the current position the process of reading has in the EFL community, it is of utmost interest on the part of the researcher to see how three different texts portray American culture. The research question to be explored is: to what extent are American values, characters, and language accurately and genuinely reflected in three EFL reading texts? Or, in other words, how congruent are these texts with present American culture?

The design of this research includes the following: three texts; four readability assessment measures; and a multi-level approach for reviewing the ESL texts at the character, value and language levels. Three different ESL reading textbooks were selected for this study: "The First Job" by Sandra Cisneros, in *Personal Themes in Literature*, this book is a current ESL reader that is presently in worldwide circulation; "Lesson 3 PART OF THE TEAM: Touch-down! He had done it!" author unknown, in *Sunshine Readings, IIB*, this book is prescribed and approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education, or Mombusho and is currently in wide use among Japanese high schools; and finally "Albert" by Dean Brodkey and Takayoshi Makino in *American Characters*, this book is one of the many supplemental texts preferred by Japanese teachers of English in high schools. The difference of these texts lies not entirely in their readability, but in their authenticity in depicting American values, characters, and language. All three texts are included in Appendix A.

A series of four readability tests were done on the three selected texts to determine their readability levels. The tests were done on a Macintosh Powerbook 160 computer using Japanese system 7 operating language with Correct Grammar software put out by Lifetree Software Inc., and Working Software Inc. The results from the four tests, see box below, indicate that there is some variation from one text to the next, with "The First Job" requiring a somewhat higher reading level than the other two texts. The differences are not that great and are to be expected since "The First Job" comes from a text that is in world wide use in college and university EFL/ESL programs. The other two texts are found exclusively in Japanese high schools.

After determining the relative readability range for comparing the texts, the task for this study shifted to its main focus: to evaluate the cultural content of the selected texts. This was be

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

Text:	The First Job	Part of the Team	Albert
Grade level required:	6	6	6
Flesch-Kincaid grade level:	9.2	5.5	4.8
Gunning Fog Index:	10.8	5.7	5.2
Flesch Reading Ease score:	75.4	77.7	77.2

done by using a three-fold approach. The texts were a) evaluated to assess the portrayal of characters, b) examined to study what cultural values are explicitly or implicitly conveyed, and c) were checked as to whether or not the language embodied in the lesson is natural.

I. TASK:

A. CHARACTER PROFILES

The data gathered shows interesting character profiles of the each text. As for the first category, "what are the roles of the men and women, adults and children? Are they archetypal or idiosyncratic?" it was found that in the text "The First Job" that the characters were idiosyncratic. Our storyteller was a young teenage woman recalling her first job. At the outset of the text, the reader can infer from the names of the characters that we are dealing with a Hispanic family: the narrator's brother's name is "Tito," father is referred to as "Papa," mother is referred to as "Mama" "Aunt Lala was sitting there [in the kitchen] drinking her coffee with a spoon" (paragraph two). The family unit appears matriarchal. The father is the absent authoritarian; the family is poor because he is accredited with the fact his children are to attend the expensive Catholic high school because "Papa said nobody went to public school unless you wanted to turn out bad" (paragraph

one). The women are left to cope with the financial mess; “Aunt Lala said she had found a job for me at Peter Pan Photo Finishers on North Broadway where she worked and told me I was to show up tomorrow saying I was one year older and that was that” (paragraph two). The preference for parochial schooling and the mention of “North Broadway” suggests a Roman Catholic Hispanic family struggling in New York’s Spanish Harlem. Anyone who has been to New York, let alone Spanish Harlem, knows the place to be intensely secular and patriarchal. There are a couple of shadowy characters of whose names we do not know; the female boss of the photo studio, and an older seemingly friendly “Oriental” man. It is interesting to note that there are no stereotypical white Anglo-Saxon North Americans in this text at all. At no time did I get the impression that the characters were archetypal, rather they were becomingly idiosyncratic.

This is in sharp contrast to the other texts “Albert” wherein the characters can be described as archetypal. Jeff is the main character in “Lesson 3 PART OF THE TEAM: Touchdown! He had done it!” from *Sunshine Readings, IIB*. Jeff is a high school student at Bear Creek High and is a member of the football team. The illustrations would suggest that he is white. Unfortunately, he suffers from asthma and this keeps him from realizing his two dreams of a) getting a varsity letter for a letterman’s sweater and b) from acquiring a commercial pilot’s license. He sees himself as a loser and fails in just about everything he does. The story is typical of the Greek tragicomedy about a “typical” young man, Jeff who has everything going for him, yet harbors an all too large hubris, his asthma. This is followed by his eventual turn around from a loser to a winner. The characters are also just as archetypal as Jeff. Jeff’s dad is annoyed with him; his mother brings him a plate of warmed-over dinner; Mr. Turnbull is the garage mechanic where Jeff sometimes works part-time; Jeff’s younger brother, Tom,

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

is the shining image of what an all-American high school boy can be: “captain of the football team, letterman, president of the Honor Society, winner of the state math award—great college material” (paragraph 14). There are others, girls have a prescribed function of being cheerleaders, Coach Foster is the football coach, and Mr. Hoag is Jeff’s guidance counselor; all are portrayed in highly predictable roles befitting to the stale genre of the text.

As for the text about Albert, we find that character portrayal is one in a long series of various other character portrayal of Americans. The title of the book is *American Characters*. The portrayal of Albert’s character is also archetypal; he seems to be like Peter Pan—he eschews the responsibilities of adulthood. He is over thirty but looks twenty. He is an independently minded man who owns nothing except for a few shirts and collection of classical guitar sheet music. When our narrator left his home for a vacation, he invited Albert to house sit. Disaster happened: “When I returned a month later, Albert had eaten all my food. He had let all my plants die and had covered every table with sheet music. He had burned all my pots and he had used all my tools and wood. He had played my guitar because it was better than his own. Nothing was in its place. He never cleaned anything. But he had practiced the guitar quietly” (paragraph six).

B. ACTIVITIES

The data gathered shows activities that are interesting as well as shocking. As for the second category, “what are the activities? Is the setting of the text representative or architectonic?” it was found that setting of the text in “The First Job” was representative of the struggle of the young minority American female. The activity of seeking employment began with an honest trip to the social security office for her number. This number would enable her to be employed legally. But by word of her Aunt Lala,

our storyteller was told of a job at a photo finisher where her aunt worked. She had to lie about her age to the boss “saying I was one year older and that was that” (paragraph two). So much for being employed legally. The image gotten of this job is that it is a sweatshop where workers need not provide proper documentation. She did get hired but only to do some very tedious work: “In my job I had to wear white gloves. I was supposed to match negatives with their prints, just look at the picture and look for the same one on the negative strip, put it in the envelope, and do the next one. That’s all. I didn’t know where the envelopes were coming from or where they were going. I just did what I was told” (paragraph four). She found the job to be easy, but in no time at all she got tired (paragraph five). Later that day she talked with a friendly older “Oriental” who told her it was his birthday and would she kindly give him a kiss. In her words she says: “I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face and with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn’t let go” (Paragraph seven). The setting in “The First Job” shows the struggle of a young minority American female, who is often hidden from those outside her circles. The closing of the essay adds an element of shock to an otherwise nervous day, being forcibly kissed carries with it the reality that women suffer from sexual harassment at the work place. No woman is immune, not even our storyteller on her first day on a new job.

As for the activities of the characters in “Part of the Team,” one needs to keep in mind the rhetorical organization of the text, which follows structure of the classical Greek tragicomedy. All the activities reinforce the structure and present an idealistic representation of white upper middle class suburban America. One of the many myths surrounding white upper middle class culture is that anyone with opportunity can gain acceptance, a future, and material wealth as a means to happiness. At the outset of the text,

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

nobody seems to know what to do with Jeff, even Jeff does not know what to do except feel sorry for himself. Coach Foster sums up Jeff's problem: "You're a senior this year, Jeff, and until now your asthma has slowed you down, so I know your problem, but it's time you stopped using it as an excuse" (paragraph three). Jeff's mother invokes the image of the suburban housewife, she brings Jeff a plate of warmed-over dinner (paragraph nine). Jeff's father shows a character that is typical of the suburban head of household; he is present at home, he is very much concerned about his son, but he does not seem to know how to effect positive change, so he is annoyed:

"Mr. Turnbull called, Jeff. He was expecting you at his garage."

"Too bad," he answered, "but maybe Mr. Turnbull ought to learn that I'm not at his beck and call."

"He considers you a good mechanic, and he certainly pays you well."

He saw the anger flicker in his father's eyes (paragraph fifteen).

His father had many reasons to be angry, everything he tried to do for his son failed because of asthma. He gave Jeff flying lessons, which enabled Jeff to dream of being a commercial pilot, until it was learned that pilots could not be asthmatic. We get the picture that everybody is pulling for Jeff, but he chooses to wallow in his own misery. It makes the reader wonder if his asthma is more of a psychological problem than medical. By the end of the text, after Jeff has scored a touchdown, the cheering section "screamed out his name, letter by letter," Coach Foster told him how beautiful out there he was. Then Jeff experienced a change, he felt in his chest a "warm feeling, happy feeling" in place of his asthma. The

activities of the characters in this text reflect an ideal situation somewhere in the suburbs of a drug-free America. The activities themselves are melodramatic and architectonic in that they impose order, balance, and unity upon the rhetorical organization of the text as the writers seek to promote a distorted presentation of suburban American culture.

The data gathered in the activities of Albert shows a setting of the text representative of someone who has departed from the values of white middle class America where opportunity and effort, lead the way to material wealth as a reward. Our narrator shows us Albert practicing his guitar quietly in the university cafeteria. Later we hear of Albert's "definite 'philosophy of life.'" It calls for spiritual development and self-realization, not money nor social competition. Albert's guitar playing is his spiritual way of life. He needs nothing else" (paragraph four). To add proof to this, our narrator gives a tour of Albert's apartment: "I once saw Albert's apartment that he shared with another student. Albert had one table and one chair. On the table were piles of sheet music for him to practice. He also owns three white shirts, three neckties, two pairs of pants, and one jacket. He has not car or bicycle. He walks to school. His guitar is old and not very expensive. That's enough for Albert" (paragraph five). By the kind of lifestyle Albert leads, his love for music, and his philosophy on life, the authors of this text successfully show a character who has departed from the values of white middle class America out of which Albert probably came.

C. LANGUAGE

A third area in assessing the texts is seeing what speech register is predominant? Is there any variation? Are idioms used appropriately? And how do the authors probe moral issues? With regards to "The First Job," author Sandra Cisneros appropriately writes in a single speech register, that of a young woman. The intent

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

of the text is hear the story of a young woman's first day on a new job; there is no variation as it is a monologue. The idioms used are appropriate in reflecting the young woman's character: "Tito had pushed me into the open water hydrant-only *I had sort of let him - Mama called me...*" The use of iffy language points to her naivete. "I was to show up tomorrow saying I was one year older *and that was that.*" The use of trust and obey language shows how open and vulnerable she is. Sandra Cisneros probes moral issues from the level of naivete and vulnerability of her main character. Our storyteller wished for an easy job that other kids had, but instead found herself listening to her aunt: family relations, how do you say no? She had to lie about her age in order to get her job in what appears to be a sweatshop: child labor. Later on her first day, she is forcibly kissed by an older man: sexual harassment. All of these issues are genuinely and adequately reflected in the language used.

As for the text "Part of the Team," the predominant speech register is a stale version of General American English. Regardless of the characters' ages and occupations, there is no noticeable variation. The idioms used may be semantically appropriate, but their use is awkward. Here is one representative example: Jeff's annoyed father says: "Mr. Turnbull called, Jeff. He was expecting you at his garage." "Too bad," he answered, "but maybe Mr. Turnbull ought to learn that *I'm not at his beck and call.*" This example shows the idiom "at his beck and call," as a syntactically fitting: it means ready to do everything he asks. The reason for its awkwardness is that the emotional tension between Jeff and his dad is nowhere evident in their speech—it simply is not indicative of a family argument. Lastly, the authors chose not to probe moral issues, rather they wish to issue a text with a moral ending: never let a sickness stop you from striving for your dreams. Similar to "Part of the Team" is the text "Albert." There is one predominant speech register, casual General American English without any

variation. There are no idioms used. And there is no serious probing of any moral issue with this text other than describing Albert's individualistic lifestyle and his wish for nothing material.

II. DATA ANALYSIS

A. CHARACTER DEPICTIONS

In analyzing the collected data, I found that the depictions the characters in "The First Job" to be accurate according to my experience of the English-speaking culture portrayed. The accuracy stems from the voice of the storyteller. The text does not read like some adult trying to sound like a teenager, rather, it reads like a teenager with full respect to the teenager's world view of wanting a job, wanting to be somebody, wanting to please people, and winding up being taken advantage of as a result of her naivete. Oppositely, I cannot say the same thing for "Part of the Team." The depictions of the characters are all stereotypical, not one departs from its norm. Even the name of the mechanic, "Mr. Turnbull" (Turn-ball?) is just too cliché to be taken seriously. The authors of the text selected a classic story line, a boy with a mild sickness has let it go to his head and the story is how he overcomes his problem, but they have fallen far short of what the text could have been. The depiction of Albert as an individualistic, spiritually oriented American male is accurate. There is no shortage of Alberts in the United States.

B. CULTURAL VALUES

In analyzing the collected data, I found that American cultural values accurate in a number of ways according to my experience of the English-speaking culture portrayed. As for "The First Job" I could well identify with the contemporary struggles of young Americans. What was accurate was the following: a) our

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

storyteller's desire to work, not for personal gain, but because the family is poor, b) our storyteller's willingness to lie about her age, c) the relations between male and female can be abusive with the female being victimized. As for "Part of the Team" the values portrayed were more universal than American. The basic story line of a boy overcoming an illness is not just American, it is universal. The many opportunities that Jeff had and passed up at self improvement were more indicative of his hubris, and that is universal as well. The inclusion of the game American Football does set off the story as happening in America and the symbolic importance of having a lettermen's sweater points to one of the cultural hallmarks of so many American high schools. The accurate American values reflected in this text are more of accoutrements that accompany a story line that is itself timeless. As for the text "Albert" I found that American cultural values were accurate in not in the mainstream, but in a contrapuntal way. The authors found someone who was individualistic to an extreme; his love for the arts made him to chose voluntary poverty. Albert was interesting from a distance, but when Albert house sat for our writer, the result was a terribly messy house. There is room in America for the Alberts of this world and their philosophies to life; letting plants die, never cleaning a thing, and practicing the guitar.

C. LANGUAGE

The third and final area of data analysis is to determine to what extent is language authentic for the three texts. As for "The First Job" the language is authentic in that the origin of the text itself came from an already published book. This text was not specially written for ESL use, rather it is a naturally occurring text of a young teenage woman who is recalling her experiences in her first job. The storyteller's voice is expressive and spontaneous and it is impossible to predict how her day will end. This is a very

authentic text. On the other had, both texts “Part of the Team” and “Albert” were written for an ESL audience. The texts both suffer in that they lack spontaneity and anything that might be expressive is explained away. The language in both texts are cliché, stilted, and at times awkward. Compared to “The First Job” the language in “Part of the Team” and “Albert” is less authentic.

III. FINDINGS

It was found that with respect to the three texts that “The First Job” was most authentic. The characters are unique and the events of the story are unpredictable, just as is its outcome. This is in sharp contrast to: a) “Part of the Team” where we know from the start of the text that it won’t end until the boy has a turn-around experience; and b) “Albert” whose text is simply a collection of descriptions about his individualistic character. It was found that the more authentic the language, the more natural, the more accurate the speech register, the more successful the texts were portraying American culture values and portraying American characters, men women, and children as unique and idiosyncratic. The text “The First job” was successful in all categories while the other two texts had substantial deficiencies. “Part of the Team” and “Albert” suffered from their lack of variety in the Mid speech register and their archetypal depiction of their characters. It was also found that of the three texts, only one handled a moral issue, the issue of sexual harassment at the work place. “The First Job” ended with a man forcibly kissing our storyteller. The reader is then in a position to deny that any harassment took place or that it did. The reader is face to face with a current moral dilemma. No such issues can be found in the other texts and as a result, the reader is not asked to do any critical thinking on moral issues.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

The first implication for instruction is of importance to the ESL teacher that she/he be aware that while texts have similar readability levels, they often have widely different pedagogical values. A text such as "The First Job" is one of high pedagogical value in that it brings the reader into company with people who are struggling in their daily life, who are not stereotypically "American," who are vulnerable, who are young and have nasty brothers and aunts with strange habits, who have to lie to only to get harassed. If a teacher can select such texts that would be ideal, but a second implication for those who must use stale and stilted texts like "Part of the Team" and "Albert" would be to highlight the main deficiencies in these texts. For example, where there is a lack of speech registers and or stale and stilted idiomatic expressions, have the whole class impose various speech registers upon the texts. This would draw upon the students' top-down abilities in sampling and predicting, correcting and confirming. A teacher who is familiar with American culture, people, and the various kinds speech, might find this to be a meaningful task. Or, if that is not possible, here is a third implication, the teacher may be able to rewrite a text like "Part of the Team" with a variety of speech registers and more authentic idioms and teach that in parallel with the printed text so that the students may see for themselves a more natural sounding version of their reading. This exercise, in turn, will build up the students' formal schemata to the point where one day they will get beyond a highly controlled English and handle naturally occurring, genuine English. But they have to start somewhere and no longer can a teacher say "Well these texts are so bad, there is nothing I can do! I wish I had different readings..."

In conclusion it has been the aim of this paper to probe to

what extent American values, characters, and language are accurately and genuinely reflected in three selected ESL texts. This has been done with the results showing that the unsimplified, naturally occurring text best offers the ESL reader authentic American behaviors, cultural value expressions, and naturally occurring speech. It is hoped that ESL teachers who can will select such texts, but for those who must use prescribed texts that are otherwise stale, it is hoped that this problem be transformed into a series of exercises aimed at developing the text into a more naturally sounding text. Such an activity, it is hoped, will build up the students' *formal schemata* about American characters, values, and language.

Appendix A: The texts

The First Job¹ Sandra Cisneros

It wasn't as if I didn't want to work. I did. I had even gone to the social security office the month before to get my social security number. I needed money. The Catholic high school cost a lot, and Papa said nobody went to public school unless you wanted to turn out bad.

I thought I'd find an easy job, the kind other kids had, working in the dime store or maybe a hotdog stand. And though I hadn't started looking yet, I thought I might the week after next. But when I came home that afternoon, all wet because Tito had pushed me into the open water hydrant-only I had sort of let him-Mama called me in the kitchen before I could even go and change, and Aunt Lala was sitting there drinking her coffee with a spoon. Aunt Lala said she had found a job for me at Peter Pan Photo Finishers on North Broadway where she worked and told me I was to show up tomorrow

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

saying I was one year older and that was that.

So the next morning I put on the navy blue dress that made me look older and borrowed money for lunch and bus fare because Aunt Lala said I wouldn't get paid 'til next Friday and I went in and saw the boss of the Peter Pan Photo Finishers on North Broadway where Aunt Lala worked and lied about my age like she told me to and sure enough I started that same day.

In my job I had to wear white gloves. I was supposed to match negatives with their prints, just look at the picture and look for the same one on the negative strip, put it in the envelope, and do the next one. That's all. I didn't know where the envelopes were coming from or where they were going. I just did what I was told.

It was real easy and I guess I wouldn't have minded it except that you got tired after a while and I didn't know if I could sit down or not, and I started sitting down only when the two ladies next to me did. After a while they started to laugh and came up to me and said I could sit when I wanted to and I said I knew.

When lunch time came I was scared to eat alone in the company lunchroom with all those men and ladies looking, so I ate real fast standing in one of the washroom stalls and had lots of time left over so I went back to work early. But then break time came and not knowing where else to go I went into the coatroom because there was a bench there.

I guess it was the time for the night shift or middle shift to arrive because a few older people came in and punched the time clock and an older Oriental man said hello and we talked for a while about my just starting and he said we could be friends and next time to go in the lunchroom and sit with him and I felt better. He had nice eyes and I didn't feel so nervous anymore. The he asked if I knew what day it was and when I said I didn't he said it was his birthday and would I please give him a birthday kiss. I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his

cheek, he grabs my face and with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn't let go.

Lesson 3 PART OF THE TEAM: Touchdown! He had done it!²

Jeff Watson felt his chest tighten and wondered if he was going to have another asthma attack. He leaned against his locker and waited for his breathing to smooth out.

Football practice at Bear Creek High had finally come to an end for the day. The team faced its toughest opponents of the season tomorrow. The Cougars from Sheridan High were powerful and undefeated.

Jeff didn't have to be told he'd lacked enthusiasm in today's practice, but then he didn't feel important enough to the team. All that Coach Foster had said was, "You're a senior this year, Jeff, and until now your asthma has slowed you down, so I know your problem, but it's time you stopped using it as an excuse."

When Jeff left the locker room, he found his brother Tom, fourteen months younger and already a head taller, dressed and waiting by the gym door.

"All set, Jeff?" he asked.

"No, I'm not going straight home." It came out sharper than he intended.

"Just tell the folks I'll be late tonight."

When Jeff came home, dinner was over. "Dad's annoyed," he thought, "but he won't start a quarrel this late."

His mother brought him a plate of warmed-over dinner. He pushed the food around, feeling the tension build up, and finally his father broke the silence.

"Mr. Turnbull called, Jeff. He was expecting you at his garage."

"Too bad," he answered, "but maybe Mr. Turnbull ought to learn that I'm not at his beck and call."

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

“He considers you a good mechanic, and he certainly pays you well.”

He saw the anger flicker in his father’s eyes, but couldn’t seem to stop his runaway emotions. “But don’t worry, you’ve got Tom. He won’t let you down—captain of the football team, letterman, president of the Honor Society, winner of the state math award—great college material.” His voice ran down. He pushed back his chair and for the second time that day made an angry and abrupt exit.

Regret was upon him all night. He felt a deep dislike for himself. Did he have to be such a loser all his life? Toward dawn he drifted into a restless sleep.

Morning broke and clear—perfect football weather.

“You feeling OK?” Tom asked.

“Yeah.”

Jeff, how come you’re so uptight lately?”

He didn’t answer.

Out of the corner of his eye, he studied Tom’s large relaxed frame, casually wearing the white letter sweater with the “B” for Bear Creek sewn on the front. “Well,” Jeff thought, “if ever win a letter, it will stand for Bench Boy.”

His thoughts drifted back to the time when he’d wanted that letter more than anything. Then, when that didn’t happen, there was something else he’d wanted even more. Wings! Silver wings on a dark uniform. It was the only dream he’d ever held steadily, over a long period of time. Last summer, the folks had given him a series of flying lessons as a birthday gift. He nearly smiled, remembering the thrill of it. He’d soloed in just five hours. The instructor said he was a natural. He’d thought at last he had his direction, but that dream had faded, too. Pilots can’t be asthmatic.

At school, the day stretched out. Lack of sleep had drained him. He wondered how he’d ever stay awake through classes or sit through the game.

Then, during the last period, his counselor sent for him. "Now, what?" he wondered.

In Mr. Hoag's office, Jeff looked across the desk and found a calm excitement in the counselor's usual monotone.

"Jeff, I called you in on the spur of the moment because I finally received some pamphlets I sent for several weeks ago. I know how you felt when you found out your medical history of asthma would keep you from becoming a commercial airline pilot. So I've been investigating, and I think we've come up with a solution. Listen to this—there's this special training program where you can combine your natural mechanical skills with flying and..."

Jeff interrupted, "Oh, sure. All I need is a Mary Poppins training school for rejects." "OK, Jeff. That'll be enough of that. We'll talk another time. I know you have a game now." Then, almost as an afterthought, he pushed a handful of folders toward Jeff.

Jeff, slipped the papers between his books and headed for the lockers. Game time for the time—bench time for him.

The game was no contest; the Cougars advanced easily and successfully over them.

Jeff sat on the sidelines and observed the sever defeat with detached interest. His thoughts caught, and hung, on something else. Back in the dressing room he had unwillingly glanced through Mr. Hoag's pamphlets and felt for the first time in months, a small spark of excitement. A jet aircraft mechanic's license could be combined with a pilot's license! He couldn't be a regular line pilot, but he could work on all the newest planes, demonstrate them, and even carry them from one base to another. It was called an Airframe and Powerplant license.

Then suddenly, in the midst of his daydream, the coach pulled him to his feet and shouted, "Tom's hurt. Just seven seconds to get in there, Jeff, and give it all you've got!"

Shocked into action, he ran in to take his position. Bear Creek

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

had the ball, and he looked up to see the quarterback throw a ball to the left end, who was moving up the center, covered by two defenders. All three reached for the ball, and in the confusion that followed, the ball turned ninety degrees to the right and thudded into Jeff's stomach. He clutched the ball, stumbled, tripped, felt himself falling, but then miraculously recovered. He was alone now, helpless, but some automatic reflex came into play, and he knew he had to run. The thirty-five yards stretched ahead; he crossed the twenty-five yard line, then the twenty, the fifteen, and in one last spurt, with no hesitation for the slight whistle that had begun in his chest, he crossed the goal line. Touchdown! He had done it!

The crowd went mad. The cheering section screamed out his name, letter by letter.

Tom greeted him in the locker room with a bear hug, and the unconcealed pride on his face almost embarrassed Jeff. Coach Foster stood over him with a smile, "Jeff, you were beautiful out there."

Jeff found his voice, "I just got lucky, Coach. Why is everybody so happy when we lost the game anyway?"

"Because we put up a good fight. And you didn't 'just get lucky': you put your heart in that run—you made yourself a real part of the team."

Jeff stared around with a dazed look, then it hit him—like a light bulb snapping on in his head. All these people were really pulling for him! And he was just wasting time feeling sorry for himself!

He felt something explode in his chest, but it wasn't asthma. It was a warm, happy feeling.

Albert³

Unlike Doctor Carraro, who wants everything, Albert is a boy

who wants nothing. I see Albert every week at the University where he plays his guitar in the student cafeteria. Albert has a pale face and large, romantic, dark eyes. He appears to be about twenty years old, but in fact he is more than thirty. He speaks in a soft, feminine voice, always very politely. At first, one thinks he may be homosexual, but he is not. He has a pretty girl friend with long, black hair.

Albert always wears a white shirt, a necktie and a tweed jacket. His style of dress is quite individualistic. The white shirts do not look very new. The neckties are in somber colors.

Albert practices his guitar quietly in the cafeteria: Bach, Tarrega, and Villa-lobos. I always ask, "How's the guitar going?" "Oh, pretty well," he replies. "I may go back to France this year for the international guitar competition." Albert went to a guitar competition in France three years ago. That surprised me very much because Albert appears to be an inexperienced man who has never traveled anywhere. I asked him if he won a prize. "Oh, I only go to play. I'm not interested in competition," he answered.

Albert has a definite "philosophy of life." It calls for spiritual development and self-realization, not money or social competition. Albert's guitar playing is his spiritual way of life. He needs nothing else.

I once saw Albert's apartment that he shared with another student. Albert had one table and one chair. On the table were piles of sheet music for him to practice. He also owns three white shirts, three neckties, two pairs of pants, and one jacket. He has not car or bicycle. He walks to school. His guitar is old and not very expensive. That's enough for Albert.

Once, I went on a long trip. Just before I left town, I invited Albert to live in my house rent-free to protect it while I was gone. I knew that he was poor, and it would save him money. I thought of him as a careful and honest person. When I returned a month

CULTURAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE EFL TEXTS

later, Albert had eaten all my food. He had let all my plants die and had covered every table with sheet music. He had burned all my pots and he had used all my tools and wood. He had played my guitar because it was better than his own. Nothing was in its place. He never cleaned anything. But he had practiced the guitar quietly.

¹Sally Jorgenson and Valerie Whiteson, *Personal Themes in Literature*, Regents/Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1993, pp.124-125.

²*Sunshine Readings IIB*, Kairyudo Press, Tokyo, 1992, pp. 28-39.

³Dean Brodkey and Takayoshi Makino, *American Characters*, Yumi Press, Tokyo, 1992, pp. 6-7.

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