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Bridging Gaps and Crossing Texts

A Workbook of English for Humanities Students



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Introduction

This book is meant for upper-intermediate and advanced students in English language for Humanities. It is thus based on a heterogeneous corpus of texts in different genres and from different media: from political discourse to music, from graphic novels to television. It is a book conceived to meet the needs of students who are learning English either for using it as a necessary tool to proceed in the study of the subjects in their own field, or as a lingua franca to be used with their peers in international contexts. It was thought to fill in a gap still existing in the range of books and resources available for the study of English at university level. In fact, whereas an increasing number of texts is published year after year to address the specific needs of the students of English for technical and scientific purposes, a much less significant effort seems to have been made so far in the direction of producing adequate study materials for students in Humanities, almost as if this broad area of knowledge and research did not have its own highly specific and sophisticated jargon. But, as any experience in both teaching and learning English in such a context reveals to those involved, the study of subjects like literature, history, philosophy and the like requires not only a high competence in using a specific vocabulary, but also a wide knowledge of the many nuances and layers articulating a language as a necessary skill to engage in deeper analyses and critical approaches to the broad range of possible texts that the student is invited to read and explore.

The book is organized into sections, each of them focusing on a specific genre and style: Speeches, Music, Images, and TV. Within each section attention has been given to offer a range of different materials, so as to excite the curiosity and capture the interest of students with different backgrounds and educational goals. This variety is also reflected in the internal organization of the sections, the latter comprising three to four units. Each of the latter, in fact, features a main text which works as a source of natural, authentic language to explore and learn from through the tasks and exercises accompanying it. The activities proposed focus mainly on vocabulary, discussion skills and writing skills, with particular emphasis on the nuances of meaning provided by the appropriate choice of register. Since the book is meant

for upper-intermediate and advanced students, it is assumed that the main points of English grammar have already been covered. However, the teacher can use the texts provided at the beginning of each unit also to check and revise (and, if need be, cover for the first time) grammar rules, with the advantage of seeing these in the context of authentic usage, rather than as abstract and improbable sentences from grammar exercises. One specific feature of this book is in fact that it only includes authentic, originally non-didactic texts, that is to say, the language is studied in a natural context comparable to that in which it is used by native speakers. The aim is that of helping upper-intermediate and advanced students bridge the gap between the language they have been studying for years in books and that which they are challenged to use in real contexts at different levels, from formal academic discussions to daily conversations among peers.

At the end of the book there is a final section called Focus on Writing, collecting a series of writing activities aimed at developing and consolidating the students' ability in writing short essays on academic subjects. For each unit in this section the student is offered a quotation from a text and is invited to write a short essay in a quite limited amount of time (90 minutes) in response to the content of the text. The student is given absolute freedom as to the choice of the specific subject of his writing, a decision of the authors aiming at allowing the materials to be used in as many fields of study as possible. The students will thus be able to identify the aspect of the text they want to analyse or comment or develop according to their own specific area of interest. Again, the teacher can choose to limit such freedom as a consequence of being in presence of a quite homogeneous group of students for whom a more specific practice would be of considerable help in building their confidence and their expertise in their elected field of study.

Fiorenzo Iuliano is the author of Units 1-2, 7-11, and 15-17.

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SPEECHES

- **“The Ballot or the Bullet” (Malcolm X)**
- **“We Are All Unequal” (Margaret Thatcher)**
- **“Writing and Being” (Nadine Gordimer)**
- **“A More Perfect Union” (Barak Obama)**

UNIT 1

“The Ballot or the Bullet” (Malcolm X)

Malcolm X was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925. His father, a Baptist lay preacher, died early, apparently a victim of a street accident, though many in the black community suspected it to be a murder motivated by racial hatred. A few years later his mother was confined to a mental hospital and Malcolm, who was still a child, was separated from his other siblings and sent to live in different foster homes. A gifted child, he left school when he was told by a teacher that being black he could not aspire to become a lawyer, and, still a teenager, took part in several criminal activities in the Boston and New York areas.

In 1945 he was arrested and sentenced to serve ten years. This proved to be a turning point in his life since, while in prison, he experienced a religious conversion and decided to join the Nation of Islam, a black Islamic sect whose main purpose and belief was the creation of a separate state for African-American citizens. This fundamentalist movement was founded in the 1930s in Detroit by Elijah Muhammad and, although it was rooted in a reading of the Koran, it was actually a non-orthodox form of Islam aiming at establishing the superiority of black people over the whites. Upon joining the Nation of Islam, Malcolm rejected his surname “Little”, as he by now considered it as imposed on him by the whites, choosing in its stead the provocative and rebellious “X”, in order to express his refusal of any form of citizenship as long as it was recognized and sanctioned by white American people.

He soon became the spokesman of the movement, which grew in influence thanks to his exceptional rhetorical skills. As an aggressive campaigner for black rights, he even advocated the use of violence as a necessary means to serve the ideal of Black men liberation. The African-American community, however, identified with Malcolm X’s way of expressing their anger and pride rather than with the positions of the Nation of Islam itself, which in fact lost much of its popularity following Malcolm’s decision to leave it.

He converted to orthodox Sunni Islam in 1964, when he made a pilgrimage to Mecca that, by revealing to him the doctrine of universal brotherhood upon which the Islam is based, contributed to a major change in his positions, especially with regard to the controversial questions of separatism and violence. He was killed the following year, while speaking at a meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in Manhattan.

The speech reported here was delivered by Malcolm X on April 3, 1964 in Cleveland. In 1964 the US is electing a new President and the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement (most of them religious leaders as well) are campaigning to finally obtain full recognition of the rights of black people in the country. In this speech Malcolm X repudiates his very belonging to the American nation, stressing the deep and radical difference between the white American historic heritage and the history of black people, which, regardless of any religion, were starting a new political movement all over the US, whose potential strength would be capable, in Malcolm X's words, to threaten the stability of American institutions and the ordinary relationships between black and white American citizens.

“The Ballot or the Bullet”

(3 April 1964)

I'm still a Muslim; my religion is still Islam. That's my personal belief. Just as Adam Clayton Powell is a Christian minister who heads the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, but at the same time takes part in the political struggles to try and bring about rights to the black people in this country; and Dr. Martin Luther King is a Christian minister down in Atlanta, Georgia, who heads another organization fighting for the civil rights of black people in this country; and Reverend G. M. Davis, I guess you've heard of him, is another Christian minister in New York who has been deeply involved in the school boy-