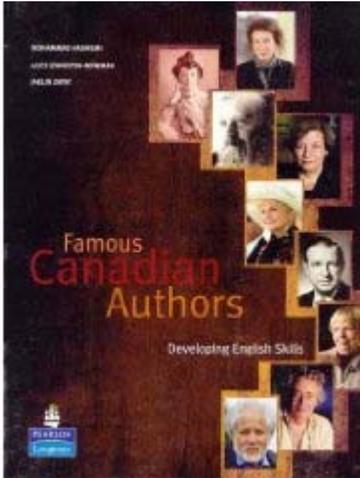


Book Reviews

Famous Canadian Authors

Reviewed by Jane Wangersky



Famous Canadian Authors: Developing English Skills, by Mohammad Hashemi, Alice Johnston-Newman, and Jaklin Zayat. (216 pages, Pearson Longman, \$44.95)

Famous Canadian Authors is written for high intermediate to advanced students, focussing on reading, vocabulary, structures, and culture. It features excerpts from short stories and novels (the authors call *Never Cry Wolf* "a non-fiction novel") by nine prominent Canadian authors of the 20th century. They range from Lucy Maud Montgomery to Mordecai Richler to Margaret Atwood.

With this book, an ESL teacher can present an entire course in 20th century Canadian literature to advanced students without any additional resources—in fact, as the authors say in the introduction (p. v), there is more than enough material for 45 hours. It combines controlled texts with workbook-style pages and prompts for oral and written activities. Although this single-volume format makes it necessary for each student to have a copy of the book, which will not be reusable, the cost is justified.

Each chapter begins with warm-up discussion questions and an author biography. The bios are written in quite advanced English, but not too advanced for their purpose, which is mainly to serve as bases for scanning exercises. Next come activities for reading comprehension, vocabulary, structures, word usage, and writing.

The excerpts themselves—two for most authors, three for Morley Callaghan, each about one to two pages—are preceded by pre-reading activities and followed by glossaries and separate activities on the story, language and culture. Students are asked, for example, to discuss changing trends in marriage, guess the meanings of words from context, write a composition on the attraction of gossip, and choose the right words for blanks in sentences. Finally, each chapter has an online activity.

Working one's way through the excerpts, one gets a feeling for life in different regions of Canada and for the country's progress through the last century. One excerpt, from *In the Skin of a Lion* by Michael Ondaatje, shows the power of literary and dramatic works to teach a nation's language to newcomers and to draw them into its culture, sometimes in unexpected ways. Ondaatje tells how early 20th century immigrants to Canada practised English by going to the theatre and repeating the dialogue, some seeing the same play multiple times. This "infuriated" the actors, but when one of them died suddenly during a performance: "[A] Sicilian butcher took over, knowing his lines and his blocking meticulously, and money did not have to be refunded" (p.202).

There are plenty of extra features that deliver more value, such as maps showing places mentioned in the excerpts, and a chart giving the correct order for adjectives (opinion, size, age, shape . . . the kind of things native speakers know intuitively, but language learners seldom see written down).

Some activities and individual questions may be too challenging for ESL students at any level (or for native speakers -- try, for example, to finish the sentence "Respectively means . . ."), but the wealth of material allows the teacher to skip activities that won't work for his/her class.

Anyone planning an ESL course in Canadian literature should seriously consider *Famous Canadian Authors*.