What can you do with the Sunrise?
Read a story, retell it, and discuss it.

Directions: Work through the following steps. If you finish a step before your classmates do, work on learning the new vocabulary you have discovered in the reading.


2. Answer the questions on the back, and then check your understanding of the story with others who have read the same story you have. Help each other with new vocabulary.

3. Retell the story to a partner who has read the other story. Tell it in your own words without looking at it. (You may refer to the answers you’ve written on the back to help you retell the story, but don’t read your notes to your partner.)

4. Listen carefully to your partner as s/he tells you his/her story. If you don’t understand something s/he’s telling you or don’t understand the story clearly, ask questions immediately so that you can understand. When you and your partner have finished telling each other the stories, write a very short summary of the story your partner has told you.

5. Show the summary you have written to your partner and ask him/her if your paragraph accurately summarizes the story.

6. Now read the story your partner has told you.

7. Discuss both stories with your partner. Tell your partner what the stories have made you think about. Also, respond to the question following each of the stories.
The Greatest Present
Fumiko Sato
Japan

What's the greatest present you've ever received?" one of my friends in the car asked the rest of us on our way to Florida. While another friend was answering this question, I was thinking about my family. The greatest present I've ever received? Not a romantic word that made me love my boyfriend. Not a nice gift that I received on my birthday. The greatest present ever given to me is the one I'm enjoying now, being here.

Nothing has influenced me more in what I am today than my experience in coming to the United States, and this great opportunity was given to me by my family. Before I came here, I expressed my gratitude to my family, of course, but I want to reiterate my feelings of appreciation by writing this article.

One month before I graduated from my university, I was worrying about my future. All of my friends had already found a job and decided what to do after graduating, but I had no plans.

The only thing I had was a dream that would probably be unacceptable to my family: to come here to America and do graduate studies in social work, my major.

As I had expected, my father strongly opposed the idea, and my grandmother also opposed it because she was afraid she would feel lonely without me. Fortunately, my mother and two brothers were supportive. But I wanted my father and grandmother to approve of my goal, too.

For a while, it seemed that it was impossible for my dream to come true; however, I persisted. At long last, I persuaded all of my family members. I know how difficult it was for them to let me go to America, and how lonely my grandmother feels. But finally they all respected my dream. To my happiness, my grandmother promised me to be of good heart until I return to Japan.

Now one month has passed since I came here, and every day I experience things that extend my world view, enrich my personality, and make my life more beautiful. My family has given me a great opportunity by supporting my dream. Whether all of my dream comes true or not, I want to express to them once again my great appreciation for their letting me come here and have a chance to fulfill my dream.
Question guide for “The Greatest Present”

Questions to answer in reading

1. What was the situation that made Fumika think about the greatest present she had ever received?

2. According to Fumika, what is the best present she ever received?

3. At the time Fumika was finishing her university studies in Japan, what was her dream (goal) for the future?

4. What did Fumika’s family think about her dream?

5. What does it mean that Fumika “persisted” in trying to accomplish her goal, even though it seemed impossible at first?

6. What does it mean that Fumika finally “persuaded” all of her family members to support her in her trying to make her dream come true?

7. What does Fumika’s grandmother promise Fumika?

8. According to Fumika, what benefits (good things) has Fumika received from living and studying in the U.S.?

9. Has Fumika accomplished all of her goal yet?

10. How does Fumika feel about her family’s support?

Ask each other after both you and your partner have read the article:
What’s the best present (gift) you’ve ever received?
The Shy Prince
Yi-Wen Chen
Taiwan

There is this prince of a small country that existed long ago. He is amazingly handsome and intelligent, but because of his being perfect he was cursed when he was born and he can speak only one word per year. Day by day as the prince grows up, he becomes aware of his defect and develops a fear of mingling with others. Consequently, he asks his parents (in writing, of course) to build him a castle located in an uninhabited forest. When the castle is finished, he moves into it and settles into a life of seclusion.

To soothe the loneliness he feels in his new home, the shy prince likes to stand beside the window and watch the wild animals of the forest passing by. One day, the prince is standing beside the window as usual when he notices a beautiful young woman sitting under a tree reading a book. She has long hair like golden silk. Her face is flawless like a doll's. Suddenly, the prince realizes that he is falling in love, and he decides to express his love to her. However, he can say only one word a year. "How can I express my love?" he wonders.

The prince decides that he won't say a word for three years so that he can save up enough words to say "I love you" to the beautiful woman when he breaks his silence.

Three years pass, and the prince's love for her hasn't faded. In fact, he loves her more than ever. Therefore, he decides that it is not enough to just tell her that he loves her; he wants her to know who he is. So he resolves to wait three more years before he tells her he loves her so that he can also tell her his name.

As time passes, the woman becomes more and more beautiful. By the end of the second three-year wait, it dawns on the prince that it is not enough to just confess his love and tell her his name. At this point, he feels he cannot live without her. "If she becomes my wife, I can see her every day!" he thinks. Therefore, the prince decides to propose to her.

But the problem is that the phrase "will you marry me" consists of four words, meaning that he will have to wait four more years to speak with her. "But the wait will be well worth it," he thinks, "if she consents to be my wife!" For this reason, the prince decides to wait four more years before he approaches her.

Finally, four years later, the prince is ready to talk with the beautiful woman. One day, she comes to the forest again and sits under a tree reading a book. The prince runs out of the castle to meet her. When he comes face to face with her, he is so nervous that he can barely speak a word. He takes a deep breath to calm himself, and finally out come the precious words. "I am John. I love you. Will you marry me?"

The woman stares at him a few seconds and then says, "Beg pardon, I couldn't hear you!"
Question guide for “The Shy Prince”

Questions to answer in reading

1. Why is the prince shy?

2. Because of his shyness, where does he go to live?

3. Who does the prince see outside his window?

4. Why does the prince decide to wait for three years before saying anything to the woman he loves?

5. After waiting for three years to tell the woman he loves her, he decides to wait another three years before talking to her. Why?

6. After waiting for six years to talk to the woman, the prince decides to wait for four more years before talking to her. Why?

7. What happens when the prince finally talks to the woman, after ten years of waiting to talk to her?

Ask each other after both you and your partner have read the article:

What advice would you give to a shy person to help him or her overcome his or her shyness?
My dear [Name],

Last night, our exploration of planet Earth culminated in a bizarre but highly revealing social event.

Strolling along one of the main streets of a city as night was falling, we realized that at the same time the quiet stores were closing the loud ones were just beginning their activities. The sounds emanating from them were weird, amazing, almost crazy, especially the sound of singers screaming as if pleading for help. Our first impression of these places was that they must be places of torture.

As the evening advanced, people started coming out of their houses and flocking into these noisy stores. Since we wanted to keep our privacy (these terrestrial aliens are really obsessed about aliens because of something called “X-Files”), we decided to enter the darkest store. We were very afraid, thinking that we were probably going to be tortured inside, but we considered it part of our job and walked on in.

We passed through a dark corridor and then came to a big open room illuminated by dim lights of various colors. The music was so noisy that it made our antennae hurt.

Numerous people were sitting at small tables arranged around a semicircular stage, talking, drinking, and smoking. No signs of pain.

We sat down at a table in a dark corner, and a waiter immediately came to talk with us. She was smiling, but we could tell how hard her life was. She was so poor that she didn’t have enough money to buy a complete set of clothes.

When she asked us only what we wanted to drink, we concluded that we should have come sooner; apparently the customers that had come earlier had eaten all the food. We answered with a question: “What do you suggest?” She told us that the drink most commonly ordered was whisky on the rocks but that there were several other options, which she kindly proceeded to list for us.

We liked the name “whisky on the rocks” because it reminded us of the rocky mountains of our beloved planet, so we asked for two of that popular beverage.

As our waiter left us, the music changed into a more pleasing sound. A slower song filled the smoky environment, and another hungry-looking woman stepped into a big yellow spotlight focused on the stage. Maybe somebody in her family had died; she was wearing only black clothes—and very few of them. Like our waiter, she was obviously quite poor, wearing only some skimpy underwear.

She walked around on the stage, going into strange convulsions. Some of the customers didn’t seem to care about what she was going through, but others felt pity for her and generously stuffed some money into her underwear and her mouth, no doubt intending that she should buy clothes and food with it. By the time her convulsions stopped, she’d lost all her clothes, and the people were so emotional that
Expedition...

they began to applaud.

Another woman, who was wearing leather clothes, came onto the stage carrying a whip. Even though we didn't see any flies, she tried to lash them with it, and apparently she was able to do this successfully; the customers shouted out praise to her when she was too tired to continue. She seemed very shy, hiding her face with a mask.

By this time, the waiter had come with our beverages and we'd tasted that strange cold liquid. We didn't know what was happening, but as we drank it, the temperature in the store began to increase and we felt happier and happier. (We should be careful: Terrestrial happiness appears to be contagious.)

Yet another hungry-looking woman appeared on the stage, and she also went into convulsions, but this time we felt different about the spectacle: We were more worried about ordering more of our funny beverage than about this poor woman's ordeal.

After six rounds of whiskey on the rocks, we saw something amazing: The store was full of twins! I'd swear that I saw a person exactly like my partner standing just beside him, and he also swears that he saw someone like me by my side. All of these twins were inseparable; wherever one went, the other followed.

From this observation, we concluded that this was a store where families meet after working hours, especially twin brothers.

We paid our bill and left the store singing a strange song that we'd heard inside. Please, don't ask why we were acting so unprofessionally; all I can say is, you had to be there. We were so moved by our experience in the store that it took us a while to reorient ourselves to the outside world. We wandered around for a couple of hours before we finally found our way back to the spaceship. The next day we woke up with a terrible headache and a very bad taste in our mouths. Maybe because of the change in gravity.

In short, we could see in this store the best of human feelings. Lots of the customers showed their compassion by giving money to those poor, underprivileged women in the store. We could also see the terrestrials' natural happiness and the great relationship enjoyed between brothers.

To invade this planet is going to be very easy. These people are obviously incapable of bad feelings or hostile behavior. It's a planet of friendship and peace.

Your faithful observer,

Dream

Dear Kazuhiro,

You used to tease me about my having no sense of direction nor any understanding of sports. Yes, I've finally acknowledged the truth; I've surrendered myself to my destiny. Well, are you enjoying yourself in Japan? Kazu, without you here, I'm in trouble. As you know, you used to correct my grammar, but now who's going to correct it? Please send me your own grammar book and I'll regard it as you.

Nara

Soccer Ball

Saad Al-Kaabi
Qatar

I don't know where I'm going
Sometimes on the ground
Other times in the sky
Everyone is chasing me
When I come to them, they kick me
I don't know where I'm going
Could somebody tell me

Dream

Soojung Kim
Korea

Dry, my heart! I
Really want to fill it.
Every day I look for
And desire
My great life!
"Expedition to Planet Earth,"
by German Molina Calvo, in *Sunrise*, Winter 1998

**Directions**
Do the following tasks and answer the following questions with a partner or two.

1. Find the words *bizarre* and *revealing* in paragraph 1. Write your own sentences using these words and share your sentences with your partner(s). (You can use any form of the word *reveal*.)

2. Find “the quiet stores” and “the loud ones” the narrator describes in paragraph 2. What exactly are the loud stores?

3. Find the word *aliens* in paragraph 3. What does this word mean in this context? What other meaning can *alien* have as a noun in other contexts?

4. What does the narrator mean by the last sentence of paragraph 4, “No signs of pain.”? Why was the narrator expecting to find pain in this place?

5. Why does the narrator assume that the waiter and the other “hungry-looking” women who appear on the stage are “obviously quite poor?” (See paragraphs 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11.)

6. In paragraph 12, the narrator’s sees twins everywhere in the “store.” How do you account for this perception?

7. In paragraph 13, the narrator explains why it took him and his colleagues so long to return to their spaceship. In which sentence does he explain this? Is there any other reason that might account for their getting lost?

8. Reread paragraph 14, and then explain the irony of the narrator’s conclusions about his experience at the strip club.

9. If you were an extraterrestrial, what human places, customs, and activities might you find “bizarre but highly revealing?”

10. As an alien (foreigner) in the United States, what American places, customs, and activities might you find “bizarre but highly revealing?”
The Wrong Planet

Karina Young
Chile

To all my fellow Zenoans, this is ArkZeno2987, reporting my experiences, findings, and conclusions on planet Earth after [+/:], or two years Earth time, of exploration here. Of all the hundreds of missions I have undertaken, I would say this has become the most interesting one due to the basic difference I have discovered between Earthlings and us, which I shall explain to you in detail in this report.

Just to summarize the objective of this mission so as to avoid misunderstandings in the future: I am on planet Earth on a mission to obtain information, in the same way that other Zenoans are working on other planets, particularly in this case to find out what human beings’ weak link is so that we will be able to dominate their minds in the near future. The reason for such investigation? As we all know, our planet Zeno will be extinguished in exactly [+/:], or 5 years, 4 months, 2 days, and 3,366 seconds Earth time, and we need a place to transfer our advanced civilization, preventing its disappearance from the universe. We have already finished 100% of the natural resources of our planet, including every vestige of plant and animal life.

At first we thought of Earth as the best planet to move to because it seemed to us that it would be very easy to dominate a civilization that is politically divided into continents, countries, and even cities and smaller communities. This would seem to facilitate the process of domination because it wouldn’t be necessary to focus on the entire population of the planet at the same time and we could take advantage of the lack of communication among the various segments.

We had another reason to think that this planet wouldn’t be very hard to conquer: the fact that human beings still have vestiges of their souls, which we assumed was a big weakness we could take advantage of. Even though every day I have seen humans perpetrate thousands of aggressive verbal and physical actions against each other, deep down almost every one of them has a very sensitive heart. At first I thought this sensitivity of theirs would become our most powerful weapon against them in the war for survival to come. But now I have changed my mind. I have seen that this trait might in fact represent their strength rather than their weakness, a strength that we Zenoans lost when we decided that it would be better for our scientific development to abandon souls and ethics.

To illustrate what I am getting at here, I want to describe a situation that I witnessed yesterday in a small and obviously not very developed town.

I was in a jewelry store, unsuccessfully trying to understand why such small colored stones, just because of their scarcity, are considered so desirable by human beings. As required by my mission, I was invisible at the time, so my presence there went unnoticed throughout the following episode.

The jeweler was alone in his store, gazing dreamily out the window at the street, when a blond-haired little girl with eyes the color of the sky—around eight years old—came up to the store and pressed her nose against the window. Her eyes lit up when she saw a blue turquoise necklace in the window display.

She came into the store and asked the jeweler to get it. “It’s for my sister,” she said. “Would you gift-wrap it, please?”

The jeweler looked at her dubiously and asked her, “How much money do you have?”

With no hesitation, she pulled a tied tissue out of her pocket and untied the knot very carefully on the counter. She opened the tissue and proudly displayed all the money she had, only a few coins. “Is this enough?” she asked. “I want to give this present to my older sister. Since our mother died, she’s been busy taking care of us and doesn’t have any time for herself. Today is her birthday, and I know she’ll be very happy with this necklace. It has the same color as her eyes.”

The jeweler put the necklace
The Wrong Planet...

in a case, wrapped it with red tissue paper, and tied it with a beautiful gold ribbon. “Take it,” he said to the little girl, “and take care.”

She was thrilled, and the jeweler smiled as he watched her leave the store with her package and go running and jumping down the street.

A little later, a beautiful blond-haired young woman with marvelous blue eyes came into the store. She put the same package, now open, on the counter and asked, “Was this necklace bought here?”

“Yes,” the jeweler said.

“And how much did it cost?” she asked.

“The price of any product in my store,” he answered, “is always a confidential issue between the seller and the customer.”

“But my little sister had only a few coins!” the young lady said. “This necklace is expensive, isn’t it? She couldn’t possibly have had enough money to pay for it.”

The jeweler carefully rewrapped and re-tied the package and then gave it back to the lady, saying, “She paid the highest price that anybody can pay. She gave everything that she had.”

Silence filled the small store. The beautiful young lady was deeply moved, and a tear rolled down her cheek. She took the gift into her hands, and with great admiration she thanked the generous jeweler for his wise words.

So, my fellow Zenoans, now I see that maybe our discarding of our souls thousands of years ago explains why our planet is about to become extinct and why extinction will result again and again wherever we transplant ourselves. Humanity has remained here on Earth for a great many years, and I think I have discovered the reason. Human beings give themselves entirely when they really want to help or love somebody, with no restrictions. And the gratitude they feel in the face of these tender gestures has no limit. In the deepest part of their hearts, in their souls, human beings love each other compassionately. Their hearts link them together, and I think that any attempt we make to dominate their minds will be unsuccessful since it will be impossible for us to dominate their souls.

Good Nightmare
Yumi Takahashi
Japan

Can you hug color like a child?
The monster dances with you on the roof under the stars.
In the kitchen, pigs and chickens sing a funny song for the moon.
Do you catch your future from the sky?
If you watch and really see this scene, you can enjoy your dream forever.

Disappearance
Yoo-chung Lee
Korea

When we are small, everything shines for us. Both I and other are growing like a dream. We don’t care where the dream comes from, even though we are little, tiny in the world. When we become big, everything turns into darkness. Neither I nor you have a dream. We care where we are, what we are, even though we are tall, big in the world.
Question guide for "The Wrong Planet"

1. Who is ArkZeno2987, and where does she come from?

2. What is ArkZeno2987’s mission on Earth?

3. Why do the Zenoans want to be able to control the minds of Earthlings.

4. At first, the Zenoans thought that it would be easy to invade Earth and to dominate human beings. Why did they think so? (Give TWO reasons they thought so.)

5. Briefly summarize what ArkZeno2987 observes in a jewelry store.

6. As a result of ArkZeno2987’s observation of human beings, especially in the jewelry store, she concludes that human beings will not be easy to dominate. Why does she conclude this?
7. What is the basic difference ArkZeno2987 has found between Earthlings and Zenoans? What is the special quality that humans still have but that Zenoans gave up in their pursuit of science and technology? What is the ArkZeno2987's attitude toward Zenoans' lack of this quality?

8. Do you agree with ArkZeno2987's assessment of human beings' special quality? Why or why not?

9. Explain the meaning of the title, "The Wrong Planet."
At last, I’ve found the meaning of hope, kindness, and the importance of having a dream. For a long time, I couldn’t trust anyone and my life was like a storm; I was always hurting others. My life was also like an empty box; I was just looking for momentary fun.

I’m Japanese. Though born in Tokyo, I grew up in the countryside surrounded by beautiful nature. Nature and baseball were my favorite things. Although I was a really naughty boy, I was pure and innocent.

I don’t remember exactly when I lost my innocent nature and became a perverse high school student. I often cut classes and went drinking with my buddies, got into a lot of mischief, went with a lot of girls, and so on. In those days, I thought it was everything to just have fun doing trivial things. I don’t know why I was this way; I suppose it was just my age. Though I could study reasonably well, I was a bad student, the sort of student that teachers find hard to deal with.

After graduating from high school, I went to the university and continued my pursuit of good times. In Japan, most students concentrate on just enjoying life during their time at the university, and I was no exception.

When I was still a freshman, though, one of my best buddies was killed in a traffic accident. I couldn’t believe it and fell into depression. I didn’t want to accept his death, but it was real. No amount of crying would bring my friend back to life. After this incident, I wandered around aimlessly. I didn’t know what to do. I began to think beyond the moment and question my fate. I stopped seeking momentary fun. His death had changed me. I began to struggle with my life. I couldn’t seem to find the answer to my blues.

Time passed. Then I happened to get a chance to go to the USA. I had never been to a foreign country and had never thought of traveling abroad till that time. Actually, I didn’t have any purpose in going to the USA, but I decided to go, anyway. I didn’t know why, but I felt something was waiting for me there.

Soon, I arrived at my destination in the USA, Denver, Colorado. Like the countryside surrounding my hometown, where I’d played so innocently, Colorado had a lot of beautiful nature. I hadn’t been in Denver long before I met an inspiring young Japanese woman there. No sooner had we met than we made friends with each other. I spoke of many things to her. I could talk about everything with her without hiding my feelings. We were always together.

As I gradually got to know her, I realized that she had a lot of qualities that I didn’t have. She was quite different from me. She was friendly, kind, considerate, calm, and filled with hope. Talking and being with her changed me little by little.

One day, she asked me suddenly, “What’s your dream?”

I was puzzled by her question and replied, “Well, I don’t really know, but I’m sure I’ll automatically get a job after graduating.”

“Some Japanese think only of themselves,” she said. “They tend not to care about others.” And then with that heartwarming smile of hers, she said, “I want to be a teacher and to teach the importance of world peace.”

I was shocked by what she said, realizing that I had been thinking only of myself. I envied her, too—she was so dazzling. At that time, I was very selfish. I didn’t care about others as long as I was happy. I didn’t have anything like a dream. I didn’t have a purpose in my life. But after my conversation with her that day, I began to think about my purpose. She taught me the importance of having a dream.

Now, I’m filled with dreams. I want to be a United Nations
What's in Your Box?...

official. I want to help unfortunate people who are in danger from war or starvation. I want to share my life with poor people. My country is the only country in the world that has suffered the ravages of the atomic bomb. Although I’m not patriotic, I think that I, as a Japanese citizen—as a human being—must advocate the importance of peace. I want to engage in helping keep world peace in my future. Though I may not always live up to my ideal, I always try to be kind to everyone. I’m doing my best and leading my life positively. Now, my life is like a quiet lake in the mountains. My feeling is calm. And like Forrest Gump’s, my life is also like a box of chocolates; I never know what I’m going to get.

What’s in your box?

Dear Milinka,
Even though you entered our reading class late in the quarter, you fit right in and contributed a lot. We truly enjoyed your presence.
From your teacher,
Bronia

A Mirror

Jong Mun Back
Korea

Sound asleep, I heard a sweet music. It woke me up, and I felt better. I went to the bathroom to take a shower and shave.

As I was shaving, I was very surprised to see my girlfriend in the mirror.

“What’s going on?” I asked. I couldn’t understand why she was there in my boarding room. It was a room that I was living in by myself near my university.

“Are you okay?” she asked me when I came out of the bathroom.

Since I couldn’t remember what I’d done the night before, I figured that her question probably related to the drunken condition I’d been in the last time I’d seen her. I did remember that I’d met her and some other friends to discuss the trip we were planning to take during our vacation. After we’d talked about that, we went to a bar to drink. I could remember that much, but the rest was a blur. Now, I was getting worried about the night before.

While I was trying to remember what I’d done, she said, “I love you very much. After spending last night with you, I want to know your true feelings toward me. Please tell me your true feelings.”

When I heard that, I thought, “Uh oh, I made a big mistake!” There were so many thoughts passing through my brains at once that I couldn’t respond. I just stood there in silence.

Finally, I asked her exactly what had happened the night before. According to her, I’d been drunk out of mind. She’d driven me home from the bar. On the way, I’d told her that I loved her and asked her to spend the night with me.

I couldn’t believe her story, but I couldn’t remember anything. Something seemed wrong, and I wanted to believe that this was all a lie. But here we were together in my room...

I was really worried. “What shall I do?” I asked myself.

Suddenly, I felt something—like somebody shaking me... harder and harder. Then I heard a strange voice from far, far away but getting closer...

Someone was yelling at me, “Get up, it's time to go!”

It was my girlfriend, I finally realized.

“Are you still sleeping? Come on, the bar’s closing! It’s time to go home!”
Vocabulary from "What's in Your Box?", by Ryuji Kawasaki

paragraph
1. momentary - temporary
2. naughty - badly behaving
3. perverse - contrary, badly behaving
3. buddies - friends
3. mischief - bad behavior
3. reasonably - relatively, pretty
3. deal with - handle
4. pursuit of - attempt to experience
4. no exception - like all the others
5. depression - sadness
5. wandered around - went around
5. aimlessly - without aim, without direction or destination
5. fate - destiny, ultimate purpose
5. struggle - have difficulty, wrestle
5. blues - sadness, depression
7. my destination - the place I intended to go
7. inspiring - influential
12. shocked - very surprised
12. envied - was jealous of
12. dazzling - bright, brilliant
13. starvation - dying from hunger
13. ravages - terrible damages
13. patriotic - nationalistic
13. advocate - promote, support
13. engage in - be involved in
13. ideal - highest standard
Question guide for “What’s in Your Box”

Comprehension questions

1. What kind of person was Ryuji Kawasaki when he was a boy (from childhood to his first year in the university)?

2. When he was in the university, something happened that changed his life. What happened?

3. Why did Ryuji travel to the U.S.?

4. In Denver, Colorado, Ryuji met a person who became a good influence in his life. Who was this person?

5. What was this person like (what kind of person was she)?

6. How did this person influence Ryuji?

7. Now what is Ryuji’s dream?

Discussion question

As Ryuji Kawasaki asks at the end of his story, “What’s in your box?” (What’s your dream?)
At last, I've found the meaning of hope, kindness, and the importance of having a dream. For a long time, I couldn't trust anyone and my life was like a storm; I was always hurting others. My life was also like an empty box; I was just looking for momentary fun.

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After graduating from high school, I went to the university and continued my pursuit of good times. In Japan, most students concentrate on just enjoying life during their time at the university, and I was no exception.

When I was still a freshman, though, one of my best buddies was killed in a traffic accident. I couldn't believe it and fell into depression. I didn't want to accept his death, but it was real. No amount of crying would bring my friend back to life. After this incident, I wandered around aimlessly. I didn't know what to do. I began to think beyond the moment and question my fate. I stopped seeking momentary fun. His death had changed me. I began to struggle with my life. I couldn't seem to find the answer to my blues.
What's in Your Box?

Ryuji Kawasaki
Japan

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know, but I’m sure I’ll automati-
cally get a job after graduating.”

“Some Japanese think only of
themselves,” she said. “They tend
to not to care about others.” And
then with that heartwarming
smile of hers, she said, “I want to
be a teacher and to teach the
importance of world peace.”

I was shocked by what she
said, realizing that I had been
thinking only of myself. I envied
her, too—she was so dazzling. At
that time, I was very selfish. I
didn’t care about others as long as
I was happy. I didn’t have any-
thing like a dream. I didn’t have a
purpose in my life. But after my
conversation with her that day, I
began to think about my purpose.
She taught me the importance of
having a dream.

Now, I’m filled with dreams.
I want to be a United Nations
What's in Your Box?

Official. I want to help unfortunate people who are in danger from war or starvation. I want to share my life with poor people. My country is the only country in the world that has suffered the ravages of the atomic bomb. Although I’m not patriotic, I think that I, as a Japanese citizen—as a human being—must advocate the importance of peace. I want to engage in helping keep world peace in my future. Though I may not always live up to my ideal, I always try to be kind to everyone. I’m doing my best and leading my life positively. Now, my life is like a quiet lake in the mountains. My feeling is calm. And like Forrest Gump’s, my life is also like a box of chocolates; I never know what I’m going to get.

What’s in your box?

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Dear Milinka,

Even though you entered our reading class late in the quarter, you fit right in and contributed a lot. We truly enjoyed your presence.
From your teacher,
Bronia

A Mirror

Jong Mun Back
Korea

Sound asleep, I heard a sweet music. It woke me up, and I felt better. I went to the bathroom to take a shower and shave.

As I was shaving, I was very surprised to see my girlfriend in the mirror.

“What’s going on?” I asked. I couldn’t understand why she was there in my boarding room. It was a room that I was living in by myself near my university.

“Are you okay?” she asked me when I came out of the bathroom.

Since I couldn’t remember what I’d done the night before, I figured that her question probably related to the drunken condition I’d been in the last time I’d seen her. I did remember that I’d met her and some other friends to discuss the trip we were planning to take during our vacation. After we’d talked about that, we went to a bar to drink. I could remember that much, but the rest was a blur. Now, I was getting worried about the night before.

While I was trying to remember what I’d done, she said, “I love you very much. After spending last night with you, I want to know your true feelings toward me. Please tell me your true feelings.”

When I heard that, I thought, “Uh oh, I made a big mistake!” There were so many thoughts passing through my brains at once that I couldn’t respond. I just stood there in silence.

Finally, I asked her exactly what had happened the night before. According to her, I’d been drunk out of mind. She’d driven me home from the bar. On the way, I’d told her that I loved her and asked her to spend the night with me.

I couldn’t believe her story, but I couldn’t remember anything. Something seemed wrong, and I wanted to believe that this was all a lie. But here we were together in my room...

I was really worried. “What shall I do?” I asked myself.

Suddenly, I felt something—like somebody shaking me... harder and harder. Then I heard a strange voice from far, far away but getting closer...

Someone was yelling at me, “Get up, it’s time to go!”
It was my girlfriend, I finally realized.

“Are you still sleeping? Come on, the bar’s closing! It’s time to go home!”
The Italian Lifestyle
Patrizio Silvestrelli
Italy

To understand just a little bit about the recent changes in the international environment, it is important to consider the different cultures of the various countries. The traditions and the lifestyle of a country help explain a people’s behavior. Used to differentiate one country from the others, they can be a strong point in the process of nations’ development. Three main characteristics of the Italian lifestyle are especially important in distinguishing Italy’s unique culture: the attitude towards work, the attention to fashion, and the love of good cooking.

Concerning the value of work, it is important to emphasize that the stereotype of Italians’ not being good workers is not true. We just have a different concept of time. We usually say, “Take it easy!” and “Time doesn’t fly, it just walks!” This means that we are not superficial people, that we consider time as a space in which it is possible to organize our ideas and actions freely.

In comparison with the peoples of some other countries, I can see that Italians have more fantasy, and our optimism and positive thinking help us tackle every problem without too much stress. If something doesn’t go as we have scheduled it, we can find innovative alternative ways to operate. One of these ways is to resort to teamwork. This behavior shows the importance we give to the “group.” In Italy, the value of the group is very strong and widely acknowledged. The Italian society believes in the relationships and interactions among people, which are considered an instrument of knowledge.

It is quite difficult to find someone who doesn’t know Italian fashion. In Italy, the term fashion can be used not only for clothes, but also for furniture, travel, and all the aspects of our everyday life. Fashion permeates the Italian way of life.

Italy has clothes stylists that are known in every part of the world, and the Italian fashion show is one of the most important meetings in the fashion world, as it is in Paris, London, and New York. There are many Italian firms that produce furniture and other home accessories that express special refinement through their beautiful design. Even the Italian way of traveling is connected to fashion. We usually look for refined places to spend our holidays. Sometimes, we go to an “in-fashion” location. In this way, traveling becomes a “fashionable moment of life.” In addition to aestheticism, fashion means good business and therefore wealth for the national economy.

Italian cuisine: who doesn’t know pizza, pasta, Italian-style fish, etc.? The ability to cook well is certainly a strong point for the image of my country. This ability derives from a very long tradition according to which the recipes and love of cooking have been handed down from mother to daughter. It is impossible to generalize Italian cuisine because the ways of cooking vary in relation to the different regions, which take care to maintain their own traditions. So, Italy can be defined as “the country of good eating.” This is certainly one of Italy’s main competitive advantages in the tourism business.

Of course, there are many other aspects of the Italian lifestyle that contribute to Italy’s distinctive culture, but I think it is better to get to know them firsthand. Visit Italy and experience the richness of the Italian lifestyle for yourself!
A **Goukon** is a special kind of mixer party common among Japanese people in their 20s and 30s. The aim of a Goukon is a little different from that of an American mixer, in that the explicit purpose of a Goukon is to match men and women. Especially on Friday nights, after finishing class at the university or work at their companies, a group of young Japanese people sometimes plan a Goukon and then go out together to downtown night spots.

A Goukon is organized by a couple who, in the process of getting acquainted with each other, gather together some interested friends of theirs for the party. The rule is that the initiating couple have to select the same number of men and women to join them. For example, if the man invites three other men to the party, the woman in turn invites three women. If the number of men and women were unequal, the situation would be awkward.

The first part of a Goukon takes place in an **Izakaya**, a kind of Japanese bar without music or dancing space that provides only food and alcoholic drinks. There we introduce each other. In general, everyone is a little quiet and shy at first, but after spending some time together, we become acquainted and more comfortable with each other. We keep talking and drinking in the Izakaya for a couple of hours. Since all the invited participants hope to get a boyfriend or girlfriend at the party, the time spent together in the Izakaya is very important.

After leaving the Izakaya, we go to a **Karaoke**, which, as many foreigners know nowadays, is a place where we can sing along with music. In the Karaoke, we can get better acquainted by singing together. Around midnight, as the time to go back home approaches, we leave the Karaoke.

At this time, if some of the men have found women they like, they ask them for their phone numbers so that they can make another date with them. At a Goukon, there is always the potential for new couples to get together, though it's not common that they actually materialize. As you know, it's not easy to get a boyfriend or girlfriend, even if you like someone.

Japanese people are said to be very shy and quiet, and I can agree with this characterization. At parties, many of us hesitate to talk or dance with someone we've never talked with before. So, a Goukon is an effective way for Japanese people to meet and date each other, whether it brings about new couples or not.

I've been to lots of parties with my friends since I came here, and every one of them has made me very happy. Unlike a lot of other Japanese people, who tend to feel out of place at foreign or American-style parties, I enjoy dancing, talking, and drinking with my friends at such parties. But like everyone else, Japanese people want to enjoy themselves. So, if you have Japanese friends, please plan a Goukon with them, even though it may seem a little restrictive.

If you're still single fifty years from now, will you marry me? Let's get engaged.

Alex@epi.sc.edu
Dick Holmes, English Programs for Internationals, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

**Goukon, by Natsuki Nakamura**

Does your summary . . .

- introduce what a *Goukon* is and how it is organized?

- tell about the two places where a *Goukon* is held?

- explain what a man does at the end of the *Goukon* if he wants to make a date with a woman he has met at the party?

- explain why a *Goukon* is a good way for young Japanese people to get to know each other and have fun together?

**The Italian Lifestyle, by Patrizia Silvestrelli**

Does your summary . . .

- introduce the three main characteristics of the Italian lifestyle?

- explain Italians' attitude towards work?

- explain Italians' focus on fashion?

- explain Italians' passion for good, traditional cooking?
Nazca Lines

Carla Valencia
Perú

There are a number of mysterious places in Peru. One of them, located south of Lima in a desert area in Ica, is Nazca Lines. People have various theories about the Lines’ origin.

This mythical place features some huge ancient designs dug into the sand—so huge that the figures they make can be discerned only from above flying over them. The mysterious lines composing these designs form various figures, including a monkey, a hummingbird, a condor, etc.

There are various theories about the origin and purpose of Nazca Lines. Some people present theories related to astrological ideas and claim that the drawings are zodiacal signs. Another theory is that the lines mark an irrigation system used sometime before the Incan culture. The principal theory about this phenomenon is that the lines represent a landing field for visitors from other planets. This theory is supported by the fact that one of the lines is a long straight one that runs parallel to the drawings.

Years ago, Marie Richter, a renowned archaeologist from Germany, visited Nazca and decided to spend the rest of her life studying the designs in this lonely place, and at present, more than ninety years old, she’s still studying them. She has been a major proponent of the alien visitor theory, supported by her personal experience of having sighted flying saucers in the vicinity several times.

Tourists from all over the world visit this wonderful place every year. Nobody knows the real story behind Nazca Lines, and maybe this mystery is the best part of its magic.
Hangul
Mi-Hye Kang
Korea

Do you know which of the world’s writing systems is the most systematic? According to research, the answer is Hangul, the Korean script. Some of you may think, “I know about the Korean language; it is very difficult and intricate.” Yes, Korean is complicated because of its irregular conjugation. But the Korean writing system is very easy to learn. If you can speak Korean, you’ll soon be able to write it. Korea’s 97% literacy rate proves how easy Hangul is to use.

Hangul was invented in 1446 by the Great King Sejong. Before that time, Korea (called Cho-sun in those days) had no script of its own. We used Chinese characters to represent our spoken language, even though the Chinese writing system didn’t match the sound of Korean. Consequently to write down what one wanted to express was difficult and needed a high-level education. Lower-class people, including women, had no chance to be educated, so they had a handicap in writing what they wanted to say.

It was because of this situation that the Great King Sejong invented Hangul. Guided by humanistic principles in his way of ruling, he wanted to focus on lower-class people, who were discriminated against by educational institutions. To teach the whole nation how to write he published a textbook entitled Hun-Min-Jung-Eum, which means “The Right Sound to Teach the Nation.” In a foreword to the book, the Great King Sejong writes, “It is so hard for the uneducated people to write. Out of compassion for their situation, I have invented our script.” Wisely, the Great King Sejong made this new script easy to learn.

There are many, many languages and scripts in the world, which were invented by various means of recording, studying, etc. If somebody were to ask me what pioneer in language I admire the most, I’d answer without hesitation, “The Great King Sejong,” because he wanted to include lower-class people in the world of intelligence, which formerly had been thought to belong only to high-class people.

RV50b,
I have enjoyed teaching you!! I hope you didn’t get too tired of my corny jokes. I hope I will see many of you next quarter and if you are leaving and if you ever visit Columbia, drop by and see me!! Who knows—maybe you will see me walking somewhere and you will come up and say, “Excuse me, I am a foreign student studying English. Could I practice . . .”

g. rice

To all EPI students,
I’m 44 years old. I returned to school and have become young. Think about doing this in your future. It’s very possible to become young and stay young by returning to school.
Leonardo (Italy)
“Nazca Lines” & “Hangul”: Summary Guides

Summarize your article for your partner by answering the following questions.

“Nazca Lines”

1. What are the Nazca Lines and where are they located?

2. What are three theories (explanations) about the origin and purpose of the Nazca Lines? Explain each of these theories.

3. Who is Marie Richter, and what does she think about the origin and purpose of the Nazca Lines? What special experiences has she had that support her theory about the Lines?

4. What are some important vocabulary words in the article? Show these words to your partner and explain their meaning.

“Hangul”

1. Why does Korea have such a high literacy rate? (In other words, 97% of the people are able to read and write. What makes it possible for so many Koreans to be able to read and write their language?)

2. What is Hangul and who invented it?

3. What kind of writing system did Koreans use before Hangul was invented?

4. What was the problem with using Chinese characters to represent the language spoken in Korea?

5. Why did Great King Sejong invent Hangul?

6. What are some important vocabulary words in the article? Show these words to your partner and explain their meaning.
Dear Pat,

When I watch comedy shows on TV, I can't understand what the audience is laughing at. Can you tell me?

Straight Face

Dear Straight,

What makes you think understanding has something to do with laughing? Who knows what the audience is laughing at? Maybe they're laughing at something totally unrelated to the show. Some of them might be laughing at something they're thinking about in their own life. A lot of them are probably just laughing because the people around them are laughing or because they don't want to be the only one that's not laughing. Go ahead and laugh, Straight Face. You don't have to laugh at anything—just laugh.

Pat

Dear Pat,

I'm a very quiet person. I hardly ever say a word. Because I'm so quiet, people think I'm stupid. Actually, I'm quite intelligent. In fact, I think I may be a genius. What can I do to show people how intelligent I really am?

Quiet As A Mouse

Dear Quiet,

I suggest that you project the confidence you obviously have in yourself. I used to be quiet and frustrated, too, but once I started writing this advice column, people began to think of me as someone who has an answer for everything. One little warning, though: Once you start expressing all that intelligence, don't be surprised if you discover that you're not quite as smart as you thought you were.

Pat
Dear Pat,

I am a divorce addict. My life is a vicious circle—I fall in love, get married, fall out of love, get divorced, fall in love again, get married again, fall out of love again, get divorced again, fall in love again... and so on. I've been divorced seven times and I'm only twenty-nine years old! How can I break this pattern, and stay married for the rest of my life?

Queen Of Divorce

Dear Queen,

Some people have a fear of falling while others have a fear of rising. Evidently, you have no fear of falling—you're always falling in and out of love—but you're afraid of rising. To overcome this fear, ask yourself, "Why be afraid of rising?" When you realize that you don't have a good answer to this question, your love and marriage will keep rising and you'll never get divorced again.

Pat

Dear Pat,

I had a dream last night that I was a hamburger with mustard, onion, and pickle on it. When I woke up, I wasn't sure whether I was a human who'd been dreaming that he was a hamburger or a hamburger dreaming that it was a human. I'm still confused. How can I know which I am?

Hamburger Man

Dear Hamburger,

Does it really matter which you are? Has it occurred to you that maybe you're both a human being and a hamburger? I think you need to loosen up and go with the flow. The important thing is to be a good human when you're a human and to be a good hamburger when you're a hamburger.

Pat
Dear Pat,

Recently, I got a dog—a French poodle—and we’ve been having a lot of trouble communicating. When I tell him to sit, he rolls over. When I say, “Come here, boy!” he runs off as though I’ve thrown a ball for him to chase.

I think the problem is that we don’t speak the same language. Do you think it would be better for me to learn French or for him to learn English?

Man And His Dog

Dear Man,

Problems that seem to demand either-or solutions can often be solved in some other way that you just haven’t considered. In your case, I can think of at least two other options. One, you could get another dog that knows English and French and let it teach your dog how to obey orders. Two, you could try communicating with your dog in Japanese. With the Japanese option, of course, you and your dog will be even more confused, but even though neither of you’ll understand what you’re saying, you’ll feel like you can communicate since you’ll be on the same level of total misunderstanding.

Pat

“ARE YOU PULLING MY LEG?”

Felix 95
Creative Writing: Dear Pat Letters

Directions
1) On one side of a card, write a letter to Pat, an advice columnist, about some humorous, fictitious problem you have, and ask for his/her advice. Write as many such letters (about different problems) as time permits.
2) Take home a few of these letters (any of those written by someone else), and on the other side of each of the cards you've taken, write Pat's answer.

Samples
Dear Pat,

My husband hates my cooking but my friends say that I'm an excellent cook. What should I do?

Queen of the Kitchen

Dear Queen,

The solution to your problem is easier than you might think. If your friends say that you cook well, that means that you do. So, all you have to do is change your husband and keep your friends.

Pat

Dear Pat,

I have a terrible problem. My right leg likes to run quickly and my left leg prefers to walk slowly. Sometimes my feet are fifteen or twenty meters apart, and everybody laughs at me. Please, what can I do?

Gum Man

Dear Gum,

Your left leg needs a tune-up and a supercharge to catch your right leg. Get these and no will laugh at you anymore (because no one will see you anymore).

Pat

Dear Pat,

Please help me! When I'm alone, I'm always thinking about my friends, but when I'm with them, I easily get angry. What should I do?

Mr. Moody

Dear Moody,

Your problem can be solved easily: If you buy a nice computer you'll never feel alone again, and if you get angry, you just have to unplug it!

Try it. It works.

Pat
Dear Pat,

I'm crazy—sometimes I think I'm a dog but other times I think I'm the president of the United States!

What can I do?

Napoleon Bonaparte

Dear Napoleon,

What's the problem, Napoleon? I'm sure the real president probably feels the same way you do.

Pat

Dear Pat,

My problem is that I can't laugh. I know I need to, but I can't seem to do it. I try but nothing happens. No one wants to be around me because I'm so serious.

How can I laugh?

Too Serious

Dear Serious,

Your problem is not such a difficult one. Remember Jack Nicholson in the Batman movie? He was able to laugh using an electronic device that allowed him not only to laugh but also to cry and to perform various other kinds of expressions. Please call toll free at 1-800-221-2210 and ask for a free demonstration. This device can be yours for only $44.99.

Pat
Ryuji Kawasaki
Japan

An Interview with Miriam Moore

RK: Congratulations on the recent publication of your book, The Scribner ESL Workbook for Writers. How did you decide to write and publish a textbook on writing?

MM: The textbook that I wrote came about because of a complaint. I was teaching composition for international students at USC, and I was frustrated with some of the writing textbooks. The books’ authors claimed to be writing for students of English as a second language (ESL), but they didn’t use writing from ESL students in the texts, or if they did, the level was too low for a university writing class. Also, most of the writing workbooks didn’t really deal with writing at all; they only dealt with grammar. When I complained about this to a publisher’s representative, she asked if I could write a better text for them. I thought I would try—and now the book is here. Most of the writing in it comes from my former students, many of whom studied at EPI.

RK: How did you become interested in teaching writing?

MM: By accident!! I wanted to be a linguist, so I came to USC to study linguistics. While I was in graduate school, the English department asked me to teach a composition class for internationals. It sounded like a fun challenge, so I took the course. I knew very soon after the class started that I had found my niche. I’ve been teaching writing ever since.

RK: A lot of international students find writing very difficult. Some of us don’t like writing, unfortunately. Apparently, you like to write. What do you like about it? Is it difficult for you, too?

MM: Yes, writing is difficult for me, at least some parts of writing. I think what is odd is that I am very much at home writing essays in the academic style; that’s easy. And I like doing it. It helps me to think about my own views of things—it helps me to sort it all out. I usually give my classes a quote from the writer E.M. Forster, who said, “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” That’s how I feel about writing essays—the process of doing it helps me to learn and to see new perspectives. On the other hand, what is not so easy for me is what is usually called “creative writing.” I have ideas in my head for short stories, novels, and poems—but I am not so good at getting these on paper. I think part of the problem comes from my training—I was always told I was good at academic writing, but my teachers never encouraged me about the poems I attempted. But I am learning!! I keep a journal every day, and most of the writing in it is like an essay, or like extended freewriting (which I love!!). But more and more I find myself writing poems in my journal.

RK: Inspiration is very important in writing, isn’t it? How much do you think writing depends on inspiration, and can you recommend any strategies to facilitate inspiration?

MM: Hmm. I’m not sure how best to answer this one. I do think there is such a thing as inspiration, but it’s hard to define. Also, I think inspiration can become an excuse for not writing—if I wait until inspiration comes, I will never write anything. As far as strategies go, I think journaling and freewriting are good DISCIPLINES for a student to practice. These force you to put ideas on paper, to use words. It may be that 75% of what you write isn’t so hot. But you may find that 25% of it is “inspired.” The process is then worth all the trouble.

RK: When writing in a second language, we international students often know what we want to say or have specific images in mind. However, we can’t seem to express ourselves exactly. How can we overcome this limitation?

MM: Believe it or not, this happens to native speakers, too. My suggestion would be first to talk about your idea with a native speaker, letting him/her help you (in other words, get feedback). Also, I think freewriting is good for this—trying your idea in
An Interview with Miriam...

several different ways. And my other idea is less direct, but important: Read. Saturate yourselves with English words—not just in textbooks, but in stories, plays, poems, whatever. You may begin to "hear" it in your mind. That "hearing" combined with experimentation in writing will help you to get your ideas more "exact."

RK: Some students can write good individual sentences but still don't understand very well how to connect them and develop paragraphs. What advice can you give about this problem?

MM: Again, this is a problem for a lot of people, not just ESL students. My first suggestion is the same as before: Read. You will begin to hear in your head the rhythm of English, its flow. You can then listen for that in your own writing. Also, you can try some tricks that we use in reading or writing classes—ask someone to read the first and last sentences of a paragraph and guess what comes in the middle. If they can't do that, you might need to work on a good paragraph of introduction. Or, you could cut apart the sentences in your paragraph and see if someone else can put it back together. If they can't, then you might have a problem with cohesion, or connections from sentence to sentence. I guess the best things are practice and feedback—keep writing, and then have others help you evaluate your success.

RK: Another big challenge we international students face is applying our knowledge of English grammar to our writing. How can we train ourselves to catch grammatical errors in our writing?

MM: Hmm. This is also tough. One thing I encourage you to do is to forget about grammar at first. Let yourself work on ideas and structure first, then save time for grammar. If you have time, put the paper away for a while before you begin to edit. When you do edit, look at your writing sentence by sentence. One thing you can do is to develop a checklist of your grammar problems, based on what your teachers have told you. Then you can use that checklist to edit. For example, if your biggest problems are subject-verb agreement, tense, and comma splices, you can focus only on those areas as you edit. You might also try reading your paper out loud, listening to the language you are using. Does it sound right?

RK: Writing means different things to different people. What is writing for you?

MM: I use writing in many ways, all the time. It helps me communicate, remember, and accomplish things. But most importantly, writing is my way of grappling with ideas, memories, and emotions. When I write in my journal, I am never sure what will happen—I don't plan anything. But in the process of writing, I learn a lot about myself, and I can ask new questions about what I am reading or thinking. At the same time, this sort of writing is private and "safe"; I don't worry about an audience. Also, in journal writing, I can experiment with different "voices," or different aspects of my personality, and I don't have to worry about being rejected. Finally, I think writing so much in private gives me a great deal of confidence for when I do write in public—and public writing brings me its own kinds of rewards. To put it simply, writing is a way of life for me.

To RV70a,
You are a really excellent class!! I have enjoyed you!!
Thanks for being such good students.
G. Rice
Mastering English: An Interview with Marit

Daniel Rafael Castellon
Nicaragua

It is well known that Marit Berg Boio is a member of the outstanding teaching staff at EPI. But it may not be so well known that some years ago Marit was a student of English as a second language. From her accent and mastery of English in general, it is virtually impossible to distinguish her from a native speaker of English, but the fact is that, like many of us students at EPI, Marit did not begin to study English until she was a teenager. Impressed with Marit’s mastery of English, I was curious about the strategies and methods she used in acquiring the language, particularly the phonological aspect of it. How did she manage to acquire her native-like American English pronunciation? How is it possible to diminish our native accent in our speech? Does this change of accent threaten our own cultural identity? In interviewing her, I got some thought-provoking answers to these questions.

DC: Marit, research studies of how people acquire a second language have suggested that the acquisition of native-speaker pronunciation in a foreign language is biologically possible only until around the age of twelve. Also, adult language learners seem to have greater difficulty improving their skills in reading, writing, and grammar than teenagers do. What do you make of these limitations?

MB: The problem you just mentioned is very common, Daniel. You learn so fast in high school—vocabulary and grammar rules are crammed into your brain. Then, all of a sudden, it seems as though your acquisition has almost ended, or it is only happening as a trickle, drop by drop. You get discouraged and frustrated. You sense you’re not moving forward anymore. This is a normal experience and one you need to understand and accept. In the process of learning a foreign language, you find yourself moving up and then plateauing, getting stuck. As you reach such a plateau, your language acquisition may not be as fast as you would like. But remember, English is still growing, settling, being internalized. You are probably not able to measure it because it may not be as dramatic. This is a refinement stage for you. It is a phase in which you refine your pronunciation and master some complex grammar constructions. It is when you expand your vocabulary areas of the language where you have never ventured before. You should be aware that you are still acquiring and moving toward mastering the language. Another aspect of acquisition, which students have to come to grips with, is emotional stress. When you are in high school, English is just a subject, like history or math. But now that you are here in EPI, Mr. TOEFL may be lurking in the bushes. All you may be able to think about is the MAGIC number—“I have 550 or 600 on the TOEFL.” When you are that tense and emotionally uptight, your ability to learn goes down dramatically. I notice it in some of my students. They have that look of stark terror in their eyes, which effectively shuts down their ability to absorb, to learn. So to offset the stress in my classroom, I sometimes dim or turn off the lights, I may bring candles or candy, or I hum a tune—just to get the students to relax. My favorite is: “Don’t worry; be happy.” I’ll actually try just about anything to get the students to relax.

DC: Second language students are encouraged to acquire correct, perfect intonation. Some students fail to lessen their native accent and as a result get frustrated. Maybe there is an important cultural identity issue involved in this frustration. Do you think that losing our native intonation might in some ways mean losing our cultural identity?

MB: I understand that this could make you feel ambivalent. On the one hand, you would like to retain your identity, but, on the other, you have to reconcile it with “sounding American.” I went through this some twenty years ago. At the time, if I had said—stubbornly—to myself, “I am Marit from Norway; I am going to be Norwegian and I’m going to sound Norwegian,” I never would have gotten rid of my considerable accent (which is actually still there, by the way!) and I certainly wouldn’t have integrated into this culture. If internationals are that fearful of losing their identity, they have to suffer the consequences, which may include alienation and certainly include losing some of the richness and nuances of living in the United States. So for you, Daniel, the objective is to remain Daniel from Nicaragua while at the same time having American professors, friends and acquaintances respond to you in the most beneficial and pleasant way possible. We know that we ARE how we SOUND, how we come across when we communicate. So a better attitude here may be to say to yourself, “I know who I am inside even though when I open my
Mastering English . . .

mouth, I sound American. I am simply adding an American facet to my personality.”

DC: What strategies can help us acquire an American-like pronunciation?

MB: One thing you can do is make a list of all the words whose sounds differ from those of your native language. Have your CS teacher help you! Then practice, practice, practice. Pronouncing words correctly involves the appropriate use of certain muscles in your mouth, and by pronouncing these words again and again, your “mouth muscles” get used to the different physical movements. Also, use a mirror and watch what happens to your mouth when you pronounce a sound. Ask your teacher to demonstrate for you if you’re having difficulty. After some time, you will find yourself articulating the words correctly and unconsciously. Another important technique is chunking. A chunk is a group of words that make up a thought unit. Americans communicate their thoughts as a series of chunks, and, between each one, they pause either slightly or noticeably. Then you have to add ready to shave, mutter American phrases to yourself. “Whaddaya wanna do tomorrow?” “I’m oulda here.” “How d’ya like livin’ here?” This looks terrible in print, but it sounds authentic in speech. By playing with the muscles in your mouth this way, you’ll discover that the words will roll off your tongue after a bit of practice. And the sense of victory is exhilarating!

DC: I know that you studied journalism and worked in that field before you got into teaching English. How did that profession influence the development of your writing in English? Any experience we could also learn from?

MB: One course I took, magazine article writing, was especially useful. We literally had to imitate the style of different writers by copying sentences using identical word order while using different words. It was a way for me to play with sentence structures and become more creative, and it also liberated me from my earlier writing style. My advice is to read with great care and concentration. Pay attention to organization, tone and specific vocabulary use. I tried to crawl inside the brain of these writers to discover how they were able to craft their individual styles by choosing from among several hundred thousand English words and innumerable possible sentences . . . I also became infatuated with words. Certain ones would excite me—and still do. I would jot them down as I came across them. Especially Anglo-Saxon words, which are compelling, immediate, spring from the page to grab your attention. This practice came in handy as I found myself writing a lot of features, which are human-interest stories. My approach was to use the language in such a way that the descriptions of the person’s behavior—through everyday words—would reveal her or his personality and tell the story. I tried to make the interviewee come alive by picking out fresh, unusual, sparkling, telling, surprising words. This practice certainly helped expand my vocabulary! And I learned that a methodical approach to language acquisition doesn’t have to be boring.

Dear Marit,

Never did I dream that I would meet the best teacher in my life here at EPI. Thank you for your enthusiastic teaching, and I’ll keep in mind the saying, “Teaching without zest is a crime.”

Walt

Marit