

# To the Instructor

*Twelve American Voices* is an ESOL textbook that uses the award-winning radio stories of National Public Radio contributor David Isay as a basis for listening and integrated-skills work. The book leads students to a holistic understanding of a series of culturally rich broadcasts about American traditions and unique individuals. In each chapter, contextualized vocabulary and language structure exercises help students analyze the language in the broadcasts, and a variety of discussion, writing, and project activities provide opportunities for them to express their reactions to the themes the broadcasts contain.

We decided to write *Twelve American Voices* because we had trouble finding authentic materials that college and adult students find genuinely interesting, materials that respect their intelligence and life experience and also provide an opportunity for focused language study. David Isay's radio stories, for which his honors include three Peabody Awards and a MacArthur "genius" grant, fill the bill perfectly. Designed to inform and entertain native speakers, they deal with traditions and changes in contemporary U.S. culture and

address a range of topics, some lighthearted and some quite serious. Students are introduced to the world's only senior citizen disc-jockey team and to a woman who played a role in a historic civil rights sit-in. They meet a retired minister in the Pacific Northwest whose diary is approaching 35 million words, and also parents in the South Bronx who are struggling to control their crack-addicted daughter. In addition to learning about a very traditional purveyor of kosher wine for Passover, they drop in on a very unorthodox charity Santa Claus as he solicits donations on a street corner.

The people featured in these broadcasts speak a range of Englishes. In addition to David's narration, we hear the distinctly non-native (but highly communicative) voice of an immigrant Chinese businessman and the non-standard dialect of an African-American waitress, as well as a wide variety of speakers of more standard Englishes from different corners of American society.

Taken together, David's broadcasts give an intimate picture of what he calls the "poetry on the edges of society" and give students an opportunity to explore topics of real interest that are all too rarely addressed in ESOL textbooks.

*Twelve American Voices* is designed to be used in either ESL or EFL classrooms, whether students speak the same first language or have a range of mother tongues. It can be used as a primary textbook for a course focusing on listening and conversation or, along with a grammar text and a reader, can serve as one part of a complete language program.

Each chapter is self-contained, and the level of difficulty increases through the book, with Chapters 1 to 6 at an intermediate level and Chapters 7 to 12 at an upper-intermediate level. We have found, however, that each of these chapters can be used successfully with a range of levels as long as the tasks assigned, the amount of time allowed, and the degree of support offered are appropriate. Each chapter is designed to take approximately one hundred minutes of class time, exclusive of the project activity, which will generally require at least an entire class period.

The activities built around David's broadcasts are designed to give students both enough structure to understand the texts and also the freedom to explore the aspects they find most interesting. Each chapter concerns a single radio story and consists of the following elements.

## Before Listening

Because learners are able to understand more when the context is known, an *Orientation* exercise asks students to relate some of the themes of the broadcast to their own experience. This arouses students' curiosity, activates their latent knowledge of the subject area, and makes the listening more realistic and meaningful.

A *Vocabulary* activity presents ten to fifteen key lexical items, with a focus on words central to understanding the world in which the story takes place.

## Listening and Understanding

A three-part listening sequence leads students through progressively deeper and more native-like levels of understanding and appreciation of the broadcast.

Students begin by reading a brief *Introduction* that further contextualizes the broadcast. A *First Listening: Predicting* exercise provides a focus for students' initial exposure to the broadcast. Students then listen to check on their predictions and see how much they can understand of the broadcast.

In *Listening for Comprehension*, students are asked to demonstrate a fairly detailed literal understanding of the text. Items in this more intensive activity follow the chronology of the text and include both short-answer and more open-ended questions.

For the final listening, students can follow along with the tapescript as they work to complete the *Listening for Analysis* activity. Here we encourage students to develop their own interpretation of the broadcasts as they analyze how it creates its meanings.

Additionally, two Language Focus activities look at points of language structure as they occur systematically in the text. *Language Focus A* addresses such discrete grammar topics as phrasal verbs and preposition use. Students are guided to understand the meaning and use of the particular feature and then are given a chance to practice it in a directed exercise. *Language Focus B* addresses broader issues of language, style, and culture. These include non-sexist language; the language of hype; and polite and impolite language. In each Language Focus B, students are given responsibility for analyzing the text and working out its meanings for themselves.

## After Listening

At the end of each chapter a variety of thought-provoking discussion, writing, and fluency activities allow students to express their own feelings, associations, and opinions about the broadcast.

*Discussion Activities* encourage students to relate the themes of the broadcast to their own experiences and to explore what they and their classmates feel about the issues that have been raised.

*Writing Activities* offer a choice between responding personally to the broadcast or relating its themes to cultural values in the United States or the students' home countries. Students are asked to write in a range of genres—personal narrative, academic essay, personal and business letters, etc.

Each chapter ends with a *Project Activity* of a different type—research activity, debate, roleplay, etc.—which offers an opportunity to go beyond the broadcast itself in exploring the themes presented. Some projects can be conducted within the confines of the school (e.g., students producing their own TV talk show). Other projects call on students to leave the classroom and interact with the larger community (e.g., doing research on the Civil Rights Movement or conducting a survey on uses of writing).

A more detailed explanation of the methodology, along with teaching suggestions and culture and language notes for each chapter, can be found in the accompanying *Instructor's Manual*.

David Isay's broadcasts have been a source of real pleasure and insight in our classrooms, and we are excited to share them with the ESOL community. We hope that you and your students will find both the broadcasts and the lessons enjoyable and interesting. And we hope that *Twelve American Voices* will help prepare your students to enter the broad and inclusive speech community of American English.

# To the Student

We have written this book for a simple reason. We feel that the best way for students to improve their English, and to explore American culture, is to work with the same kinds of materials that we ourselves enjoy. We are excited to share David Isay's radio documentaries with you because we have found them valuable and interesting enough to listen to again and again.

David Isay is a reporter who is truly passionate about his work. He has dedicated his career to telling stories from the corners of American society, giving a voice to people who are rarely noticed. We hope that some of his passion will rub off on you and that you will find yourself listening not only to learn the language but also because you want to understand and respond to the broadcasts. In fact, the best language learning will happen when you forget that you are studying and find yourself simply using English to communicate.

The broadcasts in *Twelve American Voices* have not been simplified or edited for English learners; they are in exactly the same form as they appeared on the radio. (That is what is meant by the word "authentic" in the book's sub-

title.) Authentic radio broadcasts can be more interesting than other types of listening materials, but they can also be more challenging. There is no control over the number of unfamiliar words and expressions that they contain. For this reason it is not necessary to understand absolutely every word in a broadcast. You are learning well as long as you are able to respond intelligently to the story, asking questions and expressing your own opinion about those things that interest you.

Beyond simply understanding the broadcasts that it contains, *Twelve American Voices* is also designed to help you develop into a more skilled listener, one capable of listening more effectively on your own. You will be asked to pay close attention to your own listening process and to get used to asking such questions as “What have I understood so far?” “What do I think of what I’ve heard?” “What more would I like to find out?” and “What in my own life or experience does this connect to?” This kind of active listening is important to improving your communicative skills.

Many activities in this book involve working with a partner or in a group. This is because you can learn a great deal by sharing your ideas, reactions, and interpretations. For one thing, you will come to realize how much of the broadcast you and your classmates can work out together, without turning to your instructor or a dictionary for help. More important, learning to work out meanings will make you better able to teach yourself to communicate in English.

If you are using this book for self-study rather than as part of a class it will be more difficult to do the group activities. Still, it makes sense to share this book and your reactions with someone else who speaks English or is studying it. For more information, see the *Instructor’s Manual*, which has explanations of many of the exercises and notes on some of the language and the cultural background of the broadcasts.

Welcome to *Twelve American Voices*. We hope that you enjoy working with it as much as we enjoyed writing it. We wish you every success in your studies.