

Colin M. Bain, Jill S. Colyer, J. Newton, R. Hawes. *Canadian Society – A Changing Tapestry*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, 271 pages. ISBN 0-19-540986-8.

The Canadian School system – is it an effective social institution? Do social pressures cause people to conform? How do psychologists explain aggression and violence? The Canadian Justice system – what impact does it have on behaviour? Marriage and family life in Canada – how are these institutions changing? These are just some of the questions that the course book of Canadian studies entitled *Canadian Society – A Changing Tapestry* brings up to the classroom.

It is a fact that many central-European institutions offering advanced courses of cultural studies, especially those offering courses in Canadian studies, often face the lack of concise materials and course books with a balanced amount of text and real-life material for classroom use. The publication *Canadian Society – A Changing Tapestry* thus represents a very well selected compilation of theoretical introductions, topic-oriented text, as well as newspaper clippings, charts and a digestible amount of statistics.

The strength of the book lies in four areas: (1) in its cultural awareness, factual competence and selection of topics; (2) in its real-life approach and case studies; (3) in its readability and organisation and (4) in the opportunity to improve linguistic and rhetoric skills of EFL students.

(1) The course book consists of 9 chapters, which approximately accord with the scope and length of an academic term. The selected topics include an introduction to sociology, anthropology and psychology (chapter 1), social behaviour and human communication (chapters 2 and 3), mainstream and marginal cultural groups in Canada (chapter 4), social institutions, including the school system and family life in Canada (chapter 5), various social attitudes within a society, such as alienation, conformism, aggression, violence and social issues, such as drug or alcohol abuse, as well as employment equity for women (chapters 6,7 and 8). The last chapter analyses current issues in the Canadian society and its social perspective within the next forty years. It is apparent that the publication is very informative, though it is not overloaded with bibliographical information. It rather stimulates classroom discussions (and proved to be very useful in my lessons on Canadian studies) and students' individual research. What is more, the title of each chapter is formed as a question (e.g. What causes prejudice and discrimination?; What are some examples of discrimination in Canada?; or What are the main characteristics or teenage culture in Canada?; What is the role of television in Canadian culture?). This organisation gives students a clear idea of what they are going to learn in the lesson as well as stimulates their curiosity and personal interest in the topic.

(2) In addition to the theoretical introduction of each chapter, each topic is accompanied with thought-provoking case studies which enhance students' ability to understand the broader context of selected social phenomenon, such as discrimination, conformism but also school drop-out, teenage pregnancy and youth delinquency. Selected case studies enable multiple interpretations and usually do not leave students cold but open incendiary classroom discussions. The learning-by-doing approach is very well enhanced by many personal questionnaires (for example, "What kind of social scientist are you?") where

students can learn a lot about their own attitudes to the selected issues. What also makes the course book appealing to the reader is the fact it contains a well-balanced selection of real-life sources (e.g. excerpts from the speech by MP Angus MacInnis from British Columbia who voted against the internment of Japanese Canadians or, visually attractive charts of the wage gaps between Canadian men and women, or the twelve most frequent jobs in Canada) which are presented in a clear and straightforward way.

(3) The course book is reader-friendly. The body of the text is segmented into several parts, visually separating case-studies from the theoretical part and the follow-up questions. The text is colour-coded and important terms or phrases are explained in vocabulary boxes and highlighted in the text. The course book is also visually stimulating – each theme is accompanied with a tell-tale photograph or a cartoon which could be used for warm-up activities, such as picture description, vocabulary extension, hypotheses-making or various pair-activities, improving the classroom discipline and students' team spirit.

(4) The course book is an excellent tool for teaching the English language through cultural studies. It comprises many new terms and extends students' active and passive vocabulary. Classroom discussions improve students' rhetoric skills as well as the organization and development of arguments. What is more, students gain self-confidence and strategies to win an argument.

To sum up, the course book *Canadian Society – A Changing Tapestry* is a universally useful publication for teaching Canadian cultural studies in a stimulating, thought-provoking and mind-teasing way. Our only reservations refer to the fact that almost no attention is paid to the Canadian political and economic system, which certainly offers many interesting issues for discussion. Nevertheless, the course book *Canadian Society – A Changing Tapestry*, in spite of being originally designed for teenage students, proved to be very useful with university students of Canadian cultural studies in Slovakia.

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