

**CREATAHOLIC**

**TEXTBOOK EVALUATION:  
CONTENT AREA READING  
LITERACY AND LEARNING  
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM**



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**Textbook to be Evaluated:** Vacca J.L. & Vacca R.T. (1996) Content Area Reading – Literacy and Learning Across the Curriculum. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Toronto: Oxford

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Two methods were utilized in the evaluation of this textbook, the Fry Method (Appendix One), and “The Checklist Approach” (Appendix Two).

The Fry Method resulted in the textbook being appropriate for grades 14-16. I believe the biggest factor in this method was the syllable count. Geographical terms are long and laborious (i.e. metropolitan, municipality) and therefore the syllable count was quite high for the three selected readings. I believe that this could explain the high grade level results from the graph as the sentence count was in alignment with a prior reading for a grade seven textbook.

The Checklist method resulted in the textbook being compatible with a grade nine advanced geography class. The summary ratings for the textbook rated it highest in “usability” and lowest in “understandability”. These results were also affected by the required vocabulary of geography courses. I would need to supplement “interest” within my teaching, and would require further assistance in “understandability”, especially for those students who score below a grade 9 reading ability.

The textbook was well organized, using simple unit plans. Concepts within the text were applied to “real-life” within the comprehension questions that were interspersed within the text. This method of interspersed questions appeals to me because the questions can be utilized to check comprehension and to develop group activities. Comprehension is my biggest concern with this textbook, but there are a large number of colourful pictures and graphs which compensate and help to explain the more difficult concepts.

According to the Grade 9 Provincial Curriculum, the “course draws on a variety of frameworks, such as the ecozone framework, and principles of physical, human, and economic geography, to explore Canada’s distinct and evolving character.” The selected textbook for this course provides no explanation, whatsoever, of an “ecozone framework”. This is the main reason for the department’s decision to utilize the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of this textbook. Physical, human and economic geography are all explored in depth within the textbook.

The course outline also states that “to develop geographic knowledge and skills that contribute to an understanding of Canada’s diversity and its role in the world.” This textbook fails to devote enough space, only 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the book to “World Contact”. In the face of expanding globalization, I would hope that textbooks would be more persistent in their coverage.

In conclusion, I feel that this textbook could be made more suitable for a Grade 9 Advanced (Regency) class, provided that extra reading materials and activities were utilized to ensure comprehension and interest from all students. I would not like to use this textbook for an applied geography class because reading levels would be more questionable, especially if ESL students were involved. It is quite evident that supplemental materials would be required.

## *Appendix Two*

### **The Fry Method**

#### **Selection one – page 204**

Sudbury officials decided the solution to their dilemma was economic diversification. The first step was to encourage the growth of local businesses that specialized in mining and to market their products and services to other countries. The second step was to develop a plan with the Federal and provincial governments to relocate a variety of service industries to the city. These included Laurentian University, several hospitals, a federal income-tax centre, and Science North, Northern Ontario's most popular tourist attraction. The influx of these and other government services to Sudbury created a more inviting atmosphere for other new industries. This reduced

Number of Words: 100  
Number of sentences: 5.10  
Number of Syllables: 193

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#### **Selection two – page 35/36**

Elevation is affected by erosion. This is the gradual wearing down of land or rock by a variety of natural forces. These include temperature, running water ice, wind, and vegetation. Figure 3.17 on page 36 describes how the forces of erosion work. In the Canadian Shield, the forces of erosion have been at work over millions of years. As the rock eroded, the Shield became lighter and mountains emerged once again. But again, the forces of erosion began to wear down the mountains. It has been at its present height for millions of years. The most spectacular environmental force in

Number of Words: 100  
Number of sentences: 8.5  
Number of Syllables: 156

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#### **Selection three – page 319**

Most regions in Canada contain many small communities or villages, a fewer number of towns, and very few large urban centers. As we have seen, the villages provide low-order products and services, the towns offer a wider range of middle-order products and services, and major urban centers provide a variety of goods and services, including specialized products. This pattern of community distribution is called it a service hierarchy. A Hierarchy ranks things in order from largest to smallest. Figure 15.14 shows a community hierarchy, with one large metropolitan center, four smaller cities, ten towns, and twenty-four villages. Figure 15.15 ranks

Number of Words: 100  
Number of sentences: 4.1  
Number of Syllables: 176

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**Average Number of Sentences:** 5.9

**Average Number of Syllables:** 175

**Approximate Grade Level:** 14-16

## *Appendix One*

Adaptation of Irwin and Davis (1980) Checklist from: Vacca J.L. & Vacca R.T. (1996) Content Area Reading – Literacy and Learning Across the Curriculum. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Toronto: Oxford

### **UNDERSTANDABILITY**

Y	1.	Are the assumptions about students' vocabulary knowledge appropriate?
N	2.	Are the assumptions about students' prior knowledge of this content area appropriate?
N	3.	Are the assumptions about students' general experiential background appropriate?
+	4.	Are new concepts explicitly linked to the students' prior knowledge or to their experiential background?
Y	5.	Does the text introduce abstract concepts by accompanying them with many concrete examples?
Y	6.	Does the text introduce new concepts one at a time, with a sufficient number of examples for each one?
Y	7.	Are definitions understandable and at a lower level of abstraction than the concept being defined?
Y	8.	Does the text avoid irrelevant details?
Y	9.	Does the text explicitly state important complex relationships (e.g. causality and conditionality) rather than always expecting the reader to infer them from the context?
N	10.	Is the readability level appropriate (according to a readability formula)?

### **USABILITY – External Organizational Aids**

Y	1.	Does the table of contents provide a clear overview of the contents of the textbook?
Y	2.	Do the chapter headings clearly define the content of the chapter?
+	3.	Do the chapter subheadings clearly break out the important concepts in the chapter?
Y	4.	Do the topic headings provide assistance in breaking the chapter into relevant parts?
Y	5.	Does the glossary contain all the technical terms in the textbook?
Y	6.	Are the graphs and charts clear and supportive of the textual material?
Y	7.	Are the illustrations well done and appropriate to the level of the students?
Y	8.	Is the print size of the text appropriate to the level of student readers?
N	9.	Are the lines of text an appropriate length for the level of the students who will use the textbook?
Y	10.	Are the important terms in italic or boldface type for easy identification by readers?
Y	11.	Are the end-of-chapter questions on literal, interpretive, and applied levels of comprehension?

### **USABILITY – Internal Organizational Aids**

+	1.	Are the concepts spaced appropriately throughout the text, rather than being too many in too short a space or too few words?
Y	2.	Is an adequate context provided to allow students to determine the meanings of technical terms?
+	3.	Are the sentence lengths appropriate to the level of students who will be using the text?
+	4.	Is the author's style (word length sentence length, sentence complexity, paragraph length, numbers of examples) appropriate to the level of students who will be using the text?
Y	5.	Does the author use a predominant structure or pattern of organization (compare-contrast, cause-effect, time order, problem-solution) within the writing to assist students in interpreting the text?

### **INTERESTABILITY**

N	1.	Are the chapter titles and subheadings concrete, meaningful, or interesting?
+	2.	Is the writing style of the text appealing to the students?
Y	3.	Are the activities motivating? Will they make the student want to pursue the topic further?
Y	4.	Does the book clearly show how what is being learned might be used by the learner in the future?
Y	5.	Are the cover, format, print size, and pictures appealing to the students?
Y	6.	Does the text provide positive and motivating models for both sexes as well as for other racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups?
Y	7.	Does the text help students generate interest as they relate experiences and develop visual and sensory images?