

**INSIDE: LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND, CONTENT BY D. MOORE, D. SHORT, A. TATUM,  
J. TINAJERO, & G. BERNEBEI**

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**Reviewed by  
Anneliese Cannon**

The idea of depending on a single curriculum to teach literacy raises doubts for some teachers. In today's educational climate of accountability, educators can feel that the creative, autonomous act of teaching is increasingly supplanted with standardized curricula that take the teacher out of teaching. An initial glance at National Geographic's extensive new series for grades 4-8 titled *Inside: Language, Literacy, and Content*—with its all inclusive approach to literacy (offering reading fluency software, assessments, workbooks phonics kits, leveled readers and a writing book) raises questions of 'teacher proofing'. However, a closer look through the series reveals that it offers valuable tools and resources that can be particularly helpful to teachers of English language learners, particularly if the teacher is given the freedom to choose from and use the resources he/she finds appropriate.

The series is co-authored by notable literacy experts like Alfred Tatum (author of *Reading for their Life* and *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males*), best known for his work on literacy for African American youth. Consequently, the emphasis on culturally relevant fiction is evident from the selection of stories—from the novel *Monster* by Walter Dean Meyers to poems by acclaimed Latino author Gary Soto. Deborah Short, co-developer of the SIOP method, is also an author. Fans of the SIOP method will note the integration of content with language goals that emphasize language function and grammar. The teacher's editions also offer a section titled 'Language Transfer Issues' that highlights syntactic and grammatical differences in other languages (including Hmong, Khmer, and African American Vernacular English) that can cause students confusion when learning English.

The program assesses and places students in a level, from pre-literate/newcomer to a 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level/advanced proficiency. The assessment software that accompanies the program gives teachers a table that features the student score and "prescriptions" or activities that can help the student either in language or reading. Starting at Level C (roughly a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading level), the program emphasizes writing, particularly the mechanical aspects such as how to structure a paragraph or revise.

For this program, the teacher most likely works with small, guided reading, writing and language groups, using multiple books depending on the group's level. The implicit challenge would be to manage students' progress across reading, writing and language and ensure that other students are engaged in meaningful work while the teacher is managing many small groups.

The strength of this program is its abundance of carefully crafted resources, which bring best practices in literacy (like guided reading, leveled readers, and a balance of phonics-based, decoding and meaning-based language activities) and language learning (setting language goals, teaching language in meaningful context) to middle school-aged students. However, the teacher would need to supplement the program to provide students authentic, process-based writing activities that give middle-grades students the creative freedom they need.

Because of its comprehensive and well-organized approach, *Inside: Language, Literacy and Content*, when combined with responsive, creative teaching, offers a great deal to educators and students alike.

#### **REVIEWER**

Anneliese Cannon is a former elementary and middle school teacher who has taught in Japan, the U.S. and Mexico. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in the department of Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in ESL and bilingual education.