

## THE BASIC OXFORD PICTURE DICTIONARY

Gramer, M.F. (2003). *The Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary, 2nd Ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. ix + 120. List price: \$14.50

Reviewed by  
Catherine Clements

Thirteen years after the publication of the popular first edition, *The Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary* has been updated with color-coded topic guides, contemporary artwork and a revised Teacher's Guide. Designed for low-beginning, literate adult ESL/EFL students, the dictionary features more than 1,200 words presented in context of lifelike, realistic tableaux. Attractive, lightweight, and affordable (\$14.50), it functions both as a standalone dictionary and as a companion to other materials in *The Basic Oxford Dictionary Program*.

The book is thoughtfully laid out and easy to use. Its utilitarian cover accurately depicts what the interior delivers: useful vocabulary for an English learner's daily life. Inside, it is divided into 12 thematic areas addressing its target audience's most immediate language needs. The book is full color throughout, illustrations are clear and informative, and type is large and legible.

Each page features 8-16 vocabulary words, which are sometimes shown alongside a single picture, but more often are incorporated into a scene. For example, "The Intersection" (p. 72-73) shows a busy street corner illustrating nouns such as "newsstand" and "curb" and verbs such as "come out of the store" and "buy groceries." Questions using some vocabulary are located at the bottom of each page.

The characters in the pictures are of all ages, ethnicities and social classes, reflective of the learners who are the target audience for this book. Themes such as A Day-Care Center (p. 90) and phrases such as "grate cheese" (p. 46) employ vocabulary needed by the audience.

However, the book leaves something to be desired in terms of cultural sensitivity. For instance, the emotion "scared" (p. 18) is illustrated by an affluent, nervous-looking Anglo couple walking down an alley with graffiti painted on it. For many learners, a graffiti-filled wall does not instill fear, and the connection between the signifier and the signified may be unclear. Also, the section "Occupations" devotes more space to blue-collar than white-collar jobs. This may be chance or a well-intentioned effort to depict jobs likely to be held by readers, but it does not suit the needs of adults who have left office jobs in their home countries and need to talk about their former jobs with prospective employers.

This dictionary is part of a package which includes student resources like a workbook and picture cards, and instructor resources such as a teacher's book, a book with reproducible activities, and an audio program with a CD or cassette tapes. Teachers can

pair the dictionary with complementary materials to create multifaceted, engaging lessons. If instructors can choose only one supplementary piece, the teacher's book is the best choice; it includes numerous quick, creative ideas for additional student practice, games, and expanding in-class activities

Even without additional supplementary materials, this is an effective dictionary, with many basic, practical nouns plus limited adjectives and adverbs (which are difficult to portray in pictures) that can easily be integrated into an existing syllabus. It admirably fulfills its dual purposes of being clear enough for beginning learners and real enough for adults. Its usefulness and affordability make it a wise purchase for ABE instructors and students.

### **Reviewer**

Catherine Clements is a graduate student in the MA-ESL Program at the University of Minnesota and teaches ESL at the Minnesota English Language Program.

*MinneWITESOL Journal*  
2008

[www.minnewitesoljournal.org](http://www.minnewitesoljournal.org)

Volume 25,