

**SAM AND PAT 1: BEGINNING READING AND WRITING BY JO ANN HARTEL,
BETSY LOWRY & WHIT HENDON**

Jo Anne Hartel, Betsy Lowry, and Whit Hendon (2006). *Sam and Pat 1: Beginning Reading and Writing*. Boston: Thomson Heinle. \$15.95

Parthy Schachter

Sam and Pat is an adult phonics series emphasizing reading, writing, and listening. Book 1 features twenty chapters, each presenting a controlled number of consonant and vowel phonemes in short passages. High-frequency sight words are featured as well. Questions follow the readings in which students fill in missing letters of a word, answer yes/no content questions, complete sentences by adding missing words, and circle words dictated by the teacher for phonemic distinction. Later chapters feature more open-ended writing exercises. Numeracy and preliteracy exercises are not included, and there is no explicit grammar presentation at any point.

The text contains suggested listening scripts to be read during sound identification exercises. Additionally, "key word cards" are provided for short vowels, consonants, and consonant digraphs, with the recommendation that the teacher tape them to note cards for in-class reference. Phonetic word grids are provided at the back for each short vowel sound; these contain pictures and include many of the book's content words.

The readings themselves are stories from the lives of Sam and Pat, a racially ambiguous married couple. Pat cooks, shops for groceries, and works as a school lunch lady. Sam studies, works in a grocery store, and fishes in his spare time with Gus the taxi driver. Despite the severely content-limiting nature of the phonics approach, the readings about Sam and Pat manage to touch on authentic issues: Pat struggles with New York cab drivers, Sam experiences a tumultuous job search, and the two make financial decisions while adhering to a tight budget. Some elements of the storyline appear to be geared toward westernized students – the couple share a kiss on a football field, for example, and Pat comically sends Sam to the bathtub when he returns smelling from a fishing trip. The text also features multiple references to and pictures of ham; this is doubtless because of the word's phonemic regularity, but its presence in the text could prove baffling, if not offensive, to some Muslim learners.

Sam and Pat claims to be "for all beginning English readers and writers," both those who are new to the Roman alphabet and those that are new to literacy in any language. The exercises, however, are clearly geared toward the latter category. Highly developed oral skills seem to be an assumption for users of this text, as many of the exercises address lexical items not presented in the reading. One exercise, for example, asks students to label a number of pictures with words containing /u/, including a truck, a puddle, and a duck (none of which have any connection to or appearance in the readings). Additionally, the book contains idiomatic expressions and complex grammatical features such as contractions while providing no explanation. This begs the question of whether

students who are not already proficient English speakers would understand what they are reading, even if they are able to sound out the words in the text.

The limited scope of the book may be its greatest weakness, making it appropriate for only a small sector of the preliteracy population - those with highly developed oral skills and no cultural objection to kissing couples and ham for Sunday dinner. The engaging storyline is its strength, though, and could provoke interesting discussions and serve as a basis for a number of other content-based classroom activities.

Reviewer

Parthy Schachter is an MA TESL student at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. She has taught ESL in the US and Israel and currently teaches Hebrew at Talmud Torah of St Paul.

MinneWITESOL Journal

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Volume 25, 2008