
Book Reviews

Finding Connections: Communication and Culture in 15 Scenes

Todd Rucynski. (2019) Kinseido. (101 pp.). ISBN: 978-4764740761. (¥2,860)

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Finding Connections includes 15 units (scenes), which offer scope for discussion by asking questions such as, “What does it mean to be Japanese or American?” (Scene 1); “How is your self-esteem?” (Scene 2), or the simpler, “What are your favorite kinds of music?” (Scene 3). In addition to this, the student is invited to consider when to ask for advice (Scene 4), how easy they are to live with (Scene 5), and first impressions (Scene 6), amongst others.

Each unit is kicked off with a simple ranking activity that gets students to place their strength of feeling on five opinions on a Likert scale before sharing their ideas. Example sentences are provided to scaffold the activity. This is then followed by a reading activity of around four short paragraphs, before being followed up by three questions related to the lesson topic. There is also video content with related questions, audio, and prompts to encourage a final discussion activity.

Overall, I found *Finding Connections* to be well laid out, the content clear and accurate, and the work readable in terms of logic, sequencing, and flow. I would hesitate to assign the book to a lower or even intermediate class, however, and feel that some of the idiomatic language would be more at home in an

advanced class where the students had perhaps spent time overseas and gained some sociocultural knowledge. Quotes from the likes of Plato, “Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything” (Scene 3), might be considered tough going for those getting to grips with basic sentence structure. For higher level students in need of a challenge, however, it is well structured and provides excellent scope and potential for engaging discussions.

With regard to the units themselves, the reading extracts are succinct enough not to be overwhelming for a 90-minute class. However, teachers may want to focus on parts of the text rather than the whole thing as, as previously mentioned, the language could be considered challenging for those not familiar with native level texts. The book discusses a wide range of issues and topics as disparate as roommates, partner type, being a detective, telling a story, and miscommunication. There is certainly a wide range of topics that are seldom found in other textbooks. One criticism I would level, however, is that the extracts all too often fall into the trap of comparing Japan with America to the exclusion of other countries. Despite this minor complaint, the comparison gets students to think about Japan from an alternative perspective and provides a good opportunity to reflect on issues such as the seniority system in Japan.

Overall, I got the impression that this would not be a book that would teach itself; some of the discussion questions could be more open-ended, and teachers would need to set their own questions for the reading extract. Despite this however, *Finding Connections* succeeds at offering a springboard for students to bring their own experiences to the table and share them with their classmates. It is well-written, includes some excellent online videos that are well-produced, and includes a good balance in terms of representation and ideas. If you are looking for a decent book for that higher-level class, *Finding Connections* could well be the right choice to make.

Author Bio

Andrew Innes has written on topics of machine translation in student work and the use of video-sharing during the pandemic. His most recent publication is The Short

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