

Choose Your Own Adventure: Mystery of the Maya.

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Choose Your Own Adventure: Mystery of the Maya

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Writer(s): Adam Murray, Miyazaki International College

Author: R. A. Montgomery

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[R. A. Montgomery (Adapted by M. Benevides). McGraw-Hill Education, 2011. pp. 80. ¥1,024. ISBN: 978-007132782

The Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) graded reader series consists of 30 titles that have been rewritten for English learners. The books have been written at three vocabulary levels to accommodate students with various levels of proficiency. Each book includes a list of key headwords.

One book, *Mystery of the Maya*, was piloted as part of the ongoing graded reading component of a first-year composition course. Students were first given the books to read independently as homework. While reading, the students were asked to take notes and to write down the story endings they experienced on a worksheet. A week later, the book was used as a part of a lesson plan. Activity Sheets which are freely downloadable from the companion website <mhe-cyoa.com>. Because of time constraints, only Activity Sheet 1 (vocabulary) and Activity Sheet 2 (guided reading). The vocabulary worksheet consists of 10 multiple-choice questions. The reading worksheet leads the students on four adventures and has two comprehension questions for each adventure.

Generally speaking, the majority of the students had a favorable impression of *Mystery of the Maya*. In addition to their interest in the book and the difficulty of the book. All of the students indicated that they would like to read another book in the series.

In addition to being engaging, CYOA books stimulate critical thinking. For example, the reader is forced to make decisions about the story. Concerning decision-making, some students commented about how thinking about the endings affected their choices. They said they thought "carefully about what will happen". Some of the students commented that the endings were "unique" and "unexpected".

students commented that they will reread several more times to find more of the endings. One student comment certainly indicates that she was engaged and had read the book more than once.

Another major advantage of the CYOA format is that it ensures that the students will repeatedly encounter the same word upwards of 30 times to learn it (Waring, 2012). Naturally, if a student rereads the story several times over a single reading. In addition to reading extensively, intensive reading activities such as rereading are useful (See Grabe worksheets, which are available on the CYOA website, are a great classroom activity).

My only criticism concerns the companion website for students and teachers. Because reading-while-listening aids (Grabe, 2008), accompanying audio is a useful resource. However, in order to listen to the audio, the students must register and need to answer a copy protection-type question before they can listen to the accompanying audio. Although I can understand the need for recordings, this could be a source of frustration for students who are poor typists. In terms of negative comments, the simplified vocabulary, and the short glossary to introduce essential vocabulary at the beginning of each book, seem to be helpful for them. One student wrote that it was “a bother” to turn to various pages in the book.

Despite the shortcomings of the companion website, I wholeheartedly recommend the books of the Choose Your Own Adventure to any university’s library graded reader collection. I hope, and expect that many more of the original 185 CYOA books will be added.

References

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