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U*X*L — A Publisher Analysis and Review

by **Denis W. Keyes**, Ph.D. (Associate Professor) and **mutindi ndunda**, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor) (School of Education, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424)

NB: When I came across the titles reviewed below, I was struck by their uniqueness. Colleges and universities have an increased interest in this growing curricular area. Educational programs must be concerned with important curricular issues. I thought this new venture was worthy of attention from our School of Education. I was not disappointed. I was fascinated by their comments and reviews as I am sure that you will be as well. — TG

The number of publishing houses devoting resources to reference materials is growing. While the availability of encyclopedic works in CD-ROMs and on the Internet has grown, the numbers of printed works do not appear to be dropping off. When publishers concentrate on printing numerous new reference works in these somewhat specialized areas, it becomes necessary to look not only at the printed work's qualities, but also at the overall mission and project quality of the publisher.

Gale Research Press, an International Thomson Publishing Company, has been producing various resources out of Detroit, Michigan for decades. The mid-nineties have seen the development of an off-shoot imprint from Gale, known as U*X*L, a reference group dedicated to exposing middle and high school youth to a wide variety of facts and knowledge. This imprint has, in the past two years, published at least nine fully edited text series that cover a wide range of topics in adequate detail and with high levels of accuracy and quality. This review will briefly cover the seven series titles. These reviews are intended to cover a basic description of each series format and content, how comprehensive each is, the likely intended audience, the publisher's success in addressing the needs of the intended audience, the organization (arrangement) of each series, and the production quality when compared to similar texts.

Introductory Remarks

The seven book series reviewed here appear to be quite adequate for their subject matter and comprehensive enough for the needs of today's youthful learners, particularly at the middle and high school level. The subject areas are widely diverse, and most of the information is covered in a well-written and interesting style that can be easily understood by most readers.

One point that should be noted: There appears to be some overlapping of subject

matter in the different series. Between several of the series, particularly those that concentrate on science and technology, the amount of overlap is considerable. The levels of readability between each of the different series do not vary so much as to require the purchase of all these science texts. Thus, potential purchasers should carefully review each one prior to making a blanket order.

Questions of cultural coverage arise out of current concerns for fairness in identifying each culture's contributions to society. The relevant difficulties noted below, particularly those of non-literary cultures, are systemic to almost all current academic endeavors — not just U*X*L's works. While it is important to identify the contributions of socially and culturally diverse groups, the authors of this review point out these shortcomings largely to caution future readers that not all scientific and technological progress comes from the Western or Oriental civilizations. Obviously, it may not be possible to include the oral traditions of the South American tribes and African "Bushmen" (now called the San People); but such omissions, albeit understandable, could certainly be noted in each of these otherwise outstanding texts.

Courtroom Drama: 120 of the World's Most Notable Trials. (1998, 0-7876-1735-0; \$79.95) Elizabeth Frost-Knappman, Edward W. Knappman, & Lisa Paddock, editors. (3 volumes)

This elaborate and well-organized three-volume set covers an unusual and uncharacteristically wide array of basic court actions, as chronologically diverse as from Socrates to Timothy McVeigh, and subject-wise, from Joan of Arc to Alfred Dreyfus. Each case is initially identified in a basic description of the details, including the defendant, date, alleged crime, place of action, verdict, sentence, and more. Even the longest case coverage appears to be less than 9 pages, and each appears to do a superlative job of covering the most relevant information currently available.

Organizationally, the volumes are set up in a somewhat confusing montage covering 13 separate subject areas, such as assassinations, court martials, religious crimes, and treason. However, there is an index which helps the reader understand and find the information desired more quickly. Vocabulary words are offered in a "Words to Know" section, and sidebars allow for the quick determination of information basic to the case.

Given the broadness of the proposed categories, the set appears to be quite

comprehensive for most beginners in the basics of legal proceedings, such as high school and perhaps undergraduate students. Given this, it would appear that the publisher has succeeded quite well in identifying the most important cases, and covering the information in such a way that students will gain adequate understanding of each case's importance.

While covering this information chronologically might have made it easier to peruse, the organization does not detract from the value of the work. The illustrations are helpful, if not terribly artistic or numerous, and those that are included do add to the interest of the content. Print quality is considered average, but the text itself is quite readable.

Encyclopedia of Science. (1998, 0-7876-1716-4; \$250) David E. Newton, Rob Nagel, & Bridget Travers, editors (9 volumes)

This nine-volume set covers the basics of science and covers more than 500 different fields and entries, outlined in "clear and non technical" language. Alphabetically organized, most entries are between 300 and 500 words, making their length easily readable. The articles cover a wide variety of subjects, all directly related to science, as well as including vocabulary words of "commonly used terms," sidebars of facts, cross-referencing, photographs and illustrations, and reference citations and resources. Entries are also categorized in the beginning of each volume by scientific field, thus allowing the reader quick access to each volume's basic coverage.

The subjects covered appear to be reasonably comprehensive, although they may not go into details necessary for more than the most basic, high-school research paper. Nevertheless, the simplicity and ease with which one could use this series would recommend it to the teacher and the pupil. For higher learning purposes, one should look elsewhere.

Headings are bold and set apart, which gives the reader quick awareness of not only the subject matter itself, but also of "Words to Know" which are included in the subject entry, not in the beginning of the text. Most noteworthy in each volume are the "Where to Learn More" section, carefully organized

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by subject area and set up to cover a broad array of knowledge. Students will find this information invaluable — if they can find it, hidden as it is in the back of each volume, but prior to the photo credits and indexes.

Production quality appears to be quite good, and compares favorably to other, perhaps more widely used encyclopedias, such as *Britannica* or *World Book*. However, the potential user should keep the limited coverage of subject matter in mind. These books are not going to be useful above a certain level of sophistication, particularly for students any older than typical high school aged adolescents.

Explorers and Discoverers: From Alexander the Great to Sally Ride. (1995, 0-8103-9787-8; \$81) Peggy Saari & Daniel B. Baker, editors (volumes 1-4); (1997 0-7876-1990-6 \$34) Nancy Pear & Daniel B. Baker, editors. (volume 5)

These short biographies of over 200 renowned explorers (both men and women) elaborate on the lives of those who have significantly contributed to the knowledge of the earth and universe. Biographies are arranged in alphabetical order over five separate volumes. The biographies, covering individuals ranging from H.M.S. Titanic "discoverer" Robert Ballard to Louis Leakey and his family, are quite detailed and presented in a clear and easy-to-read format. There are also illustrations and maps that provide geographic details of specific journeys. The print is large, thus enabling younger children to gain insight and knowledge from these books.

Each volume has a generic preface and introduction. The introduction highlights the achievements of some of the explorers. Each volume concludes with a chronology of exploration by region, a list of explorers by place of birth and a cumulative index. Quite elaborate, each biography is at least two and half pages long. The information is adequately comprehensive for middle school-aged and/or high school-aged students. Additionally, these texts are also adequate for most basic reference needs, such as those seeking initial biographical information for possible teaching purposes.

As previously stated, this series appears to be most appropriate for middle and/or high school-aged students. Middle and high school teachers may also wish to use these volumes as reference materials. However, though not considered a significant problem, the publishers and authors do not specify the intended audience. If the intended audience is middle school or high school students, the publishers appear to have succeeded in meeting their needs. These volumes are durable, hard covered, and appear to be well bound, with a visu-

ally engaging and colorful cover. These reviewers especially liked the page-setup sidebar arrangement.

Among the *Explorers-Discoverers* series' strength are the diversity of the explorers and discoverers, and its engaging and easy-to-read format. The biographies include explorers and discovers of both European and non-European descent, highlighting the diversity of those who have made world history. The inclusion of women is seen as important because this information helps the learner-reader to realize that women were, or are, not all home-makers. The series attempts to identify some of the major contributions of women in history. However, most of the discoverers and explorers appear to have been from "literary" communities, or those that emphasized writing. One might ask what were the contributions of other cultures, such as those in Africa, who did not keep journals — whose histories were oral? It may be time for the majority culture to investigate the existence and need for a chronological and comprehensive oral history of the African continent. However, this is clearly beyond the scope of this review.

The language of "discovering" and "discovering" can be quite problematic. For example, technically, Columbus did not "discover" America, as Speke and Grant did not "discover" the origins of River Nile. Naturally, these places existed prior to these discovers, and were often part of other cultures long before their European "discovery." They were however, the first Europeans to see these places. Acknowledging these facts in the introduction to these texts might be of some help in crediting native cultures. Despite this, the information presented is important, well-written and extremely interesting.

Parents Aren't Supposed to Like It: Rock & Other Pop Musicians of the 1990's (1998, 0-7876-1731-8; \$69) David, P. Bianco, editor. (3 volumes)

Parents Aren't Supposed to Like It: Rock & Other Pop Musicians of the 1990's contains more than 135 biographical and critical entries on various bands and musicians from a wide range of musical tastes and genres. These include grunge, rap, traditional rock and roll, folk, heavy metal, British pop, ska, art rock, techno, rhythm & blues, and more. The volumes are arranged by general musical categories, and include portraits and black and white photos of the musicians for most entries.

The information presented is elaborate, highlighting the strengths and accomplishments, as well as listing the recognitions and awards these individual artists or groups have earned. The volumes also identify further resources and references, including several Web sites, for those seeking further information on each entry.

Again, the publishers do not specify the audience. Nevertheless, this information is appropriate for a large cross-section of readership. This includes students from middle school onwards, teachers and anyone interested in contemporary music, and goes considerably beyond the basics of strictly lyrical information. The volumes give information that rarely accompanies an artist's music. Given the wide array of information presented and the potential import to those interested in gaining such information, the publishers have succeeded in meeting the needs of the reading public.

The volumes are organized by general musical categories with an overview of each category preceding the alphabetically arranged

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profiles of musicians in that genre. Again, portraits and other black and white photos of the musicians accompany most entries.

Information presented in this series is quite elaborate, and should help individuals to get a clear picture of who and what the artist or group is about, including their goals, achievements and philosophical leanings. Such detailed information as is presented in these volumes is rarely available to the general consumer, and is noteworthy.

Science & Technology Breakthroughs — *From the Wheel to the World Wide Web* (1998: 0-7876-1927-2; \$63) Leonard C. Bruno. (2 volumes)

Science and Technology Breakthroughs, a two-volume reference series, presents an elaborate account of the milestones in the history of science and technology. It provides about 1,300 paragraph-length entries. Entries are arranged chronologically, from ancient times to the present, according to twelve separate fields of study, including agriculture, astronomy, biology, chemistry, communications, earth sciences, energy, power systems and weaponry, medicine, mathematics, physics and transportation. Both volumes also include additional features such as basic vocabulary, entitled "Words to Know," clearly identified sidebars with guiding notes, cross references, 150 photos and a section for further reading references and resources.

The information presented is adequate for reference purposes for students in middle school/high school. Arranged in chronological order by subject, each volume has a paragraph "Readers guide," which is a summary of the content.

The scientific and technological entries listed in **Science and Technology Breakthroughs** are well-written and informative. Adequate information is provided to the needs of typical teen-aged students. Additionally, students are provided with further references which can be sought for additional details. The series encourages browsing as well as helping students with their homework. The "Words to Know" section contains a helpful list of definitions, and it is suggested that such a series would likely be valuable to the middle or high-school teacher of science, math, and/or other related subjects.

Science Fact Finder (1998, 0-7876-1727-X; \$79.95) Phillis Englebert, editor. (3 volumes)

A three-volume series of well-organized and non-technical information on science,

these books are probably among the best of the U*X*L offerings covered here. While probably more geared for younger learners (possibly late elementary, but probably more for middle and early high school-aged students), the series is divided into three categories, each volume covering one area. These areas include the Natural World (Volume One), the Physical World (Volume Two) and the Technological World (Volume Three). The facts that are offered in this series are fun and interesting, the kind of book that children and youths would look to not only for basic information on a skill or subject area, but also for leisure reading of interesting content.

Somewhat regrettably, the organization of these texts is, again, slightly confusing at first. Set up similarly to the *Courtroom Drama* series, **Science Fact Finder** contains 19 subject-arranged chapters, such as "Chemistry & Physics," "Cars, Boats, Planes & Trains," "Mathematics, Numbers & Computers," and "Time, Weights & Measures."

The "Further Readings" section (found in the early part of each of these volumes) is extensive and impressive. Students will find valuable cross-references and resources to guide them in further studies. Additionally, each volume has a cumulative index. Illustrations and photos are not numerous, but again, what ones there are can be described as useful and complementary to the text. There is a helpful index that can guide the reader to the exact information desired.

Texts are hardbound with larger font

print for younger eyes. Teachers might find this series a useful addition to the classroom, and librarians, particularly in the middle and high schools, would find it useful in the library collection.

Women's Firsts: Milestones in Women's History (1998, 0-7876-0653-7; \$63) Peggy Saari & Tim & Susan Gall, editors (2 volumes)

Women's Firsts: Milestones in Women's History provides information on over 1,000 milestones involving women around the world, from early-recorded history to the present. Each volume has five chapters, focusing on specific themes, such as Activism, the Arts, Business, Education, Government, Media, Professions, Religion, Science and Technology, and Sports. There are over 140 illustrations, a timeline of events, a "words to know" section and a cumulative index in each volume.

While each biography is only about a paragraph long, at the end of each entry the authors give the source of the information for details, thus allowing further research for those who desire such. Middle school and high school teachers can use these volumes as reference material. Again, the pub-

lishers/the authors do not specify the intended audience. However, if the audience are middle school or high school students, the publishers have succeeded in meeting their needs.

The themes for each volume are arranged in alphabetical order. Each volume, hardbound and well printed, has a paragraph entitled "Reader's guide," which gives the reader a summary of the content.

The strength of the **Women's Firsts** series is found in the different women whose contributions are documented here. As stated, the source/reference for each description is provided just after each description, helpful for the reader who wants more indepth information on particular women.

The editors note that they dealt with sources critically and honestly, in an effort to present the most representative and accurate list of firsts by women possible. Once again, however, the background evidence had to be written. While clearly written information is important, it may also serve to exclude women from other cultures whose most significant achievements are not recorded in writing. These volumes appear to largely reflect the achievements of white women from North America, and may indicate a cultural blindness that should not exist in academia. One simple remedy for this situation might include a brief statement in the forward of the text that indicates cultural limitations reflected in these volumes. Another might be to include editors who have a wider or broader experience in various cultural backgrounds.

Eileen Sutter Interview from page 39

does the future of publishing hold? What changes or new developments would you like to see?

ES: I believe in the renaissance of the book — still inexpensive to buy, portable, never requires an 800 number for technical assistance, smells good, and still works even if you drop it. For many kinds of reference questions, electronic resources can't be beat, but for reading anything longer than a paragraph, please pass me the printed volume.

I also foresee a rosy future for electronic publishing. The Web has made dramatic changes in what can be affordably offered to a wide audience, and once Internet 2 technology is up and running, the possibilities will increase exponentially. With the number of competitive electronic reference products now being offered, some of which seem more focused on entertainment than on education, I think the role of the librarian as a qualified judge of the good vs. the merely showy will ensure that the cream will rise. There are excellent electronic resources out there, and certainly many more to come — just wait until you see the online version of *The Dictionary of Art*!