
Brown, Joan L. and Carmen Martín Gaité.
***Conversaciones creadoras.* 3rd edition.**

New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. Includes: In-text Audio CDs, Student companion Website (www.college.hmco.com/students). Instructor resources include: Instructor's HM ClassPrep CD and companion Website (www.college.hmco.com/instructors). ISBN: 0-618-48107-9.

What if your passport were a bit tattered and you unexpectedly found yourself negotiating your entry through Immigration in Madrid? Or you were watching the national soccer championship with your host family and the correct sports terms eluded you? These scenarios, and many other communicative conflicts and doubts, unfolded for my students during our summer program in Málaga, Spain. Therefore, it was very fitting, indeed, that I was reviewing *Conversaciones creadoras* (henceforth *CC*) while directing our program there. Far too often students will ace a written test or memorize a great presentation stateside, but later fail to thrive

linguistically, and therefore socially and culturally, when immersed in the target culture. While there is no substitute for study abroad, *CC* does its very best to replicate the immersion experience — especially as this pertains to interpersonal communication based upon conflict — within the static space of the classroom. My overall evaluation of *CC* is extremely positive. From its wealth of role-play scenarios, to vocabulary that “works,” to culturally rich contexts and activities, *CC* should be your next conversation textbook (and an absolute must if you are preparing students for a study abroad experience).

Based on national standards behind the 5 Cs approach, *CC* asks students to be active learners in a twofold way. First, they must participate in role play, as well as in paired and group activities, throughout the semester. Second, they must be responsible for their own learning, as described in the introductory “Learning Strategies” section. I should note, too, that *CC* is geared towards the mid-intermediate through advanced ACTFL levels.

Each chapter is divided into carefully designed sections so that the 5 Cs are never mutually exclusive categories. An engaging cultural reading on discrete topics such as tourism, travel, sports, family, health, and the like, opens each chapter. The first reading mentions that, as a tourist destination, Spain is the third most visited country in the world. Given that many of our students will participate in a trip or study abroad program there, it makes sense to include ample information on this country, as *CC* does. Follow-up activities include comprehension questions and Internet activities related to the topic at hand. These activities and additional suggestions can be found on the Student Companion Website. My personal favorites are comparing Ebay España with Ebay in the U.S., and searching for the best (and worst!) apartment rentals in Santiago, Chile.

The material then moves into vocabulary acquisition by providing a basic and manageable list with corresponding activities. Vocabulary practice continues throughout, and a longer *Vocabulario útil* list closes each chapter. The activities often are quite creative and provide plenty of variety from one chapter to the next. One activity asks students to sit in a circle and verbally recall what others in the group bought at the market that day, with each student adding his or her own product to the mix. A perfect fit for a section on buying and selling.

With vocabulary and context setting the stage, *CC* next offers what is perhaps its most distinctive aspect: the *Conversación creadora*. Each one is authored by world-renowned Spanish writer Carmen Martín Gaité and presents an authentic situation that often centers on a contextualized conflict (a stolen purse, a lost reservation, a flat tire). The dialogue remains open-ended so that the student may speculate further on possible scenarios for closure during the post-listening activities. The audio CDs dramatize the dialogue twice: once without pauses, and a second time with pauses for structured practice. The *Conversaciones* present entertaining and convincing slices of life from the Hispanic world. Moreover, they convey a very universal human element through believable characters like bored teenagers, flirtatious truck drivers, and nervous travelers. As these dialogues provide a wealth of cultural content, they also build an effective bridge between cultures.

The grammar sections strategically follow the *Conversaciones*, so that explanations and examples refer to the dialogues and cultural readings. Common trou-

ble areas, such as imperative forms and the subjunctive mood, are described in Spanish with two or three activities provided for practice thereafter. The ClassPrep CD contains answers for these and all other cloze-ended exercises. The grammar explanations are concise, intelligible, and accurate. I was pleasantly surprised, for example, to see that the grammar segment for *gustar* rightly acknowledges the first- and second-person usage of the verb.

The remainder of each chapter is dedicated entirely to interactive scenarios, role plays, native-speaker interviews for listening comprehension, and exposure to realia. An Instructor Companion Website offers suggestions for how best to manage the scenario-based dynamic produced by these sections. Students in the *Escenas* portion of each chapter, or what may be described as kind of conversational capstone activity, form pairs (or groups of three) in order to act out the conflict described. The *Escenas* are explained in English so that students cannot simply repeat the words on the page. From conflicts as varied as watching a bullfight to how to invest a million dollars inherited from a wealthy aunt, these paired activities adeptly call for application and synthesis for their successful implementation.

The *Más actividades creadoras* section reinforces and recycles the material through additional paired work, group work, all-class discussions, and individual reflection. New to this edition, a series of persuasive drawings motivates students to invent stories, and the “Maps and Documents” segments offer a glimpse of realia in the form of an airline schedule or a subway map, for example. The native speaker interviews on the audio CDs expose students to accents from around the Spanish-speaking world. The questions eliciting these interviews make for appealing listening, given their student-centered focus.

Conversaciones creadoras recreates the complex daily experiences of living in another country and using a second language. This textbook does not, however, tediously check off the 5 Cs from chapter to chapter in a conceptually dry way. Rather, it weaves them in and out of each section and textual component holistically and authentically. Instead of reaching one uninspiring consensus after another, your students will be engrossed in believable, realistic conflicts as they converse, advise, inquire, negotiate, convince, assist, persuade and, more than likely, greatly improve their proficiencies in multiple linguistic and cultural realms.

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