
Conner, John and Cathy Folts. *Breaking the Spanish Barrier*.

Groton, MA: Breaking the Barrier, Inc., 2007. Level One Beginner Textbook: Teacher's Edition, ISBN 097128173-4, pp. 304, Student Edition ISBN 097128172-6. Level Two Intermediate Textbook: Teacher's Edition, ISBN: 097128179-3, pp. 370, Student Edition ISBN 097128178-5. Level Three, Four, AP Advanced Textbook: Teacher's Edition ISBN 097128171-8, pp. 366. Student Edition ISBN 097128170-X. All of the textbooks, both teacher and student editions, are \$32.50. The following items are available for the level one and two textbooks: Answer Key Booklet (\$15.00); Teacher Test Packet (\$20.00); Electronic version of Teacher Tests on Microsoft Word Editable Disc (\$30.00); Double Audio CD set (\$20.00). The advanced level textbook has all of the aforementioned items except the Double Audio CD set. For orders and further information, contact: Breaking the Barrier, Inc., 63 Shirley Road, Groton, MA 01450; phone: 1-866-862-7325 (toll free); fax: 1-978-448-1237; e-mail: info@tobreak.com; Website: www.tobreak.com.

All teachers, no matter which methodological approach they use in the classroom, want their students to be able to communicate effectively and to do so with grammatical accuracy. A valuable resource to attain such a goal in the Spanish classroom is the *Breaking the Spanish Barrier* three-part series. Updated yearly in order to keep the current events "current," the series has a consistent and straightforward format. This reviewer particularly liked the page layout: good-sized font with enough open space for student notes and eye-catching graphics (for example, in the Level One Textbook, the "boot" verbs have a uniquely designed boot superimposed on the stem-changing verb chart).

The textbook for each level of the *Breaking the Spanish Barrier* series consists of twelve chapters, verb charts, a Spanish-English dictionary, an English-Spanish dictionary, and an index. With the exception of the preliminary "First Steps" chapter in the Level One Textbook, each of the twelve chapters presents thematic vocabulary, introduces grammar concepts with sample sentences highlighting structures, and provides multiple practice exercises, a different Spanish-speaking country map with timely national and cultural facts, and a complete practice test. Within the chapters, a graphic symbol of a CD indicates to students when they should use the Audio CD set to practice pronunciation. The Teacher's Editions supply all the answers for all Student Edition exercises on the same pages where the exercises appear. The Teacher Test Packet, available in both hard copy and on editable disc, has a four-page test for each chapter. The Answer Key Booklet is a set of reproducible masters so individual students are able to verify answers. The publisher's Website furnishes paired or group activities to accompany each book, as well as additional practice exercises. Also provided free of charge to adopters is an e-mail quarterly newsletter in which John Conner gives

teaching tips. Potential adopters should also note that Conner is a regular contributor to *Think Spanish*, a monthly magazine for teachers.

The preliminary “First Steps” chapter in the Level One Textbook distinguishes itself from the other twelve chapters in the book by focusing mainly on getting the ball rolling. It includes “Práctica de Pronunciación” and initial vocabulary building exercises as well as speaking activities. Building upon the preliminary chapter, the remaining twelve chapters cover essential theme-based vocabulary (for example, people, transportation, and body parts), useful idiomatic expressions, and concise explanations for parts of speech. Especially appealing in the Level One Textbook are the action-packed dialogues that are found throughout the text. Grammar topics covered in the Level One Textbook are: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, formal commands, and the present, preterit, imperfect, and progressive verb tenses.

The Level Two Textbook builds on the base established by the Level One Textbook by reviewing the present, preterit, and imperfect verb tenses. New grammar topics covered in the Level Two Textbook are: the future, conditional, present perfect, and pluperfect verb tenses, the present subjunctive, the present perfect subjunctive, the indefinite, demonstrative, and reflexive pronouns, informal commands, and comparisons. The Level Three, Four, AP Textbook, ideally suited for third or fourth year of high school or the 200-300 level of college/university Spanish programs, once again reviews the present, preterit, and imperfect verb tenses but also carefully examines the perfect, future, and conditional verb tenses and covers the subjunctive mood in greater detail. In the early chapters of the Level Three, Four, AP Textbook, the vocabulary lessons have a special focus on adjectives. Other newly introduced topics include comparatives, the passive voice, “if” clauses, punctuation, and uses of the infinitive. Both the Level Two and Level Three, Four, AP Textbooks include a special appendix on the conjugations of the verbs “hablar,” “comer,” and “vivir.”

Truly, the *Breaking the Spanish Barrier* series addresses all the rules of Spanish grammar that a student needs to know. It is appropriate for both secondary and post-secondary students of Spanish but also provides solid preparation for the Advanced Placement, SAT II, International Baccalaureate, and college/university placement examinations. In addition, students are exposed to relevant and contemporary information on the Spanish-speaking world. Most importantly, however, the *Breaking the Spanish Barrier* series does not present the rules of Spanish grammar in a dry or staid fashion.

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Publisher’s Response

We are deeply grateful for Professor Angelini’s thoughtful and engaging review of the *Breaking the Barrier* texts. We are particularly pleased that she concurs that our series “addresses all the rules of Spanish grammar that a student

needs to know.” We have always felt that the fastest path to true fluency is built upon a rock-solid understanding of the structures of a language. In her conclusion, Professor Angelini states: “Most importantly, the “Breaking the Barrier” series does not present the rules of Spanish grammar in a dry or staid fashion.” We concur. Grammar has too often been presented in dull, mind-numbing ways. Why not have your students enjoy the journey while mastering the fundamentals of the one of the world’s most beautiful languages?

John Conner

Author and Series Editor

Breaking the Barrier, Inc.