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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SCIENCE

Chemistry for Everyone: A Helpful Primer for High School or College Chemistry

Suzanne Lahl
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For many people, just hearing the word “chemistry” will make them shudder. Images of high school teachers in lab coats, droning on about the periodic table, is enough to turn students away before they even give themselves a chance to learn about this very important branch of science. It is very important, however, and learning its natural mysteries can be both fascinating and fun.

Chemistry for Everyone is a primer for students facing chemistry courses in high school or college. Suzanne Lahl, who holds a Ph.D in organic chemistry, intends for her book to be read before students enter the classroom. In this way, she hopes they can be better prepared to deal with the large amount of information that is likely coming their way. She states: “I’m hoping you have a different experience than most students (including myself), who learn each concept separately, do the problems and take the tests without seeing the big picture until years later, if at all.”

The book is well-organized and well-written. Lahl covers key concepts like the atom, scientific notation, unit conversions, chemical reactions and solubility. The reader will not struggle to follow the text. The author makes excellent use of examples and provides review questions at the end of each chapter that highlight the main points. The book does contain some very complex topics, so most students will still need to sincerely apply themselves to understand everything that is being taught. The detailed glossary and index, as well as a brief bibliography, a key to abbreviations, and resources for further reading, will all prove helpful.

Certain, hands-on readers may wish that Lahl included one additional component: the directions for experiments that could be conducted at home to demonstrate some of the concepts. For many students, lab experiments are the most enjoyable and most helpful learning moments. Lahl does not offer any recommendations for such experiments, and this may make the book less useful for some readers. Additionally, the accompanying illustrations and drawings are very basic. They do little to help illuminate the author’s major points.

Ultimately, this book is definitely worth reading. Chemistry does not have to be daunting or boring. The big picture overview Lahl provides will, no doubt, enhance the class experience for any reader who makes the effort to read it.

CATHERINE THURESON (November 1, 2010)

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