Clarion Review

Education

Own These Words!
Noah Bhody
978-1-4343-4079-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

Having a good working vocabulary is a skill that more and more people seem to lack in these days of instant messaging and blogging. But knowing the right words and how to use them properly can help a person sound more educated and even get them more respect or success in their careers.

Noah Bhody uses this premise as the basis for his book *Own These Words!* which includes 250 sets of twenty vocabulary words and their definitions. The idea is that a reader would focus on learning one list a day until the book has been completed.

Bhody says he complied the list of words used in the book from various sources and that these 5000 words set people who have good vocabularies apart from those who do not. Most relatively well-read adults will find they know many of these words and may find themselves disputing the definitions given or at least noting they are much too simplistic.

For example his definition of “autism” is “withdrawal from reality with acceptance of fantasy instead” which makes it seem that autistic children choose to be that way and that it’s not a real disease. He defines “antediluvian” as something ancient or antiquated when its more precise meaning is something that happened before the biblical flood.

This lack of precision will bother some readers such as those who would like literal translations of foreign words and phrases or even an acknowledgment of where the words originally came from. Translations of phrases like “*nolo contendere*” and “*caveat emptor*” would make the meaning of those phrases clearer and stating that “*mañana*” (presented in the book without the tilde) is Spanish adds a level of comprehension that is more valuable than simply knowing that the word means tomorrow.

Notes from the author's "assistant editor" which readers must infer is his (now deceased) Persian cat are meant to add levity but really make it that much more difficult to take the book seriously.

This book is no substitute for regularly reading books with a dictionary by your side but it could be useful for children who are trying to improve their vocabularies studying for spelling bees or learning vocabulary in preparation for a standardized test with a vocabulary section.

Older readers who have done some recreational reading or who received a decent education will find that they know most of the words and the others are probably ones they would never use. As the cat notes you could use the word "farrago" instead of "mixture" or "hodgepodge" but why would you want to?

Sarah White