
Book Review

CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]

Shigeru Sasajima, Miyako Nakaya, Miyuki Yukita, Yoko Yamato, Michele Joel. Sanshusha (2024) (94 pages). ISBN: 978-4-384-33522-4 Price: \$14.30. (2,100 yen)

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It can be challenging to find a geography textbook that is engaging for both English language students and teachers. *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]* is both illustrative and thought provoking for English language learners. While the textbook has a few drawbacks, overall it is an enjoyable way for students to explore the globe, as it contains detailed maps and fascinating images from regions around the world, and it approaches English language learning through cultural, historical, and geographic lenses.

CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised] was written for intermediate level Japanese learners of English in a university context. It was published in 2023 and revised in 2024 with easier to read maps and colour photos. This textbook uses a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to language learning that involves using a combination of language and content with the goal of improving thinking and communication skills as well as promoting intercultural awareness (Sasajima, 2025), which is valuable for Japanese university students who want to broaden their horizons and participate more actively in the global society. In addition to the textbook, there is a teacher's manual that provides answers, scripts, translations, discussion questions, and optional tests. It

is available for download on the Sanshusha website (CLIL, n.d.) with a login and password, or a physical copy can be obtained upon request. Listening materials are available online and can be downloaded or streamed from the Sanshusha website.

This textbook is divided into 12 units called Areas, each focusing on a geographic region, such as “The Middle East,” “Europe,” and “Africa.” The layout is well-structured, as you virtually travel around the world learning about each region. Each Area includes a large map with clearly marked national borders and cities as well as bodies of water, mountain ranges, and deserts. The range of countries and features—many unfamiliar to students—engages curiosity and promotes peer learning through meaningful classroom discussion. The full-colour maps are great because they allow students to more clearly see the relief of mountain ranges and distinguish rivers from borders.

Each Area begins with a short listening exercise, for example, minimal pair exercises such as this one: “(Pilots / Pirates) once controlled the Caribbean.” Though simple, these tasks refocus attention on listening while introducing regional facts. Learners then discuss six colour photos, including images of architecture, natural sights, and cultural items (e.g., the Area on Russia features Saint Basil’s Cathedral, Matryoshka dolls, and Piroshki). The variety motivates visual learners and connects content to real places, though the short model dialogues often feel mismatched with the photos.

Two reading passages per Area cover a range of historical, cultural, or social topics. Examples of reading-based discussion questions include, “If you visited Rio de Janeiro, what would you do?” and “What are favelas?” Unfortunately, the readings do not provide warm-up vocabulary. For example, reading comprehension could be improved if words like *reincarnation*, *sacred*, and *purify* are learned prior to reading about the importance of the River Ganges for Hindus. Readings often contain difficult-to-read numbers and measurements (e.g., “13 million km², 37 times the size of Japan”), often requiring extra teacher support.

Each Area has an information table about a country with a short passage for students to fill in the blanks, followed by a similar blank table for students

to complete based on their own research of another country in this area. There is also a history table that students complete using the words provided. This was somewhat challenging for students as it describes events of which students may have little background knowledge. Fortunately, there is Japanese language support next to each blank, making it easier for students to deal with challenging terms like *fear and terror* and *arms race*.

CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised] is a visually attractive textbook and is appealing to teachers and students who are curious about the world and want to combine English language learning with global content. There is a heavy focus on reading in this textbook, which is why I chose it for a class focused on reading. However, it is possible to employ all four language skills, as students must read texts and check their comprehension, listen to passages and fill in the blanks, and write about another country.

A challenge of this book is the lack of examples, especially dialogues that can be easily adapted and model answers to discussion questions. *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]* is an immersive textbook with specialised vocabulary in each Area, meaning students are exposed to content-specific language as they explore regions of the world. While there are two reading passages in each unit, I found this to be excessive for one lesson. Moreover, there is a lack of scaffolding in this textbook regarding dialogues. While visual aids were great and provided images for students to reference, I felt that more sentence starters and word banks would have been helpful for discussion questions and reading passages.

Content-based learning is stimulating for language learners and helps students see a practical use of the language (Marcu, 2022). *CLIL Seeing the World Through Maps [Revised]* is ideal for students and teachers who are interested in world geography, history, or culture. Overall, this book is unique in that it delivers a new venture for learning and practicing English with a global focus. I believe it is appropriate for university students because it is structured, provides a variety of activities, and offers a unique foundation for learning about the world through English.

References

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Received: August 26, 2025

Accepted: November 9, 2025