**9c Page 111 READING TEXT**

Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

The art of the deal

By Andrew McCarthy

I’m in Marrakech, the bustling heart of Morocco at the base of the Atlas Mountains, with my son, Sam. He’s eight. We’ve come here with Mohamed, a friend who owns a shop in our neighbourhood in New York. We’re regular customers at Mohamed’s shop, where Sam can often be found negotiating with his friend. When they’re not bargaining, they’re chatting about swords, or camels or the desert. ‘You need to come to Morocco, to Marrakech,’ Mohamed told me. ‘I’ll show you around and teach Sam how to really get a bargain!’ So here we are.

We meet up with Mohamed over a cup of mint tea at a table outside the tiny Café ben Youssef, deep in the medina, the old city of Marrakech. We’re sitting in an area bordering the exotic stalls that make the *suq* – marketplace. Vendors with carts offer freshly squeezed orange juice, others sell dates or figs. Nearby are the back-alley workshops that supply the goods to this world-famous market.

Later, as we stroll around, Mohamed introduces us to weavers and olive sellers, tile makers and rug merchants. He also begins the first of his bargaining tutorials for Sam.

‘Everything in Morocco is open to negotiation, Sam. When you hear a price, the first thing you say is “Too much – *bezaf*” and then walk away.’

‘But what if I like it?’

‘When you see something you like, maybe a lamp, you ask about something else instead. Then, as you walk out, you ask, “And how much is that lamp?” as though you’d just noticed it and aren’t really that interested in it.’

We turn a corner and are greeted with the scent of sweet-smelling orange blossoms. ‘Don’t always give an offer. Make them continue to lower the price. Oh, and wear something Moroccan,’ Mohamed continues as we enter a fairly large shop. Most of the stalls in Marrakech specialise in one thing, but not this one. Decorative and lethal-looking swords hang beside soft hand-dyed fabrics; large camel bones covered in writing sit beside massive copper lamps. It is here that Sam spots his first ornate box. ‘Look, a treasure chest!’ It’s made of wood, and painted red and gold. He opens the lid, then closes it. ‘Cool.’ Then he spots a tall, cobalt blue, tear-shaped vial –an old perfume bottle. ‘Four hundred dirham,’ the shopkeeper pronounces. Fifty dollars. Sam says nothing. Whether he’s too shy or is practising Mohamed’s bargaining technique, I can’t tell. He eventually agrees to pay 200 dirham, about $24. I’d say the bottle is worth $10, at most. Clearly, his negotiating skills need a bit of work. ‘Just to get started, Dad,’ Sam reassures me as he pays for the bottle.

Life

Life

We spend a few days sightseeing around Marrakech, but Sam really has eyes for only one thing. Late one afternoon, we return to the shop where Sam saw the treasure chest. ‘You have returned. Very good.’ The shopkeeper opens his arms. He places the chest on the floor. Sam opens the lid. He runs his fingers over it.

The shopkeeper speaks. ‘Give me 2,500.

Sam shakes his eight-year-old head. ‘Eight hundred.’

‘I like your *babouches*,’ says the merchant. Sam’s wearing a pair of bright yellow, Moroccan men’s slippers. He ignores the comment.

‘You’re very good. I’ll take 1,800 dirham,’ the merchant announces.

‘One thousand.’

Both are silent. Neither blinks. What happens next happens fast.

‘Fifteen hundred, and it’s yours.’

‘Twelve hundred.’

‘Thirteen hundred.’

‘Yes!’

The man sticks out his hand. Sam grabs it. The deal is done. Mohamed will be proud.

blink (v) /blɪŋk/ open and close your eyes very quickly

merchant (n) /ˈmɜːtʃənt/ someone who sells things

vendor (n) /ˈvendə/ someone who sells things

workshop (n) /ˈwɜːkˌʃɒp/ a place where people make things

Life