



Reviewed work:

*Real Reading: Creating an Authentic Reading Experience 1, 2, 3, 4<sup>1</sup>*. (2011). Lynn Bonesteel, David Wiese, & Alice Savage. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education ESL. Pp. 211. ISBN-13: 9780136066545. \$43.93

Reviewed by  
Pakize Uludag and CeAnn Myers  
Northern Arizona University  
United States

<http://www.pearsonlongman.com>

Most researchers consider reading to be one of the most essential language skills for gaining access to new information as well as improving other language skills and abilities, both in a first and second language (Anderson, 2008; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In order to promote successful reading comprehension in the second language classroom, choosing the right textbook is imperative. *Real Reading*, which aims to provide an authentic reading experience for learners of English, is a four-level intensive reading series that is especially created to engage learners with the content in a meaningful way. The series features an appropriate balance of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency activities, which results in a total reading experience (Nation, 2008). The books in the series include the following components: (a) MP3 Audio CD-ROM with recordings of all vocabulary and readings, (b) online Teacher's Manual which consist of a model lesson plan and answer key, and (c) tests that provide online skill questions for each unit.

The presentation and the formatting of a textbook are important and can have an impact on the usefulness of the text. The *Real Reading* series has an attractive appearance and includes a variety of color photographs and boxes that distinguish the reading passages from other aspects of the book. Students will find the books interesting and easy to navigate. The books are formatted in such a way to ensure usability, with each unit and chapter clearly marked and the topic easily located. The series is formatted consistently; each book contains 12 units which focus on different themes. Units are then divided into two chapters, with one reading passage per chapter. Every unit is comprised of reading skills, vocabulary skills, and a vocabulary learning strategy, with details provided in the "Scope and Sequence" table at the beginning of each book.

Chapters are structured around the pre-, during-, and post-reading framework. Sections found in each chapter are titled “Prepare to Read,” “Read,” “Read Again,” “Discuss,” and “Vocabulary Skill Building.” At the end of each unit a different vocabulary learning strategy is provided. Each book also contains four fluency practice activities which aim to develop students’ reading rate.

The texts in the *Real Reading* series involve vocabulary taken from both general and academic high-frequency word lists. According to Nation (2004), the series consultant, second language teachers should provide vocabulary instruction in reading classes to ensure that students achieve the reading goal. Throughout the four books learners can practice parts of speech, roots and affixation, and common collocations to enhance their vocabulary. According to Stoller (1994) strategy training is essential for fostering both extensive and intensive reading. Examples of vocabulary learning strategies included at the end of each unit in the *Real Reading* series involve guessing meaning from the context, using a dictionary effectively, and creating and using word cards.

Another critical component of reading comprehension is fluency training. Research says that fluent reading is an interactive, strategic, cognitive, linguistic, and purposeful process, thus fluent readers are accurate and fast in their ability to recognize words, and in their use of strategies for comprehension (Crawford, 2005; Grabe, 2010; Jeon, 2009). As previously mentioned, the *Real Reading* series includes fluency practice activities which give students opportunities for calculating their reading times in addition to checking their comprehension. Students can record their reading times and comprehension scores on fluency charts, which is a great means for self-monitoring.

Including interesting and relevant topics is critical for learner engagement and motivation. One of the authors’ goals was to interest students through a wide range of thoughtful content. Topics in this book include sports figures, folktales, the science of laughter, and outdoor survival. The authors’ hopes are that students will enjoy the topics so much that they will be encouraged to read extensively. When content is of interest and relevant to their lives, students will be more motivated to learn language and to become successful readers. According to Guthrie and Davies (2003) if students are interested in the topic, they are much more likely to invest the necessary time and effort to read in a second language. The *Real Reading* series accomplishes this goal by including a variety of topics that are appropriate for adults while also being thought-provoking. From *Real Reading 1* to *Real Reading 4* the reading passages increase in length and vocabulary becomes more difficult.

Teaching content through a variety of stimulating activities also is a key factor for success (Evan, Hartshorn, & Anderson, 2010). While the information covered in each chapter is new, it is presented in a fixed pattern which helps students easily process the new information. The pre-, during-, and post-formatting allows students to activate their schemata for the reading, read for a specific purpose, and utilize the knowledge gained from the reading to reinforce the skills learned (Stoller, 1994). In addition to activities in the books, teachers can find supplemental materials online at <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/readreading> in the teacher’s manuals. The combination of interesting content and activities presented in a predictable pattern will, in our view, provide students who use the *Real Reading* series with a motivating yet balanced reading experience.

Although the series is very well-designed in general, there are a few aspects that could be improved. While each book includes a helpful CD-ROM with vocabulary information and an audio of the reading passages, there is no description as to how or when to use it. One improvement that could be implemented is to include activities that utilize the CD-ROM, as this would help both students and instructors benefit from this supplementary material. A second criticism is that, while the books advertise an “authentic reading experience,” there is no reference to the source of the authentic material. Instructors hoping to use real-world materials may assume that the texts are authentic while, in reality, they may be simplified or adapted.

Overall, the *Real Reading* series provides a wide variety of interesting and pedagogically relevant features. The books contain exciting content that will motivate students and contain skills and strategies that are necessary for successful reading. The appearance and layout of the series are attractive with easy navigation that should enhance the readers’ overall learning experience. One of the most beneficial aspects of using this series is the focus on high-frequency vocabulary. Students who use this book will have extensive experience with words that they will encounter in real-life contexts. The *Real Reading* series should prepare students to become successful readers by using interesting content and developing reading and vocabulary skills.

### Notes

1. Page number and ISBN information for book 2, 3, and 4:  
Book 2: Pp. 238. ISBN-10: 0136066941, ISBN-13: 9780136066941.  
Book 3: Pp. 272. ISBN-10: 0137444466, ISBN-13: 978013614464.  
Book 4: Pp. 282. ISBN-10: 013502773X, ISBN-13: 9780135027738.

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### **About the Reviewers**

Pakize Uludag is a second-year Master's student at Northern Arizona University, where she also teaches ESL in the Program in Intensive English. Her research interests include SLA, language assessment, grammar, and reading. E-mail: pu3@nau.edu

CeAnn Myers is a second-year Master's student at Northern Arizona University, where she also teaches ESL in the Program in Intensive English. Her interests include content-based instruction, pronunciation, and curriculum development. Email: CeAnn.Myers@nau.edu