

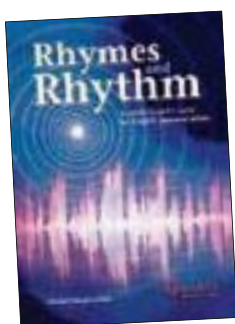
Materials reviews

Edited by Sandee Thompson

My goodness ... what an eclectic bunch of books and reviewers we have gathered this time! Four reviewers have had the opportunity to look over online readers, EAP and pronunciation materials as well as a text with Canadian songs and content. Michi has written his first review for us and trialled some of the reading materials with his students and Colleen tried out some of the material from O Canada with her class too. They were both delighted with the results. Hope you enjoy the reviews!



Sandee Thompson is a teacher trainer for CELTA and IELTS examiners. She received her MA TESL from Birmingham University and is interested in all things task based and learner focused. She currently lives in Atlantic Canada.



Rhymes and Rhythm: a Poem-Based Course for English Pronunciation

Michael Vaughan-Rees
Garnet Education, 2010
112 pages
ISBN 978 1 85064 528 4

This book offers a fun, unique way for learners to improve their English pronunciation and listening comprehension. A variety of original and engaging poems from limericks to raps are used to expose learners to the rhythm and 'music' of the English language. It provides a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of English pronunciation including stress rules, linking, elision, and assimilation in order to help learners improve both their production and understanding of natural speech. The book comes with an audio DVD and a CD-ROM, which includes teacher's notes and extra activities, as well as OHP visuals. My favourite thing about this book is the authenticity of the audio tracks, and the fact that the author emphasises 'breaking it down rather than slowing it down' in order to increase learner awareness of what really happens in the English language. Even though the audio files feature a British speaker, the accent is light enough to render the book appropriate for use in a variety of contexts globally.

Rhymes and Rhythm is designed to be taught as a course in itself, but individual activities from the book could be incorporated into any course as warm-ups or time-fillers according to the needs of the students. The book is well organised and easy to follow, with a task key included in the back. Vocabulary work is built into the course as well, although students are encouraged to focus more on the melody of the language itself rather than trying to decipher the meaning of every word in the verses. Quite a bit of metalanguage is used throughout the text, however, which learners would need to become familiar with either before or during use of this text. The book is nicely laid out with large well-spaced print, but most of the pages are filled with text and I would want to use more pictures to provide visual stimulation for my students.

Overall I think this is a lovely book that would make a great addition to any teacher's library. It demonstrates the key features of English pronunciation nicely, with interesting activities that students would find both entertaining and useful.

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Active Reading: Learning to Love Reading

<http://www.clarityenglish.com/program/activereading.php>
Clarity Language Consultants Ltd.

Before I started to explore this online application program, I had expected to have a series of reading practice tasks on the computer as its name *Active Reading* suggests; however, it didn't take long for me to realise that this program is more than just another reading series. It is more like going to an ESL school in Canada while comfortably sitting at my computer in Japan!

There are six levels in the series, from elementary to advanced, and each level consists of ten units. They all start with a video introduction recorded by an ESL teacher; this is followed by vocabulary or phrase practice and a small activity to activate the reader's interest. This is exactly what I learned to do on my CELTA course and what I do in my own classroom. Topics of the readings are very practical, mostly situations English learners encounter in their daily lives, which provides students with plenty of opportunities to use and practise what they've learned in real life.

The readings are followed by a series of comprehension questions, and then the lesson moves on to production. This is the part which varies from unit to unit. Sometimes students are expected to write essays and sometimes they are guided to websites to get information before completing a task. There are also listening and grammar practice activities after the readings.

This online 'ESL school' is incredibly practical. It keeps students' scores, checks their progress, analyses how they progressed in the unit, and at the end of each level, provides them with a certificate! This ensures learners remain motivated and are keen to move on to the next unit.

Even though I found this program very useful and helpful for English learners, there is one thing that I want to mention as a former ESL student and current ESL teacher. Each unit follows a similar pattern from the first unit of the elementary level to the last unit of the advanced level, which totals sixty lessons. This could be quite intimidating for beginner students. I think students need some kind of encouragement from a real, live teacher or from other students who are using the same program.

If I had this program at my disposal, I would create some kind of reward system to keep my students motivated over the long term. Together with the *Active Reading* materials, it would be a win-win situation!

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