

# Reactions!

Rereleased as Active Reading in 2009

## Overview

Reactions is a multi-skills program that takes reading as its starting point and focus. It is easy to install and presents the user with an uncomplicated interface that makes navigation easy. There are five skill levels, ranging from 'Late Elementary' to 'Advanced', but the titles correspond approximately to work students could expect from the start of National Curriculum Key Stage 3 through to the end of Key Stage 4. In all there are 50 units, covering a full range of reading and associated skills.

The texts, which form the basis of the units, are clearly presented and offer students the opportunity to have the texts read to them. This would assist pupils who find reading difficult and give them access to the range of activities associated with the units. The texts themselves cover all the expectations of the National Curriculum with all the 'triplets' addressed, using text styles including newspaper articles, letters, newsletters and advertisements. These are balanced by fiction texts and poetry. Students and teachers also have the opportunity to print out the texts for further use in a conventional classroom situation.

Work is marked instantly and automatically, with students inputting answers using a range of techniques including simple typing, drag and drop, anagrams and multiple choice. However, each unit also extends the simple comprehension format by offering extension work in writing and speaking and listening.

There is consistency across the package with each screen based upon a template that allows students access to the audio functions. They also have instant access to their progress as well as the opportunity to print the relevant page. In addition, there is a very useful 'Scratch Pad' for notes and interim answers.

Reactions is a useful program to support the 'Reading and Understanding' components of the National Curriculum, as well as giving students access to texts using learning styles they would not find in the conventional classroom.

## Classroom use

### Context

I used the program with two classes: a Year 9 group, who find English difficult, and a group of Year 10 high achievers.

Each of the two units I used with the Year 9 group, 'Why are You Reading' and 'Magic' from the intermediate section, was organised around a central skill or learning activity which fitted in with my own programme of study: dictionary work in the first case and synonyms in the second. They could make use of all the resources apart from the recording facility. Rather than using traditional pencil, paper and dictionary methods, I suggested that they use the built-in scratch pad and online dictionaries. This helped to reinforce their ICT skills.

The Year 10 group studied the two units from the 'Advanced' section dealing with the war poets, especially Brooke and Owen. They are studying the 'Poetry of War' for their Literature GCSE. The units catered well for some of the

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## Image



## Publisher

Clarity Language  
Consultants Ltd

## Subject

English  
Modern Foreign Languages  
Art and Design

## Key Stage

Key Stage 2 / P3 - P6  
Key Stage 3 / P7 - S2  
Key Stage 4 / S3 - S4  
Post-16 / S4 - S5

## Product Code

clar-reactions



literature-based skills, such as analysis, and, later, prompted a heated discussion on whether war is ever justified. Again, the units fitted perfectly into my own programme of study.

### **Labour saving aspects**

Once the teacher has completed initial analysis and self-training of the package, everything else is done for him/her. The whole course covers everything that a student could reasonably expect of a basic reading programme at KS3 and KS4. It should, of course, be supplemented with more traditional reading experience in preparation for examination. All of the marking is done automatically and encourages student self-assessment.

### **Learning outcomes**

Reactions encourages students to read as the questions and stimuli are presented in an attractive way. Students were enthusiastic about finding answers and showing their understanding because of the instant feedback. The outcome for the teacher is the knowledge that students have explored text at a deeper level than might be possible with conventional reading activities. Students will also have had access to a range of texts which they might expect to encounter in SATs or GCSE.

### **Student Response**

The students loved working with Reactions and not just for the initial lessons when it was new and different. After the evaluation lessons I gave them the opportunity to explore some of the other units. All students took advantage of this and stayed on task, even when they were not given a specific focus – there was no sneaky surfing the internet while I wasn't looking! I made the program available during lunchtime and four students came to 'play' on it in their own free time. They genuinely saw it as good fun! The thing that they seemed to enjoy and appreciate most was the opportunity to see their marks immediately and perform adjustments in order to get their progress report looking good.

### **Assessment and pupil tracking opportunities**

Individual student assessment is built into the software. The additional 'Results Manager' program from Clarity, which allows the teacher to have an overview of student progress, can supplement this.

Pupils can track their own progress and, if required, bring up the 'Progress' page which will also allow the teacher to track progress at a glance.

### **Special needs**

The working area is attractive and easy to use, with clear use of text and graphics to assist those with visual disabilities. The most valuable asset is the supportive audio capability, which speaks the text and assignment requirements in clear, neutral English. Access to answers, and the opportunity to reassess answers immediately, also helps with understanding. The feedback on some of the sections gave a more detailed explanation of how answers were arrived at. For the gifted and talented, each unit has extension activities which broaden learning and discussion beyond the text itself.

### **Content and design**

#### **Schemes of work supported**

Reactions is divided into five sections of study each including 10 activities. At the lower end of the skills range are 'Late Elementary' and 'Lower Intermediate'. These equate to the early and middle years at KS3. 'Intermediate' corresponds approximately with the end of KS3. 'Upper Intermediate' and 'Advanced' correspond with the levels of skill expected at KS4. In all units, the teaching objectives of the English (Reading) Programme of Study are addressed, including 'Reading for Meaning', 'The Author's Craft', 'Research and Study Skills', as well as the opportunity for research. As with all effective reading texts Reactions takes a holistic approach to the study of English and uses the texts to prompt and promote the other skills of writing and speaking and listening. ICT skills are innate within the program. All in all, Reactions provides a very useful resource to enhance reading skills in any scheme of work at KS3 and KS4.



### **Literacy**

Reactions dovetails well with the Literacy Strategy at word, sentence and text levels. There is significant emphasis upon dictionary work and vocabulary within most of the units.

### Design and navigation

The program is delightfully easy to use. The presentation is child-friendly, business-like and practical. Younger students found it approachable and even the cynical Year 10 did not feel patronised. Clarity has got a very difficult balance just right. Audio files can often be a distraction and a source of amusement but, in this case, the voices are clear and understandable with the occasional American twang accepted without comment. Registration and login procedures were straightforward and produced no problems. The menu at the beginning is easy to navigate, as is the sub-menu for the individual units. The 'What will I learn in this unit' section at the beginning of individual units is clear and useful, as are the texts and activities themselves which often use a split-screen.

Within the units navigation is intuitive with clear arrow buttons backwards and forwards across the top bar. This also contains menu, audio, marking, help and closedown buttons. The side bar contains clear and colourful links to the scratch pad, printing options, as well as the very helpful 'progress' link and 'hints' button. There is also the opportunity to record on machines with the record and microphone facilities.

All in all, Reactions is an easily navigable and attractive program for all ages and ability ranges.

### Ease of installation

Installation onto a computer suite was clean, stable and trouble-free.

### Support materials

Reactions virtually runs itself, once it is up and running, without any real need for additional support. However, there is extensive help, available online, which takes the user through all aspects of how to use the product and the various elements within it. There is also the opportunity to contact Clarity, by email, if necessary. In addition, there is a 'Hint' facility within the program itself.

### Suitable for ages

11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

### Planning

The teacher will need to explore the units thoroughly in order to incorporate Reactions into individual or class schemes of work. There is also some planning involved in installation. After that, however, the program does all the work, including the marking.

### Publisher Information

#### Clarity Language Consultants Ltd



Clarity has been developing effective educational software since 1992. We specialise in MFL and ESOL and currently have four series of language programs registered for COL. Our fifth COL program, Author Plus Online, enables teachers to create interactive activities for all subjects from Year 3 to Year 13 (see [www.AuthorPlus.com](http://www.AuthorPlus.com)). We provide lots of teacher support for all our programs!



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#### Purchasing Information

Please either send us an email directly ([info@clarity.com.hk](mailto:info@clarity.com.hk)) or following the below steps:

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Go to Clarity products page:

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Choose your favourite products

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There is a "Price enquiry" button on every page, click on it.

Step 4-

Fill in the form and our sale representative will send you the price list within one working day.