
Touchstone

Review by Tadayuki Suzuki

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McCarthy, M., McCarten, J., & Sandiford, H. (2004-in press). *Touchstone. Levels 1-4*. Cambridge University Press. Student's Book with Audio CD/CD-Rom, \$23 (Student Books also available in split versions A and B, \$11.50 each); Workbook, \$12, (split versions A and B, \$8.50 each); Value Pack with Student Book and Workbook, (\$25.73; Teacher's Edition \$43; Class Audio Cassettes/CDs (set of 3), \$56; Video VHS/DVD Program, \$150; Video Resource Book, \$25; Whiteboard Software, \$400; Teacher's Resource Book (price not yet set); TestCrafter, \$100.

Adult and young adult ELLs from basic to intermediate levels of proficiency will benefit from studying *Touchstone*, a four-level series focusing on speaking, listening, vocabulary, grammar, and conversation strategies. The series is especially useful for ESL and/ or EFL learners who want to develop the English language skills utilized in North America. Some conspicuous traits of this series include the selection of authentic words and usage and the emphasis on syntactic features in English. The words of the texts are selected from 700 million words collected by the Cambridge International Corpus of North American English (CICNAE), which are used daily by native speakers of English in North America.

Although many conversation texts are available, many of them unsatisfactorily emphasize discourse themes and topics. This series assumes that learners can develop more authentic language skills pertaining to semantic and structural usage of language, collocations, and discourses. The series does not merely target a narrow audience such as educated international students in order for them to gain English for Academic Purposes (EAP) skills. Rather, a variety of conversational topics such as describing a neighborhood (Unit 6 in *Touchstone 1*), talking about how to stay healthy (Unit 3, in *Touchstone 2*), talking about events in the news, and talking about errands and solving problems (Unit 7 in *Touchstone 4*) are included. Through the corpus-informed approach, learners become confident about their use of language because the language used in the series corresponds to what they frequently encounter through regular conversations and exposure to television and radio. This approach enables many ELLs to express their more abstract thoughts in various social settings in a more authentic manner.

A self-study audio CD/CD-Rom that comes with each student book provides additional listening and vocabulary practice. A supplementary workbook is a useful tool

that provides activities for learners to reinforce their reading and writing skills for each lesson. A teacher's edition provides step-by-step instructions, homework ideas, and a testing program with answer keys. Class audio CDs/cassettes, a video program, web support, and other tools such as multimedia and test creation software are also available to help teachers facilitate their instruction and maximize student learning.

Although nonnative speakers of English often possess extensive vocabulary and syntactic knowledge, they are not always familiar with connotations implied in English words or with how to combine the words in sentences. I believe that this corpus-informed *Touchstone* series may help many ELLs make significant improvement and gain confidence in their English proficiency.

About the Reviewer

Tadayuki Suzuki is an assistant professor of Literacy Education at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky. His academic interests include teaching ESL, multicultural and bilingual education, children's and adolescent literature, and teaching reading in content areas.