

## *Active Skills for Reading: Book 3*

### **Review by Nobuo Tsuda**

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*ACTIVE SKILLS FOR READING: BOOK 3.* Anderson, N.J. Boston, MA: Thomson Learning, Inc. 2003. Pp. 202, \$19.00.

*Active Skills for Reading: Book 3* is the intermediate level of a four-book series designed especially for adult ESL/EFL students. The author states, "Reading should be an active, fluent process that involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning." The main purposes of this book are to help the learner activate prior knowledge, cultivate vocabulary, improve comprehension, and develop reading fluency.

There are sixteen units in the book and each unit consists of two chapters, both containing a passage related to the topic of the unit. Chapters begin with "Getting Ready" or "Before You Read," which contain photos or illustrations and some discussion questions. The purpose of these sections is to activate students' prior or background knowledge concerning the unit topic. For example, the topic of Unit 1, Chapter 2 is procrastination. One of the discussion questions asks, "Do you ever put off studying or doing assignments, or do you usually do things right away?" (p. 7). Most of the topics are up-to-date and most likely relevant to the life experiences of many ESL/EFL students. In addition, discussion questions are very stimulating and are designed to build students' interest in reading the passage. "Getting Ready" or "Before You Read" is followed by other activities: "Reading Skill," "Reading Comprehension," "Vocabulary Comprehension," "Vocabulary Skills," "Think About It" and "What Do You Think?"

The "Reading Skill" section of the first chapter of each unit introduces a variety of reading strategies such as predicting, scanning, skimming for the main idea and identifying meaning from context. In the second chapter of each unit, the "Reading Skill" section focuses on reading fluency by increasing reading speed and comprehension. The author believes that when students consciously learn and practice specific strategies, they will eventually acquire essential skills.

One of my favorite aspects of the book is that the author handles vocabulary very well in the "Vocabulary Comprehension" and "Vocabulary Skill" sections. The book features very useful and appropriate vocabulary related to the unit topic. In addition,

the book focuses on various strategies such as recognizing the meaning of words in context, using synonyms, using prefixes and suffixes, and using the context to infer the meaning of vocabulary. When I actually tried out these strategies in class, students seemed to learn the target vocabulary very naturally. Although some exercises were a little challenging for some students, they seemed to feel a sense of accomplishment after learning the new vocabulary. The only problem in the vocabulary section is a minor typographical one: Some students found it difficult to distinguish which words were italicized in the vocabulary lists.

The last section of each unit, “Think About It” or “What Do You Think?” consists of a few discussion questions. The author says, “The aim of this activity is to get students to share their ideas and opinions about reading topics, and to discuss the issues raised in the reading in more detail.” I believe this section enables students to think more deeply about the topic, share their opinions, use some of the new vocabulary they have learned in the chapter, and feel a sense of closure.

In my opinion, the book is well organized and the strategies are explicitly stated so that students find it easy to identify the objectives of each chapter. However, since the organization is the same throughout the book, some students may find lessons monotonous after they go through several chapters. In order to avoid repeating the pattern of classroom activities, teachers may want to bring in supplemental materials or do something creative to maintain students’ interest in the book. Nevertheless, I think that *Active Skills for Reading: Book Three* is one of the best reading textbooks available for ESL/EFL intermediate students who want to develop their vocabulary as well as enhance their reading comprehension, skills, and fluency.

### About the Reviewer

*Nobuo Tsuda is an Associate Professor of the Institute for Language and Culture at Konan University, Kobe, Japan. His main interests are L2 reading and curriculum evaluation.*