
Oxford Bookworms Library Series

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When our program decided to strengthen the extensive reading materials available to English as an International Language (EIL) students here at Brigham Young University–Hawaii, we researched multiple graded-reader series. One of the series that we chose to include in our collection is the third edition of the Oxford Bookworms Library.

This series is designed for adults (including young adults) and includes both fiction and nonfiction titles, the latter going by the label *Factfiles*. Fiction titles are categorized into themes such as Thriller & Suspense, Crime & Mystery, Fantasy & Horror, Human Interest, and Classics. The primary audience is second-language learners of British English; the series uses British punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. For example, “tea” is used to describe a meal, and “cookies” are defined as “the American word for biscuits.” This may be a minor concern for some English as a Second Language (ESL) programs outside of the United Kingdom; however, our program encourages exposure to a variety of world Englishes since the majority of our students are more likely to use English with non-native English speakers than with native English speakers after graduation. Including a series with these subtle features of British English helps our students increase their exposure to global forms of English.

The British origin of the series is also seen through its inclusion of numerous classic titles that are adaptations of historical British literature, including *Wuthering Heights*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Vanity Fair*. There are a few historical American novels as well, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Scarlet Letter*, but the majority of the Classics titles are by British authors. Because of this we are especially pleased with the recent addition to the Bookworms Library—World Stories. These titles are short-story collections from various global regions including Asia, Oceania, and Africa.

Because our students will be using English primarily with other nonnative English speakers, we see value in assigning literature from countries beyond the United States and the United Kingdom. This broadened experience will help students better understand the cultures and values of other countries.

Another notable feature is the recent additions to the Bookworms Library Factfiles titles. These nonfiction books are about a variety of international topics including rainforests, chocolate, and information technology. These additions increase the appeal of the Bookworms offerings to teachers and students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs outside of the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Bookworms Library consists of seven graded levels: an introductory starter level followed by levels 1–6. The vocabulary in each level ranges from 250 headwords at the starter level to 2500 at level 6. By way of reference, Oxford lists the starter level as corresponding to the Common European Framework (CEF) levels A1–A2 and level 6 as corresponding to the CEF levels B2–C1. Not only is vocabulary range controlled at each level, but so is grammatical complexity. For example, one text at the starter level tells the story of a dangerous sailing trip using only the simple present verb tense (with the exception of two instances in which present continuous is used). As the levels increase, a greater range of verb tenses and clauses are added. This careful attention to both vocabulary and grammatical complexity ensures that the library offers books that fit the needs of beginning- to advanced-level learners.

The books themselves have been updated with clean, glossy covers featuring either a full-color photograph or an illustration. Some books, including the Factfiles, are also filled with high-quality photographs on semigloss pages. The majority of fiction titles, however, are printed on standard matte paper with black and white illustrations. The starter fiction titles are also printed on semigloss pages with full-color illustrations, but it should be noted that some of these illustrations are cartoonish in nature and may be off-putting to an adult audience. All titles are pocket size; the fiction titles are 22 cm by 15 cm, and the Factfiles are slightly taller at 24 cm by

15 cm. A glossary of content-specific vocabulary can be found at the end of each text.

Each title also comes with before-, during-, and after-reading activities, which are located at the end of each book. Examples of before-reading activities include questions about the topic or cover photo to encourage readers to make predictions about the content or plot of the text. Many of the during-reading activities involve comprehension questions about plot elements or content details. After-reading activities include crossword puzzles (that use vocabulary from the book), sequence of events exercises, character-matching quizzes (that use quotes or personal descriptions), gap-filling exercises, group discussion questions, and much more. These activities can be enjoyable for independent readers and can also be used in a classroom setting where all of the students read the same title. However, we would have preferred that the before-reading questions be located at the beginning of the text instead of the end.

Further resources can be found on the Oxford Bookworms Library website (<https://elt.oup.com/teachers/bookworms>) and include reading comprehension tests (available in PDF as well as editable DOC file formats) with answer keys and additional reading comprehension practice exercises. These online resources can be photocopied and used in classroom activities. Access to these resources requires site registration, which is free. Also of particular interest to teachers and learners is the Oxford Bookworms level tests (offered in both web-based and iOS app versions); this collection of tests (two at each Bookworms level) includes gap-filling activities that help learners determine which Bookworms level is most appropriate for their current reading level. A learner selects a test corresponding to his or her expected level, and upon submission, the learner can determine whether his or her current level is appropriate, too easy (in which case the learner should take the next level test), or too difficult (in which case the learner should take a lower-level test). Since each test only takes a few minutes, this is a quick method that teachers and learners can use to locate the appropriate materials.

Users can also elect to purchase audio versions of many of the texts, a feature that makes the library useful for extensive listening or as a tool

for increasing reading rate. The rate of speech in the audio files is appropriate for the level, with starter audio files being read at a slow, comfortable speed. Additionally, some titles are available in app and e-book format. Our institution has not explored these options, but we are curious to learn more about how they might support our online extensive reading and listening programs.

In all, the Oxford Bookworms Library offers a remarkable range in titles for young adult and adult learners. The expanding number of books and topic areas makes the collection appealing to both ESL and EFL audiences, and the inclusion of both fiction and nonfiction titles enables programs to use the texts for both extensive reading practice and strategic reading purposes. Institutions can build a collection that meets their needs from a library of over 200 titles. Here at BYU–Hawaii, the Oxford titles join our growing collection of ESL readers, much to the delight of our students and teachers.

About the Reviewers

Aubrey Bronson, Ellen Bunker, Courtney Hinton, and Robb McCol-lum are instructors in the English as an International Language program at Brigham Young University–Hawaii (BYUH). They recently evaluated a variety of reading materials for use in the program’s extensive reading curriculum. They worked together with Kierah Thurgood, a TESOL BA student, who works as a teaching assistant in the English Language Teaching and Learning Department at BYUH.