

Pasternack, M. & Wrangell, E. (2007). *Well Read 4: Skills and Strategies for Reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. xiii + 194. List price: \$25.50

Reviewed by  
Julie Sivula Reiter

*Well Read 4* is the final textbook in a series that Oxford has published to present and reinforce reading skills and vocabulary strategies. Designed for students at the high-intermediate to low-advanced level, this book is chock full of authentic material from both British and American magazines, newspapers, academic sources and online texts.

The book is thoughtfully and consistently organized. Each of its eight chapters revolves around an interesting central theme—The Science of Love, Strange Phenomenon, Ethics in Science, to name a few—and each presents four texts related to that theme. Each individual text is imbedded in a lesson of eight sections, starting with interest generation and pre-reading activities, progressing through various multiple-choice and more open-ended reading activities, and concluding with post-reading discussion prompts. Its simple cover reflects its linear organization, and the text is tastefully enhanced with numerous pertinent photographs, a variety of graphics, and even a *New Yorker* cartoon.

Certain useful reading skills are promoted for all the texts—such as active previewing and reading comprehension—while other skills take center stage throughout a particular chapter, like identifying paragraph topics, understanding supporting detail, skimming, and reading critically. The strategies presented, however, are more limited than one might believe at first glance, and essentially boil down to two: skipping words and phrases, and understanding vocabulary from context. In fact, many of the vocabulary “strategies” feel more like grammar topics (describing reflexive pronouns and possessive adjectives, for example) and mere definitions (defining phrasal verbs and idioms, for example). Nonetheless, the explanations and activities related to these topics, grounded in the texts presented, could prove useful in improving students’ reading despite their limited metacognitive value.

While reading is its primary focus, this book enhances the student experience by presenting engaging discussion issues and compelling writing prompts. Its philosophy is undeniably communicative and student focused; students are consistently directed to work with a partner to complete activities, demonstrate comprehension, discuss answers and provide peer feedback. In an attempt to ground itself in the twenty-first century, each chapter of the book concludes with a section entitled “Taking It Online,” encouraging students to use the internet to conduct research related to that chapter’s theme.

Content topics such as Hollywood, first dates, and cosmetics would likely appeal primarily to younger students; other topics include animal rights, eating soy, reusing and recycling, and corporate social responsibility. (Teachers interested in using this series should be aware that the content orientation toward younger students is consistent throughout. A cursory glance at *Well Read 1*, for example, reveals similar topics, including Hip Hop Music, Fashion Philosophy, and A Young Environmentalist.)

For learners falling within this target audience—perhaps college or college-bound ESL students—this book has strong potential to meet the authors’ goals of providing insights into motivating subject matter while developing reading skills. Indeed, critical evaluation and information synthesis is encouraged by the presentation of multiple texts presenting differing views on the same topic. The development of skills is enhanced by the book’s evident approach that students need not understand every word of a text in order to

navigate through it and extract its basic themes. Particular skills the book promotes—such as discriminating between fact, opinion and inference, and fine-tuning descriptions of textual main ideas and paragraph topics—could prove especially useful for college-bound students.

Each book in the *Well Read* series is accompanied by an Instructor's Pack, containing a simple answer key, a test generator CD, and a PowerPoint Teaching Tool CD. The PowerPoint CD contains a presentation for each chapter, providing electronic depictions of the book's texts and images, as well as answers to the activities, which teachers—at least those who have access to the appropriate technology—can project in the classroom.

For the right audience and context, *Well Read 4* is an effective textbook that could easily form the backbone of a communicative reading course or serve as a supplemental reading source for a course with a broader scope. Its compelling topics, authentic materials, communicative focus and useful skills presentation make it a worthwhile consideration.

### **Reviewer**

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