Review of *Ready to Read, Ready to Read Now, Ready to Read More*
By Karen Blanchard & Christine Root
White Plains, NY Pearson Longman, 2005

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Overview

The *Ready to Read* series, by Karen Blanchard and Christine Root, comprises three skills-based readers: *Get Ready to Read, Get Ready to Read Now, and Get Ready to Read More*. The series addresses the core reading skills necessary for all facets of reading, from academic reading to leisure reading, and offer “step-by-step” instruction to proficient reading comprehension through activities that continually reinforce those skills. Blanchard and Root suggest that “Proficient reading, like writing, requires a network of complex skills that can be taught, practiced, and improved,” and include activities that coincide with a wide variety of illustrative examples, such as photographs, paintings, texts, cartoons, and graphics (vii). The *Ready to Read* series attempts to engage students in an interactive journey to effective reading so that they will have the skills required for a life of reading.

Evaluation

*Get Ready to Read*

Blanchard and Root focus on the most important aspects of reading, such as finding the topic and main points, distinguishing main points from supporting points, recognizing the structure of texts, and building a strong vocabulary. They begin *Get Ready to Read* with the basics—finding the topic—and gradually move students toward subsequent skills that continue to build upon previous skills. Each chapter identifies one main skill and incorporates a variety of activities to help students understand the particular skill. The use of different activities would be helpful in addressing different learning styles because the activities give students a few ways to learn the skill instead of only one. The activities also vary in terms of presentation and content, which will help keep students interested. For example, in Chapter One, students are asked to identify the topic of a photograph, posters, emails, a city guide, and, lastly, paragraphs. The content of these activities also applies to the intended audience because activities include concepts with which students are familiar, such as current technology, travel, music, fast food, sports, and much more. So not only do the activities engage the students’ attention, but they also allow for a slow transition from “reading” a variety of media to reading paragraphs. Also included in these activities is vocabulary-building skills. Students are given vocabulary lists with words that appear in the main readings of each chapter. All of the activities are guided, meaning they direct the student to headings within the essay so that the student can more easily find the information necessary
to acquire the particular skill. Once students have become familiar with the main skill and vocabulary, they then read an essay. Following the essay, for which students have been greatly prepared, there are follow-up activities that address key points of the essay, from the main skill to vocabulary review to grammar lessons. Each chapter is organized in this fashion: identifying a skill, participating in skill-building activities, reading the essay, and completing more activities that reinforce the skills learned. This structure makes the book easy to follow and prepares students for upcoming chapters.

**Get Ready to Read Now**

While *Get Ready to Read* focuses on introducing students to basic skills and guiding them through practice activities, *Get Ready to Read Now* focuses on refining the skills already learned. Activities are now more in-depth and relative to particular readings rather than individual skill-building ones. For instance, in Chapter One, the main skill, identifying the main idea, is addressed more thoroughly and a description of topic sentences is also given. Activities include paragraphs, and while this chapter reiterates main ideas and follows the structure of the first book, there is more emphasis on reading. This structure slowly builds upon what students have already learned in *Get Ready to Read* and prepares them for much more reading to come. The structure of each chapter is similar to the first book, where students complete activities prior to reading the main essay, but the difference in *Get Ready to Read Now* is that the activities prior to the main reading focus more on refining the skill in review. It is not until after students have read the main reading that they have follow-up activities to test their skills in reading comprehension. The content of all the readings is once again appropriate for readers, including topics that are interesting, informative, and educational. For example, one essay titled, “It Happened by Accident,” discusses different products that were unintentionally developed. This type of content appeals to almost all readers, and the readings in *Get Ready to Read Now* can easily be read by any level reader. *Get Ready to Read Now* also focuses a chapter on skimming and scanning to help students learn the different ways people read to obtain certain information, which will help students become faster, more effective readers. Vocabulary lessons become more in-depth with explanations and activities that deal with prefixes and suffixes so that students can learn to identify and understand more meanings of words without having to always look them up in a dictionary. *Get Ready to Read Now* is easy-to-read because it follows a very similar structure already in place for students and slowly introduces activities to help students become independent readers.

**Get Ready to Read More**

The last book in the series, *Get Ready to Read More*, begins with a review to reiterate the main skills from *Get Ready to Read* and *Get Ready to Read Now* by emphasizing the steps readers should take before reading a text. Organized in a similar fashion to the first and second books, *Get Ready to Read More* still focuses on one main skill in each chapter, but now a majority of the readings are essays as opposed to paragraphs. Activities before readings ask students to preview the text and familiarize themselves with the vocabulary that is particular to reading, and all follow-up activities include reading and vocabulary comprehension. Most follow-up activities follow a particular pattern, where the reader must identify the main idea in each paragraph, complete a reading and vocabulary comprehension, and write a one paragraph summary of what they have read. Then students discuss what they have written with classmates. Activities like these help make students independent readers because not only are they answering questions about the text, but they are learning how to summarize, and identify, main points. Students must rely on their own comprehension in order to complete these activities, which allow them to rely less on guidance and more on ability. *Get Ready to Read*
More introduces new reading concepts, such as analyzing a text for patterns of organization, which includes lists, sequences, compare and contrast, and cause and effect. This discussion allows for students to pay more attention to how readings are arranged, and, therefore, gives them a keener eye as they continue to read. The focus of Get Ready to Read More, however, is still a more in-depth look at skills from the previous books. There are chapters that deal specifically with topics that were once just a part of another chapter, such as vocabulary or understanding an author's purpose and tone. Because the book follows a similar pattern to the previous two books, it is well-organized and easy to follow. The readings address interesting topics, and subsequent readings within chapters continue with some aspect of the other reading. For example, in Chapter Seven, the first essay titled, “Seattle: A City with a View and Worth Visiting,” is followed by the essay titled, “The Best Cities in the United States.” Students work with the same topic and are also asked to include information about their own hometowns, which helps students relate to their readings. Get Ready to Read More still guides students as they grasp their new skills while also providing them with activities that will enhance the skills they are developing.

Recommendations

The Get Ready to Read series is beneficial because the books could be used together as a series or used separately. Each book begins in a place where both old and new readers would feel comfortable and confident because the basic skills necessary for efficient reading are always reiterated in each book in the series. Blanchard and Root address a wide variety of reading skills needed for any type of reading, whether in or out of the classroom, and their Get Ready to Read series covers most of the bases. Because the books are so structured and follow a similar pattern throughout each one, most students should feel comfortable using the books. They know what to expect, especially because there is a “Scope and Sequence” grid at the beginning of each book that highlights what students will be doing in each chapter. What is lacking in the series is a way to check progress. In the first book, Get Ready to Read, the scanning activities include a progress checklist, but there are no other checklists for any other reading skills in any of the books. It would be beneficial for students to be able to keep track of their progress so that they can literally see the improvements they have been making. Another problem with the series is that while the activities remain similar and make students feel comfortable, some students might get bored with repetition. A lot of activities also include group-work, and some students are not comfortable with sharing their ideas with other people or a class. This type of activity might make students feel more anxious about reading if they also have fears about participating in certain activities. Aside from a few minor drawbacks, the Get Ready to Read series creates better readers by guiding students through the transformation. They are introduced to basic reading concepts, vocabulary, grammar, and even skills like identifying idioms, all of which help students become better, independent readers.

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