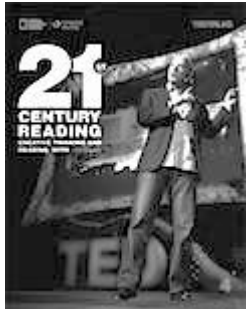


August 2016 – Volume 20, Number 2

## 21st Century Reading 4: Creative Thinking and Reading with TED Talks

21st Century Reading 4: Creative Thinking and Reading with TED Talks		
<b>Author:</b>	Laurie Blass & Jessica Williams (2015) 1st edition	
<b>Publisher:</b>	Andrew Robinson	
<b>Pages</b>	<b>ISBN-13</b>	<b>Price</b>
192 pages	9781305265721	\$51.95 USD



*21st Century Reading 4: Creative Thinking and Reading with TED Talks*, edited by Laurie Blass and Jessica Williams, is a co-created book by TED and National Geographic Learning. The book focuses on providing advanced and high intermediate English learners with authentic English reading, listening, and practicing opportunities to enrich their academic studies. Recently, TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) Talks have been widely used for educational purposes worldwide due to its availability to the public, short and inspiring messages, as well as cutting-edge topics. In the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), classroom instructors and researchers have also stated the benefits of using TED Talks as an extensive resource for English Learners (ELs) to improve their various English skills (Takaesu, 2013). This book combines reading materials and relevant TED Talks to improve learners' global awareness, reading skills, critical thinking and communicating ability, as well as creativity and collaboration capacity.

The organization of the book is straightforward and consistent. The book is divided into ten units based on different themes. There are three sections in each unit. Lesson A is a themed article with relevant reading exercises, including pre-reading, summarizing, making inferences, building vocabulary, etc. Lesson B is a corresponding TED Talk, the following exercises help learners to look into the topic in more depth by answering questions like critical thinking, summarizing, and locating key details. The last section is a Project section, which encourages learners to work in pairs and groups to investigate the topic from various perspectives. Learners are supposed to present their findings in

the end. As a result of suitable themes, logical scaffolding reading exercises, and collaborating features, this book can be used as an ideal reading textbook for advanced and high intermediate ELs in academic English programs and community-based English programs in 21st century.

The themes of this book are extensive and innovative, connecting the materials closely to current societal issues. Individual units cover themes including: science, education, business/gender, media/literature, sociology/economics, archaeology/technology, agriculture/conservation, business/technology, linguistics/psychology, and environment/economics. With this wide range of themes, learners in academic and intensive English programs are able to obtain cutting-edge content of specific fields that they intend to participate in the future. Meanwhile, with the essential content-area vocabulary exercises provided in each unit, learners who are already in the field can improve their understanding of certain topics. For community-based English programs, this book can be used as a preparation for learners who intend to enroll in academic programs in the future.

Another crucial feature of this book is the logical scaffolding reading exercises in each section. Each unit starts with a few pre-reading questions to open the topic, which allows learners to brainstorm and establish a general concept of the major topic. In Lesson A sections, reading exercises after the articles begin with main-idea questions and gradually transfer to identifying supporting details and building vocabulary exercises. This process aligned with regular classroom teaching procedures helps learners to construct a basic idea of the article first, then seeking supporting details to match major ideas, which leads to deeper comprehension of the articles. Furthermore, the building vocabulary exercises provide opportunities for instructors to teach vocabulary explicitly, which is a significant process of vocabulary learning for ELs (Folse, 2004). In addition, the vocabulary exercises are closely connected to the contexts that the articles provide; therefore, learners can refer back to the articles during vocabulary building. Compared with Lesson A sections, Lesson B sections offer more open-ended questions that require more critical thinking skills after understanding the TED Talks. Essential vocabulary and definitions are also presented as footnotes to help learners accumulate their vocabulary. What is more, in both Lesson A and Lesson B sections, visualized graphs are integrated into either articles or reading exercises. This feature helps learners meet the 21st century visual literacy requirement of dealing with information in a variety of modern formats and media.

Finally, collaborative learning is another critical emphasis of this book. The last section of each unit is a Project section, which contains mainly group work and presentations. The activities of this section offer students the opportunity to conduct research of the topic by utilizing multiple external resources. On one hand, by browsing various materials, learners are able to obtain sufficient relevant knowledge of the topic; on the other hand, during the research process, learners practice their collaborating skills, leadership ability, and team-work spirit. Meanwhile, project-based learning instruction is also suggested to be used in second language learning by researchers (Beckett & Slater, 2005). Besides the Project section, at the end of both Lesson A and Lesson B sections, the Explore More part allows learners to look deeper into the topic and the TED speakers' other ideas that are not covered in the exercise questions.

Even though this book has various advantages to be used as a textbook for ELs, instructors in certain regions with less developed Internet or media access might find difficulty in implementing all activities of the book. This may contribute to the weakness of this book. However, for most of the exercises and activities, teachers and ELs should be able to find values in using it to improve ELs' reading abilities to meet the literacy requirement of 21st century. As a community-based adult English program instructor, I am planning to include this book into my class to provide students with more up-to-date reading materials and practices. Also, the series, 21st Century Reading, has books for lower English proficiency levels which contain more simple articles as well as shorter TED Talks compared to the fourth book.

### **References**

Beckett, G. H., & Slater, T. (2005). The project framework: A tool for language, content, and skills integration. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 59(2), 108-116.

Folse, K. S. (2004). *Vocabulary myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Takaesu, A. (2013). Teaching practice: TED Talks as an extensive listening resource for EAP students. *Language Education in Asia*, 4, 150-162.

### **Reviewed by**

Xiaoli Yu  
University of Central Florida  
<[Xiaoli.yu@ucf.edu](mailto:Xiaoli.yu@ucf.edu)>

© Copyright rests with authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.