American Family and Friends 3

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Author:	Tamzin Thompson & Naomi Simmons (2015)	
Publisher:	Oxford, UK; Oxford University Press	
Pages	**ISBN**	**Price**
127 pages	978-0194816274 (Paper)	$44.70 USD (Student Book) $42.39 (Teacher Book; includes CD/DVD materials
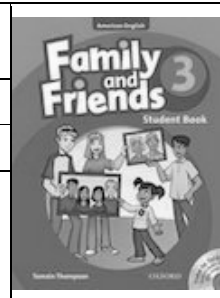
American *Family and Friends 3* (Thompson & Simmons, 2015) is third in a six-book series designed for English as a Second Language (ESL) elementary school children. The series focuses on recycling vocabulary and basic grammar concepts for students. *Family and Friends 1* begins with basic conversations and skills like counting, based on themes such as family, playing, and clothing. *Family and Friends 2* incorporates more grammar concepts, such as asking present tense questions ("Do you have…") and telling time, based on themes (e.g., school, holidays, etc.). Each book continues to increase in proficiency level and includes more complicated grammar concepts. The grammar concepts in *Family and Friends 3* include conjugations of "to be" (Unit 1), *like* + gerunds (Unit 2), possessive adjectives (Unit 3), adjectives to describe people and feelings (Units 4-5), routines and time (Unit 6), adverbs of frequency (Unit 7), countable and uncountable nouns (Unit 8), comparatives and superlatives (Unit 9), *must* for rules and obligations (Unit 10), simple past with affirmatives and negatives (Units 11-13), *wh–* questions (Unit 14), and future tense (Unit 15).

Some ESL course books are not easily transferable to different cultural contexts; however, despite their limitations, they have "considerable potential" (Rixon, 2013, p. 232) for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom when adapted correctly. Although *Family and Friends 3* is designed to be used in an ESL setting in the United States, many of the topics are relatable to an EFL context. In addition, the use of authentic language, vocabulary targeted to younger learners, and the use of technology make this book transferrable to other contexts.

Sometimes course books equip students with inauthentic language which "overprotects learners and does not prepare them for the reality of language use outside the classroom" (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 161). *Family and Friends 3* is an exception to this, as it provides depth and variety in the language it teaches. For example, students are taught that "I'm nine" is a correct response to "How old are you?" (Thompson and Simmons, 2015, p. 13), rather than the less commonly used "I am nine years old." Furthermore, *Family and Friends 3* has a section called 'Fluency

Time!' at the end of every third unit consisting of a conversation, wherein native English-speaking children model a conversation on the corresponding DVD (Oxford University Press, 2015b).

Family and Friends 3 focuses on vocabulary for younger learners, such as hobbies (Unit 2), animals (Unit 5) and daily routines (Unit 6). For example, the vocabulary in Unit 6 includes "brush my teeth," "get dressed," "have breakfast," and "walk to school" (p. 48). Whether in an ESL or an EFL context, this vocabulary is practical outside of the classroom. Conversely, some of the vocabulary in Unit 5 (pp. 40-47) is not as practical. The unit focuses on zoo animal vocabulary such as "penguin," "zebra," and "camel" (p. 40). "General" animals could be more practical for students (e.g., dog, cat, chicken), as many are common in various countries. *Family and Friends 3* provides general and practical English vocabulary for EFL students to use inside and outside the classroom. By providing vocabulary that is relevant to their daily lives, students will be more motivated to talk about themselves in the target language (Ghosn, 2015, p. 253).

Technology is crucial for current learners and teachers (Kiddle, 2013), as screens and technology are increasingly prevalent in students' daily lives. This book provides online components for both teachers and students which complement the curriculum. The teacher's website (Oxford University Press, 2018a) includes articles on teaching, as well as answer keys to student book activities. The student's website (Oxford University Press, 2018b) includes four games to practice English vocabulary, links to videos that are found on the teacher's DVD, downloadable files of chants and songs in the teacher's CD, and printable crafts and activities that connect to book themes. In addition, the teacher's book contains a CD with editable tests and worksheets (Oxford University Press, 2015a), allowing teachers the option of using technology to adapt their materials.

Although many components are transferable to an EFL setting, there are weaknesses in this book. One weakness is the lack of cultural diversity. Pulverness and Tomlinson (2013) encourage educators to avoid promoting "an implicitly superior 'target' culture" (p. 444), which is especially important for EFL students. There is minimal representation of other cultures in this book. Although the first unit includes many different characters from many countries (Thompson and Simmons, 2015, pp. 8-15), the characters are fair-skinned and have Anglicized names. One activity shows six boys, all with "American" names (Alex, Lee, Fred, Max, Jack, and Billy) (p. 18). Book characters also appear to have more money and go on vacations, and some learners in an EFL context might not be able to relate to these scenarios. This could highlight a juxtaposition of privilege and money between American culture and some EFL settings.

Another weakness of this book is its lack of scaffolding. Scaffolding leads students to understand concepts and demonstrate that knowledge (Kong, 2015). Most book activities involve matching and fill-in-the-blank, which are important beginning exercises for learners, but the materials rarely move beyond them. Although there are opportunities for students to discuss and use learned grammatical structures, this is the extent to which students can showcase their knowledge. In a real-world context, students will need to be able to create and develop their own language, and this can be accomplished through scaffolding activities.

As a whole, American *Family and Friends 3* has clear grammar concepts and themes, provides flexibility for EFL teachers to adapt materials, models authentic English, utilizes themes and topics that are relatable to children around the world, and has CD and DVD resources and

online components that support teachers and students in the growing use of technology in education. Although there are limitations, such as an under-representation of other cultures and a lack of scaffolding, this is a good choice for educators who are teaching children in an EFL context and want quality, cost-effective materials.

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