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REVIEWS

ESL ReadingSmart Alloy Multimedia Online Program

I was already excited at the prospect of reviewing the ESL ReadingSmart program, but the news that it was the first online ESL program to be adopted by the Texas Education Agency increased my expectations — I was not disappointed.

ESL ReadingSmart is a multimedia, online learning environment for ESL students and teachers from late elementary to high school. It supports classroom instruction by providing a multilevel reading program and curriculum, including writing, listening, speaking and comprehension.

The first thing that you notice about ESL ReadingSmart is how user-friendly it is. Both the Teachers section and the Students section are clearly laid out, enabling even technophobes to find their way around. The

Teachers section provides lesson plans and step-by-step instructions on how to use every lesson - invaluable assistance for the over-worked ESL teacher. There is a simple class management component, which manages the class roster and student data, and

a student assessment section where all students' scores are stored, enabling you to quickly determine who needs to work on what. There are also printable materials for use in class and links to relevant websites for more in-depth work.

The Students section is divided into four levels, for complete beginners through to advanced intermediates. Jump Start, the lowest level, can be used by students with very basic English. Its format is welcoming and exciting, without being too daunting. Great use is made of cartoons, with which all children

seem to feel comfortable.

Each level contains stories and information from international sources, which students can read or listen to. Every story has an associated vocabulary section and exercises, ranging from simple comprehension tests to more creative writing work. The material is particularly suitable for ESL students, as it is culturally appropriate — I loved the version of "La Llorona," which was beautifully written and read.

The joy of ESL ReadingSmart is that solves the two main problems of every ESL teacher — motivating students and dealing with students at different levels. It is not surprising that the program was developed by experienced teachers because so much thought has gone into solving these problems. I would recommend it without reservation.

Vera Hernandez teaches ESL in Clark County, Nevada.

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