

Tana Reiff, the author of the Hopes and Dreams readers, and Joyce Cook, a teacher in West Virginia working with Literacy Volunteers who are teaching English language learners, shared their exchange of letters with us, and we asked permission to share it with you. We feel that it speaks openly of the effectiveness and importance of these readers. Pro Lingua Associates

Hi Tana,

My name is Joyce Cook, I am an ESL teacher in Martinsburg, WV. I work with the Literacy Volunteers of the Eastern Panhandle (LVEP). We supply ESL classes for free to students that need to learn English. All the teachers, including me, are strictly volunteer. I am responsible for supplying the curriculum and training of our teachers and I also teach.

We had been teaching in a classroom but due to COVID, we had to go virtually. I found a set of Readers on ProLingua that I really wanted to use (*Hopes and Dreams Series* by Tana Reiff); however, I needed to be able to show the books online via Zoom. I emailed info@prolinguaassociates.com asking if any of these books were online and received an email back informing me of a company named Flexitome. I contacted Dave Dolan with Flexitome, and he hooked me right up! We talked back and forth and even had Zoom sessions. He was very, very helpful and got me and my students all set up using Flexitome and using the "*Hopes and Dreams Series!*"

We started with "*Neighbors*"; an excellent story and the students loved it! We just finished *Neighbors* and the students are required to write a "book report" about the book. Some of the things the students said made me want to show them to the author. (I am an author as well and always appreciate comments from students and teachers!) I asked Andy and Elise if I could get your information and they were kind enough to send it to me.

I have attached a document with several quotes from my students and a few from the teachers. I hope you will enjoy them. I also want you to know that attendance was much better once we started using these books. We have class 4 evenings each week and are doing 1 chapter/evening. We are currently reading "*Amala's Hope*". Students are asking me, "is there one from China, Vietnam, Mexico, etc.?" Wanting to read about the immigrants coming from their countries.

It is a wonderful series of books and just the level that my students need. They want to read all 12 in the series! I'm sure school will end before we get to do it this year, but next school year, we will continue to read them.

We are also using the PDF's located on ProLingua. The history and questions for each chapter are very helpful. There were just enough harder vocabulary words so that the students were learning lots of new things. Not only new vocabulary but idiomatic phrases such as "get on their feet" were all learning experiences.

Thank you so much for writing these wonderful books!

Kind regards,

Joyce A. Cook
LVEP, Berkeley County Manager

Neighbors by Tana Reiff

All the students were required to do a book report after we read each book. Here are some comments about the story and how they enjoyed reading it online via Flexitome. Please note that all the grammar, etc... was corrected in a writing exercise but I chose to leave their exact words in this paper. Hearing it from their words has more meaning, in my opinion. I also have a few teachers comments at the end. Joyce Cook

Eneyda - Nicaragua

"This is a interesting book cause talks about real cases if people who came to this country and what are they living from the beginning, why they took those decisions and their reasons, how hard is immigration here."

"I know it's hard be immigrants in other country also when we're talking other language but what is book said it's true always we can find a angels for helps us . I like this book cause it's talk about the positive things of Latin people no matter if they crossing the board they said this family was a good persons and honest and find people who They believe and also they want to see a future For their family and then for others families too. "

Liu Zhen – China

"This book let me know about the country of El Salvador, The lives of people there are very hard and dangerous."

"Ramon chose to leave his country in order to allow his family to have a better life. Encountered many difficulties during the journey, and met many people who helped him."

"He missed his wife and children all the time. Later his wife Pilar and two children also came to the United States. The family had their own restaurant and gave birth to two more children"

"The detailed explanations of the teachers helped me learn a lot of unfamiliar words. Very good story, happy ending."

"I am happy we can use flexitome to read books, it is easy."

Meiling – China

"The story has a sad beginning but it has a happy ending. The story let me know a lot of facts that I unknown. Such as in others counties, they can live safety, so cruelty. But even so, they also want to continue alive better. I think it need too much encourage to reach goal. I hope everyone in the world can be living happy, we would like a peace world!"

"Thank you flexitome for letting us have books online."

Nora – Mexico

"In this book I learned what it means to be grateful and to help others in difficult situations."

"it was really easy to read and understand. The English used in this book really helped me a lot since I learned many new words, their pronunciation, and their meaning."

"the story started very sad but ended very well as we would like it to always happen."

"the application that we are to see the books (Flexitome) is very easy to use."

Van Le – Vietnam

“The book had specific nouns, idioms, some Spanish words and some new vocabularies for me. But I enjoyed learning new things.”

“In chapter 13, Sarah said to Ramon, before Barney passed away, he had one last wish: that you and Pilar should go to Washington D.C and tell your family’s story. Because it was one step closer in keeping their families- together.”

“The story was happy and sad intertwined. But I think it was a real story happening to many families around the world.”

“The Flexitome website was easy to sign up. It was easy to use and read the books, too. I noted specific nouns, dates, and gists of every chapter while reading it. It was a good voice that read the book and even opportunity to hear the reading of the book.”

Vicki – Teacher

“I liked the story we did, and think it was good for the students. They learned a lot of new words and pronunciations.”

“I found the Flexitome website easy to use. The audio reading and the voice reading was a great feature. This helped students with pronunciation issues too.”

Vicky - Teacher

The story, *Neighbors*, was an interesting reflection of the history of and current influences on the people of Central America who immigrated to the U.S. I was able to discuss with the students how their own stories related to the characters and the plot of “Neighbors.” We also used it to facilitate discussions of immigration categories and how immigration policies change over time. Vocabulary was just enough to stretch the students’ knowledge so they could learn new phrases. The arc of the story from sad and fearful to a happy ending engaged the students emotionally. The students also enjoyed having the narrator so they could listen to the correct pronunciation.

I had no problems using Flexitome and the students had no issues either. It also ran perfectly inside the Zoom application on class days to share with the students. Look forward to reading more books about immigrants coming to America. Joyce--

Amala’s Hope by Tana Reiff

To Tana Reiff from Joyce Cook

March 17, 2021

Here are reviews on *Amala’s Hope* from several of my students. Not all wrote a review; some are busier than others. I left their words just as they wrote them to send to you, however, I did correct all issues and returned them back to the students as a learning exercise. I do see considerable improvement with their writing from the book and hopefully as we continue these exercises, they will improve more and more. These books have definitely gotten the students to talking more about their own personal experiences and there is a bond that I’ve never seen before beginning among the students, no matter what country they are from. Thanks to the author, Tana Reiff, ProLingua Associates for publishing, and Flexitome for offering them online.

I have definitely seen an improvement in my attendance since we began reading this series, "Hopes & Dreams." Joyce Cook– Teacher/Coordinator

Barbara - Peru

1. Write a sentence with the name of the book in the sentence.
 - a. The last week, our English Class were reading the book Amala's Hope by Tana Reiff, it was interesting!
2. Write a sentence or two about how easy or difficult it was to use the Flexitome web site.
 - a. The Flexitome is easy to sign up, but sometimes I forgot my password.
 - b. This web site is new for me, I never hear about that before.
3. Write a sentence or two about if you felt the book was too difficult or easy to read for your level of English.
 - a. This book was easier to read as the last book.
4. Write a sentence or two about the main characters in the book.
 - a. Amala was sad because she left free her first birds.
 - b. Baba (Amala's father) was a strong person in his family, he tried to stay them together but unfortunately, he could not bring his parents.
5. Write a sentence or two about the story.
 - a. At the beginning, it was sad because Amala's family left their country, it was difficult because they left their house, business, and the rest of the family.
 - b. I like the last chapter because it was a light of hope when all people gathered to give thanks.
6. Write a sentence or two about how the book ended.
 - a. It was nice that Amala gathered with your family and her friends in Thanksgiving, because she learned about that.

Lucy – China:

It was easy to use the Flexitone website, just from the beginning I forgot my password. It was easy to sign up, easy to use and read the books. And I make notes while reading the book online. I am very happy to hear and read this book, and I think the sound is great. Very clear and moderate speaking speed.

I felt the book had some new words, but I enjoyed learning new vocabulary. Because this is the only way for me to improve my English.

I'm glad Amala's family left the dangerous situation and came to a safe place to start a new life. This is a positive and happy book, because most people in her country have no chance to leave bad situations.

There are two of my favorite parts, One is the attitude of Amala's parents towards them when they encounter troubles. And their neighbor Marisol's help and support for them, They will also begin to give back their love to society. This is a good cycle of love!

This book has a very good ending, and I would love to hear more stories of Amala.

MeiLing – China:

About Amala Hope

It is still a real story . It also have a happy ending . I think the important point of the story is about religion . There are so many religions in the world . We need to respect each kind of re-

ligion . We have our costum for live .Everyone has freedom of religion . We live in the same country , so we also can get touch with every people friendly.

Nora - Mexico:

Amala's Hope

In this book I learned a lot about a different culture and in which many have their own opinion, but thanks to how they explain Amala's life, it helps to know more about their culture.

This book is very easy to read and understanding English is very easy to learn.

Flexitome is an easy-to-use application. I like that the books have audios because they help you understand English better. Sometimes I read the book and then I just put the audio to see if I can understand and it really helps me a lot.

Van Le – Vietnam

1. Amala's Hope is a Novel. The Najjar family was Jamal with his wife Farah, their daughter Amala, and three sons. They left Aleppo, Syria in 2011 when their country was destroyed by so much booms everyday.

2. a. It was easy to sign up to the Flexitome website.

b. It was easy to use and read the books.

c. Yes, I made notes of proper nouns, vocabularies and Idioms.

d. Yes, I liked the opportunity to hear the reading of the book.

e. Yes, the voice was good and clear

3. The book had some proper nouns in Arabic, even the religion of the Muslims, and some new vocabularies for me, but I enjoyed learning new things.

4. The Najjar family had to leave their home country while they were having a good condition of life there.

5. a. I think the book is sad and happy because, first they had to leave their house to Jordan, then they lived in the refugee camp for five year. But after they came to Texas. They had been supporting the part of a church group, even their good neighbor, Marisol ,and their community where they were living. They had to work hard and sometimes faced prejudice. But they did. Their kids adapted with their new home, new school and new friends.

b. My favorite part of the book was that everyone shared their school, their churches, their houses and anything they had to anyone needed after the hurricane happened.

6. a. Yes, I liked the ending of the book.

b. Yes, I wanted to hear more about the Najjar family and their home country now.

Joyce,

Thank you so much for writing and for sending the student and teacher reactions to *Neighbors*. You are right: an author does like to hear from readers! Even more so, it's really good to know how readers have received and digested the story and that they were able to work with the reading level.

As for a happy ending ... It was fortuitous that Archbishop Romero was sainted right at the time I was working on the new edition of *Neighbors*, and that Temporary Protected Status for Salvadorans and other Central Americans had hope for extension. Without those two events, it would have been really challenging to end the story on a hopeful note, so I'm glad several students felt satisfied with the ending.

As you may know, *Neighbors* is a new edition of the original *Who Is My Neighbor?* published in 1994. I condensed the original story into the first half of *Neighbors* and then added 26 more years of the saga, which still doesn't have a real-life ending. I have to say, it was the most excruciating research I ever did. I read a lot, watched video stories and interviews, and caught up on immigration law. I also have a Salvadoran friend who had lived through the civil war, and I observed Salvadoran and Central American restaurant workers in Maryland. Sometimes I just had to step away from the heartache and violence of the research to take a break or have a little cry. Particularly tricky was how to handle MS-13. I tried to get the point across without too much blood and gore!

So I am very, very glad to hear that your students' engagement with *Neighbors* seems to have met my hopes as a writer. A lot of credit goes to the good folks at Pro Lingua, who supported getting the story out there as part of the *Hopes and Dreams* series, and for making the books available for online instruction.

I'm writing this primarily for you as the teacher. You may share what you want with the students, but mainly please thank them for sharing their thoughts on *Neighbors* and tell them how much I admire their efforts in the hard work of learning English. I wish them peace and a good life.

And please be in touch if you work with other *Hopes and Dreams* books. *Amala's Hope* is the only completely new book in the series, written from scratch. I learned a lot by visiting the home of a Syrian refugee family here in Lancaster, PA. Members of the family told me their story, with a daughter around Amala's age doing most of the translating. It made it easier to breathe life into the book's characters.

Best to you and your good work,

Tana Reiff