AUDIOBOOKS & LITERACY
An Educator’s Guide to Utilizing Audiobooks in the Classroom

BY DR. FRANK SERAFINI

The challenges facing individuals in today’s society who are unable to read are well documented, and classroom teachers struggle every day with students who come to school unprepared to meet the challenges of literacy instruction. More and more young children have not had access to books, have not been read to regularly, and have not had exposure to the elements of written language. When the experiences that are necessary for becoming literate are absent from a child’s experiences, it is the role of the classroom teacher to provide them. In an overcrowded curriculum, teachers are being asked to do more for each student with less time and fewer resources. This is where audiobooks can play a significant role in developing reading abilities in young readers.

To educators, it often seems that the success of literacy instruction programs is measured by standardized tests. The ability to succeed on these tests depends primarily on a child’s ability to read and comprehend what has been read. With current legislation (in particular the No Child Left Behind Act) and high-stakes testing, there is a push for even greater amounts of standardized achievement testing. Effective tools for helping children learn to read are critical, and one important tool is audiobooks.

The Many Benefits of Audiobooks

- The “Milk and Honey” effect: Audiotapes help a child develop a love for reading.
- Stories can be enjoyed at home, school, or anywhere on the go.
- Students can learn to read while listening to audiobooks, improving their reading proficiency.
- Teachers and parents are encouraged to use audiobooks because they...
- Provide an opportunity for children to listen to books they may not have access to otherwise.
- Support the development of reading skills.
- Connect children to literature through audio.
- Help students develop a love for reading.

THE ROAD TO BECOMING A READER

Experts agree that reading aloud is the single most important activity for developing proficient reading skills. The road to becoming a reader begins with hearing stories read aloud. In fact, a Commission on Reading report entitled “Becoming a Nation of Readers” states, “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.” Reading aloud to students fosters the process of phonemic awareness by introducing the sounds of written language, allows access to the structure of written language, demonstrates appropriate phrasing and intonation, and provides a model of fluent reading. It serves as an introduction to the important lessons and stories of our culture and provides access to literature. Reading aloud with young children is the key to developing lifelong reading ability.

Many question what happens when there are 30 or 35 children in a classroom, or when parents work two jobs to make ends meet. Who has the time to spend reading...
to children as much as is necessary for their success as readers? Consider those parents who are unable to read to their children. In these situations, audiobooks are an important tool for exposing children to stories and developing literacy.

IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Audiobooks are an important component of a comprehensive reading framework in elementary school, middle school, and high school classrooms. Here are some examples of how teachers can use audiobooks as tools in the classroom:

READING CENTERS Audiobooks can be used in reading centers, where children are invited to listen to their favorite stories read aloud by talented performers and to follow along with a copy of the book. These shared reading experiences provide vocal support along with visual confirmation as young readers learn to match the oral language with the printed text.

BOOK BACKPACKS Audiobooks and a printed copy of the book can be included in a book backpack that students can take home and enjoy with their families. Students take turns using the book backpacks, and teachers may choose to include learning activities that relate to the story. Book backpacks involve parents and family members in a young reader’s development.

SHARING AUDIOBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM The whole class can listen to a selection together. This sharing of ideas deepens readers’ interpretations and develops their ability to comprehend and analyze literature. It also offers these research-based reading-comprehension strategies: visualizing the characters and setting of a story; Teach young readers to ask themselves questions while reading in order to monitor their understanding of the story; drawing inferences; summarizing; and predicting and anticipating events.

BOOK CLUBS Children of varying reading abilities often want to read the same book together and to discuss it in a book club. Many struggling readers would be left behind without some support for their independent reading of stories. Audiobooks help readers understand the text and discuss the book with classmates. Audiobooks level the playing field, allowing struggling readers to participate in discussions.

TEASERS Play a section from an audiobook to entice readers to read the book on their own. These book teasers can be used to motivate reluctant readers by introducing them to new stories and interesting them in stories they would not ordinarily choose for themselves.

AUDIOBOOKS AS A TOOL FOR TEACHERS An enormous number of children's books are published each year, and one great way for classroom teachers to remain current in their knowledge of children's literature is through audiobooks. Listening to books as they drive to and from school, teachers can review approximately 25 new books each school year without taking time out of their busy schedules to read them.

IN CONCLUSION

Audiobooks help children become better readers and develop a desire to read for themselves. With parents' and teachers' time at a premium, audiobooks can help readers explore new worlds through literature. If we want children to read for themselves, they must have stories read to them and must have the opportunity to discuss what they hear. There is no such thing as a child who hates to read; there are only children who have not found the right book.

About the Author

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