

THE LITERACY

Benefits of Listening

Do you want to bring life and depth to your child's reading experience? Try using audiobooks.

By Susan B. Neuman, PhD

I recently met a mom whose son loves to listen to audiobooks. She wasn't sure how these books would help build his reading skills. She wondered what he can learn from them.

Books on CD or MP3 that come with a print copy of a book are valuable for many reasons. Sure, they give your child an occasional break from reading. But they allow your child to follow along as the narrator reads. (This is how audiobooks are used for independent reading in the *READ 180* classroom.) It also enriches her multi-sensory experiences with books.

Hearing a book read helps your child see how the words on the page can come alive in a fluid, expressive way. It helps him focus on the sounds of words. It allows him to read without interruption. And it provides him with a model of fluent reading.

Audiobooks also give your child an important introduction to listening. This is a skill he must master in order to learn to read.

Many audiobooks have interesting sound effects and music. This can be motivating and fun for the listener. In addition, narrators tend to read dramatically, like actors playing roles. They emphasize reading as a source of pleasure rather than a skill.

Audiobooks have other benefits, too. They allow children to develop a sense of narrative structure. They also help them to understand language. Audiobooks help readers to grasp the ways in which language distills and conveys meaning. In addition, the different reading styles of the narrators will deepen your child's grasp of the reading process.



You don't have to spend a fortune for audiobooks. Today, many libraries have a rich collection of them. For those you may want to own, library sales and used bookstores offer some great bargains. Take books along on car trips. Or listen to them while you're in the waiting room at the dentist's office. I think you'll find that these books are truly the gift that keeps on giving.