

Listening, the 21st Century Learner, and the Common Core Standards.

A successful student has often been described as “a good listener.” Does this mean a child who makes eye contact while an adult is giving a lecture? Is it someone who remains quiet while others tell a story? Does a good listener follow multi-step directions well to execute a task?

A good listener is one who understands. A successful student can demonstrate skills based on that understanding, and apply knowledge acquired.

In the 21st century workforce, an employee is seen as good listener when they can summarize what they have been told and retell what they have learned to colleagues. A good listener takes turns in a conversation, instead of interrupting others in the group who have not yet fully presented their thoughts. Those in the workplace will be expected to reflect on what they have heard, ask for clarity in the face of a misunderstanding, as well as make connections to what is being said on team, to what was said yesterday or what has been found the latest research related to their field of expertise.

If listening is as critical in the workforce as it is the classroom, how and when is the act of listening taught?

We learn to listen by taking the time to both hear what is said, and think about what we heard.

The Common Core Standards address this need for looking at listening as a skill in and of itself, not just a behavior that enables learning to happen. The inverse is that the absence of listening is an obstacle or barrier to instruction. A more “21st Century” approach is to see silence as a distress signal. It is in the presence of spoken language that we see the products of learning.

Educator Gail Moyer asks:

What are the tools needed for children and adults to be able to acquire competency in reading? Most important, it is not about

hearing; it is a person's ability to perform specific listening tasks that relate to receiving the message accurately and clearly.

She summarizes that student who appears to have a print-based disability, such as dyslexia may actually be retelling the letter sounds she hears when she “decodes” the letter sounds in her brain incorrectly. She cites in her work, *Why Do Smart Students Struggle with Reading*, a study by The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) 2004:

*Dyslexia is **not** diagnosed or defined as a visual problem or one that necessarily involves reversals, transpositions, and mirror writing. The task of the reader is to break the code, to map symbols to sounds.*

The question of why some students struggle with reading can be answered with as many opinions as there are titles to read, but consequences of falling behind as early as grade 3 are dire, since student move from learning to read to “reading to learn” during their limited hours of classroom instruction, and audiobooks, such as those presented by Tales2Go, are successful tools to address the issue. When the barrier of accessing print to gain background knowledge is eliminated, learning is an adventure again, and not a chore.

However, when teachers are pressured to address The Common Core Standards, differentiate instruction, maintain relationships with families, and participate in professional learning communities, how will they find the time to use one more new tool?

The answer is that using audiobooks is a successful research-based solution that ties in directly with the Common Core Standards, as it opens the door to learning in other content areas.

The Common Core Standards emphasize the critical need to both listen well, and demonstrate understanding of what has been heard, in several ways.

In the area of Speaking and Listening:

- The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media.
- An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way such talk occurs, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems.

In the area of Language:

- The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases.
- The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.
- Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The Common Core Standards also address the importance of Media and Technology, stating that it is critical for 21st century learners to be able to both produce new media and provide critical analysis of media, as technology is incorporated into so many aspects of life at home and at school.

Access to audiobooks provides students with the opportunity to become more effective readers as well as more informed consumers of media and technology for learning in all content areas. For example, choosing a popular or relevant title from children's literature that motivates students to attend to a read-aloud session, (or listen an audio version), can "open the door" for a teacher to pair this title with a related book,

increasing background knowledge for students who are not reading to learn, but are still learning to read. (Dewitz, Jones, 2/2013). The researchers also note that this approach helps students to make personal book choices that are more informed, potentially developing more familiarity with authors of many titles of children's literature. It provides the classroom teacher with the autonomy to choose stories to which her students can relate-especially critical in communities where parents do not model reading at home.

The use of technology and media can seamlessly be integrated into reaching the Common Core Standards for listening and language. Strong readers are not only fluent, but read with accuracy (correct decoding), automaticity (speed in the reading of words or connect words automatically) and prosody (a rhythm and tone exhibited during oral reading) (Thoermer, Williams, 4/2012). The more exposure students have to audio versions of both fiction and non-fiction stories, read in human voices that model each of the elements of fluency described, the better equipped they are to meet the expectations of the Common Core Standards in even the earliest of grade levels, such as:

Grade 1:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.2](#) Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.3](#) Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.

Grade 2:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1a](#) Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1b](#) Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.2](#) Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.3](#) Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.4](#) Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.5](#) Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Grade 3:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.2](#) Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.4](#) Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.5](#) Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

However, the fact that these outcomes are recorded as priorities in the Common Core Standards, even when partnered with proper tools, such as audiobooks and devices on which to listen to them, is not enough to guarantee mastery and achievement at or near grade-level. The Common Core Standards rely on expert instruction from a classroom teacher.

In actuality, when reading the Standards, teachers must understand that to “read and comprehend,” or “to actively engage...with purpose and understanding,” requires the application of comprehension strategies in conjunction with metacognitive awareness and integrate these essential elements into instruction. (Hollenbeck, Saturnus, 2013).

The authors of *Mind the Comprehension – Avoiding Titanic Mistakes with the CCSS* warn that it is almost solely in the speaking and listening areas of the Common Core Standards that metacognition (asking clarifying questions when the breakdowns in listening comprehension occur) is addressed. Proficient readers employ strategies such as visualization, asking questions, making inferences, and using schema (background knowledge) to fully comprehend material that is presented in any form of media. The authors urge that teachers integrate the Common Core Standards into their work. A more appropriate approach than, “How can I help my students meet these goals,” is to consider, “How can I use these goals to support student in becoming critical readers and thinkers?”

While audiobooks are one way to promote the skills associated with speaking, listening, and language, their power exceeds the goal of checking a standard off a “to do” list for each student. While other forms of media, such as interactive e-books, also draw on the “digital native’s” comfort level using devices like tablets and smart phones, current research is as critical of the interactive e-book’s distractibility as it is supportive of the audio-only (or audio paired with print) approach to accessing a story told by a true story teller, such as the author herself. The read-aloud approach enables students to connect with the written word in a way that models fluency, connects the listener with background knowledge to which he may not have previously had the opportunity (or motivation) to acquire, and can lay down the foundation to move from being a consumer of media to a producer of media, based on his own ideas. These are critical components of living, learning and working in the 21st century, while allowing the student to exercise those higher level-thinking skills, such as visualization.

For teachers, audiobooks provide a tool that enable them to differentiate instruction, spark interest in new areas of study for even those reading print at any levels, and integrate comprehension strategy instruction, regardless of any student’s ability to decode or read with grade-level fluency. It is up to each individual school system to decide what should be taught, and up to the teacher to decide how to teach it. The Common Core Standards provide an outline, or “staircase” of increasing complexity, for the student as he strives to comprehend more and more of what a book provides.

As P. David Pearson said at the International Reading Association's Keynote address in 2008, "Today's new knowledge is tomorrow's background knowledge." The 21st Century Learner continues to move up that staircase. The Common Core Standards provide the foundation to get them a little higher, one story at a time.

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