

Rochester Area Literacy Council

Mini-Grant Proposal

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Overview

Seventh and eighth grade students in ELA AIS classes in Merton Williams Middle School, Hilton, NY, have reading levels ranging from first grade to sixth grade. Most of our students also have deficits in attention and some in decoding. We have found that even when students are matched with the right book and are immersed in literacy rich classrooms, students still need someone or something to read to/with them to improve their engagement, stamina, and aid them in accessing a text that is appealing to their maturity level. As Literacy educators who embody the teachings of Donalyn Miller, Penny Kittle, Kylene Beers, and Don Graves, we know students simply must read books they choose within their independent levels to improve their reading levels and ultimately access the world. When parent volunteers are not available to read with students, we are left with unreliable YouTube recordings of books as well as scurrying around the classroom to meet the needs of our students who are trying their best, but are not able to stay engaged in a text. We would like to build a library of digital audiobooks with streaming capabilities.

Description of Project

We would like to build a library of digital audiobooks with streaming capabilities for our building. Current audiobook productions with their high production values, stellar narrators, and a wide variety of formats, can be one avenue to reach these reluctant or struggling readers, as well as their proficient peers who are looking for more time to include reading in their busy schedules.

While our district currently has access to Bookshare, an assistive technology meant for students with an IEP or identified learning disability, the digitized, robotic narration of these texts is low production and often does not convey the prosody the author would intend. Arguably, struggling or reluctant readers need the modeling of quality prosody to inspire and engage them more than any other student. Furthermore, resources for our students who are struggling or reluctant readers who do not qualify for this particular assistive technology are virtually nonexistent in our building.

We are able to obtain audiobooks through Monroe-2 BOCES, but these come in CDs or mp3 players and are shared throughout Monroe County which limits the titles we can get and the length at which we can hold the titles. Since our students are 1:1 with Chromebooks, having the ability to stream would be more appropriate and worthwhile. The option of having our own digital audiobook library would allow us to provide books to our students without titles being on hold for long periods of time and without restrictions on the amount of time per loan.

High interest books are also limited in the Monroe County Library System. Current titles are not readily available, especially when the moment calls for having a book ready to go when you have finally hooked a reluctant reader into the idea of a book. Using the data we collect each year, we can target our purchases for the books that are frequently checked out by our students within the building and district. For example, at the moment, *The Hate U Give* has 13 audiobook copies through the Monroe County Library System. Even with that large number, our students would be placed on hold until a copy becomes available which we have found in many cases with popular teen books.

Community Connection

Once students routinely access digital audiobooks and begin to see themselves as readers, we will ask students to spark engagement among incoming seventh graders and elementary school students. We plan to do this in a variety of ways:

1. During seventh grade orientation, we will play book talks recorded by our students. We will also ask some students to book talk books in person as well as we know the power of peer engagement is boundless.
2. Our district also facilitates a day entitled *Cadet Connect*. This day connects students across all five buildings in our district and it entails middle and high school students visiting our three elementary schools. During this visit, we will prepare our middle school students to complete book talks and read aloud fluently to our elementary students. Their model for reading aloud fluently will be a culmination of listening to their audiobooks.
3. Additionally, we plan to collaborate with Parma and Greece Libraries to host teen book talk days.

Our students will have opportunities to share their positive reading experiences with younger readers while continuing to deepen their own devotion to reading.

Goals and Impact

Our digital audiobook library meets the Common Core Learning Standards and will have a powerful, enduring impact on our students.

Common Core Standards are being met:

1. Listening is part of the CCLS which can be improved through audiobooks
2. Students are asked to interpret information presented in diverse formats, which can include listening to audiobooks
3. Shared experience of listening and reading promotes discussion and critical thinking, the goal of the CCLS.

Positive impact on students:

Listening to audiobooks will improve students' literacy skills in a variety of ways:

1. Helps with processing auditory information and expand attention spans
2. Keeps reader's interest - win over reluctant readers
3. Encourages appreciation of fluency of oral reading - models fluid phrasing and cadence which assists in comprehension
4. Develops understanding of correct pronunciation of English, dialects and non-English words.
5. Provides a good reading role model and a level playing field for a wide range of learners and abilities
6. Encourages higher level critical thinking, interpretation and imagination
7. Allows access to challenging vocabulary by making it easier to understand when words can be seen and heard in context
8. Prepares multimodal learners with skills where digital literacy is redefined with every new technology. For example: electronic bookmarking, pausing, and reversing to identify key areas of texts are just a few of these skills that learners now need to be fluent in.
9. Increases sustained student engagement in a text when an adult is not present to read with them

Over the years, we have witnessed the magic and power of student access to books. Self proclaimed non-readers reluctantly read for a few months to appease their overly insistent AIS teachers and then magically one day, they begin to see themselves in their books and are hooked. Once our students, especially those with deficits in attention spans and decoding, are able to access a text they are truly interested in content-wise but no longer discouraged by the layout, through digital audiobooks, these students, too, will be hooked.

Our prediction is that once students have a quality narrator reading with them, they will continue to increase their independent reading stamina. Students will also grow from listening in ways that their own reading cannot reach. Hearing great literature on audio allows us to inhabit another culture, time, and experience, and return each listener to the most essential, the author's voice.

Timeline of Implementation

We would like to implement this program as soon as possible. This summer, during our Summer Reading and Writing Workshop, could be our first opportunity to tap into the benefits of our digital audiobook library. We would then continue into the 2018-2019 school year measuring student engagement regularly until June. We will continue this program, if successful, into the following school year and beyond.

- **July/August 2018** - four week Summer Reading and Writing Workshop
- **August 2018** - Community Connection - Orientations for 7th and 8th graders - first opportunity to share with the community and showcase our community of readers

- **September 2018-June 2019** - new school year- ELA AIS classes directly involved in circulating the digital audiobooks
- **October 2018** - Community Connection - Open House presentations and book talks - spreading the love of reading and opening digital audiobook library to all students in Merton Williams
- **December 2019** - survey students for feedback
- **December 2019** - Community Connection - Barnes and Noble, Greece location - Book Talks for the holiday purchases
- **February 2019** - Community Connection - Cadet Connect - Students in the middle school share their favorite books to readers across the five buildings within our district
- **March 2019** - survey students for feedback
- **April 2019** - Parma and Greece Library - Teen Book Talk presentations
- **May/June 2019** - RALC Sail into Summer Event Presentation - share our grant's successes and future plans
- **May/June 2019** - RALC Executive Board Meeting Presentation
- **June 2019** - survey students for feedback

Breakdown of Costs

At this moment, there is *limited* funding for digital audiobooks within our district. Digital audiobooks could be purchased, but it would be using funds designated to the library to purchase print books. The funding would *not* be used to start a foundational digital audiobook library which is what we are hoping this grant will help us establish. A digital audiobook from a outside vendor ranges from \$15 to \$65. Through BOCES, a digital audiobook ranges from \$20 - \$65. In addition, we are able to find audiobooks on sale which could lower the intimidating retail costs.

We selected titles based on student demand gathered from the data in our classroom and building libraries. We selected the titles below from a number of genres in order to help students see themselves in the books they are reading. We also wanted to help students who are “stuck” in a specific genre to experiment with new genres and having the option for high quality audiobook may make, for example, taking the leap to science fiction easier when one claims to only like to read historical fiction.

The tentative, projected total of the titles below is \$1302.26 without teacher discounts through the Follett Titlewave source out district utilizes. Additional audiobook platforms may be sourced to find titles at a cheaper price. While we recognize this total exceeds the grant's awarded amount, we are providing the realistic cost of commencing our digital audiobook library.

Memoir

**Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson \$38.00

**A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah \$29.99

Guts by Gary Paulsen \$7.34

Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhha Lai \$23.00

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika Sanchez \$63.00

**The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie \$49.99

LGBTQ

George by Alex Gino \$35.00

I'll Give You the Sun by Jandy Nelson \$14.69

We are Okay by Nina LaCour \$44.00

Release by Patrick Ness \$47.99

Will Grayson, Will Grayson by John Green \$14.69

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe by Benjamin Alire Saenz \$14.69

Science Fiction, Fantasy, Dystopian

Divergent by Veronica Roth \$64.99

Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins \$55.98

Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card \$54.99

Ready Player One by Ernest Cline \$95.00

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children by Ransom Riggs \$66.50

Historical Fiction

Between Shades of Gray by Ruta Sepetys \$57.00

Nazi Hunters by Neil Bascomb \$49.00

Refugee by Alan Gratz \$12.24

Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli \$32.30

Realistic Fiction

**Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds \$6.61

Monster by Walter Dean Myers \$20.40

When I Was the Greatest by Jason Reynolds \$50.00

American Street by Ibi Zoboi \$57.99

All American Boys - Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynolds 59.99

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas \$64.99

Goodbye Days by Jeff Zentner \$69.00

They Both Die at the End by Adam Silva \$54.99

Hello, Universe by Erin Entrada Kelly \$47.99

*audio is narrated by the author

Number of Participants

This library would be available to any student in Merton Williams Middle School. Each year we have over 600 students in the building who would have access to these books. For this grant, and to help facilitate students in using digital audiobooks, we would have students enrolled in our literacy classes participate in book clubs. These clubs would provide direct opportunities to pair digital audiobooks and print books and give students various junctures to read a variety of authors and genres. Number of participants in those classes during the school year would estimate to be 80+ students.

At Merton Williams, we also host a *Reading and Writing Workshop* for struggling readers and writers during the summer. Those student participants vary, but could be anywhere between 25 to 100 students. This workshop would be another opportunity to provide reluctant or struggling readers with an opportunity to access books of their choice through our digital audiobook library.

We expect to reach 900+ students with this established digital audiobook library. Our goal is to provide any student, grades 5-12, with a digital audiobook when the need arises.

Plan to Report Your Results

We would share our experiences through the RALC Sail into Summer or similar event in 2019. We would also present to the RALC Executive Board Meeting in May or June 2019.

Measuring Success

Please view a sample survey provided to students through this [link](#). Essentially we ask a range of engagement questions which ask students to reflect on their attitude towards reading from the beginning of the year and their attitude towards reading after accessing digital audiobooks. This survey will be wordsmithed as we discover new features and affordances to digital audiobooks. We will also conduct engagement and comprehension interviews with students periodically the way. All data will be reported to the Rochester Area Literacy Council in June 2019 and will also be shared through Sail into Summer and the RALC Executive Board Meeting referred to in the previous section.