



SOUND OFF!

The Possibilities of Podcasting

From booktalks to student projects to professional resources, Podcasts are a fun and effective way to reach and engage wider audiences. **By Anne-Marie Gordon**

Recently a group of second-graders visited our school library to work on a “holidays around the world” project. The children created pictures showing holiday customs and then created voice recordings explaining what they drew. About a week later, the class returned to the library to show off their “expert projects.” Angela went up to the computer and started her presentation. After she clicked on the screen to start the playback of her voice, I realized that she was saying something under her breath. I was close enough to hear as she recited, word for word, what she had recorded the week before.

I don’t know how long Angela will remember her presentation word for word. But the incident showed very clearly the effectiveness of student-created voice recordings. Now imagine taking things one step further and creating Podcasts in a classroom setting.

What Is a Podcast?

The term *Podcast* refers to an audio recording, linked to the Web, that can be downloaded to a personal MP3 player. The word is created from *broadcast* and from *iPod*—the wildly popular MP3 player from Apple.

Using audio with students isn’t new, of course. Teachers have used audiobooks at listening centers and recorded student voices on tape or CD for many years. Voice and music are *the* original media for teaching.

Podcasts, however, can reach a much wider audience in a time frame outside the boundaries of the school day. With a video Podcast, kids can watch as a teacher demonstrates an example of long division. Families can hear from home what students are working on at school. Other classrooms, other schools, can listen in. The whole school district, the whole state, the whole world can become potential listeners.

Another great feature about Podcasts is that they can be subscribed to using a tool called an RSS feed. Whenever you make an updated Podcast, your subscribers automatically get that information.

Why Podcast?

There are a number of excellent reasons for using Podcasting. Teacher-made audio Podcasts (and “enhanced Podcasts,” which include visuals or video clips) can be used in any content area for instruction and review. Some teachers have begun to record themselves teaching important concepts; this creates an archive of information online for kids to access when they’re stuck on a homework assignment.

Podcasts also make a superb student project. Kids—particularly primary-age kids—can often explain something aloud more fluently than they can write about it. An “interview” type of Podcast can elicit all kinds of details about a subject that kids have assimilated, but for which there is no space on that graphic organizer. The writing process can be an integral part of Podcasting, though. Creating a script for the Podcast can actually take more time than recording it. Having kids write a script, practice reading it, and perform it gives them three chances to learn the information they’re presenting.

Audio and video files can also function as assessment tools. Imagine being a classroom teacher in September who can actually *hear* how his or her students were reading in June the school year before. Some school districts have begun to create digital portfolios of students’ work because audio and video files help provide a deeper understanding of a student’s progress.

Podcasts make a great tool for communication with parents. Many educators send home a weekly newsletter with reminders, news about upcoming projects, and so on. Now imagine an audio newsletter. A child who lost a tooth on Monday can report it him- or herself; middle-school students can

explain about their Red Cross babysitter training; a high-schooler can remind families that yearbook money is due on Monday.

There's a whole slew of Podcasts aimed at the professional teacher and library media specialist. Not surprisingly, many are about technology integration, but there are plenty of content-area Podcasts as well. Podcasts such as "ESL Teacher Talk," the "Tech Teacher Podcast," and David Warlick's "Connect Learning Podcast" provide professional news on the go. (See "Web Connections" sidebar for links to these Podcasts.)

Web sites like LibriVox provide audio recordings of literature in the public domain that kids can carry around on their MP3 players. Students can create their own recordings, too. They can retell traditional tales and fables or create original works. Young storytellers and poets will enjoy hearing themselves read their creations, and so will their parents.

Booktalking, a traditional way of getting kids excited about books, gets a tech boost with Podcasting. Have a fabulous booktalk that sends kids scrambling to the shelves for the book? A Podcast is a great way to share it with a wider audience. Students can do some booktalking themselves: book review Podcasts seem to be another natural way for students to share what they know, providing an alternative to the traditional book report.

Making a Podcast with kids is just plain fun. Students enjoy an opportunity to talk about their interests and hobbies. I interviewed a third-grader last year for our "Sound Off!" Podcast

who was very knowledgeable about endangered animals—he was able to speak off the cuff for several minutes about tigers. All kids have a passion that they would be more than happy to share with the world.

But I Don't Have an iPod!

You don't need one to make a Podcast. If you have a computer, a microphone, and some free software, you can make a Podcast. While an MP3 player is a popular and useful gadget, your audience doesn't need MP3 players to listen, either: your students and their families can use the computer to play back what you've recorded. Most computers today already have software that will play back an audio file. Apple's extremely popular iTunes program is a free download. You can even put student Podcasts on audio CDs for families that don't have computers at home.

WEB CONNECTIONS

For extensive links to Podcasting software and online "how-to" help, as well as not-to-be-missed Podcasts for a K-8 audience, visit the *Book Links* Web site at <http://www.ala.org/BookLinks>

Recording Your Podcast

In order to share your podcast with the world, you need a computer connected to the Internet and a microphone. An inexpensive desktop microphone works just fine. There are some on the market for less than \$10, while a more expensive headset with an attached microphone helps cancel out background noise. One student told me she loved the headset because she felt "just like Hannah Montana" when using it.

If you use Windows, a great audio

★ "Offers something solid for children, especially those studying early American history." —Starred, *Booklist*

ANNE HUTCHINSON'S WAY

Jeannine Atkins • Pictures by Michael Dooling

"Atkins offers a beautifully produced and constructed fictionalized tale . . . told from the point of view of Susanna, Hutchinson's youngest child . . . Dooling's full-bleed illustrations are fully imagined . . . Atkins tells a complex story of faith and freedom with clarity and strength."
—*Kirkus Reviews*



\$17.00 / 978-0-374-30365-5 / Ages 8 up / Afterword

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Podcasting Resources

- *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms.* By Will Richardson. 2006. 168p. Corwin, \$61.95 (9781412927666); paper, \$27.95 (9781412927673).
- *KidCast: Podcasting in the Classroom.* By Dan Schmit. 2007. 156p. FTC, paper, \$29.95.

A Podcast with a Reading Mission

By Sonja Cole

I confess I had never heard of video Podcasts before spring 2006, so when my friend Paul Kim said, "Let's start a video blog," I didn't have a clue what he was talking about. But as soon as I caught on, I immediately thought booktalks!

Together Paul and I launched Bookwink, a video booktalk Web site for kids. Our mission is to inspire kids to read, using a medium that they already recognize and respond to: online video. The hope is that each booktalk will be a hook that gets kids excited about reading.

As a school librarian, I have seen firsthand the effectiveness of booktalks. Kids just clamor for books after hearing about them. What excites me most about creating online video is the idea that we can reach kids all over the world. To think that I can help promote reading to millions of kids instead of just 300 in one building is very motivating for me!

The audience for Bookwink is kids in grades three through eight. Book selection for each video starts with the books that are inspiring me at the moment. For example, when I read *The Death Collector* by Justin Richards (Bloomsbury, 2006), I was so excited about it that I knew I had to booktalk it. Besides the booktalk itself, kids can access Bookwink subject read-alike lists to find other books with a nineteenth-century setting, titles about zombies, or museum mysteries.

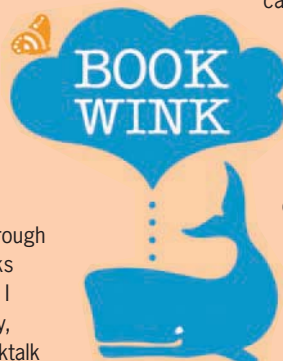
I only recommend books that I have read and truly loved. In addition, the book must speak to the librarian in me that never stops thinking about the middle-school readers I know. When I read a book and think, "Oh, Evie would love this!" or "This book would be perfect for Reed," I know I have a winner.

Most of the booktalks are filmed in my apartment with a backdrop of my current favorite books. The "book wall" changes all the time

depending on what I'm reading. We use a basic consumer camera and tripod. Shining spotlights on my face helps control the shadows, and using a microphone really improves the sound quality. If I'm going on a trip, I plan a booktalk to fit that setting. Summer vacation in Montauk, Long Island, was the natural place to shoot a "Sharks" video. And a friend's wedding in Hawaii was the perfect excuse to shoot a "Volcanoes" video.

There are definitely challenges involved in being in front of the camera. At first, I thought it would be just like booktalking in front of kids. Wrong! When I booktalk for a live audience, I don't write out what I will say. I summarize the conflict of the book, and then I can feed off the responses of an energetic audience to know if I've hooked them. When filming a video, that little camera lens gives me no energy to feed off of. Every word counts, so I spend time writing and revising my booktalks to make them as concise and exciting as possible. I also memorize them so there is nothing between me and the camera. The process has given me a newfound respect for television personalities because it is not nearly as easy as they make it look.

I would love to expand Bookwink to include video interviews with kids and authors. I would also love to include a forum for kids' reviews and discussion about the books. I hope that Bookwink will be a trusted source of book recommendations for kids, teachers, librarians, and parents. There are so many wonderful children's books being published now, and it is an exciting time to be a young reader, but the selection can also be daunting. Kids can be overwhelmed by the amount of choice. I hope that Bookwink can provide some guidance for readers looking for their next book, and also inspire reluctant readers to give reading a try.



recording and editing program is Audacity, which can be downloaded free from the Internet. Apple users have it easier (for the moment, anyway). You can use iLife's GarageBand software to record your Podcast, and iWeb to share it with the world.

Editing a Podcast

The on-screen controls in both Audacity and GarageBand resemble the buttons we're all used to from CD players and tape recorders: record, rewind, fast forward, and play. Click on the record button and start talking. Need to edit out a sneeze or a long silence? Selecting and editing works just the way it does when you're working with text: select what you want to cut by highlighting it in Audacity, or splitting and isolating the mistake in GarageBand, and then delete it. A simple, free extension to

Audacity makes it possible to save your Podcast project in a format that will play on an MP3 player like the iPod.


Publishing a Podcast

If your library already has a Web site, "publishing" is as easy as uploading the file. Listeners at home can simply double-click on the file to hear it or add it to their MP3 players. Those who use popular blogging services such as Blogger, Classblogmeister, or Edublogs can easily add Podcasts to the existing blog.

The more technically inclined can add their Podcasts to the Podcast section of the iTunes Store by creating an RSS feed for their new Podcast show. Blogging sites like Classblogmeister have built-in Podcast support. Alternatively, there are nice tools at Ponyfish and Feedburner to make and promote

an RSS feed for your Podcast. For those not afraid of cutting and pasting some HTML, there are some easy-to-follow RSS instructions available from Yahoo's new Podcast service.

Step Up to the Mike

Educators are urged to create authentic assessments and real-life situations for students. Unlike a traditional written assessment, a Podcast is student work meant to be heard by an audience, not just reviewed by a teacher. Recording a Podcast doesn't have to be a one-shot deal—it can be refined, rewritten, edited, and updated. Let kids step up to the mike—it doesn't get much more authentic than that. 

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