

Audio Books ... for FREE !

and how I used them in my homeschooling

By Lisa Frater, Christchurch

Oh no, not another article on audio books!

We have probably all heard about the benefits of audio books. Maybe you have purchased a couple of stories and played these to your 'young' children, and they enjoyed them for a time. You now have a few over priced CDs in the cupboard that everyone has heard or have outgrown, so that was the end of it. Well that was my experience.

I never had truly grasped how valuable audio books could be, nor found or heard a viable or practical way to implement them into my homeschooling, especially for older children. Until recently . . .

Last year I set on a determined path to really make audio books work for my family in a practical and effective way - and it has worked really well! Audio books have now become part of our daily 'lessons', They offer such benefits they are now part of our curriculum like any other 'core' subject. Offering knowledge, freedom, enjoyment and a multitude of other things my children and I quickly grew to love.

Here is some of what I have done . . .

Sourcing free and legal audio books – one of the treasures of the internet . . .

You can imagine how delighted I was to discover hundreds of audio book recordings for downloading that are part of the public domain and therefore free to LEGALLY download, distribute, copy etc. The best place to find these audio books are : booksshouldbefree.com

Free . . . really?

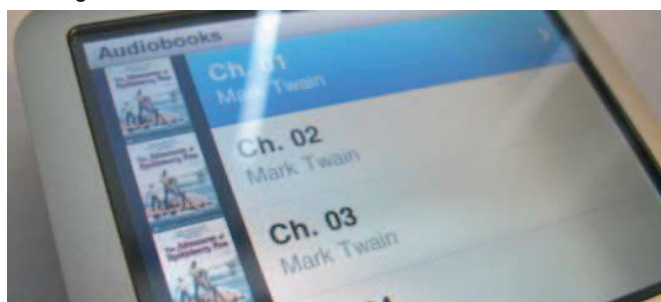
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Be Free draws on these public domain sources to deliver free audio books to you. Through their simple categorisation they have made the world's public domain audio books more readily available. The audio books are easily downloaded in various formats and there are hundreds of brilliant titles. I have particularly used the history section and children's books a lot.

So what did I do?

I believe I have been able to get the most from audio books by implementing a few simple but very effective methods. In a nutshell, the children listen to books individually suited to their age however above their reading level, with head phones on, individual players – and in the case of novels they will read along with unabridged text.



What I do is download the books and load them onto my children's individual mp3 players. Everyday they will likely listen to a chapter of their non-fiction audio, and a chapter of a novel. This can easily be up to or over an hour a day of enjoyable and effective listening with headphones on which offers me a very peaceful homeschool environment, and it helps them to focus more intently. It also means their 'audio' is not distracting to anyone else. As they sit there listening they are oblivious to the immense benefits they are gaining as they enjoy their reads.

Then, to get even more from their audio I highly recommend finding the text for children to sit and read along with the audio. I have personally seen great success in this with more reluctant readers as it allows them to easily read books above their reading level and does wonders for their comprehension, vocabulary, reading and writing skills. It boosts their reading confidence and love for reading as they complete larger books much easier than their 'reading' level allowed. Audio books give them the ability to understand the texts – as it is common for a child to say they don't like a book,

when on closer examination it was that they didn't understand it. When they don't have to work so hard on the mechanics of reading they can begin to truly enjoy books, and the 'mechanics' are being worked on without them even knowing. Listening to audio and reading alongside will quickly strengthen the reluctant reader's reading skills quite effectively.

For stronger readers or older teenagers the benefits are just as great. There are many complex works out there that can benefit from having the audio, and also reading the text. Shakespeare's plays or other classic works with more complex structure come to mind. You can open up the doors to larger and more complex works like 'The Lord of the Rings' – which may otherwise be neglected because of their sheer size.

My children also enjoy 'listening' to and 'reading' their bibles this way. I purchased the mp3 versions I required for the children and loaded onto their players, which really helped increase their commitment, comprehension, retention and enjoyment in reading. They read alongside the text which has also meant they can more easily read the full texts and comprehend it as they are tucked up on the couch. I even adopted this for myself!

Each of my children have their own mp3 player loaded with a particular non-fiction title (often history), a novel and the entire bible audio suited to them and their age. This gives them 3 things to listen to daily. The bible and often the novel have the accompanying text. In additions we also have the 'apologia' curriculum as an mp3 that is read alongside the textbook. As you can imagine my home is very peaceful with everyone quietly listening away – I just love it! Other times they may also have messages / talks loaded as well (if you're familiar with podcasts these can also be a great source of education, but that's a whole other article).

Having their 'audio books' scheduled into their individual lessons really helps free up time to deal with other siblings. This is another reason why having them listen individually with headphones on their individual players can work really well for you. You can stagger their listening times so you can give attention to other siblings – when organised it gives you a lot of freedom, peace and control in your home during lessons. Not only that but it is delightful to see the children at varying times comfortable on the couch quietly enjoying their reads . . . this is home schooling at its best.

Reading aloud to your children has draw backs that audio books can also take care of. Children can listen

to books that are more suited to their age levels. When you read aloud to all your children together often the books are too hard for some and too easy for others making listening less enjoyable. Reading aloud also requires a lot of time and good reading skills, and the diversity in texts is likely to be less.

I also have an account with audible.com, which I pay a monthly subscription. This gives me access to audio books that are not in the public domain. I have bought books like the Narnia series, Redwall, Lord of the Rings, GA Henty novels etc from audible. The monthly subscription gives me a 'title' each month, and I can buy more during that month if I want to so – this is much more cost effective and practical than purchasing CD sets.

You can also book and loan Audio book titles in CD format from the library and get the book at the same time. Audios like the Roman Mysteries and the accompanying text are an excellent example of a series for 10 year olds.

Your itunes store (in itunes) is another way to source and buy audio books, here you can access and download the free Librivox recordings also.

All a bit daunting – I must admit a bit of technical knowledge helps! I am quite computer literate – and have developed this into a bit of an art that is hard to put on paper. If you want more information or are wondering if you can put some of these things in place but you're a little unsure or even a lot unsure about how all this works just give me a call. I am also happy to recommend some titles we've already enjoyed if you don't know where to start, you can email me fbears@xtra.co.nz



Daniel (11) listening to and reading "The Taggerung", by Brian Jacques with audio (purchased from Audible.com)