**Book Talks**

Students often choose books to read based on the recommendation of their peers. A book talk is a brief overview of a book designed to raise the interest of potential readers. In many ways, it is a sales pitch for the book given by someone who has read it. The teacher should model book talks before asking students to create them.

Begin by selecting one or more books to share with your class. Write a brief, engaging presentation that includes the title, author, genre, setting, and a brief summary. Remember not to give away important plot twists. You may want to describe a key moment of conflict from the book without revealing how the conflict is resolved. Then leave the audience with "If you want to know what happened, read this book!" Use language that will persuade others to read the book. Give the reasons that you liked the book and why you think others should read it. Practice your book talk. Make sure that it is brief and engaging and that it gives enough information for someone to make a decision about whether or not to read the book.

Finally, make an audio recording of each student delivering his or her book talk. Each one will be an episode in the book talk podcast series from your class. Your students will be able to share their work with their families, with other classes in the school and with readers everywhere. See the resources listed on the Classroom Podcasting home page for more information about how to record and publish your podcast.

Because of the digital nature of the podcast, it can be shared with a very wide audience. Assuming that you do not include photographs of the students and that you have the students use first names only, you should be able to share these book talks with the widest possible audience on the internet. If you’d like to add visuals to the audio podcast, you can include students’ illustrations of scenes from the book. As your students complete the assignment, you will be building a classroom library of book talks. Whenever a student in your class is ready to start a new book, he or she can browse your class library of book talks to find a book that might interest him or her. In addition, students from other classes, other schools, or other children outside of school, will be able to use the resource to get book recommendations. The podcast series can also be available to students from year to year. New students can add their own reviews to the existing library. Since many perspectives exist for any book, allow multiple reviews of the same book. The students will respond to different elements within a book and the audience may relate to the perspective of one reviewer more than another.

A typical book report is read by the classroom teacher, possibly heard by the other students in class, and ends there. Using podcasting with book talks extends the audience in time and space. A classmate might listen to your podcast six months later. A child on the other side of the country or the other side of the world may listen to it the next day. Podcasting can transform a typical classroom assignment by making it an authentic opportunity to interact with others. Students will want to do a good job with their book talks not just to get a good grade, but because others will be using their book talks to choose a book. Classroom teachers may want to set up exchange programs where students in different classrooms listen to each others’ book talks.

This exercise could easily be done with students from primary grades through high school. Obviously the level of the reading material varies, but the key elements remain the same. In primary grades, each book talk will be much shorter. In high school, the reviewer can pose higher level questions of the audience. Book talk podcasts could also be created and used by pre-service or in-service teachers recommending children’s books for classroom use or professional development books or articles.

## Literature Circles

Cooperative discussion groups can be an enriching and rewarding way for your students to interact with literature and each other. Variations of Literature Circles are also called book clubs, literature groups, and grand conversations. There are many effective ways to organize Literature Circles and the choices that you make depend on the instructional and developmental needs of your students. Temple et al. (2002) outline five key factors when organizing a Literature Circle: "the books that are chosen, group size, length and frequency of sessions, who leads discussions, and whether responses are free or guided" (p. 474). In some cases, the teacher may list several books and allow students to sign up for each discussion group. In other cases, books and group members are assigned by the teacher. The teacher may choose to assign a specific job to each student, as practiced in cooperative groups. The groups may address specific questions during the course of the discussion. The choices made by the teacher in organizing the groups should be appropriate to the students’ needs.

Once these discussions are recorded as podcasts, there are several options for sharing them. Separate small groups can have concurrent discussions on the same book and then exchange recordings to see how different groups addressed the same topics. Groups may read different books by the same author and then compare the recordings to find similarities or patterns. Exchanges can also be made with other classes, on the same or different books. Discussions can be recorded to reflect growth in learning. For instance, compare the concluding discussion after reading one book by a particular author or genre with the concluding discussion by the same group after reading another book by the same author or in the same genre. The discussions can illustrate a growing understanding of an author’s style or a genre’s elements. Let’s say that your class recorded a series of Literature Circle discussions about The Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O’Dell. Later, a student reading that book independently could listen to those discussions to see how others reacted to the same material.

Making Literature Circles digital and online through podcasting means that students can review discussions later, conversations can be shared with other groups and other classes, and progress over time can be examined. Literature Circles can be appropriately organized for groups ranging from elementary through high school. In teacher preparation programs, either Literature Circles or Expository Circles can be used to encourage meaningful discussion of text.

## Process Drama

Many forms of Process Drama, including Writing in a Role, Reader’s Theater, Mantle of the Expert and Role Playing, can easily be extended by recording the end product. We know that process drama works because it helps develop imagination, builds voice in writers, creates authentic experiences, and helps students see the world from multiple perspectives. Podcasting the results adds an authentic audience and a real world connection by allowing collaboration and communication with a much broader audience.

Let’s take a more in-depth look at Reader’s Theater. In this strategy, students perform from an existing script or adapt a script from a book that they have read. (A collection of Reader’s Theater scripts is available for download at [Teaching Heart](http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm) .) Each student performs the role of a different character from the story. When adapting a script, adjustments are made so that all action can be conveyed through the audio performance. Often a narrator is added. See the References section below for more information on adapting scripts.

As an introductory activity, you may want to listen to some classic radio drama broadcasts from the 1930s and 1940s. Work with students on the quality of their vocal performance, capturing the emotion of the characters, and adding sounds that convey the setting. Once recorded and podcast, these audio productions can be shared and celebrated with friends and family.

### External Links

* [Teaching Heart](http://www.teachingheart.net/readerstheater.htm) - A collection of Reader’s Theater scripts is available for download.

## Meet the Author

Many teachers have students prepare "Meet the Author" reports to deliver to the class as a way of sharing author studies. Examining multiple works by the same author allows a student to notice similarities and differences, identify elements of style, and clarify personal reading preferences. Understanding an author's educational, cultural, and historical context can be essential in understanding that author's work.

Recording "Meet the Author" reports as podcasts allows the classroom community of learners to construct a library of peer-produced author biographies that could be used in a variety of extension activities after the fact. A student, in the same class or in a different school, could use the "Meet the Author" library as a resource for comparing and contrasting different authors. The library could also be used as a resource for genre study, and for discussions about the role of culture and historical events in the writing of a particular author or group of authors.

## Science Logs

Gathering authentic data during an investigation is an important part of learning in the science classroom. Consider a classroom in which students are determining the properties of an unknown substance. Recording notes using a digital audio recorder, tape recorder\*, MP3 player, or computer allows students to capture thoughts and observations in real time that can be used to supplement notes. The recorded investigation notes can be used to facilitate a peer review of data for an added level of reflection and review.

Consider a class on a field trip investigating an ecosystem. Recording field notes in audio format allows for a robust variety of data, including the sounds present in the ecosystem. Enabling a student to create a real-time narrative of the experience allows the student to take more detailed notes on observations upon returning to the classroom.

Using digital audio to record field notes or experimental observations can supplement or precede written notes. Podcasting observations throughout the course of an experiment allows another level of reflection on the experience. For any experiment that involves sound (examining how the length of a vibrating string affects pitch, for instance), using digital audio recording improves the quality of observation.

Using video or still pictures in podcasts gives instructors another flexible and robust way to distribute material for observation and investigation to students. For instance, an instructor could supply students with video of a chemical reaction that would be too dangerous for students to observe directly or photographs of events in remote locations with an accompanying audio description. While nothing can take the place of direct experience in the science classroom, podcasting offers many ways to supplement the students' experience.

\* To be digitized later.

## Art Critiques

An art instructor can use podcasting to model and engage students in art critiques. The teacher might record a series of short commentaries on artwork studied in class, discussing elements of composition, light, color, etc. for each. Students are then encouraged to record their own reactions to the same and other pieces of art. Through modeling and repeated exposure, the students build their specialized vocabulary for describing and appreciating visual art. Encourage students to record reactions to pieces that have been previously reviewed by their classmates. Consider having students record art critiques in small groups and to compare different personal reactions. Teachers may consider asking students to adopt a particular role for a given critique, such as curator, art dealer, or artist. Students may also react to individual elements separately. For example, one student may record his or her interpretation of the use of color in a particular work, while another student may look at perspective and space for the same piece.

Many museums now offer audio walking tours via headsets. For a student art show, the students could record walking tours of their own work. For field trips to art museums, students could create and share audio walking tours from their own perspectives, for example, Art Kids Audio Guides to the Tampa Museum of Art. Students could also be encouraged to record and submit their walking tours of museums visited on family trips to add to the classroom library of Art Tours. Virtual walking tours can be created for museums that offer materials online.

## Historical Audio Diaries

Have students who are studying a period in history write and record journals from the perspective of a person living in that time. By choosing different people on many sides of a conflict or event, the resulting series of podcasts could provide a rich tapestry of perspectives on and reactions to historical events and people.

There are a variety of resources, online and otherwise, that provide access to diaries, journals, and other primary source documents that would be useful in creating Historical Audio Diaries. Through a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has created a digital archive of the [journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition](http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/index.html). Teachers can assign different groups of students to investigate the experiences of different members of the expedition and then create a series of podcasts from the perspectives of each of these expedition members. The podcasts would also help illustrate the changes that took place during the course of the expedition.

The [Exploring Florida website](http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/default.htm) includes many primary source documents, in which Floridians and others describe their experiences in vibrant and sometimes surprising details. Included in their archive is a 1926 interview with Florida resident Thomas Alva Edison.

The [Ellis Island museum](http://www.statueofliberty.org/Ellis_Museum.html) and many other sites contain resources for understanding the United States immigrant experience. Using these resources, students can construct first person narratives from multiple perspectives.

### External Links

* [The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition](http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/index.html) - Digital archive of the journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition created by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
* [Exploring Florida](http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/default.htm) - Social Studies Resources for Students and Teachers. This website contains thousands of educational resources for use in your classroom.
* [Ellis Island Museum](http://www.statueofliberty.org/Ellis_Museum.html) - Digital home of the Ellis Island Museum.

## Oral Histories

Audio recordings were one of the most powerful tools used to document personal stories of Americans in the 20th century. During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration sent out teams with tape recorders to document the lives and cultural traditions of ordinary Americans. The American Memory project at the Library of Congress brings together the audio recordings of the American Folklife Center with many other resources to tell American stories. Teach your students to be recorders of their own history.

Online resources, such as this [Oral History Step by Step guide](http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html), will help you teach your students how to document the experiences of themselves and others. Students can use digital audio to record the stories of family members or others from the larger community. A podcast series of oral histories could easily be tied to service learning and helps students make authentic connections to the world around them.

This [Vietnam War Oral Histories project website](http://fcit.usf.edu/vietnam/index.html) was produced by Florida students studying the Vietnam War by interviewing veterans. The [Foxfire project](http://www.foxfire.org/) grew from students interviewing community members, documenting southern Appalachian culture. A similar approach can be used with digital audio and podcasting to make connections between the classroom and the larger community.

### External Links

* [Oral History Step by Step Guide](http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html) - An easy to follow guide to organizing and recording your own oral history.
* [Viet Nam War Oral Histories Project](http://fcit.usf.edu/vietnam/index.html) - A collection of oral history podcasts from vetrans of the Vietnam War.
* [Foxfire Project](http://www.foxfire.org/) - Not-for-profit, educational and literary organization based in Rabun County, Georgia.
* Podcasting is a way of easily distributing a series of audio or video files on the internet. (it can also be used to distribute PDF documents.) How can you use podcasting in Education? On this site you will find a few idea, but these are just a few ideas for podcasting in the classroom. Really any activity that involves oral presentation can probably be adapted to create a podcast series.
* For ideas on instructional uses of podcasting, click on the project names on the left. For more information about creating a podcast, read on!
* You may have already used audio and video in your class. Is that podcasting? Almost, but technically, no. For an audio or video file to be a podcast, two things have to happen. First, the file has to be online. That means it’s stored on a publicly-addressable server. It could be stored on your school’s server, or you could purchase server space through a number of services. Second, your file needs to be available as part of a subscription. The second step can be a little more complicated, but luckily there are many free services that will help you create the subscription file.
* Listed below, you will find several resources that you might find helpful on the technical aspects of creating a podcast. Remember that there are many, many ways of creating and publishing a podcast using different programs, services, and tools. Look at several to find one with which you are comfortable.