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Lisle Public Library

ARRT Speculative Genre Study: Audiobooks, young adult/teen, graphic novels

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We started reviewing the listening habits of our two audiophile discussion leaders.

- Megan estimates 80 percent of what she reads is on audio--she'll juggle one on Audible, one on OverDrive and one on CD as long as they have different narrators, otherwise it gets too confusing.
- Karen listens to 3 to 5 books a month, also simultaneously, but often different genres.
- Interesting to compare this with others in the discussion, some of whom can juggle reading different books, but can only listen to one audiobook at a time.

Featured resource: Audible.com

- Love/hate relationship: Vast collection has everything (many speculative fiction audiobooks only available on this platform), but they have audiobooks we can't buy for the library and it is not free to use
- Some Audible-only copies are eventually released on CD, but they don't tell you when. Doesn't make sense that they don't make them available through OverDrive or just sell an MP3 versions through Amazon
- Good customer service
- Good (cheap) deals of the day
- Megan recommends always identifying yourself as a librarian when chatting with customer service--maybe we need a lot of libraries to launch a campaign to make a demand
- Easy to search for books by narrator
- Can sample every audiobook to see if you like the narrator
- Con: when browsing SF and fantasy not separated
- "Popular features" section changes weekly and great source for display ideas
- If you buy an audiobook you can return it and exchange it for a credit at any time (some say that they had been cut off on number of returns a few years ago,, but others say that they haven't reached a cut-off limit at any time)
- Becky uses it b/c it's the only way to view customer comments specifically about audiobooks; customer comments good advisory resource
- Reviews are pretty reliable; useful that it breaks up comments about the story versus the narration (overall/performance/story), so you can get that audiobook-specific commentary
- You can look at power reviewer accounts and keep track of others.
- Occasionally they give you a free credit. And every day they have a \$4 or less daily deal with really good books offered. (Many daily deals are speculative fiction!)
- Audible also has podcast channel that you can access without paying if you have an Amazon account.

## **Audiobooks Overview**

### **Trends**

- Audiobooks are fastest-growing medium
- At first it was thought audiobooks were for multitaskers but a study found 56% of people were just listening, not multitasking.

- Becoming more popular with younger generations, perhaps tied into the growing popularity of podcasts. As podcasts become more popular, audiobooks become popular
- 48% of frequent users are under 35
- Most popular types of audiobooks: 1) mystery/thriller/suspense; 2) SF/fantasy; 3) romance
- 50,000 original audiobooks produced every year; you are hearing Audible ads on radio and TV, going to conventions, etc. 16% sales growth in 2016
- Other platforms: [Libro.fm](#) (indie bookstores); Audiobooks.com, Soundcloud, Blinkist takes a nonfiction book condenses it for 15 minutes on audio
- [Jez Layman post on RAforAll](#) talks about access implications of fewer audiobooks released on CD
- Podcasts for kids are becoming a thing, so maybe growth in audiobooks for young people not far behind. Becky says that if they put audiobooks on Spotify, teenage daughter would love it.
- [Blinkist](#) takes a nonfiction book but condenses to 15 minute audio summary (you have to subscribe/pay, but can get some free titles with every email account you use to sign up)

#### Audiobook narration

- If you have patrons who haven't tried audiobooks in a long while, they may have false impression because 10-15 years ago narrators didn't speak with emotion. Today narration is a performance, and so encourage those folks to try a good title.
- Many audiobooks are narrated by famous actors now
- Many are being re-produced with different narrators and different versions (such as full cast v. one narrator); sometimes new ones will be released when movie or TV tie-in comes out (such as *The Handmaid's Tale*)
  - Great interview with James Marsters (formerly Spike on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; now prolific audio narrator) talking about learning how to narrate vs acting and how it's a different skill set
- Author narrators highly variable: Gaiman and Douglas Adams: good; Ursula K. Le Guin and Stephen King: not so much. If it's a memoir, though, author narration is more forgiving
  - Trained stage actors are better sometimes with books, like Alan Cumming narrating *Dracula*
- Sometimes with audio, you really have to train your brain to figure out how to listen to it and pay attention
- Some fantasy readers like to listen in conjunction with reading to get proper pronunciation of names.
- Books written in dialect are sometimes easier to listen to than read.
- Series fans hate it when a narrator changes mid-series; they will sometimes be a fan revolt and the favored narrator will return (or re-record the offending narrator's book)

#### Favorite narrators from the group:

- Will Patton
- Wil Wheaton
- Robin Miles
- George Guidall
- Davina Porter
- Barbara Rosenblatt (interesting to compare her earlier works to now and hear how her voice has changed)
- Scott Brick (someone loves some hate; generally agreed he needs to stay with adrenaline genres b/c he reads everything with high-action intensity)

- Artie Johnson (yes, [that Artie Johnson](#)--oddly enough his narration of *Absurdistan* is great)

#### Bad narration:

- Narration that annoys you will ruin a good book
- Mispronounced names take you out of the story (like "Wil-meet" instead of "Wilmette" in original *The Devil in the White City* audiobook)
  - Xe Sands gets good reviews but Megan dislikes her breathy voice, everything sounds like poetry
  - Uprooted by Naomi Novik had disappointing audiobook--narrator read with wrong accent, pronounced names incorrectly

#### Audiobook assignment

##### Harry Potter

- Jim Dale, Stephen Fry throwdown--both excellent
- The problem with that is Jim Dale is that it's hard to listen to his other books (like *Night Circus*) because he is the voice of Harry Potter
- Incredible to how he keeps all voices in his head; listening to them in sequence is interesting to realize he had done it years apart and kept it straight
- One listener didn't love it as much as they thought they would
  - With audio, little writing tics get amplified--overuse of adverbs in Harry Potter; use of "he said" "she said" in *Redshirts*; repetition in *50 Shades of Grey*

##### World War Z

- Really a collection of short stories
  - First came out abridged on audio; unabridged version read by many famous names as a full cast recording. Fun to figure out who was who. Would the book have been as good with just a couple of narrators?
  - Oral history, after the fact. So engaging. You don't have to keep track of stories, so a good exercise book. *Lost City of Z* is a great exercise audiobook too. With both, what's going on in the books is worse than what you're putting up with in your workout
  - Other fun full-cast audiobooks with famous narrators are *Lincoln in the Bardo* and Sarah Vowell's books

##### Ready Player One

- Wil Wheaton a fan-favorite narrator
- Good narration fine for this material--he's good with nerdy main characters. He's not going to narrate anything super serious
- Amazed by his descriptions of what's happening on a computer screen. Some older readers did like it even if they didn't particularly love technology or video games.
- One person's coworker uses it as a comfort read when she has insomnia
- All the books he does fit his voice; he picks his projects: lighthearted SF

##### Station Eleven

- Much quieter novel
- Kirsten Potter is the reader--she narrates many romances. Liked her soft treatment of the subject without being breathy.

- But another listener thought there should have been more excitement in her voice; she was too laid back.
- Even if one doesn't listen to audio typically--prefers "to imagine my own stuff"--liked story because it was almost like a travel audiobook.
  - Dog Stars and Age of Miracles are readalikes also on audiobook. A Visit From the Goon Squad could be readalike because of non-linear style; the audio version is good.

#### Bird Box

- Readers who loved the book didn't really like audiobook or narrator--thought too breathy. Not right narrator for this story.
- The ones who liked the audio didn't read the book.
  - Thought her narration heightened the horror because of her soft voices--makes it creepier
- Can't listen to horror if you've read it--ruins the book. Horror scarier in audiobook--listen to it with eyes shut.
- Author's books are sound-based (second book is about sound that kills people), which makes sense because he's a musician. He works really well if you want to give a horror story on audio--there are only a couple of graphic, intense, graphic scenes
- If you're one of those people who needs to skip to the end of a book once it gets intense to see who survives or not, it's harder to listen to audiobooks.
  - Others speed up audio so it sounds like a chipmunk is reading it. Makes it less scary

#### Sleeping Giants

- Included on list b/c Megan didn't like book but enjoyed audiobook
- It's a case file and you get different narrators: interviews, journal articles, etc.
- As audiobook you could keep story clearer b/c of different narrators. One narrator was a great screamer.
- Not a fantastic book, but the narration was good. But quit because if felt disjointed as audiobook. Also a pacing issue: prefers fast pace when listening. Important to think about pace when recommending--some people can't do literary fiction on audio because of pace

#### Nimona

- Interesting to listen to a graphic novel--wondered how that would work
- Recording added stuff to establish context; that was important because without those added backdrops you'd be lost with the audiobooks
- It was well done but it's so much better with the illustrations
- Reminiscent of a radio production with sound effects, music.
  - Inoffensive humor, so kids like it and adults don't mind it and good for family trips.
  - Miss Marvel and Locke and Key also good audiobook versions of graphic novels, but you do miss the art.

#### Youth/YA books Overview

- Much of what young children read is speculative fiction
- Books have younger protagonists and more uplifting endings in general
- Teen books tend to have more diverse perspectives--in the past this sometimes felt forced, but now more natural and also more diverse writers, too

- Lots of books are series
- Teens tend not to want audiobooks
- Some libraries interfile teen audio with teen books; others interfile with adult audiobooks
- One way to make a teen listen to a book is when there is only an audiobook available of their required summer reading title!

## Youth/YA Assignment

### Hobbit (audiobook)

- There's travel, adventure and great as a family listen
- Rob Inglis narrates, he does a lot of YA (and also did LOTR); but a different person sings the songs

### Hunger Games

- Same narrator as Annihilation
- Not a lot of fans of the book in the room--book has too much romance, not enough revolution

### Graveyard Book

- What's the age range? It can be scary for some kids but not for others
- Would give it to kid and adult. Good read aloud.

### Giver by Lois Lowry

- A classic, but those who read as adults didn't like it
- Slow, and very anti-climactic

### Rot and Ruin

- Non zombie fans liked it; like the book; teen books for sure; first graphic novel in that series just came out.
- Has a lot about how to organize society, although easy to pick and good versus evil in different levels. It's violent.

### Shadowshaper

- Ready good audio, but one thing in audio; the main villan is off stage the whole book except the final showdown which is a bit jarring.
- What i didn't like remember from reading it the main character has a problem, the main character goes to a library a lot. Second book was supposed to be better.
- Main characters are Puerto Rican and capture spirits. Overlapping worlds. A good readalike would be *Labyrinth Lost*.
  - It will be a trilogy.

### A Wrinkle in Time

- Older audiobook stinks, but they just did a new production. G
- raphic novel well done, true to the story, didn't want to re-read it because it was a favorite as a kid and didn't want it ruined.
- One of those books that reader loved but daughter didn't like it.
  - When originally released, there weren't many books with a strong girl protagonist.

### A Wizard of Earthsea

- Slower, darker more moody Harry Potter, if somebody wants more boarding school-type magic.
- Lots of travel and internal meditation--like Left Hand of Darkness for kids.

#### An Ember in the Ashes

- Audio had alternating narrators, and loved worldbuilding
- Roman imagery and convention, different castes of people interplay between three races, lots of magic

#### Graphic novels

- Need graphic novel refresher, review notes from graphic novel genre study and read Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics*. It takes you through the appeal of the graphic novel
- Engages right brain and left brain at same time, which is a skill
- Sometimes it's easier to give new graphic novel readers nonfiction or something they know about so they
- Bad art will ruin the story faster than bad plot and/or bad characters
- Natural affinity between speculative fiction and graphic novels

#### Saga

- Loved you are thrown into middle of action, was able to go with it, followed the story could connect with characters, even though it was bonkers.
- For those who love world building it takes two, three books to get into it, so give it time
- Has elements of sf, fantasy and horror

#### Monstress

- Baroque, rich art, very good story.
- Violent, medieval world, it's sometimes easier to read the panels

#### Locke & Key

- Becky's favorite

#### Kindred

- "Worse" to read graphic novel than novel, because you can see what's happening
- it's more effective in color, the color matters as you see the blood and you see the pain

#### Bitch Planet

- Do not read this on desk. Very dystopian, very female power, with fun '70s retro vibe

#### Battling Boy

- Really good (despite what Bill says)

#### Fables

- It goes quickly, engaging
- It gets stolen a lot, it's still popular and has spinoffs; people who liked fractured fairy would like this.