

Audio Books Come to Life – and Support Traditional Reading

Ay Caramba! Skippyjon Jones has arrived! For those of you not familiar with this little Siamese cat who thinks he's a dog, you're in for a rare treat. Skippyjon is the creation of Judith Schachner and is the star of four picture books detailing his adventures as a Chihuahua. I bring this fellow up because I believe the best way to enjoy these books is by reading along with the book on CD. Hearing the author act out the parts with the correct accents adds so much to the enjoyment of the Skippyjon titles. These recordings serve as a great reminder that some books were truly meant to be performed, not just read. I can point to many other books I don't think I would have enjoyed nearly as much if I had not listened to the audio production. After listening to Tim Curry read *The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket, I absolutely had to finish reading *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. It was then Curry's distinctive voice that I heard in my head while enjoying the rest of the series in book form.

Audio productions are no longer merely someone reading the book out loud. These are trained actors delivering performances that bring the written word to life. Often they are full cast productions that bring to mind the great radio dramas of yesteryear. I frequently advise parents of young ones who are resistant to making that great big leap to chapter books to try audio books first. Children can listen and read along to a trained actor reading the parts with ease. Studies have shown that students who listen to audio books have shown marked improvements in fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These benefits can be obtained if you are reading along in bed or if you are listening in your car on the way to soccer practice. If your child has listened to *The Adventures of Hank the Cow Dog* on CD, then he or she is much more likely to pick up another *Hank the Cow Dog Adventure* in book form and find it an enjoyable experience. When they pick up that new book, they will be familiar with the characters, story structure and humor from listening to one of the stories first. They can then become their own narrator, bringing the curtain up on their own performance.

Many students of English as a Second Language use audio books as an easy way to improve comprehension and language skills. I encourage any student who is having trouble understanding an assigned book to come check out the audio edition! No, it's not cheating, and your child and his or her report card will see great results.

So, this year when you pack up the kids for spring break, take along some audio books to enjoy along the way. Make sure your kids know the great drama and humor to be found in books. You will be having some great family fun and improving your child's reading fluency and vocabulary along the way!

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