RACHEL PHILLIPS
BHP TEAM LEARNING
SCIENTIST
WASHINGTON, USA.

BHP TEACHER TAKE

DID YOU HEAR THAT? BEST PRACTICES FOR USING AUDIO AS A READING SCAFFOLD!

Some people assert that "listening is the missing part of the literacy puzzle" (Listenwise.com). People's first exposure to reading and literacy practices is through the experience of having stories told to them. Bedtime stories are one of the common ways younger children hear stories, and it's also standard practice in elementary schools for teachers to conduct daily read-alouds for their students. There are a multitude of reasons to do this, including getting kids interested in reading more generally, improving their listening skills, strengthening their comprehension skills, and enabling them to access material that they're not skilled enough to read yet, but they are knowledgeable enough to understand.

When we thought about how we might enable students of our course to access material they can't yet read but are able to understand, we realized this was a solvable problem. One of the many things I love about BHP is that students of most ages can participate in the activities and watch the videos – and indeed many students can also participate in the readings since we offer multiple Lexile levels of the reading material. However, this does not work for all students. As a solution, we created an audio

version of every article in the course so that even more students can participate honestly with the material at some level.

So, what are best practices for using these recordings in the classroom? The science isn't rock solid here, but here are some general principles we suggest you consider before diving in with your students.

1. Match audio to text

   • As we mentioned, students can often understand something aurally they can't understand via text alone. Best practices point to using the highest difficulty level, so that's what we did—we recorded only the highest Lexile version of each text. Make sure your students have the right text if they're reading along while listening.

2. Follow along!

   • This can be hard for students, but if they aren't matching the audio to the words on the paper, they're not getting the full benefit. For students who need the audio support, have them follow along using a pen or pencil as a pointer, and check in with them while they follow along, discreetly getting them back to the right spot if they lost their place.

3. Listening ≠ reading

   • Listening alone equates to more of a skim, which is the first read in the Three Close Reads process.

   • Aural comprehension is generally about 20 percent of reading comprehension. There are a bunch of studies that have tried to determine how much people understand and retain when they listen to an audio recording of a text versus actually reading that text, and that's where the 20% comes from.

4. Management can be tricky

   • Before using audio, consider whether you're using it for an entire class, or for individual students. If individual students, make sure you have enough headphones so students can listen along. Check in with students if they are using headphones – it can be easy to get lost.

   • If using whole class audio, make sure students know to follow along, and also be sure they have some way to signal to you if they get lost. Students who need extra reading supports are often self-conscious about it, so for some students, you might want to find a discreet signal.

5. Voice actors we are not

   • These articles are read by some of our very own BHP teachers. They did a great job! However, we may not have edited all of these perfectly, so if you find anything amiss, please let us know! It can also be fun to challenge students to look for errors – this tends to encourage them to follow along closely!

Over time, you'll most certainly get into a rhythm with your own students in terms of how you approach using audio. You'll probably also start to figure out some excellent management tips to share with your fellow teachers. As you start to use audio more, please post about your challenges and successes on Yammer!