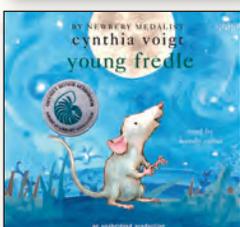
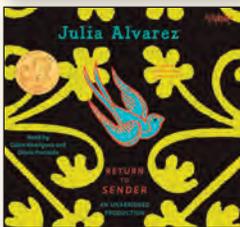
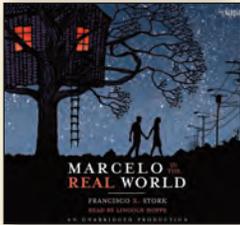
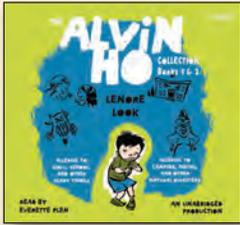


# OPEN THE WAY TO NEW STORIES, NEW INTERESTS, AND A NEW LANGUAGE

## Using Audiobooks with English Language Learners



Children and teens who are new to the United States or to English language books can be doubly served with audiobooks. Most people don't learn to read, listen, and speak a new language along an even developmental course. Audiobooks provide age-appropriate book content to kids who understand spoken English better than they can read it. Audiobooks also offer good listening and speaking experiences for kids who read print well but have difficulties with pronunciation. These skills are necessary for new Americans as they become more acculturated and more proficient readers.

American publishing for children and teens offers hundreds of exemplary pieces of age-appropriate literature each year. Many are available in the audiobook format simultaneously with the print edition, which helps expand the options for new language learners to enjoy the same rich literature as their peers. Professional readers play the role of translator from the written to the spoken, providing new American youth with cultural and historical information in the form of facts, values, and questions. By encouraging kids to filter and evaluate facts and hear ideas, audiobooks promote critical-thinking among their listeners.

Exposure to a wide variety of professional readers has a positive influence on listeners who are developing spoken language skills. In addition to providing engaging characters and evocative plots, audiobooks offer new English speakers much needed exercise in listening to oral English. This activity allows them to become cognizant of correct pronunciation and informative vocal expression. Listening to a well told—and well written—story is easier and more relaxing than listening to drills intended to advance the

Audiobooks give those new to English the means to realize the rich and universal human experience of story—an experience that is at home in every culture and that makes every language learner take on the role of audience, which is an important part of every story's success.

English learners' language skills. Audiobooks offer new English learners an experience that is similar to adult-child read-aloud time. Instead of meeting books as another challenge to one's skills with a new language, audiobooks transform the text by allowing a child or teen to listen on his or her own terms. As they develop fluency with language in its

different formats, unabridged audiobooks allow English language learners to progress from merely listening to following the printed text.

Literature in today's American marketplace is multicultural in genuine and insightful ways. Cultural and ethnic diversity are obvious and richly realized in audiobooks. New English learners are validated in their home knowledge, experiences, and values when they hear an audiobook reader who includes proper pronunciations of words from their home languages. Readers who speak English with a realistic inflection that tells of their ethnic heritage alert new Americans to the fact that there are a wide variety of ways to "sound American." Meeting all kinds of people, through their human voices, enlarges the new English learners' understanding of the America beyond his or her neighborhood. Meeting familiar stories in a new language serves as a reminder that not all is new and strange here. Good stories may be ones that strike a chord of familiarity in their setting, whether it's south of the U.S. border, as in Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising*, the Middle East of Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*, or Korea's shoreline in the opening passages of An Na's *A Step from Heaven*.

Using audiobooks with classrooms or other groups of new English learners is easy. Packaging offers information not only about the story but also about the length of time the listener will need to complete a book. Encourage kids and teens new to audiobooks, especially those who are new to English as well, to give each new title half an hour of listening before deciding whether the story is both interesting and within their current ability to understand. It takes about this long to become accustomed to listening to—and therefore understanding—most strangers whom we meet through conversation. Some listeners really appreciate visually reading along as they listen, while others want to separate their efforts. Allow kids to experiment with both approaches so each child can identify which method works better for him or her. Some new English learners actually prefer pre-reading the print text before listening, while others prefer to listen to a chapter before visually approaching it. An important developmental aspect of adolescence is learning what engages you and how to do your best; audiobooks present an excellent opportunity for youth to analyze their own reading preferences and language strengths.

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