

Winter 2010

TALKING TIMES

**REGIONAL LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND &
PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED**

**Office of Library and Information Services
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From the Regional Librarian's Desk

In October 2009, the Rhode Island Talking Books Plus program began the distribution of digital players and digital books to Rhode Island members. During the next 3 years, our plan is to distribute digital players to all Talking Books members.

By federal law the first group to receive digital players were Rhode Island Veterans. We also sent digital players to Rhode Island Centenarians as requested by the National Library Service program. Talking Books Plus (TBP) staff are now in the process of notifying all other TBP members on the digital player waiting list when a player will become available to them. If you haven't placed your name on our waiting list, please call us at (401) 574-9310 to do this. Staff are on call Monday through Friday between 8 AM and 4 PM.

The digital player is a slim 2 pounds. It has 8 simple buttons on the standard machine and 11 buttons on the advanced player. Each button has built in instructions. When no cartridge is in the player, each button will play instructions. There is no instructional tape to acquire, store, locate or insert in the digital player. When a preloaded book cartridge is inserted, the book's content will play. Narrator voices on the book cartridges are delightfully clear. Every book title is sent as one cartridge that plays the whole book. TBP members do not need to switch tapes or maneuver player buttons to continue reading a book on the digital player. The digital cartridge is easy to insert. There is a large hole at one end of each cartridge that makes it easy to pull out the book from the player as well. There are no tape ribbons to get tangled.

For those who have access to a computer either at home, through family or friends or through a public computer, the Braille Audio and Reading Download program (BARD) established by the National Library Service program offers over 16,000 downloadable book titles. All that is needed to apply for a BARD user account is high speed Internet service, download and unzip capability, an active email address, a digital player capable of playing NLS produced digital talking books, and active membership in the Rhode Island Talking Books program. Go online to the National Library Services download website, <http://bit.ly/nlsbard> to register for an account. Your approval and confirmation notice will be sent via email by NLS. Once approved, you will need to acquire a compatible blank cartridge or flash drive and cable to download books. BARD books

must be downloaded to a computer and then transferred to the cartridge or flash drive via the USB cable wire to play on the player.

Flash Memory And The Digital Book Cartridge

For Talking Books Plus members who are authorized to use the BARD system to download talking books, the flash drive is a device that can be used to transfer the downloadable book from the computer to a qualified digital player. USB flash drives are also known as thumb drives, handy drives, flash stick and jump drive. Whatever the name, these devices are memory cards that store and transfer data between computers and other digital products like the NLS digital audio player. In the BARD program, a flash drive will only store and transfer data between a computer and an authorized digital audio player.

The flash memory cartridge is a device that will store and transfer NLS talking book content data between a computer and an authorized digital audio player. A growing but limited number of digital books are stored permanently on individual NLS cartridges. These cartridges are requested just like talking book cassettes. They are mailed to the member requesting titles in digital cartridge format. In the Talking Books Topics catalog and Talking Books Plus online catalog, these books have digital book (DB) numbers. Cassette titles have recorded cassette (RC) numbers. The DB and RC code is an important component of the book order number to be

used when ordering titles whether online, by phone or by paper form.

Every NLS preloaded digital book is always stored on a singular cartridge whereas a cassette talking book is often recorded on several tapes. Talking Books Plus members may purchase blank cartridges to download titles themselves from a computer. The cartridges are flash drives within a proprietary casing. Purchase blank cartridges with at least 1GB memory capacity. The NLS digital machines were designed to play the blank cartridges. The 1GB cartridge and other compatible flash drives will hold more than one book and are reusable. Downloadable books have no due date so they can be stored on the blank cartridge or flash drive for as long as the books are needed. However, books on NLS produced cartridges are on loan and must be returned to the network library from which they were borrowed.

The Near Perfect Audiobook

For Talking Books Plus readers who would like to know how the audiobooks they read are made, Mary Beth Wise, Quality Assurance Specialist at the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, wrote an article entitled, The Near Perfect Audiobook – How We Do It. Below are some of the highlights of the article.

National Library Service (NLS) is committed to providing the Blind and Physically Handicapped with the highest quality audiobooks.

Converting a book into a spoken-word recording is complex. A narrator uses interpretive skills with the raw material of the voice and the written text to create the spoken-word recording. The process of conversion starts with creating the book collection. A team of librarians at NLS search through book reviews, scan the bestseller lists, and review suggestions from patrons to create a well-balanced collection that reflects the collection of a typical public library. The intended readers cover the fifty states, U.S. territories and U.S. citizens living overseas. Of the more than 150,000 books published in the United States every year, NLS produces 2,000 in audio format. The patron base is extremely diverse so titles are chosen carefully by NLS librarians. The goal is to reflect a collection of a typical public library. Each and every book is individually analyzed by a librarian so studios that produce the books are provided with navigation instructions for the digital versions of the recordings. Navigation instructions are used to mark up a cookbook, for example, by chapter and recipe and even by page number if indexed. Navigational markers allow readers to skip forward or backward at the touch of a button on the NLS digital player.

The next step to creating an audiobook is in assigning the book to the studio that will record it. The Production Control Section of NLS analyzes the text and decides which studio has the resources and talent pool to record a particular type of book. There is a large and diverse pool of narrators with expertise in many languages.

Potomac Talking Books has been noted for its Spanish narrators.

American Printing House for the Blind and Talking Book Publishers

are among the other fine studios assigned to read books. And NLS has an in-house studio whose narrators include professional stage actors and narrators from all over the country with decades of experience.

It is the Studio directors who match the narrator to the book. Each studio director tries to match the narrator's qualities (vocal qualities, knowledge or interests) with a particular book. Narrators tend to become subject experts so matching a narrator to a book becomes an art.

Approximately one narrator for every fifty who auditions actually makes it into the program. The ones who do make it often must audition several times. It is a rigorous process. The audiobook narrator must possess a great facility with the English language, must be able to interpret an author's point of view, recognize irony, have a sense of humor, and be able to tell a story. The narrators must be free of regionalism/dialects or at least be able to neutralize them for the work and use them when they are appropriate for the purposes of telling the story. A good narrator has the ability to make the reader feel that he or she is speaking only to a singular listener which achieves intimacy between the narrator and reader. The relationship between storyteller and reader can often be deeply personal.

A good narrator will go to lengths to make sure the story is told well and that the pronunciation of unusual words, biographical names,

and geographical places are correct. The narrator skims through a book and notates unusual words and names to be researched. The research often goes beyond a look in the dictionary. It may involve calling local chambers of commerce or museums to get the correct pronunciation of a street name. Narrators will call university language departments that specialize in Celtic, Greek, or Latin, or call authors themselves in order to get the right pronunciation. The narrators do a great deal of research in preparation to read a book.

NLS requires a monitor to be present as a narrator reads. The monitor reads the print along with the narrator and will stop the narrator if a word is mispronounced or text is skipped, and the mistake is corrected right then and there. If problems are missed in the recording, they are corrected later, after it is reviewed.

In the end, each studio does a 100 percent review of the book before it is submitted to NLS. The reviewers compare the text to the audio to be sure everything is there, that words are pronounced correctly, and that navigation markers are correctly placed. If there are odd noises in the recording, the sound quality is bad, or words are mispronounced, the reviewer notates this and the recording is corrected. Even with such a thorough review and rigorous process, mistakes can go through undiscovered. So after a studio conducts their review, the Quality Assurance Section of NLS does a random 10 percent review of a book, checking the quality of the narration, ensuring that the narration is sensitive to the text and expresses the author's point of view. NLS listens for issues in sound quality, for

mispronunciations of names and words, and checks that the navigation reflects the structure of the print text and that the book is navigable with the digital player.

Fantasy Novels from Readers Advisor

If you haven't tried fantasy novels, you just might like them. Some folks were surprised that a book they liked was a fantasy novel. As a genre, fantasy books are not based in reality presupposing that magic and mythical/supernatural creatures exist. That definition comes from the Science Fiction site at www.sfsite.com.

But who should read fantasy? Some readers' advisors gave their opinions. Anyone who wants to get away from reality can easily immerse themselves in fantasy novels to remove themselves emotionally from the topic or issue. It isn't real in a fantasy novel. And fantasy novels overlap into a wide range of other genres. They interest readers who like regency romance, adventure stories, and sagas and sequels. Major subgenres cover themes such as the sword and sorcery, myth and legend, fairy tales, humorous fantasy, bestiary, contemporary fantasy, alternate and parallel worlds, time travel, paranormal powers, dark fantasy, romantic fantasy, and shared worlds.

Fantasy novels can offer action, suspense, humor, romance, good dialogue, interesting characters, and mystery and mental challenge. So if you haven't read fantasy, what keeps you from reading it?

There are fantasy novels that appeal to all ages. So many like reading Harry Potter but wouldn't read fantasy novels otherwise. So if you loved Harry, here are a few titles from the Wolfner Library list by authors like J. K. Rowling available through the Talking Books Plus library. The titles have similar elements to the Harry Potter books or have similar themes.

Ella Enchanted, by Gail Carson, Levine RC46186

The Fairy Rebel, by Lynne Reid Banks, RC30333

Five Children and It, by Ellen Nesbit, RC26666

Half Moon, by Edward Eager, RC10135

The Secret of Platform Thirteen, by Eva Ibbotson, RC46606

Book of Three, by Lloyd Alexander, RC25013

Dragon of the Lost Sea, by Laurence Yep, RC26538

The Lost Years of Merlin, by T.A. Barron, RC47306

Join Dtb Talk

The National Federation of the Blind lists a host of public mailing lists on host.nfbnet.org/mailman/listinfo. One of these lists, Dtb-talk, covers the discussion of Digital Talking Books for the Blind. In the description of this list it is stated that "The primary focus of this list is from the viewpoint of the end-consumer, but production tools, techniques, etc. are also valid topics."

The Dtb-talk description further identifies activities that are stimulating global interest in digital talking books. They include the

recent introduction of the digital talking books (DTBs) by the National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) of which Talking Books Plus is the NLS network library serving eligible Rhode Islanders. Other products in the description include DAISY books available through RFB&D and Bookshare and the introduction of various machines and software programs which will play DTBs such as the digital talking book player by NLS.

The Digital Talking Books system of NLS includes BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download). BARD allows members to download NLS DTB books; Talking Books Plus members may apply for this service. BARD has its own discussion and support listservs that members can subscribe to as well. BARD listservs are a valuable source of information. The BARD-DISCUSS list serves as a forum for open discussion and is the place to ask questions about downloading or reading a NLS digital book downloaded onto a DTB machine. To subscribe to the BARD listservs, an individual must apply to BARD first. To be eligible for BARD, an individual must be in good standing as a Talking Books Plus (TBP) member. To use BARD, a TBP member must have access to a high-speed internet connection such as DSL or cable; have the ability and permission to download and unzip files, have an active e-mail address, and have access to a player capable of playing NLS-produced digital talking books. Players are loaned for free to TBP members directly through Talking Books Plus or can be purchased from independent suppliers. The list of suppliers can be found on the Talking Books Plus website, www.olis.ri.gov/tbp/bard/players.php.

Reading Tip

When you start a cassette book, latch close just one of the book container's straps, leaving the other unfastened. That way you'll know which container to return the tapes to, and no tapes will spill out if you drop it. –from the Kentucky Regional Library

What Family of Talking Books Plus Members Say...

"This service which you offer gave my father another way to be free of his disability... the stories traveled him to different places, situations and plots he never would have been able to explore otherwise" – J.S.

"Thank you for this wonderful Talking Books Program. It made such a difference in her life". – L.M.

Tell us how you feel about Talking Books Plus and the Talking Times newsletter and you may be lucky enough to be quoted in the next newsletter. So send us your comments.

TBPlus 2010 Holiday Closings

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	Monday, Jan. 18
Memorial Day	Monday, May 31
Independence Day celebration	Monday, July 5th
Victory Day	Monday, August 9
Labor Day	Monday, September 6
Columbus Day	Monday, October 11
Election Day	Thursday, November 2
Veterans' Day	Thursday, November 11
Thanksgiving Day	Thursday, November 25
Christmas Day celebration	Monday, December 27

Regular Hours: Monday – Friday 8 AM to 4 PM

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