



# Choral Reading: Say No to Round Robin

One type of reading that should be eliminated is *round robin reading*—the act of having children read one at a time in the order in which they are seated in the classroom. Research finds this strategy to be largely ineffective because children tend to spend their time anticipating the paragraph they will read and worrying about their upcoming turn, instead of listening to the text being read aloud by other students and developing a sense of the storyline.

In one study, Patricia Kelly (1995) states, “Round Robin Reading formats consistently show that students read less, are more off task, do less ‘real’ reading work, and fluency rates are negatively impacted.”

Teachers responded to this bad news by replacing round robin reading with *popcorn reading*, which involves the teacher calling the next name at random to eliminate this anticipation. But popcorn reading does not work either; it results in more anxiety for children as they anxiously wonder whether their name will be called next.

It is important for children to model good reading habits, but popcorn reading and round robin reading are not just ineffective, they are detrimental.

## ENGAGING YOUNG READERS

Think about the concept of round robin reading/popcorn reading from a student's perspective. Reading aloud can make anyone anxious, especially a student who is not a strong reader. Not only do these children have to read, they must do so in front of their teacher and classmates. So what is the goal of popcorn reading? Is it to practice reading or is it to learn the content? If it is to practice reading, students realistically only get one or two sentences worth of practice through popcorn reading. If it is to learn the content, not much is being accomplished there either: Students usually are anxious as they await their turn to read, so it is likely they are not listening to the content being read by other students. Then, after they finish reading a sentence or two, chances are they are not listening to the content that follows, as they are dealing with the post-adrenaline rush. In short, there is zero academic benefit to popcorn reading.

Introduce *choral reading* (also called *unison reading*), and the entire dynamic changes. In choral reading, children either read together or a strong voice reads aloud for others to follow along. Choral reading allows students to hear a strong reader, learn the content, and gain reading confidence. It is an interpretive reading of text by a group of voices.

Choral reading helps readers develop reading fluency and improve their vocabulary. Although choral reading can be used in any context, this strategy works best with stories with rhythm or rhyme and dialogue. A series of books titled *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You*, by different authors, builds on the concept that repeated reading develops fluency and reading expression. As students develop fluency, they are better able to increase comprehension.

There are many ways technology can be used to enhance the concept of choral reading, as well as several benefits of using technology as a supplement to choral reading activities.

Teachers can use audiobooks to create stations that will provide students with a personalized learning experience. For example, there may be different audiobooks at each station or the same audiobook with personalized options or difficulty levels available at each station to accommodate students' reading levels.

Audiobooks also can be used to nurture confidence and independence as students can successfully read the books without an adult hovering over them.

Using technology with choral reading adds a degree of motivation for reluctant readers. More specifically, choral reading via video conferencing with a pen pal, a deployed parent, a grandparent, or other loved one provides students with the ability to not only read, but read with someone important in their lives.

There also are benefits of choral reading for ELLs. Hearing the language modeled can make a significant difference for ELLs. Not only are they learning how to read, they are learning in a language they probably do not hear at home. For this group of learners, hearing words read aloud is crucial.

## Tech Tools to Enhance Learning

Live choral reading is a great process but experiencing it with technology opens the door for the infusion of many digital age skills. The technology helps educators raise the bar and increase the benefits of choral reading.

**Learning Ally** ([learningally.org](http://learningally.org)): An app for iOS and Android, Learning Ally boasts a library of more than 80,000 audiobooks with text. According to statistics from the 2016-17 school year, Learning Ally reported a community of more than 13,000 schools and nearly 290,000 registered student users. Their extensive collection of K-12 books includes everything from textbooks to popular fiction to classic literature to study aids. Some features of Learning Ally include page-level navigation, text highlighting, and speed adjustments that allow children to easily read along. Learning Ally amasses volunteers throughout the country to lend their subject-matter expertise to specific books. Even the Screen Actors Guild jumped on board, with more than one hundred professional voice actors lending their talents to the Learning Ally audiobook library.

**Audible** ([audible.com](http://audible.com)): Harry Potter? Ramona Quimby? Dr. Seuss? Audible has you covered. Their curated collection of audiobooks ranging from baby to age 13 allows children to read along to their favorite books. According to Audible, “Exposure to spoken language reveals a marked improvement in reading and cognitive development.” Unlike Learning Ally, Audible does not include text to read along; instead, a student holds the book and listens along. Audible is available as an app for iOS and Android.

### **Other Audiobook Sites:**

- **TumbleBookLibrary** ([tumblebooks.com](http://tumblebooks.com)) is a curated database of children's ebooks, available for subscription to elementary schools and public libraries.
- **Storyline Online** ([storylineonline.net](http://storylineonline.net)) streams videos that feature celebrities reading children's books, along with illustrations.
- **LibriVox** ([librivox.org](http://librivox.org)) is a nonprofit site that features public domain audiobooks recorded by volunteers, free to all to listen to and download.

**Audacity** ([audacityteam.org](http://audacityteam.org)) is free audio software for multi-track recording and editing available for Windows, Mac, and GNU/Linux. This is a great tool for creating audiobooks if a student cannot or does not want to use other audiobooks. Teachers simply record themselves reading the text and then create a file of the recording. Teachers can use Audacity to create an audiobook library to share with students and their parents. They also can use this tech tool to insert metacognitive questions such as "What happens next?" throughout the text as it is recorded. This is a great way to provide personalized learning for students. Even enriched readers enjoy choral reading using technology, by recording audiobooks for fellow students.

**Booktrack** ([booktrackclassroom.com](http://booktrackclassroom.com)) adds a unique feature to a classroom's choral reading exercises: a soundtrack. Through Booktrack, teachers select from the site's free library of books with engaging soundtracks, let students choose audio to accompany the text during informative and explanatory writing exercises, and enhance their classroom choral reading exercises by adding sound and music. According to statistics offered by by Booktrack, reading comprehension among students increased by 17% with the addition of contextual soundtracks, and students read for 30% longer and reported a 35% higher satisfaction rate when reading with a Booktrack.

### ● **Video Conferencing Apps**

Video conferencing apps like **join.me** ([join.me](http://join.me)), **FaceTime** (iOS), and **Google Hangouts** ([hangouts.google.com](http://hangouts.google.com)) provide excellent opportunities for students to work with friends and family who do not live close by. Children who choral read through video conferencing with loved ones, such as parents from whom they are separated (through divorce, travel, military deployment, etc.) or long-distance grandparents, may be more inclined to participate in the reading process. Not only

do the children have the opportunity to engage in choral reading using these apps, they get to do it with someone they love.

**TEACHER  
TALK**

## Choral Reading in Action

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I frequently use the concept of choral reading to increase my special education students' oral reading fluency. In addition to reading the story along with my students as a group, I often use a CD or digital audiobook, so the children are able to model the proper accuracy, rate, and expression as they listen to the author (or another strong voice) read the story. Variations on choral reading are a wonderful alternative to the dreaded round robin reading.

I've found that the students really look forward to not only listening to the audiobooks but also reading along with the various voices presented. Interestingly, they seem to enjoy that many of the audiobooks have male authors reading the text—a nice change from listening to the all-female teaching staff at our school.

One particular story that my students seemed to enjoy was *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* by Verna Aardema. This is a folktale set in Kenya. I found a particularly wonderful audiobook by Reading Rainbows that allowed the students to acquire a sense of African culture. The narration is accompanied by African music and the narrator speaks with a voice filled with sadness and foreboding—very compelling.

The host begins the experience by asking the children if they have ever been thirsty but unable to find water. This really creates a mindset for listening to the haunting words of the story as well as establishing a connection between the students and the "thirsty grass and animals." Part of the beauty of using this kind of technology is how the children are immersed in the environment. As the narrator reads, thunder can be

heard in the background, as well as the rain. Even the music imitates the pitter-patter of the rain.

After listening to the audiobook, the children are ready to participate in the choral reading experience. There are many difficult vocabulary words that we would identify in the script before beginning our choral reading experience. The children all have highlighters they can use to identify any specific difficult words. After choral reading together, we can choose groups of students to read specific parts. All in all, the choral reading experience allows the students to model expert reading, developing not only fluency but also vocabulary and expression.

Finally, the audiobook can be placed in a listening center for the students to use at their convenience. Reading independence is a terrific outgrowth of this kind of reading technology.

We use **TumbleBookLibrary** (tumblebooks.com—our PTA bought us a subscription), **YouTube** (youtube.com), **Audible** (audible.com), **Storyline Online** (storylineonline.net), audio library rentals that download to iPads, and **LibriVox**. My students really love using audiobooks. One of my second-grade students, James, told me he loves having books read to him, especially since he found out that the authors often read their own books. We are establishing a love of reading.

## ISTE Standards for Educators

### 5. Designer

Educators design authentic, learner-driven activities and environments that recognize and accommodate learner variability.

- a. Use technology to create, adapt and personalize learning experiences that foster independent learning and accommodate learner differences and needs.
- b. Design authentic learning activities that align with content area standards and use digital tools and resources to maximize active, deep learning.

### **6. Facilitator**

Educators facilitate learning with technology to support student achievement of the ISTE Standards for Students.

- a. Foster a culture where students take ownership of their learning goals and outcomes in both independent and group settings.

### **7. Analyst**

Educators understand and use data to drive their instruction and support students in achieving their learning goals.

- a. Provide alternative ways for students to demonstrate competency and reflect on their learning using technology.

## ISTE Standards for **Students**

### **3. Knowledge Constructor**

Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.

- d. Build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

### **7. Global Collaborator**

Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally.

- d. Explore local and global issues and use collaborative technologies to work with others to investigate solutions.