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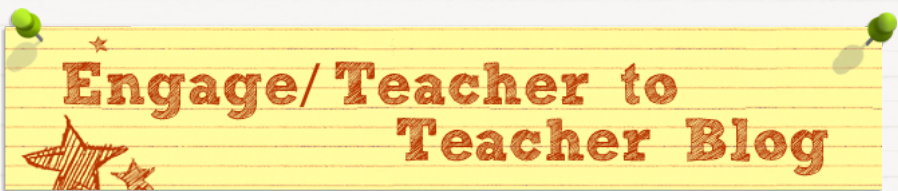
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Ask the Librarians: Audio- and e-book recommendations; contemporary models for complex writing

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Leveled Audio- and E-book Recommendations

I am looking for help and guidance! I am an elementary school librarian. We have recently purchased some iPods for audiobooks and NOOKs for e-books. One of the primary purposes for these devices is help reluctant readers. The iPods are to be used for students to listen and then read along to books of interest to them that may be above their reading level (but not too far) but are books their peers are reading. The NOOKs are to be used for reluctant readers or LD readers who are just not interested or have trouble focusing and tracking print books. The ability to increase font size and/or to space words out is what the teachers found attractive in these titles.

To make our program successful, I need to find audiobooks and e-books that are of interest to 3rd to 5th graders but at fairly specific reading levels. We use the Development Reading Assessment (DRA) system and it seems to be particularly difficult to find book lists or search options for books by DRA. I find that I am toggling back and forward from any site that have DRAs for books and then checking whether audiobooks or e-books are available for titles in the right reading levels. I am really struggling with finding resources to help my teachers select books at the correct levels for their students!

Do you have any suggestions? It seems that there are more list options for other reading level systems but I find that the conversion charts are just not very consistent when trying to equate one system to DRAs.

Sarah G.
Diamond Path Elementary
St. Paul, MN

Dear Sarah,

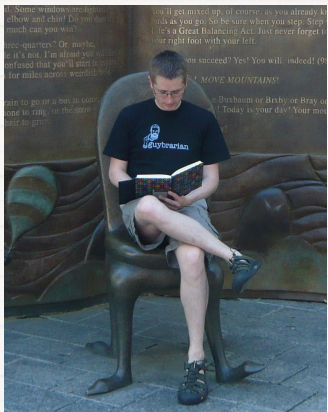
First of all, I hope 2012 is off to a fantastic start. How exciting that your library has iPods for audiobooks and NOOKs for e-books! These are wonderful tools to have in the library. I am certain your students and teachers are thankful to have access to them.

I understand your frustration locating materials at specific reading levels. I do not have any hands-on experience using the DRA system, but I found the following tools helpful.

Scholastic's Teacher Book Wizard
The Teacher Book Wizard is the perfect tool for creating thematic reading lists. It searches 50,000 titles. The BookAlike feature allows you to find similar books. You can search by Grade Level Equivalent, Guided Reading, Lexile Measure, and DRA.

Titlewave's Collection Development Tool
You probably have a Titlewave account. If not, you can sign up for a free account at www.titlewave.com.

Once you are in the system, click on the "Collection Development" link. You can search by reading levels. You will have to use a [leveled text chart](#) to convert to DRA levels.



This system allows you to search ebooks, too.

BookSource

BookSource is a friendly and helpful company. You might consider using their [custom book list service](#).

OverDrive

It is likely your public library subscribes to OverDrive. Maybe a children's services librarian could show students how to download materials using their public library card. I am not sure if this idea would actually work, because every system has unique rules. I plan on contacting the Oak Brook Public Library (where I teach) about coming out to talk to my students about OverDrive.

NOOK Suggestions:

- [My Weird School series by Dan Gutman](#) [DRA level 20]
- [LIKE PICKLE JUICE ON A COOKIE by Julie Sternberg](#) [DRA level 20]
- [STINK AND THE ULTIMATE THUMB-WRESTLING SMACKDOWN by Megan McDonald](#) [DRA level 20]
- [The Frankie Pickle series by Eric Wight](#) [DRA level 24]
- [WHERE I LIVE by Eileen Spinelli](#) [DRA level 24]
- [SPUNKY TELLS ALL by Ann Cameron](#) [DRA level 28]
- [HAMSTER MAGIC by Lynne Jonell](#) [DRA level 28]
- [Most books](#) by Claudia Mills [Most are around DRA level 34]
- [THE GENIUS FILES: MISSION UNSTOPPABLE by Dan Gutman](#) [DRA level 38]
- [THE MAZE OF BONES by Rick Riordan](#) [DRA level 40]
- [PIE by Sarah Weeks](#) [DRA level 40]
- [GRANNY TORRELLI MAKES SOUP by Sharon Creech](#) [DRA level 40]
- [YEAR OF THE DOG by Grace Lin](#) [DRA level 44]

Audiobook Suggestions:

- I regularly check [Listening Library's website](#).
- Booklist puts out a list of the [top audiobooks of the year](#).
- I usually turn to [WorldCat](#) when looking for audio books. It searches thousands of libraries.
- You can search for materials using School Library Journal's [Reviews Center](#).

Hope this helps!

Best regards,
John Schumacher

John Schumacher is a K-5 School Library Director in Oak Brook, Illinois. Read his popular blogs, [MrSchuReads.com](#) and [TwoLibrariesOneVoice.com](#) for even more book suggestions.

Contemporary Models for Complex Writing

I like to have students emulate complex writing styles to help add variety to their sentence structure, but my examples (W.W. Jacobs, Roald Dahl) are getting a little stale. Are there current YA authors who have an interesting, complex writing style I could for this purpose?

Mary C.
Horace Mann Middle School
Franklin, MA



What a great question! Today's young adult literature is full of prose stylists from the mood- and setting-rich stories of **David Almond** and **Sonya Hartnett**, to the Attolia fantasies of **Megan Whalen Turner**, to the loosely autobiographical humor of **Jack Gantos**. In addition, here are some specific samples from a few other authors in a variety of genres that may provide what you are looking for:

Let's start with **Franny Billingsley's** new fantasy, CHIME (Dial, 2011), also a mystery and romance featuring an unreliable narrator, Briony, in a rich swamp setting. It's picked up six starred reviews, was a National Book Award finalist for 2011, and is suited to older middle school and high school students:

I've confessed to everything and I'd like to be hanged.

Now, if you please.

I don't mean to be difficult, but I can't bear to tell my story. I can't relive those memories—the touch of the Dead Hand, the smell of eel, the gulp and swallow of the swamp.

How can you possibly think me innocent? Don't let my face fool you; it tells the worst lies. A girl can have the face of an angel but have a horrid sort of heart.

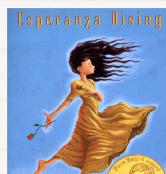
Another book, coincidentally with an unreliable narrator, is the 2008 Printz Award winner, THE WHITE DARKNESS (HarperTempest, 2007) by **Geraldine McCaughrean**. Sym is a teenage girl in love with Titus Oates, Antarctic explorer who has been dead for 90 years. He's since for the ride—in her head at least—for her wild ride to the Antarctic with her Uncle Victor.

In the general way of things, I don't know much about anything. Uncle Victor says I'm 'the victim of a shoddy education system.' But I do know about the Polar Regions. The bookshelves over my bed are full of books about the North and South Poles. Icebound almost. A glacial cliff face teetering over my bed. I remember, the night after Dad had been rushed into the hospital, one of the shelves sheared off and crashed down on me. I woke up thinking the house was collapsing—books gouging at my head, bouncing off the bed frame, slapping flat on the floor. I looked at the hole in the wall and the brackets on the pillow and I didn't know what to do.

About the shelf. About anything.

One of my middle school students' favorite historical fiction novels is ESPERANZA RISING (Scholastic, 2000). This riches-to-rags story by **Pam Muñoz Ryan**, winner of the Pura Belpré Award, is beautifully written and infused with Spanish phrases.

Papa handed Esperanza the knife. The short blade was curved like a scythe, its fat wooden handle fitting snugly in her palm. This job was usually reserved for the eldest son of a wealthy rancher, but since Esperanza was an only child and Papa's pride and glory, she was always given the honor. Last night she had watched Papa sharpen the knife back and forth across a stone, so she knew the tool was edged like a razor.



"Cuidate los dedos," said Papa. Watch your fingers.



LEVIATHAN (Simon Pulse, 2009) by **Scott Westerfeld** is the first volume of an exciting Steampunk science fiction trilogy featuring a pair of heroes aboard a living whale airship in an alternate 1914 Europe.

It seemed only fair that Alek have some fun while his parents were off watching military maneuvers. He'd begged to be taken along, to see the mustered ranks of soldiers striding past in real life, to feel the rumble of massed fighting machines through the soles of his boots.

It was Mother, of course, who had forbidden it—his studies were more important than "parades," as she called them. She didn't understand that military exercises had more to teach him than musty old tutors and their books. One day soon Alek might be piloting one of those machines.

War was coming, after all. Everyone said so.

I hope some of these help you, and definitely ask your librarian (fingers crossed that you have one) to keep an eye out for more good excerpts for you. I love that you are willing to supplement your examples with some from contemporary teen literature.

Sincerely,
 Cindy Dobrez
 Middle School Librarian
 West Ottawa Public Schools
 Holland, MI
 dobrezc@westottawa.net
 Bookends Blog: <http://bookends.booklistonline.com>

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