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President's Message

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President's Message...

by Sean Kottke, MRA President 2016-2017

"This ... is ... Audible!"

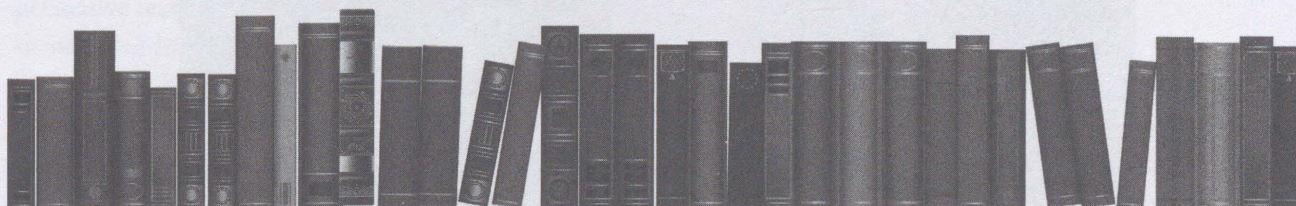
Do you recognize that greeting? Like a lot of avid readers, I find it difficult to resist the urge to "read with my ears," as Teri Lesesne puts it, when I'm unable to direct my eyes to a text. Whether I'm driving, working out, doing housework or even occasionally engaging in some routine task in the office, if I'm alone and not reading something with my eyes, chances are you'll find me plugged into an audiobook. Once the sole province of readers with visual impairments and commuters, audiobooks have earned a privileged spot in the routines of everyday readers worldwide. Audible alone boasts over 1.6 *billion* hours' worth of listening by its users in 2015, while audiobook sales have bucked otherwise sluggish trends in the publishing industry with immense year-to-year growth (Graham, 2016). My home library has devoted ever increasing amounts of shelf space to audiobooks over the past decade, and now features four distinct areas of the library to provide audiobooks for different audiences of readers. Add to this the thousands of audiobook titles available for interlibrary loan through MelCat and for download through the Woodlands Library Cooperative, and one's access to audiobooks in my township becomes virtually limitless, even without a paid subscription to a service like Audible.



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If you're a connoisseur of audiobooks, not only do you have an ear for prosody—fluent, expressive reading that uncovers nuances of meaning in a text—chances are, you've also encountered a few rotten apples. These include readers who refer to Michigan cities like Ludington, Munising and Sault Ste. Marie as LOO-dington, MUNNising and SAWLT Ste Marie, and readers who plod along at a snail's pace. With Audible, you can speed up the recording, but if you've ever experimented with that setting, you've likely realized that past a certain point, you may hear all the words, but the audiobook goes by too fast for the ear to comprehend.

The authors featured in the Critical Issues section of this issue of *Michigan Reading Journal* understand this phenomenon intimately. They write about the importance of fluency as foundational to reading



comprehension, and warn educators not to mistake speed for fluency. If you attended MRA's Summer Literature Conference last July, you had the privilege of hearing Dr. Timothy Rasinski speak on "Why Fluency Matters," a topic that has been deemed (unfortunately, we believe) "not hot" and "should not be hot" in separate surveys of MRA and ILA members. If Dr. Rasinski's address didn't convince you, or you didn't have the opportunity to hear him, let the articles in this issue of *MRJ* deepen the case for attention to fluency. In my day job, I'm frequently asked why Michigan certification standards for teachers of world languages, English as a Second Language, and bilingual education privilege oral proficiency in languages other than English over other areas of prospective teachers' literacy. Although fluency as discussed by our authors in this issue may seem different from fluency in the context of mastery of another language, both usages stem from a common concern: effective communication. Without fluency, readers cannot hope to derive the full spectrum of meaning from a written text, and speakers cannot hope to convey all the nuances of their intended messages to listeners. Without fluency, we lose access to communication.

As always, read, share, and document your sharing on social media with #mraaccess. To paraphrase Audible's trademark send-off, "MRA hopes you enjoy this journal."

References

Graham, L. (2016, March 3). *Book sales are in decline but audio books are thriving*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/03/03/book-sales-are-in-decline-but-audio-books-are-thriving.html>

Dr. Sean Kottke is the 2016-2017 President of the Michigan Reading Association. Sean is employed as an Education Consultant in the Office of Professional Preparation Services of the Michigan Department of Education, where he leads activities related to the development of teacher preparation standards, programs, assessments and placements in literacy, world languages and arts education. He holds degrees from both the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, and is a former high school Humanities and Spanish teacher, gifted/talented specialist, professor of reading teacher education, and college dean.

