

Introduction to Summer Listening

“School's out for summer” proclaims the lyrics of a popular 1970s song by Alice Cooper. Kids are thrilled, but teachers and parents want to be sure kids don't fall prey to the dreaded summer slide, a term researchers have given to studies that show that students [can lose one to three months](#) of hard-won reading skills during the school break.

How can parents and other caring adults help kids keep literacy skills strong? Dr. Teri Lesesne (“Summertime and the Reading Is Required?” *Knowledge Quest*, v. 43, no. 5, p 46-49), children's literature and reading expert, as well as an enthusiastic audiobook advocate, recommends that we “CARE about readers” by offering kids “Choice, Access, Response, and Enthusiasm.” Lesesne’s suggestion is echoed by Search Institute, creator of a framework of 40 [Developmental Assets](#) for young people that are key to school success and development into successful and contributing adults. Search Institute names reading for pleasure as a core asset and suggests creating a family tradition of reading together each day, with all screen media—television, cell phones, tablets, computers—turned off. How can families follow the advice of Dr. Lesesne and Search Institute? Try the pleasurable magic of audiobooks!

Summer’s here, and the time is right for listening as families spend lots of time in the car: from pool to practice field or on trips to cross-country treks. Audiobooks turn those hectic travel times into shared literary experiences that banish boredom. Researchers have proven that audiobooks increase a listener’s vocabulary, comprehension skills, and fluency while educators advocate audiobooks for all ages, as listening is the fundamental language art which serves as the basis of reading, writing, and speaking skills. But most importantly, the power of a great story serves to connect listeners of all ages, creating bonds that foster those important assets that demonstrate CARE. Let your kids choose an audiobook CD or download titles from your public library to turn the family car into a traveling book club. Use the audio to spur discussion: What would you do if you were that character? How would you act in that situation? Can you predict what will happen next? Talking about the audiobooks is a great way to foster comprehension and response to literature without making it seem like a school assignment. And, with a family listen, the enthusiasm will grow without trying. Everyone will be hooked!

We've put together a list of terrific audiobooks for family listening, selected to satisfy wide-ranging interests and ages. There are fabulous stand-alone titles that will introduce new ideas, new cultures, and new worlds. Plus, we recommend great series that will spark the “potato chip effect”—start with the first title in the car, and young listeners will just have to listen to the entire series on their own.

Check out each audio’s summary for an overview, then listen to the audio clip to sample the treat that’s in store for your child or your family when you listen together. If you need more suggestions, we recommend [Kids on the Go](#), an extensive list of audiobook titles from [AudioFile](#) for first grade through high school. If you're looking for audiobooks that you can share with teens, be sure to try the 14 free weeks of downloads available from [SYNC](#), pairing a contemporary YA title with a classic, or required reading list title each week.

The Audio Publishers Association 2012 Consumer Survey found that adults listen while commuting in the car and traveling during vacations. Parents note that the second most common time youth under age 18 listen to audios is during vacation travel. Load up the family car with audiobooks, a terrific literacy tool when school's out for the summer. Listen up and defeat the summer slide!

As summer reading is, and should be, a much broader, free-flowing experience than reading for curriculum purposes, these titles are categorized into younger listeners and older listeners. All of the titles in the younger category would (unless noted in the annotation) be acceptable for families with a wide range of ages, from Kindergarten to 7th grade. Older listeners encompass 8th grade and up.