
As the authors state in their introduction to this guide, ‘there’s more than one way to read a book or indeed any kind of text’. Both school and library teachers report an increasing number of young people prefer not to read, or do not enjoy reading, traditional print. This volume introduces the librarian/teacher to alternative formats, which can engage not only reluctant or nonreaders but also young people with physical, cognitive or psychological impairments. Librarians now have at their disposal an array of formats to reach out and bring the magic of reading to students. This book describes these formats and how they can be used effectively.

The alternative formats are listed with their latest enhancements. The technology of digital books permits readers to adjust the contrast, brightness and font size, and apps increase the interactive experience. An example is the Audiogo system of digital audio books based on a small device attractive to young readers because of the gadget factor. The content can be displayed in a variety of user-friendly formats, such as easy-to-read fonts, sizes, and character spacing.

For Braille users electronic titles can be accessed via ‘refreshable Braille’ by means of a magnetic strip attached to any computer. The DAISY system (Digital Accessible Information System) is primarily for visually impaired people and offers audiobooks that can be played on computers and mobile devices. Readers can play the audio and simultaneously display and highlight the corresponding text.

Books made into films provide another avenue for young people to discover stories. DVDs incorporate subtitles and audio description features useful for those less familiar with English or with sensory impairments. There is a good selection of book and author websites chosen for their peripheral offerings with all manners of hooks to attract readers. The reading promotion section offers resources where writers and readers can interact and gain advice from educators.

The case studies highlight both the benefits and the downsides to the alternative formats and assistive technology and are a valuable addition to the book. Children find the missing book cover and page numbers on their e-reader disconcerting, while a librarian regrets the lack of bookmarking and note-taking facilities.

The websites are predominantly British, but the authors point out that they represent a sample in a fast-evolving field. This publication is not restricted to school libraries; public and tertiary libraries too can use alternative technologies to benefit patrons, attract new readers or facilitate the acquisition of English as a second language.

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