

Bookshare



SHIRLEY NG-BENITEZ

Special-Format Literature for the Print Impaired

BY JANE LAKE

WHAT DO RENÉE Watson's YA best seller *Piecing Me Together*, Peter Brown's *The Wild Robot Escapes*, and picture books *My Lucky Day* by Keiki Kasza and David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs* have in common? They are all available free on www.Bookshare.org (and Read2Go as an iOS app) for young readers with a documented visual or physical disability. Special-format literature on Bookshare is a little-known outlet that can come as a surprise to both authors and agents.

Bookshare is the world's largest accessible online library for people who aren't able to read a black-and-white print edition due to a significant visual or motor impairment. More than 425,000 patrons in seventy countries have access to Bookshare's collection of 620,273 titles. About 820 US and international publishers donate their digital files. At first glance, some may feel a touch "infringed" by this program, or at least want to know more about how it works. Here's the long and short of it: Bookshare operates under an exception to copyright law called the *Chafee Amendment* (17 U.S.C. § 121), which allows the organization to provide copyrighted digital books as long as they are available only to people with bona fide print disabilities. Eligible student readers must first provide disability documentation and set up a login and password-protected account through their educator. The Bookshare site does not provide access to copyrighted works for the general public, and adult members pay an annual \$50 fee.

For young readers, the online library can offer access to literature and periodicals at the same time as peers. Features include: text-to-speech in dozens of voices and languages; speed controls for audio pacing; word highlighting; enlarged text; and options for background colors and fonts. Digital audio cassettes and Braille formats are also available.

Since 2007, this National Library Service program has been using the latest technology to offer New York Times best sellers, Caldecott and Hugo Award winners, cookbooks, poetry, popular series such as Harry Potter and Goosebumps, and more. Each title goes through multiple stages of programming to enable visual enhancements and alternate modalities, such as audio and Braille.

Using a web browser, Android, or iOS app, members open titles using the Bookshare WebReader. Settings automatically format text according to personalized preferences. No specialized equipment is required.

While Bookshare does not distribute royalties, it offers authors and publishers a no-cost avenue to reach this niche population. Special-format books provide a more equal playing field for print-disabled youth to develop a rich inner world through literacy. Authors can check if their books are in the Bookshare library by visiting the site and typing their name or title in the "search" text box at the upper right of the homepage.

Major publishers such as Random House, Penguin, and Scholastic already submit files to Bookshare through a

direct feed, according to Nick Bowen, the manager of customer service for Benetech, the nonprofit in Palo Alto, California that converts EPUB3 files into the accessible formats used by readers. "It's a more manual process for small and independent publishers," he explains.

"Whoever owns the copyright and rights to distribute can request a letter of consent. Our collections team will reach out and gather the files and information needed to build the book on the backside," explains Bowen. Publishers can request the final, formatted file at no cost.

www.bornaccessible.org is Bookshare's companion website for publishers and digital content creators who want to know more about making content—including illustrations—fully accessible from the beginning.

For more information, visit the Library of Congress/National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped website: www.loc.gov/programs/national-library-service-for-the-blind-and-physically-handicapped/about-this-service/?cid=loc-ppc_s=bing_c=audiobook_ag=visually-impaired_kw=audio-books-for-visually-impaired&msclkid=4d252c234a861b0bdfc676e24c5ee114

Jane Lake is an SCBWI member and teacher in New York City. Her one-act children's play Seafood Veranda was recognized in 2018 by the Bronx Arts Council. Her modern limerick "Pluto" was published April 2018 in THAT Literary Review, an annual publication of Auburn University. Visit www.dabadelic.com to view Lake's creative work for children with a poetic bent.