

Tell Me a Story

A media specialist promotes reading, with podcasts

Library media specialist Sarah Chauncey spent the waning days of summer engaged in the annual ritual conducted by educators nationwide—preparing for a new school year. But beyond straightening shelves and taking inventory

in her library at Grandview Elementary in Monsey, NY, Chauncey clicked away at her computer, loading the latest tools in her learning arsenal—podcasts—onto the library's Web site.

Among the hottest trends going, podcasting lets users download audio files from the Web, store them on digital music devices, and play them at one's leisure. Commercial outfits and chatty bloggers alike are podcasting, and so are progressive educators, like Chauncey, who are beginning to adopt the communication tool to captivate their students.

Starting this month, Grandview's 420 K-3 students can access podcast snippets of selected picture books on the library's Web site (www.grandviewlibrary.org). There are also recorded questions related to each book, which parents can use to help spark home discussion about their child's reading. "I want to get parents more involved," says



Media specialist Sarah Chauncey, a former computer programmer, has introduced podcasting at her school.

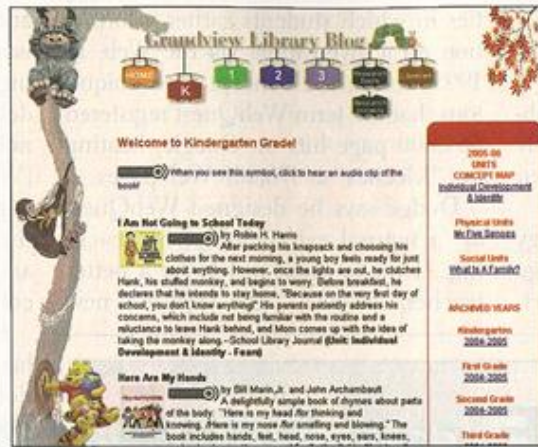
Chauncey, who describes Monsey as a high-need community, where families may have few books at home. "They are a bright, able group of kids, who've had a harder start and just need to be challenged," she says.

Children can also take home a complete CD recording of each book featured on the site, which will be available, along with the hard copy version, in the library's listening center. Chauncey did most of the narration herself, but students can also experi-

ence books read to them by their peers. "The nice thing about podcasting is that kids can feel they are being heard, but you don't raise privacy issues by showing their faces or names," she explains.

Chauncey is also launching a school newspaper this fall, in both hard copy and a Web-based version. The online edition of *Top of the Fold* will include podcasts produced by students.

"I am using CastBlaster to create the podcasts and book CDs—it has worked beautifully as I can easily incorporate one of the Windows WAV files as a page-turn signal," Chauncey wrote in the blog *On the Cutting Edge-education* (onthecuttingedge.blogspot.com). CastBlaster, a podcast recording system currently in beta, cost Chauncey \$50 to download. Overall, the podcasting program cost several thousand dollars, says Grandview Principal Anita McCarthy.



Grandview Elementary's blog, featuring podcasts.

But, she adds, the district willingly made the investment after the superintendent came by to see what they were supporting.

What's next for Chauncey? "I've applied for a Best Buy tech grant to buy iPods and digital recorders to push the initiative into the classrooms," she says, with a zeal characteristic of those who

find their calling later in life.

After starting out her career as a teacher and earning a master's degree in information science, Chauncey says she "fell in love with programming." She acquired an MBA and spent the next 29 years as a programmer for First Boston and Morgan Guaranty, among other top-tier corporations, before taking her position at Grandview last year. With a goal of "applying everything I know," Chauncey has infused learning activities throughout the school with technology and, according to McCarthy, "has brought a whole new dimension educationally to the library."

And then there are the personal rewards. "In business, I worked with stocks and bonds," says Chauncey, "but to be working with kids again, I've renewed my life."—Kathy Ishizuka

Sarah Chauncey, a library media specialist at Grandview Elementary, a K-3 school in Monsey, NY, is another avid blogger. She "does everything" with blogs, she says, using online entries to update content on her library's Web site, share classroom news with parents, and organize lesson plans. Chauncey's eventual goal, in fact, is to "do away with paper-based lesson plans entirely." (For more on Chauncey's work, see "Tell Me a Story," pp. 24-25.) Like McDowell, Chauncey believes that blogs, used in a thoughtful way, can increase the quality and the quantity of student writing. "I think it's really about teaching a new generation in a language and context that they accept and embrace," she says. "Blogs are their notebooks; this is how they'll communicate in the future."