

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE A “;”? THE REPACKAGING OF VISUAL-TEXTUAL PIECES FOR THE AURAL-ORAL MEDIUM

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"I think every writer would rather have people read books, committed as we are to the word. But I'd rather have them listen to it than not at all."

-Frank McCourt (Harmon 2005)

0. ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I address the issue of whether there is a difference between listening to and reading a book, and how much it is possible to determine if one is better than the other for the purposes of retaining information. I started by interviewing people in the audiobooks industry, and moved on to doing original experiments and analyzing the data.

I. INTRODUCTION

Given that books are generally assumed to be a primarily written form of communication, a number of questions arise with respect to audiobooks, partially due to the way we often consider and deal with written and oral language. We learn to speak

before we learn to read and write, and for the most part our dealings with written language exists in this direction. In general, we translate spoken language into written language. For the most part, when we write things down, they are intended to be read off of a sheet of paper, a screen, a poster, a projector, a t-shirt, or some other object. We imagine written language as something to be seen. Works that are intended to be heard are usually written with this in mind. With audiobooks, however, a work that is originally intended to be seen is now being re-produced for a hearing experience. This interface between spoken and written language is especially fascinating in the present day, when a whole new level of informal and immediate written communication is becoming prevalent with the advent of the Internet.

Thinking about audiobooks has led me to come up with many questions. What difficulties are there in re-packaging a visual and textual piece of work as an auditory and verbal piece of work? Is there any information lost? If so, how can this information best be preserved over the change of medium? In order to address some of these questions, I began interviews with people who work in the audiobooks industry, both commercially and for the Library of Congress (LOC). The LOC has a division called the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Disabled (NLS), which produces and hires other studios to produce audiobooks for people who are not able to use the print versions. Some of the books produced by the NLS are also commercially produced. (Gordon 2005; Lawson 2005; NLS website 2005)

I was going to begin my exploration of audiobooks by comparing a commercially produced audiobook with an NLS audiobook of the same text to see if the differences fell into any nice groups that would lead to interesting issues of any sort – that is, I planned a

fishing expedition. However, I have decided to move in a different direction, partly because on further consideration of that idea, I got worried that if no pattern emerged, I could be without a thesis topic. Given the limited amount of time I had to work in and the fact that I found a more interesting avenue to pursue, I decided to focus exclusively on commercially produced audiobook novels using original experiments to test some hypotheses. Primarily, however, I ended up conducting two preliminary experiments to determine whether there is any support for my hypothesis that different information is emphasized in the different mediums. In this paper, I attempt to analyze the data in a coherent manner to identify and discuss any of these patterns in the data, and suggest further studies that could help to form a more supported set of theories. Along the way, I also will discuss observations I have made about audiobooks and about my own and others experiences in listening to them.

1.1 STRUCTURE OF THIS PAPER

This paper will consist of five major sections: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, EXPERIMENTS, ANALYSIS, and CONCLUSIONS. Each of these sections will be further subdivided into sections as necessary.

The INTRODUCTION section contains a general introduction, this STRUCTURE OF THIS PAPER section, a HOW I CAME TO THIS TOPIC section, and a HOW I GOT FROM THERE TO HERE section. The second-to-last section is about how I became interested in audiobooks, while the last one explains how I worked with that interest through some intermediate topic ideas to this one.

The BACKGROUND section contains some background research I did on learning styles as well as some general background on audiobooks and the process of recording them.

The meat of the paper is in the EXPERIMENTS section, with sections for each of the two experiments I performed and sub-sections for METHODS, RESULTS, ANALYSIS, and FURTHER RESEARCH.

There is then a CONCLUSIONS section in which I discuss my results in more general and finally an ACKNOWLEDGMENTS section in which I give credit where credit is due.

There are also two APPENDICES containing the entirety of my data sets and a BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1.2 HOW I CAME TO THIS TOPIC.

This past summer, from May to August of 2005, I worked full time in the Friends Historical Library. Mostly, I spent my days quietly sorting through the Swarthmore College Photograph Archives, doing relatively routine tasks like stamping the backs of photographs with the library stamp and writing a unique number on the back of each photo before putting it in its archival plastic sleeve and snapping it into its binder. Needless to say, this soon became automatic, and my brain was quickly freed to, for the most part, fill up with thoughts of how bored I was.

After a surprisingly long time, I realized that I could listen to music at work without bothering anyone (and, to be honest, most of this realization came from the fact that the other student employees had already been doing the same) and brought my iPod with me to work. I filled a few of my days with music, but even that wasn't enough of a diversion after a while, and I also increasingly feared the inevitable moment I would start humming along or loudly tapping my feet as patrons were doing quiet research on their genealogy or paging carefully through a delicate and rare book.

I settled into my room one night after work and was idly browsing through the iTunes music store¹ when I noticed a link to the audiobooks section. I decided to look at the selection, and ended up purchasing and downloading *The Golden Compass* by Phillip Pullman, as I had started reading a friend's copy a month or so earlier, but he had gone home for the summer along with his book collection. The book was about 12 hours or so long, and took me a few workdays to finish entirely. Those days went by so quickly that I decided the investment was worth it, (and besides, I was thoroughly hooked on the series by then) so I ended up listening to the next one and the next. This series had all of the dialogue acted out by a full cast, so it was particularly engrossing.

At this point, I was convinced that I would be listening to a fair share of audiobooks over the summer, so I ended up looking up and subscribing to Audible.com, a service that

¹ See <http://www.apple.com/itunes/> for more information on the iTunes music store. In short, it is a service that allows customers to purchase and download music over their Internet connection, and has lately expanded to include an audiobooks section, as well. It has (by my observation) become very popular, especially among teenagers and twenty-somethings.

I had remembered hearing about a few years ago. With this service, I would get two audiobooks for \$20-odd a month total as well as a discounted price on any other books that I wanted, which was significantly more affordable than prices the audiobooks were listed for individually on iTunes or in CD or cassette tape format. I found myself running through my subscription and buying extra books every month and listening to books outside of work as well (I found it particularly relaxing to listen to audiobooks while doing something visual, such as puzzles or art projects).

For the most part, I enjoyed the audiobooks I bought, though I had one amusingly bad experience. As a part of a package deal with another website, I bought the audiobook version of *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle, and I tried to listen to it. I had read the book many times before and loved it, but I found this book nearly impossible to listen to, as it was read by the author and his accent and general intonation reminded me very strongly of my childhood rabbi. While a strong New York accent might seem comfortable in certain genres, it was so out of place in this sort of fantasy setting (especially with the mental image of my rabbi and a lingering feeling of fidgeting in my seat from overly long sermons) that I found that I couldn't enjoy the book at all, and I couldn't even keep listening to it. I remembered a *New York Times* article that my mother had mentioned to me² maybe half a year before that was about how specific

² My mother, who has her B.A. and M.A. in English, is now a stay-at-home mom and is an avid and thorough reader of *The New York Times* (we get home delivery, and she reads the entire paper from cover-to-cover on a daily basis or whenever she can find time to do so). Regularly, my mom will cut out and mail me articles she thinks I might enjoy, and sometimes she will summarize them for me³ if I'm busy or if we are chatting about

audiobook narrators can be very popular and have quite a following, and how authors often are not the best choice for reading their own audiobooks, and moved on to a different book. (Newman 2005)

By the end of the summer, I had listened to quite a few audiobooks, and had started thinking about some questions I had about it. When I was in high school, I had volunteered for Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, a non-profit organization that primarily records textbooks. While working at RFB&D, I had noticed there were many challenges in recording a book, and that it wasn't nearly as simple as hitting record and talking into a microphone. Even with that sort of non-commercial recording, any mistakes that obscured the content had to be dubbed over, and recording a passage could sometimes take several tries. In the cases of textbooks, diagrams and footnotes had to be described and all information relayed through them had to be fully conveyed in some manner. In some of these textbooks, a great deal of the content is contained in a visual format, so the factual information in this case had to be translated, in a sense, into a form that could be understood through speech. In this case, the issues involved in reading go well beyond questions of punctuation and esthetics. (RFB&D website 2005)

My high school volunteering experience primed me to notice how such problems were dealt with in commercial audiobooks. One of the novels I listened to over the

something relevant. In this case, she was also very helpful in finding the article again for me when I started working on audiobooks as my thesis topic.

³ Interesting enough, *The New York Times* is available in an audio digest form from Audible for \$2 a day, \$13 a month, or \$70 a year.

There was a hammering on the door. Nanny Ogg carefully put down her brandy nightcap, and stared at the wall for a moment. Now a lifetime of edge witchery* had honed senses that most people never really knew they had, and something in her head went “click”

This is an example of a typical footnoted bit of text that Terry Pratchett tends to use. It's possible to go on without reading the footnote, but I think I would be missing out if I didn't get to hear them, and I do think it adds something to the text to have these bits in footnote form.

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y Pratchett, an author known for his stylistic use of footnotes, and dealt with this creatively by swapping in a different narrator for the footnotes.

***An edge witch is one who makes her living on the edges, in that moment when boundary conditions apply—between life and death, light and dark, good and evil and, most dangerous of all, today and tomorrow.**

This is the footnote itself – in this case, it's pretty closely related to the text, though in many cases Pratchett uses footnotes to wander off in a tangential direction to the rest of the piece.

Others of his books simply integrated the footnotes into the main text. Another thing that happened was that I listened to a few books that I had previously read in paper form. One thing that I have found about re-reading books is that I will notice details that I didn't notice the first time around or forgot about. I found that in the case of listening to a book I had read before, I noticed even more details and word choices to the point that I

felt almost as if I were reading a different book. It made me wonder if I am missing out on as rich an experience as I can have with reading novels since I tend to skim or read quickly, and if it's possible that being forced to listen to the story more slowly can actually be valuable to me.

I also noticed that audiobooks seemed to be getting more popular. The National Endowment for the arts was quoted in the Fall 2005 Authors' Guild Bulletin as saying that "fewer Americans are reading books than a decade ago, but almost a third more are listening to them on tapes, CD's, and iPods." (Geeslin 2005:34) I wondered if this increase in interest was due to the accessibility provided by downloading services like iTunes and Audible, the greater convenience and ease of use when you can carry an entire book or many entire books in a device the size of a single cassette tape, or some other factor that I hadn't considered. It seemed likely that it was some combination of these factors when I noticed that Apple was relatively heavily advertising a package of a Harry Potter-themed iPod and downloadable set of audiobooks for \$500, with half of the price covering the engraved iPod and half of the price covering the set of 6 books, coming to a total of almost 100 hours.

A *New York Times* article, "Loud, Proud, Unabridged: It Is Too Reading!" addressed exactly these issues. "Audio books, once seen as a kind of oral CliffsNotes for reading lightweights, have seduced members of a literate but busy crowd by allowing them to read while doing something else." (Harmon 2005) It went on to cite a variety of opinions of authors and critics, such as "listeners are opting for convenience, they say, at the expense of engaging the mind and imagination as only real reading can," while audiobook lovers assert that listening is not objectively worse or better than reading, and

that (for example) they never noticed “how much of the language they were skimming over in the books they read on paper.” This sparked a debate in the form of letters to the editor, with strong opinions falling on both sides of the issue.

So, I came into the school year with all of these questions in the back of my mind, and when I started thinking about topics for my thesis, it seemed like a natural step to see what research there was out there on the topic of audiobooks. When I couldn’t find any, it was clear to me that I had to at least begin applying other research and doing some preliminary experiments of my own to begin to examine some of the output of this \$800 million industry.

1.2 HOW I GOT FROM THERE TO HERE.

With some of these questions, I started emailing people in the audiobooks industry Donna Jo Napoli referred me to. Victoria Gordon and Celeste Lawson both work for a division of the Library of Congress called the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). At first, I thought that I might do my own comparison of two different versions of the same audiobook by listening to them and noting differences where I heard them, so I did some research on the NLS by reading their websites. It became apparent that most of the differences were probably due to budgetary concerns and thus less pertinent for my purposes. That is to say, the NLS creates their own versions of novels that are also produced commercially because they legally have the right to do so without violating copyright, and they simply have nothing to do with the

commercial audiobooks industry. (NLS Website 2005) So I started to explore different directions that I had been thinking about.

I then came up with the idea of running some small experiment prototypes in order to begin exploring this topic, since I was not able to find any direct research on audiobooks. I came up with three experiments that I can do which are described in a later section. I think the part of this topic that I actually care about is how people actually interact with audiobooks and how they experience them, and this is something I will need to do my own research on in order to find more about. At first, I wanted to look into and highlight the differences between listening to an audiobook and reading a book on paper, but upon consideration, what I would like to do is attempt to place these differences in the context of other general and individual differences in book-reading experiences, such as learning styles. I think that this will be a helpful contribution to the debates that seem to surround the use of audiobooks and to a general understanding of the readership experience both with respect to audiobooks and with respect to the “traditional” printed word.

2. BACKGROUND: RESEARCH ON LEARNING STYLES

One question that concerned me when approaching this topic was the question of whether “learning styles” would have an impact on my experiments and on people’s experiences of books and audiobooks. In order to examine this, I needed some basic information on what learning styles are and how they are thought to impact learning in general.

I found a webpage from the National Science Foundation's Division of Research, Evaluation, and Communication's 2002 conference with what looked like a fairly comprehensive survey of the literature about learning styles. This term, the paper explains, has been used in a not entirely consistent manner in literature. Furthermore, there are several other terms (cognitive style, learning ability, learning strategy) which have been used interchangeably in some cases and in sharply-defined contrast in other cases.

As far as I could gather, learning styles seem to be, in effect, the way one prefers to get information about a subject: "visually (by reading), or auditorally (by lectures)." (Nickerson, 2002). It seems to me that these "styles" are not really rigorously defined concepts in any light, and that there is no consensus on whether they are anything more than personal preference. It seems reasonable enough that different people would be able to retain information passed to them in different forms with varying degrees of effectiveness, and that people might enjoy certain styles of learning more than others. It is not, on the other hand, clear whether this preference would have much of an effect on "pleasure reading" situations other than being a factor in whether a given person would prefer to read a book or to listen to it.

2. EXPERIMENTS

I decided to further study audiobooks by running two experiments. My goal here was to look at whether people get different information out of reading novels on the printed page to or listening to them as audiobooks. I have observed that I notice

things when I hear them that I don't on paper, a phenomenon also cited as a common argument by audiobooks listeners in *the New York Times*. (Harmon 2005). I think that this might be the case for other people as well. On the other hand, I do suspect that some information can be lost when heard out loud, especially in the case of long and complex sentence structures, punctuation like semi-colons and parenthetical statements, and footnotes. This position is held by a number of authors: for example, David Rapp said, "As a writer, I feel obliged to point out that listening to someone read a book is not the same as reading one. The place where a paragraph breaks is every bit as important as the sentences that make up that paragraph. The point where a write places a single comma can be crucial to the meaning of a scene, a chapter, or an entire book. Books are a visual medium, after all. We're not writing radio scripts, here."

I would like to test how important this to the readers. It seems to me that most sentences are rather resilient and can stand a little bit of loss of punctuation, so I am going to test spoken and written sentences and selections, here. In this thesis, I am entirely restricting my study to novels; I think that anything beyond this would be too wide of a field for my time constraints.

3.1 FIRST EXPERIMENT – SENTENCES

In this experiment, I selected three sentences from three books and played them for one group of people, and had another group of people read them (in the same amount of time). After hearing each sentence, I asked the subject to write the sentence out word-

for-word, and then to paraphrase it. My goal, here, was to explore how much information can be transmitted verbally and how much can be transmitted through written text, and search for comparative differences. My suspicion was that some kinds of punctuation information would be lost in the audio versions of the books.

3.1.1 METHODS

For this experiment, I selected three sentences that had interesting or complicated structure but seemed to have related thematic elements throughout. My source materials came from books that I had listened to for pleasure reading, primarily because they were what I had on hand and was familiar with. I also made a lot of use of Google Print⁴ to help me find the appropriate selections in the books I was looking for, and Audio Editor Pro⁵ to isolate the sound clips I wanted to play for people. I used iTunes to create a CD

⁴ Google Print (the search page portion of which appears to have been renamed Google Book Search during the writing of this thesis) is available at <http://books.google.com>.

The purpose of the Google Print project is to scan in and make available for searching the full text of as many books as possible. This allows for people to search through the text of books under fair-use guidelines, as it is only possible to view a few books or a small selection of text around the text that was searched for.

⁵ Which actually cost me a great deal of frustration and \$50 because I discovered, after doing all of the work, that the program (which I had found on the Internet and claimed to

of the files that I wanted to play, and I printed out several copies of the sentences that I was going to have people read. For each of the three sentences, I also printed out separate slips of paper that read:

“Please write down sentence 1 word-for-word to the best of your ability.”

and

“Please paraphrase sentence 1 to the best of your ability.”

When each subject arrived, I read the following text: “This experiment should take no more than 10 minutes of your time. I will give you instructions as we go. If you’re confused, feel free to ask any questions you have. Please check off your name here.” For subjects who were listening to their selections, I asked them to listen and I played the first selection to them. The first quote was:

“He himself was a very old man with shaggy white hair which grew over most of his face as well as on his head, and they liked him almost at once; but on the first evening when he came out to meet them at the front door he was so odd-looking that Lucy (who was the youngest) was a little afraid of him, and Edmund (who was the next youngest) wanted to laugh and had to keep pretending he was blowing his nose to hide it.”

-C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*

be shareware) wouldn’t let me save my files or in any way that would let me access them without paying for the program. I then, to my chagrin, discovered that there is a completely free/open source and probably much better program called Audacity.

I then handed him or her the half-sheet of paper that asked them to write the sentence down word-for-word. When each subject was done with the first sheet, I took it back and handed back over the sheet which asked for a paraphrase of the sentence I had just played. I then repeated this procedure for each of sentences 2 and 3. Sentence 2 was:

“The three Baudelaire children lived with their parents in an enormous mansion at the heart of a dirty and busy city, and occasionally their parents gave them permission to take a rickety trolley—the word “rickety,” you probably know, here means “unsteady” or “likely to collapse”—alone to the seashore, where they would spend the day as a sort of vacation as long as they were home for dinner.”

-Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginnings*

And sentence 3 was, “An edge witch is one who makes her living on the edges, in that moment when boundary conditions apply—between life and death, light and dark, good and evil and, most dangerous of all, today and tomorrow.”

The procedure for the subjects who read the quotes was as similar as possible to the procedure for those who listened. I timed them while reading and took the slip from them if they were reading as long as it takes to read the sentence out loud. Other than that, the sheets handed back and forth were exactly the same, as were my instructions, and the quotes were taken directly from the printed versions of the books, which I then checked against the audiobooks. Whether a student was a listener or a reader was determined randomly; I flipped a coin to decide which to begin with, and then alternated

between having subjects listen to the sentences and read them. For the purposes of labeling my data and the privacy of the subjects, I assigned each of the participants a number and a letter. The numbers were between 1 and 11 (inclusive) for the 11 participants, and the letters were either R or L for reader or listener. I will refer to all data in this thesis with the assigned number-letter combination.

3.1.2 RESULTS

Before I discuss specific results, I think it's important to note what might be an important flaw in the experiment. I handed people slips of paper asking them to write out "sentence 1," "sentence 2," and "sentence 3," and at least in two cases, the subjects interpreted this as a request to write out the first part of the multi-part sentence. In one case, the subject asked me this before starting to write the sentence; in another, the subject noted it later in the experiment.

I was expecting—or at least hoping for—results that would fall along the lines of some sort of a pattern. On the other hand, it would be good to find that there is no pattern – that immediate retention and repetition of a sentence (short term memory, I suppose, or the memory one would carry from one sentence to the next) has no correlation with whether it is heard or seen.

The data supports the latter case much more than the former. One example would be for the first sentence – respondent 5L wrote the sentence,

1. He himself was a very old man.

while respondent 6R wrote

2. He himself had white bushy hair.

In contrast, there were subjects in both groups that reproduced most of the long sentence very clearly.

3. He had shaggy gray hair which grew in a beard over most of his face and he appeared so wild that when he came to the door Lucy was almost frightened and Edmund had to pretend to cough into a handkerchief to keep from laughing. (11L)

4. He was a very old man w/shaggy white hair whom they liked very much, but on the first night they saw him he looked so frightening that Lucy (who was the youngest) was a little frightened & Edmund had to keep pretending to blow his nose to keep from laughing. (10R)

We can see in this case that the parenthetical asides did not come across as punctuation in for the listener, which was the case for this quote throughout the experiment, but not always true – for the second quote, respondent 7L used parentheses:

5. The Boudler family lived in a huge mansion in the middle of a dirty city. The children were given permission to ride a rickety trolley (rickety means “unsteady”) to the seashore, as long as they were back for dinner.

However, the subjects seemed to be at least as likely if not more likely to use dashes in this case:

6. The three Burgler children lived in a mansion in a dirty city with their parents, who sometimes allowed them to take a rickety trolley—"rickety" in this case, I'm sure you know, means "run-down" or "ready to collapse"—to the seashore alone, as long as they were home for dinner, for a vacation. (1L)
7. The three Baudelaire children were on their way, taking a rickety carriage—the word rickety in this case meaning unsteady or lacking stability—as long as they were home in time for dinner. (3L)

This probably makes sense, though, since the original text used dashes and perhaps they are the more natural punctuation choice in this sentence⁶. Still, this evidence supports the idea that it is not impossible for parts of a sentence that are set aside to be heard as parenthetical.

Aside from these minor patterns with respect to punctuation, and some orthographic creativity on the part of the listeners (for sentence 3, "edgeridge" or something along those lines was as common replacement for "edge witch," and I suspect

⁶ While I do question whether these types of punctuation actually have a useful pragmatic semantic difference (leaving prescriptivist grammar aside), I haven't either the time nor the space in this thesis to explore that subject, and will simply observe the differences. It is, however, entirely possible that dashes have more of a "real" existence in spoken language than parentheses do.

that most or all of the listeners who had not previously read *A Series of Unfortunate Events* were not able to spell “Baudelaire”), I could not determine a coherent pattern with respect to differences between listeners and readers.

3.1.3 ANALYSIS

The results of this experiment have lead me to suspect that individual differences in reading a story vary so widely that a relatively small variation, such as whether it is heard or read, is not all that important. This experiment was trying to examine the information that a reader brings from one sentence into the next, and in both cases, it can be relatively small or relatively large depending on the retention of the particular reader.

3.1.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

I would love to see a computerized variation on this experiment in which each subject is shown a sentence for a particular period of time or played a sentence and then is asked to reproduce or paraphrase it. In this case, awkward timing issues would be avoided, and all subjects would have the same experience. This would also provide the opportunity to mix-and-match between the sentence types, and find out whether each particular subject has better retention for aurally or visually. I believe this sort of experiment would be a fair deal more rigorous and supportable than the prototype that I ran. Furthermore, it would be possible to tweak the language so that

problems like my “sentence 1” direction would not lead the subjects in the wrong direction. Finally, a larger data set, cleaner data (typed as opposed to hand-written), and a wider variety of respondents would be much better than the small and somewhat messy group that I had.

2.2 SECOND EXPERIMENT

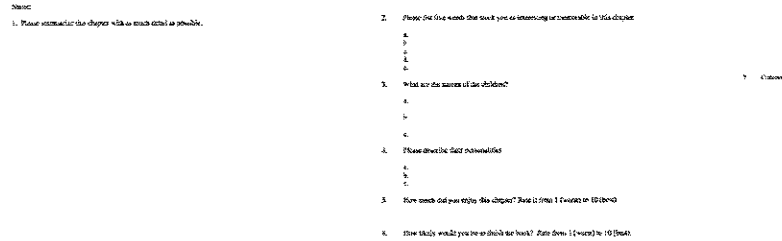
In this second experiment, I chose a selection of a book that took no longer than 15 minutes to be listen to. I decided I would play this section of the audiobook for some people, and give a photocopy of this section of the book to some other people, leaving them as much time as they liked up to the length of the audiobook to read it.

Once this was over, I provided a survey for them to fill out. This included a section asking for a summary of the book, any words they could particularly remember, and a few content questions. Next, the survey asked them to rate enjoyment of it on a 10-point scale and asked them how likely they would be to finish the rest of the book.

3.2.1 METHODS

In this experiment, I was interested in testing slightly larger portions of audiobooks and books, so I chose the first chapter of Lemony Snicket’s *A Series of*

Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginnings, because it was a short chapter (only about 12 minutes long) and had plot, interesting language and character introductions.



I also prepared 3-page surveys that look as shown in the figure above. The full surveys and responses are all available in Appendix 2. The methods of this experiment were simple: I played the chapter for one group and handed the photocopies out to the second group. In both cases I handed them the surveys as soon as they were done, and allowed them to finish the surveys on their own time.

3.2.2 RESULTS

The results here are difficult to report or summarize. They are all in Appendix 2, and are interesting to look at, but I do not really know if they show very much. In the case of the audiobook as well as the written book, most people finished the chapter with a pretty good idea of what went on, and probably would not be confused if they were to continue with the book at this point. Once again, short of spelling errors, the audiobook listeners did not, as far as I could tell, have more factual errors than the book readers.

The readers were slightly better than the listeners at remembering the children's names. All respondents were able to come up with 5 memorable words. Most of the lists included "executioner," or "perish(ed)."

One thing that may have affected the survey is that several of the people in both groups had read the book or seen the movie. It would be ideal to do the experiment with unpublished or less well-known texts.

As far as how much people liked the books, it seemed that for the most part the respondents who listened to the book liked it more and were more likely to finish it than those who read it. The lowest any of the listeners rated it was 7, and the lowest likeliness to finish the book was 6 among that group, while there were people who rated it as low as a 2 and 3 in the other group. The sample size, here, is really not large enough for this to be very significant, though, and one subject was careful to note that he or she is picky with novels and would not rate many very highly.

3.2.3 ANALYSIS

It seems that while there may be a personal preference as to whether audiobooks or printed books are more enjoyable, there is not a really major difference between the information gleaned through the different methods. This is a pretty major claim to make for such a small experiment, and I am not in any way saying that this is thoughtfully well-supported, but that is the direction my data seems to lead in.

3.2.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

Ideally, I would like to send people home with the whole book in either form and survey them about it later. That is to say, I think it would be interesting to leave people to read the book in their own home environments. Furthermore, a much larger sample size would be useful, as would a more concrete method of figuring out how well the readers were able to retain the information in the books. It would also be fantastic to be able to do this experiment with several books, several different genres, and even the same book printed differently and narrated by different authors. There is so much that could be done to better understand the ways in which these experiences differ.

4. CONCLUSIONS

I have stated most of my findings in the results and analysis sections of the experiment section, but I would like to summarize them here. It seems to me that the issue of whether it is “better” to read a book on paper than to listen to it is not an easy one to answer concretely, but that the differences as far as information retention are very minor. It also seems to me that people have a relatively poor memory for the details of sentences, even after they just finish reading them and even when they know they are about to be tested on them (see Appendix I for some interesting takes on some sentences), and thus the idea of a single punctuation mark being responsible for the entire meaning of a book seems a little overstated and sensationalist.

I think that our ideas about written language as a culture are heavily influenced by the idea that oral language is a less well-educated and less perfect version of written language. It seems to me that this is a left-over idea from a time when literacy was available only to the upper classes and the poorer lower classes were left with oral language alone. This seems to me to be well-supported by comments made by many authors claiming that punctuation marks are a vital part of the meaning of a sentence (or, indeed, entire work). When we look at the actual retention and understanding of ideas put forth in a work, it seems that, to the contrary, punctuation can often be “white noise,” but when it has important semantic meaning, it is preserved in people. Just because you can edit and change and fix written language in a way that you cannot fix oral language (at least as you say something the first time) does not mean that written language is a more perfected version of oral language. The fact that our culture has completely forgotten about purely oral language as an art does not make us more sophisticated; rather, it means that we have lost an art form.

Finally, I feel that this thesis has highlighted for me how much there is to the interface between written and oral language. I no longer feel that there is a unidirectional flow in which we write down and fix the language that exists in our ears and mouths, but rather a dialogue between what we write and what we say, and that while there are certainly differences between the two, they both can have valuable and satisfying places in our lives.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could never have finished this thesis without the help of Donna Jo Napoli, my first faculty reader and coach throughout this experience. I also had a great deal of help from my first student reader, Sarah Hartman, and my second student reader, Eric Eisenberg, was very encouraging. David Harrison, my other faculty advisor, found some inspiring articles for me.

Outside of the Linguistics majors and staff, there were several other helpful people. I would not have been able to show anything in this thesis without the 25 student volunteers who participated in my experiments. Whether it was in return for candy and cookies or for some extra credit on some homework, their participation was priceless to me. Next, I am very grateful for the kind and timely help of my friends Arthur Chu and Marie Cosgrove-Davies, each of whom gave timely and much-needed help in typing up the results of my experiments. They were there for me when I was stressed out and running out of energy. I also want to thank all of my friends for putting up with my lectures and rants about this subject at all times and in all places. I'm glad to know that my friends will stick with me even when my brain is overflowing with a topic they probably care little about (though they always did a convincing job of showing interest when I started talking).

Finally, I want to give special thanks to my mother, Maxine Spitalewitz, who has always been extremely supportive of my efforts inside and outside of school. She helped me find articles and was a kind ear when I was upset and worried about being able to complete a project of this magnitude. She visited and brought me home-cooked food

when I was feeling stressed out. I can't express how lucky I am to have such a devoted and caring mother.

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Audio Publishers Association. 26 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.audiopub.org/>>.

Gordon, Victoria. E-mail interview. 16 Sept. 2005.

Victoria Gordon records books for a division of the Library of Congress called the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). I began the interview by sending an email containing several questions grouped into three broad categories: selection of audiobooks to be recorded, issues in reading aloud, and success or failure of audiobooks. Her response addressed each of these categories with respect to the LOC / NLS and her personal experience. As for the first set of questions, the LOC tries to include variety in the works selected. Users and narrators also can request specific books. She divided issues in reading aloud into two parts: narrator issues and book/author issues. The narrator issues she described were mostly along the lines of "not feeling well" or "having a bad day." Issues with the book or author included situations such as dealing with footnotes, foreign language portions, diagrams, and other challenges. As for the third category, Ms. Gordon focused mostly on the narrator side of things, noting that a good narrator can make anything interesting, and that a good narrator is one who can tell the story. She also recommended listening to as many audiobooks as I can, and offered to continue the interview by email or by phone.

Geeslin, Campbell. "Along Publishers Row." Authors Guild Bulletin Fall 2005: 2, 26-38.

Harmon, Amy. "Loud, Proud, Unabridged: It Is Too Reading!" New York Times 26

May 2005. Times Select. Swarthmore, PA. 20 November, 2005.

Lawson, Celeste. E-mail interview. 16 Sept. 2005.

Celeste Lawson is the Acting Director at the recording studio for the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), and also narrates books for a commercial company, Blackstone Audiobooks. I sent her the same questions that I sent Ms. Gordon. On the topic of audiobook selection, she passed the contact information of the people who do this at the NLS and Blackstone Audiobooks on to me, and also indicated that books generally need to receive positive reviews in order to be recorded, but that requests of patrons also bear weight. As for challenges in recording books, one point she brought up is that as a division of the Library of Congress (LOC), the NLS needs to make sure that all pronunciations of words need to be accurate and backed up with an LOC-approved source. The narration also needs to be both clear and to tell the story, including character voices and acting. Ms. Lawson also noted that some books seem to work better when read aloud than other books, and that patrons often seem to have favorite narrators, and have been known to pick books based on the narrator rather than the author. In the past, women's voices were considered too high, and it was thought that their voices would bother people's ears, but this is no longer as true.

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. 26 Sept. 2005

<<http://www.loc.gov/nls/>>.

This website provides information about the National Library Service for the

Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a division of the Library of Congress. The NLS is a free national library program of recorded books as well as Braille books. A special provision of United States Copyright Law allows the NLS to record some books, and permission from the authors and publishers of works that are not covered by this provision allows them to record those books. Furthermore, the NLS provides the books and the playback machines to patrons for free, and they can be returned through postage-free mail. The website indicated that training on audiobook production is available to local groups upon request, which could potentially provide relevant information to this thesis.

Newman, Andrew A. "Actors You've Never Heard of Are Becoming the Ones Heard

Most." New York Times 15 Jan. 2005, Late ed., sec. B: 13. ProQuest. Peninsula Public Library, Lawrence. 27 Sept. 2005.

This article originally interested me in the subject of audiobooks, and I looked it up again while beginning work on the topic. Barbara Rosenblat is featured in this article. Having recorded over 400 audiobooks, Ms. Rosenblat is one of the most well-known and prolific narrators out there, and with 27 Golden Earphone awards and 5 Audies (from the AudioFile magazine and the Audio Publishers Association, respectively), she is also one of the most critically acclaimed narrators. It seems that pertinent skill is her ability to create and maintain different character voices including dialects and accents, all while continuing to act. And yet, George Guidall, another incredibly prolific narrator (who recorded over 850 titles) cited restraint as essential to successfully narrating a book, as

overacting comes across as talking down to the audience. One thing many stage actors struggle with is keeping a balance between the dialogue and the narration—they'll find it easy to record the dialogue, but lose all feeling in other parts of the text. The article also touched on Recorded Books, a company that produces unabridged audiobooks, which pays a minimum of \$150 per recorded hour (which will typically take two hours for an actor in the studio). Furthermore, it mentioned a few statistics about the audiobooks industry; it is an \$800 million industry with download sales through websites like www.audible.com as its fastest-growing sector.

Nickerson, Raymond S. May 2002. Accessed 20 November 2005.

<<http://prospectassoc.com/NSF/learning.htm>>.

Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic. 26 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.rfbd.org>>.

APPENDIX 1

This appendix contains the full results of Experiment 1.

For comparison, the quotes used in the experiment follow.

SENTENCE 1

He himself was a very old man with shaggy white hair which grew over most of his face as well as on his head, and they liked him almost at once; but on the first evening when he came out to meet them at the front door he was so odd-looking that Lucy (who was the youngest) was a little afraid of him, and Edmund (who was the next youngest) wanted to laugh and had to keep pretending he was blowing his nose to hide it.

SENTENCE 2

The three Baudelaire children lived with their parents in an enormous mansion at the heart of a dirty and busy city, and occasionally their parents gave them permission to take a rickety trolley—the word “rickety,” you probably know, here means “unsteady” or “likely to collapse”—alone to the seashore, where they would spend the day as a sort of vacation as long as they were home for dinner.

SENTENCE 3

An edge witch is one who makes her living on the edges, in that moment when boundary conditions apply—between life and death, light and dark, good and evil and, most dangerous of all, today and tomorrow.

Trial 1L

--He was a man with shiny white hair growing off of his head as well as on top of it, and they liked him almost at once, but he was so strange-looking that Lucy, who was the youngest, was afraid of him and Edmond, who was the oldest, thought he was silly, and had to keep blowing his nose.

--There was a man with lots of hair, and he was likable. Two children, upon meeting him, thought he was scary or strange, based on his appearance.

--The three Burgler children lived in a mansion in a dirty city with their parents, who sometimes allowed them to take a rickety trolley—"rickety" in this case, I'm sure you know, means "run-down" or "ready to collapse"—to the seashore alone, as long as they were home for dinner, for a vacation.

--The three children live with their parents and sometimes their parents let them take a trip to the ocean by themselves.

--Edgeride is on who lives her life on the edge, when it comes to such things such as life and death, dark and light, and most dangerous of all, today and tomorrow.

--Edgeridge takes lots of risks.

Trial 2R

--The man was very old with a with beard and when he first came to dinner Lucy said he was very strange and Edmund wouldn't stop glancing over at him.

--There was an old man that came to dinner who both Lucy and Edmund thought was very strange.

--The Bauldedaire Children lived in a big mansion by the seashore right by a huge and dirty city into which their parents allowed them to take a rickety old trolley (rickety here meaning old and falling apart) alone.

--The Bauldedaire children live in a mansion by the sea close to a big city and their parents let them ride the trolley into the city.

--An edge witch is one who makes her living on the edges of things—between light and dark, life and death, good and evil—the most dangerous kind.

--An edge witch makes her living on the edge of things and is dangerous.

Trial 3L

--He came down the stairs and had a very long beard.

--A group of two or more children are meeting an older man for the first time, each responding with varying degrees of apprehension.

--The three Baudelaire children were on their way, taking a rickety carriage—the word rickety in this case meaning unsteady or lacking stability—as long as they were home in time for dinner.

--The children are on their way into town by means of a rickety carriage.

--An edgeridge is some one, who lives near an edge.

--Described a term for some one living “on the edge,” so to speak.

Trial 4R

--He was an old man, with long shaggy hair that covered his head and most of his face. They liked him almost at once. Lucy (who was the youngest) ... while Edmund (who was next to youngest) could only stand there and laugh.

--The old man had long, shaggy white hair; he seemed very friendly and the two children liked him immediately after they saw him.

--The three Baudelaire children lived in the center of a dirty, busy city; sometimes their parents would allow them to take a rickety trolley—rickety here means “unstable” or “likely to collapse,” you know—down to the seashore as long as they were home by dinnertime.

--The 3 Baudelaire children lived in the middle of a big city, and every once in a while they took a rickety trolley down to the seashore.

--An edge witch is one who lives her life on the edges; on the boundaries between life and death, light and darkness, good and evil, but most of all today and tomorrow.

--The edge witch is a person who lives on the boundaries between contrasting ideas, for example, good and evil.

Trial 5L

--He himself was a very old man.

--There was this very old man with white hair. Everyone in the town, young and old, loved him. However, he was not the best looking old man. So when he went to greet the town, they thought he was hideous. The youngest girl, Lucy, was terrified, while the second youngest, a boy, hid his laughter by pretending to sneeze.

--The children lived in a grand mansion with their parents.

--Three children lived with their parents in a huge mansion in the bad part of town. Their parents would seldom let them go out by themselves except on a dingy, rickety trolley which they rode to the beach to frolic. The only requirement: they had to be home by supper.

--An Edgewitch, is someone who lives their lives on the edge.

--An edge witch is a person who lives their life on the edge. They prefer to hang on the balance of life: good and evil, light and dark, night and day, etc.

Trial 6R

--He himself had white bushy hair.

--As for him, he had white, bushlike hair and when he answered the door, he was ridiculous looking.

NOTED: in word-for-word, thought "sentence 1" meant the first sentence [of the passage].

--The three Baudlaire children used to take walks with their parents who...rickety (here meant to mean unstable or likely to collapse)...down by the sea shore as long as they were back for dinner.

--The Baudaire children, of which there were three, would walk by the shore with the permission of their parents, sometimes using a rickety carriage, as long as they were back by dinner time.

--An edge witch is a witch who makes her life on the edges and boundries, between light and dark, good and evil...but most importantly today and tomorrow.

--An edge witch is a name for a witch who exists on boarders between two contrasting concepts; such as good and evil, darkness and light or night and day, but the key division on which these witches dwell is that of now and the future.

Trial 7L

--He himself with the white shaggy beard showed up at the front doorstep. Although Lucy tried to hide and was scared, Edmund jumped out to greet him.

--The wizard had white, long beard. Lucy was scared of him, but Edmund welcomed him.

--The Boudler family lived in a huge mansion in the middle of a dirty city. The children were given permission to ride a rickety trolley (rickety means "unsteady") to the seashore, as long as they were back for dinner.

--The Bowdler family lived in a mansion in the middle of the city. The children were permitted to go to the seashore by rickety trolley.

--Edgerich is the boundary that divides light and dark, good and rich, and, most importantly, today and tomorrow.

--Edgerich divides polar opposites like light vs. dark, today vs. tomorrow, etc.

Trial 8R

--He was a very old man with a white beard, and upon first meeting him Lucy (who was the youngest), did something characteristic of a small child, and Edmund (who was the next oldest) had to cough to keep from laughing.

--The old man looked odd, and the children were appalled by his appearance (although he was kind). Lucy as frightened initially, and Edmund found him comical.

--The three Baudelaire children lived in a [verbose description] part of town, and periodically their parents would allow them to take an old and rickety—where here “rickety” means, as you probably know, [condescending explanation]—where they could have a sort of vacation for as long as they liked.

--The kids (Baudelaires) lived with their parents, and periodically took a rather questionably safe trolley to the seashore by themselves for holiday.

--An edge witch is one who makes her living on the boundaries of things—good and evil, light and dark, and, most dangerously, today and tomorrow.

--An edge witch exists between extremes—good/evil, light/dark, &c., but (most hazardously!) between today & tomorrow.

Trial 9L

--He was an old man with shaggy white hair that grew down over his face as well as his head, but they liked him almost at once...came to the door that first evening...Lucy, who was the youngest, but he made Edmund laugh so that he had to keep pretending to blow his nose to hide it.

--There was an old man with long white hair and a beard. The children liked him immediately, especially the youngest one, Lucy. He made her brother Edmund laugh.

--The Three Baudelair children lived with their parents in the heart of a dingy city, and they were sometimes allowed to take a rickety trolley—rickety, as you probably know, here meaning run down and ready to collapse at any moment—to the seashore and stay the day as a kind of holiday, as long as they were home for dinner.

--The three children lived with their parents in the city, but sometimes they were allowed to go to the each for the day as a vacation.

--An edge witch is one who makes her living on the edges of things, whenever something happens on the boundary between life and death, light and dark, or, most dangerous of all, today and tomorrow.

--An “edge witch” works on the boundaries of things—life/death, light/dark, today/tomorrow, etc.

Trial 10R

--He was a very old man w/shaggy white hair whom they liked very much, but on the first night they saw him he looked so frightening that Lucy (who was the youngest) was a little frightened & Edmund had to keep pretending to blow his nose to keep from laughing.

--When the old man with the shaggy hair comes to the door, Lucy’s first reaction is fear & Edmund’s is to pretend to blow his nose to keep from laughing.

--The three Baudelaire children lived w/their parents in an enormous mansion in the dirty city & sometimes their parents gave them permission to take the rickety trolley—here “rickety” means “unsteady”—as a sort of vacation as long as they were home for dinner.

--There are 3 children from the city whose parents let them take day trips on a rickety trolley as long as they are home for dinner.

--An edge witch is one who makes her living on the edge, that boundary in which...life & death (?)...today & tomorrow (?) (that’s all I remember)

--There’s a type of witch who is called an “edge witch” & lives on the edge, so to speak.

Trial 11L

--He had shaggy gray hair which grew in a beard over most of his face and he appeared so wild that when he came to the door Lucy was almost frightened and Edmund had to pretend to cough into a hankerchief to keep from laughing.

--The man had a lot of shaggy grey hair. His appearance was wild and scarred Lucy but Edmund found it all amazing.

--The three Baudelaire children lived with their parents in an apartment and were allowed to take a rickety trolley, rickety as you probably already know is a word which means unstable, or about to collapse, to the sea shore. This was their vacation.

--The three Baudelaire children were permitted by their parents to take a rickety trolley alone to the sea shore. This was their vacation.

--Edge living is that one who lives on the edge between light and dark, good and evil, and that which is most dangerous of them all, between today and tomorrow.

--Edge living describes some one living on the edge of life & death, today & tomorrow, good & bad.

APPENDIX 2: FULL RESULTS OF EXPERIMENT 2

Name: 1L

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The Bogaler children, it is summarized, led an unfortunate life. It began (this misfortune) when their parents sent them to the beach for a vacation day. The eldest, Violet, spent her day skipping stones and contemplating an invention to make them come back to her. (She was an inventor, you see, and held her hair at of her eyes, in a drawn back. The middle child, Claus, was studying animal life on the island while the youngest, Sonny, was gurgling happily—she didnt know many real words yet. Then, a stranger—adult size—started approaching from the distance. Violet thought to throw a stone at him but held back. Eventually, he grew close enough that they saw he was a friend of their parents. He told their parents had perished (he translated: died.) in a house fire that the firefighters didn't get to in time. The kids were to live with him, henceforth. Until Violet became of age and they came into their fortune, the money would be handled by the bank while they lived w/ him.

2. Please list five words that ~~stuck~~ struck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. Claus
- b. stone
- c. beach
- d. skipping
- e. invention

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Claus
- c. Sonny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. inquisitive, inventor
- b. into nature,
- c. young
inexpressive

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

7

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

6

Name: 2L

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

Starts by warning that it's not a book with a happy ending (or beginning or middle). Then introduces the 3 children, last name starting with B. Eldest, Violet, and baby are girls, middle is a boy I think (Lance?). It talks about what Violet and Lance(?) like to do, and how the infant has 4 teeth and can say "Bottle" and "mom" and "bite." Also, the infant is smaller than a boot.

They live in a mansion in a rough part of town by the beach. They go to the beach often. On cloudy days, they are the only ones there.

They see a figure approaching them (or so they figure since no one else is around) and become scared. Violet(?) says it's frightening because of the mist. It's a man they have met at their parents' dinner parties. Their parents let them hang around at parties if they help clear the table afterwards.

The man says that their parents were killed by a fire that burned down the whole house. Violet looks at the ocean, it doesn't sink in. It doesn't reach Lance either, but he eventually understands that he will never get to read all the books in the library because they all burned.

The man goes through particulars (the \$ goes to Violet when she's of age) and all take hands and leave. The man has changed their lives.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. perish
- b. bite
- c. bottle
- d. ocean
- e. happy

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Lance
- c.

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Thoughtful
Bright
- b.
- c. aggressive

Name: 3L

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

A story with an unhappy beginning and an unhappy ending begins with the Baudelaire children on Briny Beach. Violet (who likes to invent) stands skipping stones and imagining a machine to retrieve skipped stones, Klaus (who likes to read) watches sea creatures in the tidepools, and Sunny (who likes to bite) squalls at a shady figure approaching them. The figure turns out to be Mr. Poe, a family friend of the Baudelaire's. He tells them that their parents were killed in a fire that destroyed their entire house, and that he, the executor of their parents' fortune, was in charge of them until he decided who would take care of them until Violet came of age and inherited their parent's fortune. They take hands and walk back along the beach to Mr. Poe's house.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. happy
- b. rickety
- c. perish
- d. scary
- e. fortune

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Sunny
- c. Klaus

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Violet—likes to invent, ties up her hair in a ribbon while she thinks, quiet and contemplative
- b. Klaus—likes to read, very studious, has read many of the books in his parents' library, curious and inquisitive
- c. Sunny—likes to bite and say nonsense words (which is understandable for a baby) observant and bold

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)
9

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).
10

7. Comments:

I've seen the movie—I don't know if that means anything

Name: 4L

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

There are three Boudelier children.

The oldest girl is named Violet—she likes to invent things and doesn't like to be disturbed when doing so. On the day of the story she is @ the beach skipping stones (w/her right hand) w/her hair tied back so that she wouldn't be disturbed from inventing a devise that removes stones from the water after they sink. She is also looking at the horizen.

Franz?

Her brother, v a little older than 12 is also at the beach w/Violet. He is very intelligent and has read many of the books found in his parents' (the Bodelleir's) library. He likes examining the animals in the pool. and he knows the dif. Between crocs ← alligators. They also have w/them their baby sister. sunny. who is no larger than a boot but has very powerful jaws w/which to bite (which she loves doing). She often speaks in unintellegable yells and can say baby, mommy bite and bottle.

The three children are at the beach b/c their parents allow them to take a bus there
dark
by themselves. Its a foggy ~~rainy~~ day which the children don't mind and it means that the beach is secluded.

They see a man coming out of the fog towards them. He looks scarry and looming b/c they are alone + he is coming out of the fog.

They find out it's a fam friend who will be the executioner of their fortune now that their parents are dead.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. figure
- b. right
- c. horizon
- d. fire
- e. executioner

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Hanz → something German.
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Violet → likes to invent things + doesn't like to be disturbed.
- b. Hanz → intellegent
- c. Sunny → likes to bite things

all: ~~charismatic~~ pleasant, clever, intellegent, nice featured + have bad luck.

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

(8)

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

(7)

7. Comments:

I've read a part of a Series of Unfortunate Events b4.

Name: 5L

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The narrator states that if we enjoy pleasant stories, we should stop listening now, as nothing pleasant will happen to these children.

on an overcast, nasty day.

The three Baudelaire children—Violet, Klaus and Sunny—are at Briny Beach ^ Violet is skipping rocks (with her right hand) and thinking of a device to get the rocks back after she skips them; she is an inventor, and always ties her hair back in a ribbon when she's thinking of inventions. Klaus is examining the creatures of the beach/ he loves to read and knows such things as the difference between an alligator and a crocodile and all the slimy creatures of Briny Beach. Sunny, the baby, has four sharp teeth and loves to bite things. Her speech is usually incomprehensible. The three children see a figure with a large, square head approaching through the fog. Violet is unsettled and thinks about throwing her rock at him; Klaus reassures her that the figure only seems frightening. The figure approaches, revealing himself as Mr. Poe, a friend of the family who always has a cold. (The Baudelaire parents let their children have dinner with the adults, as long as they helped clear the table afterwards). They exchange pleasant introductions and stand there awkwardly. Mr. Poe looks upset. Violet tries to make small talk about the weather. Mr. Poe finally tells them that their parents have perished in a fire that burned down their house. The children find it hard to comprehend. Mr. Poe takes Violet by the hand; Klaus takes Violet's other hand, and Sunny takes Klaus's, and Mr. Poe leads them away from their old lives.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. rickety
- b. perished
- c. briny
- d. fog
- e. fire

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. See question 1
- b.
- c.

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

8

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

8 for audio book, 9 for book in general

7. Comments:

I've read this book and I'm a fan of the series, so I already know the plot & the personalities. I enjoy reading more than audio books, but I enjoyed listening to this and may listen to the rest of it. And Tim Curry!

Name: 6L

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The book opens with the 3 Bougledier^(sp?) children sitting on the beach. Violet, the oldest, is an avid inventor. She is skipping rocks across the ocean—they go further when she throws them with her right arm, because she's right-handed—and trying to determine how she could build something to retrieve the rocks after she's thrown them.

The boy middle in age amongst the children is daydreaming. He is about 12 and a prolific reader; he's read most of the books in their house.

The youngest is just learning to say simple things, and is the first to notice the man coming toward the children through the fog. It is a while before the others notice: the children are frightened by the indistinct figure approaching them in the fog.

The man turns out to be a banker, executor of their parents' will. Both parents died as their house burned down to the ground. The children think he's joking & don't much like the joke, until he says he is to take the children home. Violet makes a connection between the banker's status as executor of the will, and executioner of their former lives.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. pulleys
- b. stone
- c. fog
- d. square
- e. executioner

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b.
- c. ?

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. inventive; introverted; likes playing with different ways things fit together (words—executor/executioner; objects—building machines; etc)
can become absorbed in own thoughts to the exclusion of surroundings
- b. curious; likes trivia; likes to read lots of books; also somewhat introverted
seems visually oriented
- c. investigates the world around; seeks comfort in elder siblings when frightened; highly observant

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

8—particularly striking is the simple but powerful phrasing

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

9-10—excellent writing/speaking for arousing curiosity about the rest of the story

7. Comments:

Name: 7R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

in fact

The chapter opens telling us it won't be a book with a happy ending because even its beginning is sad. We are told the 3 Baudleire children are just unlucky. Then we are told that they have gone to Briny beach on a grey day (they prefer it because there are less people). Violet, the eldest (16 yrs old) is skipping stones. We are told she enjoys thinking about constructing things. Klaus (12) enjoys reading and is examining orgaisms. The youngest Sue likes to bite. Mr Poe a friend of their parents comes to the beach to tell them their parents have died in a fire that burns down the whole house. Initially the children didn't recognize him due to the mist. But as he gets closer their fear disappears. Although they understand what he tells them the orphans think he is joking/just can't comprehend his message. (Violet sees him as an executioner) because he has changed their lives in an instant.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. orphans
- b. executioner
- c. perished
- d. skip
- e. Gack.

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus
- c. Sue

4. Please describe their personalities

- d. V—quiet, likes to think, construct things, not at all girly, serious. mature.
- e. K—intelligent, though a thinker, mature, curious.
- f. S—innocent, s

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

8

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

7

7. Comments:

It was a sad way to start a book but, I like the children already. I am sure the rest of it will be sad but, I'm curious and hope that somehow it ends well.

Name: 8R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The 3 Baudelaire children are on the beach. Their names are Klaus, Violet, and Penelope (?). The youngest one begins to shout some word (“Gack!”), and that calls the other children’s attention to a figure coming out of the mists. This figure turns out to be Mr. Poe, a family friend, who tells them that their parents have died. The oldest boy is rather shocked and disbelieving. Mr. Poe tells the children he will take care of them and their fortune and they all walk off. I should put some more detail in this. Klaus likes tide pools. The parents were killed in a fire that destroyed the entire house, including the library, which Klaus regrets very much. Klaus seems very suspicious of Mr. Poe and thinks that he is either lying or had something to do w/ the parents’ death, evidenced by the part in which Klaus equates “executor” and “executioner”

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. rickety
- b. perished
- c. engulfed
- d. executor
- e. executioner

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Klaus
- b. Violet
- c. Penelope?

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Klaus is the oldest—likes tide pools—likes to read
- b. youngest girl likes to shout random words
- c.

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

5—it was kind of entertaining. I don’t really care what happens in the rest of the book.

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

2

7. Comments:

I generally do have a pretty bad recollection of details when I’m reading.

Name: 9R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

Three children are living in a mansion and every day they go to a beach called Baudilire Beach. The oldest child is named Violet. The second child is a boy is and is named Klaus. The last child is a girl and is named Sunny. The children do not interact with other people, besides each other, very much. While at the beach a figure begins to walk toward them and they become ~~frien~~ frightened. because the figure is surrounded by fog. Once the figure becomes visible they recognize him and ~~come~~ go to greet him. The man tells them that their parents have died in an accidental fire and that they we are to come live with him until they find out whats to become of the children.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. family
- b. Teeth
- c. fire
- d. beach
- e. mansion

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Violet—loves to make inventions
- b. Klaus—loves to read
- c. Sunny—has very sharp teeth

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

7

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

7

7. Comments:

I have watch a movie that was based on the book. The movie came out within the past couple of years. I forgot the name of the movie.

Name: 10R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The 3 Baudelaire children, who are resourceful & clever, enjoy hanging out at the beach. Their parents let them take the trolley to Briny Beach alone so long as they come home by dinner. One grey, cloudy day, they go to the beach. They are glad for the gloomy weather because it means there are no tourists around and they can put their blanket wherever they like. Violet skips rocks into the sea w/ her right hand, because she can is right-handed and can skip them farther that way. * [arrow to next star] Klaus is examining animals in the tide pools. * (sorry). She is wearing her hair in a ribbon because she is thinking very hard about an invention for retrieving rocks from the ocean once she has skiped them, and doesn't want her hair getting in her way. Sunny, w/her 4 teeth, starts say "Gack!" over and over, which may mean "Look at that figure approaching in the fog." Then the other children see it too—an adult w/ a tall, square head. It is their parents friend Mr. Poe. When Mr. Poe visits for dinner, their parents let them eat w/ him if they clear the table. Mr Poe, referring to the children as "dears" explains that their parents & home have been destroyed in an awful fire. Since he is the executor of their will, they must come w/ him until he sorts out what to do w/ the children.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. perished
- b. rickety
- c. Bring
- d. executioner
- e. ribbon

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus } Baudelaire
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Pensive & introspective, clever
- b. Level-headed & insightful; seems to know what people are thinking before they tell him. Bookish, inquisitive
- c. Well... she likes to bite.

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

6

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

8

Name: 11R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The chapter begins with a warning about the end. Whatever the end is it won't be a happy one. Three children, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny (in the order of age) are on the beach. Their parents are wealthy. Soon the children see a man Mr. Pots approaching them. Violet picks up a rock for some reason with the intention of throwing it at him. The children and the man make some small talk about how nice it is outside, then Mr. Pots finally tells them that their parents perished in a fire. He then says condescendingly that perished means "killed", the kids say they already knew what "perished" meant. Mr. Pots informs them that he is to take them to his home temporarily + will sort out w how the fortune left by their parents will be handled. Once Violet reaches a certain age she will be the beneficiary. The storm ends dramatically as Violet drops the stone, and all 3 children walk w/ Mr. Pots holding hands.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. perished
- b. killed
- c. fire
- d. stone
- e. beach

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Violet—
- b. Klaus—
- c. Sunny—made weird sounds which were inaudible

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

6

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

7

7. Comments:

I feel like, as the first chapter of the book, was a cliffhanger type which urges the reader to read on. What will happen to the 3 kids? Why was the fire so devastating? Was it arson? Will the kids be adopted?

Name: 12R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

Violet, Kraus, and Sunny are the three Baudelaire children. Violet is the oldest and is always inventing things in her head. She also likes to skip stones, noting that her right arm propels them further than her left, since she is right-handed. Kraus is the middle child and likes to examine crabs on the beach, and Sunny is the youngest. She shrieks and bites with 4 sharp teeth. The 3 take a rickety trolley to Briny Beach, and on a gray day like today they like that they are alone on the beach. Violet ~~are~~ is about to skip

a smooth stone when ~~Kraus~~^{Sunny} notices a figure in the fog. Violet almost throws the stone at the frightening figure, but doesn't, and soon realizes that it is ~~the~~ a family friend named

^{tall} Mr. Poe. Mr. Poe has a ^ square head and a cold that requires him to cough a lot, so much so that he excuses himself from dinner tables to have a coughing fit. (These dinner tables are also inhabited by the children, who like that their parents don't make them disappear when company comes over.) Mr. Poe is cordial, but seems sad. In a very stoic way he proceeds to tell the children that their parents "perished" in a fire that day, and that the fire burned their house to the ground. He says that "perished" means killed, and confusedly/defiantly Kraus exclaims that they know what "perished" means. Mr. Poe explains that he will look after the children for a while until further plans are made regarding an apparent massive fortune the parents left behind. Mr. Poe is the executor, not executioner, of said estate.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. perished
- b. executor
- c. rickety
- d. briny
- e. shriek

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Kraus
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. introspective, inventive, moody, dark
- b. adventurous, talkative, curious
- c. shrieky, difficult, bites a lot
"little terror" comes to mind

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

8.

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

10.

7. Comments:

Is this book British?

Name: 13R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

There are three children of the Baudelaire family: Violet, Klaus, and Sunny. The story that is told of them does not have any happy sections, there is no happy ending, middle, or beginning, just a series of terrible events.

One day all three kids went to Briny Beach. It was dreary and cloudy, so no tourists were there. They liked this so they had the place all to themselves. Violet was about fourteen and she was skipping rocks on the ocean and thinking about a machine that could retrieve the stones. She loved making inventions. Klaus was a little older than twelve and he looked and was intelligent. He read many of the books in the extensive Baudelaire library; they had a library and a mansion because they were well off. Now, he was examining the creatures in a tide pool on the beach. Sunny was around two and only knew fragments of words and some words that she mispronounced. Then, a strange figure started to walk toward the children. All of the children were upset until they saw it was Mr. Poe. He was a friend of the family who the parents had over for dinner, and the kids were allowed to sit at the table and talk if they cleaned up afterward. He came to inform them that their parents had died in a fire that engulfed the house before the firefighters could get there. Mr. Poe was the executor of the household, and the family estate would be in his home until Violet became of legal age to have the money and property in her name. Violet and Klaus were stunned and awestruck. They took Sunny and left the beach with Mr. Poe.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. ending
- b. unfortunate
- c. executor
- d. executioner
- e. library

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus
- c. Sunny

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. Violet enjoyed inventing things and had an inquisitive mind that wandered her devious work. She wanted to make an invention that would retrieve her stones in the ocean.
- b. Klaus was very intelligent. He read all of the books in the family library. He picked up Sunny when she started to cry. He is caring

- c. Sunny is hard to describe with respect to personality because she was still a child. She just wants to hear things in her environment like any child would.

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

I was not particularly thrilled with this chapter. It seemed a little too cut-and-dry in its story. I would give it a 4.

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

I am not a fan of fiction books; I'm really picky when reading fiction so I would not be likely to read the rest of the book. → 3

7. Comments:

I have no additional comments.

Name: 14R

1. Please summarize this chapter with as much detail as possible.

The three children are standing on the very cold, wet, and miserable Briney Beach, which they like because they like to be alone. Violet throws stones, skipping them into the ocean → [in margin]with her right hand, and trying to invent a way to retrieve them from the ocean.[/in margin] Klaus reads a book, and Sunny the baby bites things. While they are all doing their respective activities Mr. Poe, one of their parents' friends, shows up → [in margin]Sunny first notices that he is there, and says "Gak!" as he comes out of the fog. He is described as always having a cold.[/in margin] to inform them that the house has burnt and their parents are dead. He is the executor of the estate, and he asks the children to come with him. They have a hard time understanding what has happened but do finally come along with him.

2. Please list five words that stuck you as interesting or memorable in this chapter.

- a. figure
- b. perished
- c. briney
- d. executor
- e. briney

3. What are the names of the children?

- a. Violet
- b. Klaus
- c. Sunny.

4. Please describe their personalities

- a. oldest, likes to invent, ties long hair up in a bow when doing so, right-handed
- b. middle, loves to read, very intelligent with a large vocabulary, protective of sisters
- c. baby, loves biting things and squawking made-up-words

5. How much did you enjoy this chapter? Rate it from 1 (worst) to 10 (best)

7

6. How likely would you be to finish the book? Rate from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

5

7. Comments

I have read the book before.