INTRODUCING PUBLIC LIBRARIES TO THE BIG READ

FINAL REPORT
ON THE
AUDIO GUIDE DISTRIBUTION

by
Kay Sloan
Michelle Randall
Rockman et al

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Introducing Public Libraries to The Big Read

Final Report on The Big Read Audio Guide Distribution

Background

In July 2008, over 14,000 public libraries throughout the U.S. received, free of charge, a set of fourteen Audio Guides introducing them to The Big Read.[1] Since 2007, when the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, in partnership with Arts Midwest, debuted The Big Read, the program has awarded grants to over 500 communities nationwide. In collaboration with local partners, grantees host events that bring citizens together to read, discuss, and celebrate one of 23 classics of American and world literature.

In addition to direct funding, grantees also receive companion resources, including The Big Read Audio Guides. Preliminary results from a national evaluation of The Big Read indicated that these audio resources, which feature Big Read authors such as Amy Tan and

Ray Bradbury, and commentary from other writers, actors, and well-known figures such as Edward Albee, Robert Redford, Mary-Louise Parker, and Colin Powell helped participating communities engage readers and non-readers alike in local Big Read events.

Findings also indicated that public libraries play a pivotal role in The Big Read, as grantees and as partners.[2] To support and take advantage of that role, and the vital role libraries traditionally play in local communities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services contributed additional funds for The Big Read Audio Guide distribution, managed by Arts Midwest, with the assistance of the Public Library Association. By making these resources more widely available, program sponsors hoped to give libraries and communities the opportunity to participate in The Big Read without formally applying for a full grant.

To learn more about libraries' reception of the Audio Guides, Arts Midwest contracted with Rockman et al to conduct a two-stage study. During the first stage, Rockman gathered descriptive data on participating libraries and their initial impressions of the Audio Guides. The second stage gathered additional feedback about the reception and use of the guides and the impact of this auxiliary effort in promoting The Big Read, supporting public libraries, and returning reading to the center of American culture.

Survey Methods and Administration

Initial Survey. In collaboration with IMLS and the NEA, Rockman developed a one-page paper survey that was included in the July 2008 mailing to libraries. The survey asked respondents whether they had previously

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[1] The July distribution included Audio Guides for *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *My Ántonia* by Willa Cather, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Maltese Falcon*, by Dashiell Hammett, *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy, and *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton. A second distribution in November 2008 included guides for seven additional titles.

[2] *A Book Club for a Nation*, the final report on the national evaluation, conducted by Rockman et al, is available from the NEA.

heard about The Big Read and how they might use the Audio Guides. It also requested basic descriptive data about the size of the populations served and the numbers of registered borrowers. To generate a sample for a follow-up survey, the initial instrument also asked for email addresses of those willing to take part in a follow-up study.

Follow-Up Survey. Approximately one-fifth or 2,287 of The Big Read Audio Guide recipients returned the initial survey and provided email addresses. In October 2008, Rockman invited these libraries, via email, to complete an online follow-up survey designed to gather data about how they used the guides. To boost response rates, Rockman sent a reminder email to the original group in November, and an invitation to 209 additional libraries that had returned initial surveys in the interim.[3] Out of the 2,496 total emails, 313 were undeliverable, leaving 2,183 libraries in the follow-up survey sample.

Closed-ended items on the follow-up survey asked whether respondents added the guides to their audio collection; paired them with companion books, audiobooks, or movies; shared them with schools; used them in book discussion groups; or created special displays. The survey also asked whether respondents observed an increase in interest in The Big Read titles, audiobooks, or DVDs, and among what patron groups—regular borrowers, book clubs, students, or seniors. A final section of the survey asked respondents whether they had visited The Big Read Website and, if so, whether they had accessed other Big Read resources, including lists of participating communities or titles, Reader's Guides, Teacher's Guides, or other grant or program information. Again, the goal was to determine

the impact of the distribution on the libraries and patrons reached indirectly by The Big Read.

Follow-Up Telephone Calls. As part of the study, Rockman followed up with a small sample of respondents from two groups—those who did not respond to the second survey, and those who expressed particular interest or described uses that merited further discussion.

Rockman telephoned 15 non-respondents and 15 respondents to the follow-up survey. The first group was a random list generated from the full respondent group; the second group was purposively selected based on responses to open-ended questions. In both cases, the goal was to explore what factors affected or characterized patterns of use.

The original plan also included calls to a random sample of non-respondents to the initial survey, but emails or comments explaining why librarians were not responding provided sufficient information. The three reasons most often cited were lack of time or staff to process new materials, lack of display or shelving space, and lack of interest in "excerpts." (Follow-up survey respondents cited similar reasons for limited use.) Two libraries returned the Audio Guides.[4]

RESPONSE RATES, SAMPLES, & ANALYSIS

Initial Survey. Rockman received 2,753 surveys from the initial mailing, for an overall return rate of 18.6 percent. Surveys came from all 50 states, with a range of from 1 to 192 surveys per state. States with higher populations (e.g., New York, California) generally received more Audio Guide sets and therefore returned more surveys. Texas, Illinois, and New York had the highest number

[3] Libraries returned initial surveys through the fall, and a few continue to come in. In all, Rockman received 2,858 surveys, 2,753 of which were included in the preliminary analysis and report.

[4] A total of 47 libraries, including these, indicated that they would not be able to use the guides.

of returns, but not the highest rates of return. Table 1 below shows the frequencies and percentages, by state, for surveys that included respondents' addresses or state name (n=2,652).

Table 1. Frequency and Percent of Surveys Received, by State (n = 2,652)

State	Number Sent	Number Returned	Return Rate	Percent of Sample	State	Number Sent	Number Returned	Return Rate	Percent of Sample
AK	71	18	25.3	0.7	MT	106	34	32.1	1.3
AL	227	53	23.3	2.0	NC	365	45	12.3	1.7
AR	86	23	26.7	0.9	ND	93	31	33.3	1.2
AZ	120	32	26.7	1.2	NE	258	68	26.4	2.5
CA	1052	105	10.0	3.9	NH	230	53	23.0	2.0
CO	233	45	19.3	1.7	NJ	384	77	20.1	2.9
CT	239	47	19.7	1.7	NM	92	23	25.0	0.9
DE	29	5	17.2	0.2	NV	74	10	13.5	0.4
FL	290	50	17.2	1.9	NY	1074	154	14.3	5.7
GA	127	11	8.7	0.4	OH	731	72	9.8	2.7
HI	2	1	50.0	<1	OK	146	47	32.2	1.7
IA	548	92	16.8	3.4	OR	177	44	24.9	1.6
ID	132	33	25.0	1.2	PA	650	130	20.0	4.8
IL	774	178	23.0	6.6	RI	72	10	13.9	0.4
IN	370	81	21.9	3.0	SC	167	23	13.8	0.9
KS	372	91	24.5	3.4	SD	82	24	29.3	0.9
KY	191	57	29.8	2.1	TN	234	39	16.7	1.4
LA	309	31	10.0	1.2	TX	823	192	23.3	7.1
MA	466	82	17.6	3.0	UT	104	18	17.3	0.7
MD	309	9	2.9	0.3	VA	327	38	11.6	1.4
ME	259	67	25.9	2.5	VT	186	35	18.8	1.3
MI	608	126	20.7	4.7	WA	181	22	12.2	0.8
MN	326	42	12.9	1.6	WI	459	96	20.9	3.6
MO	337	48	14.2	1.8	WV	149	17	11.4	0.6
MS	62	9	14.5	0.3	WY	57	14	24.6	0.5

TOTAL SENT: 14,802

OVERALL RETURNS, N=2,753; RETURN RATE, 19%. RETURNS WITH ADDRESSES/STATES, N=2,652

A sizeable percentage of the initial survey respondents identified their libraries as "city or municipal" libraries, but responses to an item asking about the size of populations served suggest that responses from populous states did not necessarily come from populous areas. Two-thirds of the surveys received (67%) were from libraries located in rural areas, with the remaining from suburban (21%) and urban libraries (9%); 3 percent did not answer the question.

Less than half of the sample (42%) identified themselves as a city library or municipal library; Smaller percentages said they were a branch of a city, county, or regional library (14%), or a county or consolidated library system (12%).

Close to one-fifth of the respondents (18%) selected the "other" option. Coding showed that they most commonly described their library as a special district library or as a township, rural, or village library. Somewhat fewer respondents described their libraries as cooperative, federated, or association libraries; school district libraries; tribal libraries; volunteer libraries; or non-profit libraries. (See survey responses, p. 20.)

When asked about the size of the populations and registered borrowers their libraries served, the largest number of respondents selected "under 5,000" as the population option, and more than half reported having fewer than 5,000 borrowers; around a fourth (23%) had over 10,000.

Follow-up Survey. Rockman originally planned to create a stratified random sample of 2,000 names, from those completing the initial survey and providing valid email addresses. After removing the names of those who said they would not be able to use the guides (n=47) and those with missing or incomplete email addresses (n=376), we were left with 2,287 names. Instead of sampling from the list, Rockman invited the entire sample of 2,287 to take the follow-up survey. The additional names provided some cushion for the likelihood that some emails would bounce back. As noted above, Rockman also drew on surveys received but not entered or included in the preliminary analysis, and ended with a sample of 2,183 libraries receiving the email inviting them to complete the online follow-up survey.

A total of 679 of these libraries submitted follow-up surveys, for a response rate of 31 percent. Once duplicate records or those with no data were eliminated, the final sample used for analyses was 624 surveys.

The majority of respondents were library directors or managers (68%); the remainder were librarians (25%), assistant directors or managers (3%), library staff (2%), program coordinators (<1%), administrative staff (<1%), or other (1%).

Due to missing data and different respondents submitting surveys on behalf of their libraries, we were unable to match all the first and second survey respondents. Based on matches for 514 libraries, we were, however, able to determine that the second sample was very representative of the first. Library location mirrored the first group, with two-thirds (67%) of the responses from libraries in rural areas; one-fourth (24%), from those in suburban areas; and 9%, from those in urban areas (compared to 67%, 21%, and 9%; 3% missing). Close to half (44%) of the second set of responses, like the first, came from city or municipal libraries, and similar percentages, from branch libraries (13%) or county or consolidated libraries (12%). More than half of the libraries in the second sample had fewer than 5,000 borrowers, and approximately a fourth (23%), over 10,000 borrowers. (See Tables 2 and 3; initial survey results in parentheses.)

Table 2. Population Served by Libraries in Follow-up Sample

Population Served	Percent of Respondents
Under 5,000	39% (41%)
5,000 – 9,999	18% (18%)
10,000-49,999	33% (30%)
50,000-99,999	6% (6%)
100,000-250,000	3% (3%)
Over 250,000	1% (1%)

Table 3. Registered Borrowers of Libraries in Follow-up Sample

Registered Borrowers	Percent of Respondents
Under 1,000	23% (24%)
1,000 – 4,999	35% (33%)
5,000-9,999	20% (16%)
10,000-50,000	19% (19%)
Over 50,000	4% (4%)

Follow-up surveys came from 47 states; the number of surveys received from each ranged from 1 to 41. Again, the states with the highest numbers of returns—California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin—were the more populous states, with

thus more libraries (or names on the list). Those states from which there were no responses included Alaska, Delaware, and Hawaii, which received relatively few sets of Audio Guides in the initial mailing, and returned few surveys (see Table 1). A few (18) respondents did not identify their state. Table 4 shows the frequencies and percentages of surveys received by state.

Table 4. Frequency and Percent of Follow-up Surveys Received, by State (n=606*)

State	Number of Responses	Percent of Sample	State	Number of Responses	Percent of Sample
AK	0	0	MT	6	1.0
AL	7	1.1	NC	16	2.6
AR	4	.6	ND	4	.6
AZ	7	1.1	NE	15	2.4
CA	29	4.6	NH	14	2.2
CO	7	1.1	NJ	16	2.6
CT	12	1.9	NM	4	.6
DE	0	0	NV	4	.6
FL	14	2.2	NY	41	6.6
GA	1	.2	OH	15	2.4
HI	0	0	OK	9	1.4
IA	19	3.0	OR	19	3.0
ID	7	1.1	PA	32	5.1
IL	40	6.4	RI	2	.3
IN	17	2.7	SC	4	.6
KS	18	2.9	SD	4	.6
KY	13	2.1	TN	9	1.4
LA	3	.5	TX	33	5.3
MA	16	2.6	UT	11	1.8
MD	2	0.3	VA	12	1.9
ME	16	2.6	VT	10	1.6
MI	30	4.8	WA	10	1.6
MN	11	1.8	WI	27	4.3
MO	8	1.3	WV	2	.3
MS	1	.2	WY	5	.8

18 (2.9%) respondents did not answer this question

Data Analysis. For both surveys, Rockman ran basic descriptives and frequencies for the closed-ended survey items, and correlations where warranted. In analyzing the data from the initial survey, for example, Rockman looked at whether libraries that had heard of The Big Read were more likely to use the Audio Guides. In analyzing responses to open-ended questions, Rockman reviewed all responses to identify emerging themes. Once a list of recurrent themes was established, Rockman coded all responses.

KEY FINDINGS

Most survey respondents welcomed The Big Read Audio Guides. The majority of initial survey respondents thought they would use the guides. Almost all of the follow-up survey respondents (90%) said that they were glad to have received them, and three-quarters reported that they had used them. Responses to open-ended questions and unsolicited feedback echoed the positive feedback. Even librarians who noted limited interest among patrons expressed their own pleasure in listening to the guides and said they would keep promoting them.

- **Promoting the Audio Guides to particular audiences helped ensure their use.** Feedback indicated that simply adding the guides to audio collections or displaying them for the general public did not guarantee interest or circulation. What did attract interest was targeted promotion, through displays, book kits, or announcements to teachers, students, parents, or other special interest groups.

- **Among the groups respondents found, or thought would be, most receptive to the Guides were book clubs.** Librarians who targeted certain audiences reported the most interest among book clubs, which could use the guides not only to enhance current book discussions but also guide future selections.

- **Many librarians saw teachers or students as a prime audience for the Audio Guides.** Although only one in five survey respondents had shared the guides with teachers or schools, those who had found students to be a natural, receptive audience. Students, they reported, often seek help with assignments or required reading lists. To serve the student audience, some librarians had added the

guides to a student resource section; others had alerted teachers and school librarians to the guides or forwarded them to schools. Some who said the guides had attracted limited interest noted that they seemed more appropriate for schools than libraries.

- **Pairing the Audio Guides with companion books appeared to generate interest in both.** A third of the survey respondents said the guides generated an interest in books and authors. One librarian specifically noted increased circulation of the classic titles among teens and young adults. Displaying or shelving the guides with the books seemed to be more effective than adding them to audio collections. Several librarians said they created kits (with the Audio Guide, book, and DVD) to generate across-the-board interest.

- **Those familiar with The Big Read were more likely to see how the Guides tied into their other library efforts, and to be among the Audio Guides' most enthusiastic recipients and promoters.** Many libraries (half of the initial respondent group of 2,693) were already familiar with The Big Read, as grant recipients or partners, or through media outlets advertising Big Read events in neighboring communities. The Audio Guide sets generated interest in the full range of Big Read titles. In part because librarians and patrons were already familiar with the guides, they were able to clear up any confusion about what the guides were and to direct patron groups to them.

- **The Audio Guides also generated interest in The Big Read among those unfamiliar with the program.** Approximately half of the responses to both surveys came from

those who had *not* heard about The Big Read prior to receiving the Audio Guides. Levels of use, reported on the follow-up survey, did not differ based on whether respondents had or had not heard of the program: three-fourths of both groups said they had used the guides.

Half of both groups (49% of those who were familiar with the program and 53% of those who were not) also said that they had visited The Big Read web site. Many (41%) of those who visited the site said they had downloaded other Big Read resources, most frequently lists of featured books, a Big Read brochure, the contents of the Reader's Guide, or press releases. Half of the respondents (50%) who visited The Big Read Web site said that they looked at information about applying for a Big Read grant.

- **Timing and other operational factors affected reception and survey responses.** The time it takes libraries to process new items and the timing of the surveys likely affected both use and response rates. Some librarians are still submitting initial surveys, suggesting that the guides are just now reaching their desks or advancing to the head of the processing queue. Of the follow-up survey respondents offering reasons for why their patrons did not use the guides, close to one in five (21%, n=60) attributed limited use to delays in processing or related issues such as lack of staff and shelving or display space.[5]

- **Another common explanation for lack of use or lukewarm responses was confusion about the Audio Guides.** Several survey respondents (17%, n=50) explaining low interest or use said that their patrons expected or preferred audiobooks, as opposed to commentary. A few also said that once patrons discovered The Big Read Audio Guides were not audiobooks, they returned them to the library. Some added that their patrons rarely read commentary or criticism, or, with limited leisure time, would likely opt for listening to the book rather than listening to commentary or "excerpts."

- **Negative responses were few, and often alluded to the fact that the materials were not requested.** A small number of Audio Guide recipients—less than 1% for each survey or around 30 in all—responded negatively to the mailing. The group included small and large libraries, both short on space and staff that they can assign to unsolicited materials. A few said that they devote the staff and space they have to books, not audio materials, or that their patrons preferred books to audiobooks or "abridged" versions. Not fully understanding the purpose or circumstances of the mailing, some recipients, noting limited book budgets, said that free books would have been more welcome.

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[5] A total of 288, or 46% the 624 respondents provided reasons. A few offered more than one reason, bringing the total to 291, the denominator used in calculating percentages of each coded response. See p. 15 and Table 8, below.)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

I. RECEPTION BY LIBRARIES

Overall Responses

Most librarians, completing one or both surveys, responded positively to the Audio Guides and saw them as a welcome way to enhance their collections or interest patron groups in Big Read titles and authors. When asked, on the initial survey, whether the Audio Guides tied in with other library programs and efforts, the majority of respondents (61%) answered "yes." (Just under a third were "not sure" how the resources would fit with other efforts; a small percentage said "no" or did not answer the question.) Nearly all (90%) of the follow-up survey respondents said that they were glad to have received the Audio Guides.

Responses to open-ended questions and voluntary feedback generally echoed positive survey responses. Some librarians enclosed thank-you notes with the initial paper surveys, added favorable comments in margins, or sent pictures of Big Read displays. A respondent whose library was switching from audiocassettes to CDs was happy to have The Big Read set to anchor their new collection. Other librarians—those with limited resources, those committed to promoting literary classics, those routinely suggesting titles for book groups or creating book kits for avid, homebound, or school-age readers—indicated that the guides were welcome additions.

Lukewarm or negative responses to both surveys generally came from those who said space and staff were in short supply or that they would have preferred audiobooks or the books themselves. A few librarians indicated that unsolicited items in particular create burdens because of staff or space shortages.

One librarian who returned the guides explained that they had been part of a Big Read, and did not feel their patrons were interested in the Audio Guide (for *Fahrenheit 451*). This librarian, like a few others who wrote comments on the surveys, thought other libraries could make better use of the CD set, and suggested smaller libraries especially be contacted before distributing unsolicited materials. There was, among a very few respondents (n=7), a misperception that this mailing was an expensive undertaking and that taxpayers' dollars or available resources could have been better spent in support of libraries.

Of the follow-up survey respondents offering reasons for lack of use the guides, close to one in five (21%, n=60) cited processing challenges.[6] Calls to or emails from non-respondents (n=20) revealed that approximately half had not yet catalogued or circulated the Audio Guides they received in July. A few of this group (n=5) and of the survey respondents (4%, n=11) said they were unsure where the guides were in the library's store of unsolicited items or processing queue.

As noted in the Key Findings, a few *initial* surveys are still arriving each week. As also noted, the time involved in processing and the timing of the surveys likely affected not only use but also survey response rates.

Another common explanation for low interest or use (17%, n=50) was that patrons expected or preferred audiobooks, as opposed to commentary. Some librarians thought the guides were more appropriate or geared toward teachers and students (15%), that patrons preferred contemporary or best-

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[6] As noted above and in Table 8, p. 15, 288 respondents offered 291 explanations for lack of interest or use.

selling titles (10%). A few (4%) said they did not have all the companion titles in their collections. Similar percentages of respondents said they were not sure why the guides had not attracted interest or thought more time was needed (14% and 15%, respectively). While accounting for tepid interest among patrons, several librarians also shared their own personal excitement.

Use of the Audio Guides

Three-quarters of the follow-up survey respondents reported that they had used the Audio Guides. The majority of users added The Big Read Audio Guides to their audio collections. This behavior was in keeping with how respondents from the initial survey had anticipated using the guides (see initial results, in parenthesis, in Table 5). The second and third ranking uses of the guides were to "Display them with companion books and/or videos" and "Recommend them to book groups." One in five respondents shared the guides with teachers or school librarians. Table 5 below shows the percentages of respondents selecting each choice. (Participants could select multiple uses, and, on average, selected two of the survey choices.[7])

**Table 5. How Respondents Used
The Big Read Audio Guides (N= 475)**

Uses of Audio Guides	Percent of respondents[*]
Added them to audio collection	80% (72%)
Displayed (e.g., with companion books/videos)	46% (46%)
Recommended to book clubs/discussion groups	39% (41%)
Shared with teachers or school librarians	20% (32%)
Created a special Big Read display	18% (NA)
Other	10% (6%)

[*]Percentages exceed 100 because respondents could select multiple options.

[7] Mean = 2.14, Standard Deviation = 1.08

Smaller percentages reported using the guides in "other" ways, such as:

- recommending them to regular patrons or students;
- previewing or using the guides themselves;
- adding them to book collections or kits;
- giving them away to patrons or schools;
- advertising them with a newspaper article, press release, or blog;
- creating a new program around them; or
- playing them in the library.

There were a few notable differences between projected and actual use, or between initial and follow-up survey responses, and between use and *effective* use. On the initial survey, approximately a third of the respondents said they would share the Audio Guides with schools or teachers. On the follow-up survey, fewer, or 20 percent, reported that they had done so. This may have been a matter of timing: librarians noted that teachers already had their reading lists set, and the titles were not included. Those who had shared the guides with teachers and students found this to be an effective strategy.

Effective Displays & Promotion

Follow-up survey respondents also described strategies that seemed especially effective in attracting interest in the guides among patrons. Chief among these were:

- **Displaying or bundling Audio Guides** with companion books, DVDs, and resources. A number of librarians reported that displaying the Audio Guides with companion books or DVDs drew attention to them and helped clarify that these were guides, not audiobooks.

  Respondents also frequently mentioned creating kits or bundling guides with companion titles and other resources.

One librarian explained that they were "purchasing the book for each," and another indicated that, if requested, they would "purchase VHS or DVDs that are available to supplement materials." These kits appear to be popular with book clubs. One library also regularly "bundles" books, DVDs, or other materials for homebound readers. Continuing with this multimedia promotional strategy, some respondents said they were planning to do "a very big publicity article," or promote the combined resources with "a special article in our town newsletter." Libraries with more extensive collections planned to display the Audio Guides in their "literary criticism" section.

As evidence that the companion display strategy worked, one respondent said that they were "actually circulating more classics to teens/young adults with the Audio Guides."

- **Recommending Audio Guides to book clubs**. Respondents noted that the Audio Guides could not only offer interesting commentary and background for book club groups, but also influence what they read. One librarian reported that *The Maltese Falcon* fit well with a club's current theme of "murder and mayhem." Some respondents also indicated that book club members, as opposed to general patrons, would be more interested in commentary.

- **Sharing with teachers and students.** Several respondents found promotion to teachers and students an effective and appropriate way to use the guides. Some had contacted teachers or school librarians—via phone, email, letter, or in-person presentation—to alert them to the new additions. One librarian had actually worked "with high school and college

students and teachers to add these titles to their reading lists for required reading assignments." A few had also contacted local community colleges or other "special interest groups," such as homeschoolers. A librarian who had asked high school students for their opinion of the guides reported that students found them to be "very helpful."

Rather than contacting teachers, some librarians focused on promotion to students and parents within the library. Some had pointed the Audio Guides out to students—and to parents—looking for information on books or authors for school assignments. A few had also advised Youth Librarians to do so. Others had shelved the guides in their Cliffs Notes section. One librarian had displayed the guides alongside the "reading list required for graduation."

Several respondents reported that the Audio Guides had already drawn positive responses. "Our teachers are VERY interested in these titles," wrote one librarian. Others wrote that they "had several on display with a copy of the book and the local English teachers asked if they could use them," that "School librarians and teachers were very interested in using them for classes, groups, and meetings," and that "Students whose curriculum calls for them to read these titles really enjoyed having them as a reading guide."

- **Adding to or creating a classics section**. A few libraries emphasized that the books discussed in the Audio Guides were literary classics. One respondent said they had shelved the guides "in a special unit we purchased to display 'The Great Lecture Library' titles we bought from Recorded Books." Others added the

guides to existing classics sections, with promos that read "A Taste of Modern Classics," "Good Reads," or "Classics: How Many Have You Read?" One respondent noted, "I've been waiting to set up a section on the classics. This fits right in with what I want to do."

• **Making personal recommendations.** Some librarians found that "personal recommendations work best," and "hand sold" the Audio Guides. In a few cases, respondents said they had encouraged library staff to listen to the guides so they could make their own recommendations.

II. RESPONSES FROM PATRONS

Overall Interest and Appeal

The majority of respondents who used The Big Read Audio Guides thought that they were popular with patrons. More, however, reported that they were "somewhat popular" than "very popular" (56% compared to 6%). Approximately one-fifth of the respondents (19%) said they were "not at all popular," and another fifth (21%) were "not sure." Although respondents thought the Audio Guides were popular with patrons, approximately half (52%) said that patrons were less interested in them than in other resources; 42 percent said patrons showed similar levels of interest.

There were some indications that the Audio Guides had sparked an interest in related authors or titles. Approximately one-third of the respondents (30%, n=139) who had used the Audio Guides said that they had generated interest in authors or titles. In citing evidence, almost two-thirds of this group (64%) cited inquiries about companion books. One third said that they noticed inquiries about other media, and book club selections of related

authors or titles. (See Table 6. Respondents on average selected two choices each.[8])

Table 6. Evidence Suggesting Greater Interest in Authors or Titles (N=139)

Evidence of interest	Percent of Respondents[*]
Inquiries about companion books	64%
Inquiries about companion videos/ DVDs/books on tape/audio CDs	33%
Book club selection	32%
Higher than average checkout of companion books	27%
Check-out of videos/DVDs/ audio CDs	26%
Inquiries/checkouts by local teachers	21%
Higher than average checkout of other books by the authors	18%
Other (e.g., verbal compliments, checkout of other audio guides)	7%

[*]Percentages exceed 100 because respondents could select multiple options.

Of the remaining respondents, half (50%) were not sure—again, this may have been a matter of timing—and just under a fifth (19%) said the guides had not sparked interest.

Targeted Promotion

Although the most frequent use of the guides was "adding them to the audio collection" (see Table 5), descriptions of effective displays and comments about targeting particular audiences suggested that more proactive efforts helped draw patrons' attention to the Audio Guides.

A survey item asked respondents to indicate whether they directed particular groups to the guides, and, if so, whether these groups found the guides appealing. Responses showed, first,

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[8] Mean = 2.29, Standard Deviation = 1.37

that, following regular patrons, librarians most often directed media borrowers and book club groups to the Audio Guides. And, second, that in over half to three-quarters of the cases, the Audio Guides appealed to the targeted group. (See Table 7.)

Table 7. Groups Targeted and Attracted to Audio Guides (N=475)

Patron Groups	Percent targeting group*	Percent targeting groups reporting that group was attracted to guides
Regular patrons	63%	67%
DVD/audiobook borrowers	55%	65%
Book club groups	51%	79%
Students	41%	74%
Seniors	34%	66%
Adolescent readers	26%	58%
Visually challenged	15%	65%
Adult literacy groups	8%	64%

*Percentages exceed 100 because respondents could select multiple options.

Some interesting differences emerged in the relative rank of groups targeted and groups with which the efforts were successful: Approximately half of the respondents had directed book club groups to the Audio Guides; over three-fourths said that the Audio guides appealed to book clubs. A third or less of the respondents had targeted seniors, visually challenged patrons, and adult literacy groups, but relatively large percentages, or close to two-thirds, said that the guides appealed to these groups.

Interestingly, less than half, or 41% of the respondents, had directed students to the resources, and fewer (26%) had promoted them to adolescent readers, but significant numbers said the guides appealed to students, and over half (58%) said they appealed to adolescent readers. As noted above, librarians who had interacted with teachers or students found them to be receptive audiences. (See Figures 1 and 2.)
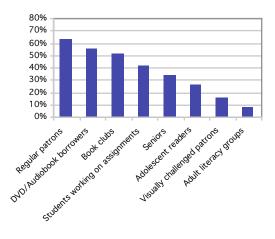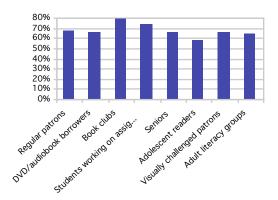
Figure 1. Percentage Targeting Patron Groups

Figure 2. Percentage (of those targeting) Reporting Appeal

Other comments from librarians indicated that targeting a specific audience or actively promoting the Audio Guides increased interest. As one respondent explained,

We have added them to the collection, displayed them in our new audio book section, and distributed a list to local middle school, high school and college teachers as well as home school educators. This distribution seemed to do more for gaining interest than just displaying them as we were hitting a specific interest group. Also, by

personally recommending the audiobooks, teachers were more receptive to utilizing them than if they just picked them up on the shelves.

Limitations to Use

The follow-up survey also asked respondents who had not used the Audio Guides to explain why, something explored further during calls with non-respondents. As reported earlier, several librarians attributed lack of use or interest to confusion about what the guides contained or who constituted an appropriate audience (see darkest shading in Table 8). Out of 288 respondents offering 291 explanations for low use, 17 percent said that patrons didn't care for commentary or expected or preferred the full text of books. (It was not clear from comments whether librarians fully explained what the guides were, but it was clear that patrons were confused. In their responses, some librarians referred to the guides as "abridged" books.) A similar percentage of librarians (15%) thought the guides seemed more appropriate for schools or student groups. Slightly fewer (10%) said patrons were less interested in classics than in contemporary or best-selling authors, or had already read the Audio Guide titles. Calls with non-respondents generally echoed these comments.

One-fourth of the reasons for limited use were operational (medium shading, Table 8): one in five of those who hadn't used the guides said they had not had time to process them or evaluate their use (21%), often also citing lack of space or staff. During calls and emails, as well as in survey replies (4%), some librarians said they had forgotten about the guides until prompted by the survey email; a few worried that they had been misplaced in the large volume of unsolicited materials.

A small percentage (4%) thought low interest reflected the absence of Big Read titles in the collection. The remainder of the respondents

reported that they had displayed or recommended the guides, but unsuccessfully. Half of this group did not anticipate more interest. The other half thought interest would increase with more time and promotion: One respondent noted that when local students did their "major English research papers," interest would build; another said that "Our book club will be selecting and voting on books for the next six months in November so we will know if they have interested them at that point."

Table 8. Explanations for Lack of Use (Number of responses=291)

Explanation	Percent
Audio Guide not appealing to patrons who expected or prefer full text/audio books	17%
More appropriate for school use/ audiences	15%
Titles/classics not appealing to patrons	10%
Have not had time or staff to process/catalogue/evaluate	21%
Forgotten/lost among other unsolicited items	4%
Don't have companion books in collection	4%
Little interest so far, but pleased with addition to collection/will promote further	15%
Little interest so far, unsure why and may not promote further	14%

III. INTEREST IN THE BIG READ

Half of the initial survey respondents (50%) said that they had heard about The Big Read before they received the Audio Guides. One-fifth of these had heard about the program through Big Read publicity, such as the Web site or printed materials; somewhat fewer, from an ALA or other library conference or from an organization newsletter or mailing. It appeared that libraries in rural locations or who had fewer registered borrowers (under 1,000 people) were *less likely* to have previously heard about The Big Read.

Others (15%) who heard about The Big Read said they had received—or partnered with a library or organization that had received—a Big Read grant. Providing a sense of the interest The Big Read has generated among librarians, several added positive comments, such as "We're big fans!" Some wrote that, as Big Read sites, they eagerly welcomed Audio Guides for all the titles; others noted that receiving the guides added to their excitement and ability to promote an upcoming Big Read.

Follow-up survey respondents who had been or were currently participating in a Big Read also shared their pleasure in having the full set. A respondent who completed the survey after receiving the second set of guides said, "The best ones yet!"

Other data indicated that the Audio Guides generated interest in The Big Read among those not familiar with the program. Approximately half of the follow-up survey responses (48%, n=245) came librarians who had indicated, on the initial survey, that they had not previously heard about The Big Read. Of these, over three-fourths (79%) reported that they had used the guides.

Half of the follow-up survey respondents— those who were already familiar with the program (51%) and those who were not (53%)—said that they had visited The Big Read web site, and 41 percent of those who visited the site said they had downloaded two to three other Big Read resources[9]. The most frequently accessed resources was a list of featured books, downloaded by almost three-fourths of the respondents. Nearly half (47%) downloaded a Big Read brochure, and approximately a third, the content of the Reader's Guide or press releases. Table 9,

shows the percent of respondents who downloaded each resource.

Table 9. Percent of Website Visitors Who Downloaded each Big Read Resource (N = 131*)

Resources	Percent who downloaded
List of Featured Books	71%
Big Read Brochure	47%
Content of Reader's Guides	34%
Press Releases	31%
Calendars of nearby events	28%
List of Participating Communities	20%
Teacher's Guides	18%
Big Read Catalogue	14%
Other (e.g., artwork, posters, grant information)	5%

*N = the number of people who reported downloading any resources; multiple responses allowed

In response to a separate item, half of the respondents (50%) who visited The Big Read Web site said that they looked at information about applying for a Big Read grant.

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[9] Mean = 2.73, Standard Deviation = 1.65

IV. IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Survey responses and comments suggest that creative displays and targeted promotion help generate interest in the Audio Guides. Should additional distribution take place, examples of effective displays or quotes from satisfied users could give new recipients ideas for use. These could accompany the packages, or be available online. One librarian said they used "Relevant quotes about books/literature, explanations for use of audio guides, and graphics" to highlight interest. Another said, "We hadn't thought of creating a display with the Big Read audio guides, copies of the books & even film adaptations—but that's a great idea & we'll most definitely do it." There is a fine line between being helpful and being too prescriptive, but ideas from other librarians could inspire and support better use of the guides.

- The confusion about what the Audio Guides offer and to whom also suggests a need for a fuller introduction to the resources. As one librarian noted, "Even interested patrons may not be used to the concept of audio for book introduction." More background information about the guides and how or why they're being made more widely available could also clear up any misperceptions about the allocation of resources to audio guides rather than books or audiobooks.

- The Audio Guides may attract more interest in displays with companion books, DVDs, or in a classics or "Good Reads" sections than in audio collections. The latter location also seemed to add to the confusion about the guides. Although some respondents noted that their patrons are more interested in contemporary, best-selling fiction than in classics, many

were eager to use the Audio Guides for a classics display or reading kits.

- Big Read grantees, or those familiar with the initiative, are some of the strongest advocates. Instead of, or in addition to, mass mailing, the NEA could offer multiple Audio Guide sets to partner libraries. This could get patrons reading other Big Read titles, help engage schools, and extend The Big Read beyond the month-long focus on a single title.

- Feedback suggested that word of The Big Read spreads through library and librarian networks. An Audio Guide exhibit at a regional conference, or an endorsement through a listserv or newsletter, could advertise the guides, emphasize the value of audio commentary, and provide examples—again, from other librarians—of potential uses.

- Although it involves additional expense, other free materials may help librarians promote the guides. For example, one librarian suggested that free bookmarks for each book, displayed alongside the guides, might attract patrons' interest in guides and companion titles.

- Feedback suggests that the Audio Guides can help public libraries serve local schools. As one respondent said, "Any and every opportunity we have to help our schools is a great thing for both sides." Libraries no doubt have different relationships with schools or different mechanisms for working with teachers and students, but suggestions accompanying the guides could include displaying them with summer or required high school reading lists, announcements to teachers, or shelving with literary criticism and aids.

- The Audio Guides appear to help promote The Big Read and encourage recipients to explore the Web site or consider an application. One librarian turned the guides over to their grant committee to help them "explore books." Not all recipients, however, saw the guides as an introduction to The Big Read or program participation as well as an addition to their collections. Suggesting that they share the guides with grant or programming committees, library boards, Friends of the Library, or potential grant partners could steer recipients toward the program and different ways to participate.

- Librarians are busy and appear to receive a good deal of unsolicited materials, and processing new materials takes time. Prior to future distributions, it may be helpful to check with recipients on the timing.

- If responses and uses are tracked, it could be fruitful to gather feedback from book club members, youth librarians, students, and other potential users.

APPENDIX:

THE BIG READ AUDIO GUIDE PUBLIC LIBRARY SURVEYS
(with responses by question)

Audio Guide Public Library Survey

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts Midwest, designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. You have received these audio guides as part of an effort to introduce The Big Read to public libraries across the country and make these resources more widely available. **To tell us more about your library and how you might use the resources, please return this survey in the envelope provided.**

In 2-3 months we'll check back with a sample of libraries around the country, asking them to complete a brief online follow-up survey about their use of The Big Read Audio Guides and the interest they generated. To assist us with this goal, please provide your contact information below. ***Your email address is especially important****, because we can provide you with a direct link to the online follow-up survey. All the information you provide will remain confidential, and not be sold or shared. We really appreciate your help.*

Name:_____Title:_____

Name of Library:_____

City:_____State:_____Zip Code:_____

*Phone:*_____ *Email*:_____

1. Is the location of your library is predominately:

67%, Rural   21%, Suburban   9%, Urban

2. Is your library:

4%, A regional library   14%, A branch of a city, county, or regional public library system
12%, A county or consolidated library   8%, A central library in a county, or regional public library system
42%, A city or municipal library

18%, Other, including, district or special district (27% of "other" responses); township/village (20%); cooperative/federated (12%); school district libraries (7%); independent (6%); and, tribal libraries, volunteer libraries, private or non-profit libraries, and community libraries.

3. What is the approximate size of the population served by your library?

41%, under 5,000   18%, 5,000-9,999   30%,10,000-49,999   6%, 50,000-99,999   3%, 100,000-250,000
  1%, over 250,000

4. Approximately how many registered borrowers do you have?
24%, under 1,000   33%, 1,000-4,999   16%, 5,000-9,999   19%,10,000-50,000   4% Over 50,000

5. Before you received your set of Audio Guides, had you heard about The Big Read? 50% Yes   50% No
(If no, please skip to #6.)

6. If yes, how did you hear about The Big Read? *(Check all that apply.)*
22%, Big Read publicity (via website or printed materials)
10%, Coverage of a Big Read project in the newspaper
  5%, Advertisement of a Big Read project on TV or radio
  8%, Word of mouth
19%, An ALA or other library organization conference
14%, Newsletter or mailing from ALA or other library organization
12%, Other

7. How do you think you might use The Big Read Audio Guides? *(Check all that apply.)*
72%, Add them to your audio collection   32%, Share them with teachers or school librarians
46%, Display them with companion books and/or videos   22%, Not sure yet
41%, Provide them to book clubs or discussion groups   6%, Other

8. At first glance, do you think these resources tie in with other library programs/efforts?
61%, Yes   6%, No   30%, Not sure   (1%, no response)

Audio Guide
Public Library Follow-up Survey (administered online)

A few months ago you received a set of Big Read Audio Guides, and a survey asking you how you might use them. We're following up to see how you've actually used the guides, and whether they generated any interest in the books and authors. Your responses will help us understand how libraries and patrons might benefit from further distributions such as this one, and possibly take part in a national initiative like The Big Read. Your answers will also help us determine whether to undertake these types of free mailings in the future. We very much appreciate your help.

Name:_____Title:_____

Name of Library:_____

City:_____State:_____Zip Code:_____

Phone:_____ Email:_____

1. **Are you glad to have received The Big Read Audio Guides?**   90%, Yes   10%, No

2. **Have you used the Audio Guides?**   75%, Yes   25%, No *(If no, please skip to #9.)*

3. **How have you used the Audio Guides?** *Check all that apply.* (Percentages exceed 100% because respondents could choose multiple options)

80%, Added them to your audio collection   39%, Recommended/used them for book clubs/discussion groups
46%, Displayed them with companion books/videos   18%, Created a special Big Read titles section
20%, Shared them with teachers/school librarians

10%, Other:
   - recommended them to patrons or students (14),
   - added them to current book collections, displays, or kits (9),
   - used themselves (9),
   - gave them away to patrons or schools (7),
   - are in the process of or planning to create a display or advertisement (6),
   - previewed them (4),
   - advertised them with a newspaper article, press release, or on a blog (4),
   - created a new program around them (2), and
   - played them in the library (1)

4. **Briefly describe displays, distribution methods, or other strategies that caught patrons' eyes or attracted interest.**

   - Bundling with companion books, DVDs, or other resources (including kits for patrons and homebound readers)
   - Recommending to book clubs
   - Sharing with teachers, and with students (and parents) looking for homework help or resources for high school reading lists
   - Adding to or creating classics sections
   - Making personal recommendations

5. **How popular were The Big Read Audio Guides with patrons?**

19%, Not at all popular   56%, Somewhat popular   6%, Very popular   21%, Not sure

6. **How would you rate patrons' interest in the Audio Guides, compared to other library audio resources?**

52%, Less than other resources   42%, About the same as other resources   6%, Greater than other resources

7. Have The Big Read Audio Guides sparked interest in the related authors or titles?

30%, Yes   19%, No   50%, Not sure

If yes, what evidence suggests greater interest in the authors or titles? (*Check all that apply. If no or not sure, please skip to #8.*)

64%, Inquiries about companion books

27%, Higher than average checkout of companion books

18%, Higher than average checkout of other books by the authors

33%, Inquiries about companion videos/DVDs/books on tape

26%, Check-outs of videos/DVDs/books on tape

32%, Book club selection

21%, Inquiries/checkouts by local teachers

7%, Other: verbal compliments, checkout of other audio guides

8. In the table below, please indicate, in column 2, whether you directed The Big Read Audio Guides to particular groups, and, in column 3, whether the Audio Guides seemed to appeal to these groups.

	% Yes: Did you direct the resources to this group?	% Yes: Did the resources appeal to this group?
Regular patrons/avid readers	63%	67%
Book club groups	51%	79%
Visually challenged patrons	15%	65%
Students looking for information for school projects	41%	74%
Adult literacy groups	8%	64%
Adolescent readers	26%	58%
Seniors	34%	66%
Books on tape or DVD patrons	55%	65%

9. If you or your patrons did not use the Audio Guides, please briefly explain why, or what would make them more useful. [text box]

Number of comments, 293, from 288 different respondents

- Audio Guides not yet catalogued (staff shortage, processing time)
- Patrons prefer audiobooks, confused by or uninterested in commentary
- Audio Guides geared more toward among teachers and students
- Patrons prefer contemporary authors, bestsellers (as opposed to classics, have already read classics)
- Not sure where Audio Guides are (among unsolicited items, in processing)
- Library does not have companion books
- Not sure
- Not enough time to promote, establish interest

10. Have you visited The Big Read (www.neabigread.org) web site?   51%, Yes   49%, No

    A. If so, did you download any other Big Read resources?   41%, Yes   59%, No

    If yes, which ones?

    34%, Content of Reader's Guides

    18%, Teacher's Guides

    47%, Big Read Brochure

    14%, Big Read Catalogue

    28%, Calendars of nearby events

    31%, Press Releases

    5%, Other: artwork, posters

    B. While on The Big Read web site, did you look at information about applying for a Big Read grant?

        50%,Yes   50%, No