



Bookshare Transforms Reading Independence for Iowa Student with Reading Disabilities ...Brings Harmony to School and Family Life



Kurtis Broeg, Special Education Teacher and Learning Strategist for Williamsburg Jr. and Sr. High School, Williamsburg, Iowa, uses a new, online accessible library, www.Bookshare.org, to provide access to digital books for qualified 9th-12th graders with reading and learning disabilities. Mr. Broeg said, "The Bookshare library has brought reading independence and harmony back into the life of his 9th grade student, Megan Krapfl and her family."

Bookshare is the world's largest accessible digital library for qualified individuals and students with print disabilities. In 2007, Bookshare received a \$32 million dollar (five-year) award from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to give all students in the U.S. with qualifying print disabilities free access to over 50,000 digital books to use at school and at home. The books include educational books, textbooks, teacher-recommended reading, pleasure reading and newspapers and periodicals. To read the electronic formats, the Bookshare website offers two downloadable software applications. These ebook readers are READ:OutLoud from Don Johnston and Victor Reader Soft from HumanWare. The digital books and software are free to qualified students and schools serving students with print disabilities.

In 2008, Mr. Broeg worked side-by-side his general education English teacher, Mrs. Ellen Grim, to identify appropriate reading strategies and assistive technology tools that would assist students with learning disabilities who read below grade level. He discovered Bookshare after attending a local community meeting. Over the past year, Mr. Broeg has downloaded over 30 books from the online library. He said, "Bookshare provides qualified students a new multi-modal reading and learning experience. Required reading assignments in Junior and Senior High School can be long and difficult for average readers. For struggling readers, it can be nearly impossible to have a successful reading experience. Bookshare has transformed my students' reading experience and has saved me countless hours of searching and locating required books."

The Bookshare online accessible library helps school administrators comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) requiring schools to provide accessible reading materials to students who qualify with print disabilities. Using a digitized version of a book and ebook reader software, Mr. Broeg can quickly manipulate the text and add questions from the English teacher to customize a reading experience for each student. "Before Bookshare, it wasn't possible to find digital books," said Broeg. "Scanning

books the size of *Frankenstein*, a required reading classic, is time consuming. Using Bookshare, I request a novel or textbook and within days I receive it in digital text. We can prepare lessons in advance to add comprehension questions and create a unique study guide to address a student's particular learning challenge."

The Bookshare library becomes a bridge to help students with reading and learning disabilities grow to be successful learners because they feel good about reading the same book as their peers. Mr. Broeg uses the program as an incentive to encourage students to read more books. He says, "It's a win-win for our students, our school and the parents!"



Since using Bookshare, Megan Krapfl, a spirited 9th grader with a reading disability and speech delays since second grade, has more reading confidence and learning independence. Megan struggles with decoding and reading comprehension skills and is frequently overwhelmed by her English assignments.

Recently, she was assigned the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Using the electronic version from Bookshare, Megan was able to complete her assignment and do well on her reading test. Her

father, Craig Krapfl, noted a positive change in Megan's attitude. "The digital books make it easier for Megan to read and comprehend a story," he said. "I see my daughter gaining confidence. It restores my hope that Megan will download more books to read for pleasure and maybe read a daily newspaper. No matter what she does in life, she will need to read to do well. Bookshare is helping her do that!"

Jenny Naderman, Megan's mom said Megan's ability to comprehend required English assignments got tougher as the years went by. "Every night, the tension mounted to complete her reading assignments," she said. "The books Megan is assigned to read are too high a lexile level. It was an absolute source of stress. Megan did not comprehend what she read and the vocabulary was difficult. I felt she had no time to be a normal child. When her teacher, Mr. Broeg, introduced her to Bookshare, our lives changed. Sometimes she would say she read a book and we didn't know. Now we do! Bookshare has made a tremendous difference for our family. I wish our school would have had access to it earlier because many kids, like Megan, just fall through the cracks."

Megan just completed an English assignment using a digital copy of the *The Red Pony* by *John Steinbeck*, because she loves horses. "Without Bookshare, there would have been no way Megan would have done well on this assignment," said Mr. Broeg. "We would have had to create another assignment giving us more work and making her feel different. Bookshare helps us level the learning field. If there is a roadblock for decoding words, then students have a difficult time enjoying the act of reading. Digital books from Bookshare, plus the free reader software, eliminate this hurdle because the text and audio are tied together; helping students decode more easily; and giving them support to improve their

comprehension skills.” This year, Mr. Broeg hopes to widen the circle of Bookshare users to his elementary schools. He says that using this free digital library will open up life-long learning for these students who might have been left behind.

About Bookshare

Bookshare, (www.bookshare.org), is the world’s largest accessible digital library for persons with print and learning disabilities, such as blindness, low vision, a physical disability, or a reading disability. The Bookshare library is operated by Benetech <http://www.benetech.org>, a Palo Alto, CA-based nonprofit technology development organization. In October 2007, Bookshare received a \$32 million dollar award from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education to offer free memberships to all U.S. students with qualified print disabilities, through a school or individual membership. Using a school membership, teachers can download books for their students. Using an individual membership, students may download all the books they want. Members can access over 44,500 digital books, textbooks, teacher recommended reading, periodicals and best-sellers on the Bookshare website, along with two ebook readers. [SIGN UP](http://www.bookshare.org/signUpType) at <http://www.bookshare.org/signUpType>

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