

# Camas Valley student Jazmin Ode helps get her school more audiobooks, better instruction

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Camas Valley sophomore Jazmin Ode appealed to Audible get audiobooks for the school.

Photo by Charity Ode

Jazmin Ode, a sophomore at Camas Valley Charter School has an auditory processing disorder combined with a reading disability. Because she has found that audiobooks helped her be more successful in school, she decided to email Audible, an audiobooks company, with the subject “A moment of your time for a brilliant idea.”

“I propose that Audible could create a program for schools to let students with disabilities to be granted free accounts or maybe give the school an account that the students could use to really be able to understand the meaning within every book, and inspire them to learn and always never let their disabilities get in the way of their success,” she wrote. “Doing this would help so many kids, and by reaching out to our youth this could create a good impact on the future for the company of Audible. When the children grow up to become adults they may start sharing their positive experience with the app and so could the teachers who my tell their families and so on.”

She got an automated response the first time she sent the letter but was able to get her message heard by a real person the second time she sent the email.

Robyn Brown, vice president and general manager of Audible for Education, responded, “We would like to help, so would love to discuss your program idea with you and your teacher (or you and your dad) if you have a few minutes over the coming days. Let me know.”

Jazmin was joined in the meeting by Camas Valley special education teacher Bill Storey and library, media and technology coordinator Andrea Carter.

Storey said Jazmin did most of the talking and was able to convince the Amazon-owned company to provide students at the school with free access to 80 books that are commonly required reading in high school and an additional 12 books a year for recreational reading.

“I was really surprised and pleased. Any time a student takes that initiative it’s really special,” Storey said. “I’ve had kids go to local companies for donations or fundraising, but in my 41 years of teaching I don’t think I’ve ever had a student approach a company about an instructional need.”

Audible did not respond to questions from The News-Review by deadline.

Storey said his job was to open it up to the rest of the school. The program was initiated just before the coronavirus pandemic shuttered the doors of Oregon schools and about 40 of the school's estimated 61 students signed up for the program.

Jazmin said it was her mom who first suggested she write to Audible.

"I told my mom I was frustrated," she said. "I kept wasting their money. I'm very conservative, I don't like to spend money. So I said that I wish it was free for people with reading disability and she said 'go write to Audible.'"

At first, she laughed off the suggestion, but then she sat down and started writing a letter and two days later she hit the send button on the email.

In her letter to Audible, Jazmin explained that auditory processing disorder "causes me to struggle with the ability of filtering and intercepting sounds." People with the disorder have difficulty deciphering and processing auditory information.

"This causes children with this disability to have a difficult time in school," she wrote.

Ode is in a special education class to receive extra help and has access to a quiet space to learn in.

The class also provides access to a program called BookShare to help Jazmin with her reading disability. A book would be read aloud through the program, however, the voice is very robotic and doesn't use intonations or emotions.

"I was reading a pirate book, so when a pirate in it would say 'Aaargh' it would spell it out," Jazmin said. "My brain clasps on to that and that makes me detached from the story and then I don't understand the rest of it."

She said it would frequently spell words or names that were unusual, which would frustrate Jazmin who enjoys reading dystopian books where people and places often have unusual names.

"It's a synthetic voice," Storey said. "It doesn't bring things to life. There's no comparison in terms of interest. I think when there's emotion in the reading that you can actually hear, it gives some contextual clues to kids who have a hard time reading."

Jazmin's dad introduced her to Audible, which are books read by other people and thus using emotions, accents and intonations.

"I read a book with it and was surprised at the difference," Jazmin wrote. "Because a professional reader is reading the text it is much easier for me to follow along and understand what the character is feeling and saying. Since I've used Audible I've gotten almost perfect grades on my quizzes for my Language Arts class and my love for reading has become greater now. Also constantly inspiring me to write in different ways."

Jazmin is writing her own dystopian book series and reading other books has helped her develop her writing skills as well.

"With Audible, I'm able to see other people's professional writing and translate it to my own," she said. "I can see how their writing tugs at a reader by just changing a few words."

Jazmin has continuously excelled at school.

"She is just a wonderful young lady. She is incredibly thoughtful and she has a heart for other students that have reading difficulties," Storey said. "She's a pleasure to be around and she outworks anybody."