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Hi-tech talks

South Oldham High School teacher Adam Watson and his students are taking their literary opinions online with podcasts about books.

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By Chris Hall, The Courier-Journal



Photos by Chris Hall, The Courier-Journal

Torin Hester held a microphone as Conor Buckner looked over his words for their book commercial as part of their podcasting project at South Oldham County High School in Crestwood.

Digital

By Sara Cunningham
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The Courier-Journal

In most classrooms, literature circles look like groups of students, desks pulled together, papers out and pens in hand. Their

talking. However, there are also microphones, laptops and lots of questions about audio editing.

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Digital discussions

S. Oldham High uses podcasts for literary chats

By Sara Cunningham

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The Courier-Journal

In most classrooms, literature circles look like groups of students, desks pulled together, papers out and pens in hand. Their teacher might circulate the room, listening and occasionally joining the conversation.

When the chatter dies down and the reports are handed in, the exercise is pretty much over.

The exercise plays out differently in Adam Watson's English classes at South Oldham High.

There are the familiar groups of students, the roll sheets with different assignments and lots of

talking. However, there are also microphones, laptops and lots of questions about audio editing.

Watson's students have learned to create podcasts of their literature conversations. A podcast is a series of audio and/or video files that are distributed over the Internet.

When the podcasts are ready, they are posted on Watson's class Web site, "Dragon Booktalk."

The podcasting project became possible after school librarian Noel Gnadinger received a grant from the school board last year to purchase some of the sound equipment, Watson said.

Teaching his students to create and post podcasts of their litera-



English teacher Adam Watson worked with Alexa Laviena on her podcasting project. Watson's students have learned to create podcasts of their literature conversations.

ture discussions was a way for Watson to give them a new form of publishing experience, he said.

"English teachers are always concerned with getting their students to reach out to authentic audiences and this accomplishes that," Watson said. "For a writer to know that someone is listening, well, it really legitimizes their work."

And someone is listening.

While the site only got a handful of hits each week early on, the traffic has increased to about 100 hits during the past two weeks, Watson said.

"It's kind of weird because people all over the school know about it and they can listen to us talking about our books," said sophomore Abigail Houchens, 16. "Our parents can listen to it. It's weird but cool, I guess, because people can listen to what we think and it's not just a class thing."

Knowing that people are

listening to her group's podcast has helped Meredith Ellis, 15, work on her speaking skills.

"When you listen to yourself, it helps you not to talk too slow or too fast," the sophomore said.

Their classmate, Alexa Laviena, also a sophomore, said she doesn't like reading but she is a fan of the podcasting project.

"It's hands-on," Alexa, 15, said. "You're not just reading to read. You get through the reading because you want to be able to know what to say and do when you do your recording. That's pretty cool even for people who don't like reading."

While the students "fumbled and stumbled" together through learning the technology, they are becoming skilled at using the audio equipment, Watson said.

Students spent class time on Jan. 12 recording and editing, and several of the podcasts were already

Podcasts

► To hear the student podcasts, visit Dragon Book-talk at <http://mrwatson-sohs.podbean.com>

on the class site the next day.

Next, Watson said he plans to contact some of the authors of the books his students are reading to let them know about the podcasting site.

"Now that would be really cool," said sophomore Garrett Davis, 16. "Then the authors could hear what kids think about what they wrote."

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► **COVER PHOTO:** Teacher Adam Watson spoke with students, from left, Meredith Ellis, Liz Ryan and Garrett Davis.