

MP3, iPod, and Me

Using Technology for Fun, Learning, and Encouragement
by Bethany Barnosky

Twenty years ago I was a teenager and technology was changing. My parents had to learn about video tapes, VCRs, microwave ovens and CDs. Twenty years later our kids are teenagers and technology is still changing...

Let's talk about a popular successor to CD technology: the MP3. An MP3 isn't a disk or a piece of "hardware" that you can hold in your hand. MP3 is a digital format that allows us to store large quantities of data in a much tinier-than-usual size. According to Wikipedia, when you "rip" (or "copy") a song to mp3 format it becomes around 1/10th of the data size of the original audio CD. When people refer to "MP3s", they are simply talking about songs that have been saved in this compressed digital format. Most people can listen to MP3, and other digitally formatted audio files, through their computer. Also, many modern "boom boxes" play CDs and MP3s, but be sure to check your labeling. However, the most popular way to listen to the MP3 is the **iPod**.

Ok, no, that's not really true. The iPod is just one "brand of portable media players designed and marketed by Apple." Other people use the Zune (produced by Microsoft), other "generic" MP3 players, or even their cell phones to listen to digitally formatted music. (Of course, you actually listen via a headset, plug-in speaker, or car adapter, but I digress.) I've noticed that many people like the iPod in particular because it is quite user friendly and synchs effortlessly with iTunes, Apple's *free* music management program. Once you start using iTunes to listen to music, either through an MP3 player or your computer, you are bound to run into the amazing, and overwhelmingly free, world of **podcasts**.

Podcasts are internet-based radio programs. There are lots of different topics, styles, and quality levels out there, but it's a treasure trove for the family who loves to learn. Content ranges from Flash Gordon (the 30s), Dragnet (the 40s), and the Science Fiction Theatre of the 50s; there's a little something for everyone. Here are some of my personal favorites:

The Math Factor (with Goodman-Strauss and Kellams, mathfactor.uark.edu) is a little 5-10 minute math broadcast that's produced weekly. These challenging math and logic questions are posed in a friendly, professional manner and include such topics as "Perfect Sums" and "The Prisoners Dilemma". Most appropriate for students who don't mind being stumped!

Mathgrad (with Chris Frederick, www.mathgrad.com) is a great, and more accessible, podcast, but it ceased production last January. Chris' episodes tend to be a bit lengthier than the Math Factor, but he explains topics, such as "Voting—Why the Two Party System?" and "Sudoku" more thoroughly.

Make Math Matter is "a professional development podcast for middle school and high school math teachers." It is available from the University of Florida, through "iTunes U". This is aimed at teachers, and can give you some ideas on sparking learning as you face difficult subjects such as "Graphic Organizers" or "Conic Sections".

iTunesU isn't really a podcast, but rather a category of podcasts, available through iTunes. If you love education and learning-for-learning's sake, check out Berkley's "Descriptive Introduction to Physics" or RTS's "History of Christianity".

Mom-to-Mom Radio show (with Cindy Rushton, www.momtommomradioshow.com) is like listening in to an encouraging chat at a homeschool convention... whenever you like! She covers a variety of topics, from an interview with Katherine Loop to "Say Goodbye to Super Mom" and "Ready for Your Future"!

The Two Blind Squirrels (with Brad & Chaz, mylifeministries.org/blogs/twoblindsquirrels/) will have you laughing out loud. This daily podcast is produced by two Christian dads, one of whom homeschools. Laughter is good medicine and episodes such as "Would You Wear Tattoo Ads?" and "Christmas Turkey Protocol" will have your children wondering just *what* is going on inside those headphones!

A final word: I love iPods. Their user-friendliness and seamless integration with iTunes makes my iPod perfect for my needs. However, before purchasing one, you should really consider "New Hampshire Downloadable Audio Books" at nh.lib.overdrive.com. This program is purchased by local, New Hampshire libraries (check with yours for availability) and is truly exciting. You download their software to your computer, "check out" an audiobook from their site, and download it, for the lending period, onto your own mp3 player. You're ready to clean, exercise, or entertain the kids in the car! Unfortunately, this service does not work with the iPod, so if you're looking to borrow audiobooks via this system, consider your purchase carefully.

Happy listening!

Next issue: "Teach (math) Like Your Hair's On Fire!" Please visit www.candlestarservices.com with questions, comments, or topics for future columns. You can find some audio and podcast links off of the "Technology Workshop" section of my site.