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How audiobooks are recorded

5:10

ONSCREEN TEXT: Suzy Jackson has performed more than 100 audiobooks. We wanted to know how audiobooks are made. So we wrote one for her.

SUZY JACKSON: Okay. You ready?

MAN 1: Yeah.

JACKSON: Okay. I was raised to be generic. Born that way. But on the third day in the second quarter, I'm starting to think it's not who I really am. I diagnose the things the computers can't see, the moods they don't understand just yet. Usually, it's to help sell things. But sometimes, you glimpse a person in that reflective surface who seems a little bit like you. My name is Suzy Jackson, and I am a narrator of audiobooks. Is that what we call ourselves? I don't know. Audio... audio voiceover artist. I mean, but, like, we're talking about audiobooks, so. As I'm reading, any time a character pops up, I'll underline their name.

"Very good," Dr. Snoot says. I didn't notice her behind me. She feels like a grandmother. I don't have one, but I've read about them in books. On to the next one. One trick that I'll do... Trying to find if I have a place here. Like, let's say there's a sentence that says, "She whispered," at the end. So I need to know that before I start. So I'll underline it while I'm preparing the book. So, like, I'll draw an arrow to it, and then so I'll catch it before I'm saying it. So there's... It's this weird mental trick of staying really present, but also kind of always reading a little bit ahead. After Dr. Snoot walks away, I fall into a daze until Kenneth hits me on the shoulder, Rita and Adelaide bouncing next to him. "Addison," he says, sniffing a little and pushing his hair behind his ears. "Do you want to go look at it again?" "I'm supposed to work. I have 13 cases to diagnose before break four." Rita grabs me by the shoulders. "Come on, daydreamer, let's go." I start to follow them, Adelaide chattering the entire time. (burping) Did you hear... So that's what happens. You're like, "And now my esophagus made some strange bubbling sound, so we stop and pick up. Adelaide chattering the entire time. That might be her greatest skill. I guess it's something about people from her district. "So anyway, I

was screening this guy who was totally non-operator, very aggressive, and he started hitting a vending machine. And I realized I knew him when I was five, before they made me an operator. He ate a lot of glue." She'd keep going, but we stop. Standing in front of us, we see it. A funny drawing scrawled on the wall. I wrote down the characters in the book, and I noted on my paper what I knew about them, that Dr. Snoot was like a grandma, that Kenneth was nerdy, that Rita was always in control, that Adelaide was feisty. I felt like I knew the energy of it. It says, "Kilroy was here," underneath. And then underneath that, there's another word. "Vox?" Kenneth says, his voice catching on the X. Rita laughs. "Is that even how you say it? It could be Vos." "I know what it means," I say. "Voice." To me, the voices aren't as hard as committing to the story and doing it for hours and hours and hours on end. Like, that stamina is more difficult than coming up with, like, variation of vocal quality to distinguish characters. Whether I'm reading aloud to my kids or whether I'm reading on my own, the experience has changed a bit since I've been narrating. I think in terms of just storytelling and what makes good storytelling and what I've learned is to respect the story and to

respect the audience that's listening to the story. You aren't necessarily going to only be narrating the style or genre of books that you yourself might choose to read on your own. So I think there is something to just respecting that story and the audience for that story. "Voice," I tell the group again. The one thing that can never be generic. I don't know if I've done alien voices, but I've done, like, in the sci-fi world, a lot of creatures.

MAN 1: Can you do a pizza order as a dragon?

JACKSON: Oh, sure. I'll take a large cheese with extra pepperoni. That's so weird. It's so weird, what I do. Yeah.

MAN1: I'm frightened.