



ST STITHIANS
COLLEGE



“YES, WE ALL AGREE. WE WANT STUDENTS TO READ!”

“Taking into consideration innovative developments in education, some years ago, St Stithians College¹ provided opportunities for students to learn in an online space by rolling out iPads from Grade 5 upward but COVID-19 became the catalyst that triggered real change in mindsets and skillsets.”

VALUE SENSE

COVID-19 effectively obliterated any excuse not to allow the students to read on SORA. It was the only way our students could access and read books during lockdown.

Features such as:

- The dyslexic font
- Highlighting
- Making notes
- Earning the badges
- Tracking reading
- Personalised text sizes

are most critical in empowering students to be enthusiastic readers, critical thinkers and skilful researchers. Furthermore, the immediacy of getting a book you require, or a copy of a newly-released novel, and having it on an iPad without having to go to the library or wait for a book delivery, is fantastic! SORA has provided inclusive and immediate access to books in both the virtual learning environment and physical classroom learning spaces at St Stithians.

SORA comes with **added benefits** as highlighted below:

- Students can read what they are comfortable with.
- No one judges the quality of their reading. The SORA space is a safe space.

¹ One of the biggest schools in South Africa comprising of eight schools: Girls’ College; Boys’ College; Girls’ Prep and Boys’ Prep; as well as the Junior Prep; Saints Online School; Thandulwazi Maths and Science Academy and the Kamoka Bush School. The school has iPads rolled out from Grade 5 upward.

- Audiobooks: listening to words the way they are meant to be pronounced is a lesson in itself and has huge value.
- Reading and listening on SORA quietens ourselves and we focus on the content; it is therapeutic.
- The learning gap of transitioning from a physical book to an e-book or audiobook is minor, it comes naturally.

EMBRACING CHANGE

SORA has allowed the St Stithians Community the experience of being open-minded to embrace change in a traditionally analogue area; that of printed media in a library and in classrooms. OverDrive provides exciting things for the students to do and look at such as, what new books are coming out; discovering that reading from SORA is no different if not better than reading from a physical book! Both girls and teachers and especially the English and First Additional Language teachers have been included into being part of the e-content purchasing process.

Bronwyn Desjardins² has created a whole-school Team on Microsoft Teams for the Girls' Preparatory. She began by posting and sharing the different blogposts that came from OverDrive. Furthermore, she created a separate channel on MS Teams where she invited students and staff to post their requests. She created a FlipGrid book review section; inviting students to upload their video book reviews which students could like and comments were welcomed. Prolific readers were asked to share what they'd read and send their reviews to their teachers, including the amount of time it had taken them to finish reading a book. This valuable data, which provides analytics and metrics to show library resource use, would not be available from reading a physical book. The initiative fosters a **direct relationship** between the student and the teacher regarding reading habits. Teachers started asking the students: "What are you reading on SORA?"

Through OverDrive, St Stithians College acquires South African language readers (Sesotho, isiZulu, and Afrikaans). The Black Lives Matter content access was easy, and having the material available to read within 24 hours was exceptionally valuable!

UNFORESEEN BENEFITS

Due to the increased use of OverDrive and SORA, St Stithians Girls' Preparatory and Girls' College have been able to remove unused shelves and repurpose the resource centre space to do augmented reality, coding and other activities, thereby saving additional costs for a new building. Through the use of OverDrive and SORA the library has been transformed into a dynamic space that provides an innovative and stimulating environment for collaborative prototyping, creativity, learning and teaching.

² Bronwyn Desjardins is a Digital Learning Coach and Resource Centre Coordinator. She, alongside her librarian colleagues across the campus, has overcome a couple of interesting challenges with the adoption of OverDrive and SORA by 'old school' St Stithians community members in the past.

“I am a huge believer in embracing the new even if it means things might go a little wrong”. Bronwyn Desjardins is thrilled that she and her librarian colleagues had the vision and the foresight to implement SORA. “We’ve got to be very careful how we role model new developments and habits. There’s a responsibility that comes with being a teacher where, in spite of your own fears, of your own reservations, of you not knowing and not being familiar with something, to embrace it and learn alongside the students so that you role model that attitude of – let’s take the risk...and let’s embrace learning together.” She sighs and continues, “We want our students to be lifelong learners, and we want them to be risk-takers!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

St Stithians has established a fine-tuned balance between the physical library and the OverDrive digital library – a hybrid space that embraces both physical and digital. A perfect balance that makes students learn and excel; embracing both analogue and digital. She envisioned the school library as an environment where students can be collaborative in creating diverse projects, inside and outside the library. The goal is to create an environment that motivates students to become lifelong readers.

“Not having to spend hours of covering and labelling books; saving the cost of labels, plastic covering and shelves; classifying them according to the Dewey system, shelving them, mending damaged books and physically checking them out and back to individual students, tracking down unreturned books etc., moreover cutting down trees. The goal is to make kids read, isn’t it? Let go and let them read!”