



Episode 1

Reading Aloud to Older Kids Guest: Andrew Pudewa

Sarah: Thanks so much for chatting with me today. I know it's a super busy time of year for you with conferences all over the country and a packed travel schedule, so I really appreciate you taking time to talk to me today.

Andrew: Oh! It's a joy to do so.

Sarah: Well, tell us just a little bit about your family and the Institute for Excellence in Writing so that our listeners get a bit of an idea of who you are and what you do.

Andrew: We have seven children. Five are grown. The other two think they're grown. But they're still at home, 17, 14. I have five grandchildren so I'm moving very rapidly into being the very experienced grandpa. We live out here in Eastern Oklahoma, a very rural location where we came five years ago from California and built a nice big office warehouse on our property and we have Institute for Excellence in Writing where we coordinate my speaking and online classes and of course mostly, we're known for our video courses on helping parents and

teachers help children learn English composition with a system of structure and style. And we keep adding little new products and services and growing over the years and primarily servicing the homeschool market. And it's been a great ride.

Sarah: Very good. Yes, your work with the Institute for Excellence in Writing and your speaking has been a big inspiration to me so...

Andrew: Thank you.

Sarah: Well, you have a huge heart for reading aloud and that seems to be a message that you want to get far and wide. So the first time I heard your talk, Nurturing Competent Communicators—that must have been sometime around three or four years ago—and it has been instrumental for me in understanding the importance of reading aloud and helping me make it a huge priority in our family life. So can you tell me what inspired you to record that talk and to give that talk and what you're hoping to accomplish with that message?

5:20 Where do reliable and sophisticated language patterns come from?

Andrew: I was noting that some people just have kind of a natural ability to kind of learn our system and do it and it works very well—the structural models, the stylistic techniques—and other people, they can learn the same thing and do it, but they just don't have the same level of smoothness, refinement, sophistication, and language vocabulary. So I kind of started wondering. I worked mostly on the output side. How do you get good quality English out of people's brains? And I thought, "Maybe my problem here with these folks that seem to not just get it is that they don't have a good database of language in their brain to begin with. So I started to think, where do people—children in particular, because that's we teach—where do children get their language from on a daily basis? Like the average kid in the average situation, what's the number one influence on their language?"

I came up with this kind of line of thought that was a little bit disturbing to me because statistically—now this is probably not true for most homeschooling families, but statistically—children watch 25 hours of television a week and that's just huge. That's a huge influence on their language. And you would ask the question: Does television provide for our children a source of reliably correct and sophisticated vocabulary and syntax?

We divide children into age-based groups and then you have to ask yourself, do peers provide a source of reliably correct and sophisticated English for each other?

Sarah: Yeah, no, of course not.

Andrew: So I thought, well, okay that's a handicap for a lot of kids. That's a huge amount of time but it's not the only influence. What's number two? And again I thought, the average student in the average situation who goes to a school with age-segregated classrooms and then plays with children the same age after school and goes to sports and extracurricular activities with children the same age.

Our whole society is kind of geared toward—even Sunday schools—we divide children into age-based groups. And then you have to ask yourself: Do peers provide a source of reliably correct and sophisticated English for each other? No. If anything, they sink down to the lowest common denominator of language and you'll actually see kids intentionally kind of dumb themselves down so they don't look out of place or too smart so they can fit in and be cool.

Sarah: Yes, I've seen that.

Andrew: So really linguistically, the worst possible environment you could create would be 26 nine-year-olds in one room together all day. Again, we in the homeschool, we tend to realize that good socialization actually occurs when children are with a wider range of children and adults, younger and older than they are. I was working a bit with kids in

public schools and in Christian schools and I'm thinking, the top two influences on their language are both actually negative. They're not elevating the language, they're probably pulling it down.

So I thought okay, let's keep going here, what's number three, and I realized, for most families, probably parents and, by extension, other busy adults. So you could say, how's the family going? To what degree are we able to sit and have long, meaningful, in-depth conversations with our children and I realized even though I'm homeschooling, I am blasted busy all the time. A lot of what I say to my children are, "Do your math or you're not going to eat lunch ever" or "Hey, you're doing a great job, keep going with that. I got to go over and do something really important and then I'll come back." I'll also go into a bit of detail, I think all of us can relate to how electricity and modern technology just pulls people in different directions.

Sarah: Oh yeah. Even if they're in the same room, we can all be in the same room but everybody's attending to their own little screen or whatever.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. And so I thought that's so different than what it was even fifty years ago. There were still televisions and phones but televisions were controllable and phones were on cords attached to walls. Now everybody has got their own phone and there are computers everywhere and you can go everywhere and do anything you want. So I'm seeing even in my own family how hard it is.

And so I got to this conclusion that the most significant source of high quality language coming into children's brains is not going to

come from media, from schools, from peers, or even from families. It's got to come from reading out loud to children in huge quantity, which was the main source—pretty much the only source—of entertainment that existed before electricity.

And you think about the mid 1800's, if you ever read these letters from say Civil War soldiers, the prose is just magnificent. It's language that would put all of us to shame in terms of its poetic quality and beauty. And yet that was common for people to be able to speak and write so eloquently, and I think it's because the culture for so long—for many, many generations, particularly in the white populations of North America—was to sit in one room with, from great-grandma to the baby on the floor, and read to each other and read the great literature and the scriptures and talk, and this whole very literate culture was primarily developed in the home through reading out loud.

12:26 What it will take to recover the cultural and social literacy in our world.

Andrew: And when I realized that, I thought this is the real problem with the increasingly, not even illiterate, just aliterate society; not people who can't read, people who just don't read in this country. And of course the schools are desperate. The teachers and schools are just "Oh, if children would just read, read, read, read. If children would just read, then all our problems will be solved."

Sarah: Like the Holy Grail or something.

Andrew: It's the new god of education. It's become an idol. If everybody would just read,

then they could take standardized tests and we'd all look better. If they can't read, we can't test them and everything falls apart. So I just kind of got on this track of thinking and wanted to demonstrate to parents in a more complete way than I just went through with you that this is the world we live in and if we're going to recover individual, family, cultural, social literacy, it's got to happen with reading aloud. And I just love your little paper. It's got the books and says, Read Aloud Revival. That's what I want, is this revival where we believe again in what's important and then we do what we believe.

Sarah: There definitely seems to be a pretty common misconception that it's more valuable for children to read to themselves than it is for them to be read to. And I think a lot of people don't even consider listening to audiobooks—maybe they haven't considered doing it at all. But if they have considered it, they don't really consider that or stories that are read aloud to children as actual reading. We tend to value "reading to yourself," a child reading to himself as a more important activity than reading aloud. So can you speak to that a bit?

Andrew: Absolutely. That's part of the brainwashing that the public school institutions do on everybody around them. I've actually heard of teachers who have said to parents, "Don't read out loud to your children. They need to read on their own." But here's what I've discovered, is that it's actually the age at which children start to read on their own more, and that can happen at five or six, it can happen at thirteen or fourteen. I know some men who didn't read a book till they were on their late teens.

That's what I want, is this revival where we believe again in what's important and then we do what we believe.

14:00 Why is it even more important to read to older children than to younger ones?

Andrew: So you can never predict an age-based standard for when children start to read more on their own, but I would argue this, Sarah. It's the age at which children start to read independently more that they most need to be read to at a level above their own decoding skills.

Sarah: I'm glad you said that because I wanted to ask you specifically about that. I have heard you say that before, so can you tell us why that is?

Andrew: Well, there's a couple of things that can happen. One thing that can happen with children who like to read and read a lot is they'll start to read fast. They'll read books like they watch movies—very, very fast. They want to get the plot. They want to get the action. And so they'll do what you or I do when we read fast, they'll just skip stuff, see a word, don't know what it is, skip it. See an idiom or an expression or a figure of speech that you're not familiar with, just skip it. Let's face it, you can skip huge chunks of Tolkien and still get the story. And so kids, especially because they're so used to very, very fast-paced juvenile literature that are driven by very, very fast-paced movies, people don't have the tolerance for a 90-second view of the landscape with a soundtrack on the

background like movies used to have fifty years ago. If it doesn't have instant action, they won't pay attention to it. They'll say this is boring, same thing with the juvenile literature. If it doesn't hook them from the first page, they're just going to say "It's boring. I don't want to read it." And so they won't.

So the literature is written to be sped through, whereas great literature actually is written to be savored—the language, the descriptions, the depth of insight that comes through a great book. So one reason we need to read to kids who read a lot, is because they will skip stuff and they won't actually build the syntax, the complete sentence patterns. They won't stretch their vocabulary. They'll just read it for fun and we think that's great. But they're missing out. And the second thing is they won't read things that are not immediately interesting to them and so in order to build their appreciation for the better literature, if we read out loud to them at a level above their own decoding skills, two things happen.

Number one, we read every word. We don't skip stuff. Second of all, we can talk about it. We can explain things. We can help them understand the allusions if there are historical elements. We can discover who was that person? Where was that place? We actually can build comprehension by reading out loud and talking about stuff. And even for kids who read a lot on their own even at a young age, doing that is what's going to pull up their comprehension.

Sarah: One of the things I really appreciate when we read aloud as a family in our family is not only does it pull up the comprehension, but I feel like it builds kind of a family culture

because we're all sharing stories and ideas and it gives us something else to talk about that's bigger than ourselves or bigger than the small world kind of daily grind that we are inhabiting every day and so it builds this beautiful family culture.

Andrew: So true, so true. And then something will happen in the home and then one of the kids will say "Oh, well that's like when that character did this thing." And they start to make these connections and comparisons and that's when the literature becomes even more meaningful to them because they see the parallels and the similarities between literature and life.

Sarah: Right. And the point you made about kids skipping stuff, and I skip stuff when I read too. My oldest daughter is twelve and she is a voracious reader and she reads at a very high level and yet, I know that she skips stuff and you have a phrase that you've talked about, or you've mentioned before when you talked about this about the reliably correct and...

Andrew: Sophisticated language patterns, yes.

Sarah: So I know that when she's reading to herself, she isn't getting those language patterns into her brain and I know you've said before if you don't get it into their brain, then you can't really expect them to have reliably correct and sophisticated language patterns coming out in their writing. So how does reading aloud tie in really specifically with a child's ability to write, to learn to be a good communicator?

18:48 How does reading aloud impact a child's ability to write well?

Andrew: For one, they are hearing language. And if you read even half decently, they're hearing complex ideas being articulated with the correct nuances. So when you have a compound sentence or even a compound sentence with multiple clauses, when you try to decode that on paper, it's a little bit hard to follow. Where's the main clause? Where's the subject? What's going on here? Unless you can hear it, because when you hear it, then the natural speaking style of humans is to emphasize certain things and de-emphasize certain others and to pause in certain places, and to give language its depth and life.

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Let's face it. Language is first and foremost, a verbal auditory function. Listening and speaking are prerequisite to reading and writing. If you cannot listen well, it's going to be hard to read complicated things. If you cannot speak well, or at least form complicated language ideas in your mind, you're not going to be able to write that. And so having those first two of the language arts, listening and speaking, under good development, then the reading and the writing is so much easier. But the problem is society and schools in particular, they can't really test, they can't really assess the listening and speaking so they jump over to let's teach reading and writing because we

can assess these things, and yet the latter two are predicated on confidence with the former two.

Sarah: Right, and we can recover that at home.

Andrew: I also notice that adults—often, I'll be at a conference or something and somebody will come up to me and we'll be chatting and an adult will say "You know, I'm a pretty good writer. At least, I think so. I always got good grades on my papers in college and I feel like I know what I'm doing but I don't remember ever learning how to do it. It was just kind of a natural thing that happened."

I will ask them. I will say, "Did your parents read out loud to you a lot as you were growing up?" And eight times out of ten, they'll say, "Yeah. As a matter of fact, my father read the Reader's Digest every day after dinner. How'd you know that?" And the two times out of ten, when they say, "No, my parents didn't read out loud to us but I was the oldest in my family and I used to read to my younger siblings a lot." Because when you read it out loud, you're kind of forced to read every word with the better expressions, the nuance, the phrasing that builds the language database so well.

Sarah: It slows you down. I know that if I'm going to read something out loud to my kids, it slows us down considerably but it's so much more enjoyable than when I speed through it. Even reading it myself, I have that natural tendency to skip over the really descriptive passages or those things that are really poetic. If you stop and read them out loud it really helps you to see what's beautiful

and appreciate the art that is the literature; that's a whole different ball game.

Andrew: And I'm actually reading a book right now called *How to Read Slowly*.

Sarah: Oh, I don't think I've seen that one. Who wrote that?

Andrew: Sire. I've been on it for quite a while.

Sarah: Okay. Is it a hard one?

Andrew: No, I'm just reading it slowly.

Sarah: Yes, of course.

22:30 Andrew discusses his experience copying the book of John by hand, and how that informed his understanding of the benefits of slow reading.

Andrew: Well, can I tell you one really fascinating extension off this idea? I went to a conference years ago and listened to a talk where he was really very strongly pushing the idea of children copying the scriptures by hand, copying the Bible by hand. I was so persuaded by this talk. I came home and thought, I'm so persuaded, but I'm going to actually try this myself, on me.

So I started, one night, just copying the book of John. And I tell you when you're copying, it is ultra-slow reading because you read the sentence, you copy a few words, you check and be sure you copied is the same as what you read. If you're trying to copy neatly, you're really lucky to get three hundred, four hundred words in twenty minutes. I mean it is slow motion contemplation. And what I noticed is in reading and writing it again and

again so slowly, things came into focus. It was a bit like watching a movie in slow motion where they slow down the fight scene and the fist punches into the face and you see the face deformed and the sweat flies off in the air.

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You can see all these little details that you would never have noticed if it had been in regular motion. That was my experience in copying the book of John. I was seeing, imagining, details that I never would have imagined because things kind of whip by you. There's that walking on the water again. There's that miracle at Cana.

So I think that when we slow down, not only do we build the language database better, we actually allow for greater imagination. We allow for more detailed imagination. And the great books, like the Tolkien or Dickens, that would have these kinds of extended descriptions, are so much better at helping to build the imaginative faculty than some of this modern juvenile literature that just whips through the plot.

Sarah: Right. I've noticed that even with my kids when I'm assigning them something to memorize—a poem or a psalm or something—if they hand write it out, it's amazing how much quicker the task of memorizing it is. And I think it's fairly enjoyable, especially if you write something out really neatly. It's contemplative, and then

you have this beautiful written narration of what you've read and that's really neat.

Well, I asked the readers at my blog if they had any specific questions for you. Are you up to tackling a few of those?

Andrew: Oh, I love questions.

25:26 A listener says her 13-year-old son prefers to have his lessons read to him because his now reading is slow going. Is she holding him back by reading everything to him?

Sarah: Okay, excellent. Well, the first one comes from Ellen and she says, "My son is almost thirteen and he can read but he much prefers me reading aloud to him. His reading independently is slower and he has a harder time focusing. Am I making it worse by continuing to read to him aloud?"

Andrew: That is a great question and Ellen is not alone in having that question. It's probably one that I answer every week at a convention multiple times. And one thing I like to share with people is the story of my son because he literally couldn't read anything at all independently. He couldn't read anything until he was almost 12 years old. He could sound out words like mom and cat when he was nine and ten, but you give him a word like bed and he'd just flip out: "Beg-deg-bad-bleb. . .I can't!"

Sarah: That's how my eight-year-old son is.

Andrew: And so, it's not like I don't know how to teach someone to read. It's just that neurologically, he was just not going to do it no matter how hard you try to drive the

phonics into his brain. He's just not ready. And as I said earlier, I know any number of men who did not read a book until they were teenagers. Mark Hamby, big speaker on the homeschool circuit. Do you know Mark?

Sarah: Yeah, I'm familiar.

Andrew: He didn't read a book until he was 20 years old.

Sarah: Really? I did not know that.

Andrew: Now he owns a publishing company. So here's the really interesting thing. Because my son couldn't read and certainly couldn't read at grade level until he was about 15 or 16, he got way more into his ear than any of his siblings, any of the girls. And the truth of it is he's actually the most eloquent writer of any of the kids at his age because he's got the most extensive database of reliably correct and sophisticated language patterns because he never read drivel. He only listened to good and great literature growing up.

Sarah: But you can't listen to drivel. I mean you can't. You can try and it's just painfully obvious how...

Andrew: Yeah, I tried once to listen to—true confession, just because I was curious what it was—I tried to listen to *Twilight*. But it was just so awful, I gave up after about five minutes. Why would I torture myself with this horrible language when there's so much other great out there? So it's like. . .here's my analogy: If you've heard that thing about how they train secret service to detect counterfeit, is they let them only see real bills and they handle only real bills and so then when they find the counterfeit bill, they detect that it's not real.

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**28:32 Why we often stupefy kids
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read.**

If children only hear good literature, then they will be sensitized to that. They will have appreciation for the reality, whereas what we do, and Andrew Kern points this out very boldly and clearly when he says we stupefy kids when we put them in first grade. They're intelligent when they're home at five and we're reading them books and they're listening and imagining. And then we sit them down and say, "Here, read this. 'Max the cat sat. Max the cat sat and sat. Max sat.'" And you're just thinking, this is an intellectual insult to any human being and so we actually start to dumb them down by teaching them to read.

Now, I'm not saying we don't teach decoding skills and books with simple phonics are important for that. But if we don't continue to feed them high quality literature at the same time, then they become deprived of good language. And then we exacerbate that by putting them in a world where they are getting who knows what from the media, from peers, parents and adults who are busy.

So I would say to Ellen, I think you should be happy that he still loves listening and don't ever stop reading out loud to him. Read everything you need to if it's better comprehension. And there will be a time and it may be next year, maybe four years from now, it might be ten years from now, when his own decoding skills will come up to his listening skills.

Sarah: And that will probably blow her away.

Andrew: But it certainly doesn't have to happen on any kind of rushed schedule unless of course you put in a kid in public school. At which point, they are all anxious about reading levels and comprehension levels. The other thing, I tell you, it was so cute, just melted my heart. I have an adult daughter, Genevieve, who's mid-30's right now—I'm not even sure how old she is. She lived at home on and off in her 20's before she was married. Recently, she was married. And we would read out loud and she would love to hear me read out loud even though she's one of those kids who was reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* back to back ten times through when she was six years old. And she said to me, "You know Dad, when I listen to you read, it's kind of like I'm seeing everything in color. And when I read it myself, it's more like black and white." So even for kids who do read extremely well and have from a young age, there are some real benefits.

31:30 Why it was a blessing for Andrew's son not to read a thing until he was 12 years old.

But the last thing I want to say to Ellen is that for my son, I think honestly, it was a blessing for him to be such a late reader because he avoided reading any junk, he only got great quality language into his brain, and he became the more eloquent speaker and writer of any of his siblings because of that. So you keep reading out loud as much as you want and don't worry at all if his independent decoding skills are behind. They will catch up eventually and it really doesn't matter when.

Sarah: That's very good. That's very inspiring. It's funny for me, my first two daughters read when they were younger and my son is just not quite there yet and I never feel angst about it until someone from the public school mindset maybe, that whole idea of just they need to be reading at a certain level, at a certain age, starts questioning, and then I'll start to kind of wonder what I'm doing wrong. But you know he speaks very well and he loves to listen to stories. My oldest daughter who reads voraciously on her own, if I offer to read aloud to them, she'll slam her book shut and "Yes, please!"

32:50 What do you do about a child who thinks he's too old to be read to?

Another question we have is from Erin and she says, "I would love to know Andrew Pudewa's thoughts on a mid-elementary child thinking he is getting too old to be read to. We have always read aloud as a large part of school and also as a family but my oldest

keeps dropping heavy hints that he thinks he's aging out of reading aloud.

Andrew: Well, there is that desire of every 11-year-old to grow up faster and that's normal and natural. There's a couple of responses. One response is "Well, it doesn't matter. I want you in the room. We're reading aloud as a family. It's non-optional so just play with Legos and listen. And we're not going to debate whether this is a good use of your time or not."

So you can just make rules and kids that age can live with them. Around 14, it's a little harder, although I did it with a teenager and I said "I'm going to read this book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, out loud to everyone in this family. And if you don't sit in the room and listen to me read it to you, you don't get to go see the movie."

And what I found is that kids around a certain age, and of course this can vary, they do start to get a little fidgety. I mean it's actually harder for a teenager to sit still and listen than it is for a seven-year-old. So can they keep their hands busy? Can the student crochet or play with Legos or draw pictures or—good heavens, even work on math homework. You even use a kind of a different part of your brain I think to do a lot of the math homework you need to do and I can listen to an audiobook and work on non-language type activities and it's enjoyable. So I think keeping the hands busy will help to minimize the feeling of "I'm not doing anything right now."

Another thing you can do is put on audiobooks when you have captive audiences, usually in cars. So you've got your whole family in the car. You put on an audiobook

and “This is what we’re doing. We’re listening to it. No, you can’t put in your iPod and listen to music. We’re listening to the audiobook.” But Erin can also tell her mid-elementary child that I am a 54-year-old adult and I love listening to audiobooks.

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In fact, I was driving to Springfield last week and I found this wonderful book of stories called *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* by Arthur Conan Doyle, and I was sad when I got to my destination because I wanted to keep listening to these stories. In fact, I will—true confessions here—I am a Lemony Snicket fan, the *Series of Unfortunate Events*. That is the modern Hansel and Gretel fairy tale done better than anyone else. He’s probably one of funniest living writers. You tell your elementary child that I, a 54-year-old man, secretly listen to Lemony Snicket audiobooks. So you never really outgrow that.

But I would guess that he’s kind of saying, “Hey, I’m getting older so I better do whatever it takes to get older faster,” which is what most kids think about. And if he has friends and talks about “Oh my mom was reading this story,” and he’s got public school friends, “Your mom is reading to you? That’s kind of baby. Our teacher says we should read everything our own.” That kind of conversation with peers can kind of undermine what’s true and what’s good and what’s beautiful.

And so I think some of those approaches—just do it whether you like it or not, convince them that there’s value and then have opportunities where you all enjoy listening together. And it’s just not mom reading but mom listens too. And then you talk about what you’ve read. I think a student deep in their heart, knows what’s good for them. And I think we all know that listening to a good story, listening to a good book, a great book, is good for our soul.

37:28 Reading aloud is a family event—not as a method to improve our children but simply because it’s how we enjoy time together.

Sarah: Yeah, one thought I had when I read that question was that maybe it would help to frame the read-aloud time as more of a family event, not something that you’re doing necessarily for the student to get more content into their brain or more literature into their head, but just something the family does to enjoy time together. I know I’ve heard of couples who read to each other. I think Leigh Bortins from *Classical Conversations* says that she and her husband read aloud to each other in the evenings even when there’s no kids around at all. I love the message that sends. I think that sounds romantic for one thing but it’s just a great way to connect with each other and with these bigger ideas.

So when I talk about reading aloud as being a cornerstone of family culture, that’s when I’m kind of thinking of, as something that’s meant to be enjoyed and relished for its own sake. So maybe if the student thinks of their read-aloud time, if Erin’s child thinks of

reading aloud as something they do as just family culture rather than something that is being done to him as a way to improve him or whatever, I think that would be helpful.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. I think that's true. And the other thing is if this child actually is a pretty good reader, why not put him on the job of reading part of it out loud to the family?

Sarah: Oh that's a great idea!

38:47 One thing Andrew's family did to get his children to read to their younger siblings every day.

Andrew: And one thing we did, if I can tell you, Sarah. This is one of the really nice things that we did with the kids and it worked really well until we got to number six and seven because number six was the dyslexic boy and number seven was the very sharp, early reading girl.

But before that, there was always a policy that every day, one of the children had to read to a younger child out loud for 15 minutes. So the 14-year-old would go find the 10-year-old and read to them for 15 minutes. It was on the checklist. It was one thing you had to do and then the 10-year-old would go find the seven-year-old or the four-year-old and read out loud to them, obviously probably a simpler book, maybe a picture book. But it was good relationship-building. It was a good opportunity for everyone to practice their skills of elocution, of reading out loud, of doing that well. And it was a part of the day's responsibilities and one of the more fun, less taxing of their responsibilities.

So it worked really well until like I said number six and seven, because I couldn't really say to six-year-old girl, "Go read out loud to your nine-year-old brother." It kind of broke down at that point but until then, and they usually didn't choose the closest one. They'd usually kind of skip one and go to a younger sibling and you can start that because good heavens, one-and-a-half, two-year-olds love to look at picture books and be read to out of picture books. So that's an idea for some of your listeners as well.

It was a good opportunity for everyone to practice their skills of elocution, of reading out loud, of doing that well.

Sarah: Very good. And as far as keeping hands busy, I know that we did brainstorm... I ran the Read Aloud Revival as a series of blog posts on my blog originally before I converted it into this podcast. And in one of those, we brainstormed some things that kids could be doing with their hands, and so I will link that post in the show notes of this podcast so that people can find some ideas for things they can have their bigger kids do to help them still themselves for read aloud. All my older kids—they're 8, 10, and 12—they all need some things to do. They love read-aloud time but they need something to do with their hands to keep them still.

41:02 When we're done reading for the day, should we ask for narrations, have Socratic discussions, or just let it be?

Sarah: Aimee asks, "Should I ask for narration at the end of read aloud time or should I use a Socratic method of questioning or should I just let it be?" So before you tackle that question, let me just give a brief rundown for our listeners in case they don't know what narrations or Socratic questioning is.

Narrations are pretty much a telling back, and so you'd read a selection and then you'd ask your child to tell back everything they can remember or tell back something specific. "Tell me back about a certain character or something from what you just read." That's generally what people mean by narration. And then Socratic questioning is this ancient kind of method of asking questions that help you think deeper about the material you've read, so not yes, true or false, not the kind that you typically see on a reading comprehension worksheet that just asks you what happened, but questions that help you dig into the text a little bit deeper. I'm actually going to be chatting later on this podcast in a future episode with Adam Andrews who I know you work with...

Andrew: Oh, good, good.

Sarah: Yeah, from the Center for Lit. and he has... You know, *Teaching the Classics* was my introduction to Socratic dialogues so we're going to be talking a little bit about how to have really effective conversations with our kids about books. So that will be coming up, but back to Amy's question, so do you think

we should ask for narrations, use a Socratic method or should we just let it be? What would you suggest that we do after read aloud?

Andrew: Well, I think it's a false trichotomy. There's not one that is necessarily better than the other. I think the answer to the question is yes. You should do one of those things and probably judging on the book, on the story, on the circumstance. It's certainly good for children to do that narration, to relate back what they heard, what they did, what they experienced, what they can articulate of that, but it is not convenient to do that if you're in a group because if you have more than one child, it's very probable that the other ones will not necessarily appreciate that in the same way that you can if you're on a one-on-one situation.

So if it's just you reading to a child, "Hey, let's stop for a minute, tell me what you just heard?" I think there's a lot of value—develops speaking skills, develops one of those four language arts, and it has a lot of value in creating attentiveness and observation power as well. But I don't think it's going to work too well in a group, honestly.

Socratic questioning is a little better because you can direct specific questions to specific people. And I'm really delighted that you're going to have Adam Andrews on because he has kind of worked out this system to help even parents who didn't grow up with this type of dialogue experience in school.

Sarah: Most of us probably.

Andrew: Most of us, we sit through class, listen to lectures, leave and say, "Glad that's over." How to engage children and not only

ask them questions but teach them how to ask good questions. Teach them how to ask you questions and teach each other questions. So I think there's value there. But then there's also value in let's just keep enjoying the book. Let's just go read one more chapter. This is so interesting and we want to be sure not to do... and I love Andrew Kern. He's the one who taught me this idiom, "kill the puppy." We don't want to be dissecting literature prematurely. We want to just play with it. We want to just live with it. We want to just take it into our soul. Have you read John Taylor Gatto's book *The Underground History of American Education*?

Let the book seep into your soul and don't analyze it prematurely.

Sarah: I've read pieces of it, not the whole thing.

Andrew: You might like to link to your listeners because you can download this whole book for free now. It's JohnTaylorGatto.com and there's one chapter called "Eyeless in Gaza" where he talks about how he wanted to teach Melville, he wanted to teach *Moby Dick* to his eighth-grade class in Brooklyn, New York and he had a school edition. They had all the right questions and all the answers to the right questions and the chapter by chapter extracts—that this teacher's edition of *Moby Dick* actually did more harm than good because it asked all the right questions and demanded all the right answers.

But the fact is a book like *Moby Dick* is a huge thing. And as he put it, it pre-empted

any opportunity for a personal relationship with the author, for a personal understanding or a personal interpretation. I think if you and your husband and I and my wife and a couple other people all read a great book and then came together to talk about it, we would discover that each of us found different aspects of it to be maybe even be the most significant thing for us. So I think to just play with the puppy. Just let the book seep into your soul and not analyze it prematurely. There's a lot of importance in that as well.

And so I think Aimee's question is answered by yes, all of those things are good in their own time under the right circumstances and there's no formula. You're going to have to decide.

Sarah: Right, okay. Great! Do we have time to squeeze in one more question?

Andrew: Sure, I can talk for hours so it's all up to you.

47:00 Andrew's advice for how to choose what to read aloud.

Sarah: Okay, Kelly wants to know, "How should I pick our read-aloud books? Should I choose them to enhance our studies? Or just choose books that seem interesting? My problem is I always choose books that enhance our studies, that we never get to the good modern fiction books that I loved as a child."

Andrew: Well, certainly you want to read books that enhance the studies. I think that brings things to life. But you know, for example, most people remember a lot more from having read or listened to *Johnny Tremain* about the Revolutionary War time

period than they would by reading a textbook about the Revolutionary War time period. Why? Because the textbooks give you facts but there's no narrative really to lock it to, whereas with the story of *Johnny Tremain*, you start to live the life with Johnny Tremain and so you're there. And you're building your imagination and interest. So particularly with historical fiction, I think that's really important. If you ask most of my adult children, where'd you learn most of your history, they'll probably say historical fiction.

But my other advice to Kelly and all parents really is this: Read books that you want to read. Because if you're reading a book you really want to be reading, you'll be having a good time with it. You'll be enjoying it and if you're enjoying it, your kids will be enjoying it. And if you're reading a book that you don't really want to be reading, they will tune in to that very quickly and they will probably not enjoy it all that much either. And I would even go so far as to say, if you start in on a book and you're just really not having fun with it, just stop. There is no rule saying you have to.

Sarah: Yeah, we've done that before. As hard as it is to carve out time anyway just in our sort of busy culture, if the motivation is not there, the intrinsic motivation that it's really enjoyable to read aloud, it makes it much harder to carve out time to sit and read aloud. So I found that enjoyment element to be really important.

Andrew: And then what happens if you're enjoying the book, you'll say, "Hey, do we have time for another chapter? Yes I think we do. Let's just read more." So you actually... you'll get more volume of reading done if

you're reading books that you want to read yourself as well.

**Read books that you want to read.
If you're reading a book you really
want to be reading, you'll be
having a good time with it.**

Sarah: Very good. Well, where can our listeners connect with you online?

Andrew: Well, our website, we just recently broke down and bought the three-letter domain name so we can look big. It's IEW.com and we've got on our website—I think it's quite intuitive and easy to navigate—but we have our help tab, we have our audio downloads tab, our help and support it is, and then our resources—articles, video, audio. I have a two-page article I wrote summarizing the importance of reading out loud and of memorization, which I know you're also quite keen on. And they can sign up for our e-newsletter. They can get our magalog. We just sent it out in March. And so it's got some great little articles in there. And if you want to know about events that are happening in our area, be sure we have your physical address as well, and then if we come and do some seminars for kids or mini-conferences or whatnot, we'll let you know.

Sarah: Great and I will go ahead and put links to all that up in the show notes too because of that article One Myth, Two Truths. That's the one you're talking about, right?

Andrew: Yes. That's the one I mentioned.

Sarah: Yes. I'll make sure I'll link to that because that's a great read, and then Nurturing Competent Communicators I assume is still available on your site?

Andrew: Yes. That would be in the audio part. And we also have a search bar so if you get a little bit lost...the problem is, we've got so much on the site now, sometimes it's a little harder to find the things that you immediately want. But you can search for that Nurturing Competent Communicators as well, or maybe you can put the direct link.

Sarah: Great, and if any of our listeners are going to homeschooling conventions this year, make sure you check the IEW website because you can see where you can possibly get a chance to talk with Andrew or his team. You'll be at several of those, right?

Andrew: I will, yeah, lots of them. We're hitting the busy season. And I don't think I'm coming to Washington again this year.

Sarah: I know. I've been watching. I watched like a hawk to see when you're coming.

Andrew: We'll hope to meet up again at some point.

Sarah: Yes, definitely. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. It's been very enlightening and super fun like I knew it would be so I hope we can do it again some time.

Andrew: Well, thank you so much for your time and we'll look forward to putting this podcast up on our Facebook page and letting all our folks know about what you're doing out there serving the homeschool community with friendly, energetic, informative interviews.

Sarah: Perfect! Thank you so much, Andrew.

Now it's time for **Let the Kids Speak!** This is the part of the podcast where we'll hear from kids in their own words about the books that have been read aloud to them.

"Hi, my name is Olivia. I come from Alabama. I'm 8 years old, almost 9, and I'm going to tell you about my favorite book, *Judy Moody and Stink: The Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Treasure Hunt*. This is a very good story. It has one of my favorite characters in the story, Judy Moody. What I like about it was, they won the treasure hunt. The end!"

"Hello, my name is Hans and I am 10, and my favorite book that my dad has read to me is *The Hobbit*. I like *The Hobbit* because of the many adventures and the voices my dad has for all of the different characters."

Remember that your child can be on the Read-Aloud Revival podcast by going to ReadAloudRevival.com, scrolling to the bottom of the page and leaving me a message there. For today's show notes, with links to everything that was discussed, head to ReadAloudRevival.com and look for Episode 1.

Until next time, go build your family culture around books!