



Episode 2

Engaging Conversations – How to Talk to Your Kids About Books Guest: Adam Andrews

In episode one, Andrew Pudewa from the Institute for Excellence in Writing told us why it's so important to read aloud to older kids. But building a family culture around books involves more than just consuming stories together. We need to read aloud, yes, but we also need to have meaningful conversations with our kids about the books we are reading together. That can be intimidating. Or at least it's intimidating to me.

So today, we're going to hear from someone who can help us get a good handle on how to talk to our kids about books.

Adam Andrews is the founder and director of the Center for Literary Education. He and his wife, Missy, homeschool their six kids and create products and resources at the Center for Lit that instill a love of literature. Adam is the author of the fabulous resource *Teaching the Classics*. That book was my own introduction to learning how to talk about books with my kids.

Sarah: Thanks for being here today.

Adam: My pleasure. Happy to be here.

Sarah: Well, tell us a little bit about yourself, your family, and about what you are doing at the Center for Literary Education.

Adam: Sure. My wife and I started Center for Lit about eleven years ago, after an impromptu conversation in our neighborhood among some of our friends who approached my wife, Missy, and said, “We didn’t get a literary education when we were coming along and we’d like you to help us give one to our own students.” And they were real clear about the fact that they didn’t want Missy and I to teach their kids for them. They wanted us to give them some tools that would help them do the job themselves because they were committed homeschoolers and wanted to be on the scene when all those wonderful moments of self-realization and discovery happen in the house, you know.

Sarah: Right, yeah.

Adam: So Missy put together a couple of ideas combining her love for children's literature on the one hand, and her interest in literary analysis on the other, and sort of stuck those two things together and came up with a technique for using kids' books to pass on the basic techniques of literary analysis.

And we found that using kids' books that way enabled the moms that are in our little group to catch on really quickly onto what really makes up a literary analysis and then turn around and pass those lessons on to their kids efficiently. So we've been doing that just kind of spreading the word about our method for the last ten or eleven years and having a great time reading good books along the way.

Sarah: Very good. So is that the method that you've distilled into *Teaching the Classics*?

Adam: Exactly right. Yup, that's it.

Sarah: Okay. Let's tell our readers a little bit about *Teaching the Classics* right off the get go. I have loved that book. It was really my introduction into learning how to talk about books with my kids and so maybe you can give us a little Reader's Digest version of what that is.

Adam: Absolutely. Yeah, we're basically trying to work on applying three ideas. The first one is that all books, all stories I should say, share common elements of context, structure, and style. And if you can understand how these elements fit together and how authors use those elements to make their point, you can go a long way towards being able to have a conversation with the author about what he's trying to say and enter into a give-and-take and encounter the big ideas that he's trying to communicate. So that's the first idea.

The second one is that since it's true that all books have the same elements, children's stories as I just mentioned, are really the best place to start learning them, learning how to identify them, learning how to see the connections, and how to really understand how a book is put together.

5:35 Why are picture books the best way to learn literary analysis, even for adults?

Sarah: You're even talking about picture books here, right?

Adam: Yes. I'm actually talking about the ones you read to your pre-readers, your lap-sitters, before you go to bed, absolutely. Our first *Teaching the Classics* session was with probably *A Bargain for Frances* by Russell Hoban, the one about the badgers learning how to share.

Sarah: Yes. We're big Frances fans here.

Adam: Okay, very good. It's amazing. The Frances books and really just about anything with a story to it, has got all the same elements in it that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does or Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. And regardless of your age, if you can start learning literary analysis on an approachable, easy title, the whole job is way simpler.

Sarah: Yeah, I think that's huge. Because I know that I was never introduced to any kind of literary analysis until I was in high school and we were trying to dissect—dissect and kill was what I was going to say—books that could have been... it would just have been an easier tool to learn if we had started with something simpler. And so now as I'm teaching my kids, I think if I learn on these

books that we're reading to our toddlers and preschoolers, that would be really effective.

Adam: Yeah. If you can imagine being at a college classroom where this teacher gets up and has this sort of intelligent look on his face and he scrunches his face up and says, "What does it all mean?" And you realize that you're supposed to answer from some secret knowledge that you've gotten by some magical technique. And really, the answer to that question is, what's the main conflict in the story? And where does it resolve itself? And we've realized that putting the question in those easy terms and seeing it crop up in easy books is a really powerful tool.

Sarah: Yeah, that makes it so much more simple. It makes it approachable because I think a lot of us, a lot of parents and myself included for sure, are a bit intimidated by the concept of talking about literature with our kids because we don't feel like we know the right questions to ask.

Adam: Oh yeah, of course.

Sarah: And I have the very unhelpful habit myself of asking my kids yes or no questions about the books they've either read to themselves or that we read aloud together. Did you like it? And they say, "Yes." And that's it.

Adam: It's the discussion floor of all time.

7:45 What kinds of questions should we ask our kids about the books we read together?

Sarah: Exactly, yes. So what kinds of questions should we be asking?

Adam: That is a great question in and of itself because you're right. There's nothing that kills a discussion faster than "Did you like it?" and the kids looks at you with kind of a dull look on his face and says, "No" and then your next point is, "Very good. Next book."

So it really is important to ask the right questions. And interestingly enough that "did you like it?" question is a wonderful object lesson in and of itself, because first of all, it's a terrible question because it doesn't really lead to any discussion. But secondly, it actually focuses on the wrong person. It focuses on the reader. You're asking a reader to evaluate the book. And so the whole focus of that discussion is the reader's response, the reader's reaction, the reader's take away from the book, when really...

Sarah: I've never thought about that, right.

Adam: When really, the point of literary analysis is to understand the author and to enter into a conversation with the author about the point that the author wanted to make, in the subject that the author wanted to talk about. And so when we ask about our own reactions to a book, we're really asking the wrong person the wrong question.

So what we've done instead is find ways to ask the author what he was trying to say by examining his work in a systematic way. Just let me give you one quick example. One of the most important common elements of all stories is the plot, obviously, and that's just the list of events that happened in the story from beginning to end.

And we can divide the plot up into five separate compartments. There's the

exposition, which is the beginning of the plot where the author introduces his world.

There's the **rising action**, where a conflict of some kind enters the story and causes events to happen one after another that result from the conflict and result from each other. And the effect of this rising action is to increase the tension in the story and in the mind of the reader as he's going along following it.

And then there's a **climactic moment** in every plot where something happens. A decision is made or an event takes place that has the eventual effect of resolving the conflict. Since every story has a conflict, every story's plot also has a climactic moment.

10:48 Why you need to think through the plot to find out what the author is trying to say in the book.

After that climactic moment, every story has a **denouement** or an **unraveling** or a **falling action** where the tension that was building in the beginning of the story drains away.

And then finally, there's a **conclusion** where the author stops writing and usually gives the reader one more thing to think about so that he doesn't forget the point that the author was trying to make.

If you can ask your students, which of the details of the story belong in each of those five compartments, each of those five parts of the plot, it's amazing how the author's point starts to become clear. When you ask the students, "Okay, which details are the most important ones to put in the exposition?" and

the reader, regardless of how young he is, is already starting to think, "What's the author trying to tell me by setting up the story this way?"

But when you get on to that climactic moment, that's when the power of asking the author rather than asking yourself really becomes clear. Because every story's climactic moment is the resolution of a particular conflict in the story. And so you ask the student, what's that highest point of tension in the story? "Where are you going? Oh my goodness, what will happen next? Something's got to give." You identify that point in the story.

And then ask the student, what conflict is being resolved there? Why is that the turning point of the story? What major question is being answered? And when you locate that major question that's being answered there, the major conflict that's being resolved there, you've got a real clue as to what the author really wanted to talk about.

Sarah: Very good. And so then when we ask our children what was this book about, then we'll have a much better idea than just... I feel like I don't know how to answer that question about lots of the books that I read. I really know what that was about. I don't mean, I can tell you a little summary of what happened, but... well, that's my next question for you then I guess is, is this something that you've practiced yourself as you're reading books just on your own? Do you now naturally kind of pick out these different elements?

Adam: Obviously, Missy and I do because we basically do this all day long every day. But you'd be surprised how quickly the

students develop the habit as well. Sometimes, parents come to us and say... Well, let me just start from the beginning. One of the things we often tell parents is, “You can’t really have a discussion like this with your students unless you’ve read the book too.” And that’s often kind of discouraging because some parents have six or eight kids in the house and they’ve got six or eight different grade levels and there’s just no way to read all of those books.

Sarah: Right, which makes it a particularly good method for when you’re reading aloud because you’re sharing the book together.

Adam: Exactly. And so what we often tell them is, “You don’t have to read every book with your students this way.” In fact, sometimes you won’t have time to read the books that you assigned to your students at all. But if you’ll have a good discussion with them once in a while, it will affect the way they read on their own. Because I think what we’re talking about here is this is the way literature is actually put together. And once you recognize that, you will literally see it wherever you go.

And so I have my kids sometimes say, “I just finished this book and I thought that the climax was kind of weird because it resolved the wrong conflict.” And they’ll talk with me in the technical language that we have been using all their lives. It’s kind of become second nature. And I think that happens pretty fast.

12:16 Developing a habit—why you can do this on occasion with your child and then they’ll start to naturally do it on their own.

Sarah: So how often do you think we should be having these kinds of conversations? How many books...I mean it’s probably hard to just pin that down to a number. Every family is different but...

Adam: Yeah, I think every family is different and I think that what I usually say in response to that question is, start with one. Learn how to do this method and ask them good questions and do it once. And see whether everybody’s not excited about doing it again before too long.

Sarah: That’s so good because I think a lot of times with things like this, I know that I will go, oh well, we are going to start to have literary discussions. And then I’d build it up to this big thing and I have to do six different books this year. And it’s a literary discussion and I’m so overwhelmed to start. But if I just thought, we’re just going to do it this one time with this one picture book to start and just see where we go with that.

14:30 Start with a picture book, no matter the age of your students.

Adam: Exactly right. And since you mentioned picture books, I would actually also recommend starting with a picture book regardless of the age of your students. When we teach this method, we start with literally, *A Bargain for Frances* by Russell Hoban, I think I mentioned already, and I teach that to rooms full of grownups all the time.

And the age disparity between the intended reading level of the book and the intended reading level of the audience is usually pretty vast. But the truth is, it's a great book! And if what you're there for is to learn the techniques of good reading, it's a fabulous lesson. And so I really would recommend a good, well-written picture book to start with and see if the class doesn't say "Hey, wow, that was kind of fun. Let's do another one."

Sarah: And you have fabulous lists on the Center for Lit website which I will link in the show notes to this podcast so everybody can find it. And you have picture books and then books for each grade level going on up that are particularly good for this...

15:29 Do you need to use particular books for this method?

Adam: Yeah, exactly right. And the truth is, every book is good for this because this is no original method. This is a window into how stories are put together. And so once you understand that, you can turn and apply it to literally any book in the world. But for those looking for a specific list, we have all kinds of suggestions on our website, of books that Missy and I have used and had good discussions with. Also movies and other narratives of any type are easily laid open by asking the kinds of questions that we recommend.

Sarah: Oh right, very good. I didn't think of that.

Adam: And sometimes we have great discussions reading a book and then going to watch the movie version of the book and having a literary discussion of both of them.

And you'd be amazed how when you learn to ask not yourself what you thought of the work but ask the author or the movie director, as the case may be, what he was trying to say, it's amazing how a movie director sometimes come along and try and say very different things than the original author was after.

16:25 Why ask the author and not yourself? It all starts with, "I don't know. I want to know."

Sarah: What I like about that too... what I like about the whole idea of asking the author, not asking yourself, is that it's just less of a self-centered way of approaching big ideas and life in general. I'm encountering this big world, not what do I think about *Hamlet*? Or what do I think about *A Bargain for Frances*?

Adam: Yeah, I think you're right. I mean one of the presuppositions that you should go into education with is that I don't already know. The reason why we're giving our kids an education, the reason we want one for ourselves is because we don't know yet and so the proper thing to do is ask, rather than tell.

Sarah: And that makes it a little less intimidating too if you come across a book that has ideas or underlying things that kind of a little bit make us as Christian parents, maybe make us a little uncomfortable because we think we're asking the author what they're trying to say and helping our children see the message that they're saying which will help them then as they encounter different books and movies and messages in their life, be able to get down to that person's intention.

Adam: Oh exactly right. I couldn't agree with you more. Reading well is a mode of listening. And when we're talking to Christian parents, I'm always reminded of that message in the epistle of James which says, "Let every man be quick to hear and slow to speak." And I think it's a really good reminder when we read that our job, first of all, is to listen and get ourselves out of the way a little bit. Just pay attention to what the author is trying to say. They'll be plenty of time later for disagreeing with him or whatever, but until... as C.S. Lewis once put it, until we've surrendered first, we can't possibly know whether to disagree or agree.

18:10 What is the Socratic method and how can parents apply it in their conversations with their kids?

Sarah: Yes, I like that. Well, *Teaching the Classics* is based on the Socratic method. So what exactly is the Socratic method? Because I know people are going to be asking that question.

Adam: Well, that's a good question. We use the term very broadly and very informally. In some strains of education, it's used very technically to refer to the method popularized by Socrates and his followers. We use it very broadly to refer to teaching by asking questions and getting a discussion going, rather than teaching by lecturing.

And so we're really convinced that the lecture is a terrible way to teach literature precisely because authors went to write in order to get a conversation started. And so, participating in that conversation is the best way to learn literature and the best way to get a

conversation going is to ask questions rather than deliver various dicta about what the book means.

Sarah: Yeah, where they just kind of tune it out.

Adam: Right, exactly.

Sarah: So how do we convince our kids then that we're not looking for specific right answers? We just want to have the discussion. I know with my own kids, I feel like they open up or are just willing to have better conversations with me when they realize that I'm not looking for a particular answer that's right or wrong so they're afraid of getting it wrong. I just really want to know what they think so when we're talking about a book I just really want to know what they think about it or what impacted them. So how do we do that?

Adam: I totally understand. Well, the first thing we have to do is, as moms and dads and teachers, we have to learn that lesson ourselves. And if I had a nickel for every time a homeschool mom came up to me and said, "Can you please publish the answers to your Socratic questions? I just want the answers." And eventually, we have started publishing some answers just because of the hue and cry.

But really, what we'd really like to say is, don't worry about the answers. Ask the right questions and read carefully. The fact that there's not a right answer sitting in front of you will require that you have a discussion about it. And that the room full of people that are all reading this book together ought to come to some sort of consensus about what the author was trying to say. And in a world where the author is sometimes dead and not

available for comment, his book is actually all we have to go on.

**Don't worry about the answers.
Ask the right questions
and read carefully.**

Sarah: Right. And two different families reading the same book, asking the same questions could come up with two completely different discussions on it.

Adam: They could. Exactly right. It's funny because I sometimes get criticized for contradicting myself because I would agree with what you say, that two different discussions can come with two different answers about what the main point of the story is.

On the other hand, I also always say that the meaning of the book is what the author intended it to mean. And we don't have a choice actually. The book can't mean whatever we want it to mean. It actually only means what it meant. And so we're in between a rock and a hard place because the author is often dead and we can't ask him. We're going for understanding exactly what he was trying to say which was only one thing or actually was not two contradictory things. But on the other hand, being okay with the fact that two different discussions could come up with different conclusions. And that's essentially...

Sarah: And it could just be two different facets of maybe two different parts of what he was trying to say.

Adam: It could. And it could also be two different interpretations of a work of

literature which was what literary analysis is. That's the work of interpreting literature correctly, is striving after what the author was going for and realizing that since he's not around, you might get it wrong.

21:53 How do we schedule this into family life?

Sarah: Right. So do you schedule this as part of your homeschooling day? Or is this something that you just do more... I know that we have listeners who are homeschoolers and listeners who are not, and so how would you suggest that families go about having these kinds of conversations? Scheduling it or just when it crops up?

Adam: Yeah, great question. Once you are kind of alive and awake to this idea that there's an inherent structure in a story and that a certain group of generic questions can make the bones of that story appear in a discussion and lead to understanding what the story was all about, the question about how often to have the discussion really does answer itself. Partially because students really get interested in picking apart the things they read especially as they get up into the late grade school/junior high age, when they're picking apart everything and trying to figure out how everything works. They will take to picking apart literature and movies in particular, as my father used to say, "Like a cold hog to warm mud." It will be very natural.

Sarah: I'd rather have my pre-teen picking apart books than picking apart the reasons we do things the way we do it.

Adam: Exactly right. Have a book for a while.

Sarah: They wrestle with the author instead of with me.

Adam: Exactly. The other thing is that obviously, everybody's looking for a way to schedule things in, in a way that accomplish a book list or a curriculum. I can tell you what Missy and I do. We try to have the kids read and discuss six books a year when they are working with us in junior high and high school. And rare is the year that we get through the entire list and I'm always very quick to say that. I really hesitate to say, "You must be doing this many books or else you're failing." Because really, the quality of the discussions that you're having is far more important than the number of books you're covering.

But once every six weeks is kind of a logical thing for our family. We have them read in between the other books but then once every six weeks, we try and sit down and have a more formal discussion. In the meantime, however, they are always thinking clearly about everything they read because the techniques are second nature to them.

Sarah: So when you're having these conversations, if you ask a question, you're going through the... there's five parts to the story: exposition, rising action, climactic moment, denouement, and conclusion. Is that right?

Adam: Yeah, those are the five parts of a plot.

Sarah: Five parts of the plot, right. So when you're going through those and you're asking them to find the most important parts of the

story to put in each of these parts of the plot, how long does that take? I'm sure it changes depending on the story too, but is that something we should block out an hour for?

24:49 How long does it take to have this kind of discussion?

Adam: Well, I can do a plot analysis of *A Bargain for Frances* with a room full of moms in half an hour to forty minutes. But it really does depend not only on the simplicity of the book but on the age of the student and the degree to which you really want to get all the way to the bottom.

I mean a lot of books you're going to read and you're going to talk about setting for just a minute. Maybe talk about conflict for just a minute then you're going to move on because you don't really want to spend that much time on that book. And some books, you really want to suck all the juice out of so you're going to spend longer.

Missy and I do a complete Socratic discussion of a book in all of its facets in about two hours when we do one of our online classes.

Sarah: You do it all at once?

Adam: We do it all at once. Yeah, we have the kids read the story altogether and come to the online class having already finished the book. And then we do a *Teaching the Classics* style discussion where we cover not just plot, but conflict and setting and characters and theme and some contextual issues all in about two hours.

Sarah: Okay, tell me a little more about that. What are those online classes? Are they live? Are they video? How do those work?

Adam: We do them live and we use screen-sharing technologies, so like GoToMeeting, something like that. So the kids are online listening to our voices and watching our computer screen. And then our format is kind of like what you and I are doing right now, just kind of a back and forth conversation. We do it a little bit of like radio call-in show where all of the students are in the class and then if they click a button to raise their hand, we can call on them and any kid can participate.

And so we do some Socratic discussions, throw some questions out about the climactic moments and the conflicts and those sorts of things, and just have a ball talking about literature. The goal of each discussion obviously is to understand more clearly what the author was trying to tell us and interact with that great idea.

Sarah: Right. And what ages are those for, your online classes?

Adam: The online classes are... for this next fall, we're expanding our offerings. We've got a class for fifth and sixth graders. And then we have a junior high class for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. And then we have three high school classes, World Literature, British Literature, and American Literature.

Sarah: Wow. Very good. What age do you start having these kinds of conversations with your kids?

27:00 What age do you start having these conversations?

Adam: That's a good question. We wrote our Socratic list, which is the collection of generic discussion questions designed exclusively for

moms who look at me and say "Yeah, but what questions do I ask?" And they are arranged so that there are questions for kids of all ages. They're divided up into 21 general questions about structure, style, and context. And then each question has sub-questions beneath it that examine different aspects of that question and follow leads and follow trails that that question implies, and those sub-questions are graded according to difficulty.

So one of the things we teach parents how to do in our seminars is choose the right questions based on the age of the student and the difficulty of the book. And so using the simplest of our Socratic questions, you can really have a discussion with somebody who's sitting on your lap and can't read by himself yet.

Sarah: Right, then they just get in the habit of being able to see the skeleton of the story no matter what?

Adam: Exactly. It can start with something as simple if you're talking about setting for example is where does the story happen? Does it happen in the country or the city? And have that be enough for today because the kid's really little.

Sarah: Yes, right.

Adam: But the habit, the mental habit of asking questions about what you read and identifying elements from the story and categorizing them in your head can happen at a very early age.

Yeah, at this point we're split up in different ages at this point because the kids are trying to prepare for a formal high school lit course. And so sometimes we pair them up but Missy

is teaching two or three different sections at least. We've got two kids out of the home already, and one's just about to graduate. So we're going to have three at home next year. And I think they might be in at least two different sections, maybe three. But when they're younger, combining the grades is the easiest thing in the world.

Sarah: Yes, right, and maybe when you're just learning the method of *Teaching the Classics*. Just learning the, how to pick apart the different parts of the plot, doing it with a picture book all together would be...

Adam: In fact, we recommend that everybody start the year with a picture book or two with the whole class together in one room just reminding... if you've done it before, just remembering after the long summer, what the basics of this discussion model are and what kind of questions we're going to be asking and using *A Bargain for Frances* as the lesson.

And sometimes we recommend people do that as many times as necessary until everybody's comfortable with the style of discussion and the types of questions because there's really no hurry. You're not going to finish all the books in the world anyway. So there's no hurry.

Sarah: Right. Okay, well is there anything else that you think we should know about talking about books with our kids that is important for us to keep in mind as we try to do this more often?

**30:57 Who is best suited to have these discussions?
(Hint: look in the mirror) :)**

Adam: Well it's interesting you started by heading the direction towards the author's perspective rather than our own. And that's the kind of thing I usually come back to around at the end because I think everybody sort of assumes that our own reaction to the story is the point. And so I'm glad to have talked about that early in the hour. That's something I usually have to bring up myself, so congratulations!

Sarah: Yay! I win.

Adam: One of the things I do like to encourage moms and dads about is that, even though we don't feel like all of us necessarily that we're well prepared for this because it seems very academic, the kind of things you need to know and the kind of questions you need to ask and the arcane vocabulary that you need to be master of, the truth is that an open conversation with your students about the things they read regardless of how smooth it is and regardless of how erudite and sophisticated you sound, really is the most important part of an education. And I love to reiterate this every time I get the chance.

You parents are the perfect people for this job and nobody could be better suited for it. Just because God has put the two of you in the home and you're the one who's across the table from that kid and he is in your family by the will of God and so I love to encourage parents with that idea that they are in exactly the right spot and so are their kids.

Sarah: Oh, I'm so glad you said that. And I think that's something important to keep in mind too for all of our listeners who are not homeschoolers because this is a fantastic way to connect with our kids and have these conversations and maybe just to get a little peek into the way they think. Something you can share at home doesn't have to be something that's just tied to your school day, it's just part of that whole family culture.

Adam: Absolutely. Anytime we can support just the development of the family culture even informally. On the way home from the movie, leaning back to the back seat and say "Hey, what do you think about that? What was the director trying to say there?" That kind of conversation is so productive and it really is the bedrock of a good education in life, not just a good academic education.

Sarah: Well before we go, I want to know what your all-time favorite title to read aloud is.

Adam: Oh my goodness! That is a great question. Depending on the age of the student, there are so many to choose from. When my kids were little and still lap-sitters, Al Perkins' *Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb* was the family favorite. I don't know if you're familiar with that book at all.

Sarah: I am not. I have heard of it before and of all the picture books I've ever read, I can't believe I've never... I'm going to have to get my hands on it though. *Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb*...

Adam: Al Perkins' *Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb*. It will probably tell you more about our family than you knew but it's a great one. When they get a little older, I love and will never get tired of *The Adventures of Tom*

Sawyer by Mark Twain. We read that together and laugh out loud from beginning to end.

34:15 The best read-alouds for high schoolers.

Sarah: Do you save that for a certain age? With my daughter for example, I saved *Anne of Green Gables* until she was about sixth grade, because I wanted her to really just cherish it and it worked. So what about *Tom Sawyer*? What do you think?

Adam: I would actually read *Tom Sawyer* as soon as they... it's hard to say because his sentences are... part of the fun is the way he puts his sentences together and the fun that he has with the language. And so maybe grade school, mid-grade school to late grade school. I wouldn't read *Huckleberry Finn* until late junior high, though, just because of some of the content in it. But *Tom Sawyer* is I think free of objectionable or mature content. It's just a great ride.

Sarah: Okay that will be our next. We're starting *The Hobbit* today. But when we're done with *The Hobbit* we'll do *Tom Sawyer*.

Adam: My son Aaron is graduating from high school in a couple of weeks and he has to give a speech, a valedictory address and there is a chapter in Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* that is about the end of the year recitations in a little one-room school house. And Mark Twain just has a field day making fun of kids giving valedictory addresses and we read it this morning, and just busted a gut laughing. And I think he's going to incorporate some of Twain's paragraph into

his speech and poke fun at himself. So it's a great one.

Sarah: Oh that's great fun! I'm looking forward to that.

Adam: If they're in high school, you can't do better I think for read aloud than Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield*. That's another guy who really has fun with the sounds of his own language and is just a master at making it musical.

Sarah: Okay, I'm going to have to get... Charles Dickens has been on my own list of what I need to read to sort of recover my own education so that will jump up to the top of the list.

Very good. So where can our listeners find you online?

Adam: We're at CenterForLit.com and it's a pretty easy website to navigate if you're interested in learning our method. There's a curriculum materials section that's easy to click to. If you're interested in online classes, there's an online academy link. And my email and phone number is all over the place so if you have any questions, you can get in touch with me anytime.

Sarah: Very good. And I noticed that a couple of your, or several of your convention talks, are available as free downloads on your site right now which I think our listeners would enjoy. So I'll include a link to that page. Are those going to continue to be free or is that just for a limited time?

Adam: Those are going to be free in perpetuity and I'll actually be updating that page when this particular convention season is over. We've added a couple of new talks

that I think are going really well. So I'll add those to the website early this summer.

Sarah: Excellent. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. I think you've shared a ton of useful information. So I appreciate all your time.

Adam: It's my pleasure, Sarah. Thanks for having me.

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.

"Hello! My name is Allison Rosemary. I am ten years old. My favorite read aloud is *The Search for Delicious*. It starts when the prime minister sets out to write a dictionary. The king does not agree with his definition for delicious so he sends his apprentice to take votes around the kingdom. It's quite an adventure."

"My name is Drew. I am eight years old and my favorite story is *By the Great Horn Spoon!* It is set during the California Gold Rush. My favorite spot was the fighting scene. Go find it."

"Hi! My name is Audrey. I'm twelve years old. I live in Washington state. And one of my favorite books ever read aloud to me is *Half Magic*. I liked this book because four children find a lucky coin that takes them on many adventures and sometimes they even change history."

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 2.

Thank you so much for joining me. I'll see you again soon for another episode of the [Read Aloud Revival](http://ReadAloudRevival.com). Until then, go build your family culture around books.