



**Cheat Sheet by Allison Burr**

**Episode 8**

## **Every Book is a Mystery**

**Guest: Lawrence Goldstone**

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## Meet Lawrence Goldstone



For years, in an effort to instill a love of literature in their daughter and her friends, Lawrence Goldstone and his wife Nancy volunteered their time to run parent-child book groups for elementary school children at their local library. He describes it as the most rewarding experience of their life together. In *Deconstructing Penguins* (the title refers to their very first book group, an in-depth analysis of *Mr. Popper's Penguins*) Larry chronicled what he and Nancy learned from these sessions.

The book recommends children's titles they found to be indispensable and also offers detailed discussion plans including the real-life (and frequently hilarious) responses of both the kids and their parents.

## In this Episode

In this episode, Larry removes the intimidation factor of launching a parent-child book club by providing a plethora of practical tips on how to start one and how to focus on the most important aspect: a substantial interchange between parents and children. He reminds us that fourth graders are quite capable of developing critical reading skills. The good news is that these skills can also be learned by parents whose education was lacking in this area!

Larry also provides a tremendous amount of encouragement about the value of digging deeper into a book, whether it be a picture book or a classic novel. You will be freshly inspired to ask "why" questions, alongside your kids, when reading together. Larry's framework of "Every book is a mystery, and every reader is a detective" will help you encounter a book's ideas, and engage your kids with them, at a more profound level than ever before.

## Cheater's Guide

Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or [listen to the entire podcast](#).

- 2:45 Larry's motivations for launching the parent-child book club.
- 6:15 The trend (and trap!) of "personal identification" rather than critical literary analysis.
- 9:05 Writers are on mission: a smart reader is aware that every word, setting, and plot is by design.
- 10:46 The key to a successful book club is the interchange – rather than finding a specific answer.
- 11:36 The parent/child dynamic is real: fourth graders are capable of sophisticated answers, and many parents never learned critical reading skills.
- 17:48 Play the book detective: what is the writer trying to get me to believe?
- 19:16 Kids develop their own critical analysis to prepare for their own independent reading.
- 21:03 The logistics of a book-club session: how many parents and children should be involved?
- 25:17 A book club equips you with an understanding and respect for those who disagree with you.
- 26:25 The leader does not have to be an expert on the book.
- 31:56 Reading books together is as an effective way to work through difficult ideas, while your children are still under your wing.
- 35:23 Larry's final thoughts: don't be discouraged! Reading books with your kids is worth it!

**Don't get discouraged; it is a mutual journey.**

**You're doing this together. And if it doesn't work  
with the first book, do it with the second book.**

**This is a journey of exploration  
undertaken by two equal participants.**

—Lawrence Goldstone

# Major Takeaways

## 1. Kids love to discuss substantial themes.

We know that as parents, don't we? How many times have we commented – *I had no idea Johnny (or Suzie) was even listening to me read aloud, but then he asked the most insightful question.*

Even if the marketing world tries its best to focus the hearts and minds of our children on meaningless tripe, we know our calling is to properly order their loves and train their affections. Let's apply that to every area of their lives, including the books we provide them. According to Larry, the notion that substantive book discussions only begin at the high school level is deeply misguided. Let's start with our elementary kids and watch them rise to the occasion.

## 2. Beware: every writer is trying to influence his or her readers.

Reading critically means discerning what precisely it is that the author is suggesting. The author, for good or for bad, is presenting a worldview and crafting a message, whether it is a picture book or a young adult novel.

Playing the book detective involves, in part, figuring out the whys and wherefores of the scene and setting, and it also involves determining the author's motivation. Ask the "why" question for yourself and for your kids, and you'll understand the book more deeply than ever before.

## 3. The mystery propels the story forward.

Every character, every dialogue, every setting is moving toward something that needs to be resolved. The subtlety of the message varies, so the detective sifts through the clues—characters, plot, setting, pacing—and figures out what the solution is.

But don't be alarmed! These solution-finding discussions don't have to be collegiate-level rigorous. Younger kids can fully participate by asking (and answering) the questions along the way. Get your kids (and yourself!) beneath the surface, and you will be hooked.

## Show Notes

Books mentioned in this episode:

*Deconstructing Penguins: Parents, Kids, and the Bond of Reading* by Lawrence & Nancy Goldstone

*Mr. Popper's Penguins* by Richard Atwater

*White Lilacs* by Carolyn Meyer

*Half Magic* by Edward Eager

Many thanks to Isabel on **Let the Kids Speak!** She recommended: *Seven Loaves of Bread* by Ferida Wolff

The feature Larry wrote for the Book Reporter: *TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY and Other Surprises*

Two bloggers I enjoy reading who have started their own book clubs based on the Goldstones' book: *Mt. Hope Chronicles* and *Here in the Lovely Woods*

Larry's website: <http://lawrencegoldstone.com>

Nancy's website: <http://nancygoldstone.com>

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com).

## Action Plan

### 1. Borrow or buy Larry's book and decide whether starting a book club is for you – or for you and a friend.

If now is not the right time, simply use the material presented to help you become a more insightful reader and, by extension, help your children become more discerning as well.

### 2. See these resources for more parent-child book club inspiration:

- [Episode 2](#) with Adam Andrews, founder of [Center for Lit](#) and creator of [Teaching the Classics](#). The Cheat Sheet for Episode 2 also provides a quick reference tool for those interested in *Teaching the Classics*.
- [Mt. Hope Chronicles](#) for Heidi Scovel's journey of leading a book club based upon Larry's work. Heidi successfully blended the approaches found in *Teaching the Classics* with *Deconstructing Penguins*.
- [Episode 10](#), Sarah's helpful and inspiring interview with Heidi Scovel on the topic of starting and running a parent-child book club. Heidi assures us that running a book club doesn't have to be a daunting task.
- [Here in the Lovely Woods](#) for Hannah's experiences with launching a parent-child book club.

### 3. Insider's tip for Read-Aloud Revival members:

Check out Heidi Scovel's workshop [How to Create a Parent/Child Book Club](#), where she takes you step-by-step through the ins and outs of starting a parent/child book club. Filled with practical applications, this will be your go-to reference when you are ready to launch a book club!