



RAR 043 - Dr. Daniel Willingham

Sarah: If your heart's desire is to raise kids who read not because they can but because they love to then you're in the right spot.

You're listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that inspires you to build your family culture around books.

Hey, hey, hey! Sarah Mackenzie here, your host for the Read Aloud Revival podcast. I've been so excited to share this episode with you. I'll tell you what, we recorded this conversation in mid-February and I told the rest of the Read Aloud Revival team that I was going now to sit on my hands to keep from publishing it right away. It's just that good!

I'm talking to a cognitive scientist today who, well, doesn't sound like a cognitive scientist. That's because he's also a father of four kids and he has an uncanny ability to take the best research and convert it into very practical strategies that we ordinary parents can put into practice in our homes. I was so inspired by this conversation. I just know you will be too. Stay tuned to the end because we have something big and wonderful happening next week at the Read Aloud Revival and I don't want you to miss it. But I also don't want to delay this episode anymore. So I'm going to go ahead and turn to our conversation but make sure you listen all the way through to the end today so you don't miss that announcement. Ready? Here we go.

1:35 Introducing Dr. Willingham

Dr. Daniel Willingham wants kids to read but more than that, he wants kids to really find joy in reading. And so he studied a lot about what it takes to make that happen. Dr. Willingham is a professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia where he has taught since 1992. He earned his B.A. from Duke University and his PhD

in Cognitive Psychology from Harvard. His research currently focuses on the application of cognitive psychology in k-12 and college education. A parent himself, he's taken his vast research and writes about it with candor, humor, and positivity making it approachable for parents and teachers. He writes the Ask the Cognitive Scientist column in American Educator Magazine and has been featured in The New York Times. He's the bestselling author of four books, all of which I think many of you listeners will be interested in. One of them include Raising Kids Who Read. He's also written Why Don't Students Like School, among others. And today, I'm delighted to have him join me to talk about what it takes to raise kids who read. You're going to love hearing what he has to say. Hey Dr. Willingham, thank you so much for joining me.

Daniel: My pleasure to be here.

Sarah: Well, before we plunge into our conversation, do you want to tell us a little bit about your work and your family?

2:50 More about Dr. Gillingham

Daniel: Sure. As you said, I'm a professor at the University of Virginia, taught there since 1992 and my whole life really has been in school settings. I spent one year after college working on Capitol Hill, that brief glimpse of the political system up close was probably enough and I rushed back to school, went to graduate school, and had been a professor since then.

My wife is a teacher and has been for her whole career and I have four children ranging in age from 9 all the way up to 25. And in terms of our family life and reading, I know it sounds pretty predictable that a professor and a teacher would be reading would take a central role in our family life and I guess we're sort of guilty of that stereotype but it is true. All of my kids love reading. All my kids love books. And it is very



much sort of woven into the fabric of our daily life. And so in no small part, why I wanted to write this book, *Raising Kids Who Read*. It was something that live all the time in our family.

Sarah: Well I was really excited to see. I'll tell you. I read the book in a day because I was stuck in the Phoenix airport for 11 hours that day on my way to a homeschool conference to speak at a homeschool conference and so many people came up to me and said what are you reading? They were really interested in it so I'd show them the cover. I mean it was like complete strangers in an airport saw that what I was reading and thought, "I think I need that." And I know that a lot of our podcast listeners, this is the number one thing they want for their kids. They want to raise kids who read not who just can read but who love to read and who'd do it for the joy of it which is something that you really emphasized in your book and I so appreciate that.

4:30 Kids who read for the joy of it

Daniel: Yeah, absolutely. And actually this is something that really surprised me. When I first started working on the book, one of the first things I thought to ask myself is, is it the case the most parents like the idea of their kids growing up to be leisure readers? I kind of thought that was probably true but I didn't really know. And so I started looking in the literature to try and find some sort of survey of parents or something. I could not find one, which really astonished me and so I ended up doing a little survey on my own and surveyed several hundred adults throughout the U.S. and gave them different activities that a teenager might engage in during their leisure time and I told the people whom I was interviewing the average American teenager has about a little over 5 hours of leisure time each day. Here are six categories of

ways they could spend their time. So one of them was reading, one of them was hanging out with friends, one of them was being outside, getting exercise and so forth. And I said, allocate the 5 hours, the way you think would be ideal for a teenager to allocate their time. And what I found was reading was the most preferred activity. American adults, and this didn't matter, this is really an interesting part of the survey actually. It didn't matter whether people actually had teenage kids or didn't have teenage kids, didn't matter whether the person was wealthy or not wealthy. Anyway, we sliced up the data, there was very, very high agreement that reading was the number one thing that people thought teenagers should do in their leisure time. And they wanted kids to spend a little over an hour each day reading.

Unfortunately, we know from surveys of what teenagers actually do, if not remotely, an hour. The estimates vary but one of the better studies indicates it's on average about 6 minutes a day that teenagers spend reading. And of course what that really means is most of them are not reading at all.

Sarah: You're right.

Daniel: And there's this small subgroup where several times a week, they're reading or a few hours a day or something like that.

Sarah: So let's talk about that a little bit. Why do you think that is? I mean I know you dig into that into your book. But maybe we can just give the listeners a little peak into. Why is that? Why is it of so many parents want so much for their children, their teenagers specifically to be readers, how come so few teenagers are actually reading for leisure?

6:50 Why don't teenagers read?

Daniel: A lot of people blame technology for this that we've got these new digital technologies



and kids are just texting their friends all the time, whether gaming, whether they've got much better access to much better access to music and video content. I think that's probably not the real reason though because we've been measuring how much time kids spend reading for decades and it really hasn't changed that much. So when the new technologies came along, they didn't really displace reading because kids already were not reading very much. So in a way, it's like okay the technology is not to blame but not really for a happy reason. It's that there wasn't enough reading to really disappear when technologies became available.

Smaller children do read quite a bit more than teenagers do. So one of the ways I construe the problem is how can you keep it going? So if teenagers read about 6 minutes a day, in early elementary, it's more like 36 minutes a day. They're reading, kids in early elementary are reading an amount that we would be fairly happy if that could be maintained or at least that would be a start. But attitudes towards reading, how kids feel about reading, is at its peak in first grade and it drops every year thereafter. And the amount that kids drops every year thereafter. So you got a couple of things happening in the teenage years. One is that by that time, their attitudes towards reading is, it's not super negative on average, but it's kind of indifferent at best. And of course, that's an average. So half of the kids really do feel negative about reading.

And then the other thing is there are a lot of things competing for teenagers' time. They're very social by that time and so they've got that on their mind and schoolwork is more serious. And they've got more other organized activities, maybe their own sports team or something like that. So those are also pretty legitimate reasons that reading might get crowded out.

Sarah: Yeah, one of the things that I kept thinking of when I was reading your book was

that I'm an adult who loves reading and who wants to make that a priority but even I, as a 34-year old, will find myself just being pulled into a different direction. There's too many other things to do that I feel like I should be doing so I feel guilty if I sit down with a book or, and this is probably more frequent than I want to admit, my phone is right there. It's so hard for me to choose the book over the phone because it's like that human nature default when I choose the thing that's going to take less effort.

9:20 A central piece of advice

Daniel: Absolutely, and this is, I think if I was asked to pick one piece of advice that I think is most central in how to encourage more reading in your kids, that's really and I will make it a little more broader than just take away their phone, but what I would say is, parents should keep in mind that if you want your child to choose reading, it really is a choice. It's not enough that they like reading. They have to like reading more than anything else that's available to them at that moment. So the analogy I think I used is this analogy in the book like my kids really like watermelon. If they asked, "What's for dessert tonight, Dad?" I'd say, "Watermelon." They're going to be fairly happy. But if I say, "Well, there's watermelon or you can have candy." Candy is going to win every time. So it's not enough that they like reading. They have to like reading most.

So there are two things that I say that implies. One is, for parents, make it really, really easy for them to choose reading. And the way to do that is have books very readily available in places that your kids typically get bored. This is I think the easiest way to start if you're a parent. If you want your kids to read more, notice when your kids get bored and put books in that location where they tend to get bored. So an obvious place would be if you drive, have a



basket of books in the minivan, next to where your child sits.

Sarah: Hmmm. Good idea.

Daniel: Put a basket of books in the bathroom. Parents always laugh about this but I told you my wife is a teacher. She recommends this to all her parents and an astonishing number come back to her and say, "I can't believe it. He's in there 20 minutes. I'm wondering what's going on but he's picked up a book." So that's a super easy way to start.

The other thing is regarding this analogy of sort of watermelon to candy, I really do think most digital technologies are the candy and I'm just like you. The pull and the allure of that phone is very, very strong. And it's actually as a psychologist, it's pretty interesting to me that I try to speculate on why that might be but we get a little far field. I think the message here is you do need to think about time limits for technology if you want to make some space for reading in your child's life. At some point, if they've got a phone, the phone should be parked. There should be a limit on gaming and so forth. And I'm not a fan of coercing your child into reading. I'm not a fan of rewarding your child's reading. I want my children to choose to read but I recognize that in order to make that choice more likely, I need to limit some of the other things whether that would be enormous to which enormous amounts of time would go. And then once they're there, it's like reading becomes a much more natural thing to pick.

13:00 The bookkeeping nightmare

Sarah: I'm looking right now on page 68 of your book, which is where you talk about how parents need a two-prong strategy to keep screen time under control, first setting limits and then promoting independence and you've got some

great ideas in here on setting limits, that limits per day, time limit, reminds me of Melissa Wiley who's a children's book author that I interviewed on an earlier podcast told me that her kids have a screen time slot from 1-3 in the afternoon. If you're going to get on the screen, that's the only time you can get on the screen. And her kids are homeschooled so that works for them because they're home from school by then. But I like that how it's the same time everyday and so it's just expected so after a while, probably your kids would stop asking, like my kids hound me for screens all day long because I haven't set a period of time like that. But I could see how if you institute an hour or two a day where screens can happen. Then maybe the kids would stop peppering the parrot with like, "Can I get on the screen? Can I get on the screen?" And it would feel less of a battle.

Daniel: Exactly, yeah. And it does give a big advantage of that fixed time per day is not only do they stop asking but also I'd feel like it turns into a bookkeeping nightmare. If you say you have this many minutes per day because then let's say like, okay, I want to bank some time. So you're constantly in this discussion with your child like, "How many minutes you have left?" And the child's like, "Oh but remember then like the Windows started reloading and so that shouldn't count so I should get an extra 5 minutes."

Sarah: You must know my son.

Daniel: This is a conversation I do not want to have, getting into this sort of detail. So that's another reason I really like the business about just having a fixed time per day.

Sarah: I also love how you mention in there, I'm sorry I interrupted you, I love how you mentioned "stick to your guns, the hardest part of limiting screen time is the whining" because for me, that is so easily true. The hardest part



about keeping to it is just the fact that when everybody starts whining, it's way easier to say, okay, just half an hour than it is for me to stick to my guns and say, "I'm really sorry that you're bored. You can do this, this, or this. But you have to kind of get out of my face with your whining."

14:30 Becoming resourceful about finding something to do

Daniel: Yeah, no, I mean, at some point I just became pretty merciless at this. And the point being really, I thought my child was old enough to be resourceful about figuring out something to do on their own. But there is this feeling that you're sort of enabling them if you sort of like yeah, if you're bored the thing to do is to turn to a screen. I think almost any parent would say like yeah, I get that. I want my child to be resourceful and sort of figure out how to entertain themselves. And figure out something to do when they're feeling a little bit bored.

Another thing while we're on the subject that I think is really important is some amount of coordination with other parents and I think I mentioned in the book when if your kids are little and they're going on a play date, my wife and I would always mention that to other parents that we're not really doing screen so much at our house. And the response was always positive and parents would always say, oh yeah, like if they're having a play date like why should they watch a video or something. They should do something else. But if we didn't know or remember to say that, it surprised us how often that could sort of turn into something that they would do. So I think it's good to coordinate with other parents. This becomes I think even more important when kids are teenagers because one thing is if you're trying to delay getting your child a phone, they are really going to feel out of the social swim. And I've had many, many

parents say to me like "I really didn't want to get a phone but I felt terrible. Every single other child in their class had a phone." I certainly get that but this is again a place where coordination with other parents might help so if you can agree with your child's best friend, say, that after 8:30, the phone is going to get parked. Then she knows like "I can't text my best friend anyway." There's less of a feeling of being left out. So there are sort of compromises you can strike that both parents and children can live with I think.

16:40 Making space for reading

Sarah: Yeah, I like that. I also like that you're not going so extreme as to say, my kids are not going to watch any screens or my teenagers never going to have a phone because I feel like sometimes as parents, if we feel like if we don't go extreme, there's no way to moderate it. But exactly what you said on page 71, I'm just going to read this, is you said, "My goal is to make space for reading so that by the time she's 10," sorry you're talking about your daughter here. "By the time she's 10, reading is so firmly socketed in her life that it cannot be threatened by an obsession with gossip websites, the latest video game, or anything else."

And I like that, as I underlined this and wrote, this is the goal. Because I like how you put the focus on making space for reading. Our job isn't to teach our children that all screens are just life-suckers and then books are so much better but just to give them the space to fall in love with reading. And so that it becomes a part of who they are so that when they get older, they can't help but think "reading is something that I do."

Daniel: Yeah, you put it nicer than I did. That's exactly it. It's really about self-image. It's about self-identity. I want my children to think of themselves as readers.



Sarah: Yeah, okay let's talk about a little bit more about how to help our kids enjoy reading when so many kids see reading as something they do for school or something that is assigned to them. What can parents do to help their kids actually see reading as something they want to do in their free time?

17:50 Reading—an opportunity for fun

Daniel: So one thing I've already suggested is making it readily available more or less everywhere so that kids see it as they see print as something that offers an opportunity for fun, for entertainment. There's actually really interesting research showing that parents' attitudes towards print also matters to help kids think about print, which when you think about it, the way I just said it makes perfect sense. But a lot of parents don't think about it. So parents who are very, very concerned about their children being good readers. And the reason the parents think that is because reading is important for success in school, those parents are less likely to have kids who enjoy reading and read in their free time than parents who see reading as a venue for entertainment. And what's even more amazing is it's those kids with the second set of parents, the kids of parents who see reading as entertainment, those kids end up being better readers in school than the kids with parents who think you have to be successful in reading because it's important for success in school. So parents' attitudes towards what reading is for, that also matters.

19:00 The implicit message about reading from school

Another factor that parents might consider is the message that kids are getting about reading from school. So I'm now thinking about older kids,

upper elementary, middle school through high school. So I don't think that kids at all are getting explicit messages about reading from school that are going to be negative. No way. Every teacher likes the idea of reading. They want their students to read. But at the same time, there are some sort of implicit messages that kids might get about what reading is. Think about what reading is like when you're in school and you're in early elementary. What reading is like is you read stories. There's a whole lot of choice. So the purpose is really enjoyment. It's to read a narrative, enjoy the narrative. If you're not enjoying it, it's perfectly fine to toss it aside and read something else most of the time. As kids progress through school, choice gets greatly restricted or much more often eliminated. If there's an assignment that you read something about the civil war, you can't go to the teacher and say, "Listen, I'm just not feeling this book." You're not going to be told to find something else. You're going to be told, "Well, I'm sorry but you have to read it."

Also reading is now put to different purposes. So it's not just about understanding a narrative and enjoying it. Now you're being given textbooks and you're being asked to read them for the purpose of memorization where you take the book home, read a chapter, you're going to be quizzed on it on Friday. Or you've also got the purpose of research. You're reading books or flipping through, trying to find little nuggets because you're working on a project for example. So one of my concerns and there's not good research on this. I should be clear. This is not like a research-proven thing. I've talked with some people who are experts on attitudes and reading and they think this is pretty plausible. That for at least some kids, part of the reason their attitude towards reading gets worse as they get older is they confuse these different purposes of reading. So reading becomes associated with difficult mental work, which fair



enough, that's very often what reading is when you're in school. But that doesn't mean that all reading is like that. And they forget that when I'm reading for pleasure, I can read whatever I want. If I'm not enjoying it, I can toss it aside. I can peek at the ending if I want to. Reading the way reading used to be. So one thing that parents can do is encourage their kids to remember that this is what reading for pleasure means and it has all these wonderful attributes.

Sarah: A lot of our listeners are homeschoolers and I think sometimes we feel this pressure to assign really high quality reading to our kids at the expense of letting our kids have this time with just things that might be enjoyable, I don't know, Calvin and Hobbes or comics or things like that. So I love what you say about how before a child can develop taste, they must develop hunger. Can you talk to me a little bit more about a relief in the pressure of some parents feel about having their kids only read classics and the highest quality literature.

22:00 Developing good taste

Daniel: Yeah, I mean I would encourage parents as a very general rule of thumb. What you want to do is just stretch them a little bit wherever they are at the moment. You want to just broaden their horizons a little bit. But that's going to have to happen in baby steps. And if your child right now just doesn't see print as something that is worth his or her time at all and would never think of picking up a book if they weren't required, then yeah, I would say like how in the world could you be worried about them reading junk? Right now, what you're trying to do is get their mind open to the idea that reading is something that can afford pleasure. So if it's Calvin or Hobbes or whatever it is, and I what I encourage parents who are in that situation, I encourage them think about what your child really loves, is really passionate

about, and find some written material where they're going to get new access to that thing they love for a print. So if it's The Walking Dead television show, that's what they love, find some books that's about The Walking Dead even if you think it's junk and maybe, I don't know what's the name of the show by the way, but whatever, pick a really junkie show if that one's not junkie. If you think this reading material is really junkie, fine it is. But like that's not your goal right now. Your goal right now is to just get them thinking, "Oh, reading is sometimes fun and interesting." And from there, you keep it going. And again, just stretching them a little bit at a time. And again, you just think about what your goal is for reading here. Reading the classics is wonderful and that's enriching and you learn about people in different ways and you learn about language and you learn about vocabulary. When you're talking about books that you might see as sort of junkie, so maybe your kids are getting a subset of that. Comic books actually are pretty good on vocabulary. This has been, there are people who assess the richness of vocabulary of different sorts of text. And so, that's another way to think about it that it's alright so this is not my ideal in some sense but my child is still getting something out of this. Clearly, they're getting pleasure and there's other things they could be doing in little leisure time that maybe you would like even less.

Sarah: Yeah, okay so we'll link to this in the show notes but we just published a post at the Read Aloud Revival on series books that help struggling readers become voracious ones. And one of the points I tried to make in that post is that if you have a child who's 8, 9, 10 and is really struggling with reading, they are not enjoying reading yet because I mean you try to do something where you have to sound out every third or fourth word. It's a slog. It can be really difficult. And so I'll see parents feeling hesitant to let their kids jump into easy to read series or



feeling like they have to have their child decode every word. So I've got some strategies in that post for getting them hooked on a really fun, light series that makes them fall in love with reading. And then some strategies for using specific times when your kids are reading. I mean when you're sitting there doing what your next lesson, you're going to ask them to decode and they're going to try and challenge them that way. But when they're sitting there trying to read Magic School Bus or Hank the Cowdog or even Calvin and Hobbes and they say, "What's this word?" If you just tell it to them, then they start to realize that the story is actually really engaging and they start to enjoy reading for reading's sake. And I think that goes a long way toward helping them become kids who want to read in their free time rather than kids who think this is hard. This is school work. I'd rather be doing anything else except for this.

25:45 Three big components of reading

Daniel: I think that's a great idea. And one way that if you encounter a parent who finds that it's a little tough to swallow, here's another way that maybe would help that parent make sense of it. In the book, I pointed out that there are three big components of reading that we want to pay attention to. One is fluent decoding, the second is comprehension and third is motivation. And so one way to characterize what you just said is a parent maybe really fixed on the fact that their child 8, 9, 10 is not as fluent a decoder as the other kids in the class and so every opportunity is seen as an opportunity for the child to work on decoding. And what you were saying is you don't want to ignore motivation. This is an opportunity when the child is reading Calvin and Hobbes or Magic School Bus or whatever it is, this is the time when the child's getting that peek at how wonderful reading can be. And that's going to

make it all that easier when they really are putting those to the grindstone working on fluent decoding to know that this is going to pay off because I know that reading is fun.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. Okay, so you've written some really interesting things about reading and rewards and praise. So can you tell us what you've learned about rewarding our kids for reading and how that impacts them in the long term?

27:10 Should we reward kids for reading?

Daniel: Sure. And this has been a big topic in social psychology since the 1970's, rewards in particular. And the upshot of that literature is that the conclusion that I offer in the book is that rewards should not be the first thing that you try. The concern with rewards is that when you reward someone for doing something, it changes their attribution, of why they did it in the first place, their understanding of why they did this. So if I reward you for reading, if I didn't reward you for reading, and I ask you why'd you read? You say, "Well, I read because I thought it would be interesting. It's kind of fun." Whatever. If I reward you now, the reason that you read is quite plain which is "I read because you promised me a reward." So there are lots of studies indicating that if you like something and then I reward you for doing it, you will definitely do more of it so long as I'm rewarding you but once the reward stopped, you actually do it less than you initially did it before the rewards began.

Sarah: Interesting.

Daniel: And the interpretation is that colloquial with thinking about it is as if like "Well, you're not paying me anymore. Why should I read ever, right?" And that makes you read even less than you did initially before the rewards or offer. Now praise is a little different because rewards



almost always come with an explicit understanding, sort of a bargain. If you read this many books then you'll earn this much money or whatever the reward is. Praise doesn't work like that. Parents don't usually say if you finish that book, I will praise you later instead praise is more spontaneous and so that undercuts this attribution business so I don't think to myself well I did that to get praise because I didn't know. When I started doing it, I wasn't anticipating getting praised. Praise still has a negative aspect to it though, which is parents don't praise kids for doing things that the parents figure the kids enjoys.

Sarah: That's so true. Yeah, good job.

29:30 An alternative to praise

Daniel: yeah, it's like, "Sarah, you know the way you ate that cake was awesome. I am so proud of you for eating that cake." I just know that my child ate cake because she loves cake right? And so, when we praise our children for reading, we're sending this message. This is not something that I think you would have done on your own. This is something I'm trying to reinforce. I'm worried about whether or not it's really a likable enough activity. So an alternative I would offer for parents, because it is irresistible, I mean especially when the child who doesn't read very often finally does read. You want to somehow acknowledge that especially when a child is a struggling reader then they want to acknowledge also. So the way I think about is you can show appreciation without necessarily praising. You can ask about the book. So by paying attention to the child, that's a much more subtle form of reward and praise, is ask him about it. Discuss it until like, "Yeah, I really noticed you were really into that book. Tell me about it. Let me hear about that book." In a way, this is sort of the way adults interact with another around reading. If you've read a great book, I'm not going to, I see

you finishing a book, I'm not going to praise you. But I'm going to talk to you about it. Ask your opinion about it. That's actually pretty fun to have your opinion solicited and talk about it.

I always say, as soon as you can, take your child seriously as a reader because I think you're much more likely to gain currency, gain interest from your child by interacting with him that way as opposed to sort of being the parent who's the rule enforcer. I have no aversion to doing that. We've already talked about that in the context of screens. But I think with reading it more often backfires than helps.

30:50 Creating a book club atmosphere

Sarah: Yeah, I love this because at the Read Aloud Revival, one of the things we teach inside membership is to treat your children as they're reading books like you would if you're going to a book club. So there's such a different way you talk about books with your book club peeps than if you're sitting there drilling your child to find out if they really comprehended what they're reading. So asking reading comprehension questions about the different things that happened in the plot of *By The Great Horn Spoon!* by Sid Fleischman is very different than asking a book club type question and just having an engaging conversation that just feels different, has a book club vibe rather than a teacher-student drill vibe. I think that goes a really long way too towards just sort of re-framing what reading is for your child.

Daniel: Yeah, I think that's a great idea. Yeah, it does send a very clear message about how you see reading and what interactions around reading are like and it also sort of gets away from the reading comprehension check question and sort of what has a much more punitive feel to it. And I would add that for children who are



sort of in lower elementary and they're just learning how to read and write, I would say the same thing can apply. I talked about this a little bit on the book. A lot of times when kids are just learning how to read, parents kind of want to in a way give them an opportunity that in a way sort of check out their doing so they ask them to read stuff. They'll ask their first or second grader to read something when it's kind of plain for parent to do it themselves. And so clearly, the child knows they're kind of checking up on me to see how that's going or even more they want me to practice.

So one of the things I recommend in the book is look for opportunities where literacy is logical where it's actually doing some work for the child or doing some work for you. Obvious example so like leaving notes in your child's lunchbox or in fact when it makes sense, ask your child to write a note to leave it for another parent or for another child, that sort of thing. Look for places where doing some reading actually makes sense in the moment because it's going to be useful either for the child or it can mean sort of an invented context in which you need help where they can do a little bit of reading.

Sarah: I like that. That reminds me of some strategies I've heard people talk about revolving around math whereas if you have a child thinking, "Why do I ever need to use this?" Just help them kind of in an organic way, have to do things like add up the grocery bill when you're at the grocery store and things like that where they see that math is actually applicable to their real lives so it feels more relevant to them than it might otherwise. It kind of reminds me of that.

Daniel: Absolutely. And that's exactly the kind of situation where I would try and figure out some ways that I could appear busy so that I would say, "Could you add up this bill for me because I've got to do this right now." They get to be a

helper, right? Instead of being the one who's being quizzed.

33:50 Is there a downside to e-readers?

Sarah: Exactly. Exactly. Okay, so what about e-readers. We have a lot of questions from our audience about letting their kids read on Kindle or other kind of e-readers. Can you speak to that a little bit from a scientist's point of view? Is there negatives to that? Should we be careful about how often we let our kids read on e-readers? That kind of thing.

Daniel: Sure. So I think there actually is a big database of research on this even though Kindle is relatively new. So let me first talk about what I see as the pros of e-readers. I think one big pro is access especially if you've got a child who's a little bit of a reluctant reader. The gee whiz aspect is probably going to last to almost no time at all. So in other words, that kid who doesn't like to read is not going to read just because it's now on a Kindle instead of paper.

Sarah: Got it.

Daniel: But the good thing is that if you have a Kindle and a child hears about a book that they're actually kind of curious about, you can get it immediately instead. So you sort of strike while the iron is hot instead of saying, "Oh! Okay your friend told you that that book is kind of fun and you're curious about it. Okay, we'll go to the bookstore tomorrow." By tomorrow, it may almost be too late. So that's one thing that's good. Access is good. Portability is obviously good. That's one of the reasons adults love Kindle. In terms of reading comprehension, most of the studies indicate that there may be a little hit to comprehension but not huge and not enough that people care. So it's probably as I'm going out a little bit on a limb here because most studies are kind of squishy on this. My guess



is that comprehension on a Kindle is probably not quite as good as it is on paper. But most of what, and this is actually the critical part, most of what you read on a Kindle, you're reading for pleasure. So you don't care that much so maybe you're getting 94% understanding on the book instead of 96%. You don't really care. You are just reading this to get lost in the narrative and enjoy it. You weren't trying to commit it to memory or anything.

Now, that changes radically when we start talking about textbooks on Kindle-like devices, on tablet devices. There, the data really clear. Comprehension definitely takes a hit. And that partly because the material that you're reading is more complex. It's in a different genre. It's not a narrative form. Narratives are easier to understand than other genres. And you're reading it for another purpose. You're not reading it to get lost in the narrative. You're reading it to study and learn new, difficult material. SO e-textbooks are so far, they're still struggling to get those to really exploit effectively everything that could be done on electronic format.

The final thing to think about and this will not surprise parents at all. If you've got an e-reader that is web-enabled then that's a huge distraction. And if you can flip from the book over to Facebook or whatever also this, studies show reading gets interrupted all the time as kids are flipping between different apps. So your intuition about what would probably happen there seems to be right on the money.

Sarah: Why even know that as an adult. This goes back to that whole lack of self-discipline even though I love reading and I want to be a reader. I have a Kindle app on my iPhone. I used to bring my iPhone to bed to read it because then I don't have to use a book light. If my husband's already asleep, I can just read on my Kindle. That was my idea. But what would more often happen is I would start reading on my

Kindle and then I'd go "Oh, I wanted to check that one thing on Facebook" or "I should just check my email one more time." And I'll flip through my other apps and it would probably be 15 or 20 minutes before I even realize, "I wasn't going to do that. I was only going to read." And so now I can't even bring my phone near my bed because I realized that pull is really, really strong. So I can only imagine it being stronger for a child who maybe doesn't even have as strong of a desire to be a reader or has limited amount of time to have to read, that kind of thing.

Daniel: I absolutely agree.

38:10 Dr. Willingham's favorite childhood books

Sarah: Okay, so before we go, I would love to hear some of your favorite books that you've read with your kids or that your kids have read or maybe books that influenced you as a child?

Daniel: Wow! The books that I really remember my parents reading to me actually I think I mentioned this in Raising Kids to Read. I more or less memorized Winnie the Pooh from hearing my mother read it aloud to me. Absolutely love that book. And of course, retained a really strong fondness for it today as well. And I also love Horton Hears a Who by Dr. Seuss. I loved it because of the story and also because it's just a fun story but also if you know the story, the theme there is that someone who's seen sort of insignificant ends up being really important in saving the day and I think it's a load of the ground three year old. I can really identify with that possibility.

Sarah: Relate with that.

Daniel: Yeah, who knows? Maybe someday. And when I got a little bit older, the first series that I remember getting really excited about was the Henry Huggins books and those are the first ones when as an independent reader, I sort of went



through all of them with mounting excitement. So yeah, those are probably the big ones from my childhood.

Sarah: Okay, I'm excited you just mentioned Henry Huggins. This podcast is airing on April 5th and if you're listening to this, April 12 is Beverly Cleary, the author of Henry Huggins. Her birthday, her 100th birthday and it's also...

Daniel: Oh my gosh!

*39:00 Celebrate Drop Everything And Read Day with RAR

Sarah: I know. It's so exciting. And it's also worldwide DEAR day. Drop Everything And Read. And so if you haven't seen it yet, head to ReadAloudRevival.com because we have a fun, whole family DEAR kit for you so that your whole family can celebrate Drop Everything And Read Day with some really fun, simple ideas for kids of all different ages. That's free and you can get it at readaloudrevival.com. And we're also going to be using hashtag on social media that day to share pictures of our families dropping everything to read on April 12th and celebrating the life and work of Beverly Cleary. So make sure you head to readaloudrevival.com because that's coming up very soon. It's going to be so much fun. So yeah, I'm excited. When you said Henry Huggins I thought, yay!

Daniel: Yeah, absolutely. I'm all over. I'm so excited about it.

Sarah: Well this has been so wonderful. Thank you so much for chatting with me. Before we go, let me make sure that our listeners where they can get your books. So DanielWillingham.com and we will have a link in the show notes directly there. I have read Raising Kids Who Read and also Why Don't Students Like School, both wonderfully fabulous. I know that the listeners to this podcast would be very interested in both of those. I have not yet read When Can You Trust the Experts. That's another one on my to-read

stack. Is there anywhere else we can send our listeners to connect with you or find your work?

Daniel: Yeah, DanielWillingham.com has any article that I could without breaking copyright laws publish on the internet, you can find there. And there are actually a fair number of the things I've published over the years that's sort of a cognitive psychologist looking at education and parenting. So I'd be grateful for anybody who wants to stop by.

Sarah: Wonderful! What I love most about these books is that you come at them with all of the knowledge of cognitive scientist but you write them for parents and so I as a parent, don't feel like I'm listening to a scientist talk about research and kind of more difficult. It's very conversational and engaging and you have a way of making the research very practical for me as a parent. So what does this mean for me as a parent in the world today with kids who are distracted by phones and technology but who wants to raise readers, that kind of thing. So it's very accessible. I would encourage all of our listeners to go check them out.

Daniel: Thank you so much. I really appreciate that.

41:30 Let the Kids Speak

Sarah: Now it's time for Let the Kids Speak. This is my favorite part of the podcast where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read aloud to them.

Aspen: My name is Aspen. I come from Houghton, Wisconsin. My favorite book is Who Do You Love? and I like it because of the flip flops and the feelings of the mom.

mom: How old are you?

Aspen: Four.



Elias: My name is Elias and I am 5. I like The Littles book because it has lots of little people in someone's house and it's really fun to listen to.

Dianne: Hi! My name is Dianne and I'm from California and I'm 6 years old. And my favorite book that my grandma reads me is Ferdinand and I like the part where he gets stung by a bee.

Blake: Hi! My name is Blake and I live in Oklahoma. I'm 9 years old. One of my favorite books I've read is called Brightly of the Grand Canyon which is about a little burro named Brightly and one of his best friends is named Old Timer. And it's an exciting book. Maybe you should go read it.

Ella: Hi! My name is Ella. My age is 6. I live in Nevada. One of my favorite books are Wonders of Nature by Jane Werner Watson, illustrated by ... I have been learning about the kangorilla. They are cool and they are also kind of funny because they jump like kangaroos.

Althea: Hi! My name is Althea... I live in Nevada. My favorite books are...

Sarah: Good stuff, right? Great book recommendations from the kids as always. And by the way, that last book recommendation was four books by Eric Carle in case you missed it. And an utterly fabulous conversation with Dr. Willingham. As always, we'll have links in the show notes to Dr. Willingham's books and to anything else we referred to during the show. I told you there was an announcement coming at the end.

And yes, I actually referenced it during my chat with Dr. Willingham. April 12th is Worldwide DEAR Day. That's Drop Everything And Read Day. This day started as a spin-off from the Beverly Cleary's Ramona Quimby series in which the students celebrate a DEAR Day. Well now the whole world celebrates reading and the life and work of Beverly Cleary on April 12th because it's her birthday. And this year, it isn't just any

birthday. It's Beverly Cleary's 100th birthday. Big deal! We're going to make sure we do it up right here at the Read Aloud Revival. Here's what you need to do. Head to readaloudrevival.com and grab your free DEAR Celebration Packet. Inside you're going to find some simple ways to celebrate reading and the life and work of Beverly Cleary with your kids. You'll even find some ways you can celebrate with friends. At our house, we're ditching the rest of our school day and we're doing Drop Everything And Read Day up right. We're going to have some friends over. We're going to dress up like book characters and do some other fun activities to celebrate reading. I can't wait!

In addition, the whole community will be using the #DEARwithRAR to share photos of our kids dropping everything to read. So at 12 pm Pacific (3 pm Eastern) on April 12th, the whole world of revivalers is going to do exactly what we should do on DEAR Day. We're going to drop everything and read. So think of all these kids all over the world reading at the exact same time. I get like goosebumps. I get so excited. We'll also going to bomb social media with photos of our kids reading and celebrating books all day long using the #DEARwithRAR. So come play along. It's free. I think it will be a memory your kids will remember for a long time. Go to readaloudrevival.com to get your packet. Okay, as always, I just love everyone of you listening. You make building a family culture around books so much fun that we can all share it together. Thank you for listening. Thank you for committing to your kids. Thank you for doing your part to raise the next generation of readers and book lovers. And hey, until next time. Go build you family culture around books.