

RAR Bonus Episode – Melissa Sweet

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

Hello there, Sarah Mackenzie here. You know what this is? This is a bonus episode of the Read Aloud Revival podcast. We plan out and schedule our podcast pretty far in advance so we can make every episode as good as possible for you and worth every second of your time, but every so often I get way too excited about a podcast episode to make it wait its turn in our podcast queue. And that shows up as a bonus podcast. Today is such a day. It's going to be a great show. We're talking to Melissa Sweet about her brand new book, *Some Writer! The Story of E.B. White*. I am so excited about this book because I think E.B. White is one of the finest writers of children's books, one of the finest writers of all time. Mom to mom, I want to give you a little heads up on this one. The book is gorgeous and wonderful but do peek at page 46 before you launch into it or hand the book over to your kids so you can decide what you want to do with that paragraph in the middle of the page. You know your kids and family best but I wanted to give you a heads up so that paragraph doesn't catch you by surprise. The book is fantastic; the illustrations and mixed media collages are spectacular. Let's go talk to Melissa to find out how she made this work of art.

Now before we launch into today's interview I want to let you know that later this week we are posting the brand new 2017 Read Aloud Revival calendar that shows everything we've got happening in membership in 2017. If you've been following along on Facebook or Instagram you

know a lot of the authors that we have lined up. Authors like Patricia Polacco, Andrew Peterson, Tomie dePaola, all kinds of spectacular authors and illustrators who will be joining us and your kids can meet them face to face inside Read Aloud Revival membership, type in their questions, get their questions answered live on screen by the author or illustrator himself or herself. It's going to be a fantastic year. We have some other surprises we haven't shared yet, so if you want to know what's happening in 2017 get on the email list now so you get that email and that heads up as soon as our calendar's available. Go to RARMembership.com and put your email in there. Not only will we email you as soon as we've got that calendar and news about what's coming in membership, but we'll also send you access to the Andrew Clements Author Access Event. That's something we gave just to our members last year. Andrew Clements, of course, is the amazing writer of *Frindle* and a gazillion other wonderful books, but we are sharing that one with everybody because it was really fantastic. You'll find out all kinds of things, like what a frindle is and Andrew Clements' favorite frindles to use. It was a fun day. Anyway, go to RARMembership.com and put your email in there and you'll find out all the great stuff we've got coming just around the bend.

Many of us are quick to name our favorite children's authors, but so often the artist who illustrated those books are what we really recognize on the shelf. So today, we have quite a treat for you. Melissa Sweet is an award winning illustrator who recently published a biography of the one and only E.B. White, that infamous author of some of the best children's lit. in history; *Charlotte's Web*, *Stewart Little*, *Trumpet of the Swan*. Melissa Sweet has illustrated nearly 100

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picture books in non-fiction titles, books like the Baby Bear series written by Jane Yolen, the Pinky and Rex Series, The Boy Who Drew Birds, Brave Girl, goodness the list goes on and on and on. She's received a Caldecott Honor Medal and two New York Times Best Illustrator Citations, and she's also the author of books like, Balloons Over Broadway, and the new book we're going to be talking about today, Some Writer!: The Story of E.B. White. Melissa, thank you so much for joining me on the show today.

Melissa: Thank you, Sarah, I'm thrilled to be here, and you just said something, you said "the one and only E.B. White" and that would have been a great title for the book. Wouldn't it?

Sarah: Yes, but Some Writer! was so clever.

Melissa: It was good, but that would have been a good subtitle even I'm happy to hear that, thanks.

Sarah: I found out about your book because I was just cruising around and looking at kid's books like I do on the internet, and when I saw that you were coming out with a new book by E.B. White I knew I had to get in touch with you, and it's brand new. It just came out last week when we're airing this on October 11th, it just came out on the 4th, right?

Melissa: Correct.

5:00 A little more about Melissa Sweet

Sarah: So, before we launch in to talking about E.B. White and the book and how you make your books, do you want to tell us just a little bit more about you and how you work and your dog?

Melissa: Sure! Yes, sure! I have been illustrating for a very long time and somewhere in the middle of my career I started doing more collage and

assemblage work. Always the books are very different. But I was beginning to get more than picture books, non-fiction books or historical fiction, and those seem to call for something else, so for a number of years now I've been doing wonderfully fun and intricate type of collage work. And I live in Portland, Maine, we just moved to Portland and I have two great dogs, one's a rescue from the Hurricane Katrina down in Louisiana...

Sarah: Oh, I didn't know that.

Melissa: And she's so sweet, she's a very sweet thing, and then we just got a great new dog named Ruby so when I'm not out in the studio, we're getting exercise.

Sarah: I bet you are!

Melissa: That's what my life looks like.

Sarah: That's so great. So then, tell me, your books are this beautiful combination of drawing and painting right? I was flipping through the ones that I have here trying to figure out exactly all the different mediums that you use. And of course this gorgeous collage work that you do. So tell me a little bit about the different art forms you use when you make a book.

6:15 Melissa's work with collage

Melissa: The collage work started off using found objects; bottle caps, little bits of wood, and shells, and anything that seemed pertinent to the story. So it's safe to say it really went full tilt when I did The Boy Who Drew Birds about John James Audubon. Part of it happened with the research because that was the first time I traveled to see some place in conjunction with getting ready to illustrate a book. His father had a house in Belle Grove, Pennsylvania that became open to

the public. So, I went there to see his studio, bedroom, the gigantic prints of his water colors that are there, and just see accoutrements of his life. That is, to my mind, hard to translate in two dimensions, so I thought, 'Wow' when I'm going to recreate what I think the desk of his studio might look like, so I had desiccated animals and bits of bone and shells and leaves and sticks and anything I thought, just little bits of drawing, just like my studio. And it seemed to bring him to life for readers in a way that was really satisfying, that you felt what it might have felt like to be him. So, that continued on when I did *Balloons Over Broadway*, the main character, Tony Sarg, the man who invented the Macy Parade balloons, he's nothing like Audubon, so what should those materials look like? And in that case I made paper machete puppets and used wood and very simple materials, old children's blocks to make a bunch of toys that I was going to photograph for the book, or I have photographed, I should say. I don't do the photography but my work is very three dimensional, like three dimensional assemblages so they get photographed. In conjunction with the three dimensional pieces, there's flat pieces, so I'll do a painting for a spread, two dimensions, and that becomes merged with the three dimensional pieces in the book, and we have some very talented people in the production department too make it feel seamless, because it could like very chopped up but then it looks like one person did it and it has the same feeling, not only in the textures and materials but in the color and the way it's reproduced.

Sarah: It's so beautiful, I really feel like the pages jump out at you. You spend a lot of time just looking at each page, and like you said, it looks seamless, it's just astounding how beautiful. It

takes you by surprise, every time you turn the page you think, 'What am I going to get?' it's like a surprise.

Melissa: Just to reiterate too, not every book calls for the same materials and not every book calls for a collage at all. Sometimes a purely painted book is the right solution to portray this material. So I spend quite a bit of time thinking about that, playing around with that before I settle in on how I'm going to begin.

Sarah: Wow! So, I think the first encounter I had with your art was probably those *eeBoo Counting Birds Wild Cards*. I ran into those on a little weekend getaway I went on with my husband and I had to grab them for our school room, we homeschool our kids and I had to put them up because they are so beautiful. And then I thought, 'I need to find this artist online' and discovered that you had illustrated Jane Yolen's books and of course the John James Audubon book was something I had already on my shelf, so I was just putting it altogether I thought, 'Oh my goodness, this is beautiful.' So, when you get a new project to work on, you are saying that you basically play with it for a little bit to decide exactly what medium is going to tell the best story, is that what you're saying?

10:10 The place of research

Melissa: Yes, and the research especially since it's a non-fiction book will help me dictate. I'll read and see bits of people's lives that I think could be incorporated into the collages. I did a book with author Jen Bryant, the title's *A Splash of Red*.

Sarah: Yes.

Melissa: *The Story of Horace Pippin*, so that was a very different book because he's an artist, the

trick is not to become Horace Pippin, not to mimic his type of art, but to look for clues within the art, so what I found about his work, for instance, was there was a flattened perspective, and he used a lot of pattern especially wood grain pattern. Also, there were tiny splashes of the color red. Those are my clues and that's how the book began. That's true of every book, and that's part of the fun of it though, is really honing in and finding the exact right recipe for beginning the art, and that's what makes each one unique and fresh, and just a lot of fun to make.

Sarah: That's so fun. So, do you work with a lot of the same authors over and over? I've noticed that you've worked with Jane Yolen, and Jane Yolen is actually going to be featured at the Read Aloud Revival. We're going to introduce her face-to-face with our community in an Author Access Event in 2017, super excited about that, but do you find yourself working a lot with the same authors or does that just constantly change, or how does that work?

Melissa: That changes from year to year. Sometimes, for instance with Jane, we did the Baby Bear's books together and then I just did a fourth with her, *You Nest Here With Me* written by Jane and her daughter, Heidi, but then Jan Bryant and I did three books together. More often though, it's one book together, one book per author, and for whatever reason we go onto the next thing, but that marriage of author and illustrator happens within the publishing house. I mean an author can say, "I'd love to work with so-and-so if they're available" and sometimes we're just not available. There's probably a short list of who could illustrate this book. But I think because each book is so different for each author they look to have that marriage be special and

carry the material through in a new way, so I think it's very careful.

Sarah: So, I've read that even as a child you loved art, and we have a lot of listeners to the podcast, young listeners in the families that listen to our podcast who are aspiring writers and illustrators, in fact, I have an aspiring children's book illustrator in my own home who's 12 years old and wants to grow up to illustrate children's books, I'm just curious to know how your love for art as a child, how did that grow into what you're doing now as an adult? Maybe you could tell that story for our young listeners.

13:00 Melissa's childhood interest in art

Melissa: Sure, well, I grew up in New Jersey where we were on our bicycles all day, and played kick the can at night, we had a big crowd of kids in our neighborhood, we had a wonderful public library, and we used to ride our bikes to the library and come home with books, but to be honest, I wasn't such a great reader. I loved books but that wasn't my "go to place," I always wanted to be making things. My mom was a great seamstress, my grandmother was constantly doing crafty stuff, my father did carpentry, so having tools and glue and construction paper was all around me, and also I had a lot of kits. It's almost like the pieces I did for eeBoo are an extension of my childhood; the matching games and all the wonderful puzzles and gorgeous pieces come out of eeBoo were a little bit like when I was a kid and I played with Spirograph and Etch A Sketch and Paint By Numbers, so those toys are really design tools, and they taught me a tremendous amount, they occupied my unending energy I had as a kid...

Sarah: That you probably still wish you had, right, if you're anything like me?

Melissa: Oh yes, exactly. I think they're very satisfying. It was very satisfying to play with the Spirograph, so I had a lot of fun doing that. I never really thought I'd be anything but an artist. It was after college, discovering that I loved painting and drawing best, that I was just looking for ways to portray my art doing anything; greeting cards. I understood that an artist had to be entrepreneurial, so I was looking for ways to do that, and I loved children's books. The children's book illustration in the late 80's was kind of a renaissance, I think, the printing process had changed and we were seeing David Macaulay and Chris Van Allsburg, and a lot of wonderful people just come in onto the scene that were making these books that just looked like nothing else.

Sarah: Yeah.

Melissa: So that's a little bit how it happened.

Sarah: David Macaulay has a special place in my heart. We just chatted with him at Read Aloud Revival in Membership, introduced him to the kids. He did an Author Access Event for us last weekend and he showed us how he did his sketches and how he drew the woolley mammoth on screen, live, and then sent me the sketches in the mail. I went and talked to my mailbox and I could not wipe the smile off. My husband is building a frame for it, that's how excited I was!

Melissa: That's awesome. I would too.

Sarah: He is such a man, he is such a great man. It was such a treat to meet him. His work is really astonishing.

Melissa: It truly is.

16:00 Picture book biographies

Sarah: So, you do lots of biographies which I love how you tell the story of a person that makes it really come alive. I think this is what history really should do for our kids, which is tell the story of a person in time and the world around them and make it come alive for them so they can really feel like what it might have been like to live there. But you've written a book, and I just got this one because I hadn't seen it before, *The Right Word*, which is a story about the man behind Roget's thesaurus, well, *Roget and His Thesaurus*, that's the subtitle, you said *A Splash of Red* which is a book about Horace Pippin, *Brave Girl*, and of course, this new one about E.B. White, *Balloons Over Broadway*, about the man behind the Macy's Day Parade, so tell me how do you choose who to write about when you're writing a biography or illustrating a biography?

Melissa: Almost all of those books that you just listed came to me from other authors and again, I'm guessing it came from my work in *The Boy Who Drew Birds*.

Sarah: Yes, OK.

Melissa: So publishers found me and working with Jen Bryant, we did a book, *A River of Words*, the story of William Carlos Williams, the poet. That was a very interesting project and probably a defining moment. There were big shoes to fill, and so you look at these people and wonder how can you portray them with the magnitude, or reflect the magnitude of what they've done with their life, and with William Carlos Williams, and not unlike E.B. White, it's a little bit intimidating to find the right formula of how to illustrate their work. So one thing that happened around that time was I was participating in my public library,

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there was an event around making altered books, so I had this big box of books in my studio that was slated for the landfill, you know, once a library has a big book sale, and the books just don't sell for the third time, a lot of them get thrown away, but we were looking to give these books to artists and have them come up with all different ways of, you know, re-purposing our up ... oh, what's the word?

Sarah: Upcycling?

Melissa: Upcycling, thank you. So I began to use parts of books in my art, and I still love to do that. I use the front of the book covers, I use the end papers, I use the interiors of the book, for collages or to paint on top of, so those were some of the things I began to use and for whatever reason, they fit these biographies really well. That was just a great beginning for me, so especially with William Carlos Williams, that took quite a bit of research for me to get to know William Carlos Williams better. I traveled to where he lived, and read a ton of his books. The best way to illustrate him to my mind was to illustrate the poems that Jen had within the text. So, here's where this lovely dialogue starts to happen with an author. I approached her and the art director and said, "What if, instead of illustrating the story, so to speak, his poems become part of the story as full page illustrations. That was a very different feeling than coming at it, he's running through the woods, well, is there a poem that talks about that would also portray that? And do we have to be quite so literal? That happened in my research with E.B. White in early readings especially in his letters of E.B. White, so letters of E.B. White is a collection from the time he was a very young boy up until he died and it's a think book of his letters. And he had the wherewithal to use carbon paper as a youth too when he went out west (he took a

cross-country road trip) and all of those letters written home, and written to his friends, were all on carbon paper so there's a record of them and so that was pretty remarkable. In crafting the story, I knew that E.B. White said it so much more eloquently and heartfelt and right from him, it was right from him, that I had to use essays and quotes peppered throughout my text to give an even deeper story. In the early reading of the letters of E.B. White it was evident that to be able to excerpt these letters and use them within the story was going to give readers a better sense of who E.B. White was. And, how will the reader know they're at one of his essays? So being a visual person I wanted to separate that out and not just with a different font. So I thought, "Well, I'm going to type these up on a manual typewriter just like he would have done," and I'll illustrate them, and that was probably the first thing I thought of that was going to separate me from E.B. White and give the readers a little more depth and insight, so it's kind of exciting when you hit on something like that. That was just a decision I stuck with, there's many things that are trial and error and I discard, and that was one of them, and then the chapter openers to have these, they're almost in a collage assemblage, the chapter openers...

Sarah: Yeah.

Melissa: They started out with just some hand lettering for the title but I thought, 'no, this is such an opportunity to have even more illustration or to set the tone for these chapter openers' and the book is peppered with manuscripts, so again, how does the reader know when they're at an archival piece or a manuscript, those are all photographed on top of a very pale green paper. The reader might not say, "Here I am at this archival piece," but there's a consistency

throughout the book, and that becomes part of the design process, so as the illustrator and author, it's not just about making the pictures and writing, and I go back and forth between those all the time, but it's the design. The design helps us marry those two.

Sarah: That makes sense because when I was reading the book I never was confused when you were speaking or when he was speaking; that was always very clear to me but I didn't stop and think about how I knew that so easily...

Melissa: Good.

Sarah: You put a lot of thought into it!

Melissa: If it's invisible, then all the better, because it's not meant to scream, it's meant to go down the road smoothly and not have it be a bumpy road full of potholes, so that's good.

Sarah: Yeah.

Melissa: Yeah.

22:30 The road to creating Some Author

Sarah: OK, so tell me, what was it like to research this book, because you wrote and illustrated this book? First of all, tell me how long it took you to research, and then tell me a little bit about what that was like.

Melissa: This book took me about three years, maybe more, from the inception to finished art, and the minute I had the idea and it was just sort of a random idea I was looking for my next book and I was wanting to again continue to explore how you portray someone's life in the two dimension, a book is actually three dimensions but on a two-dimensional page, and I thought if I could do anybody, who would I do? And E.B.

White popped in my head and I was gone, hook, line, and sinker with questions popping up right away- how did he get to that first line of Charlotte's Web? Was he a good reader as a kid? What kind of kid was he? Of course, what were the names of all of his dogs, and all those tiny details that were interesting to me, so I went right home and pulled out that letters of E.B. White, working for about a year trying to figure out his life. I create a timeline on my wall right away and begin; I'll put up anything, anything ... a found object, a post-it note, or anything that feels pertinent to the story. I'll start to stick up on my wall in the time frame (1899-1985) when he lived, and that helps me sort out what happened when. Now, some biographies are an anecdote or a snippet of somebody's life, but early on, in order to tell the story, for instance, of how he got to his three children's books, to my mind there had to be a lot of back story. There was so much of his life, his love of nature, his caring for animals, his love of Maine and having a farm, all pointed in the direction of where he went, even Stuart Little living in New York City, his granddaughter Martha tells me E.B. White is Stuart Little. I trust that comes from a good source.

Sarah: Oh, that's too much fun, OK!

Melissa: So there's always 100 times more information than we can use, so a lot of things have to be set aside, they might be riveting to me but they don't support the story so ultimately this is E.B. White's story, and yes it's told through my eyes as the biographer, but it's always in service to the story, even though there's things I have to let go of, that, to be honest, once I let go of them and just keep honing in on the book, I completely forget what they were, why was I so worried about that at the time.

Sarah: Oh yeah.

Melissa: So, you begin to know the quote you picked, the photograph you pick, one picks, the art, it all starts to feel just right, like you're making the jigsaw puzzle, the pieces are fitting together.

Sarah: I love that, because the way you talk about it, I can tell that you take it so seriously, this is a big task but you also sound so playful; putting together a jigsaw puzzle, or fiddling with around with the different elements of art, so I can hear in your voice when you're talking about it, the joy that you get from making books like this one.

Melissa: Yes, yes.

Sarah: Now, how long did this project take you?

26:15 Working with the White family

Melissa: This took a good three years and I was about a year into this project before I was very public about it, and even then I wasn't tremendously public; my husband knew, obviously the publisher knew, but it was almost like I had an uncut diamond sitting on my drafting table that was so precious that I didn't want too many opinions about it, I didn't want people to say, "Oh, you've got to include this essay, or you've got to include that, or are you going to talk about that" and I didn't even contact the White family for permissions until about a year in, and to be honest, I knew that anybody could write a biography, but I didn't know (I should know this, but I didn't know it) that not anybody could have permissions, so to use the archival materials or the photographs had to be granted from the White family.

Sarah: Oh, I didn't know that either.

Melissa: Well, yeah. And I gave her a very slight dummy; my dummies are notoriously cryptic, because I don't even know what I'm going to be doing I just have an idea, but I have to make a dummy for the publisher, so I have to know where the words are going to go but I certainly don't know what the art is going to look like.

Sarah: Let me interrupt you just for a second, you have to send a dummy to your publisher before you sell the book, before they get behind you, is that what you're saying?

Melissa: Well, not exactly. They bought this on the idea alone...

Sarah: OK.

Melissa: ... but at a certain point, they say, we're talking about things like, for instance, "How many pages is it going to be?" so we say, "OK, let's start with 80 pages and see how that feels," and so at that point, I'll make a dummy.

Sarah: Got it!

Melissa: Yeah. And I'll begin to place the words or the front matter, for instance, the title page, the copyright, and the back matter we know we're going to have sources, so it's very rough but it gives us a sense.

Sarah: I see.

Melissa: I had one of those when Martha White said, "Let's get together in my studio and we'll talk further," and I knew Martha slightly because we live in the same town and our paths have crossed and she's been nothing but kind and supportive of my books and her children had my books, so she knew of my work, and she knew of my biographies, and the White family was just unbelievably generous. They granted me permissions, she said, "Sure, I will," and I

promised to do a very good job. But then the wonderful thing started happening, Martha said, “Oh, I’ve got a scrapbook I think you should come see,” and I said, “Yes, I would love to see that.” She stopped by my studio with some home movies. This is just mesmerizing. The privilege it is to be able to have this kind of resource, and to know that I can do anything, absolutely anything to portray this author, this beloved author, I have everything at my fingertips, so that’s how that happened. And once I had access to those materials I went to Cornell University and looked at all the archival materials, the photographs, his papers and manuscripts, and that again, it’s hard to describe the privilege it is and that I get to do this for my work, it personally was not just an education but a way of looking at the world that I didn’t have before, to have the time and resources to delve into E.B. White and his writing, I hardly think I would have done it without this book in mind, so I grew as an artist and author from the chance to do this book.

Sarah: That’s amazing.

30:00 A favorite E.B. White book

So there are three books E.B. White wrote: of course, we have Stuart Little, Charlotte’s Web, and The Trumpet of the Swan. Do you have a favorite?

Melissa: Wow, they’re each so good. It’s like saying, “Which is your favorite dog, which is your favorite child?”

Sarah: Yeah, I know!

Melissa: They’re so good, each for different reasons, but I’m going to say, Charlotte’s Web.

Sarah: OK.

Melissa: Because it has a universal theme and it’s pitch perfect - that every word in that book feels, to me, I don’t know if you have snow where you live but when you’re walking along and you have the first snow of winter and the first snowflakes start to fall and they land quietly and perfectly, and that’s what that book feels like to me, it’s like snow on a path, the first snow on a path in the winter. I wished he were alive for me to ask how did it feel to him when it was done? Did he know what a masterpiece it was? He must have had some sense that he had gotten it right or gotten it pitch perfect, I think.

Sarah: You know it’s funny because I was voracious reader as a child and I don’t remember a lot of books that I read or I don’t have specific memories. I can look at a book and go, ‘I remember reading that as a kid’ but I don’t remember actually reading it. I remember where I was sitting when I read Charlotte’s Web for the first time. I remember thinking, ‘I have just encountered something different than other things I have encountered before.’ As an adult I think Trumpet of the Swan is my favorite, and I was trying to think why is that? I think his characterizations in that book, like the father swan. It makes me laugh out loud every time I think of Louis’ father just starting to talk. His characters are so well – they are in all of his books but Trumpet of the Swan holds a special place in my heart. When I read it to my kids a few years ago, it must have been about five years ago, we actually went and saw trumpeter swans that were living in a nature reserve near us, and it just took the book to a whole new level.

Melissa: That is really fantastic. Yeah, Trumpet of the Swan, to my mind, represents that journey he took from his home in Mt. Vernon, New York to Seattle after he left college, because he went to

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Billings, Montana, he took a little side trip up to Canada, and I'm not sure if that's the trip he saw trumpeter swans, because I'm sure they were there, the impetus of the story was from a New York Times article on trumpeter swans, but I love that too, it definitely feels like a journey into another place for Sam Beaver (the main character), it's pretty special.

Sarah: Well, I live in the northwest, I live in Spokane, Washington which is several hours east of Seattle, but that's where we saw the trumpeter swans so I wonder if it was when he was up here. Maybe that's the real reason why when I read that story it feels like home to me, that could make a lot of sense, actually.

Melissa: Did you cry when you read Charlotte's Web?

Sarah: Oh yes.

Melissa: What was that like for you when Charlotte died?

Sarah: I remember as a child feeling like this overwhelming sense of no, no, no and weeping, at the same time knowing it was just right. All was right with the world, things are exactly as they're supposed to be. So it was incredible sense of grief because you love her so much and also at the same time realizing there was something bigger going on that I wouldn't have been able to describe to you as a child but I could definitely feel inside my bones.

Melissa: That's a beautiful thing you just said, that's really true.

Sarah: Well, this has been such a treat. Before we go, I was wondering if you could talk to our young listeners who are aspiring writers, aspiring illustrators, and tell them or their parents, some kind of advice or something you could tell them

as they continue on experimenting with words and art.

Melissa: Read. Read a lot. Or listen to books. Or be read to, because there's something about the music of language that we absorb whether we know it or not, so even if like me, or E.B. White even was not a great reader, there's still something about the language of words that's so delightful and I listen to his books much more than I read them. For three years I listened to them incessantly, so I would say that. And as far as making art, I have a wonderful quote on my studio wall by Alexander Calder, it says that art should be happy and not lugubrious...

Sarah: What does that mean? I'm going to use that word I don't even know what it means but you're going to have to tell me now.

Melissa: The context what it means, right? Yes, so not heavy or sad. I think that it's true in making art and in viewing art and in surrounding ourselves with art, so as kids it's fun to go see art and make art and be immersed in it in all different ways, and bottom line, it should be a lot of fun.

Sarah: Well, you're a very good model for that, because we can just hear, like I said, we can hear the joy in you and you can see it when you're reading your books, enjoying your books, just the playfulness of your work, so thank you so much for this new book. Thank you for all of your work, and thank you for coming to chat with me today.

Melissa: Thank you so much, Sarah.

35:00 Let the kids speak

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.



Child1: Hello my name is Ruthie, and I am nine years old, and I live in Dawn, Montana, USA, and my favorite book is Daniel Pinkwater's Snarkout Boys and the Avocado of Death. I like it because it's really funny; some of the guys in say really funny things, like the main character in the book's name is Walter, and he is telling the story officially and he makes a speech in this park that is in his town. His town's name is Baconburg, and he makes this speech in Blueberry Park and he ends with "School stinks." It is really funny. Another reason I like it is because Walter and his friend, Winston Bongo, and his uncle [**inaudible 35:53**]

Child2: My name is Nora, I am seven years old, and I'm in Dawn, Montana, and I like The Princess and the Goblin by George MacDonald, and the reason I like it is because it's delightfully scary, fantasy stuff and things like that, so. Bye.

Child3: Hello, my name is Kelly, I'm five. My favorite book is Red Wall by Brian Jacques. I like it because the bell tower fell on two roosters. Goodbye.

Child4: [Mom: what's your name?] Aubrey. [Mom: And how old are you?] Three. [Mom: Three. And what's your favorite book?] Bird book. [Mom: The Bird Book. Is it The Bird Guide to Oklahoma? What's your favorite thing about the book?] I love the whole thing [Mom: What's your favorite bird?] My favorite bird is ... [Mom: Is your favorite bird the chickadee?] Oh yes! [Mom: By Summer Tanager. Can you say, Summer Tanager?] Summer Tanager.

Child5: [Mom: What's your name?] Katie. [Mom: And how old are you?] Five. [And what's your favorite book?] Beauty and the Beast. [Mom: And, who's it by? Jan Brett?] Jan Brett. [Mom: And what do you like about this book?] About the

pictures and the flowers and the girls and the decorations on them.

Child6: Hi, my name is Isaiah, I'm almost eight, and I live in Nepal. My favorite book is The Wingfeather Saga, and my favorite out of all of them is the fourth one.

Child7: Hi [**inaudible** 38:01] I'm five and I live in Nepal. I love [**inaudible** 38:08] because he has lots of dogs and I like animals.

Child8: Hi, my name is Caroline and I'm seven years old and I'm from Park City, Utah, and one of my favorite stories is Ms Frapscott's School For Girls, and the reason I like it is because it's very funny. It's by Elise Primavera.

Child9: Hi, my name is Phoebe and I'm nine years old and I'm from Park City, Utah, and one of my favorite books is Beezus and Ramona by Beverly Cleary. I really like it because Ramona is so naughty.

Child10: My name is Eagon, I'm eight years old, and I live in Dillon, Montana. My favorite book is The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis. The reason I like it is it was the first book about Narnia ever written. The children make friends with the beavers and they meet Aslan, the great lion, and they kill the white witch.

Oh man, you've got to hear this message too. This came in from one of our Read Aloud Revival moms, and it made my heart sing.

Hi Sarah, my name is Erin, I'm from Park City, Utah. I have eight children, very similar in ages to yours and I even have twins, twin boys right at the end, just like you do. So, often when I am listening to the podcast I can relate to all that you are talking about and I just wanted to thank you for all you and the Read Aloud Revival team for all that you do because I started listening to you

READ-ALOUD REVIVAL



Transcript Bonus Episode with Melissa Sweet

last summer when my sister-in-law told me about you and I was at a point where I felt very discouraged about homeschooling and feeling like I just want to give up and I started listening and you and the guests that you have and the advice and the tips and the ideas are such a great motivator and they have kept me going on many a dark day, so thank you so much.

Kids, thank you so much for those messages, that's my favorite part of the podcast. And Erin, thank you especially for your note that completely made my day. Now listen, if your kids would like to leave a message to be aired on the Read Aloud Revival, head to ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page and you'll find out exactly how to do it. It's very easy. Do you want to get Melissa Sweet's new book, *Some Writer!: The Story of E.B. White*? You'll find the link to it in the Show Notes, just head to ReadAloudRevival.com and you'll see it there as a bonus episode in season 9. In the Show Notes we'll also have links to some resources that will help you as you introduce your kids to the work of E.B. White, that's *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, all of E.B. White's are perfectly suited for reading aloud. That's not really something you can say about most authors, but if you want to take those books to the next level with your kids, head to our Show Notes at ReadAloudRevival.com and you'll find links to great resources that will help you do just that. Next up, from Melissa Sweet, is a book she's illustrating that was written by the award-winning author, Kwame Alexander. I cannot wait to see it. And hey, we'll be back next week seeing as this was a bonus episode. So, I'll see you next Tuesday right here on the Read Aloud Revival. Don't forget to go to RARMembership.com, pop your email in there if you want to know what's

coming right around the bend here at the Read Aloud Revival. It's going to be a great time. See you soon, until then, go build your family culture around books.