



RAR 66 – Do Audio Books Count as Read-Alouds?

Sarah: You're listening to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that helps you make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.

Well, hello, hello, Sarah Mackenzie here. You've got episode 66 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. This is our first mini episode. So, as you may have heard in a special edition podcast we put out not too long ago we have moved to a weekly show for season 11. Super excited about that, so you can look forward to another episode of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast every single Tuesday. What's going to happen is every other episode will be just like all of the ones we've done before – interview shows between me and a guest, a little bit longer, somewhere between 30-60 minutes, usually. And in-between those are weeks of mini episodes. Today is our first one. It's going to be shorter and I'm just going to give you a few tips or answer questions that you've sent in; help you make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books with a little mini episode – just enough time for you to scrub the dinner dishes or fold a load of laundry, right? OK. So today, we're going to talk all about audio books because we get so many questions about audio books. Audio books are one of my favorite ways to get more reading aloud in with my kids. So today we're going to talk about what listening to audio books is worth your time. We're going to ask the question do they really count as read-alouds. I'm going to give you some information on that. I'm going to give you some ideas on when and how to listen, and where to get the best deals. This is like your audio book quick guide, so here we go. Let's get started.

Alright, first, let's talk about why. Why audio books? Why take the time and energy to download them, find them, figure out a way to listen to them. Really, the best reason is just that it helps you get more reading-aloud in with your kids. So if you've listened to the first episode of the Read-Aloud Revival (and you can find that at ReadAloudRevival.com, just look for episode 1 with Andrew Pudewa) we discussed why it's so important for kids to have grammatically correct and sophisticated language patterns coming in through the ear. It helps a child academically, it helps them build their vocabulary, it helps them make connections inside their brain, it's really formative and amazing what listening to stories, listening to correct grammar, and sophisticated language patterns and vocabulary, can do for the brain, and because we're all limited in our time and energy we can only do so much reading-aloud with our kids, right? Audio books are a great way to continue getting those sophisticated, correct, and enjoyable language patterns into our kids' ears even when we can't do the physical reading-aloud.

3:08 YES! They count!

So I get asked a lot do audio books really count as read-alouds? And the answer is absolutely, resoundingly yes. Here's what we're going for: we're going for two main factors when we're reading-aloud. First, is just what I mentioned, those sophisticated and correct language patterns coming in through the ear and the second, and possibly even a more important piece, is the connection that we make with our kids by sharing a story, by inhabiting a world together, by diving into the life or the shoes of a character together, right? So, both of those things can be achieved through audio books. Of



course, it doesn't really matter if it's you reading the book or the narrator, who's oftentimes very, very skilled at reading-aloud and telling a story in a certain accent or dialect or just with really good pacing. Really well done audio books are often done by skilled narrators, a lot of times famous actors and actresses, they're just really well done and that can be a really enjoyable way to listen. Your kids are still then getting those grammatically correct and sophisticated language patterns in through their ear, right? Well, the other thing is that if you're listening to an audio book together you're still making those same connections because you're still enjoying the book together. So you can still talk about the book together, you can still connect with your kids together through that story. A great way to do this is on a road trip or a car trip or even just a commute to soccer practice or school or wherever you're commuting with your kids. That is a great time to listen to audio books and you're still getting the full benefits of both the sophisticated language patterns and the connection through story by listening together. At our house we sometimes listen to audio books while we fold laundry, I call it "Read-Aloud Laundry," my kids are less impressed with it than I am but I will run a ton of wash and dry all through the day and then I pile it up in this huge mountain of laundry and either I will read aloud to my big kids while they sort and fold or what they like better is if we turn on an audio book because then I help them sort and fold and it goes faster. It's really enjoyable. And again, you're still getting the two main factors: the sophisticated language and the connection.

5:12 Bonding Through Audiobooks

So audio books absolutely count. Now, my son listened to a tremendous number of audio books on his own for years before he was a fluent reader himself. From the time he was about 6 or 7 until he was reading really fluently at about 10 he was listening every day to audio books during our quiet reading time, in his room while he was doing legos or drawing or playing with his little figurines or whatever. And he got in so much high quality language patterns through his ear that way, he listened to a gazillion *Red Wall* books, love of *The Little House* books, just a whole bunch of really great stories through audio. Now, I have not personally read all of the *Red Wall* books and yet, we still were able to get both of those benefits – the sophisticated language patterns and the connection. And the way we did that is he was getting the sophisticated language patterns by listening to the books and then I could ask him a few key questions about the books, even if I hadn't read them. This is something that I think is really important for us to realize... and we'll do a show on this, a mini episode on this coming up, but you don't actually need to read all the books your kids are reading in order to talk about them. You don't need to have read the books to have good discussion with your kids and I'll teach you how to do that really soon. For now, if you're interested in that, in the Show Notes to this podcast we'll put a link to our Read-Aloud Revival Guide to Having Conversation with Your Kids About Books even if you haven't read them. It's a really short PDF document that will be a lifesaver to you as you try to figure out how to talk to your kids about books that they've read and you haven't. But we can suffice it right now to say that you can have some



great conversations about those books even if your kids are listening to the audio books on their own. So, audio books make it possible for you to listen to a whole bunch more books that you could get in on your own, and they also give you all the benefits. They completely count. So, no more feeling like you're cheating when you're using audio books. You're not cheating, you're just being smart about it. So, I say let's dive into audio books! This can be a great year to get a lot of audio book reading into your family because they completely count. First of all, know that audio books can play a really key part of your read-aloud life, specifically in seasons ... well, anytime they can, but specifically in seasons when you're short on time. Maybe you're really busy with extra-curricular activities, sports, family emergencies, sickness, any kind of anything that takes your family by surprise and takes more time than you want it to, you can still fit in lots of reading-aloud through audio books. I know that when there's say, a new baby in the house I rely on audio books a lot. When there is a lot of extra-curricular, out of the house activities, I rely on audio books a lot. Any time you're especially tired, it's like having a baby for example. Relying on those audio books because for you to be able to stay awake when you just had a baby – reading-aloud to your big kids, that's kind of hard, right? Let the audio book reader do it for you. You can also listen to audio books in the car – we talked about that a little bit about that already – you've got a captive audience basically there. Super enjoyable. I've heard so many stories of people who say their kids get to wherever you're getting to and nobody wants to get out of the car because they're enjoying the audio book so much. I also save for audio books, any kind of books that are particularly hard for me to read-aloud. So really long descriptive

passages are hard for me, personally, I'm yawning as I'm reading them, and so those kinds of books I'll oftentimes do on audio because the narrators do a really great job with those. *Little House on the Prairie*, that whole series is one that I like to do on audio for that reason. Books that have difficult dialects like Mark Twain's books for example, they can be really enjoyable to do on audio where you have these skilled actors just inhabiting the characters and the way that they can portray the feeling behind a text is really inspiring and so I enjoy, particularly, Mark Twain's books, Charles Dickens' books. Recently I was reading *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin to my older kids and it was a hard book to read-aloud. There's 12 main characters and you're trying to solve this mystery while you're listening so you need to keep track of who's who and what their little quirks are. It's really hard to read-aloud. I'll just say I was really struggling – and I read-aloud a lot so I've got a lot of practice, right? It was still really hard. We switched to the audio book – so much better.

9:33 How to Listen

So those are some ideas of when to do audio books – when you're struggling with a read-aloud, when you're finding yourself not wanting to pick up the book because it's hard to read-aloud, because the dialects are difficult, because it's just you're struggling, switch to the audio book, try that. Try it in the car, try it in times where you're short on time, where you have an emergency, or sickness, or unexpected things are taking over your life, turn to audio books. Logistically, playing the audio books doesn't have to be this hard. I'm going to recommend in just a few minutes a few different places to get audio books but how you play them will kind of depend



on where you've gotten them. If you're going to the library and getting CDs, of course, you want a CD player and that may be what you have in your car. Or you may have a CD player in your house. I don't have one anymore, isn't that funny? And so CD audio books I always stare at like, what am I supposed to do with this? I want mp3 versions I can play them on our devices but of course you can go to the library and get books on CD. Most libraries still have those. And you can also, from the library, check out mp3s – we'll talk about that in a sec on how that actually works, or you can get them online and I'm going to tell you where you can get them from in just a second. But how to play those mp3s will depend on what kind of devices that you have in your house and the kind of freedom you're willing to give your kids with those. So I have played audio books on my laptop, just in the middle of the kitchen table, everyone's drawing. I've played audio books from my desktop, same kind of thing. I've played them from my phone. Basically, you can download an audio book onto your phone or your iPod, you can hook that iPod or phone up to a Bluetooth speaker if you like, and that will play out loud for everyone to hear. Now, we'll put some Bluetooth speaker links in the Show Notes of this episode for some of our favorite Bluetooth speakers but I have a Bluetooth speaker and I never use it because I can't ever find the cord to charge it with because I'm just that organized. So I actually take a really low-tech approach and just stick my phone or iPod into a glass bowl or cup... really super sophisticated, right? It works great. It totally amplifies the sound. Try it! I'll put a picture of what I mean in the Show Notes. It works really, really well. So that works. I have a friend who buys her kids old refurbished old iPods, like the kind that your kids can't get online with, and she just downloads audio books onto there for them

and in that way she can hand them to them. They go do their chores or their rest times, whatever, listening to audio books. I have done it where I have turned on an audio book on an iPad and turned on guided access. Guided access is something you can do on an iPhone or iPad that keeps your kids locked in app. So basically, this is how that works: I want my son to listen to *Red Wall*. I want him to listen to it on the iPad, in his room, on quiet time. I also don't want him to get off the audio book and start playing Minecraft. Right? So what I do is I turn on the audio book and I enable guided access and I'm going to put a link in the Show Notes where you can learn – it's just a couple of steps you need to set up on your iPad – it's really simple, or your iPhone, where you can set up guided access and basically, I can then hand the iPad to my son and he can't get out of that app without a code. So now I can just hand him the iPad knowing he can't do anything else on it. He can just listen to his book and pause it. That's all he can do with it and he can play with his legos and I don't have to worry about him sneaking onto the internet or sneaking onto Minecraft, Angry Birds, whatever the thing is that he's interested in at that point. So we'll put a link in the Show Notes for how you can do that. But basically, just think creatively because in today's day and age there are a lot of ways to listen to audio books. It just depends on the kind of devices you have in your home. If you think, 'Oh gosh, we don't really have that many devices,' if you have a phone you can download and like I said just stick your phone in a cup or a bowl, set it on the kitchen table, put everyone around there with drawing paper. If you have a way that you listen to audio books that I haven't mentioned, if you would let us know in the comments to this episode, that would be really helpful so that we can share ways to listen to



audio books with each other. So go to ReadAloudRevival.com and look for episode 66. Leave us a comment in the Show Notes letting us know how you listen to audio books in your house. That would be so helpful.

13:44 Favorite Resources

So if we know why to listen to audio books and we know that they count and when to use them and how to play them, now we need to get some audio books, right? So I will tell you a few of my very favorite places to get audio books from. First of all, your public library – that should be your first stop, of course, and you can usually get books on CD, like I mentioned. A lot of libraries have these portable mp3 players. Basically, they are like a single audio book will be on a single mp3 player and you can check that out, attach some headphones and your child can listen to a whole book, start to finish, on this mp3 player. I personally don't love checking those out because they're super expensive to replace and we have a knack for losing library materials – don't tell anybody I said that. But you can check to see if your library has those. Ask your youth services librarian or your information desk at your library they will know. What I like even better than checking out CDs or those mp3 players is using Overdrive. Your library, very likely, has digital download audio books that are available to you. And you can't pay library fines on digital downloads – it's so great. You don't have to return them on time, they will just expire for you and then there are no late fees. It's so great. So basically how this works is you're going to go to your library's website, and if you're not sure how your own library system works, go to the library, take five minutes to go up to the information desk, and ask someone, "Can you show me how

to download an audio book onto my phone?" Really, they would love to do that, I promise. I worked in library services for several years and I know this, they would love to help you do that, and you will feel like, "OK, I know how to do this!" It's not like this secret language, because it's not, it's just the technology hurdle. You just need to get over that little technology hurdle. But you can go to your library's website and check out audio books from your library and then listen to them on your phone or your desktop or your laptop or your iPad or your iPod, all different kinds of devices, and the great part is it's free – they're usually really high quality audio books and you don't have to pay late fees because, depending on how long your library checks them out for, maybe three weeks, maybe four weeks or something like that, you'll have that long to listen to the audio book before it just disappears off your device. It's sort of magical. They usually use a service called Overdrive. Again, you're going to need to ask your own local library because all libraries do it slightly differently but I could just encourage you to take a few minutes next time you're in your library and ask somebody there how to listen to audio books through the library. You're going to be really happy that you took the few minutes to do that. Another free way to listen to audio books is through Librivox. Librivox is an online service of audio books, books that are all on the public domain, so there's no copyright on them anymore, they can be listened to and downloaded for free. There's a couple of different ways you can go to Librivox. You can go to Librivox.org, you can also go to LoyalBooks.com, I believe those are the same service, they're just two different websites. I could be wrong about that but Librivox.org or LoyalBooks.com, we'll put links to both of those in the Show Notes. You



can download just gazillions of audio books for free. Listen to them on your devices that way.

17:16 How to Audible (+Deals!)

Now I'm going to give you a heads up that because they're free public domain audio books and because all of the readers are volunteers they're not all read awesome. There are some fantastic audio book readers there. I will say just some really fantastic readers but some of the books are read by multiple different narrators so you'll have one book, let's say, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* or something read by five different readers depending on the chapter. I personally cannot stand it. That makes me a little bit crazy. Then also the skill level of the narrators varies. So there are some really amazing readers like Karen Savage and then some readers that are not quite so good. So we can do something for you here; at the Read-Aloud Revival we have created a list of our favorite Librivox narrators. That means the people who are narrating the actual books who are reading them aloud the ones who we think do the very, very best job and we've got a list of them and if you go to the Show Notes for today's episode, go to ReadAloudRevival.com, look for episode 66, you can grab that list. Actually, it's a clickable list, you can just go right to that list just click right through to our favorite free audio books available online. That's going to get you started on Librivox or LoyalBooks in a really awesome way because you're going to find the best stuff right away. My own personal favorite way to listen to audio books, however, is neither of those, but is through Audible. I love Audible because I love the Audible app, it's very straightforward, and clean, and simple, because I keep finding these amazing Audible deals where you get there Audible books, audio books, read

by amazingly talented narrators for so inexpensively. Basically, Audible is a subscription service where you can pay monthly to get an audio book every single month, however, even if you don't want to pay \$15 a month to be an Audible member you can get good deals on Audible. So in the Show Notes to this episode I'm going to put in a couple of links. One is the great Q&A post I did on Audible that answers all the questions you can think of about Audible subscriptions and getting Audible deals, and the next one is going to be a link to the best current Audible deals right now. You don't have to be an Audible subscriber to get good Audible deals. Basically what happens is you purchase them for their deal price, usually, \$2 - \$5 on Amazon. You want to download the free Audible app and then you can listen to those books on the app. The great thing about this is you own the books, so you're not borrowing them from the library, or just streaming them, they're really skilled narrators and you own the books forever. So I love doing this, for example, with the *Red Wall series* because I know that my son loved them and my two other little boys, when they get older, are going to love them. So I want to just own them so we can just listen to them anytime. So buying them on deals at Audible or through my Audible subscription is a really good use for our funds and our budget to build an audio library. We've collected a list of the best current audio book deals on Audible and you own these books, they get to be a part of your permanent collection. That's what I love so much about Audible, it's what I like better than the library, or better than some of these free online services, because I love owning the books. I love knowing that I just have the whole *Red Wall* collection on audio or I have *Pippi Longstocking* and Beverly Cleary's books and the *Little House* books, I own them all and



we can play them at anytime and I don't have to go to the library website and see if one's available and download it, I just have it. So I really like that. I love building an audio book library for my kids because we take our audio books very seriously around here. So that's why I love Audible deals. Basically, we collected a current list of all the best audio book deals we can find on Audible for you. We put them in a single post for you, a single page, where you can go to the website and download those. I'm putting a link to that in the Show Notes but you can always go to ReadAloudRevival.com and look for the Audible deals link right at the top, it's right there in the top of the page where you can find it easily, totally worth your time to click over there. Now what happens is you buy the audio books for their deals through Amazon, then you download the free Audible app, and that's how you listen... on your phone, on your laptop, on your desktop, on your iPod. You listen with the free Audible app. Now, if you don't want to be an Audible subscriber and you don't want to be paying the \$15 a month Audible subscription fee the best way to do that is to grab the deals you want from that Audible deals page that I'll link to, get the free Audible app, download it onto your devices, then go to Audible.com and just sign in, because you'll now have a sign in, you'll sign in with your Amazon credentials, your Amazon log in, and then go to Account Details and just double-check to make sure that you're not going to be charged for a membership. If you are going to be charged, you get your first 30 days free, so sometimes when you download that free Audible app you forget to uncheck the box that says you don't want to be a member, so you accidentally sign up for a free membership, free for 30 days and then you have to pay \$15 a month after that, all you have to do is go into "My Account Details" and

just change your account settings, you're going to want to cancel that monthly membership. You'll still have the Audible app, you'll still have all of the books you've gotten for deals, you actually own those, those are now part of your own library, and you can listen to them in the app without an Audible subscription. Does that make sense? I hope it does. We're going to put a link in the Show Notes to an FAQ about Audible. I really think this is the best, simplest way to build your audio book library. It's my own family's favorite way to listen to audio books and that's why I've taken the time to make an FAQ page that answers your questions about how to use Audible and why we spend some time curating the very best deals you can find on the best audio books that we love for you at the Read-Aloud Revival. Again, go to ReadAloudRevival.com look at episode 66 and you'll get more details and links to where you can get those audio books. I will tell you right now there is an amazing sale. Usually Audible only has a couple of good deals at a time on kids' audio books. Right now there is well over 40 of my very favorite audio books on sale. We've curated the best of those and put them on that list. If you go to ReadAloudRevival.com, look at episode 66, link over to those Audible deals. You'll see them and that sale ends August 27, 2017 and I've never seen a sale like this at Audible before. And trust me, I'm watching all the time. So you want to make sure you snag some of those really good deals before August 27, 2017 (if you're listening to this before then). Again, ReadAloudRevival.com, episode 66, and that'll give you everything you need. So I hope this episode which ended up not turning out to be very mini, in fact, I'm waiting for my team to start laughing at me because I said, "These are going to be mini episodes, 10 minutes!" and now I'm



realizing I've been talking for almost a half an hour. But I hope it inspires you to listen to audio books with your kids, to get in more read-alouds by relying on audio books which is an amazing technology that we have that will help us share more stories with our kids, and help us make those meaningful connections with our kids through books. They completely count. It's doable to listen to audio books no matter how busy you are because audio books are something you can listen to while you're doing other things; while you're driving the car, while you're on a job (if you do that sort of thing), while you're cooking dinner, while you're folding laundry. Right? Just thinking through the logistics a little bit about how the best ways for your family to listen and where you want to get your audio books from, getting set up with some good Audible deals. We can help you with all that at the Read-Aloud Revival. Look in the Show Notes, episode 66. And hey, I would love it if you left a note in the comments there at episode 66 telling me your favorite ways to listen to Audible and if you have questions, just let us know there, because we'll be happy to answer them.

25:32 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: [Mom: what's your name?] Sammy. [Mom: how old are you?] 5. [Mom: where do you live?] Rhode Island. [Mom: and what's your favorite book?] *Magic Tree House*. [Mom: which one?] *Earthquake in the Early Morning*. [Mom: what do you like about that?] Annie gets out of the hole. [Mom: how did she fall into the hole?] Because of the earthquake in it.

Child2: My name is Brooke, I'm 8 years old, and from Tennessee. My favorite book series is *The Wrenly Series* by Jordan Quinn. It's my favorite because I love dragons, magic, and adventure.

Child3: My name is Lauren. I'm 6 and from Tennessee. My favorite book is *The Princess in Black* by Shannon Hale. I like the cool horse and the place called Monster Land.

Child4: [Mom: what's your name?] My name is Haddon Joe. [Mom: and Haddon Joe, how old are you?] 2. [Mom: you're 2. And where do you live?] I live here. [Mom: you live here? What's your favorite book, Haddon?] My favorite book is *Stinky Face*. [Mom: and what do you like about *Stinky Face*?] *Stinky Face* is stinky.

Child5: [Mom: what's your name?] Hadley. [Mom: and Hadley, how old are you?] 4. [Mom: where do you live?] Spring Creek, Nevada. [Mom: and what's your favorite book, Hadley?] *Stories from Grandma's Attic*. [Mom: and what's your favorite story?] When Sarah Jane cuts Mable's hair.

Child6: Hi, my name is Virginia and I am 5 years old, and I'm from Brighton, Tennessee, and my favorite books are *Little House on the Prairie* and *Little House in the Big Woods*. My favorite part about it is when they make paper dolls and when Pa plays his fiddle and when they sew their dresses for paper dolls.

Child7: My name's Muriel. I live in Michigan. [Mom: how old are you?] I'm 3. **[inaudible]** and my favorite book is *But Not the Hippopotamus*.

Child8: Hello, my name is Kell. I'm 8 years old. I live in Michigan. My favorite book is *Sophia Quire*. And I like the part when she meets Peter Nimble.

Child9: Hello, my name's Anastasia. I live in Michigan. And my favorite book is *The Hobbit*.



And I like the part when Gollum says, “What’s in his pocketses?”

Child10: Hello, my name is Moose, I am 9 years old. I live in Spirit Lake, Idaho. My favorite books are *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The reason why I like them is because I like the characters and the wars and how the wars got developed.

Sarah: Thank you, kids, so much. I love it when you leave messages for us. If your kids would like to leave messages to be aired on the Read-Aloud Revival, we air every single one that comes in, in the order it was received. Head to ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page, and you’ll see a spot on the bottom left for your kids to leave a message. Hey, don’t forget to visit the Read-Aloud Revival shop. We have custom fantastic book bags, mugs, t-shirts, all kinds of good stuff there. The book bags are everybody’s favorite. And we keep selling out of colors and we keep having to order more but we now offer those beautiful book bags with grommets that make them really sturdy and an interior zipper pocket for your library card. We offer them in four different colors. Go to RARStore.com to grab yours. Next week, we’re going to be back. I am so excited about this interview. I don’t think I’m supposed to have favorites but you guys, I totally have favorites. And the author that we’re talking to next week may be my favorite living author. You’re just going to have to wait ‘til next week to find out who it is. I’ll be back next Tuesday. Make sure you’re subscribed to the Read-Aloud Revival so you don’t miss out, ReadAloudRevival.com, pop your email in there, I’ll let you know when a podcast is up and ready. Hey, until next time, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.