



RAR 77 – Andrea Davis Pinkney

Andrea: So you've just given me a new idea, I'm putting books in the refrigerator now. How's that for availability?

Sarah: I knew we were kindred spirits. I knew it.

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.

The *Kids and Family Reading Report* is a biannual survey conducted by Scholastic in conjunction with YouGov exploring family attitudes and behaviors around reading books for fun. Today I'm thrilled to be joined by a friend from Scholastic, somebody that you know and love already probably. We're going to be talking about the findings of the latest *Kids and Family Reading Report* and what that *Report* means for us as parents. So many of you got to meet Andrea Davis Pinkney last year during a Read-Aloud Revival Author Access Event if you're a premium access member you got to see that video and if you are not and you listened to the podcast I'll put a link in the Show Notes today because we put a little snippet, a really awesome snippet from that hour we had with Andrea in a podcast where we were showing little bits of clips from those author access events. We'll make sure we'll put a link to that to the Show Notes. She's the best-selling and award-winning author of books like *Sit In*, *Let It Shine*, *Bird in a Box*, *The Red Pencil*, and a very special favorite here at the Read-Aloud Revival, *A Poem for Peter*. Andrea is also vice-president and editor-at-large at Scholastic. Welcome back to the Read-Aloud Revival, Andrea, so happy to have you with us.

Andrea: Thank you Sarah, it's great to be back.

Sarah: As we get started, Andrea, can you tell us a little bit more about how this *Report* got started and why Scholastic takes the time to research?

2:03 Why Scholastic created this report

Andrea: Absolutely. Let me just say that at Scholastic our main mission is to get kids to learn to read and to love to read. So we've been collecting data as part of the *Kids and Family Reading Report* for 10 years and the data supports that goal. I remember a decade ago when I first happened upon the *Report*, speaking as a mom, I thought, 'This is a golden treasure trove of information' so that I can help my son and daughter find books, learn to read, and love to read.

Sarah: I love that because, first as parents, we really want our kids not just to read because they can, right? We want them to read because they love to and because they choose to do it in their free time and then we want to lunge these kids from our homes who are voracious and avid readers so any information that helps us make that more likely, I think is really valuable information for us.

Andrea: Absolutely. And the beauty of the *Kids and Family Reading Report* is that the responses are from parents just like you and me, Sarah, and the responses are also from kids just like my son, just like my daughter, just like your own children. So it feels like I'm part of this community of like-minded folks, and again, that's the beauty of it.

Sarah: So one thing I love about the *Kids and Family Reading Report* is how the information is laid out. I'm going to put a link in the Show Notes that you can find the Reading Report really easy. It's also just at [Scholastic.com/ReadingReport](https://www.scholastic.com/ReadingReport) or



you can just head to the Show Notes of this episode and we'll have a link there. The results are laid out in different categories. For example, "Reading Books for Fun" or "Reading Aloud," "Summer Reading," "Favorite books," but there's also a summary of "Key findings." And some of these are just really interesting to me so I'd love to chat about a few of these. Andrea, is there one or two key findings that stand out to you as maybe one of the most important things that came out of this year's *Report*?

3:48 Key report findings

Andrea: Definitely, definitely. Since we launched the *Report* 10 years ago a lot of things had changed. Actually, in four key areas. The first one which is access to books. One of the findings of the study that I think is very intriguing is this idea of having books available for your children in the home. I like to say that kids see what they see and they don't see what they don't see. So, it's important for them to see books in their home where they live. The *Report* lets us know that a really powerful predictor of how often a child will read and their academic success depends on the access to those books, so it's just really key that those books are around everywhere they are and in their homes.

Sarah: And there's some research there that also points to the fact that the more books that a child has in their home the more likely they are to be readers, which just makes so much sense because you can't read something that's not in front of you, right?

Andrea: Right. Exactly.

Sarah: You're not incited to go pick up a book off the shelf if they're kind of sparse. We have a little rule at our house that there needs to be books in

every room and so I will, as I'm kind of living life, poke around and if I notice that there's not books in a certain room I think, 'Hmmm, that might be kind of a problem, where could we put books? Where can I set a little basket of books in this room?'

Andrea: I love that. This idea of within reach because you think about it like the same muscles in the hand that it takes to reach an apple or a bag of potato chips is that same hand that can be reaching for a book. So you've just given me a new idea, I'm putting books in the refrigerator now. How's that for availability?

Sarah: I knew we were kindred spirits. I knew it.

5:26 Building a home library

Andrea: The average American family with a child 0-17 has about 104 books in the home and again, you know, the more the better but you don't have to necessarily have a lot of dollars to get those books. There are so many ways to do that. As you said, little by little slowly build it up. Have a book swap. This is the perfect opportunity to have that mother-daughter book club where everybody brings a book and then you trade them, or father-son book club or a tag sale or libraries that will often sell off books that there aren't in circulation or that they need to restock the shelves. There are many ways to get those books and make them available. As we as moms and dads are collecting all those books and looking for innovative ways to gather them I just want to remind your listeners that in the *Kids and Family Reading Report* we've created an info graphic that really shows books in the home and where you can get them. Again, book clubs, book fairs, dollar deals that, again, make those books easily available and affordable.



Sarah: Awesome. We'll make sure we'll put a link that's easy to find in the Show Notes that everybody can see that. We get a lot of questions from people asking how they can affordably build their library so that's really, really helpful. Could we talk a little bit about what the *Report* shows about reading aloud? I think for most of us we often read aloud with our kids who can't read for themselves and then that tapers off as they get older and once a child is more capable of reading on their own and they get older and their schedules get busy and the seasons of life just change, the family dynamic just changes, we read aloud less often. But I was surprised at what a huge difference there was so I'm looking at the *Kids and Family Reading Report* right now and it says that 59% of families read to their 0-5, and only 17% read aloud with their kids ages 9 and up. And I thought, 'Wow, those are smaller numbers than I expected.'

7:18 What the report says about reading aloud

Andrea: Yes, it's really fascinating, this idea of reading aloud because that is a key aspect to the findings in the *Report*. And let me say, Sarah, that this podcast is so perfectly named for this topic. Read-Aloud Revival – love that because I'm a big believer in reading aloud and thanks for talking through those statistics. What we did find is that yes, parents are reading to their children younger now. It's starting from birth to age 5 is more parents are doing that. It's interesting- we got information from the American Academy of Pediatrics from the year 2014 and reading aloud was prescribed for infants, for younger children as something that builds language and literacy skills. And then to your point, as it relates to our *Kids and Family Reading Report* it starts to taper

off. But here's the thing. The best kept secret – older kids like being read to. And I am totally speaking again from personal experience here, as a mom, now with two teens. They love that time together. We tend to taper off because we think that's not what they really want to do and you might not, with a teenager, get that cuddle up moment, but there are ways to engage your older children, your middle schoolers, your teenagers with reading. "Let's sit and read a blog post together," "Let's read the newspaper," "Let's look at this magazine article," and again it's a way to enjoy that quality time that is so precious.

Sarah: My oldest three kids are 15, 13, and 12 and right now we're reading aloud *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis. My 12 year old son is ... they're all readers but he's the one I usually have to do a little more cajoling, I have to work a little harder to find books he likes. I have to sort of woo him a little bit more. And every day since we've started reading this book he'll ask, "Could we please, please make time to make sure we read that aloud today?" And he's 12 year old. Clearly, he's reading on his own as is my 15 and 13 year olds but there is something that happens when we sit and read that book together, or any book together, that really bonds us together in a unique way. So one of the key findings that I thought was really interesting is that, I'm just going to read it straight from the website here, it says, "Parents underestimate the degree to which children have trouble finding books they like. Only 29% of parents say, 'My child has trouble finding books he/she likes' but 41% of kids agree that that's a challenge. And that percentage of kids increases to 57% among infrequent readers. So what this shows us is that kids who are not reading a lot, who are probably not reading a lot because they're having trouble –



if 57% of them are saying, “I’m having a hard time finding books that I like” then we as parents that’s really unhelpful to us to realize, “OK, if our kids are not reading voraciously in their spare time maybe a big piece of that is that they’re having a hard time finding books that they really love.”

10:20 Helping kids find books

Andrea: Yes, it’s true. We think that kids are having an easy time of it but again, if you refer to the study, it’s not true and we should never underestimate our kids, or underestimate what’s possible. But I think imagine yourself, I’ll imagine myself, as the 4th grader going into a library or bookstore and seeing so many books, there are so many choices, and we grownups tend to think it’s easy for kids to think to make those choices but they need our help. They often need our help and that’s what it means of being a parent- we can help our kids narrow it down. I might say to my kid, “Listen, you love a book about the planets, let’s go to that planets section of the library or the bookstore or the book faire and choose from these and I’ll help you narrow it down,” and that’s what where we really can help kids find the books that they love. This idea of helping kids directing them to find the books that they love so much it’s great that we moms and dads can do that but we have helpers, we have teachers, we have librarians, and they can also help drive our kids’ choices and options and again, point out where that magic book is for my child.

Sarah: We recently did an episode here on the Read-Aloud Revival on how to best use and support your local library. It’s episode 65, I’ll put a link to that in the Show Notes as well, and I had a youth services librarian, Amy Comers join me and

talk about how parents can use the resources in their library including their lovely and wonderful librarians to help their kids find books they love. And the kinds of questions that are helpful for librarians, the kind of information that’s helpful for kids and parents to provide to their librarians so their librarians can do a better job of helping them find the books that they’ll love.

Andrea: True. And you know what else, Sarah, is that kids talk to other kids, “Oh my gosh, I read this amazing book, you’ve got to read it!” Kids talk to each other so they depend on their classmates and their friends to make recommendations also.

Sarah: One of the main thrusts of this entire report is to gauge and encourage kids reading for pleasure, right? which is really, really critical to a real reading life. And I think about adults who read they read for fun, they read for pleasure not because they have to do it for work or for a school assignment but because reading itself is fulfilling, so we want to encourage our kids and help them read for the delight of it. Does the *Report* have anything to say to us about who or how we best encourage kids to read for fun?

Andrea: Yes. Let me just say reading is a good time and it’s those same folks that we’ve been talking about, family, friends, peers, teachers, librarians, they can all send that message and remind kids that “hey, this book is going to take you places and you’re going to really enjoy it.”

Sarah: One of the things that I loved reading in this *Report* is that over 62% of kids said, “I really enjoy reading books over the summer” and we know that’s mostly pleasure reading, right? I know that some schools may have some assigned reading in the summer but for the most part the books kids are reading in the summer are



reading for fun and that more than half of the kids answering the survey said they enjoy reading in the summer and so I think it just circles right back around to helping them find books that they really will enjoy and it's not like we have to cajole a child into reading because like you said, reading's a good time, once we're giving them books that they really enjoy they will naturally read more for fun. And I loved that statistic – 62% kids enjoy reading in the summer.

13:52 Avoiding the summer slide

Andrea: Right. And you know the number one source of information on that phenomenon that we call the summer slide which is when you're not reading and the skill and the desire might taper off, the main source of information on that or to help with that are taking your kids to the library, make it an outing, let kids choose books through their reading club, again, through a fair that they might go to, and of course, the most obvious pack up that knapsack, throw a lot of books in, bring them on vacation.

Sarah: A friend of mine had texted me before she was going on a road trip (this was last summer) and she said, "Man, I'm worried that my kids are going to be stuck on their devices the whole trip." So I knew the ages of her kids and I thought, 'Hmm, why don't you go to the library and see if you can grab Avi's book, *Poppy* on audio and see if that's something that you might want to listen to on the way. So she went and she grabbed it. She comes back and she said, "Oh my gosh, Sarah, that was amazing. We would stop for lunch, you know we'd been in the car all day, we'd stop for lunch and the kids didn't want to get out because they wanted to keep listening because it was at a pivotal moment in the book." Her husband, she told me, who's not usually big

on having audio books or anything like that playing in the car, he was like, "Stop talking, I want to hear this." I love that. It can make a long car ride go really fast if you've got a great audio book going.

Andrea: Sure. I totally get that. And it's not just summer. It can be holiday time, anytime. How many times have we had that audio book going or books in the back and the kids are reading them, and I think, 'Maybe they fell asleep' and I look back and no, they've got the nose down in the pages or they're just listening intently.

Sarah: So there was a lot of focus on diversity in children's books in this study and that's a focus we're really committed to here at the Read-Aloud Revival, too. I'd love it if we could talk a bit about some of our favorite books that feature diverse characters or important points from the *Report*.

15:54 Diversity in children's books

Andrea: Yes, we're really committed to that here at Scholastic also. In fact, it's really core to our almost hundred year history. The founders of our company, again, almost 100 years ago, as part of the mission statement of Scholastic put forth a statement about the importance of respect for the diverse groups in our multi-cultural societies. So, it's interesting, if any of you want to come and visit the Scholastic headquarters, I will immediately show you our carpeting where those words are woven into the carpet so we literally stand on that mission, but anyway, as it relates to diversity in children's books and the *Kids and Family Reading Report* what we found is that parents shared with us that they consider diversity in books, books that include people and experiences different from those than their child.



So, that's one aspect of it but in the same respect kids want to see their experiences validated, they want to see themselves in books while learning about others. It's interesting, it is a complex world today, it's very complicated and we want to help kids become citizens of that world, we want to help them navigate that and books with diverse characters and themes are a really great way to take complex information, make it simple (as we talked about, it's perfect moment to share a book with a child, to look at something through the eyes of a character, through a setting, and again, be able to talk about some of the complex issues. Some of what I'm loving right now (I'll give you some great examples) a book, one of my faves of the whole year, *Happy Dreamer* by Peter Reynolds, no secret because he talks about it frequently and it's the theme of the book *Happy Dreamer* grew up with ADHD and the book is about being unique, being special, being different, and the wonderful dreams and creativity that someone who, perhaps is a reluctant reader or learns differently, can enjoy no matter what. Another one that I'm really loving is *Refugee* by Alan Gratz – Amazing! It's for older readers, middle grade novel, and it is the harrowing journeys of kids in search of refuge. So we meet several different kids in different scenarios and they're woven together; a Jewish boy living in 1930's Nazi Germany coming on a ship to the new world, we see a Cuban girl 1994 hoping to find safety in America, and then we meet a Syrian boy in 2015 on this long trek for Europe. I'm currently, just recently, got on the New York Times Best Seller list so I'm really loving that. And another picture book that again is a great one, *Why Am I Me?* by Paige Britt. That is illustrated by the husband and wife team of Sean Qualls and Selena Alko and it's so simple and it's so beautiful; a boy and a girl, one white, one brown,

they are asking why am I me and not you? And it beautifully, very poetically underscores the beauty in our differences. So those are three that I am just really enjoying at the moment.

Sarah: You just named three books I haven't seen yet. Fantastic! So Andrea, one of the things I noticed about this *Report* is that 89% of kids ages 6-17 said "my favorite books are the ones that I have picked out myself" and I think that's a really good indicator, actually, of cultivating a reading life because as adults ... actually, we talked about this on the episode with Amy Comers about libraries ... it's important if we're trying to grow and nurture readers that they do learn how to choose books for themselves because that's what they're going to be doing as adults is choosing books for themselves. So 89% agreeing that their favorite books are the ones they've picked out themselves – that's pretty interesting.

19:36 The power of choice

Andrea: Yes, yes. The power of choice. You said it, how many times have I brought home the book I think my kids will like and they like something else. And we found that finally, I'm to the point where I just step back and say, "Hey, do you whatever you want to read" because that, again, if you refer to the *Report* is a really good predictor they are more likely to finish that book if they've chosen it themselves and of course, they're more likely to enjoy it because it's what they want and we found in the *Report* that really two of the top choices as a kid chooses his or her book, the kinds of books that kids like, are those with a great story and those that have humor. We all like to laugh.



Sarah: Laughter is one of the pieces that will make that read aloud time even more special than it would be just on its own. Also, when I'm reading a book on my own and it makes me laugh out loud, I mean that instantly gives me a connection to this book or a fondness for this book that I might not have if I hadn't been laughing but I love that's what kids want – they want to be able to laugh. The *Report* also indicates that they've indicated something else they want besides laughter which are strong characters. Do you want to talk about that for a minute?

Andrea: Yes, absolutely right. Kids want protagonists that inspire them. They want kids that are smart, brave, strong; this is what we all want to be. They want a character, a boy or girl who can face a challenge and overcome it and I think that's what we all aspire to and it's the kinds of books, again, that kids are choosing for themselves with those themes. You know, Sarah, you mentioned Christopher Paul Curtis – we published his *Elijah of Buxton* and *The Madman of Piney Woods*. I bring him up because he is an author who has that combination of everything we talked about; characters who are strong, brave, overcoming things, and then the laughter piece. I remember when I was reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* my kids were around and I literally, my mascara was running, I was laughing so hard, I was crying. The kids thought I was weeping. They said, "Mom, mom, what's the matter?" And I said, "Oh my gosh, this is the funniest book I've ever read." And then again, if anyone's read it you know that a few pages in you're laughing and then you're crying because he does all the things that kids desire in a book.

Sarah: He tackles hard themes and kids who have to face, and really beat courage in the face of real hardship, and real struggle, and makes you laugh. It's pretty brilliant when an author can do that, it's pretty special.

Andrea: It really is, it really is. And you know, you raise a good point, which is books really create empathy, and again, what a better way to learn to care about someone else, to feel their feelings and that's what we want our kids to take into the world and it's books that can open that door to doing that.

Sarah: When we read books with our kids and also when we cultivate a reading life at home so that they're reading a lot on their own as well, they're just getting to practice that empathy or to slip into another man's shoes over and over and over and over again. They get so much practice seeing life from someone else's point of view.

Andrea: Yes, absolutely.

Sarah: Well, this has been such a great interview. Andrea, thank you so much for your time. Before we wrap, I'm wondering if there are things that you wanted to share with us that we can take away as we forge forward in cultivating our own children's reading lives.

22:52 Reading Resolutions

Andrea: This is what we lovingly call Our Reading Resolutions and I offer these to parents as it's conveyed in the study and they're really simple and they're resolutions we can all follow. The first being, as we talked about, keep books in the home, make that commitment, have them accessible, let kids see books all around, and as you say, Sarah, every room of the house is worthy of a book. The second one: let kids choose. Let them pick what they want to read



because they're more likely to finish that book and they're more likely to enjoy it if it's one that they've chosen themselves; third being, ask your child's teacher what are good suggestions for your home library. What will my child be reading this year? And again, it circles back to that Access. And the fourth one is reading aloud's so important—start when they're infants—but don't forget you can read aloud past age 8 that quality moment, that time together with a child can go on until they're much older. And, number five, last but certainly not least, be a reading role model. Kids do what they see their parents doing when they see us choosing books, when they see us reading, they're going to copy that behavior. Let's show them the way, as you say, of creating a reading culture – it begins with us as moms and dads and caregivers, also.

Sarah: I'm going to make sure I like to the *Reading Report* in the Show Notes of today's episode and really appreciate all the work you and your team at Scholastic do to make this report available.

Andrea: Thank you, Sarah.

24:22 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: My name is Sadie and I'm 5 years old and my favorite book is *Madeline*. I like it because she gets a sickness call appendix and they save her from it and they take her to the hospital. It was written by Ludwig Bemelmans.

Child2: My name is Kale and I'm from Ohio. I like *The Swiss Family Robinson* because they are out

and doing things instead of being cooped up in town. And they are on an island.

Child3: Hi, my name is Mara. I'm 6 years old. I'm from Ohio. I like *The Gypsy Girl* because she's written by Rumer Godden, and she gets a little pony.

Child4: Hi, I'm John. I like *The Goose Got Loose*, I do.

Child5: Hi, my name is Unya, and I'm 5, and I live in Ohio, and I like *The Children on Troublemaker Street* because they're so silly.

Child6: Hello. I'm Luke. I am 5. I live in Durango, Colorado. I love the book of *Socks* by Beverly Cleary. It's so, so, so, so, so hilarious because Charles Williams is a baby and he's hilarious because he threw the wallpaper out of the crib bumper; he tore of the wallpaper and he was hilarious. *Socks* does not like to be shutted indoors and that happened and he was in Charles Williams' room when he was supposed to be napping inside the living room so it's never OK to be locked inside that so you should always, always not be a cat.

Child7: Hi, my name is **[**inaudible** 26:51]**. I live in Basalt, Colorado. I am 7¼ years old and my favorite book is *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. My favorite thing about *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is Greg, the main character is pretty much always a wimp and the book is hilarious because mostly the bullies are like, tripping things over and all the pictures have labels which really make you laugh.

Child8: [Mom: what's your name?] Forrest. [Mom: how old are you?] 3. [Mom: where do you live?] Colorado. [Mom: what's your favorite book?] *Cat in the Hat*. [Mom: what's a silly thing that Cat in the Hat does?] Buys the fish. [Mom: and what happens to the fish?] They **[**inaudible** 27:43]**.



Child9: [Mom: what's your name?] Amelia. [Mom: how old are you?] 2½. [Mom: 2½, and where do you live?] Deer Park, Washington [Mom: what's your favorite book?] *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*. [Mom: and why do you like that book?] Because I want to read it for my [****inaudible**** 28:04]

Child10: [Mom: what's your name?] Micah. [Mom: how old are you?] 4. [Mom: where do you live?] Deer Park, Washington. [Mom: and what's your favorite book?] *Mouse and the Motorcycle*. [Mom: why is that your favorite?] Because the play motorcycle actually goes.

Sarah: Thank you very much, kids. If your kids want to leave a message for the Read-Aloud Revival, just head to ReadAloudRevival.com and the bottom lower left corner you'll see where to leave a very simple message; you can coach your kids through that, they don't have to be perfectly polished. They can echo you and we can edit it out or you can coach them all the way through the message. We just love hearing from your kids. Hey, if you haven't grabbed the Read-Aloud Revival booklist you're missing out. Go to ReadAloudRevival.com and pop your email into the page there. Hey, I'll be back in a week with another episode of the Read-Aloud Revival. Until then, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.