



RAR 70 – How to Find Time to Read as a Busy Mom

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.

Hello, hello, Sarah Mackenzie here. You've got episode 70 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. On today's show I want to answer a question I hear a whole lot, which is, how do you find time to read? Not read-aloud with your kids, not read to your kids at all, but just how do you find time, as a busy mother, to read. I know so many busy parents who want to cultivate their own reading life, but have a hard time figuring out how to fit reading in, reading of their own in, amidst all their other demands on their time and attention. So, this is an important question because we know that for our kids to really take on the mantle of a reading life, they need to see it modeled at home. In fact, Dr. Daniel Willingham, who was a guest on an earlier episode of the podcast (we'll put a link to the Show Notes the episode where I interviewed him [episode #43]) we talked about his book, *Raising Kids Who Read: What Parents and Teachers Can Do*, it's a great episode (again, I'll link to that one in the Show Notes). In the introduction of that book he says this, "If you want your child to value reading schools can help, but you, the parent, have the greater influence and bear the greater responsibility. You can't just talk about what a good idea reading is. Your child needs to observe that reading matters to you, that you live like a reader."

1:51 Living Like a Reader

So, how do we do that? How do we live like readers when there's so many other pressures

and demands on our time and attention? If you follow the Read-Aloud Revival on Instagram or Facebook you know that I show you what I read that month in a stack. I've been doing this since about March of this year, so five or six months, something like that, I love sharing that stack. I will say that just knowing that I'm going to share that stack with you makes me motivated to keep reading because I want the stack to be bigger. So, there is one tip for you. Share it on social media and see if that doesn't incentivize you read a little bit more. You can follow me, by the way, on Instagram if you just search for Read-Aloud Revival, or Facebook, just Read-Aloud Revival. So, that's Facebook.com/readaloudrevival and Instagram.com/readaloudrevival. And again, I share a stack of what I've read. Inevitably, when I do that, people say, "How on earth do you have this much time to read?" So, we're going to chat about that today. I am busy, just like you are. I've got six kids. I homeschool all my school-aged kids. I work. So, life is busy, right? And it's hard to fit in time to read unless you're intentional about it. Here's one thing I know from personal experience and from talking to a lot of my readerly friends, if you want to cultivate your own reading life, you're going to have to be intentional about it. At least I've had to be intentional about mine in order to read as much as I'd like to. Now, in this episode I'm going to share the ways I have found to fit more reading into my busy life, but not every one of the things that works for me is going to work for you. You have different kids, a different spouse, you live in a different town, you probably have a different job; we all have different lifestyles. But, what I'm hoping is that by sharing the best ways that I have been able to fit more reading into my life that will, even if it doesn't translate easily over into your unique circumstances, it will shed a little bit of light and



help you see, how maybe, you could tweak it a little bit or just give you an idea for what you could do in your life to make more reading time happen. OK? So, this is not a guilt-inducing episode. I'm hoping this will shed a little bit of light, so you can go, 'Wait a second, that doesn't work exactly for me, but this other thing might. Or that one strategy she uses, I could try that and see if that helps me.' And my hope is that after listening to this episode you will be excited about fitting more reading into your own personal life.

4:19 Making Reading a Priority

The first thing that I want to say is, of course, if you want to fit more reading into your life you've got to make it a priority. So, this is what I have found in my own life. If I do not make reading every single day a part of what I expect from every single day it won't happen. I can go easily for days or weeks without reading if I'm not putting it up on my high priority list as important as taking a shower and brushing my teeth, and reading. It's something I do every single day. In order to make reading a priority I have to consider trade-offs. You're not just going to realize that now you have 24 hours and 30 minutes a day so you could dedicate those 30 minutes to reading. You're probably going to have to look into your life and decide what do you have going on there that you could trade-off for reading. So, when I do this in my life I realize that I would rather, personally, I would rather read a book than watch TV. Other things I'm willing to trade-off are some housework. I am willing to have a house that's not quite as tidy, not quite as organized, definitely, probably not quite as tidy as most people's houses in order to read. In fact, I have been reading, *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr, which is a longer book (I don't

remember when this was, not terribly long ago) but my friend, Angela, said, "Oh, Sarah, I just love how you make time to read for yourself even with all the other demands on your time and attention." And I looked around my house, as she sent me that text, and, uh, was like, "Well, there's a sacrifice there," because my children had been getting their clothes from the pile in the living room, the clean laundry pile that I had not folded, so that I could finish this book. But it's OK with me to trade-off some housework, to trade off having quite as elaborate cooked meals, things like that, because reading is important to me. You're going to have to look in your life and say, "What am I doing with my day that is less important to me than cultivating my reading life? What am I willing to trade-off?" Of course, it doesn't mean you're going to live like in a pit, but it just means, am I willing to sweep the house a little less often, do the laundry a little less often, cook a little less elaborately, maybe get up 20 minutes earlier, or trade-off watching a TV program, in order for me to read every day? And that's just something you just have to make a decision for yourself on what you're willing to make a trade-off with. But, just realize, you're not going to find 20 or 30 uninhibited minutes in your day, you're going to have to trade them for something. So, just make that trade intentionally. One of the things that I do that helps me is I keep multiple books going at once. Most of the people I know who read a lot do this as well. Now, I don't like to read multiple fiction books at once, I have a hard time keeping stories straight when I do that, so I read, generally, I am always reading one non-fiction and one fiction book. Sometimes I'll also be reading something else, maybe a spiritual memoir or something like that, but for the most part, I read non-fiction and fiction. I will keep those books really handy, and my friend, Anne



Bogel, you'll know her as Modern Mrs. Darcy and the host of The What Should I Read Next podcast, she said one time, very just casually, she said you should never leave the house without a book and a snack. While I'm very good friends with Anne, she probably does not know that her voice is in the back of my head constantly when I leave the house thinking, 'Ann told me never to leave the house without a book and a snack.' I will bring a book even if I don't think I'm going to have time to read it. So, I bring it because I'm looking for a surprise 10 minutes. Here's the deal. These 10 minute pockets of time crop up more often than we think they do and I want to be ready with my book so that I can read for a couple of pages if I have a surprise 10 minutes. That could, of course, be in the waiting room at the dentist office, or while I'm waiting at the soccer field for my son to finish his game, or while the kids are playing on the trampoline in the backyard, or the pot of noodles – waiting for those to boil, or whatever. A surprise 10 minutes comes up very often. Now, here's something I've realized about myself in the last year. I was picking up my phone and doing some mindless scrolling whenever I had a few minutes. If I'm in line at the bank or at the grocery store I would oftentimes pick out my phone and just start cruising Facebook or Instagram, or checking my email, and that adds up. I realized, gosh, I don't even know how many times I'm doing this every day, but I made a commitment earlier this year to pick up a book instead of my phone every time I felt the temptation to mindlessly scroll and I cannot believe how much time I have to read, how much more I'm reading, just from making that simple commitment. I say simple, but it's not as simple, because we're so ingrained in our habits, so I will tell you something I haven't really told hardly anybody because it's a little

embarrassing to me, but, I'm going to tell you anyway, today on the podcast, which is that we all think we have self-discipline than we do, so I was telling myself when I have the temptation to pick up my phone and scroll mindlessly, I'm going to pick up my book instead, but what would happen is I would pick up my phone and be inside Instagram or Facebook before I even realized what I was doing. So, I deleted the most distracting apps, which for me, were email and Facebook off of my phone completely. And, of course, I'm not swearing off email or Facebook, I check them every day, so I'm not opposed to those, but I make myself go to the desktop computer to access either Facebook or my email. And I'll tell you, it's just appalling to me how many times when I first deleted those apps, how often I picked up my phone, I'd be staring at it, realizing I was looking for the email or the Facebook app without even realizing it, and I'd go, 'Oh gosh, Sarah, put that down and pick up your book.' So, sometimes we have to be a little bit like 'tough love' with our self and realize that we have to set ourselves up for success. I'm not telling you, you have to delete any distracting apps from your phone, I'm just telling you what I did, and I'll tell you what, it carved out a whole bunch more reading time. Now, that I'm committed to using my little surprise 10 minute pockets of time for reading instead of scrolling I get in a lot more reading.

10:34 Reading the Best Books

Another way that I read quite as many books as I do is, if you look at those stacks, the pictures of stacks that I show you on Facebook and Instagram at the end of each month, you'll notice that a whole lot of that is middle grade fiction. So, here's the secret about middle grade fiction:



they're some of the best books ever written. Truly. If you ask me, "Hey, Sarah, tell me the 10 most profound books you've ever read," I bet the majority of those would fit in the middle grade fiction category. The thing about middle grade fiction is that they're very satisfying. If you are a busy parent and you don't have a ton of time to read, you'll still be able to finish a lot of books if you read middle grade books. The difference is just that they're just faster to read because they have fewer words, but they're no less profound. If you're reading the best middle grade fiction you know absolutely that really good middle grade fiction books can be just as nourishing as any kind of adult fiction. So, if you're thinking, 'Gosh, I just want to get in the habit or I'd like the satisfaction of being able to finish more books than I can,' ... people will ask me all the time, they'll say, "How are you such a fast reader?" Here's the deal: I am not a fast reader. I have taken those reading speed tests online to see how fast I am and I am very average. Absolutely not fast at all. But, I'm just reading a lot of middle grade fiction which is very satisfying and also very enriching to my life. An added benefit is a parent who really wants to talk about books with my kids is that a lot of times I can read a book and I'll think, 'Oh my gosh, Drew would love this book,' or 'Allison would love this book' or my kids will see it and go, "Hey, what's that about?" And then their interest is peaked because they might see me laughing or crying as I'm reading a middle grade book, so it gives us another currency. I think reading middle grade books is an awesome use of your reading time as a parent. Another great way to fit in more reading into your life is to do it via audio books. If you find yourself, especially in the car a lot, which happens in a certain season of parenthood, right? – You're running kids to soccer, or ballet, or to choir

practice, or whatever their activities are, you're in the car a lot and so you can use audio books in the car. I listen to audio books while I fold laundry and do housework. Man, it makes laundry and housework so much more satisfying, doesn't it, to listen to a book? I'll tell you what, this last summer I did a whole bunch of organizing projects in my house, some closets and places I had been neglecting for awhile, and I realized how much fun it was, I would organize an entire closet while I was listening to my audio book and then not really want to stop listening so I'd look for another organizing project or another task that needed to be done around the house. So, that's harder to do if you have really young kids who need your attention because you don't want to always have your ear buds in and that's a circle I've had in the past, I don't want to send my kids the message that I'm ignoring them in favor of an audio book, but if you have time or space to do something where you could listen to audio that's a great way to fit in more reading. If you're walking the dog or you're exercising or you're carpooling kids around, or doing tasks where you could totally listen to an audio or a podcast, sometimes just instead of listening to a podcast flip on an audio book instead. If you're listening in the car with your kids in the car you're probably going to want to shoot for something that you're 100% certain is going to be appropriate for their ears as well – that's just another case for reading middle grade fiction, as an adult.

14:01 Taking a Reading Time

I do take a reading time during the middle of the day and depending on how old your kids are and however your life is set up, you're going to have to tweak this a little bit, but I'll tell you how I do it at my house. For 20-30 minutes right smack dab



in the middle of the day it's quiet reading time. My big kids all get their books, the books that they want to read for fun, not books that I've assigned or that they have to read for school, and they go and they find a quiet spot and they read. I have twin 4 year olds and a 5 year old at the time I'm recording this episode, they also go to their beds and I put a stack of picture books on their beds and they read them. The twins alternate between reading them and terrorizing and destroying their bedroom (just keeping it real here!), but I'm OK with that because, like I said, trade-off's – I'd rather have 20-30 minutes reading in the middle of the day and put up with a little bit of a messy bedroom from the twins, so that's probably where I get the bulk of my reading in is during that dedicated space and time. So, yes, I like to fit in my reading in those 10 minute spurts, those 10 minute surprise moments I was telling you about before, but I think if you really want to dedicate time to reading and cultivate your reading life you probably need to set aside a time of day where you can expect to have 20 or 30 minutes all at once. If your kids are not used to having a quiet reading time like that you're going to have to ease into it because your kids are going to start interrupting you a bunch and it's going to make you crazy. So, when I first started doing this with my younger kids it would be like five minutes, that was it, we're all going to sit here and read for five minutes. You have to stay on your bed with your books or on the blanket on the living room floor with your books, however, it works for you, and read. And you cannot interrupt mommy until the five minutes is over. Then we would slowly ease up to 10 minutes and 15 minutes, and by the end of a month we were at 30. If you have older kids who love that reading time that will become their favorite time of day. If you have kids who struggle

with it and don't love reading on their own try audio books. For years, during quiet reading time, my son would listen to audio books and play with his legos – that totally counts. And if you want to hear more about how audio books count as real reading, you want to go to episode #66 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast (we'll put a link to that episode in the Show Notes). As one final little bit of encouragement, I want to remind you, or let you know (maybe you don't know this) that the more you read, the more you read. Reading begets reading. It gets easier. If you have gotten out of the habit in your adult life as a reader you're not alone. It happens to all of us at one point or another. And you get better at it when you read more often. So, I hear a lot of people say, "I can't do that 10 minute chunk." And maybe you can't, but I would suggest that it's possible that once you establish a daily reading habit and you get in the groove with reading, and your brain rewires itself from needing those short, little attention grabbing moments of scrolling online, and instead, can sustain attention for a longer period of time through a book, I would bet that the more you get into the reading habit the more you'll be able to read even in little chunks of time, or the more you'll be able to tolerate interruptions from your kids while you're reading. Something happens in our brain when we get out of the habit of reading that makes it hard for us to sustain the kind of focus you need to focus on a book and so it makes it harder then, to grab reading time in the fringe moments so you'll get way more reading in once you're in the habit of reading daily. So, if you get discouraged because you start trying to read more and you think this is harder than I remember, I don't know what happened to my brain, there's been books written on that! On what is happening to our brain in this internet, digital age, but really the best thing you



can do for yourself is commit to reading more and remember that reading begets reading so the more you read, the easier it will get, the more you will want to read, and it's a happy little cycle of sustaining your reading life. There's not some secret code or secret pill or secret silver bullet for reading more. I think it really boils down to making it a priority, deciding that cultivating your reading life is important to you, and important for your kids to be able to see you reading, so if you're just reading in bed before you go to bed, and your kids are never seeing you with your nose buried in a book or if you just feel like, 'Gosh, I don't hardly ever read at all, I just don't have time' think through what you're doing with your life that's less important to you than cultivating a reading life and make a trade-off, an intentional trade-off. Hey, if you have strategies for fitting more reading into your life that I haven't mentioned here I'd love to hear them in the comments of this episode's Show Notes. Go to ReadAloudRevival.com and look for episode 70 and then tell me there in the comments how you fit more reading into your life. I hope, hope, hope, hope, that in the coming months you're able to take some time and space to cultivate your own reading life, and to model a real life of a reader for your children.

18:48 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 Issy and I'm 5 years old. I'm from Tennessee and I want to tell you my favorite book is *Hey Diddle Diddle* by Eve Bunting. And, I would **[**inaudible**]** because it's telling the thing and it's couple. Thank you.

Child2: Hi, my name is Tamzie, I'm 5, and I'm from Memphis and I'm going to tell you my favorite book. It's *Strega Nona* and I like the part where the boy makes the pasta and he makes a lot and he has to eat it. It looks like there's a baby in his belly.

Child3: My name is Issy and I'm from Memphis, Tennessee. I'm 5 years old and I wanted to tell you my favorite book. It's called *Hey Diddle Diddle*. And my favorite part of it is I can see all the animals and I'll tell you what they are: elephant, dog, a lion, a kid, a horse, a seal, a camel, a dolphin, and a rhinoceros, and a cow, and a cat.

Child4: Hi, my name is Everett and I am 8 years old. I live in Virginia. My favorite book at the moment is *The Mysterious Howling* by Maryrose Wood. I like it because Penelope homeschools cute and wild children. Bye.

Child5: Hi, my name is Alex. I am 6 years old. I live in Virginia. My favorite book is *Marie-Grace and the Orphans*. I like it because when Marie-Grace finds out the baby's on her doorstep. Bye.

Child6: My name is Jude and I'm 5 years old and I live in Kentucky, and my favorite book is *Nobody Likes a Goblin*. [Mom: what is your favorite thing in *Nobody Likes a Goblin*?] When they all fight the people. [Mom: when the goblins fight all the people?] Yeah.

Child7: My name is Paul and I'm 6 years old and I live in Maine and my favorite book is *James and the Giant Peach* because the peach keeps growing and it breaks off and rolls off the hill and then they say, "There's **[**inaudible**]** and then it gets smooshed and then they say, "There's a sponge" and then she gets smooshed.



Child8: Hi, my name is Andrew, and I'm 7 years old, and I live in Maine, and I have five brothers and sisters, and my favorite book is *Indian in the Cupboard* because the kid, he finds out that the Indians can turn any plastic thing real and move.

Child9: Hello, my name is John. I'm 9 years old. I live in Maine, and my favorite book is *Twenty One Balloons* and I like it when they find him in the shipwreck and trying to put his story in the newspaper but he doesn't explain why so in the newspaper they say Professor William Waterman, chairman, found 21 balloons off the coast of the Atlantic, and the next part is and he refuses to explain why.

Child10: Hi, my name is Elaine, and I live in Eastbrook, Maine, and I'm almost 11. My favorite book is *The Penderwicks* because they're all sisters and because Skye is so fun because all she wants is to have a clean room but she shares a room with her sister, Jane, who's very messy and has lots and lots of books and papers all over. Bye.

Sarah: Kids, those are awesome recommendations. I just put Eve Bunting's *Hey Diddle Diddle* on hold at my library because that sounds like something my own kids would really enjoy so, thank you for those book suggestions. I know I'm not the only one who uses them to choose books for my kids. Listen up, we are gearing up to open enrollment at Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership. This is where we equip parents, inspire kids, and connect like-minded families. It's the place you want to be if you desire to make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids. We only open enrollment twice a year for a week each time and the fall enrollment is almost here. If you don't want to miss it, make sure you pop your email on the page at RARmembership.com to request an

invitation when we open. Again, that's RARmembership.com, you want to pop your email in there to request an invitation when we open enrollment so you don't miss out. I'll be back in a week with another episode for you. In the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.