



RAR 84 – Books for Kids Who Don't Love Reading (Yet)

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 84 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. Really glad you're here with me today. So, here's the deal. Today, we're going to be talking about reluctant readers. So, these are kids who are perfectly capable of reading on their own they just aren't. They just don't read for pleasure. They haven't become voracious readers. They haven't become bookworms. You don't have to tell them to put their book down and do something else for a change. They're not always trying to sneak in more reading. These are reluctant readers. So, kids who don't love reading yet. These are kids who can read they just don't want to. And so, what I'm going to do today is give you a couple of helpful things to remember and some strategies that I think will work well, and also recommend seven books that I think could possibly turn your reluctant reader into a voracious reader. OK, so the number one thing I think we've got to remember here is that the goal is to help our kids fall in love with stories. OK, sometimes we get a little bit hooked on the idea of we want our kids to actually fall in love with the act of reading. But, I really think the love for the act of reading always comes after a love of stories. The only reason any of us love reading is because we love the stories we're reading when we do that, because we want to know what those words on the page say because we're hungry for more. If you are an adult who loves reading I think you'd agree that you love the stories more than

the actual decoding of the letters. So, remember that the first goal is a love of story. Now, if that is truly the first goal we can use a few different strategies to help our kids fall in love with stories.

2:08 Different Kinds of Stories

There are a lot of different stories in the world, not just the written ones. There are stories that you watch every time you turn on the TV, or watch a movie as a family. There are, as far as literary stories, there's audio books which are so powerful and such a wonderful way to fall in love with stories. There are graphic novels that use a lot more images than words. So, if our goal is to help our kids fall in love with reading the first thing we want to do is help them fall in love with stories. And, sometimes we have to take a sideways way in to do that, especially if we have an older child who just does not love reading yet. I want to encourage you not to be afraid of using audio books when you help your kids fall in love with stories. What brain science has shown us is that when kids read stories or hear stories the same thing is happening in their brain. The only difference really comes down to the actual decoding of letters in words. So, if your goal is to help your child become a better decoder and learn how to read, the skill of learning actually how to read, then of course, there's a benefit to having them read off the page. But, if your child can do that and what you want them to do is fall in love with stories there is no harm at all in having them do that through audio books. In fact, I would bet that you'll have a better success rate if you release yourself from the expectation that reading from a page is somehow better or preferred to hearing books out loud because that's just simply not true. Not when it comes to what's happening inside our kids' brains and



inside their hearts when they're reading. So, don't be afraid to use audio books. I also want to encourage you not to be afraid of graphic novels or comic books (as we probably are more familiar with calling them). So many kids fall in love with reading through *Calvin and Hobbs*, *Garfield*, and now there are some really amazing graphic novels being put out that are pretty well done. Now, I will tell you this, I am not nearly as well-read in the graphic novel area as I would like to be. In a future episode we will definitely do a recommended graphic novels for your kids but I need to read a little more widely and a little more thoroughly in the graphic novel department before I can do that episode for you. I just don't want you to be nervous about graphic novels. They're not something to be afraid of. In episode 82 of the Read-Aloud Revival, Dr. Michael Gurian came to the Read-Aloud Revival to talk to us about how, especially with boys brains but certainly with some girls brains as well, the brain actually prefers images to words and that for many, many kids easing them into a love of stories through graphic novels can be really, really helpful. You can hear that whole episode at ReadAloudRevival.com/82, or just go to the Show Notes for this episode and we'll link to it there.

4:50 Finding the Right Jelly Bean (Books)

We're going to link, in the Show Notes, which is, by the way, at ReadAloudRevival.com/84 since this is episode 84, we're going to link to a post I wrote called, *Series Books that Will Turn Your Struggling Reader into a Voracious Reader*. I wrote this post because, the truth is, that not all of our kids become voracious readers on their own. If you have a child who can read but just

doesn't want to the problem is usually that we haven't turned them onto the right books yet. Laura Martin, she's the author of *The Edge of Extinction* books (which I'll talk about in just a moment), she came onto the podcast once and told me about this jelly bean principle, which is basically that you wouldn't give your child a licorice flavored jelly baby and have them eat it and if they said, "I don't like this, I just don't like jelly beans," that's not necessarily true, right? They just don't like licorice flavored jelly beans, but they may very well like one of the other flavors. Books are the same way. So, if you have a child who doesn't love reading yet then I want to give you hope. That doesn't mean you have a child who won't love reading, that means we haven't found the right flavored jelly bean, we haven't found the right book for them, and so we're going to try and do that today, I'm going to give you a few hints. In the post I mentioned about series books I suggested that you use a series, like *Encyclopedia Brown* or *Hank the Cow Dog* or *Nate the Great*, or *The Boxcar Children*, and what you do is you take the first book in the series and you read it aloud to your child. And, you just read the first book in several different series aloud to your child, even a child who's very capable of reading on their own, and wait until one of them really strikes your child's fancy. So, for my son, it was *Encyclopedia Brown*. I read the first book in several series and when I read the first book in the *Encyclopedia Brown* series he was riveted. He wanted more. I happened to have the second *Encyclopedia Brown* book on hand but darn it all, I just didn't have time to read it aloud to him. So, he knew if he wanted to read the next *Encyclopedia Brown* book he was going to have to read it on his own. Another option is to have the audio book. So, you can say, "You know what? You can listen to the next one." Series are



really fantastic for this because our kids fall in love with characters and if we're hoping to help our kids fall in love with stories the first thing we need to have them do is fall in love with a character and want to know what happens to them. A series can really do that. So, I actually mention several series that I think can help struggling readers become really voracious readers, and again, we'll link to that in the Show Notes.

7:18 Books to Help Kids Fall in Love with Reading

But today what I'm hoping to do, is just to give you an idea of seven different books that I think you could use to help your kids who are capable of reading fall in love with reading because they just want to know what happens next, because they can't put it down. The strategy of reading aloud the first book, or even the first chapter or two, not even the whole book but just the first chapter or two, is a really solid strategy. It helps your child feel on your side instead of at odds with you. It helps them, kind of, get into the story without much effort. And then, a lot of times the impetus to keep reading comes from within themselves and not from you, which is really fantastic. So, before we continue, I want to remind you—don't be afraid of audio books, don't be afraid of graphic novels, and don't be afraid of reading aloud to a child who's perfectly capable of reading aloud on their own. Again, any of the books I mention here you could read the whole thing to your child or you could read just a chapter or two your child, you could get the book on audio, and see if that doesn't light a fire in your child. Basically, what I want to help you do with this episode is dig around for another flavored jelly bean. So, see if any of these may

be, possibly could be a spark for your child's reading life.

8:40 The Edge of Extinction Series

The first books I want to mention are by Laura Martin, who taught me the jelly bean principle itself. She is the author of *The Edge of Extinction* books. The first one is called *The Ark Plan*, the second one is called *Code Name: Flood*. Basically, a very quick premise of the book is that the dinosaurs are back. Humans have figured how to bring the dinosaurs back and the dinosaurs have taken over and driven all of the humans underground, or at least, that's what we think at the beginning of the first book. So, we're going to follow the main character as she discovers the truth of her world, both underground in her community, and above ground in the world of the dinosaurs. I'll tell you what—my 13 year old daughter read this book (well, she was 13 when she read it), she loved it. Told me to read it, and I went, "Dinosaurs? Nah, I can pass." Then my then-11 year old son read it, and said, "Mom, you have to read this." And I went, "Eh, I'll pass." But then they were so persistent that I had to read it and I could not put it down. I loved the book. And I am not a sci-fi reader. I'm not usually a person to pick up a book about dinosaurs and I'm telling you it was one of my absolute favorite books I read that entire year. The second book called, *Code Name: Flood* is every bit as good as the first one. And, this is easily the book that I recommend most often for kids who are reluctant to read. Not because they can't but because they don't want to. I, sort of, what to double-dog dare any kid between the ages of 8 and 14 who said they don't love reading, I'd like to hand them one of these books



or read the first chapter or two, and then hand it to them, and say, “Read this and prove to me you don’t love reading.” I know Laura said that when she wrote the books because that was, sort of, her intent, and the lady knew what she was doing, because the books are so, so well done. We’ll put a link to them in the Show Notes. And actually, this is a good time for me to mention that any links I’m mentioning today and all the books I’m mentioning today will be collected for you in the Show Notes at ReadAloudRevival.com/84.

10:40 Andrew Clements’s Book

Another suggestion I have for reluctant readers is any books by Andrew Clements. So, he has written more books than I can count. I’m pretty sure, more books—he’s lost count. We had him on the Read-Aloud Revival in our premium membership where he came on live video and met the kids in our online community, answered their questions. He was so inspiring, and actually, if you would like your kids to meet some of today’s best authors and illustrators, we do that live online every month in premium membership. It’s really pretty fantastic and you can find out more about that at RARMembership.com. So, Andrew Clements came, he talked to us about *Frindle*, which is my own personal favorite of Andrew Clements’ books. Really funny. What I like about Andrew’s books is they’re very approachable because they’re short, they’re easy to read, they’re light-hearted but a lot of times they have, sort of, bigger themes or issues kind of in them, but they read in such a delightful way you just fall in love with the characters. And, they’re fast to read. And there’s tons of them. My kids have liked *Above Average*, *The Map Trap*, *Lost and Found*. He has a whole series called

Keeper of the School that they’ve enjoyed. Basically, everything my kids have read by Andrew Clements has been a win around here, and I think they’re a really great way to turn a reader, or a child I should say, who isn’t much of a reader into a kid who, kind of, can’t wait to pick up his book again. We’re going to link to some of our favorites in the Show Notes, and I would encourage you to look at your library because you’ll be able to find his books there. He’s sold over 6,500,000 books, so I’m telling you, when I say kids love his books they really do. They really do love his books. Anything by Andrew Clements is a win. My son really loved *The Red Wall* series. Now, here’s a good example of books that I didn’t read-aloud and that my son didn’t read on his own, he listened to the audio books. There are a ton of books in *The Red Wall* series. You may have listened to them when you were a kid, even. This is the series by Brian Jacques. Adventure, fantasy, lots of sword fighting, and life and death situations, kids just love these books. And, if they love the first one they’re good to go because there’s a whole slew of others that they can read to continue on *The Red Wall* adventures. And so, *Red Wall* is a great one to either do on audio or as a read-aloud or to hand to your child or to read the first chapter of, and then give them the rest of the book to read on their own. *Red Wall* could be a really good one, also, for kids who haven’t yet fallen in love with reading.

13:10 The Chronicles of Narnia

The Chronicles of Narnia is sort of an obvious choice, right? Except that sometimes we need an obvious choice. We need someone to say, “Hey, if your kid doesn’t love reading, have they read *The Lion*, *The Witch*, and *The Wardrobe*? And I’ve been surprised as I’ve made this



recommendation at how many kids whose parents say they don't love reading haven't. I'm telling you *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* not everybody's going to love it but a whole lot of kids are. And so, if you have a child, a teenager, an 8 year old, a 7 year old to a 16 year old, who hasn't fallen in love with reading try reading it aloud. I think *The Chronicles of Narnia* are some of the best read-alouds. They're really pleasant to read-aloud. They've got a good mix of dialogue, not too long of descriptive passages, a plot that moves along at a really good pace, and of course, they're just some of the books ever written, I think, for kids. So, C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, you want to read *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* first. *The Magician's Nephew* is often labeled as the first book in the series but you really want to read #2, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* first, continue with the rest of the series and then circle back and read *The Magician's Nephew* at the end, which is how C. S. Lewis and God intended it, I'm quite sure, because *The Magician's Nephew* is a prequel. So, start with *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. This is one I would say if you can carve out a little time to read-aloud this is going to be the one to do it because it's going to be a really enjoyable experience for you as much as your kids.

14:38 The Fablehaven Series

In line with fantasy, since we've been talking fantasy books with *Red Wall* and *Narnia*, *Fablehaven* by Brandon Mull is a series I recommend a lot of times to kids who haven't fallen in love with reading yet. Or, to kids who have read *The Harry Potter* series and don't know what to read next. I don't know if you've ever met a kid who's been in *The Harry Potter* funk, it's a

real thing you guys. It's when kids read *Harry Potter* and they go, "I can't read anything else, nothing will possibly compare." Usually, I find myself recommending *Fablehaven* to kids in such a funk state because it's not the same but I think it appeals to a similar audience. So, my kids love the *Fablehaven* series by Brandon Mull, and actually, Brandon Mull is another author who's coming to Read-Aloud Revival premium membership live online. He'll be on screen in our membership answering kids questions in real time. It's going to be pretty fantastic. And, you can find out more about that at RARMembership.com.

If you have girls who are not voracious readers yet, I would like to encourage you to check out *The Mother-Daughter Book Club* by Heather Vogle Frederick. These are contemporary stories. Basically, it's moms and daughters who are all in a book club where they're reading classics together but the books themselves are set in contemporary times, there is lots of contemporary things happening while they're reading *Anne of Green Gables* or *Pride and Prejudice* together. So, what happens when you read these stories (and this happened to my daughter) is she read *Pies and Prejudice*, for example, and then she had to get her hands on *Pride and Prejudice* and read that as well. So, a lot of times that happens with books like these where you, kind of, need a light-hearted easy to read, contemporary book to spark in your child that desire to read something older.

16:25 The Hunger Games (Teens)

Alright, so if you have teens who are not voracious readers, in fact, just aren't likely to pick up a book and read in their spare time ever, then I would suggest a couple of things. I would



suggest that you read a book with them. This one, I hope, doesn't ruffle too many feathers. But here's what I would suggest if your child has not seen *The Hunger Games* movies I would recommend reading *The Hunger Games* books. Now, I say if they haven't seen the movies because (and you could read the books even if they have seen the movies) something happens when a child sees the movie first, I think, in that, they know what happens. They know how it ends. So, when you're reading a book part of the thing that keeps you turning the pages is you want to know how it ends and if you've already solved that by watching a two-hour movie then it, kind of, takes away some of the urgency that you have when you're reading a book like *The Hunger Games* where you just want to know how it ends and what's going to happen. If your kids haven't seen the movies I think *The Hunger Games* are really well written, they're page turning, and they have lots and lots of opportunities for fantastic conversations with your kids. Conversations about group think, about doing what's right when nobody's looking, conversations about what it means to be courageous, or noble, what abuse of power looks like. I mean, there are so many good conversations just waiting to be had about these books and your teenager is very likely to want to read them. I would suggest that you either read them aloud or you can get them on audio book or that you hand the first book to your teen and you read the first book as well and you set a coffee date in two weeks (or a week because it probably won't take them that long to read it because it's a page-turner) and say, "We're going to go to Starbucks and we're both going to ... We're going to go to a coffee shop and we're both going to get something nice to drink and we're going to just chat about our favorite parts of the book or the things that we don't want to forget or

who was the most courageous and who was the most cowardly in these books" because they make really good discussion starters. Now, I have lots more recommendations for teens in the brand new book I wrote called, *The Read-Aloud Family: Making meaningful and lasting connections with your kids*. There is, in fact, a whole chapter on reading aloud with your teens and lots of book recommendations for your teens there as well. So, if you want more recommendations for what to read with your teens make sure you get your hands on *The Read-Aloud Family*. And also, like I was just talking about good conversations you could have with your child about *The Hunger Games* there are some really good open-ended questions, 10 of them in fact, right from *The Read-Aloud Family* that you can use with any book. You can actually use those with your 2 and 3 year old and also with your 20 year old if you want. They're questions rather that will open up really good conversations with your kids about books and so, especially with your teens who haven't fallen in love with reading, if you get them a page turner like *The Hunger Games* and then you use those, any of one of those 10 questions from *The Read-Aloud Family*, you're going to have some really good conversations, and I would be surprised if a good page turner plus a little bit of open-ended conversation with you at a coffee shop doesn't do the trick.

19:25 Tell Us!

We're constantly on the lookout for more books that are page turners and that kids don't want to put down and that turn kids into readers. So, if your own child became a reader because of a certain book or they were reluctant, hesitant readers before, and then they read a book and it,



kind of, turned them into readers we want to know about it. Tell us about in the Show Notes for this episode, ReadAloudRevival.com/84.

Remember that all the books I've mentioned on today's show, as well as all the links to the tips I've mentioned, are going to be in the Show Notes as well. And, *The Read-Aloud Family* book will be released March 27, but you can pre-order it now to get some really awesome gifts that only people who order it before March 27 will get, so you can do that at TheReadAloudFamily.com.

20:17 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: can you tell me what your name is?] Landon. [Mom: Landon, can you tell me what your favorite book is?] *Curious George*. [Mom: and why do you love *Curious George* so much?] Because he gets into everything.

Child2: My name is Caroline and I am 8 years old and I live in California. My favorite book is *The Green Ember* because it is full of adventure.

Child3: Hi, my name is Elias and I am 8 years old and I live in California. My favorite book is *Winnie the Pooh* and I like the part where Tigger tries to eat thistles but he eats a bee.

Child4: Hello, my name is Trinity. I'm 10 years old and I live in California. One of my favorite books are *Edge of Extinction*. My favorite part is when Kennedy is getting eaten by Saltopus dinosaurs.

Child5: My name is Hannah. I am 6 years old. I live in Washington. My favorite book is *Fancy Nancy* and I like it because it's fancy.

Child6: My name is Henry. I'm 2 years old and I live in Washington. [Mom: what's your favorite book?] **[**inaudible**]** [Mom: that's from *Good Night Moon*. Why do you like *Good Night Moon*.] A bowl full of mush. [Mom: why do you like bowl of mush?] Because. [Mom: because.]

Child7: Hello, my name is Lilly. I am 10 years old and I live in Anchorage, Alaska. The book I enjoy most is *Tuesdays at the Castle*. It's about a girl name Selah and her sister, Delilah, and her brother, Rolf. And Rolf is about to become King and there is lots of obstacles and the castle is alive and it helps them through all their problems. Thank you.

Child8: Hi, my name's Ari. I'm 5 years old. I live in Texas. My favorite book is *Saint George and the Dragon*. I love when he fights the dragon.

Child9: Hi, my name is **[**inaudible**]**. I'm 7 years old and I live in Texas. My favorite book is *The Penderwicks*. The reason I love it so much is because Skye is so much of a tomboy.

Child10: Hi, my name is Asher. I am 9 years old. I live in Texas and my favorite books are *Lord of the Rings* and *Watership Down*. The reason they are my favorite is because of the good vocabulary, the suspense, the comedy, and the action and adventure.

Child11: [Mom: what's your name?] Evie. [Mom: Evie. How old are you?] 2. [Mom: what's your favorite book?] *Winnie the Pooh*. [Mom: *Winnie the Pooh*. Who do you like the best in *Winnie the Pooh*?] Rabbit. [Mom: Rabbit.]

Sarah: Thank you so much, kids. Hey, if your kids would like to leave a message to be aired on the Read-Aloud Revival podcast just go to ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page, you'll see how easy it is to leave a



message. We actually air every single message that gets sent in the order it's received. You can coach your kids right through those, so if you need to say something and have your child repeat after it, or if they read off a piece of paper, or you just want to ask your kids the questions and have them answer you on air, all of that works. We can clean it up and make it ready for the Show. We just love to hear from your kids and what they're most enjoying in the books they're reading and you're reading aloud with them. That's ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page to do that. Also, don't forget that you can get our free Read-Aloud Revival book list. All you need to do to get it is text the word BOOKS to the number 345345 or you can just go to RARBooklist.com to get it. Alright, I'll be back in a week with another episode for you. In the meantime, go make some meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.