RAR 92 – Books Boys Love & Meet the Author, Matthew Paul Turner

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 92 of the Read-Aloud Revival, and you have been asking for book recommendations for boys. In fact, at the end of last year we did a quick survey and within, I don’t know, 24 hours or so, over 1,200 of you told us that the book list you want more than any other is one for your boys. So, if you’re looking for book recommendations for the young men in your life, you are in the right place. We’ve collected a list that, right now at the time I’m recording this, has over 50 book recommendations for boys. We’re going to continue adding to it as we read and find new books to recommend for boys. So, you’ll be able to find this book list at ReadAloudRevival.com/boys and that way, when you’re at the library or the bookshop, or perusing something online, looking for something for your son or your nephew or any other young man who needs a good book to get lost in, you’ll know where to turn. It’ll be easy to remember. It’s just ReadAloudRevival.com/boys. And, like I said, we’re going to keep this list updated.

1:40 Not just for boys, but …

Now, first, let’s get really clear about something. These are not just books for boys. You know there’s not really any such thing, right? Girls will love these books, too. But, boy readers can get a little tricky around the time they turn 7 or 8, and if your son is picky about his books it can be really difficult to get him to read something that he can fall in love with. What we definitely don’t want is for our boys to grow up and think that reading is for girls or is a girlie activity, and sometimes we need a sideways way in, or a hook – something that just captures their imagination. So, this book list is a list of a bunch of books that we think will hook your boys. I’m focusing, primarily, on boys about 7-8 and up, all the way through the teens. So, we pretty much skipped picture books entirely for this list, just because in our experience boys don’t tend to be particularly picky when they’re in those younger ages when picture books make up the biggest part of their reading life. And, of course, I also have to say here, that picture books are not just for young kids, but this book list in particular is not going to name a lot of picture books – we’re going to focus on novels and longer narrative books that will really appeal to your boys of 7 and 8, all the way through 10, and then up to 12, and those teens as well. So, the books on this list are focused on fast moving plots and characters who have to search inside themselves for a unique strength to face whatever obstacles they’re facing. We looked for funny books, we looked for adventurous books, and books full of daring do; all of those appeal to boys. If you go to ReadAloudRevival.com/boys you’re going to find this list. And, you want to do that because if I talked about all 50 books on today’s show we would be here all day. This episode would last a gazillion hours. So, instead I’m just going to name a few of my very favorites and then you’re going to have to go to ReadAloudRevival.com/boys to find the rest.
3:48 Young readers (4-7)

So, let’s start with books that appeal especially to boys, I would say, are 7 and 8 – maybe they’re just starting to read longer narrative or you’re just starting to read longer books to them and novels to them, or they’re becoming more fluent readers, all the way up to age 10 or so, and they haven’t really fallen in love with reading yet. One of the best ways to help a young reader who’s just getting fluent and hasn’t become a really comfortable fluent reader yet, one of the best ways to get them to turn into a voracious reader is to get them hooked on a series. And there are a couple of series that are really good for boys in this stage. The one that worked for my son was Encyclopedia Brown because the Encyclopedia Brown books are those really fun mysteries, easier to read, shorter book length, and they’re captivating, so if your kid really decides that Encyclopedia Brown is kind of a fun side-kick to hang out with there’s a lot of mysteries to read. Same with Nate the Great and I’d say Nate the Great is actually a little bit easier to read, a step down as far as the reading level than Encyclopedia Brown so you could get it to a child who’s a little less practiced in their fluency in reading. Other books that are a really good for this age are The Henry Huggins books by Beverly Cleary. Those are really delightful especially on audio, and so, don’t be afraid – of course, if you have not listened to it yet, we have a whole episode on whether audio books count as real reading. The short answer is Heck! Yes, they do. And, the longer answer is in another episode of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. You can search for it in your podcast app or you can just go to ReadAloudRevival.com/boys and we’ll have a list there of any other links I mention. One of those links will be that episode about audio books and so, don’t miss that. The Henry Huggins audio books are really nice to listen to, they’re funny, and you can get them on Audible as a whole collection of The Entire Collection of Henry Huggins Stories; boys really like those. Some other really natural fits for this age are Homer Price by Robert McCloskey, which is really funny. And, some books about American history that your young boys may enjoy include books like The Matchlock Gun, The Cabin Faced West, and Sign of the Beaver. Those are three that my son read this last year (he’s actually 12, so they were fairly easy reads for him) but they’re kind of those boys that emphasize that American spirit and boys tend to really enjoy those particular titles. There are some other titles for this age range – you’re going to have to go to ReadAloudRevival.com/boys to find out what they are.

6:20 8-12 ... ish

Let’s move up the ages. So, we’re going into 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 (you guys know how I am about ages, right? Because, if you’re reading aloud a book, you can oftentimes read to a very broad age range; you can read to kids who wouldn’t otherwise be able to read the books on their own yet because their reading skills are not that great but you can also read it to kids who are old enough that they could read it in no time flat but it’s really enjoyable and a great experience to hear the book read-aloud). So, I’m calling this the 8-12ish (let’s say that) age range and one of the first authors who comes to mind is N. D. Wilson. He’s been on the show before, he was on episode 44 – we recommend that episode so often I know that one by heart – his books are fantastically creepy. So, 100 Cupboards is what
he’s most well-known for. That goes squarely here in 8-12 age recommendations. If you have a sensitive child who gets scared a bit easy you might not want to do 100 Cupboards quite yet, but, I have found that all of my kids have been able to handle his books have been 8-12 or at least the 100 Cupboards series (not all of his books – we’ll talk more about his books in a second that are a little creepier). But, the 100 Cupboards series starts with the book called 100 Cupboards and that’s a great one for boys. Another trilogy I love for this age is The Wilderking Trilogy. I know you’ve heard me talk about this one before. It starts with The Bark of the Bog Owl, it’s written by Jonathan Rogers. Aidan is the main character and he has to figure out who he is and if he has what it’s going to take to do what he’s been tasked to do in this life. It’s a fantasy but it’s there’s not a lot of magic – actually, there’s no magic, it’s a fantasy world but it’s one of my favorites – one of my very favorite books to read. Last year, my son adored this trilogy.

We’ll get back to today’s episode in just a moment. But, I wanted to take a quick minute to make sure you know about The Read-Aloud Family. This is a new book I wrote just for you. Here’s what I know: you will never, ever regret the time you spend reading to your kids. Connecting deeply with our families can be, kind of, difficult, right, in our really busy and technology-driven world? But reading aloud is one of the best ways to be fully present with our kids even after they can read to themselves. In the new book, The Read-Aloud Family you’ll find the inspiration you need to start a read-aloud movement in your own home. You’ll discover how to prepare your kids for academic success, how to develop their empathy and compassion, all through reading aloud. You’re going to learn how to find time to read-aloud in the midst of your really busy day; school, sports, dinner dishes, all those pressures on your time and attention. And, you’ll learn how to choose books across a variety of sibling interests and ages. The best part is that you’ll discover how to make reading aloud the very best part of your family’s day. The Read-Aloud Family also offers age-appropriate book lists from infancy all the way through adolescence. So, from a toddler’s wonder to your teenager’s resistance, you’re going to discover practical strategies to make reading aloud a meaningful family ritual. The book releases wherever books are sold, March 27, 2018, but if you order the book before March 27 you’re going to get some extra gifts and I am so excited Zondervan let me do this, because I made you a brand new video Master Class to show you how to choose books for your kids. So, you know that feeling when you walk into a library or a bookstore or maybe you’re cruising around online or something, and you don’t know if a book is worth your time or attention or your child’s time and attention? In this video Master Class you’re going to find out exactly which two characteristics make a book worth reading and you’ll find out the three question test I use to decide if a book deserves a place on my family’s reading stack. So order The Read-Aloud Family before March 27, 2018 to get a promo code to access that Master Class for free. I am thrilled Zondervan is letting me do that. Go to TheReadAloudFamily.com to grab your copy. I can’t wait to get it in your hands.

10:42 Mysterious Benedict & Will Wilder

Another great series for this age is The Mysterious Benedict Society. Now, if you have a
son who’s just getting comfortable reading these could be a little intimidating because they’re fat. And so, these could be really good to read-aloud or to get on audio, but *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, there’s a whole bunch of books in the series now, and they’re really smart and lots of adventure; really enjoyable. And, then another one I want to make sure I mention, another series for this age range are the *Will Wilder* books, and actually, I don’t remember what the first one’s called so I’m going to look it up right here on air because I forgot to look it up ahead of time. OK, you’re coming with me – here we go – *Will Wilder* (that’s right!) *The Relic of Perilous Falls*, and there’s a few in the series now. They are fantasy adventure novels and kids get really hooked on them, so I’m going to read the description here for you since I have it up in front of me: “Will Wilder didn’t mean to unlock his otherworldly gift. But that is exactly what happens when Will “borrows” a sacred relic believed to protect the town of Perilous Falls for nearly a century. Even though his intentions are good, the impulsive twelve-year-old unwittingly awakes an ancient evil endangering all of Perilous Falls. As boats sink and hideous creatures crawl from the rising waters, it is up to Will to confront a nightmareish enemy and set things right before it is too late. Along with his sweet—if lethal—great-aunt Lucille, the curator of a museum of supernatural artifacts, Will proves that the actions of one twelve-year-old boy can change the world.” So, I don’t need to describe why that appeals to boys of this age, right? *Will Wilder series* is written by Raymond Arroyo. We’ll have links, of course, in the Show Notes. Once again, that’s going to be at ReadAloudRevival.com/boys. And then, I want to mention (oh, I’m looking at my list – I want to mention a few more but because we’re short on time for this episode, I’m just going to mention one more. I was going to say two—one more.)

**12:37 Andrew Clements's books**

I want to mention books by Andrew Clements. You all hear me talk about *Frindle* quite frequently, but he has a whole bunch of others, *The Map Trap, No Talking, The School Story*, and they’re easy. OK, first of all, they’re not intimidating because they’re short, and there’s a lot to be said for a good, short book. They’re really well written. I really love Andrew Clements —had a great conversation for him once before at Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership and he’s very thoughtful about the kinds of books he’s writing. He takes a lot of pride in making sure the books he’s writing are worth a spot in your child’s childhood. That is a really special thing, I think. My son loved one of them called, *Lunch Money*, because my son loves books about kid entrepreneurs or kids who are trying to earn money. But, Greg Kenton is the main character in *Lunch Money* and he thinks he’s basically a billionaire in the making. And so, he’s sort of obsessed with figuring out how he can make money. The book is really funny, it’s light-hearted, it’s fast to read. And, what you’ll find about Andrew Clements’ books is they’re all like that; they’re all really easy, and fun to read. They’re hysterical. They’ve got great characters and boys and girls both love them. Your boys will have absolutely no problem getting sucked into these, and then it’s just a good idea to have a whole bunch of them on the shelf – go to your library, your library will have them. It’s a very good idea to have a bunch up on the shelf because your son will probably read more than you’ve ever seen him read before.
14:16 Books for teen boys

Let’s go up to teens because this is a real pain point for a lot of our listeners; finding good books for their teen boys to read. So, let’s head back to N. D. Wilson because he’s the one I said wrote 100 Cupboards, he’s written some other books that are more appropriate for YA or for older kids; they’re scary, they’re fast paced, they’re adventurous, Boys of Blur is one of those books. I will confess I started reading it, I got about two-thirds of the way through, I ditched, it was a little creepy for me. I didn’t want to have bad dreams. But, my son loved this book and I know a lot of teen boys, or teen kids I should just say, really enjoy that book. He’s also written the Ashtown Burials series which starts with The Dragon’s Tooth, Leepike Ridge, the Outlaws of Time. N. D. Wilson’s a natural go-to when it comes to reading for your teen boys. Of course, The Lord of the Rings which I don’t even know if I really need to say because they appeal so broadly to teen boys. Also, The Hobbit, all by Tolkien, of course. I want to talk about a new trilogy that I just read, and I was floored by how much I loved this. And, my son was reading it at the same time I was, and we would steal it from each other. Like, “OK, you can have it for half an hour but don’t lose my spot, and I’m coming back to get it!” and I’d sneak into his room at night so I could grab it and read it. OK, this is the Ascendance Trilogy written by Jennifer Neilson. It starts with a book called, The False Prince. The main character is a boy named Sage. He’s a very defiant boy and he is basically kidnapped along with some other orphans right at the very beginning of the book by a man who’s motives are somewhat questionable. He is basically trying to groom one of the main characters to stand in and become the Prince of their kingdom. So, there’s no fantasy in these books but they take place in a made up kingdom. So, it’s basically a pseudo kingdom, it’s not like a real time in history. But, it’s a very medieval feeling book—lots of adventure and treachery and putting together all these clues and, I think, it’s published by Scholastic and I’m pretty sure I saw online that they recommended it for kids 9 and up. I would not hand these to a 9 year old myself, I would hand them to a 12 year old and up; my 12 year old son is about as young as I would go. They’re intense. There’s some really intense violence, they’re probably on par with the Hunger Games I’d guess I’d say as far as the violence. There’s some torture and I found myself squirming a little bit, but they’re so well-done. The storytelling is fantastic. I don’t know if I’ve read books where there is better dialog than there are. Jennifer Neilson is sort of the queen of dialog but that’s not what’s going to attract your sons, of course—I’m getting a little derailed here. Your sons are going to love the adventure and the treachery. And, the main character is maybe one of the best main characters I’ve read in a long time as far as his own origin story, sort of, how he became the way he is. And, the quirky things he says and what motivates him to take the actions he takes. The first one’s The False Prince, the second one is The Runaway King, and the third one is The Shadow Throne. It’s called the Ascendance Trilogy. I would highly recommend it for your teen boys.

17:40 The Boundless and Gary Paulsen's books

And, I’m looking at the time here and I think I only have time to talk about one more here on the show, so I’m going to mention Kenneth Oppel’s The Boundless. The Boundless’ main character is
a boy who wants adventure and he definitely
finds it. He finds it on the Canadian railway when
the Canadian railway was just being built, but this
isn’t just historical fiction; there’s some steam
punk in here for sure. There’s some fantasy,
magical realism in here for sure, and basically, the
main character, Will, has to figure out if he can
save the train (I’m trying to figure out how much I
can tell you without ruining the story), save the
train before it’s too late. That’s all I’m going to
tell you. I think your teen boys are going to like it.
And, another thing is, and I should mention this—
you know, sometimes when we’re thinking about
our teen boys we feel like they should just be
reading classics, so that’s where we go when we
think about books to recommend to them. If your
teen boy is not already a kid who loves reading
for his spare time I would encourage you to find
something that’s not a classic. And, the
Ascendance Trilogy that I just mentioned is a
great place to start. The Boundless, the one I’m
just now mentioning by Kenneth Oppel, that’s a
great place to go. Something like the Fablehaven
Series by Brandon Mull, which yes, I know is
written and marketed toward middle graders, so
8-12, is still something that a lot of teen boys
would have a hard time putting down. And,
actually all of Brandon Mull’s series are kind of
like that; The Candy Shop War (oh man!), the
Beyonders. I’m trying to remember, I haven’t read
them all, my kids have. But, think ‘How do I huck
my kid into reading so that he realizes this is
something that will delight him?’ And, N. D.
Wilson’s books will do that. I would just think
outside of your standard, “If he’s 15 he should
be able to read bla, bla, bla.” Even if he can read
something that’s of higher literary value, think
about how you can cultivate his delight in reading
life. We’re going to have other recommendations.
Oh, Gary Paulsen – that’s another person I should
mention. Books by Gary Paulsen are a really big
hit with teen boys. Hatchet is probably what he’s
best known for but, he has a ton of books. A lot
of them are set in the natural world and like boy
versus nature type, or boy versus himself in
nature, type themes. And, so Gary Paulsen can
be a good place to go to. Anyway, I’m going to
wrap this episode up here because I have an
author I want to introduce you today, as well. But,
don’t forget to look at ReadAloudRevival.com/
boys for books for your boys. Remember to
focus on their delight and their enjoyment in
stories, and helping them find books that have a
fast moving plot, there’s nothing wrong with
hooking your young readers with a fast moving
plot. A lot of times that’s what’s going to turn
your boys into kids who read for fun. Now, before
we get into Let The Kids Speak I would love to
introduce you to another author. I did this about a
month ago when I invited Karina Yan Glaser onto
the podcast, and then a couple of weeks ago on
the podcast episode number 90 where we talked
about Easter basket ideas for young readers you
got to meet Lindsay Davis who’s a new picture
book author, and a news correspondent. And
today, I have another author I really want you to
meet so I want to spend the next five minutes
introducing you to a picture book author that I
think you’re going to want to know about.

20:14 Meet Matthew Paul Turner

Matthew Paul Turner is a best-selling author,
writer, story-teller, photographer, speaker, and
blogger. You might recognize his work from CNN,
The New York Times, maybe The Washington
Post. Or, you might know his lovely children’s
books, When God Made You and his newest one,
When God Made Light. He’s joining me today to
talk about his books and writing for kids, or as he
explains it, encouraging young readers to learn about their own special gifts and how they fit into God’s divine plan as they grow, explore, and begin creating for themselves. Sounds pretty great, right? I’m really happy he’s here. Matthew Paul Turner, welcome to the Read-Aloud Revival.

Matthew: This is such a treat. I’m excited to be here, so thank you so much.

Sarah: OK, well, I really want to talk about these picture books. They’re so beautiful. And, listeners, we’ll have links to these in the Show Notes, and they’re beautiful – you want to go see them because you want to see the covers. The first one is *When God Made You*, the newest one is *When God Made Light*. Matthew, tell me where do they come from?

Matthew: When we first had kids I would read kids books to my kids all the time, and as a person of faith I would always become not frustrated but sort of just not really engaged in the books that were available about God, where I saw this void in Christian publishing and just wanted something that would inspire my kids the same way other books inspired my kids. I wanted to write something that was just fun to read, exciting, and really presented God’s love and affection for kids, and give something that would eventually, over time, be something that would be easy for parents to read when you’re trying to read that 8th book right before bed and you’re tired and you kind of what it to read itself.

Sarah: I love that because I actually think the real danger with children’s Christian picture books is that the books can be a bit preachy and a child can sniff that a mile away.

Matthew: Totally. Or, they dive into something so serious so soon. And, I’m like, my kids is four, and I just want to lavish my kid with good words and I actually wrote *When God Made Light* before I wrote *When God Made You*…

Sarah: Oh, interesting.

Matthew: … and I got 11 “no’s” from publishers and so we ended up self-publishing that title and then it ended up getting picked up along with *When God Made You* by WaterBrook.

Sarah: OK, so how did you and David Catrow get connected? Was that something that WaterBrook did?

Matthew: Yeah, my publisher hooked that up. And, I was very familiar with his work and when they told me they were going to approach him I was like, it would be a dream come true. And, he brought such a different perspective from an artist’s standpoint. He brought my words to life in a way that I never thought was possible. It just looks different. It doesn’t look like your book that you would get in a Christian bookstore, kind of thing.

Sarah: No, not at all. Which is, they do – they capture your imagination in a unique way and they’re not at all what you’re expecting which is part of their delight. I just want to read this one little part toward the end that says, “If you ever feel scared in the darkness of night remember the shadows are no match for God’s light, climb into bed, sleep soundly and dream, and know that inside you God’s glow is agleam. Because you’re just like the sun and the moon in the sky, as lustrous twinkles that dazzle the eye, you’re a splendid as lightning when it flashes so bright, because on the day you were born, God said, “Let there be light.”” I love how your books help a child – you cannot read this to your children and not remember that these children are amazing gifts from God. Like, I think as an adult reading them I feel like it reminds me how amazing and
Matthew: It’s kind of nice to end the day on a positive note that just reminds you that wow, these kids are really, truly amazing. And, also I think that adults need to be reminded that they are awesome, too. And that they’re God’s gift, too.

Sarah: Well, especially because in When God Made You I can see that how as adults who sometimes feel like we’re just slogging through our responsibilities and forget that we’ve been made for some – that when God made us He had a particular brilliant vision and we kind of forget the glory of that and the miracle of that. That’s what I mean by your books capturing the imagination of the readers. It’s exactly, it’s so beautiful. So, where can our listeners connect with you if they want to find out more about your work?

Matthew: On Facebook I am at Matthew Paul Turner. My website is MatthewPaulTurner.com and on Instagram it’s MatthewPaulTurner as well. If you read the book, tag me, I would love to hear from you. And, I’m just so grateful to be on your show. So, it’s just a real honor.

26:05 Let the kids speak

Sarah: 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: Hi, my name’s Maddie, and I’m 4. And, I’m in Oklahoma. My book is Sleeping Beauty and they have so much fun and they wake each other before they marry each other, and they have a pillow fight and then Lucy rides the horses and then [**inaudible**]. Bye.

Child2: Hi, my name is Charlie and I am 6. I live in Moore, Oklahoma. My favorite book is [**inaudible**]. My favorite part is when one of the [**inaudible**] says, “There’s no need to be forewarned. [**Inaudible**] perfectly normal. He’s OK, that’s what we want to say, don’t blame it on the ball, he was born this way.” Bye.

Child3: Hi, my name is Kinley. I’m 8 years old. I live in Moore, Oklahoma. My favorite book is [**inaudible**]. I like it because it’s about this cat who tries to find a good human to take care of him and I like this book because it has adventure, it just talks about the characters, what they’re going through in their lives, and it also kind of talks about what they’re doing, what they’re planning, and how they feel. Bye.


Child5: My name is Serenity and I’m 6 years old and I live in Sacramento, California. And, my favorite book is Princess Pink. [Mom: what do you like about it?] It has a wacky land.

Child6: Hi, my name’s Israel and I’m 9 years old, and my favorite book is Dr. Suess’ Sleep Book because it almost makes you fall asleep and I am from Sacramento, California.

Child7: Hi, my name is Drew, and I’m 13 years old, and I’m from Sacramento, California. One of my favorite books is Much Ado About Nothing. One of my favorite parts from it is when the two
main characters are fighting and the first one says, "What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?" And the second one says, "Is it possible disdain should die when she has such neat food to feed it as Sr. Benedick?" And, then at the end when they have inevitably fallen in love with each other, they say, "Oh miracle. Here's our own hands against our hearts. Come, I will have thee, but by this light I take thee for pity." And then the other one says, "I would not deny you but by this good day I yield upon great persuasion and partly to save your life for I was told you were in a great consumption." And then the other one says, "Peace. I will stop your math." And then they get married.

Child8: Hi, my name is Dillon. I am 8 years old. I live in Ohio. My favorite book is *Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes*. I like it because it is a story about a blind thief who goes on an adventure and becomes an unlikely hero.

Child9: My name is Madelyn and I live in Irving, Texas. My favorite book is ["inaudible"] and I am like ["inaudible"] it's because they go on an adventure and they have lots of fun.


Child11: I’m 16 and some of my favorite books are *The Felicia Trilogy* by S. K. Venezuela.

Sarah: Awesome, thanks so much, kids. I love hearing your book recommendations. Whew, we fit a lot in this short episode. I’m proud of us. Head to ReadAloudRevival.com/boys to see the book list, to check out the Show Notes, you’ll get everything you need there. And, we’ll be back next week with another episode of the Read-Aloud Revival. In the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.