



## RAR 101 – How to Connect with Your Kids this Summer (Summer in RAR Membership)

**Sarah:** Sarah Mackenzie here. You know what? It's kind of a surprise episode but for those of us in the Northern Hemisphere we're looking at summer and I don't know about you but I want to read some really wonderful books with my kids this summer. I want to really connect with them. I just don't want the whole thing to pass in a whirlwind of swimming lessons, and camping trips, vacations, road trips and activities, and not get a chance to look into my kids' eyes, find out what they're thinking about, get to know them better, and have some great conversations. If that sounds familiar to you then this episode is one you don't want to miss.

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.

### 1:10 My heart's longing for summer

So, you've got episode 101. And if you listened to the last episode you heard me say, "We're going to take about six weeks off." But then, I was looking at my summer calendar and I was thinking about my heart's longing is for this summer. We have a couple of camping trips planned, some swim lessons, my older kids are going off to camp for a week, I know I'm going to be spending a fair amount of time pulling weeds in the yard, watching my kids eat popsicles, running through the sprinkler – all that good stuff. But, I thought, you know what? I want to have a really good summer of connecting with my kids.

The kind of connection where I can connect heart-to-heart, you know, you spend some time looking into your kid's eyes and you feel like you get to know them better. And, I want this to be a summer that has at least a few memories my kids can look back on and say, "That was a good summer!" So, I thought I'd just pop in here with a little episode, even though I said I wasn't gonna, and give you a few steps to having a summer of connecting with your kids.

### 2:05 Steps for connecting with your kids this summer through books

And, of course, because this is the Read-Aloud Revival and we love connecting with our kids through books that's how we're going to talk about doing it today. I want to give you just three brief steps to connecting with your kids this summer through books. And, I'm hoping these will be simple, actionable enough that you can do them with your kids without too much fanfare, without having to pull out the highlighters and color-code a new spreadsheet with your new summer ahead (am I the only one who does that?), and that you can do it with your kids no matter what ages they are – whether they're 2, they're 12, or this is their last summer before they leave home. Or, maybe they're in college and they're coming home. No matter what ages your kids are I think this can be a great summer for connecting with our kids through books, so let's make that happen. Shall we?

### Step 1 - Make a goal

OK, step one, is first of all we just need to sort of make a goal that we're going to read-aloud with our kids this summer and we're going to connect



with them through books this summer. And, I think we can make this goal really reasonable and really simple. It needs to be short. Here's what I want you to know. You don't need to read a ton with your kids to make a lasting impact. Even if you just read a single novel with your kids this summer that will be huge for your kids' love of reading. I think you'll be amazed, even if you just read one novel with your kids this summer, I think you'll be amazed that they'll remember it years from now. They'll go, "Oh yeah, that's the summer we read *The Trumpet of the Swan*, or that's the summer that we read *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, or whatever it is that you're reading. They'll remember it. If you're not sure what to read with your kids, first of all, the actual experience of sharing a book with your child is more important than the actual book that you choose. So, first of all, take that pressure off – you don't have to find the "just right" book. You can, of course, find recommendations for what I think are the best read-alouds for different age kids in *The Read-Aloud Family* which is my brand new book. You can find that anywhere books are sold, and the last several chapters are collections of books that I recommend to be read-aloud at different ages. So, depending on how old your kids are. We also have, of course, our read-aloud lists online that you can get for free. All you need to do to grab that is go to: [RARBooklist.com](http://RARBooklist.com) or you can just text the word BOOKS to the number 345345 and you'll find some good recommendations there as well, depending on your ages and stages that you're in with your kids right now. But, I can tell you, I want to tell you what we're reading aloud this summer. So, stay tuned because in just a minute I'm going to tell you what we're reading and maybe you'll want to read it with us, because that would be really fun. So, first of all, just make your goals really

reasonable. So, just choose to read just one novel. Or, if you have all really little kids just make a goal to read five picture books a week. Really – make it small and reasonable, something that you can do without too much fanfare, without feeling like you have to overhaul your whole plan because summer is busy. It always feels really luxurious and open in theory and then we look at our calendars and go, "What on earth happened to my summer?" So just make it really reasonable because there's a lot of daylight hours but they get filled up pretty quick and sometimes it can even be hard to pull the kids in from all their outside activities in the summer, or just rally everybody and get them in the same place to read-aloud. So, make it a very simple, doable goal – that's my first tip for you.

## Step 2 - Peg your read-aloud time

The second is that you want to peg your read-aloud time to something you're already doing every day. Like I said, in this summer when everybody's going kind of fast, there's kids going to different activities – maybe they're at day camp, maybe they're at summer camp, maybe you're going on a road trip, you're camping, visiting grandma, or your kids are just like mine, and they're outside in the cul-de-sac from dawn until dusk every day, it can be kind of hard to do those things we may find to be more ritual or habitual in the school year. Reading aloud fits in there, so what you want to do is you want to peg your reading aloud to something you're doing every day. Breakfast may be a good plan if your kids all come to the table and have their morning breakfast around the same time, or if you pull everybody in for dinner time at the same time every day-ish, then you may just want to peg



your read-aloud time to that meal because what it basically means is everyone's going to sit here for 10 or 15 minutes longer than they need to to eat so that we can read together. And that can be a way to get reading aloud in even when you're not totally in the habit of it or your normal routines have gone out the window. If you're going on road trips or vacations get your audio book set up and figured out, whether you have a car that you can just Bluetooth, your phone in, so you can buy a book on Audible or get one on Librivox and stream it through your car, or going to your library and getting books on CD – whatever it is just bringing even a book to be listened to in the car on a road trip can be awesome. And you may be surprised at how enjoyable that is and be able to cut down on some of the screen time your kids have in the car – on road trips or vacations. Now, to help you with this what we have in the Show Notes for this episode is a summer sheet and it has the months of June, July, and August. Now, for those of you listening in the southern hemisphere, it's not really a summer sheet it's just June, July, August – you can use it as well for this season. But, basically what this is is for those of you in the northern hemisphere where it's summer, like it is for me, you can download this – it's one page. You can stick it on your fridge, it's just a calendar of June, July, and August. And every day that you read-aloud for at least 10 minutes you're going to X off the day. And, basically what this is is a visual reminder to you to read-aloud as often as you can, but it's also going to be, I guess, motivating or encouraging when you see the collection of x's at the end of the summer. You don't need to read-aloud every day to do this well, but if you read-aloud 10 minutes a day, every other day, over the summer you're going to see a huge collection of x's on your chart at the summer's end and that's going

to feel really good because we never regret the time we spend reading aloud with our kids. We never end up regretting the time we're fully present with them enjoying their presence and sharing a story together. So, you can get that summer sheet that you can stick up on your fridge and get x's on, you can get it for free. You want to go to the Show Notes for this podcast. That's at [ReadAloudRevival.com/101](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/101) because this is episode 101. And you can grab that sheet that you can stick up on your refrigerator and motivate you to read-aloud with your kids through the summer. So, like I said, make your goals reasonable: choose to read less -- set out with a more simple goal that you can achieve, whether that's one book or a stack of picture books or a certain number; number two, peg it to something you are already doing every day and put up this motivating sheet where you can then x off the days you're reading aloud so you feel and you see physically the momentum. And, I'm going to go on a quick tangent here because one of the things I know about parenting is that the things that matter most that make the best impact I don't get to see the fruit of that labor right away. It's not like you sit down and you read *Charlotte's Web* with your kids and all of a sudden they pop up and they're more virtuous and kinder to each other and nobody's sassing you for the rest of the day – that's not how it works – but it actually will make them kinder, more empathetic, and probably have warmer family memories down the road, but what those x's on that sheet do when you put it on your fridge and you x off the days, is it shows you visually, 'hey, I'm doing something that's making a long impact even if I can't see the results of it right in front of my face.' Does that make sense?



## Step 3 - Talk about books!

OK, the third thing you want to do to read-aloud with your kids this summer, to connect with your kids this summer, is to talk about the books you're reading. The connection that happens, the connection that comes, it comes from two parts. It comes from, number one, the shared experience of a story, because what happens when we sit and read a story with our kids is even if we're at odds with each other or we're just, kind of, operating in different worlds, it puts us on the same side of the fence instantly. So, if you have a teenager who you're at odds with or if you just feel like you're a little disconnected from your 10 year old, or whatever, because they're busy all day and you're busy all day, when you sit and read a story, when you read Charlotte's Web you're rooting for the same characters. You're worried about the same thing, you're sad about the same things, so it puts you on the same side of the fence. It reminds you that you're allies. So, that's where a huge part of the connection comes in – is just the shared experience of the same story. The other huge part of the connection comes from organic, casual conversations you have with your kids about those books. And, this doesn't need to be hard. Again, if you want to know more about how to have really good, meaningful conversations with your kids you probably do want to pick up a copy of The Read-Aloud Family because I dedicate two whole chapters in there to this, but what I want you to go away with today is that this doesn't need to be hard, you can ask your kids a couple of really simple questions. One that I would get in the habit of asking your kids this summer is "Who was the most [blank] in this story?" and you can fill that blank in with any character trait you can think of. "Who was the most courageous?" "Who

was the most cowardly?" "Who was the most noble?" "Who was the most fearful?" "Who was the most shy?" "Who was the most wise?" "Who was the most kind?" Fill it with any adjective – but just ask them one. So, "Who was the most courageous in this story?" and when they answer you can say, "Really? So, what did they do that was courageous?" You will be surprised at how meaningful of a conversation that can open up. And it's not like you have had to have read the story, so even if your kids are reading something you've never read you can ask them that, "Hey, I saw that you finished reading [that] book. Who was the most courageous in it?" and have them tell you a little about it. It just opens up this opportunity to connect with our kids. Another question you can ask, that you can probably memorize right now so it's always on the tip of your tongue, is "If you could change something in that story, if you were writing the story, what would you change it to?" I got this idea from N. D. Wilson, the author of 100 Cupboards, Outlaws of Time, one of my favorite book books Hello, Ninja because it's funny, and a whole bunch of other books, and he's also making movies now, too. And, what he said was when he was, I think he was somewhere between the ages of 10 and 12, he started to hate reading and he didn't enjoy it at all, and his dad told him, "Hey, what I want you to do is read this book and tell me what you would have done to make it better?" and so, N. D. Wilson started reading with more of a critical eye, like what would he have done to make this story better, and now he's this award winning best-selling author of children's books. So, this is a fun question to ask in the summer. There's no right or wrong answer – kids can have fun thinking, "Wow, I would have done it this way or that way or I would have made this more adventurous or as S. D. Wilson says, "Add pirates



and kill everybody,” that sounds like a fifth grader’s boy’s response, doesn’t it? So, basically, what you want to do is ask your kids, “Hey, if you were writing this story what would you change?” you’d be surprised at how enjoyable that conversation can be. You don’t really need to make this conversation a thing. It doesn’t need to be a sit-down, take you to the coffee shop, or we’re going to go out for dinner, or we’re going to sit down for an hour, just ask them casually as you lather them up in sunscreen, as you hand them a popsicle as they run out the door, when you’re in the car on the way to the pool or the beach; it can be easy, it can be short, you don’t need to overcomplicate it. Every time we are fully present with our kids and we ask them what they’re thinking about good things happen.

## 14:36 This summer at RAR

So, at the Read-Aloud Revival we are all about helping you connect with your kids through books. And we have an incredible summer lined up to do just that. In fact, if you’re hoping to read some really good books with your kids this summer I want to invite you to join us. I’m going to tell you what we’re doing at Read-Aloud Revival this summer – and this is all happening in Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership. We’re opening the doors to Premium Membership so you can join us for our amazing summer – doors actually opened today, May 30, and they close this Sunday, June 3 because we like to spend most of our time, our team’s time, really helping our member’s connect with their kids through books, so open enrollment is very short. That means you only have five days to sign up to join us – so you don’t want to miss it. Now, if you already know you want in because you’ve been waiting for us to open Read-Aloud Revival

premium membership, like I know a lot of you have been waiting, then you can go to [RARMembership.com](http://RARMembership.com) and sign up, and let me tell you what you can expect this summer because this whole idea of reading a couple of books (or just a book), pegging it to your day, and not needing to do reading aloud every day but just fitting it in when you can this summer and then talking about it, we’re going to be reading three books together this summer in Premium Membership. You don’t need to read all of these books, you can just choose whichever books work for your schedule and for your kids’ ages and decide, ‘OK, that’s the book club we’re going to participate in,’ but we have three book clubs happening this summer in Premium Membership. The first is, Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes. This is by Jonathan Auxier, you’ve heard him probably on a previous episode of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. I don’t have the episode number in mind just now but what we’ll do is put a link in the Show Notes so that you can find that, it’s a really good episode with Jonathan Auxier. His mom (this is a spoiler here) pulled him out of school for a year because when he was (I think) about second grade she realized he wasn’t reading for pleasure and that was not an option in their home. Everybody reads for pleasure in the Auxier home. And, so she pulls him out of school with the single intent to turn him into a book lover and she did. And the next year he went back to school as a book lover. So, kind of fun. Anyway, Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes is written by Jonathan Auxier. It’s a fantastical tale of a ten year old blind orphan who is a thief. And around the time Peter finds himself in possession of three pairs of magical eyes he realizes he’s being sent on a quest to save people who need him, a quest to travel to the dangerous vanished kingdom. I think this is a tale that’s going to



quicken the hero's heartbeat in your kids. And if you've got kids who liked *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, *The Green Ember*, *The Wingfeather Saga*, I bet they'll also really like *Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes*. I think, as a read-aloud, this book is ideal for kids about 8 and up, but I'll tell you, my teens love this book as well. We're reading it in Read-Aloud Revival Premium as part of one of our family book clubs and in Read-Aloud Revival Premium you'll get a list of really awesome, open-ended questions you can ask your kids about this book, to have a really good conversation, and also some great ideas for how to dive into this book this summer as a family and create some meaningful memories around it. As the icing on the cake Jonathan Auxier, himself, the author of the book, is going to join us for a live Author Access Event so your kids will get to ask their questions in a live video stream and he'll answer them right there, live on screen. Kind of amazing! That's our first family book club we're doing in Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership this summer.

## 18:27 Gary Schmidt!

The second family book club is *Okay for Now* by Gary Schmidt. I'm just going to tell you Gary Schmidt has written some of the most compelling books I've ever read: adult, kids, novel, non-fiction, in the whole world – I'm not kidding. I basically think Gary Schmidt's a genius. This is my favorite of all the books he's written. In *The Read-Aloud Family* if you're only going to read two books with your kids as teenagers make *Okay for Now* one of them. It is pretty amazing. It's a book that's going to make you want to stare at Audubon paintings and read *Jane Eyre* and thank a veteran and get an orchid and hug a mean kid. It's stupendous. So, the main character

is Doug Sweeney. He's this skinny thug who suffers at the hands of an abusive father and he has to navigate this tumultuous home life with his struggles in school, with the return of his older brother who just came back from Vietnam. Schmidt's writing style it really does change the way you see the world and the people who are hurting all around you. He's a really spectacular singular author. I like this book best for teens, so I'm just going to say that. I recommend this book for teens in Read-Aloud Revival Premium, we're recommending this as a family book club if you have teens, to read this one with your teens. And, if you do have teens and you want to have one meaningful reading experience with your teens this summer I cannot think of a better one than this. Read this book, join Premium Membership so you can get out kit that will help you with conversations with your teens about this book, and of course, Gary Schmidt himself is going to come to Read-Aloud Revival Premium and do a live video stream so that your kids can ask him about this book or any of his books, and it's going to be fantastic. So, that's *Okay for Now* by Gary Schmidt. It's going to be pretty amazing.

## 20:37 Fablehaven (A cure for the 'Harry Potter Funk')

The third book we're reading this summer is *Fablehaven* by Brandon Mull. And you know what, this is the book that I find I recommend most often to kids who are in a Harry Potter funk. You know what the Harry Potter funk is, right? They've read all of Harry Potter, maybe multiple times and they don't know what to read next. Usually, I say, "Try *Fablehaven*." So, I'm just going to read the book's flap copy to you because see if this sounds like something your kids might like: "For centuries mystical creatures



of all description were gathered into a hidden refuge called Fablehaven to prevent their extinction. The sanctuary survives today as one of the last strongholds of true magic. Enchanting? Absolutely. Exciting? You bet. Safe? Well, actually, quite the opposite. Kendra and her brother, Seth, have no idea that their grandfather is the current caretaker of Fablehaven. Inside the gated woods, ancient laws keep relative order among greedy trolls, mischievous satyrs, plotting witches, spiteful imps, and jealous fairies. However, when the rules get broken -- Seth is a bit too curious and reckless for his own good -- powerful forces of evil are unleashed, and Kendra and her brother face the greatest challenge of their lives. To save their family, Fablehaven, and perhaps even the world, Kendra and Seth must find the courage to do what they fear most.” Sound like something your kids would enjoy? I like this book best for kids who are 8 and up, although I know teens, a few that live under my own roof, who read and re-read and re-read the entire series. I actually think Brandon Mull is probably two of my teenagers’ favorite authors of all time. We’re going to read this first book, Fablehaven together in Premium Membership and then we’re going to get a visit from Brandon Mull himself in a live Author Access where your kids can ask him questions on a live video stream – kind of amazing. So, those three books, Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes, Okay for Now, and Fablehaven – those are what we call family book club, because you read those with usually more than one of your kids at once and then you can use our open-ended questions that we give you about those books to have really good conversations. And, we also give you some very simple ideas for creating memorable experiences around the book. These are not ideas where you have to go to the store to get supplies for

example. There’s not like sugar cube pyramids happening here or anything. These are not tinker ideas. These are how to create a memorable experience so that your kids go, “I remember reading that book and it was one of my favorite childhood experiences.” That’s what we’re going for. Now, you’ve got to trust me on this – when your kids meet the authors of the books you read together they develop a whole new relationship with books. We have families tell us that their library visits and bookstore visits are never the same after an Author Access Event. Their kids are finding other books by those same authors, they’re reading more, they feel like they have a personal connection with the author which is, frankly, an experience you can’t really give your kids any other way. So, I would challenge you to join us and see what your kids think. I think you might be floored.

### 23:59 Picture books too + writing, drawing and more!

Now, we often have family book clubs around picture books. In fact, we just did one very recently with the amazing Tomie dePaola around his Strega Nona books. We have another award-winning picture book illustrator coming up in September but this summer we decided to focus our family book clubs on kids 8 and up because, for a lot of us, we want to a way to keep our kids, our school age kids, reading through the summer, engaged in what they’re reading and then hit the ground running next school year, more in love with books than they’ve ever been. And, I really think that’s what they’re going to get if you guys take part in our Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership book club this summer. They will hit the ground running and they will be more in love with books than they’ve ever been. But, there’s



still a lot of good things happening this summer in Read-Aloud Revival Premium for the whole family. One of those things is that S. D. Smith, the author of The Green Ember series is going to come and do a live online workshop called “Rabbits with sWORDS.” He is going to inspire your young writers in a live one hour online writing workshop so that your kids can write stories this summer, keep their writing skills fresh and creative all summer long, and have a ton of fun with it. And, if you’re anything like me you want your kids to keep their skills fresh and also get excited about keeping up with those things that are so important to you like reading and writing, and we want to do that in a really fun, engaging way. So that’s why S. D. Smith is coming this summer to do a “Rabbits with sWORDS” workshop. And, then we have a drawing workshop as well. My favorite how-to draw illustrator, his name is Ralph Masiello. I recommend his books all the time. And this is literally a workshop for all ages. He came to ReadAloudRevival.com Premium at Christmastime and he did this Christmas how-to draw. We had kids from age 3 all the way up to teens just knocking it out of the park with their drawings. It was so fun. It might have been the most fun we’ve ever had with a whole family workshop in Premium so we invited him to come back. He’s going to come back this summer and teach us to draw some summery things, some summery animals and backdrops. It’s going to be really fun. Your kids will love it and you’re going to be really kind of astounded at what they can make at the end of this one hour workshop. It’s really fun. My son spent hours and hours and hours making amazing drawings after our last workshop – my 12 year old son did. But, there is good stuff here for your kids of all ages. And then, Premium’s for you too, of course. So, I’m

going to be leading a live book club around my newest book, The Read-Aloud Family: Making Meaningful and Lasting Connections with Your Kids. We’re going to be reading it, or many of us are going to be re-reading it this summer as a group, and I’m going to be leading some conversations about how you can take your family relationships up a notch through that simple power of shared stories. So, I’m really looking forward to it. I am pretty convinced, as you can probably tell, that no matter what your kids ages you want to join Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership this summer so that you can have a summer to connect with your kids in a really, meaningful way through our family book clubs, through our writing and drawing workshops, and through all the amazing book recommendations and conversations that happen in our forum. We have a very active member forum that is easily my favorite place to hang out online. You will see when you join and get in there yourself. Here’s the deal: you have to join in the next five days to get in on all this summer stuff. So, you want to RARMembership.com and join by June 3, 2018 to get in on what we’re doing this summer. If you’re hearing this after June 3 you can still head to RARMembership.com and just request an invitation for the next time we open doors – that’s going to be in the fall – we’ll open doors again for our fall lineup, but if you want to get in on what we’re doing this summer, you want to head over there and join now. There’s really no risk. We offer a 30 day 100% money-back guarantee. This is what we want. We want you to have a summer full of good reading, meaningful conversations, and wonderful memories with your kids. And, we’re convinced you’ll have that if you join Premium Membership and we can help you do that best in Premium Membership. Oh, I’d just love it if you joined us



there. We basically want your kids to end their summer more on fire for books than they've ever been before. That's what I want for my kids and that's what I want for yours, too. That's what we're going to be doing this summer in Read-Aloud Revival Premium. Oh, oh! And, don't let me forget to mention this: one thing that's amazing about Premium is that if you can't make it to any of our live events, like the live Author Access Events with Jonathan Auxier, Gary Schmidt, Brandon Mull, or any of those live workshops with S. D. Smith or Ralph Masiello – you can watch those on recording. So, everything we do is recorded and it's stored in Membership for you, forever actually. If you're on vacation or you can't make it to a live event for one reason or another, there's no worries, you just log into Membership when it works for you and the recording is there for you to get in on all the goodies. The really cool thing is that when you join Membership you actually get in on all the recordings of everything we've done before. So, if you've got really small kids who, let's say, love *Strega Nona* and the Tomie dePaola books, you could join Read-Aloud Revival Membership and watch our recording we did with Tomie dePaola last month and have a really awesome experience with your kids. You can still access our book club kit that gives you good questions to ask your kids about *Strega Nona* books, and our suggestions for having a good family memorable experience around the *Strega Nona* books and then watch the Author Access Event. So, this is really geared around whatever works for your schedule and your kids' ages. Want to learn more? You've got to get in by June 3 to get in with the summer, so head to [RARMembership.com](http://RARMembership.com). That's where you want to join us. I can't wait to see you inside and I cannot wait to dive into this summer with you. Don't forget you can grab that summer sheet to stick

on the front of your fridge and mark off the days you've read-aloud this summer by going to the Show Notes for today's episode:

[ReadAloudRevival.com/101](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/101). Until next time, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.