

RAR 108 – Picture Books for Ancient History

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.

Hey, hey, hey, Sarah Mackenzie here. You've got episode 108 and I have a great episode for you today. Really excited to share a new book list we put together for you. We have heard from a lot of families, Read-Aloud Revival families, that they're studying ancient history with their kids this year, so we put together a little book list. Now, I don't know about you but really long, comprehensive book lists, they tend to make me see double. I get really overwhelmed. I think, 'OK, but I don't have time to read all of these, so somebody tell me which ones are the best ones.' So that's what this list is. It's short. These are our very favorite picture books that you can use to infuse your history curriculum or your history studies with some enjoyable read-alouds, knowing just what to pick that will be delightful and useful for your studies. Now, we're going to, hopefully, be coming out with book lists for different time periods. This one is ancient history, so whether you're learning about ancient Mesopotamia or ancient Greece or ancient Rome or Egypt, we've collected our favorite picture books for you right here.

1:36 Get the printable

Now, a couple of things I want you to know right off the bat. First of all, if you'd like a printable version of this list so you can take it with you to the library or a bookshop, or stick it into your teacher's binder, or whatever you want to do with it, we have one of those free for you in the Show

Notes. All you have to do to get it is go to ReadAloudRevival.com/108. Another thing I want you to know about this list is that it's only picture books. You won't find any chapter books or novels here. Why is that? Well, first and foremost, here at Read-Aloud Revival we're always trying to encourage you to use picture books with your older kids because picture books are worthwhile for everyone. I would bet that especially with the books on this list your high schooler will enjoy these books every bit as much as a first grader would. And I bet your high schooler (and you) may indeed learn a thing or two right along with your first grader. Picture books can be so informative, and helpful, and beautiful. They reach us in a different place. They add an element of beauty and really, the text in a picture book is only half of what you get. The illustrations lend the other half. So it's kind of a double whammy, you get a whole lot of bang for your buck with a picture book. It's just a beautiful, beautiful tool to use in your home schooling or in your family life as you're trying to learn about the world and enjoy books together. So, this is all picture books—that does not mean it is only for younger kids, definitely choose some of these for your older kids as well.

3:03 A short, delightful list

This isn't a comprehensive list; I didn't try to find books that would cover all of the most important things that happen in ancient history or events or whatever you're putting on your timeline or learning about. I didn't try to find biographies about all the most important historical figures. This is just a short list of delightful read-alouds for the whole family that can infuse what you're already doing in your home with some delight and some joy, and just a darn good story. I'll tell



you what: if you happen to be short on time, and I am raising my hand firmly here, committing to read-aloud a picture book is a whole lot easier than sitting down to read a novel or a chapter book, so let this be a way that you can dip into an enjoyable, historical read-aloud with your child, and connect with them. These books can be used on days when you're starting to, kind of, be at odds with each other, to just realign and remember who you and remember how much you enjoy being with each other. So, with that, let's get started. I want to tell you about some of the picture books on this list. Now, if you want to see the whole list you've got to go to ReadAloudRevival.com/108, so you can see them in the Show Notes. What you'll find there is a book cover, so you'll see it, and of course, you'll be able to recognize the book. We also have a very short description next to it that tells you the general geographic location or the geographic origin of the story whether that's Mesopotamia or Egypt or Greece or Rome or wherever, and that way you can choose your read-alouds based on where you are at in your studies, and a link where you can go grab the book, where you can at least recognize what the cover looks like for when you head to the library. This will be a great list to pull up online, on your phone, if you're at the library or bookshop, or to print out and bring with you. So, let's talk about picture books for ancient history.

5:12 Fables from Demi

Alright, I want to start with two books by Demi. Now, you probably will recognize these books because Demi has a very classic and distinctive illustration style, not very many others or anyone else illustrates the way Demi does, and so, usually I can recognize one of her books by her

illustrations before anything else. The two I want to mention today are both fables, so they're not historical events but they're historical fables from different parts of the world you may be studying during your ancient history studies. One is called, The Empty Pot. This one is a fable set in ancient China and we've got a story of an Emperor's challenge and a schoolboy's honesty. This is a delightful fable where the Emperor decides he's going to choose who will succeed him based on a challenge he sets out for the children in his kingdom and well, I'm not going to tell you what happens next. The Empty Pot by Demi. Another one by Demi that is just wonderful is, One Grain of Rice, and this one is actually set in India. It's a fable about a very selfish Rajah who, at the beginning of the story, keeps nearly all of his people's rice for himself, feeling that he must store it away in case they ever need it, in case of an emergency or a famine, and then basically what happens, of course, is there does come a famine and the Rajah is still selfish and so he's feasting himself while his people are starving. Well, there's a clever girl in this story based in India who outwits the Emperor and teaches him a better way. It's a very lovely story and I think your kids would enjoy it. And, of course, the illustrations in both The Empty Pot and One Grain of Rice are just gorgeous. So, those stories can pair with your studies of China or India.

7:01 Ancient Greece

Let's talk Greece. There's several books on this book list that will pertain to your ancient Greece studies. The first couple I want to mention are actually math adventures written by Julie Ellis. One's called, What's Your Angle, Pythagoras? And the other is Pythagoras and the Ratios. They're both math adventures which means your



kids are actually learning math through the story. They're clever, they're sweet, they're really well illustrated. I particularly enjoy the illustrations in these stories. Pythagoras is the main character in these stories and, of course, he's an ancient Greece philosopher, and these stories tell about if, possibly, how he may have learned about angles or ratios. They're fun. Anyway, I think you'll probably enjoy them. I'm not sure if your library will have them. I went and grabbed mine from a bookshop, but they're worth having on your shelf. Another one set in Greece is *The Librarian Who Measured the Earth*. And, this is probably one of my more highly recommended books on this list. This one's written by Kathryn Lasky. It's a biography of Eratosthenes who is a historical figure. Basically, Eratosthenes was someone in ancient Greece who continually asked questions and eventually he determined how to measure the entire world without traveling the entire world. The pictures in this one are lovely, there is so much information, your kids will learn so much about ancient Greece in this story, and I really think it's probably one of the best ones on this whole list. Let's stay with Greece for a minute because I have another recommendation for you and this one is *D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*. This is a lot of families favorite collection of Greek myths. This one's retold and illustrated by the talented pair, the D'Aulaires. And, when I read these with my kids a lot of times we'll just read one everyday because there's a nice big illustration and a story, and two of my kids, in particular, just were fascinated by Greek myths, and this was a book that we pulled out again and again and again. *The D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths* is one you will not be remiss for putting on your shelf permanently instead of borrowing from the library. We're going to stay in Greece for one more book

recommendation. I want to recommend Aesop's Fables illustrated by Jerry Pinkney who is, I think, one of the greatest current illustrators of our time. He's won a Caldecott, he's just absolutely a brilliant illustrator. Aesop's Fables, of course, you'll be familiar with many of them, like "The Fox and the Crow," "The Owl and the Grasshopper," "The Fox and the Grapes," "Belling the Cat," "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse," there are so many that will be familiar to you and I like this particular collection, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, and it's a lovely addition to your collection of read-alouds as you're studying ancient Greece because Aesop is one of the most famous people from that time as he was author of these fables that have stuck with us until now, so these are great fables to add to your studies of ancient history.

10:00 Ancient Egypt

Now, let's move over to some recommendations for books set in Egypt, which is another place where I have several book recommendations for you. The first one is *The Egyptian Cinderella*. This is by Shirlee Climo who is well-known for a lot of her retellings of folklore and this is an Egyptian spin on the classic Cinderella tale. You may know that many different civilizations and cultures have their own spin on Cinderella. They have similar stories that are Cinderella. This one was initially recorded in the first century by a Roman historian, and it was retold in picture book form by Shirley Climo. I remember being told this one as a child, I remember the illustrations by Ruth Heller, and I read this one with my kids, so you may enjoy reading this one aloud with your own kids while you're studying ancient Egypt, and this is one that's definitely going to be able to be found at your library (very, very likely), but it's also



worth having on your shelf permanently if you're looking for a few to purchase. Another one set in Egypt is called, *Of Numbers and Stars: the Story of Hypatia*. And this one presents the life of a girl who lived in fifth century Alexandria and she became, in a time when it was very uncommon, a respected scholar in mathematics, in philosophy, and we have hardly heard anything about her because women were not supposed to do scholarship and mathematics and philosophy back then, so this story is inspiring and it's got really, really lovely illustrations. I bet that the cover alone will capture you. So, it's called, *Of Numbers and Stars*. The author of this one is D. Anne Love. Another really great one for your ancient Egypt studies is *Pyramid*, written and illustrated by David Macaulay who's been here at the Read-Aloud Revival before. His illustrations are so compelling, they're so detailed. And this is a book that will very likely capture any of your kids who love attention to detail and love to know how things were made. I highly, highly recommend this one. You could spend a good long time reading and learning from the books by David Macaulay. *Pyramid* is a fantastic place to go for that. And then, one more for your studies of ancient Egypt is *Mummies Made in Egypt* by Alike. Alike is another one of those illustrators we kind of recognize by her style. They're just very distinct and oh goodness, Alike has done a lot of really wonderful books. This one is a non-fiction look at the process of mummification. I'm not going to lie; it gets a little gruesome, so just maybe preview it. It's a really informative, wonderful book, and your kids will likely be just fine with it if they're already learning about the process of mummification which, I mean, it's a gruesome process, but don't say I didn't warn you—you might want to peek through it if you've got particularly sensitive kiddos.

13:14 Ancient Rome and Mesopotamia

OK, I mentioned *Pyramid* written by David Macaulay for your studies of ancient Egypt. He's also written another one that will come in handy as you're doing your ancient studies. It's called *City: A Story of Roman Planning and Construction* and this one is just a visual feast just like *Pyramid* is; so informative, it teaches how a Roman city was built. And so, I would pick up both of those for your bookshelf, *Pyramid* and *City*, so that you have for ancient Egypt and you have for ancient Rome as well. Now, let's back up a bit because we have the story of *Gilgamesh, the King*. Now, the story of *Gilgamesh, The Epic of Gilgamesh* is said to be one of the oldest stories ever recorded, and this one origin's in Mesopotamia. This particular one is rewritten by Ludmila Zeman, and it's a picture book trilogy—there's actually three of them. The first one is just *Gilgamesh, the King*. I would recommend you get that first one from the library and see if that's a good fit, and if your kids like this one they may like the next two in the trilogy; and it retells *The Epic of Gilgamesh* for children. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is not for the faint of heart so you may want to preview it first, and I know lots and lots of kids who've poured over these particular versions by Ludmila Zeman, they're just really well done. So, go ahead and get your hands on that and check it out.

14:42 Tomie dePaola Bible stories and more

And let me share one last collection of three books that I think are really, really helpful during ancient studies, and those are the Bible stories illustrated by Tomie dePaola, who is my very,



very, very favorite children's book illustrator. I think you guys probably know that by now if you've been listening to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast, you know he's a favorite of mine. There are three that I would get on your shelf for your studies of ancient history: the first is his book of Bible stories, it's just a collection of Bible stories that he illustrated. There's a newer 25th anniversary version; it's the NIV version of the Bible, illustrated with Tomie dePaola's illustrations. And then, two others that I would make sure I had on my shelf are The Miracles of Jesus and Mary, the Mother of Jesus which is a picture book biography about the mother of our Lord, illustrated by Tomie dePaola.

15:34 Less is more

So, again, this isn't a long, long list. And you know why? It's because when I go to the internet to start digging around and see if I can find books based on a certain historical time period, less is more, as long as those few choices are really very carefully chosen. And that's what we did here. We tried to choose what we think will have a really wide appeal in your home, a good chance for delight and connection, offer a good opportunity for conversations in your family, and appeal to a broad range of ages. I think all of the books on this list will do all of those things. So, it's a short, mighty list for your ancient history studies. Remember, you can get a printable version of this list and you can get easy links, and book covers and all that good stuff, so you know exactly what you're looking for at ReadAloudRevival.com/108.

16:29 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: Hi, my name is Anna. I'm 4 years old. My favorite book is Big Hero 6. My favorite part is when Baymax fights **[**inaudible**]**. I'm from Arizona.

Child2: Hello, my name is Justice. I am 7 years old. I'm from Arizona. My favorite book is Magic Tree House #1, Dinosaurs Before Dark. My favorite part is a T-Rex is trying to get Jack and Annie.

Child3: Hi, my name is Brio, and I live in Hagar City, Wisconsin. And I am 6 years old. And why I like Caddie[Woodlawn] is because they live kind of close where we live, and the Indian John gave Caddie a dog and a scalp belt, and then Caddie hanged up the scalp belt in the barn so they couldn't see, and I like this book because Caddie goes very much adventures with her two brothers, and that's all.

Child4: [Mom: what's your name?] Nathan. [Mom: and how old are you?] 3. [Mom: and what's your favorite book?] I Stink! [Mom: I Stink!? And why do you like that book?] **[**inaudible**]**

Child5: Hi, my name's Emmy. I'm 5 years old. I live in California. And my favorite book is Dragons Love Tacos. My favorite part about it, when the dragons eat the spicy salsa, and when the kids help.

Child6: Hi, my name is Hooper. I live in California. I'm 9 years old. My favorite series of books is Fablehaven. I really like it because there's lots of plot and mystery.

Child7: Hi, my name is Connor. I'm from California. I'm 9 years old and my favorite series of books is Percy Jackson. I've read the first five



but the first one's my favorite. I like them because they're mysterious and they have lots of fighting. Bye.

Child8: Hello, my name is Faith and I am 9 years old, and my favorite book is The Penderwicks, and I like it because Batty is funny.

Child9: Hi, my name is Rebekah and I live in Virginia, and I'm 7 years old. My favorite book is The Chronicles of Narnia because I like the adventures.

Child10: Hello, my name is Grace, and I am 5 years old, and my favorite book is Peter Rabbit because I like the stories. [Dad: what story's your favorite?] Peter Rabbit, the first one.

Child11: Hello, my name is Asta and I live in Virginia, and I am 3 years old. And my favorite book is Peter Rabbit.

Child12: Hi, my name is Eli. [Mom: and where do you live, Eli?] I live in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I'm 4 years old. And also, my favorite book is Give a Mouse a Cookie. I like the mouse. I like all the mice and also there is milk and cookies and I like that, too.

Child13: Hi, my name is Jane, and I live in Georgia. I am 6 years old and my favorite book is Dragons Love Tacos because they each have jalapeño peppers and then they blow up the house.

Sarah: Kids, thank you, thank you, for those recommendations. I always love hearing. It's one of my favorite things I do at Read-Aloud Revival, is listen to your messages and get them ready for the podcast because I just love to hear what you're loving. If you haven't left a message and you would like to, we air every single message in the order it's received. You can do it at ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of

the page there and you'll see how you can leave a message and we'll air it on the podcast. It's pretty fun. Don't forget you can grab a printout of this list of books we've recommended today at ReadAloudRevival.com/108. We also have some other carefully curated book lists about a few different categories, several different categories that you can get for free at RARbooklist.com or simply by texting the word BOOKS to the number 345345. So, if you want to find out what we're recommending at Read-Aloud Revival you want to text the word BOOKS to 345345 or head to RARbooklist.com. Thanks so much for listening. We'll be back next week. But in the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.