



RAR 109 - Rea Berg- How to Take Your Kids Around the World through Picture Books

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 109 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. So this is actually going to be our last show before we take just a little break, not too long, I promise. We're just going to take a break for the month of September. We're homeschooling families here at Read-Aloud Revival, we need a little time to get the school year going, but we're going to be back on October 2 with a whole other batch of fantastic episodes for you. Today, I want to talk about how we can travel the world with our children through picture books. At Read-Aloud Revival we're always talking about how picture books are not just for young kids but they're for older kids, too. Here's something interesting to think about. Picture books often feature richer more beautiful language than chapter books and novels do. This is why: when authors and publishers are making picture books they are expecting that these books will be read aloud to children but when they're making chapter books and novels they're expecting those books to be read by the children themselves. So when we think about picture books they're not worried reading level. The language can be so much richer because of that.

1:45 Circles, not ladders

So, I think a lot of times (and we're going to talk about this a little later in today's show) we think of reading as a ladder – so you read-aloud picture

books to your young kids and they step up maybe to earlier easy readers, and then they step up to chapter books and novels, and like rungs of a ladder you're moving up a ladder. And I want to get rid of that whole metaphor – that is not what we want our children's reading lives to look like. It's so much healthier and so much richer to think of our child's reading life as a set of expanding concentric circles. And so, when they're very young and they can't read for themselves we're reading picture books to them, and then when they're starting to read on their own we can add a layer of easy readers but we still keep reading those picture books to them. Then when they become fluent readers they start reading chapter books and we, indeed, start reading novels to them but we continue to read those picture books. Our literary richness, our diet of books becomes really rich and varied. Instead of rungs of a ladder where you leave something behind and graduate, we want to think about expanding concentric circles so that we're welcoming more kinds of books and more language into our child's reading life. Another thing that picture books have (surprise, surprise!) are pictures. Oh, the beautiful pictures! It's kind of funny to me that as a society we tend to think of picture books as something for young kids and then as adults we spend all kinds of money to go look at pictures at art museums. It's kind of funny to me. A picture book is an art museum in your child's lap. Some of the world's greatest artists have made their art for picture books. Some of today's best artists are making their art for picture books. Can you imagine – I'd love to imagine – Laura Ingalls Wilder (who, by the way, if you remember from her *Little House* books she talked about the green animal book – they had one green animal book that was like a treasured book; they read it over and over in their home) and just imagine that



if you were able, if you could give little young Laura Ingalls a beautiful rich picture book. What a feast for the eyes that would be. We, sort of, take it for granted that we have this ability to put this rich, beautiful art right into the laps of our children.

3:55 Rea berg is back

So, today I invited Rea Berg back to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast (we'll put her first episode where we talked about learning history through books, we'll put a link to that in the Show Notes – that was a few years ago, it was high time for her to come back). Now, in my conversation with Rea you're going to hear us talking about homeschooling. That's because I have a homeschooling family, a lot of our listeners are homeschooling families, and Rea herself is a homeschooling mother and her company, Beautiful Feet Books, makes wonderful guides for homeschooling families. But, if you're not a homeschooler I don't want you to ditch this episode because I think you're going to be inspired by how beautiful picture books can really nurture your relationship and the education of your children. We're going to go through it whether or not you're a homeschooling family, or not. So, don't ditch the episode just when we start talking about homeschooling – that's one of my caveats – and also, as I was editing this episode I kind of noticed that I didn't give you the title of the guide that we start talking about, I don't know, about a third of the way in, so I'm going to give it to you now. It's called *Around the World with Picture Books*, and like every episode of the Read-Aloud Revival you can see that book, other books we mention during the Show and all of the links and resources we mention in the Show Notes. You can also get a complete

transcript and a cheat sheet if you just want a quick-and-dirty version of the podcast. You can get those at ReadAloudRevival.com/109. OK, let's do this.

5:35 Rea and Beautiful Feet Books

Sarah: Let's just give listeners a quick introduction to your work. So, do you want to tell them about Beautiful Feet Books and then maybe a little bit about your family?

Rea: Well, Beautiful Feet Books really was an outgrowth of my own homeschooling with my children and when I first thought that I would be homeschooling I was inspired by the work of Susan Schaeffer Macaulay in the book, *For the Children's Sake*. And that book just really set a vision for me of what education could look like and so after I read that book I was on a mission to just find the best books for children because the Charlotte Mason approach, which is what *For the Children's Sake* is about is just a beautiful introduction for catching a vision of what you can do in your home with your children using the best literature and exposure to art and music and nature studies, and so that was my first introduction, and I actually didn't have any real exposure to picture books as a child. I was not read to as a child, and so, my first real exposure – I mean, I had a few books. We had *Winnie the Pooh*, A. A. Milne's *When We Were Six*, and I read those books as child and we had a few things around but mostly adult books – and so, it was when I had my own children that I really fell in love with picture books. You know, I also had Elizabeth Wilson's book, *Books Children Love* and in those days we didn't have Amazon Prime so if we wanted to use a beautiful book with our children we went to the library and I always went



with *Books Children Love* in hand and that was my guide to finding the best books, and that's how I got introduced to so many picture book artists. You know, the D'Aulaires, and Marguerite Henry, and Margaret de Angeli, and all of those, Robert Lawson, Robert McCloskey, and all of those wonderful old classics – that's where I discovered them, and that's what I started using to teach my children.

7:33 Too old for picture books?

Sarah: So, tell me what about – what do you say to people who think their kids are too old for picture books? I had mentioned at the beginning that we, sort of, tend to think of picture books as being for younger kids—something that your kids read until they can ... like, they're going to graduate from picture books ...

Rea: Right.

Sarah: ... to chapter books and novels. I think in *The Read-Aloud Family* I talked about if we could think of books, instead of a ladder like you graduate from picture books to easy readers (oh my goodness!) to chapter books, instead if we, kind of, think of them as concentric circles, like expanding concentric circles so that you're always adding ...

Rea: Yes.

Sarah: ... this richness, and by adding to the picture books the picture books never actually lose an important place in your child's life or in your life. What do you say to people who think their kids are too old for picture books?

Rea: Well, I think it's such a great point, and I love your metaphor there of concentric circles because I think C. S. Lewis just sums it up so perfectly, "A children's story that can only be

enjoyed by children is not a good children's story, not in the slightest. No book is really worth reading at the age of 10 which is not equally and often far more worth reading at the age of 50 and beyond." And that's really how I feel about picture books, too, because here I am a woman in my 60's and I'm doing this course on *Around the World with Picture Books*, and I'm just falling in love with picture books I never knew about, picture books I'd never seen before, and the stories of real people that have inspired and challenged me, so it shows that picture books are for everyone. And I think that's the real beauty of a classic children's book or an award-winning children's book is as an adult when you sit down and read it with your child you're getting just as much out of it as the child, and often, just because of our perspective and our life experience, even more than your child is getting. So I think that's the key – a really beautiful book, a really well-written, well crafted book is ageless, it's timeless.

Sarah: One of the things I love, because for listeners who don't know, my kids at the time of this recording anyway are 16, 14, 13, 6, and the twins are 5, so I will sit down to read a picture book with my 5 year old twins and my 6 year old, and when I look up over my shoulder all the older kids are now peeking over; it's either a book that they loved from their childhood and they're like, "Oh, I remember that one," or it's one that's new and they don't know about and they're just reeled in. My favorite is at bedtime all three of my boys (the 13 year old and the 5 year old twins share a room – bless my 13 year old's heart) and when I'm sitting there reading their bedtime stories he'll often come in and get his stuff for his shower and so often he'll come in to get his things for his shower and he'll just sit down and listen to the



rest of the story, and then specifically, you have a new program at Beautiful Feet Books that I am in love with.

10:20 Around the World with Picture Books

I'm actually using this program with my own 5 and 6 year olds this coming year. Let's talk about the program first – what inspired you to write it and what is it exactly?

Rea: Let's see. Well, I think I was really wanting something new and fresh for those primary grades because we've had our most popular curriculums are early American history which is a picture book curriculum, and then we have a geography one, and a science one, and they have always been very popular for the primary grades, but we never really did anything that sort of stretched the horizons and went beyond early American history, so I was really hankering to do something like that and I started thinking, 'Oh, I want to write an *Around the World with Picture Books* study – that would be really fun – and honestly, it has been really, really fun, but of course, what I discovered was my vision was way too big because there are so many beautiful picture books from around the world that trying to put it all in a one year study was virtually impossible, and of course, I didn't find that road block until I was about half way through and then I had to inform the company that I just can't do this in one year, I'm going to have to break it up into two parts, maybe even three parts, and there was some pushback on that, but I finally convinced them that it would be OK, and so the very first Guide covers Asia, Australia, Africa, and Antarctica. And then the Guide that I'm just finishing up now is Europe and South America. So it's been really a wonderful experience for me

because one of the things that Charlotte Mason is such a big proponent of is nature studies, and honestly, I have to say there weren't a lot of really great resources when I was homeschooling my children who are all adults now, there weren't a lot of great resources for incorporating nature study into your everyday study, so I didn't ever feel like I did a really good job of that. I feel like I did history and literature pretty well but the nature study it always seemed like it was extra, so when I set about to do this Guide, I decided I'm going to have a nature study component that's going to be integral to this guide. And so this Guide includes literature and then it includes nature study. We have these beautifully drawn animals from all over the world and then we have links for excellent videos on them, and the children get to cut them out and color them, and paste them in their notebooks. So, having the nature component as part of the Guide was really important to me because I just knew as a young mom I struggled so much to make sure I got that in on a regular basis, and with this Guide, not only do you have all of these amazing wonderful books but every country that you study has a map of the country for the kids to color, and these wonderful nature studies with these beautiful animals and so, to me it was like oh, I wish there was something like this when I was homeschooling because it just, to me, sells that vision that Charlotte Mason had, just having that focus on wonder, and always incorporating wonder into your studies.

13:47 Spread the feast

Sarah: Well, one thing I can tell you that I appreciate about it is that this is what you write, on very page one, so right out of the get-go. You said, "The best literature tends to inspire the



student's interest in curiosity to bubble up naturally. And often, notes are not necessary. If this is the child's first exposure to a diet rich in literature a little prompting helps the student to begin to look, question, and observe more keenly which is the ultimate purpose of the notes. Allow the literature to do what it does so well with only gentle prompting to observe something unnoticed." When I read that I went, 'OK, now here's a Guide that's going to help me keep my child and the book at the forefront instead of getting lost in all the peripheral stuff. And, I guess the focus on helping our children observe and look more closely, which sometimes, because it's not something we can document, feels like maybe it doesn't matter as much as something they can write down,' but it is.

Rea: That's right.

Sarah: Another thing that you said ...

Rea: Well, thank you.

Sarah: ... before, you said "Each day following the Guide will be a little different, be flexible, allow for spontaneity, and remember that this is Guide is just that – a guide. It is not meant to be [****inaudible****], or followed rigidly. Feel free to ramble off the trail at times as you are inspired to explore, discover, and enjoy the journey of *Around the World with Picture Books*. To me, it feels like what you're asking us to do – and this is such a very Charlotte Mason thing to do for those listeners who are familiar with Charlotte Mason's educational philosophy – it's like spreading a feast. We spread this feast through books. We help our children look more closely. And then what I sort of noticed when I was looking through your Guide is that you constantly remind us that when our kids eyes light up or when they want to go deeper, stop and go deeper, but I guess it's

the spreading of the feast is what the Guide is and then we just get to stay and dig more into those mashed potatoes when the kids really love them. That's what it feels like to me.

Rea: Oh, that's awesome.

15:50 A springboard for older kids too

Sarah: Have you heard from anyone, from families, who are using this? I know that the Guide says that it's a literature approach for primary grades, and probably people mostly purchase this for their kids who are up to grade three, but as I'm reading this and looking at it, I mean, the framework is what we do here at Read-Aloud Revival, with our Premium Members in our book club every month, we're always saying there's very simple three steps you can do: (1) you can read-aloud a story, (2) you can share a memorable experience, often around food, that relates to the story, and then (3) you talk about it, you have these wonderful conversations. That right there is a powerhouse experience, educationally, and relationally, and that's what I see this Guide as being a springboard for, so I can see it being something you could use with kids who are well beyond grade three. Have you heard of families doing that?

Rea: In fact, people have even posted on Instagram how they have been bumping it up for their older children, by finding chapter books and classic books, Newberry winners that sort of thing that can expand the course for their middle and upper grade children so that they're all studying at the same time; really traveling around the world together.



Sarah: We had Jamie Martin on the podcast (we'll put a link to her conversation with me about her book, *Give Your Child the World* in the Show Notes). It's a book that has book list recommendations for older kids, like chapter books and novels, and one of the things I keep thinking is you could use – so the same month that you're in Japan in *Around the World with Picture Books* and you're sharing these picture books and Japanese food and art and nature study, also pulling in some books from Jamie's recommendations based in Japan. Now, we have kids of all different ages in the same geographical space in their mind and experiencing the world or slipping in those shoes and exploring a new part of the world together. And that can be a great jumping off point for family dinner time because now everybody's got something in common but a different perspective that could be great conversation starter.

17:55 Giving kids a heart for the world

Rea: Oh, I think that's such an important point. And also, one thing we haven't mentioned at all, but of course, when you're bringing the older students along too, what you're really doing is giving your kids a heart for the world and giving them an understanding of a vastly different and diverse cultures from ours, and what a beautiful way . You really begin cultivating a love for people from all across the globe. This is really God's heart – is that all people have the same inherent value, all people are created in the Imago Dei and you know, we sure need to be cultivating that understanding and that vision in our children when they're young.

18:51 Miles and miles of empathy

Sarah: Every time we read a story with our kids we get to slip into the shoes of someone else and walk a mile, so I just keep thinking, oh my goodness, we can fill our children's childhoods with miles and miles of that. They will grow to be empathetic and kind, and be able to see every human on the face of the planet as an image of God – it's such a beautiful experience to give our kids, a beautiful opportunity we have as parents.

Rea: And, I think this goes along with what Mark Twain said. He said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice." And that's because when we travel we see people for who they are, we understand them, and we discover that people are really exactly like us. We all have this commonality, this universality, our emotions, our passions, our dreams, the things that we desire in life. And so, we can do that, we can't always take our children around the world, but we can do it through the medium of picture books. One of the books I want to mention, I think does this so well is in the Part 1 Guide, and it's a story of ... well, the name of the book is *Immanuel's Dream: The Story of Immanuel [**]*. This is a beautiful story about of a young boy who was born with only an appendage for one of his legs and in that culture it was considered a curse, that you'd been cursed by God if you had a deformed child or a child that was handicapped in some way. But this mother was a woman of faith and when this child was born, even though her husband abandoned her, she named her newborn son, Immanuel "God with us." And I think in the testimony of her faith and her vision to see that her child was still, regardless of the challenges he was going to face, he was still in the image of God. And she breathed so much faith into this young man that she told him he could do whatever he wanted to



do in life and that he could become a success. And you know, this is a boy that cannot walk because he only has one leg, and yet, he figured out how to get himself around and he became such a strong jumper that he would jump miles, he was so passionate to get an education. He would jump like 2 miles to school every day on one leg. They didn't even have crutches. I mean, it just blows your mind because just the state of what children born with these sort of challenges face in these countries. But, eventually, somehow when he was a young man, his grandmother found him a pair of crutches. And he became such a skilled soccer ball player that he played soccer on one leg with a crutch. He just had this incredible passion for life and for learning and he ended up, a group from San Diego brought him over to America because they had heard of his faith and his passion for learning, and this orthopedic world class team, fabricated him a leg and for the first time in his life he said he'd donned a pair of pants and walked on his own two legs into Sunday church. And then he set about to change the face of disabled children in Ghana. And, he has single handedly created an entire movement in that country to get people the help they need. It's just a true story that, you know, it's so inspiring. There's other books like that, that come out of Africa and books like, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*. There's so many inspiring stories that you can use with older children, but you can see a story like that (this isn't a picture book) but it just inspires you and challenges you and moves you in a very, very deep way. Anybody can read a picture book. Anybody. And, thank God for picture books because, I think, really picture books are a way that you can fall in love with reading in such a simple, easily approachable, unintimidating way. Anyone can read a picture book. And, even if

you've never been a reader your whole life you can pick up a picture book with your child or a grandparent that's never been a reader. And, you know it can be a door to whole new worlds for us.

Sarah: Which brings up a really good point about how anybody can read a picture book, and we'll put a link to this other episode the Read-Aloud Revival team did a few months back, we'll put a link in the Show Notes, on using picture books with older kids. We mentioned something that's been happening on Instagram. It was started by a teacher called "Classroom Book a Day" and it was basically a challenge that these school teachers had to read a picture book with their older students every day. Because it only takes 10 minutes, or maybe 15 minutes, to read a picture books they could fit it in.

Rea: Sure.

Sarah: It's not like a novel you embark on reading a long novel with your kids and it sort of feels like a commitment. A picture book is something you can start and finish in a matter of minutes, right? But it also ...

Rea: Right.

Sarah: ... gives you this whole story, the whole story arc in 15 minutes, so you actually get a whole entire encapsulated story, you get the satisfaction of having finished something, which is not to be taken lightly in motherhood – the laundry pile may not be done but I finished a book today – and you get ...

Rea: Absolutely.

Sarah: ... this opportunity to have a conversation with your kids about a story without having to wait a month to finish that longer read-aloud that's a chapter book or a novel. There are a lot of



benefits that I think, a lot of perks that picture books give that actually make them in a lot of ways preferred to longer literature, and I think that's one of those things that we need to remember, especially with our older kids who are reading to themselves or capable of reading to themselves and who we might not think of as our primary audience for picture books. But, we're going to put some of the book selections from this *Around the World With Picture Books Guide* into our Show Notes so that you can look at them, go get them from the library and try to read a couple and just see what happens. My thought is when you pick a book like this you're going to be surprised and delighted in ways you didn't expect and you're a grown up person. And ...

Rea: Absolutely.

Sarah: ... so, that's one of those things that helps us realize that our middle schoolers, our high schoolers, our older kids will be delighted and surprised in ways that we can't imagine, and so, Rea, is there anything you want to leave with our listeners? Any final words of wisdom for the moms who are really seeking to connect with their kids and maybe piqued by the interest of doing this through picture books?

25:39 Beauty, wonder and joy

Rea: You know, life is tough, and life can be hard. There's sickness and there's death, and there's hardship, and there's financial stresses, and yet in all those things we have this assurance that we'll never be last, we'll never be forsaken, and I think it's important for us to pursue a path that can help cultivate that and keep us in that place of joy, because no matter what comes against us, we know who we belong to, we know who has us in the palm of His hand, and I think having the

focus on beauty and wonder and joy will help us to impart that to our children and to cultivate that in our own lives.

26:33 Let the kids speak

Now, it's time for Let the Kids Speak. This is my favorite part of the podcast where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read-aloud to them.

Child1: My name is Francis and I live in Lincoln, Nebraska. And I'm 4. And my favorite book is *Fire Engine Man* because it has a little boy who wants to be a firefighter and he tells his brother he can be a fireman, too.

Child2: My name is [Mom: Sylvia.] Sylvia. [Mom: and how old are you?] 2. [Mom: what's your favorite book, Sylvia?] *Angelina Ballerina*. [Mom: what do you like about *Angelina*?] She has a brother, brother, brother, brother ... [Mom: a brother like you?] Yeah.

Child3: [Mom: what's your name?] Louis. [Mom: and where do we live?] Minnesota. [Mom: and how old are you?] 4. [Mom: and what's your favorite book to have read-aloud to you?] My *Bible*. [Mom: *The Jesus Storybook Bible*?] Yeah. [Mom: and what's your favorite part?] David and Goliath. [Mom: how come?] Because where Goliath says, "Am I a dog?" [Mom: you like that part?] Yeah. [Mom: yeah.]

Child4: Hello, my name is Kennedy and I am 4 years old. My favorite book is *Winter Wonderland* because I get to trace my finger on the line. [Mom: and where are you from, Kennedy?] California.

Child5: [Mom: what's your name?] **[**inaudible**]** [Mom: how old are you?] 3. [Mom: and where do you live?] Alaska. [Mom: what's your favorite



book?] *Cat in the Hat*. [Mom: and what do you like about it?] The funny ones.

Child6: [Mom: what is your name?] **[**inaudible**]**
[Mom: and how old are you?] 2. [Mom: and where do you live?] Wisconsin. [Mom: and what is your favorite book?] The three *Monkeys Sitting in the Tree* and the alligator. [Mom: *Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree*.] Yeah. [Mom: what is your favorite part?] They escape. [Mom: they escape from the alligator?] Yeah.

Child7: [Mom: and what is your name?] My name is Abigail Olivia. [Mom: how old are you?] 4 ½ years old. [Mom: where do you live?] I live in Wisconsin. [Mom: and what is your favorite book?] My favorite book is **[**inaudible**]**. [Mom: who is it by?] Edith **[**inaudible**]** [Mom: and illustrated by?] Michael **[**inaudible**]**. [Mom: what is your favorite part of the book?] My favorite part is **[**inaudible**]**.

Child8: Hi, my name is Sylvia. I am 8 years old. I live in Chattanooga, Tennessee. My favorite books are all *The Magic Tree House* books because they are go on fun adventures and it feels like they're taking me with them. And my other favorite book is *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* because it's a fun story about fun candies.

Child9: Hi, my name's Kimberley. I am 6 years old and I live in Chattanooga, Tennessee. My favorite book is *Peanut Butter and Cupcake* because of the silly things that they do and that they all become friends.

Child10: Hello, my name is Eden, and I'm 5 years old, and I'm from Atlanta, Georgia. My favorite book is *Charlotte's Web*. My favorite part is when Charlotte for Wilbur so that Wilbur doesn't have to die.

Sarah: Thank you kids. You know I love listening to your book recommendations. I could listen to you guys all day. We're taking a little bit of a break just for the month of September. I hope you enjoy the start of a new school year with your kids. We'll be back October 2 with episode 110. This is an episode a lot of you have been waiting for. Some of you that at the Great Homeschool Conferences in 2018 the author of *the Green Ember series*, S. D. Smith and I did some live podcast recordings. We're mushing them all up together, kind of doing a mix of them, and that's going to be episode 110. It's really fun. That was just a really fun – doing a live podcast recording with a studio audience, I'm just going to say, it's really fun, because Revivalers are awesome, and we got to do a podcast in I think it was five different states over 2018 and record them. So, we'll have that one for you on October 2, and once again, in October once we're back you'll be able to expect a brand new episode every Tuesday. Now, in the meantime, we're not going anywhere, we're just not popping into your ear buds. If you want the best book recommendations, articles, and free resources from the Read-Aloud Revival and you don't want to miss any of it, you want to text the word BOOKS to the number 345345 or go to ReadAloudRevival.com and sign up for our booklist. Once you're on the email list you get always the very best stuff that we have here at Read-Aloud Revival and you don't miss a thing. Again, you can text the word BOOKS to the number 345345 or just head to ReadAloudRevival.com and sign up for the book list and that's where you get the good stuff. Thank you so much for listening, I'm so glad to have you with us, we'll be back in October. Until then, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.

