



RAR 115 – Are you Making this Mistake When you Read Aloud With Your Kids?

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 115 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. Today I want to give you a tip that is very likely to make you instantly better at reading aloud. In *The Read-Aloud Handbook* Jim Trelease says that this is the number one mistake most all of us make when we're reading aloud, and I've completely noticed it in my own reading, when I hear others read-aloud; we all tend to do it. I find myself slipping into it as well. So what is it? Reading too fast. Here's what Jim Trelease says in *The Read-Aloud Handbook*: "The most common mistake in reading aloud whether the reader is a 7 year old or a 40 year old is reading too fast. Read slowly enough for the child to build mental pictures of what he just heard you read. Slow down enough for the child to see the pictures in the book without feeling hurried." Now this might seem really, really obvious or simple. You might not even realize that you're reading as fast as you are, but I'm going to give you an example by reading to you both quickly at the speed I normally would if I wasn't thinking about it and a pace that I think is much better and gives a much better read-aloud experience.

1:48 Building mental pictures

But before we do that I just want to talk for a quick second about why will slowing down make you better at reading aloud. Why would this give your kids a better read-aloud experience than

when it does when you read quickly? Mr. Trelease comments on those mental pictures and I think this is really important. Remember that when we are reading words, reading language, reading stories with our children, they're creating mental pictures in their head. We can read the words faster, oftentimes, than they can create those mental pictures, and then we just move right along. So, we've got a great story, we're doing this thing reading aloud, and then we rush through it so fast that we actually miss giving our kids some of the best benefits from the experience—which is the experience or the opportunity to build those mental pictures. So we lose that experience, that part of the experience, when we read quickly. The other thing to consider is that listening is actually really difficult work. When's the last time you listened to someone read aloud a book? If it's been awhile, if you're used to being the one doing the reading aloud and not having others read aloud to you, I would invite you to try listening to an audio book or have somebody else read aloud to you a book, and you might be surprised to realize that in a lot of ways listening is the harder job. It goes back to those mental pictures, it goes back to not having the visual anchor of the words right in front of your eyes and so listening is really difficult. And if it's been awhile since you've had to listen and then maybe tell back what you've heard it's a really, really difficult exercise. So, when we read quickly we make that job of listening that is already difficult so much harder than it needs to be. We don't want to make this harder; we want this to be enjoyable, we want our kids to get all the benefits they can get from listening to read-alouds, all of the academic benefits, all of those grammatically correct sophisticated language patterns coming in through their ear, we want them to create great mental pictures because



that's what spans their imagination and invites them into this big, beautiful world of story, so we've got to slow down in order to do that.

4:04 Vocal expression

The other thing to keep in mind is that there really is no room for vocal expression when we read quickly. And you're going to notice this when I sample for you here in a minute. I'm going to read aloud a section of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. I'm going to read a section of it quickly the way I would if I was just reading it as quickly as I probably want to and then I'm going to read you that same passage slower with more variation with my voice. And I think what you'll notice when you're doing this, when you purposefully set out to read-aloud with your kids and you say, "I'm going to slow down and read this slower" there is a lot more room for vocal expression. It's not nearly as difficult as it is. If you are reading quickly, reading aloud quickly, it is extremely difficult to give your kids any kind of vocal expression through your reading. Now, if you're not the kind of person that really likes to get dramatic and use different voices and such, it's really hard to show any expression at all when you read quickly. So it can even be hard to differentiate between who's talking with dialog or when a moment is tense or when a character is sad, even if you're not somebody who goes over the top with your expressions (and I'll just leave it to your imagination what kind of person I am when it comes to that). But even if you just like to keep things pretty tame one of the best ways then that you can add vocal expression is through slowing down because it's kind of like the white space around the margins of a page. If you were to pick up a book and the text ran from the edge of the

page all the way to the binding on both sides it just feels claustrophobic. You need a little white space, you need some margins, you need a little bit of space between those lines so that the font, the text, isn't just butted up right next to each other. We give our kids that orally when we read aloud slower. OK, so I've made this impassioned case, right? To help your kids build mental pictures that make their listening experience easier (because that's actually difficult work) and to give yourself some more room for vocal expression, and I want to give you a sample.

OK, for those of you have not read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* the section I'm going to read to you comes from right out of chapter two. So, no spoilers here, this is right at the front of the book. To set you up, I'm going to tell you what happens in chapter one. There are four kids, siblings: Peter, Susan, Edmond, and Lucy. The story takes place at the time of World War II in Europe and Peter, Susan, Edmond, and Lucy have been sent to the country away from London where they moved to the country because of the air raids, and they were sent to a house of an old professor who lives in the country. And they have just gotten to his house and they are exploring the house and they come across a wardrobe. Now, the other kids continue to explore the house and Lucy is pretty sure she wants to take a closer look at this wardrobe. Now, for any kids listening who don't know what a wardrobe is a lot of these old houses don't have built-in closets so a wardrobe is like a giant cupboard. It's like a piece of furniture that's a giant cupboard that you can store clothes in. And so, Lucy wants to see what is in this wardrobe. So she opens the wardrobe and she's sort of peeking through and thinking, 'Wow, this is an enormous wardrobe, so big.' And she's kind of rubbing her hands against coats



and things that are in the wardrobe and finds that out of the back of the wardrobe is another world and there's snow and a lamp post and she steps and crunches her way through the snow in this new world. Now what she finds in the other world is a Faun. So she's in this other world and crunching through the snow and she finds a Faun who looks like a man but his legs are shaped like goats and he has goats hooves instead of feet and he has a tail. And then he is also wearing a red woolen muffler around his neck and his skin's a little reddish and she says he has a pleasant face with a short pointed beard and curly hair. So, she's very surprised by this creature that she encounters in this world beyond the wardrobe, and here's what happens next. I'm going to read it quickly to you first and don't get discouraged, this is what our kids hear when we read aloud to them really quickly. Then I'm going to read you the exact same passage more slowly so you can hear for yourself the difference and you can experience what a slower read-aloud feels like and how much more rich it feels. So here we go with the fast version.

6:18 Listen to some examples ...

This is the beginning of chapter two, "What Lucy Found There." [Read with some inflection at a moderate, consistent pace, slight pauses for punctuation.]

"Good evening," said Lucy. But the Faun was so busy picking up its parcels that at first it did not reply. When it had finished it made her a little bow.

"Good evening, good evening," said the Faun. "Excuse me—I don't want to be inquisitive—but should I be right in thinking that you are a Daughter of Eve?"

"My name's Lucy," said she, not quite understanding him.

"But you are—forgive me—you are what they call a girl?" asked the Faun. "Of course I'm a girl," said Lucy.

"You are in fact Human?"

"Of course I'm human," said Lucy, still a little puzzled.

"To be sure, to be sure," said the Faun. "How stupid of me! But I've never seen a Son of Adam or a Daughter of Eve before. I am delighted. That is to say—" and then it stopped as if it had been going to say something it had not intended but had remembered in time. "Delighted, delighted," it went on. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Tumnus."

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Tumnus," said Lucy.

"And may I ask, O Lucy Daughter of Eve," said Mr. Tumnus, "how you have come into Narnia?"

"Narnia? What's that?" said Lucy.

"This is the land of Narnia," said the Faun, "where we are now; all that lies between the lamp-post and the great castle of Cair Paravel on the eastern sea. And you—you have come from the wild woods of the west?"

"I—I got in through the wardrobe in the spare room," said Lucy.

"Ah!" said Mr. Tumnus in a rather melancholy voice, "if only I had worked harder at geography when I was a little Faun, I should no doubt know all about those strange countries. It is too late now."



“But they aren’t countries at all,” said Lucy, almost laughing. “It’s only just back there—at least—I’m not sure. It is summer there.”

“Meanwhile,” said Mr. Tumnus, “it is winter in Narnia, and has been for ever so long, and we shall both catch cold if we stand here talking in the snow. Daughter of Eve from the far land of Spare Oom where eternal summer reigns around the bright city of War Drobe, how would it be if you came and had tea with me?”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Tumnus,” said Lucy. “But I was wondering whether I ought to be getting back.”

“It’s only just round the corner,” said the Faun, “and there’ll be a roaring fire—and toast—and sardines—and cake.”

“Well, it’s very kind of you,” said Lucy. “But I shan’t be able to stay long.”

“If you will take my arm, Daughter of Eve,” said Mr. Tumnus, “I shall be able to hold the umbrella over both of us. That’s the way. Now—off we go.”

And so Lucy found herself walking through the wood arm in arm with this strange creature as if they had known one another all their lives.

11:07 A little more slowly

OK, I’m a little breathless. I was trying not to go too over the top but you can see you can still read with some expression when you’re reading quickly but now let me read it to you the way it should be read, and see if this doesn’t just feel more inviting and more rich of a read-aloud experience for you as a listener.

“What Lucy Found There.” [Read with greater inflection at a slower yet engaging pace, pauses for punctuation.]

“Good evening,” said Lucy. But the Faun was so busy picking up its parcels that at first it did not reply. When it had finished it made her a little bow.

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“If you will take my arm, Daughter of Eve,” said Mr. Tumnus, “I shall be able to hold the umbrella over both of us. That’s the way. Now—off we go.”

14:12 How pauses help you

OK, so here’s the deal. I looked at the recording for how long it took me to read both of those. The first time I read that passage to you it took about two minutes, the second time it took about three minutes, so fifty percent longer. But, I would be surprised if most of you listening didn’t have

better mental pictures in your mind or a richer more personal experience of that encounter between the Faun and Lucy the second time. Do you see how much easier it was? You can’t really see how much easier it was. For me to add vocal expression it was so much easier. Here’s the key. When you add pauses between sentences and don’t worry about just jumping into the next sentence it also gives your eyes a chance to scan ahead. And the reason this is helpful as the person who’s reading aloud is because how often are you reading a book out loud with your kids and you say the dialog and you realize you said it in a totally wrong voice or it says, “she whimpered,” and you said it brightly. You go, “Wait a second, let me try that again.” It’s kind of like at this point that I said (here, let me find it in the book, I just read it) where she says, “But they aren’t countries at all,” said Lucy, almost laughing. I could have said it like, “But they aren’t countries at all!” said Lucy, indignantly. But that’s not what the words say. “But they aren’t countries at all,” said Lucy, almost laughing. Now, because I take just a pause before I read that sentence my eyes can scan down quickly and you will develop this habit of being able to deliver dialog so much better because you know how it’s supposed to sound because you give yourself a second for your eyes to jump ahead and figure out who said this and how did they say it, and it becomes a habit so that when you’re reading aloud a book you’ve never read before so you don’t know who said what, and you don’t know how they delivered it, if you give yourself these pauses, not only is it a better listening experience for your kids but it’s also a better reading experience for you because you feel more successful. You actually do a better job at it. You’re able to stay in character or just deliver the story more true to what the story actually is



because you're keeping ahead, just one step ahead of what you're reading out loud.

16:22 Why do we read so fast?

Now, thinking this through, I was thinking as I prepared this episode, why do we read so fast? I think there's a lot of reasons, but I think one reason is that we feel like we need to—there's so many books, so many books so little time, like we always say on Instagram—there's so many books that we want to share with our kids and so we feel like we can read more books or we can get through this read-aloud time faster or we can get more read today. So, if you have twenty minutes to read aloud and you think, 'Well, I can read more if I read faster.' I want to challenge that idea that that's a better way to go because I think when we decide that reading a lot or reading a certain quantity is more important than the richness of the actual read-aloud experience itself we forget that the experience itself is the meaningful part, not getting through the book. So, Allen Jacobs says a little about this in his completely delightful and wonderful read, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*, and I'm going to put a link to that in the Show Notes because it's a really great read. I just completely enjoyed it and recently I was flipping through it and seeing all my book darts and my notes in the margins and I think I'm due for a re-read of this little... it's short, and it's quick, and it's just so... if you're a reader or you want to be a reader, either one, I think there's just so much to love about this book. But anyway, in *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*, Alan Jacobs says this: "I believe that most people read quickly because they want not to read but to have read." I think we basically forget that the primary goal of reading is not actually to upload a

quantity of information to our brains. The reason we read-aloud with our kids isn't because we want to upload a whole bunch of stories into their brains, or at least, that should not be, it's rather to connect with them. And connections take time. It takes time to connect with people and it takes time to connect with ideas in a meaningful way, so we need to stop valuing the number of books that we read aloud and instead value the experience. In fact, kind of related, and I wasn't really planning on sharing this but it just popped into my brain, you might know that I used to share the stacks of books I read each month on Instagram and at the end of the month I'd say I read all these books and I would have a stack there and one of the reasons I stopped doing that, and I just quit and a few people asked me where did those go, why don't you do them anymore? is because that, sort of, innately turns into me wanting to beat the previous month. So, if I read seven books last month this month I read eight you start to value getting through a book more than you value the reading experience itself. And so I quit doing that and in fact I quit numbering the books in my journal. I used to count up the number of books I read each year so I could say "I read this number of books this year." I quit doing that too because it just feels like, it felt to me like I was innately valuing getting through the books more than I was valuing the reading experience itself. I can tell you that reading aloud with my kids, reading aloud with your kids, quantity doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter. I have shared before that I am reading *Okay for Now* (actually, we're done with it now) by Gary Schmidt with my teenagers which I think it's one of my all-time favorite books for ever. If you haven't read it it's such a delight, you should read it. I just think it's really an exquisitely beautiful book. I've read it three times in the last



year and a half or something, and I'm reading it aloud with my teens, I don't recommend this one for kids under 12 (just heads up there). I am reading aloud with my teens and it took us months. Now this is a book that's—I don't know, I don't have it in front of me—350 pages or something. If we read a chapter a day or something we could get through it in a couple of weeks. I know a lot of people who read it aloud in a month. It actually took us more like three months to read it, three and a half actually. But it didn't really matter. It was a slow, rich experience for my kids. So, I still heard my kids, for example one of the themes in the book, one of the things that happen, I should say, in that book is a boy learns to draw birds like Audubon, like John James Audubon. And, I heard one of my teenagers commenting to a sibling about a bird she saw in the backyard about the magpie and about the shape of the feathers, and she was using words she got directly from *Okay for Now*. And then there's this sort of joke in the book how to drink a really cold Coke, and my kids and I today still make comments to each other even if we're just chugging water about, "Hey, do you know how to drink a really cold Coke?" and we all laugh. So we have these connections; we have these memories about *Okay for Now* even though it took us three and a half months to read. Now, I'm pretty sure ten years from now my kids are going to remember that we read it aloud because it's been such a rich experience and because it's such an unforgettable book, but I don't think they'll remember oh, it took us three or four months to read it versus it took us three weeks. So, just remember speed is not important. Even if you only read two books a year, two novels a year with your kids, those add up year over year over year. They add up to dozens of books you've read with your children. Dozens of

memories your kids will carry. So many connections; hundreds and hundreds of connections you're making with ideas and with each other. So, I think for us to really take on this idea of we're going to slow down and be better at reading aloud we have to stop worrying about finishing books, about reading a certain quantity of books, and we have to prioritize frequency and a good quality read-aloud experience over speed or over quantity, you know, more reading aloud. OK? So, I hope this has been inspiring to you. I thought, 'hmmm, how can I express the difference of this because I've really noticed it. I've noticed it when I hear others read-aloud really quickly and I have a hard time keeping up, or if I hear them read-aloud real slow and luxurious, not too slow, but slow enough that allows me to build those mental pictures, that allows me the ease of a listening experience, and I think, 'oh my goodness, if we can give this gift to our kids they will treasure read-aloud time even more.' And the way we do that is to remember that the number of books we read with our kids doesn't matter, that the speed with which we read does not matter, it's the quality and richness of these experiences that we have with our kids that makes the difference that lasts their lifetime.

22:46 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 Noah. I live in Alaska and my favorite book is *Boxcar Children*. [Mom: how old are you, Noah?] 6.



Child2: My name is Clyde. I'm from Cheyenne, Wyoming and my favorite books are The Oz series by L. Frank Baum. I like them because there's lots of adventures and **[**inaudible**]**.

Child3: My name is Luke. I'm 8 years old, I'm from Cheyenne, Wyoming, and my favorite books are The Burgess Animal Stories because they're full of adventures; they're about animals.

Child4: Hi, my name's Eucile. I'm 8 years old. I live in Hawaii. My favorite book is George's Marvelous Medicine. I like it because it's silly.

Child5: [Mom: what's your name?] David. [Mom: how old are you, David?] 3. [Mom: three. Where do you live?] In Hawaii. [Mom: in Hawaii. And, what's your favorite book?] ****inaudible**** [Mom: Richard Scarry's Cars and Trucks and Things that Go?] Yeah. [Mom: why do you like it?] Very funny.

Child6: Hello, my name is Miriam. I'm 10 years old. I live in Hawaii. My favorite book is Anne of Green Gables. I like it because Ann is always getting in trouble.

Child7: Hi, my name is Titus. I am 6 years old. I live in Hawaii and my favorite book is This is My Home, This is My School. I like it because it's so funny.

Child8: [Mom: what's your name?] My name is Noah. [Mom: and how old are you?] 6 years old. [Mom: and what state do you live in?] Illinois. [Mom: and what is your favorite book?] Henry Huggins by Beverly Cleary. [Mom: and what do you like about Henry Huggins?] Something is always happening to him. He finds a dog and his mom finally lets him keep it, and that he finds fish, and that he gets too many **[**inaudible**]** something happens to him, and Beverly Cleary makes other books that I also really like.

Child9: I'm Noah and I'm 4 and I live in Georgia. [Mom: and what are your favorite books to read aloud?] Mercy Watson. [Mom: and why do you like Mercy Watson?] Because she likes butter.

Child10: My name is Noah and I live in Alabama. I'm 5 years old and my favorite book is My Father's Wagon, and I like it because it has a boy saving a dragon.

Sarah: Well, that's it. Thank you so much for joining me for another episode for the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. Stay tuned because we have more great episodes coming your way. Next week we're going to talk to a special guest about reading with babies, connection parenting, and getting books into the hands of every child. And then, I've got a list I'm working on right now of my favorite Christmas novels to read-aloud so that's coming, soon. And you know we already have a list of our favorite Christmas picture books, right? They're in the picture books for December list which you can get for free by texting the word BOOKS to the number 345345, or by going to RARBooklist.com. Anyway, I've been working on a list of novels that you can read aloud with your family in December for Christmas, which we've had several requests for over the years, and this year we're finally getting one to you. So that list of novels is coming up in a future episode. And, of course, we're updating our Read-Aloud Revival gift guide for young readers, so we're on the hunt for the best bookish delights for your kids that would make great Christmas gifts and that will be coming your way soon as well. As always, you get the best of and the most free resources delivered by email so to make sure you don't miss out on anything wildly wonderful and free go to RARBooklist.com and get on the list there. Alright, until next time,

READ-ALLOUD REVIVAL



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