



RAR 120 – Focus on What Matters Most (psst: that's your relationships with your kids)

Sarah: Hey, heads up. Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership is open for enrollment now for just one week. Our members rave about their Premium Memberships including Kameron who said, “Membership here is worth more than I have paid for my curriculum for the year.” And Kristy B. who told us, “If anyone out there isn’t sure take the leap you only have to gain by joining RAR Premium.” Lacey Reagan said to anyone who’s on the fence, “It’s the best money I spend each month,” and Homeschool House of Scott on Instagram said, “RAR is by far the best thing we’ve been a part of in twelve years of homeschooling. You won’t regret joining.” Listen, we’re only open for a week. You don’t want to miss out. Enrollment closes Monday, January 21 and then we won’t re-open until May; head to RARMembership.com to learn more.

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.

Sarah: Hello there. Sarah Mackenzie here. So glad to be with you today. This is episode 120 and since we’re at the beginning of a fresh year I wanted to make sure we took just a few minutes to consider how we, as intentional parents, can focus on what matters most in the coming year with our kids. We all want to connect with our kids, right? And, every one of us is short on time and pulled in a million directions, but strengthening our relationships with our kids is within reach for all of us in the coming year no matter how much time we do or don’t have to spare. In fact, I’m pretty darn sure that if you

spend just a little time and energy improving your relationships with your kids this coming year you won’t regret it come December. You won’t think, ‘Man, I wish I had spent that time and energy differently.’ Indeed our kids are worth it.

2:20 Kids before books

Today, we’re going to talk about three very simple ways to focus on what matters most. The first one is just to put our kids ahead of the books we’re reading. I’ve said it before but I think it bears repeating because we forget this so easily (and I am raising my hand here because I forget this as much as anyone else does). We forget that that list of books that we want to read with our kids, even if it’s important, is still not as important as making sure our kids feel loved and valued and seen every time we share books with them. The people matter more than the stories. The goal, of course, with our reading aloud is connection, it’s not actually to get a certain number of books into our kids or to expose them to a certain number of stories. What this means is so freeing because even if our read-alouds don’t look perfect, even if our kids miss stuff, even if our read-aloud time doesn’t look ideal, it doesn’t really matter so much. What matters is that our kids feel seen and valued and loved. We want them to leave read-aloud time feeling seen and valued and loved. Whether we finish the story or not doesn’t matter nearly as much as connection with our kids during read-aloud time. The people matter more than the stories. So this year one of the ways that we can really focus on what matters most is use our read-aloud time to put our children ahead of everything else, to put them ahead of the story, to put them ahead of our plan, to put them ahead of our list that we were hoping to get through. Putting our kids first and



remembering that the relationships there are the most important piece; connection is the goal of read-aloud time.

4:02 Use small pockets

The second thing we can do (very, very simple thing we can do) to help focus on what matters most in our families this year is to use very small pockets of time for read-alouds. I would say don't wait for twenty minute chunks of time or a thirty minute chunk of time before you read aloud. If you commit today to read with your kids, even if you only have ten minutes for it, you will read so much more in the coming year. We oftentimes can squander little five or ten minute chunks of time, and we all do it—we either hop on Facebook or we just, sort of, piddle around, we sweep the floor again or we check our phones or we stare into outer space. I don't know, there's a million different things we can do with five or ten minutes but if we spent those five or ten minute chunks reading we could get a lot more reading in. Now, two weeks ago on episode 119 of the Read-Aloud Revival (ReadAloudRevival.com/119) I had Anne Bogel on and we talked about really delighting in your own reading life. This is how I fit in more reading in my own reading life. So putting aside the read-alouds for a second, this idea of reading in ten minute chunks helps me read so many more books over the course of a year. One thing we didn't mention in that episode, but I think is worth mentioning here, is that this is not something that you'll probably feel like comes naturally to you. We have actually changed the way our brains have been wired by using technology (and I'm not going to rant against technology here, so don't worry) but I am going to say that if you find it difficult to read a novel or a non-fiction book or a book of any kind in ten

minute chunks because you have a hard time sinking into it and you feel like you need more time just keep at it. For an entire month make it a commitment to read in ten minute chunks, just to take all those little times that you're waiting for a child at basketball practice, or you're waiting in the dentist office, or you're sitting in the carpool lane, or you're waiting for the pasta pot to boil, or you're waiting for the tea to brew—whatever it is you're waiting for—and read for just a couple of minutes. You reach for your phone, instead put your phone down and reach for a book. Do that for a month and I bet your ability to concentrate and dive back into your book will strengthen. When we're out of the habit of something like reading it can be hard for our brains to know, 'Hey, now it's time for you to actually focus on this book' – so people have said to me, "You know, I hear you say I should read in those ten minute chunks of time but I just can't concentrate," and I would say keep trying it anyway. I bet you can re-train your brain and in a couple of months you will be able to read tons more books if you utilize those five and ten minute chunks of time. Just re-train your brain so it knows what to expect. Don't expect that you're going to be able to do it right away—might take a little brain re-training.

6:45 Don't limit yourself

Now, when it comes to reading aloud with our kids, even if you only have ten minutes, you can read aloud with your kids. You don't need to read a whole chapter, you don't even need to finish an entire picture book. You can use a post-it note, you can use a bookmark, you can use anything to mark where you left off and just come back to it later. Don't limit yourself and limit the amount of time you can share books with your kids by



thinking you have to have a long stretch of time. The truth is if you wait for a long stretch of time to read-aloud with your kids you're just not going to do it very frequently or maybe at all. So, try and use five or ten minute chunks of time whenever you can. Do it for your own reading life and do it with your reading aloud with your kids. And, I bet 2019 will be an awesome reading year if you take that one to heart.

7:39 Share an experience

So, as a review, number one, put your kids ahead of the books, prioritize those relationships more than the books. Number two, read aloud in all available small pockets of time. And, number three, share simple and memorable experiences about the books you read together. Now, this doesn't need to be complicated or expensive or even require much or any planning. I'm not talking about reading a book about sled dogs and then making an igloo out of marshmallow or reading a book about ancient Egypt and mummifying a chicken, or something like that. I mean very simple, memorable, beautiful experiences around the books you share. My best tip here is just to transform something you're already doing instead of adding on to your to-do list. I said at the top of this episode we all feel like we're pulled in a million directions, we all have a lot on our plates so the best way to make this work is actually not to add to your to-do list but to transform what you're already doing to make it more memorable and revolve around a book. So, in our Premium Membership Book Club, our Family Book Club guides often suggest dinner transformation. And we do this because of that to-do list. So, for example, when we read as a group *Strega Nona* by Tomie dePaola we had pasta for our Family Book Club night dinner. All

these families all over the world are sharing *Strega Nona* together and then having pasta dinner, an Italian dinner, transforming something you're already doing every day (dinner, hello? We have to do it every day, we all bemoan it, right?), you're just transforming that into a richer, memorable experience. Likewise, last December in our Premium Membership, our Family Book Club selection was *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park as well as her picture book, *Bee Bim Bop*, so we read those books and we enjoyed the Korean dish *Bee Bim Bop* which is mix-mix rice. We all made that in our homes. So, we were reading these books set in Korea for our Book Club and then we enjoyed *Bee Bim Bop* for dinner. Again, transforming something we're already doing—making dinner into a simple, memorable experience. And those are memories your kids will share. In fact, a dad pulled me aside at a conference last summer and told me that Read-Aloud Revival Premium Family Book Club night was his favorite night to come home from work because he got to be a part of what the kids were reading and doing and it included him in the family's reading and exploring. The kids loved it, it was something to anticipate—and it's always fun. We read *Locomotive* by Brian Floca, a picture book about the transcontinental railroads (one of the first transcontinental railroads, in fact), he had grilled up antelope on the grill for that dinner. I think some of the rest of us did other kind of railroad food but they grilled antelope. These are just fun, special memories that your family can make. And, in Read-Aloud Revival Premium we do it every month so that every month you know that there's a really great family dinner experience that's going to transform your ordinary dinnertime into a meaningful and memorable experience around books that your family is sharing.



10:49 All about connection

Actually, let's talk about Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership Family Book Club for a moment because these really are ideal ways to put your kids ahead of books and to share experience with your kids about the books you're reading (simple, simple experiences—which is always key—that's a very important adjective). Imagine if you will if reading aloud became your favorite part of your own day, your kids' favorite part of their school day. Reading books together as a family is such a beautiful way to connect—we connect with each other, we connect with the books we read, and of course, we connect with the big ideas that we encounter in the books we read. So, every month in Read-Aloud Revival Premium we have a Family Book Club, and we do these four steps: we read aloud, we share a simple and memorable experience (like the ones I've described), we have meaningful conversations with our kids about those stories and ideas, and then the fourth thing we do is meet the author or illustrator of that book in a live video stream. What we found is that it's a sure-fire way to read well, fall in love with books, and create some awesome family memories around the books your family is reading. So, let me tell you what your family can look forward to over the next few months because Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership opened today, our enrollment is open just for a week, and I'm going to tell you about the Family Book Clubs we're doing over the winter months.

12:10 Snowflake Bentley

So, in January our Family Book Club pick is Snowflake Bentley by Jacqueline Briggs Martin. This is a picture book based on the true story of

William Bentley who was a scientist who uncovered the patterns in snowflakes. And, our Family Book Club guide helps you create simple and memorable experiences about Snowflake Bentley. We give you conversation starters and open-ended questions you can use to talk with your kids of all ages from your 4 year old to your 17 year old about Snowflake Bentley and then (this is where it gets really fun) the author herself, Jacqueline Briggs Martin, is going to come to Read-Aloud Revival in a live online video stream and answer the kids' questions about the process of writing that book. That's what Family Book Club looks like at Read-Aloud Revival and that's what we're doing in January.

13:04 Narnia!

Now, if your family is a fan of Narnia then this the time for you to join Read-Aloud Revival Premium (we are all about Narnia this winter). So the whole family is going to enjoy this Family Book Club, it's featuring The Chronicles of Narnia, the families in our Premium Membership will be reading those books all winter long, you can jump in wherever you are—if you've never read Narnia with your kids you can start with The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. If you've read some of them you can just jump in wherever your family is. Even if your kids have read Narnia before we are going to help you fall even deeper in love with these magnificent books because there's something for everyone in the family. We have a couple of things happening in Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership around Narnia this winter. So, first of all, a brand new Mama Book Club featuring Jonathan Rogers who wrote The World According to Narnia. So moms are going to be reading that book and having a deeper conversation. We're going to have a Family Book



Club guide, of course, that helps parents read the Narnia books with their kids, discuss them, and then again, transform some simple dinner experiences so that those can become family memories around the reading of Narnia—it's just going to be wonderful, it's going to be fantastic.

14:14 Celebrate St. Patrick's Day

Our March Family Book Club is going to feature some of our favorite books for St. Patrick's Day. So, we've got four picture book titles all lined up, written and illustrated by the one and only Tomie dePaola. I don't know if you've heard of these books—he's written several for St. Patrick's Day—Fin M'Coul: The Giant of Knockmany Hill. There's a couple of books about Jamie O'Rourke—there's Jamie O'Rourke and the Big Potato and Jamie O'Rourke and the Pooka, and of course, there's a very beautiful book Patrick Patron Saint of Ireland. Again, the Family Book Club guide is going to help you have discussions with your kids about those books, those questions in that discussion guide will help you have discussions with your kids whether they're 4, whether they're 3, and whether they're 13 or 17, so it really is a whole family guide. And then, if you're wondering how close and personal you'll get to be with Tomie dePaola (well, I'm glad you asked!), Tomie, of course, is going to come back to Read-Aloud Revival and he's going to do a live online Author Access Event. He's going to read from some of his books, he's going to answer your kids' questions—it's just going to be a really, really good time.

15:19 All about service dogs

And then in April we are going to be reading some books about service dogs. So, you know the If You Give a Mouse a Cookie books (you

know, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, If you Give a Pig a Pancake, If You Give a Moose a Muffin—we all love those books, right?) the author, Laura Numeroff also has a lovely picture book called Raising a Hero. And she's coming to Read-Aloud Revival to talk to us about it. So, we're going to be reading that book and doing our Family Book Club guide about conversations, we'll be having conversations about service dogs and about the ideas in the books we're reading, and transforming a dinner experience, and then we get to meet Laura Numeroff. And let me tell you, she is a hoot. It's going to be so much fun. As part of that Book Club older kids will get to read a book called Chester and Gus by Cammie McGovern. This was one of my very favorite reads of last year. It's a book about an autistic boy, a service dog, and what it means to become who you were born to be. In Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership we know your kids matter to you more than just about anything else and we also know that you're short on time. That is why in Read-Aloud Revival Premium you get a regular dose of connection to inspire your family through monthly book clubs and live online events, community to refresh and rejuvenate you alongside other like-minded moms, and confidence to help you teach from rest, to help you lead well. We do that through Mama Book Clubs and Master Classes.

17:02 Online workshops and more

We love to help your kids read and to help your family read together but we also love to help your kids learn how to tell stories with both words and pictures because the next generation of storytellers comes from our children. So, this winter and spring your kids are going to get a

front row seat at some excellent online workshops. We've got published authors and illustrators coming to teach both writing and drawing workshops for your kids. And, if that's not enough, we have Master Classes designed especially for you, the homeschooling mom, to help you teach from rest, to help you plan and create your own simple and effective curriculum, and to help you discover how your personality type can supercharge your homeschool. Now, one of the questions we get a lot about Read-Aloud Revival Premium is what if I can't make it to some of the live online events? What if I have conflicts in my calendar? And, the good news is we record every single one of our classes, our workshops, our author visits—so that means you can watch the replays anytime and you won't miss a thing no matter how crazy your schedule is. And don't let me forget to tell you about the best part—our member forum. Melissa, who's one of our Premium Members, she told us recently that when she has a little time to log in online she just skips Facebook altogether these days and she comes to the Read-Aloud Revival Forum instead. Our members jumped onto that thread to agree and they said that the forum is almost impossible to describe, just how wonderful it was. It's where you're going to meet kindred spirits and like-minded mamas who'll encourage you, they'll pray for you, they'll make you laugh, they'll root for you on your toughest days, and honestly, Read-Aloud Revival Premium exists to light a fire and energize your homeschooling. Now, we only open doors a few times each year so this week we're open and then we won't open again until May. So, to make sure you don't miss it, you want to head to RARmembership.com and request an invitation.

18:48 Don't forget: 3 simple things

Now, whether you join Read-Aloud Revival Premium or not I really want to encourage you to do those three simple things to focus on your relationships with your kids this year: number one, prioritize your kids more than your books or, frankly, more than anything else on your plans. Number two, use the smallest pockets of time to read aloud and to read yourself and that will really supercharge your reading life. I think you'll be surprised at how much more reading you fit in your life when you use the small pockets of time to get more reading in. And then number three, share simple and memorable experiences about the books you read together. I promise you this—you will not regret a single minute you spend nurturing your relationships with your kids no matter how old they are, whether they're babies or toddlers, grade schoolers or teens, every single minute you spend nurturing your relationships with your kids is time well spent. I hope 2019 is a rich and wonderful year for you and for your kids and for the relationships in your home.

19:58 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 Hope. I am 9 years old. I live in Frankfurt, Kentucky. One of my favorite books is *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street*. I like it because it has a little bit of mystery and it also is really funny. My other favorite book is *Emily's Runaway Imagination* by Beverly Cleary. This one is also really funny. I love funny books.



Child2: Hi, my name is Will and I'm 6 years old. I live in Frankfurt, Kentucky. One of my favorite books is Finding Buck McHenry. I like it because I love baseball. And my next favorite book is Summer of the Monkeys by Wilson Rawls. My favorite part is when the monkeys got drunk.

Child3: My name is Damien and I live in Kentucky and my favorite book is The Circus Ship because I like when the animals fall off the boat and they crash into a huge log and when they hide in the village. [Mom: and how old are you?] 4 years old.

Child4: Hi, my name is Wren. I live in Kansas City, Missouri. My favorite book is CeCe Loves Science and I'm 3½ and I love CeCe Loves Science because she thinks she's not a real scientist but she actually is.

Child5: Hi, Mrs. Mackenzie, my name is Laura and I live in Williamson, Georgia. I just turned 6 years old and my favorite part of the podcast is the same as yours, Let The Kids Speak. My favorite book is Little House on the Prairie because I like the part Laura leaves their big house in the woods. My daddy reads the books to me and I am named after Laura Ingalls Wilder. Thank you.

Sarah: Laura, you are named after Laura Ingalls Wilder! Well, that is so special. I love it. And you know, I'm really glad that you like Let The Kids Speak as much as I do. I'm really glad that you left a message. Thanks for telling me about your favorite book.

Child6: Hi, my name is Yvonne and I'm 7 years old and I'm from North Carolina. And, my favorite books are the Magic Tree House books. I like them because Jack and Annie learn stuff and because they are amazing and awesome and because it feels like they're taking me where they're going to.

Child7: Hello, my name's Alyse and I'm 6 years old and I'm from North Carolina. My favorite book is Tea for Ruby. And my favorite part is when Ruby does not know that it's really her grandma not the queen. It's a great book and I love it.

Child8: Hi, my name is Libby, I'm 6 years old. I live in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and my favorite book is The Last Battle by C.S. Lewis. I like it because Aslan's really powerful.

Child9: [Mom: what's your name?] Ivan. [Mom: where do you live?] Cambria, California. [Mom: and what is your favorite book?] the Interrupting Chicken. [Mom: what do you love about it?] Because he says, "Don't worry, it's just an acorn." [Mom: he says, "Don't worry, it's just an acorn?"] Yeah. [Mom: is there anything else you love about the book?] Ah, no. [Mom: OK, thank you.]

Child10: My name is Summer. [Mom: Summer lives in Cambria, California. Summer, how old are you?] I am 9 years old. [Mom: Summer uses a communication device to communicate and she loves the Read-Aloud Revival. She will tell me...] Read. [Mom: "read" on her communication device and that means she wants to listen to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast and Author Access and Master Classes. Is that true, Summer? Yeah. Are you excited to leave a recording and have you loved books your whole life? Yeah. Thank you.]

Sarah: Summer, thank you so, so very much for your message. I am so glad that you listen to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. Someday I hope I can give you a real hug but for now we'll both just have to both enjoy reading books that we love. I am so glad to hear from you and I'm really glad that you really enjoy listening to the podcast.



Child11: [Mom: what's your name?] Jade. [Mom: how old are you?] 9. [Mom: and what is your favorite book?] Brother's Grimm and Witch Is When. [Mom: and why are both of them your favorite? What was your favorite part about Brother's Grimm?] Brother's Grimm is just fun to see all the fairytale creatures involved. [Mom: and Witch Is When, why is that one also a favorite?] Because the kids cured the witch. [Mom: Awesome.]

Sarah: Thank you kids, wonderful recommendations this week. Remember that Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership is open for one week only. We won't be opening again until May so you don't want to miss this open enrollment period. Go to RARmembership.com today to join us. On the next episode of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast Newbery Award Winning author, Kate DiCamillo is coming to talk with us about reading aloud for connection. Trust me, this is a podcast you don't want to miss. We've had Kate DiCamillo here at Read-Aloud Revival before in Premium Membership, in fact, and next time on the podcast you'll get to hear from her yourself. And you'll find out why so many of us just absolutely adore her. She's inspiring, she's brilliant, and she's writing some of today's best books for kids. So, next time Kate DiCamillo, but until then, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.