



RAR 122 – Picture Book Biographies

Kara: Probably have to edit that part out, huh?
[Laughter]

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. This is episode 122 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. So, today I've got the Read-Aloud Revival Team with me. You might not know who makes up our Team. First, my husband who might be the one to answer emails" when you write in. He takes care of a whole lot of other behind-the-scenes details here at the Revival. He's not joining me on the Show today, but our other Team members (we've got two other Team members), they are Kortney Garrison, who is our Read-Aloud Revival Community Director, and Kara Anderson, our Read-Aloud Revival Podcast Manager, are joining me today. We've assembled a brand new book list for you and we're dishing all about it on today's Show.

1:18 Bigs and littles

Now, before we dive into this brand new, wonderful book list we're going to talk about today, I have a question from Amber that I'll be answering:

Amber: My name is Amber. I'm from Indiana. I just listened to your podcast on reading to a wide-range of ages. My question is when you have a specific book that you want to read to just your older kids how do you keep the younger kids from listening in or joining in? Also, what are

your tips for busy moms who want to find the time to read to two different age groups?

Sarah: These are great questions, Amber. You've probably heard me say that I do, indeed, read some books to only my older kids who, at this time, are currently 17, 15, and 13, and then different books to my younger kids, those are currently 6, 5, and 5. I might be reading a book just to my older kids because the content isn't really appropriate for younger ears. I can tell you the two most common times I read to just my older kids. One is after the littles are in bed—they go to bed around 7pm and my older kids don't go to bed until 8:30pm or 9pm. I will tell you this is not my favorite time of day for read-alouds because I am tired, but if it's all we can get, we take it. You know, mixing up a batch of cocoa or something can help make it special. In seasons when it's just difficult or impossible to use that before bedtime, or even just on days when it's impossible—my oldest daughter has a job so sometimes she's not here, sometimes I really am just too tired—I will read earlier in the day. And the way I do that is I put on a short show for my younger kids. I know! I can hear all the parenting police gasping as I say that. I put on a short show for my younger kids and then I read with my older ones in a nearby room. At some point along the way it became clear to me that I only had a short time left with my oldest kids, like I said, my oldest daughter's 17, so she'll be going off to college in no time at all, and as far as giving the little ones some screen time, I just think it's not a bad use for that. Using about 20-30 minutes of screen time for my younger kids so that I can connect with my older ones is a trade-off I'm willing to make. So, sometimes that's what I do as well. The other question you asked about is tips for busy moms who want to find time to read to two

different age groups, which is also what I do. So, when I'm reading with the older kids (and to clarify, I don't read to them every day, we just shoot for most days; every other day or so, in some seasons it's more, in some seasons it's less). The younger kids get read to every day. I read to my younger kids every day their bedtime stories, but I also try to read picture books earlier in the day. Often, it's a tool I use to calm down a tantruming child or just to re-set and snuggle. I'd say the bedtime read-aloud with the younger ones is routine. It's the most consistent. And the rest of our read-aloud times are not quite as routine. We just have books everywhere so I'm constantly being asked to read-aloud. My kids are also not early readers themselves and so they need to be read to if they want to engage in a story. And they do want to engage in stories. I've said before that putting books face out is helpful to getting your kids to pick up books and if you do that, if you put books face out, you will find them asking you to read to them more often. And oftentimes, that's just the best way to fit in more reading aloud. Fitting in more reading aloud is helping your kids asking you to read to them more often. So, keep in mind, that you don't have to read aloud every single day and that your read-aloud times can be as short as ten minutes. That can help when you have a really busy schedule and you have multiple groups of kids that you want to read to. You can even set a reminder on your phone if that would help. And, I hope that helps, Amber. Hey listeners, if you have a question you'd like me to answer on an upcoming episode of the podcast, go to ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page, you'll find a spot that says "Got a question for Sarah Mackenzie?" and that's where you leave your voice message.

5:17 The team is here!

Well, as always, it is a treat to have the Read-Aloud Revival Team with me here today. So, before we launch into our conversation about this awesome book list we have for you, I'd love for each of you ladies to tell our listeners a little bit about what you do at Read-Aloud Revival. Kortney, do you want to start?

Kortney: Sure. I am the Community Director, and that means that I do lots of customer service stuff, so if you ever have a question or can't download something you probably emailed me, and I also work inside of Membership in the forum, and helping get events ready. So, it's a fun gig.

Sarah: And keep me on track, and make sure I get on my plane, because sometimes that doesn't happen. She does a lot more than she's giving herself credit for. Kara, what about you?

Kara: So, I'm the Podcast Manager. So, I help to schedule guests for the podcast and put together the Show Notes and the stuff that goes along with it—like transcripts and the cheat sheet that you can print out, and all kinds of other behind-the-scenes stuff.

Sarah: The only reason the Read-Aloud Revival works as well as it does is because of the work you ladies put into it. So, it's always a treat to talk to you. I'm so excited to talk about this book list. Today, we have a list of picture book biographies, which I think has been on our list of book lists to make for a very long time, and I'm really excited about this particular list because it's just really good. Kortney really headed it up and gave us this list and I have been reading through it and just loving everything that we read. My kids have been loving it, so I'm really excited to share these



with our listeners. Before we get into the actual titles, Kortney, you're really the person who reminded me of how much I love picture books, and also convinced me that they're as worthwhile as anything else I'm reading with my kids, and so let's talk about that. Why picture books? Why is your heart so big for picture books?

6:53 Picture books are worthy

Kortney: I think picture books sometimes get forgotten in the read-aloud world because we want to move into the classics, we want to move into E.B. White and Charlotte's Web and Laura Ingalls Wilder and read those beautiful stories. And so, we kind of think that picture books come before that and then we move on from them. But, we shouldn't, because there's so much good stuff inside. And they're short—that's a really good thing. I mean, for the busiest people you can always squeeze in a picture book. You're not committing yourself to a big, long novel that's going to take weeks and weeks to read aloud. You're committing yourself to maybe ten minutes of good connection with your kids.

Sarah: And you can get a whole story in, it's not like you just get a chapter, you get the whole story structure, the entire thing in just a few minutes, which is something you can't do with a novel.

Kortney: And that's wonderful because you can practice thinking about the way stories work. You can talk about what does the main character want and why can't they have it. And getting into those habits, even with our youngest kids, really pays off when they're older and tackling their books.

Sarah: One of the things I really love about picture books is their careful attention to really

beautiful language. So, in talking to all these picture book authors at Read-Aloud Revival, especially the authors that come for our Author Access in Premium Membership, they're constantly telling us how every single word in those picture books mattered. And, a lot of picture books read like poetry. So, the language of them is very beautiful and curated and carefully selected; a lot of times we tend to think that picture books are for little kids and we don't even realize that they're, oftentimes, written at a higher level than most of the middle grade novels or YA novels that we're handing to our teenagers.

Kortney: Something that we've been doing this year is using a line from a picture book as copy work or dictation in our homeschool. So, it's just one little line—it's not a big selection, it's a small piece, but it's really helped the kids be excited about doing copy work because it immediately brings them back into the story. Just a few lines, a few carefully chosen words helps them to enter into that world again. And, so when they open up their notebook and see the passage that I picked, their eyes light up and we start talking about the story all over again.

Sarah: Now Kara, you have older kids—remind me how old they are.

Kara: They are going to be 12 by the time this podcast airs and very much on the way to 15 by the time this podcast airs.

Sarah: Oh my goodness. OK, and so, picture books—have you moved past them in your house?

Kara: You know, we haven't because I still find that there is a ton of value in reading a picture book with older kids. I've found it's a great way to introduce a person in a certain historical time period and then connect your kids with that



historical time period. So, by stepping into the character's shoes through a picture book they really get the idea of what it was like to live during a certain time, so it's one of our favorite ways to study history, and I think a good biography picture book is just such a good jumping off point for so much more.

Sarah: One of the things that Caroline Starr Rose said when she was here at Read-Aloud Revival in episode 71 (ReadAloudRevival.com/71)—she writes historical fiction middle grade novels and picture books—and she told us that no matter what she's researching when she begins research for her writing projects she always starts with a stack of picture books instead of heading to an encyclopedia or digging into more official research, she starts by reading picture books, and so that's something that I think is really inspiring, and Kortney, I know that you had mentioned, sort of, being mind blown, 'Wait, it's not cheating, that's there and it counts.'

Kortney: Picture books are so delightful. You don't think of research as being something that's wonderful. Research is something that sparks your imagination. Research is something that calls forth your own creativity, and that's what picture books do, and so I loved when Caroline Starr Rose said that because it really sparked my imagination for the way that we could use picture books.

11:26 Gather 'round

Sarah: One of the things that I find particularly delightful about picture books is this happens a lot in my home because I have older kids and younger kids (and so, my oldests are currently 17, 15, and 13, and the younger ones are 5 and 6), and so I will sit down to read a picture book with

the younger ones and look up when I'm done, or half way through, and all the older ones have wandered or sat down or peeking over my shoulder—it's just like a warm memory for them they want to revisit. Or, it's intriguing and so they want to look at the pictures and sit for a while. So, I love that—it's that invitation to connect with our kids no matter what their ages are. Or, your husband may even. You might find that he'll wander through the room and be like, 'Hang on a second, I want to look at that picture.'

Kortney: And because it's not just the words because the pictures are a part of what's happening as well, you want to see it, you can't just hear it, you have to get in close and sit next to each other and pour over the illustrations.

12:22 Storybooks and picture books

Sarah: That's something I don't think I realized when I first started reading with my kids. So there's actually a difference between a storybook and a picture book. A story book is something that can be read with or without pictures, so when we're thinking of reading a fairytale, a classic fairytale like *Little Red Riding Hood*, like old-style fairytale, you can read that story and you don't need pictures to understand what happens. An actual picture book is only a picture book because you need the pictures to tell part of the story. And so, what you'll notice when you pay attention to that little detail when you're reading with your kids in picture books is that part of the story would be lost if you didn't get to see the pictures. And it's funny to me that we do tend to think of picture books as books that are for little kids and then we all, as grownups, and with our teenagers, go off to the art museum and want to stare at art on the walls when really a

picture book is an art gallery you have in your lap with your child that you get to just spend time with on your cozy couch while you're sipping cocoa and talking about the story. It's a beautiful experience of story in words and in pictures.

Kortney: One of the books that's on the list is called *Boulderdash!: John Newbery and the Boisterous Birth of Children's Books* by Michelle Markel, and it's illustrated by Nancy Carpenter, and she is just a wonderful illustrator. I really feel she knows children. She has illustrated a lot of really good books. Books that should be on everyone's shelf. *Abe Lincoln: The Boy Who Loved Books*, *Apples to Oregon*, *Dear Mr. Washington*, and in all these books there are kids who are a little bit mischievous or a little bit—they're doing funny things—and they're true to life. My kids just get these knowing looks on their face when you turn the page and it's not the main character who's doing it, it's always some little kid on the side who's doing something naughty and they're just wonderful. I don't know anything about Nancy Carpenter but I have a feeling that she knows kids really well.

Sarah: Or maybe she has a mischievous streak herself.

Kortney: Or maybe so.

Sarah: We might have to have her on to ask her.

Kortney: I would love to.

14:35 Jen Bryant's books

Sarah: I have fallen in love with Jen Bryant's picture book biographies and so we've slowly been reading them, and every time I find another one I think, 'Ooh, that one's by Jen Bryant, we should read it.' I, on Kortney's recommendation, got *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille* from

the library and I really enjoyed it, but my 6 year old, Clara, did not just enjoy it, she loves this book. She had, I think three or four of us, in our family read it to her all in the same day, over and over. She was just so interested. She just stares at the picture where Louis becomes blind. It's not graphic or anything (I realize that sounds terrible—it's a beautiful picture) but it's a pivotal moment in, of course, Louis' life. And something about that part of the book she just really, really became interested in it, and asked me if there was any way to find a book that was in braille; it leads you in this whole new direction that you didn't know was coming.

15:33 Exploring difficult topics

Kara: I love that she now wants to explore braille because of that book because what you were talking about, where you find an author of picture books that you love and then you start picking up those books and reading each one, sometimes what can happen is you'll pick up a book unexpectedly and it will create it's own informal unit study from that. I'm thinking *Snowflake Bentley* which we had all kinds of activities last month at Read-Aloud Revival (around *Snowflake Bentley*) but when we started working on it as a team, the kids and I had a whole snowflake week, almost, just talking about different things around that picture book, and I also think that picture books can be a good way to introduce kids to topics that might be, kind of, difficult to talk about and so, I'm thinking of a book like *Immanuel's Dream* which is about a boy who was born in Ghana, and he was born missing a leg, and at that time in Ghana that was considered almost a curse, and he was born to a mother who wanted to help him pass all of that, and the stigma attached to it, and he went on to bicycle

across 400 miles in ten days to show that a disability wouldn't define him. And there's books like *The Boy who Harnessed the Wind*, which is about a boy in a village in Malawi. They experienced a famine and he was forced to leave school to help support his family, and somehow ended up at the library, a library that Americans had built there, and started researching how to build different things, and ended up adding windmills to their village so that they would never experience a famine again. And, I mean, he went on to have a TED Conference in Tanzania, a TED Talk, but these are things our kids might not run into in their world and yet, through a picture book, they're able to experience it.

Kortney: It reminds me again of *Six Dots*, the book about Louis Braille. Jen Bryant, the author, she had already written a middle grade novel about Louis Braille and she said it was full of all of the right facts and figures, but it somehow was missing something, and she said what it was missing was what does it feel like to be Louis Braille? That was the story she wanted to write—what does it feel like? And I think all of these books that Kara's been mentioning it gives us a way into 'what does it feel like to be different?' What does it feel like to be blind? What does it feel like to experience the world in a different way? And that sort of empathy and connection with people who are different from us, that is what we want for our kids, that's what we want for ourselves.

Sarah: What does it feel like to be Louis Braille? What does it feel like to be Abe Lincoln? What does it feel like to be Thomas Jefferson and creating the first library? I mean, all those questions are answered in a 32-page picture book in a way that feels a lot more visceral and

personal than maybe a longer narrative could possibly do.

18:37 An invitation

OK, so thinking through this particular list of picture book biographies, this list can serve as an invitation for your family to dive into the lives of those who have gone before us in a way that doesn't feel like your typical history lesson, it feels like something better. We have a whole list for you in the Show Notes at ReadAloudRevival.com/122. Of course, you can see the whole list there. You can also download a printable version, you can print out and take it with you to the library or bookshop, and that's super handy to have. Get that all at ReadAloudRevival.com/122. We won't have time here on the Show to talk about every book on the list, but I thought maybe each of us could pick one or two to talk about.

Kara: There is *Hidden Figures*, a lot of us have heard about the movie "Hidden Figures" and there's a book for adults and there's a picture book by Margot Lee Shetterly. And we've read the picture book, but we listened to the young reader's version in the car, and then I read the adult version of the book, and then as the, kind of, cap on everything we watched the movie and then we had a space night in our house. We drank Tang and we ate astronaut ice cream and it was just this fantastic memory that we have together.

Sarah: You are the coolest mom, ever.

Kortney: I know she is, totally.

Sarah: Your kids are like, 'Tang? I am in!'

19:39 Kara's picks

Kara: You know what's funny about Tang? You cannot buy a small amount of Tang. You have to commit. So, something like that, where we can have these great conversations because I've read the grownup version, we've listened to the one in the car, we looked at the great illustrations, and it's just this whole thing where you connect with these real people and this real time in history. It was really powerful while also being really fun. OK, and then the other (this isn't a favorite this is a favorite topic, I guess) is math picture books, because math is just not a place where we tend to have a lot of fun in our homeschool—I wish we had more fun. Have you read *The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos*? We've read that. We've read *Nothing Stopped Sophie: The Story of Unshakable Mathematician, Sophie Germain*, *Blockhead: The Life of Fibonacci*, and kind of along that same line, *Ada Byron Lovelace and the Thinking Machine*.

21:19 Sarah's picks

Sarah: I think we might have mentioned this before on the Show, *The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon* by Jacqueline Davies, illustrated by Melissa Sweet. This is a picture book about the famous ornithologist, John James Audubon, and I loved it. This may have been my own real introduction actually into Audubon's life until I really knew much about him as an adult. As with all of Melissa Sweet's illustrations—they're beautiful and rich, and there's lots to look at, because she uses several different mediums, and so there's just a lot of different things to look at, and of course, you learn so much. I really enjoyed that one.

Kara: She has such a nice illustrator's note in the back talking about how she sourced her material.

21:58 Kortney's picks

Kortney: I really like the notes in this book, too. It's called *Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty* by Linda Glaser with paintings by Claire A. Nivola. Those are both author and illustrator—they're new to me. The book, kind of, looks like, reminds me of *The Dress and the Girl* by Camille Andros. Really beautiful, colorful illustrations, and it's about Emma Lazarus and the new Colossus, the poem that's on the bottom of the Statute of Liberty. So, it covers a historic moment, and in the back, both the author and the illustrator, show family pictures of the first time that their family came to America. And so, it's really, really wonderful to see these old, old pictures from 1893 and their passport pictures from Russia (of the illustrator's grandparents). It really makes it not just a story about people in the past but it's a story about somebody's grandma. I love that.

22:55 Barb Rosenstock's books

Sarah: So, in Read-Aloud Revival Premium Membership, one of our members, Michelle, recommended Barb Rosenstock, and she's written some books, like *The Noisy Paint Box*, which I think has won some awards about the artist, Kandinsky. The favorite one at our house is *Thomas Jefferson Builds a Library*, and this is one of those cases where you like a book but you don't expect your kids to love it, and then you find out they do, so it's kind of like *Six Dots*, same little girl, Clara, who's 6, she loves *Thomas Jefferson Builds a Library*. And it's one of those picture books that has a lot of tidbits of information that they're not really part of the main

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narrative, but you could just skip of them, but I can't, because I read them one and so now when I try to read it and skip over anything she remembers what fact is on which page and asks me to read that section. So we were reading it for bedtime not too long ago, and you know how it is before bedtime—I'm looking for the short picture books before bedtime because I just want to get the show on the road so I can get back to my book—and so trying to find a short book, no, that's not going to work, she wants me to read *Thomas Jefferson Builds a Library*. Great! But I try to skip over some of the tidbits and that just did not fly. Barb Rosenstock's picture book biographies are quickly becoming favorites of mine.

Kortney: I wonder if Clara's going to become a historian.

Sarah: That will be interesting to see, won't it? I know Barb has some other biographies that members have really liked. One about Joe DiMaggio becoming an American baseball hero, one about a camping trip that changed America—that one features Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, and it's a story of our national parks. She's got one of Vincent Van Gogh, one on Bill Munroe who was a bluegrass musician—so lots and lots of different topics. There's definitely picture book biographies that can appeal to your kids no matter what their interests are, I think. I think we're adding to our list.

Kortney: That's good.

Kara: Says the lady who doesn't have to do the Show Notes.

[Laughter]

Sarah: So, remember that all the books we're mentioning plus more are on this giant, now it's

becoming pretty ginormous picture book biography list at ReadAloudRevival.com/122, you can see it there, you can download it to print it off. Thank you, ladies, for coming on the Show. We talk all the time, but we don't talk all the time here at the Read-Aloud Revival on the podcast, although you're here all the time. So, it's really fun to have you on the mics so our listeners can hear you.

Kortney: It's been really fun. Thank you so much for having us, Sarah.

Kara: Yep, it's been great.

25:45 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, I'm Melissa, I'm 9 years old. I live in New Jersey and my favorite book series are *The Land of Stories*. I like it because it's a fantasy.

Child2: Hi, my name is Emma. I'm 11 years old and I live in Central New Jersey. My three favorite books series are *The Penderwicks*, *The Incorrigible of Ashton Place*, and *The Green Ember*. I enjoy these series because they're full of adventure and I really like adventure stories.

Child3: My name is Darius. I live in Indiana. I am 7 years old and my favorite book is *The One and Only Ivan* because I love **[**inaudible**]** and it made me feel very good.

Child4: My name is Daniel. [Mom: how old are you?] 4. [Mom: what's your favorite book?] My favorite book is *Captain Underpants*. [Mom: why do you like *Captain Underpants*?] Because it has amazing stuff.

Child5: [Mom: what's your name?] Chloe. [Mom: Chloe. And, how old are you? 3.] 3. [Mom: and what's your favorite book?] *Minnie Mouse*. [Mom: *Minnie Mouse*?] Uh huh. [Mom: nice.]

Child6: Hi, my name is London. I am 10 years old. I live in Alto, Michigan, and my favorite books are *The Wingfeather* books, *Harry Potter*, and *Ramona and Beezus*.

Child7: Hi, my name is Claire and I live in Alto, Michigan, and I'm 6 years old, and my favorite book is *Uni the Unicorn*. Bye.

Child8: [Mom: what is your name?] Coran. [Mom: how old are you, Coran?] 4. [Mom: and where do we live?] Alto, Michigan. [Mom: Alto, Michigan—very good. And what are your favorite books?] *Hulk*, *Superman*, and *Spiderman*. [Mom: *Hulk*, *Superman*, and *Spiderman*?] Yeah.

Child9: [Mom: what's your name?] Victor. [Mom: and how old are you, Victor?] 2. [Mom: and where are you from?] Michigan. [Mom: Michigan? And, what's one of your favorite books?] *Frog and Toad*. [Mom: and why do you like *Frog and Toad*?] Because he says Waaa. [Mom: who says Waaa?] Toad. [Mom: Toad. Alright, say bye.] Bye.

Child10: [Mom: what's your name?] Ava. [Mom: and how old are you, Ava?] 3. [Mom: and where do you live?] [Mom: and what did you tell Bubba your favorite books are?] How about you can be Sarah Mackenzie? [Mom: I can be Sarah Mackenzie? OK, what are your favorite books?] Say, what's your name, first. [Mom: OK, what are your favorite books?] Ava. [Mom: no, what's your favorite book?] I said what's your name? [Mom: OK, what's your name?] Ava. [Mom: uh huh, and what's your favorite books?] ****inaudible**** [Mom: OK.] *The Three Ninja Pigs* and *Uncle Wiggily*. [Mom: and *Uncle Wiggily*. And what's your favorite part of *The Three Ninja Pigs*?] When she

kicks up the statue. [Mom: when she kicks ... what does she say?] She says "hee ya."

Sarah: And that's a wrap on episode 122. Thank you for joining me. Always a pleasure to spend some time with you. I hope you enjoyed that. Remember that all of the books that were mentioned on today's Show are in the Show Notes and there's also a printable version that you can download. You can grab that by going to ReadAloudRevival.com/122. I will be back in two weeks with another episode; really excited to share this interview that I had ... ooh, I'm not even going to give you any peeks – I'm just excited about it and I hope you'll join me, two weeks from now for a great episode of the Read-Aloud Revival. In the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.