

READ-ALOUD REVIVAL

Episode 126: Creating a Book Club Culture at Home

- Speaker 1: [00:12](#) 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 Mackenzie: [00:29](#) Hello, hello. Sarah Mackenzie here, and this is episode 126 of the Read Aloud Revival. Last time, on episode 125, I shared with you the first half of a Master Class from Read Aloud Revival Premium. The Master Class was creating a book club culture in your home, and I shared with you the first half of that class. The best way to help your kids fall in love with books or to protect and guard your child's love of books, so it doesn't ever get schooled out of them, is to create a book club culture at home, and you got to hear the first half of the Master Class. If you didn't get a chance to listen to that, you can listen to it at readaloudrevival.com/125, or just look for the episode before this one in your podcast app.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [01:16](#) You don't actually have to listen to that one to understand what we're doing today. Today we're diving into the how. How exactly do you build a family book club culture at home? If we're not doing worksheets, and we're not doing book reports, and we're not doing assigned books in the way that we've always done them before, what are we replacing it with? Well we're replacing it with the principles of a book club culture. We also dive into a little bit about what we do with literary analysis. Does it need to be done, and what does that look like, and I answer a few questions. This was a live class recorded in Read Aloud Revival Premium. If you enjoyed last episode, and if you enjoy this one, you would love Read Aloud Revival Premium. We do a new Master Class like this one every single season. We have classes on how to talk to your kids about books, how to choose books for your teens, how to home school the early years with rest and intention.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [02:09](#) We have a whole home schooling series called, Focus and Align 2.0 that helps home schooling moms teach from rest and lead with confidence, and a whole host of other classes that are helpful for moms who want to make meaningful and lasting connections with their kids through books. I would encourage you to check out rarmembershp.com. That is where you can read more about Read Aloud Revival Premium. We only open a few times a year, but we're opening soon, May 6th through 10th, 2019, so for just five days, you can register to join us for the summer, and we have a pretty fantastic summer line up. You can find out all about it at

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rarmembership.com. Before we dive into the rest of that Master Class, I'm going to answer a question from Izzy.

- Izzy: [03:05](#) My question is how do you know when your child is ready to read? I have six and a four year old. How do you know they're ready? That's my question.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [03:16](#) Yeah, this is a great question Izzy, and it's a question a lot of us have, so I'm glad you asked it. According to Marie Ripple at All About Learning Press, there are five big skills your child needs under their belt before they're ready to learn to read. They are print awareness: that is, understanding that the print on the page represents words that have meaning. Letter knowledge: the ability to recognize the letters of the alphabet, and then to know the names and sounds of each. Funnel logical awareness: that's just a fancy way of saying the ability to be able to hear and identify various sounds. For example, the beginnings and ending or words and rhymes, and Listening comprehension: that's the ability to understand the meaning of words that they hear. Your child has listening comprehension in spades if you are reading aloud to them regularly.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [04:04](#) The final scale is motivation, your child needs to want to learn to read, so she says they need all five of those big skills under their belt before they're ready. Now of course, every child develops at a slightly different pace, so I would recommend that if you are wondering about your four and six year old, and if they're ready, or how much instruction to be giving them, that you take the All About Learning, Reading Readiness Checklist to see if your child is ready to learn to read. I'll put a link in it at the show notes, which show notes are at readalongrevival.com/126, and that checklist can help you know if your kids are ready.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [04:41](#) I also want to say, when in doubt wait. There are almost no benefits to teaching a child to read earlier than they are ready, and there are a lot of benefits to teaching a child to read when they are fully able to do so, and can do it with pleasure. In the meantime, keep reading aloud, try teaching your child the letter names and sounds in a playful, casual way, and then if your child has all five of those skills well underway and is begging you to teach them to read, you can dive in. At that point, short playful lessons are best.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [05:13](#) I use All About Reading to teach my kids how to read. There are a lot of really wonderful programs. Really, the key is just to teach it with a smile on your face, with patience, and whenever your child is ready to move on. Not with any pressure of moving through a phonics program, or a learn to read program at a certain pace, because God made each of our kids unique, and they're all gonna learn at a slightly different pace.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [05:37](#) Thanks so much for your question Izzy. If you have a question you'd like me to answer on an upcoming episode of this show, head to readaloudrevival.com. You can scroll to the bottom of the page and look for the spot that says, Got a Question for Sarah Mackenzie, and just leave your voice message there.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [06:03](#) I'm gonna read a couple of pages from the Read Aloud Family, and then we're gonna exactly about how we make this happen. "Humor me for just a moment here. Imagine you have arrived at your Book Club gathering. You spent a long day with the kids, and you're looking forward to attending this Book Club for the first time. This month's selection is Anthony Doerr's All the Light We Cannot See. The book left you speechless, and you're ready for a meaty discussion with the other members. You're greeted at the door by the hostess, a friend who embraces you in a hug, and then promptly hands you a sheet of multiple choice questions about the book. 'Welcome to book club,' she says cheerily. 'Go ahead and start with this. We just want to make sure you've read and understood the book before we get any further.'
- Sarah Mackenzie: [06:43](#) You take the quiz, making guesses at the city names, numbers, details and dates. Was the girl who haunted Werner's conscience Viennese or Parisian? Werner was 16, or was he 17? Did Madame Manec get the flu, or was it pneumonia? Did the story begin in 1944, or 1934, or ...? You fill out the answers as best as you can, realizing you would have read the book differently if you'd had any idea you'd be taking a test on it. You look up to see the rest of the book club attendees waiting expectantly for you to finish your quiz, so you mark a few more answers and then wait for whatever happens next.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [07:18](#) The hostess pulls out a notebook. 'Okay,' she says, 'Let's start brainstorming what we can all write our five-paragraph essays on. Who wants to take a stab at the book's theme?' By the time you leave book club, you've been assigned to write an essay on the role of duty as it

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relates to Werner's character. You've also been given a list of hands-on activities to choose from. You could make a diorama, write a diary entry from the perspective of Etienne, or draw a map of Marie-Laure's steps through the city of Paris.

Sarah Mackenzie: [07:45](#)

On your way home that night, you realize that the book club is really just a way to demonstrate that you've read the book. There's no meaningful discussion happening here. No relationships being formed with other attendees, no deep dive into the murky and beautiful waters of a well written story. You are assigned tasks only to prove that you did indeed read the book. Check this book off a list, you've done it. Now on to a new one. Would you go back to such a book club? Would you be itching to re-read the novel in your free time? Call your best friend and ask if she's gotten to the part you're dying to talk about? The part that turns you inside out? Would you, after completing the quiz, writing the essay, building the diorama, feel that the book was one of your life's companions? Would you say the book changed you, formed you, challenged you, or would you simply feel like you had done the book?

Sarah Mackenzie: [08:35](#)

That is exactly how we treat our children's reading lives, and yet we wonder why they view reading as something to be done for school, for a grade, for a checklist. All of these from the comprehension quiz, testing to see if you really read the story and understood it, to the five paragraph essay, dissecting the book's theme, to creative projects, like making a diorama, or creating a map are typical assignments that tend to accompany the books our kids read. We literally school the love of reading right out of our kids, and then we worry because they aren't taken up with the voracious love of literature and a burning desire to enjoy reading for pleasure.

Sarah Mackenzie: [09:11](#)

What would happen, I wonder, if we started treating our kids' reading lives the way we treat our own? What if we were to get out of the way and let the book work its magic on the child without interfering, without telling him how to think about it, without insisting that he parrot back facts, or agree with us on the theme? What if rather than obsessing over whether a child did the book, we let our children meet great ideas, make connections, think for themselves and experience what it means to be fully human, fully alive through the great ideas and great characters they encounter in stories. Don't misunderstand me here. I'm not suggestion that a teacher or parent

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never assigns school work related to a book. I am suggesting, however, that delight must play an important role. If we want to raise kids who will be life long readers, then we would do well to take a page from real adult readers, those who read for the sheer joy and thrill of it.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:02](#)

The adults I know who read for pleasure do not make dioramas, do not take comprehension quizzes, or write five paragraph essays on the story's main conflict or theme. Real readers enjoy books that pique their interest and curiosity. They talk about them with friends. Sometimes they join book clubs. At those book club meetings, they might enjoy food and drink while discussing open ended questions. They ask questions that help everyone think more deeply about the book, and about what the author might have been trying to say to us, questions about what the author might have been trying to say, questions about what the book might be saying to us. Real readers get lost in stories. Sometimes they're burning to talk about them with others, sometimes they just read and ponder the questions by themselves. They might dog ear the pages, jot down passages from the book in their journals, underline them, scribble in the margins. Real readers engage with books in a way that fuels curiosity, inspires connection and provides enjoyment.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:00](#)

I think the biggest difference between our classroom experience and what we want in our book club experience, is that we want our kids to leave a book richer than they were when they got there. How do we do that? We don't want to have that feeling of having done a book, we want to have the feeling of being richer because we've encountered the book.”

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:23](#)

Okay, I'm gonna talk about three components. These are three things that I think make up a culture, a book club culture, and Kara18:44 Put books face out and Kortney, if you wouldn't mind pulling of the ... I know there's a lot of questions that have been in the chat, and if you wouldn't mind just pulling those and pulling them over on Slack for me, so that I can answer those in time, that would be awesome. First, we're gonna talk about those three components that make up a book club culture. Let me pull up my slides again.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:49](#)

Okay, this is the first one. We are people who read. The first piece of creating a book club culture for our kids is

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helping our kids identify themselves as readers. Not reading because it's been assigned to them, which is what happens in a classroom, but reading because we read. We are people who read. To really think of reading as a key part of who they are. We want our kids to grow up thinking, I am a reader, it's part of who I am. That's just who I am, so that when they are grown and gone, it will feel weird if they have a day where they don't read. It will feel like they forgot to brush their teeth, or they forgot to eat lunch. It's just a part of what they do, part of who they are. How do we do that? How do we raise kids who have this idea of we are people who read?

Sarah Mackenzie: [12:29](#)

I think one of the things we can do when they're in our home is we protect the time for reading. In our home, we are protecting that daily quiet time for everyone to read. We call it quiet reading hour. Some people call it D.E.A.R., like Beverly Cleary coined that, Drop Everything and Read. Anyway, that daily quiet reading time for kids, or for everybody, not just for your kids is what I meant to say. Even you. We know that modeling is hugely important, and it is just lip service if we're telling our kids how important reading is, and how much we love reading, and then they never see us reading for enjoyment.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:05](#)

I totally understand the pressures on our day. I'm trying to think of the way to say this. I understand slipping out of the reading habit. I understand feeling there's so many things to do, and so many pressures, and the baby's crying, and the toddler's in the toilet, and the laundry's spilling out in the hallway, and I still haven't started dinner, and I don't have time to read. Even carving out 10 minutes a day for our kids to see us not on our phone, not doing chores, but reading a book for the sheer joy of it would sear in our children's memory the thought that my mom read because she loved to. It doesn't mean that we have to read hours and hours and hours every day, but if they see us reading most days, for even a sliver of time for the sheer joy of it, that will be a part of what they remember about us when they leave home, but also a part of what they think about their reading life now when they're home.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:52](#)

How does this happen? How do you do this with really small kids, and with kids who aren't reading? Laura just put that in the chat. *How does that quiet reading work with pre-readers?* Okay, so I'm gonna give you some ideas. When my three smallest kids were under two. They're six

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and five now, the twins are five, but at one point, they were twin one-year-olds and a two-year old. If you just wrap your mind around that for a minute. I remember when the twins were about two, so Clara was three, they gave up naps, which was so sad. What I did instead of having our quiet reading time during nap time, which by the way, if you have small people in your home and you are tired, because you have babies and toddlers, and it's nap time, and you read for five minutes and fall asleep, that is awesome. You are still showing your children you read for delight, even if you fall asleep every day. You still chose to read before you fall asleep.

Sarah Mackenzie: [14:41](#)

Once my toddlers had given up naps, what I would do is put a quilt on the floor for each kid, like a small blanket, on the floor for each kid and a couple small toys on them. I would set my timer for 10 or maybe 15 minutes. I would say, "You have to play on that blanket while mommy lays right next to you", and I'd lay on the couch and read. I don't actually think I ever read 10 minutes, 'cause you can imagine with three little kids how often one of them came off, or one of them hit the other, or there was noise. That wasn't the most important thing. The most important thing was that my older kids, and even those young ones saw me saying it's just so important for mommy to sit here and read my book every day. That sheer commitment to reading I think says a lot to our children. It didn't always work, there was a lot of days it didn't work great.

Sarah Mackenzie: [15:25](#)

When it worked, I felt like the world's smartest mom. I'm like, I read for 15 minutes today. That was amazing. Then I was a much happier mom afterwards. I think the key here is to carve out the space and then don't worry too much about the logistics. Carve out the time, is what I mean. Not really space, but time. Every day after lunch for half an hour it's quiet reading time in our house. All the pre-readers, you're gonna sit and look at books. Stock up on books that have lots of pictures that take 100 years to look at, Where's Waldo, Richard Scarry. You know what I mean, right? All the pictures that have just a bazillion, because it takes a child a really long time to look at all those. Not like a regular picture book where they can flip pretty quick. If you get them one of those seek and find books, or whatever, they can look at those for a long time. That can be helpful with the pre-reader.

Sarah Mackenzie: [16:13](#)

Letting them listen to audiobooks. My son was a late reader, my now 13-year old. We was not reading fluently

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until here was nine-and-a-half. When he was not reading fluently, during those years seven and eight and nine, when the girls were reading on their own. They would go do their quiet reading time on their bed, he would go into his room and I turned an audiobook. He listened to the entire Redwall series that way. Audio books count just as much as any other kind of reading.

Sarah Mackenzie: [16:39](#)

It also helps to know, and we can just put a link to this in the show notes, but if you're wondering how to listen to audiobooks, there are some forum threads where we've talked about different ways you can listen to audio books, or let your kids listen to audio books in a different room than you, depending on what kind of devices you have, and that kind of thing. I think the key to daily quiet reading time is that you schedule that time, but not the titles. This isn't the time where I say, this isn't even where I have my kids read their assigned school work, it's just quiet reading time, they can read whatever they want. Sometimes my kids just read a Garfield book. The key here is remembering delight, remember prioritizing delight. The key is to schedule the time for reading, and to save that space around it, and not worry too much about the exact titles that your kids are reading.

Sarah Mackenzie: [17:22](#)

The delight piece, I think, comes into play hugely here, because when they know that they have a dedicated time to read, they're free to really enjoy that reading a lot more. Okay, Sarah Bledsoe asks, where do your kids do their silent reading time? It kind of is dependent on the different ages of the kids. Over the years, we've done it differently. Right now, the older kids all go to their beds, and they read on their beds. Sometimes, if it's really nice out they'll find different nooks and crannies around the yard and read. The younger kids, when they were really young, when they were toddlers and I was just having them on their blanket with toys or whatever, they were right next to me in the living room.

Sarah Mackenzie: [17:57](#)

Now, the smallest twins are five, and Clara's six, and I have them go to their bed. I give them three jelly beans, and I give them a stack of books. I tell them, I will come get you in 20 minutes, and it's usually 30. Then I put them in their room with their three jelly beans, and they're not allowed to get off their bed until they're done reading. My twins sometimes, they're like hanging from the ceiling, so it's not like they listen just perfectly well or anything like that. The point is that they know there's reading time every day, and they know mommy's reading

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every day during that time, and that it's guarded. Does that make sense? Okay, yeah. If you want to sear reading time with delight in your children's mind, just give them a little treat while they're reading every day, and they'll beg for reading time, 'cause they know they get their three jelly beans.

Sarah Mackenzie: [18:44](#)

Okay, another idea here, when we're thinking about cultivating this principle of we are people who read, or I am a reader, is to put books face out, and we've talked about this in the forum. In fact, the conversation in the forum sparked an entire podcast episode that we just recently did. There is a home school term of this is strewing. It's just leaving interesting books out for your kids to stumble on and find themselves. We can link to that in the show notes. We can probably put a link to it in the chat as well. It's amazing how effective this can be by simply going to your bookshelves and pulling a few books, and putting them cover out, so that your kids actually see the cover. I bet you'll be surprised at how much more often your children read, and every time they pick up a book and look at it on their own, reinforcing that principle of I am a reader. We are people who read.

Sarah Mackenzie: [19:30](#)

Okay, so the second principle is, our home is a haven for reading. Our home is a haven for reading. If reading feels like it primarily happens for school in your family, this is where we want to change and adjust things a little bit. We want reading to feel cozy like comfort food. We want it to feel like chicken and mashed potatoes on a dark wintry night. We want it to feel warm, and comforting, and home. How do we do that? How do you make a home that's a haven for reading?

Sarah Mackenzie: [19:59](#)

Going back to the books face out and string books around, and leaving them face out, leaving them where kids are naturally going to pick them up, putting out baskets in random rooms with books in them, so that every room in your home basically has books in it. Let's go back to that jelly beans. Really, the bigger principle here is food. Think about a book club for grownups would always have food. I mean, I can't remember the last time I went to a book club that didn't have food. You think of movies, you think of popcorn. You can think of adding some simple element of food to your reading time, and that is like a haven ... I'm sorry, I'm not even making myself [inaudible 00:20:50] here. That adds the element of our home is a haven for reading. It's like that warm cozy feel.

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Sarah Mackenzie: [20:56](#)

The third one is our family conversations often revolve around what we're reading. If your family gets in the habit of talking about books, it won't seem strange or out of the ordinary when you start asking your kids open-ended questions about books. For example, my son read *My Side of the Mountain*. I tell this story in Read Aloud Family. My son read *My Side of the Mountain*, and I started chatting with him about that book on our way to soccer practice. It was a like a 12-minute drive, so there was not that much time. I asked him about what the most courageous thing Sam Gibley did in *My Side of the Mountain*. The only reason he didn't look at me like I had a third head, 'cause I have two, a second head.

Sarah Mackenzie: [21:39](#)

When I asked that question, the only reason he didn't look at me like, "What are you talking about?" Is 'cause it's normal for us to talk about books. What you want to do is even with your very smallest children, as they grow, you want it just to be completely normal that you talk about books regularly. It's a casual, normal, organic part of your family conversation, and then as they grow and they become older kids and teens, then those conversations can continue to be an organic and normal part of the conversation. That's huge. Those three things right there. I am a person who reads, or we are reading people. Our home is a haven for reading, and we talk about books. That's what we do. That's a book club culture. You've got people who read. You've got a place where it's lovely to read in, and good food, maybe, to read with, and you have people who talk about books. That is what a book club is, right? It's a place where you go that's warm and welcoming. It's people who are readers, and people who talk about books.

Sarah Mackenzie: [22:31](#)

That's what we're forming in our homes with this book club culture. If you want to get better at those conversations with your kids or your not sure where to start with having conversations with your kids, or asking open-ended questions, there's a Master Class for that in membership already. If you go to membership and you look under Master Classes, it's called *How to Talk to Your Kids About Books, Even if You Haven't Read Them Yourself*, and you'll get the nitty gritty on this. You'll get the questions you can use to talk about books. We go through examples. We use *Anne of Green Gables* and go through examples of how to talk about books. We talk about organic conversations versus intentional conversations, so if you haven't watched that Master Class yet, that's a

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great one to watch next if you really want to get this book club culture thing well in hand.

Sarah Mackenzie: [23:10](#)

The key I want to point out today is that in that class, I talk about organic conversations and intentional conversations. Intentional conversations being like those hamburger dates I was talking about with my son, right? The, we're gonna go talk about books together as a date, it's gonna be a thing. Organic conversations being on the way to soccer practice, while you're watching dishes, while you're folding laundry, while you're brushing hair, whatever. Those organic conversations, I think are the heart of a good book club culture. They're actually the more important piece. More important even than having family book club, or an event, is that constant, normal, organic conversation about books. That's the heart of a family culture.

Sarah Mackenzie: [23:47](#)

We're gonna think about these three elements of a book club. We are readers. Our home is a haven for reading, and we have conversations about the books that we read together. We're gonna talk about how we take things up a notch, and make ourselves a family book club. That's the culture. This is the environment that we want to create in our home. Now, what if we want to take that up a notch and have a family book club? I think these elements, they slide right over. We just take it up one notch if we're going to have a family book club, which I think can lend so well to ditching the curriculum. To making us feel like we can actually step away from those comprehension worksheets. Yes, I promise, I know there's lots of questions in there about literary analysis, and we will talk about that in a minute too.

Sarah Mackenzie: [24:31](#)

Let's think about those three elements of a book club culture, and how that basically feeds into a family book club, which is what we do here in Premium all the time. We take those three elements of family culture where people read. We have a home where reading happens, and we talk about books, and we make a family book club about of those three principles. That's kind of the three core pillars of our family book club. I'm gonna show you how we did this with American Tall Tales. If you're here and you're in the chat, and you participated in that, tell us, because that was so fun.

Sarah Mackenzie: [24:57](#)

We did a family book club with American Tall Tales by Mary Pope Osborne, and you might know her best as the author of The Magic Treehouse series, but she also wrote

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this collection of tall tales that was wonderful. I meant to have the guide printed out for you, and I forgot to do it. We have a guide kind of like this pdf for notes, where in that guide, there's three steps. The first step is to read aloud. Remember, we are people who read. The second step is to share an experience, which is we have a haven for reading. The third step is to talk about it. Those are the three steps in our family book club culture. First, we're a family who read. In the first step of that family book club guide is reading aloud the book, which of course you can read aloud, or you can use an audio book, but the key here is to share the experience with your kids. It's that shared experience of reading the story that's key here.

Sarah Mackenzie: [25:42](#)

One thing I really want to point out here, is that it's okay if this takes a long time. My teens and I have been reading *Okay For Now* by Gary Schmidt, which was our July book club pick here at Read Aloud Revival. We have been reading that for months. It's just been tricky with summer schedules to find time to read aloud when the younger ones aren't around, so we're not making a ton of progress all the time, but it's okay. Even so, even though it's been a very slow read aloud for us, I heard of the older kids say to the other one the other day when they were drinking pop, or soda for those of you who don't live in the north and don't call it pop, said, "Do you know how to drink a really cold Coke?" If you read *Okay For Now*, you know what that is, right? It's a whole piece of *Okay For Now*. They were kind of re-enacting the scene of drinking a really cold Coke.

Sarah Mackenzie: [26:31](#)

Another thing that I heard happening was my freshman in high school, Alison, she was looking out the window, and we had a magpie in our yard. A whole bunch of magpies actually. She was talking about how hard it would be to draw the magpie, using language that she got directly from *Okay For Now*. In *Okay For Now*, we have a character who's drawing Audubon's birds, and so she was using language she got directly right out of *Okay For Now*.

Sarah Mackenzie: [26:55](#)

it's important to know that speed is not important here. Even if you do this just with two or three books a year, your kids will remember those. You will remember those. Quantity is not important here. It's okay if it takes you a long time. It's okay if it doesn't look exactly like you hoped it would. It's okay if it looks a little scrappier than you were hoping. The point is the connection. The point is sharing the story, sharing an experience, and talking

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about it. That can take a while, and it's still okay. It's still okay. It's still meaningful. In fact, it's good probably to point out that here in Premium, we have a monthly book club, and we vary them. Of course, every book, there's the book club, and then we have the author come. We vary those so that we can appeal to very young kids, all the way up through teens. That's why we'll have Fablehaven with Brandon Mull, and then we have Janet Stevens in Top and Bottoms, because we have a book that's gonna appeal to the older kids, and a book that's gonna appeal to the younger kids.

Sarah Mackenzie: [27:50](#)

You probably won't do our family book club every month. It's a rare family that does every single book club every month. I don't even do all of our family book clubs as a read aloud with my kids every single month. Don't go for quantity here, go for a few solid family book club experiences each year. Think about that. If you could do two or three really good family book club experiences over a handful of years, that is a lot of memories, and a lot of really good bookish memories that your kids will take with them.

Sarah Mackenzie: [28:19](#)

Yes Claudina, the family book club is the author events. They are tied together. Every month, the family book club that we choose here in Premium that you get your guide for, it is tied to the author that's coming. Your family book club will be three steps. It will be read aloud, share an experience and talk about it. Those are all in the guide, and then we wrap it up by introducing you to the author.

Sarah Mackenzie: [28:39](#)

Okay, so let's go back to American Tall Tales. The first principle was reading it aloud. The second principle is our home is a haven of reading, right? We're making a warm space for reading. In the book club guides, we talk about this as sharing an experience, and these aren't cutesy crafts or complicated plans. They're simple. They're usually based around food, and the reason why this is so helpful, is 'cause all have to feed our children every day anyway, over and over again, right? Every day they want dinner. If we can just transform family dinner once in a while to be an experience around a book we're not really adding to our to-do list, we're just transforming something we do every day, and making it a little bit richer for our literally lives as well.

Sarah Mackenzie: [29:16](#)

I want to share some pictures. These are some pictures of families, and they posted them in our Premium member

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forum, of their family enjoying the flapjack read aloud. Going back to that American Tall Tales example, we were reading American Tall Tales, and then the shared experience was having a flapjack dinner, or a flapjack meal together. Flapjacks, and American flapjacks are pancakes. I don't think that's what they are in Europe, but in Paul Bunyan, they're pancakes. We had these flapjack dinners. This is so fun, because we just had families reading American Tall Tales, having flapjack dinner. It's very simple. I love doing these shared experiences around dinner, 'cause it's like I said, it's simple. It doesn't add anything to what we're doing on our to-do list. It just enriches it. It makes it more beautiful.

Sarah Mackenzie: [30:01](#)

I love this picture, 'cause here's dad reading. One of the families I met in Ontario, California when I went to the home school conference there said they loved the shared experiences with family book club, because dad gets to be involved. A lot of times in our home schooling, or whatever we're doing with our kids during the day, dad's not really included. This is a way to include dad.

Sarah Mackenzie: [30:23](#)

Here's another one. We read *Locomotive* by Brian Floca, which is a Caldecott Award winning picture book, just beautiful, about the steam train development in Canada. Just gorgeous illustrations. We made railway dinners. In the forum, we were swapping recipes and we all made a dinner that was like a railway dinner to share this experience. They were having, I don't know what they're having in this picture, but we had some people making antelope. All kinds of fun things. Visiting their local trains. You can see over on this side, they were watching the author access event with the illustrator, where he actually showed us drawing a train. It's super cool.

Sarah Mackenzie: [31:00](#)

We've also done this with *Owl Moon*, which is what you can see here. Same thing, we did a shared experience. Our shared experience, it wasn't a meal this time, it was an owl walk, because we read this in December or January. I can't remember now. We went on an owl walk on the night of the full moon, and then came back to our homes. Everyone was doing this in their own home. Came home and read a story by candlelight with hot chocolate. This is what I mean, is how simple it can be. Going on a walk, having some hot chocolate, reading a story, and this is going to stay in your child's memory far more than making a diorama or answering some comprehensive questions on any of these books or stories.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:34](#) Remember that the goal of that shared experience is to enjoy your children, and to enjoy the story. By focusing on the enjoyment of your children and the story, you take the pressure off of feeling like your children have to have all the right answers about the book, or know exactly what the author meant about this or that this. Sharing an enjoyable experience together that they will remember and carry with them.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:56](#) The third principle of that book club culture we talked about was our family conversation often revolves around what we're reading. If you look back in a family book club guide, that's the third thing, is talk about it. Actually, in the guide, we'll give you examples of usually five to ten specific examples of open-ended questions you can use to talk with your kids about the book we're reading that month. Basically, the idea is that you want to use open-ended questions, and I go into this more in that Master Class about why those open-ended questions are so important. To invite your child into conversation and not feel like they're being quizzed. That's super, super important.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [32:28](#) Because those open-ended questions are so powerful, I was looking for a better word, but they're so effective, maybe that's the word I'm looking for, that I never assign book reports to any of my kids. I never assign book summaries or really deep formal literary analysis, although we'll talk about that in a second, because the conversations that we have using those open-ended questions are so meaty so much of the time, there is just no ... When we go back to that goal, what do I want reading to do in the lives of my children? The open-ended questions will often times show me that our goals are being beyond met. They're opening, they're expanding my child's horizons, they're helping them see their place in the world. They're reading widely. They're seeing beautiful language, and they're making all these deep connections about what's happening in this story. Open-ended questions invite our children into a conversation in a way that a quiz or a comprehensive question doesn't.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [33:24](#) I'm gonna answer questions in just a second, but before I do, I want to talk about what this can look like for kids in traditional literature classes. If you are not a home schooling parent, or maybe you were homeschooled, but your kids are doing literature as a part of a class at a co-op, which one of my kids is, you can't really control or have complete control anyway, over their reading life as

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children. That's okay. You're not gonna actually have complete control authority over your child's reading life after they leave your home anyway.

Sarah Mackenzie: [33:51](#)

This is the good news. Even if you're not in charge of your child's literary education, you are in charge of how books are encountered at home. You're in charge of the approach you take of books at home, so what I think we need to do at home, is we need to focus primarily on delight. I've already said that a bazillion times, right? If your kids go to school, or go to a literature class, I would focus, out of those three principles, I would focus most heavily on number two, our home is a haven for reading. Strew good books. Put lots of books face out. Add food. When you do a quiet reading time on the weekends, put mugs of hot chocolate out in the winter, and cups of lemonade out in the summer. Read aloud, use audiobooks. Let your kid see you interacting with book for the sheer delight of it.

Sarah Mackenzie: [34:34](#)

Make your home a haven for reading, so it's a place for everyone who wants to encounter books, and that will go so, so far to counter balancing any negative impact that a traditional literature class might have on your child's reading life. Then you don't need to worry about it, because what our kids will take with ... Even if there's just one or two books a year that you're able to do a family book club with, but that you have a quiet reading time on the weekends for half an hour and everybody gets a treat. It's like they look forward to Sunday afternoons after church, because mom puts out a pan of brownies or treats, and we all get to go read. That will stay with them, and that will help them see themselves as readers.

Sarah Mackenzie: [35:10](#)

Also, when your reading at home, I would focus on reading things that are just fun. If your child is reading assigned books at school, I wouldn't worry too much about the literary caliber of what you're reading at home with them. Books like I'm Just No Good At Rhyming, which is a really fun poetry book, books that you remember from your childhood as being really fun and delightful. Don't worry so much about it being high brow. Just have fun together and remember connection and delight, because those two things are gonna make your child a reader when they leave your home. Connection and delight are gonna keep your child reading when they're not living at home, not whether or not your child is assigned books in school, if that makes sense.

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Sarah Mackenzie: [35:46](#)

Let's talk about literary analysis. I see a lot of you asking about literary analysis. Here's what I think we need to remember about literary analysis. It's a tool. The primary focus always needs to be connection, always, always, always. Reading is all about connection. It's about us connecting with the ideas we encounter in what we read. It's about connecting with our children. It's about our kids connecting with each other, sibling to sibling. If they're in school, it would be classmate to classmate. It's about connection with ideas that the author put on paper, and then among us and how we live. That is what reading is for. Reading is to connect us. If we remember that the primary focus is connection, it needs to be connection with each other and with the ideas, then we can see literary analysis as a tool that helps that. Literary analysis can be helpful insofar as it helps your child make better connections with their books and with each other. That's the extent of the benefits of literary analysis.

Sarah Mackenzie: [36:46](#)

Practically speaking, I will probably teach each of my high schoolers very briefly the basics of what we commonly think of as literary analysis. The plot setting character and the theme of the story, but it doesn't take very long. For a child who reads, who loves to read, who's read to constantly, and who lives in a book club culture, those things are very quick to learn. They are not the heart. We don't read for the purpose of analyzing it. You analyze for the purpose of reading well. I think sometimes when we talk about literary analysis, we get it upside down, and we think that our high schoolers should be reading in order to analyze, when really, analyzing should be helping our child read and love more. The whole purpose of everything is for our kids to love God and love each other better.

Sarah Mackenzie: [37:30](#)

If you can use literary analysis in a way that strengthens connection in your home, then that's great, but it doesn't need to be used all the time. You don't need to do it all four years in high school. It does not take a child who's in a reading home very long to pick up on the nuances of literary analysis, and I will tell you that I have never done literary analysis with my oldest girls, but they do have to write literary analysis papers for their home school co-op for the literary teacher there, and I have been happy as I've been editing their papers, to see that they are quite capable of ... I mean, if you have a child who reads, it doesn't take ... They know a character, a setting, a plot and then if you've been asking your children that open ended question of what is the main character want, and

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why can't he have it? They can figure out the theme. It's just very basic.

Sarah Mackenzie: [38:15](#)

I think sometimes we think of literary analysis as this big thing that we need to teach, and we forget that it's just this tool that helps us read and connect better, if that makes sense. The point of analysis is to help us read better. As long as we don't forget that it can have a place, but as for having a whole class in literary analysis, I don't understand that. I don't think that makes sense. When we're talking about kids younger than high school, I don't think literary analysis has a place at all, because what we want to do is connect with our children through books. To help them connect with ideas. I think those open ended questions that you can ask your kids will get you far further than doing any kind of literary analysis with kids before high school could possibly do.

Sarah Mackenzie: [38:49](#)

I think the focus needs to be on teaching our kids to ask questions while they read, because we want our kids to be discerning readers. We know that they're going to be reading things that we're not handing them, so we want them to learn to ask questions when they read books, so that they always ask questions when they read books. That's way more powerful than literary analysis, I think.

Sarah Mackenzie: [39:10](#)

Chloe says, my oldest is a good reader, and he was reading Beverly Clearly before seven. He is seven now, but lately getting him to read has been a struggle, and he just wants to read his brother's easy picture books, or just look at picture books without even reading. Should I just let him stick with picture books, or encourage him to enjoy the journey and reward finishing a longer book?

Sarah Mackenzie: [39:27](#)

I would let him stick with picture books, and I would turn on longer books on audio. He will read them. There will come a time, I promise, when he will not largely want to read easy or picture books. Reading, when they first get that skill of reading, it's kind of hiking up this huge mountain, and you get up there, and it's like someone saying, "Okay, hike up another. You just did it." You just kinda want to sit there and be like, "Hold on. That was really hard. I spent a lot of energy on that." Giving him the time and space to continue to enjoy books without pressuring him to move on is really helpful.

Sarah Mackenzie: [40:01](#)

One of the things I like to think about with chapter books, is we tend to think of easy readers, picture books, chapter books, middle grade novels, classics as rungs on a

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ladder. I think that's an incorrect way for us to think about it. If we think about our reading life as rather expanding concentric circles, your child read pictures books or easy reader, and then we continue to read those, but we add another circle. We add more richness by now adding chapter books on audio, I he doesn't want to read them on his own yet. When he gets those, we're gonna keep expanding it, but we never take one out completely, and that lends itself to so much of a richer reading live.

- Sarah Mackenzie: [40:40](#) There really is not anything your child can get from a novel that they cannot get from a picture book. There's nothing they can get from a novel that they can't get from a picture book. If he wants to read picture books and easy books, I would just let him, and then I would read aloud tons of picture books to him, and turn on some audiobooks if he's up to listening to them. If he's not, I would wait, 'cause I bet he will be very, very soon.
- Speaker 1: [41:07](#) 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.
- Shannon Olsten: [41:20](#) Hi. My name is Shannon Olsen. I live in Watertown, South Dakota, and I am seven years old. My favorite book is Pocahontas. Why I like it is because Pocahontas saves the day, and how she does it, is she tells John Smith when he's gonna get hurt.
- Speaker 6: [41:37](#) Hi. My name is Sophia Olsen. I live in Watertown, South Dakota. My favorite book is Felicity. I like it because there is a horse Penny in the book.
- Speaker 7: [41:50](#) What is your name?
- Patrick: [41:51](#) My name is Patrick.
- Speaker 7: [41:53](#) How old are you Patrick?
- Patrick: [41:55](#) Three.
- Speaker 7: [41:56](#) Three, and what is your favorite book?
- Patrick: [41:58](#) A book of dinosaurs.
- Speaker 7: [42:00](#) The Big Book of Dinosaurs, and why is it your favorite?
- Patrick: [42:02](#) Because they roar.

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- Heidi: [42:06](#) Hello, my name is Heidi. I'm nine years old, and live in Oakland, Illinois. My favorite book is [inaudible 00:42:13] because it shows the hardships in life and how God loves us.
- Elise: [42:16](#) Hello, my name is Elise. I'm from Algonquin, Illinois. I'm six years old. My favorite book is Narnia, and my favorite is book is the Magician's Nephew, because the lion sings.
- Adlin: [42:31](#) My name is Adlin. I am 10 years old, and I am from Algonquin, Illinois. My favorite book is Peter and the Star Catcher series, and my favorite part is when Blackstache captures the Neverland.
- Speaker 13: [42:43](#) What is your name?
- Charlie: [42:44](#) Charlie.
- Speaker 13: [42:46](#) Where do you live Charlie?
- Charlie: [42:49](#) In Mississippi state.
- Speaker 13: [42:50](#) In Mississippi? What is your favorite book that is read to you?
- Charlie: [42:53](#) Let me see. I like Dachshund.
- Speaker 13: [43:01](#) Dachshund? What is your favorite about Dachshunds?
- Charlie: [43:03](#) Doing their baldy face-
- Speaker 13: [43:07](#) Their baldy faces?
- Charlie: [43:07](#) ... and playing with them outside.
- Speaker 13: [43:10](#) Oh, okay.
- Charlie: [43:13](#) Bye.
- Speaker 13: [43:13](#) Bye.
- August James M: [43:16](#) Hello. My name is August James Meyers. I live in Mississippi, Gulfport, and my favorite book is Winnie the Pooh. One of my favorite parts is in which Tigger comes to the forest and has breakfast.
- Barron: [43:32](#) My name is Barron, and I'm eight years old. My favorite book is Five Minute Spooky Stories. My favorite part is when RC pops out of the bed.

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Speaker 16:	43:50	Where do you live Barron?
Barron:	43:50	Gulfport.
Speaker 17:	43:53	What is your name?
Alex:	43:54	Alex.
Speaker 17:	43:56	Alex? How old are you Alex?
Alex:	43:58	Since my birthday, I'm this [inaudible 00:43:59] ... I'm.
Speaker 17:	43:59	12
Alex:	43:59	I'm 12.
Speaker 17:	44:09	You're 12? What is your favorite book that mommy's read to you?
Alex:	44:13	Poo Bear.
Speaker 17:	44:14	Poo Bear? Do you like Winnie the Pooh?
Alex:	44:21	The best part about Winnie the Pooh is when he grew [inaudible 00:44:26].
Speaker 17:	44:26	When he and Piglet caught the Heffalump? That was a funny part. Where are you from Alex?
Alex:	44:32	Gulfport.
Speaker 17:	44:33	Gulfport.
Bronman Lennox:	44:34	My name is Bronman Lennon Meyers, and my favorite book is Clarice Bean. My favorite part is when Clarice Bean and her friend save the day by finding the lost trophy, and before they found it, all the teachers and the principal thought that it was the mischievous boy who always causes mischief. They thought he was the one who did it.
Sarah Mackenzie:	45:13	Thank you, thank you kids. I always love hearing your recommendations. If your kids would like to be featured on the show, you can do that at readaloudrevival.com . You just scroll to the bottom of the page. There's a button down there, where your kids can leave a message to be featured in Let the Kids Speak, and there's also a place where you can leave a question of me if you'd like

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me to try and answer it on an upcoming episode of the podcast.

Sarah Mackenzie: [45:34](#)

Remember that this Master Class, Creating a Book Club Culture at Home was a Premium membership master class. We do a new Premium Member Master Class every season at Read Aloud Revival. We also have a monthly family book club, where we put these exact principles, the whole idea of reading aloud, sharing an experience, and talking about it. We put that into practice every month. We give our members a book club guide that they can use with their family, with their kids of all different ages to walk all three of those steps. We have really wonderful community in our forum, where we spot pictures of what's happening when we're doing our shared experiences, and then in the guide, we give questions that you can use to have really wonderful conversations with your kids about the books you're reading. It is a game changer. I think it changes the way your family interacts with each other around books, and it reminds us constantly that reading is about connection. It's about connecting with ideas, and it's about connecting with each other.

Sarah Mackenzie: [46:32](#)

If this is something that sounds right up your family's alley, you want to check out Read Aloud Revival Premium Membership. We only open a few times a year, so we've got an upcoming enrollment, and I don't want you to miss it. It's May 6th through 10th, and you can find out more at rarmembership.com. Okay, that's it for today. I will be back in two weeks with another episode of the podcast. It's a good one, so I'm really looking forward to it. In the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.