

# READ-ALOUD REVIVAL

## Episode #137: Why Your Kids Love Graphic Novels (and which we like best!)

- Kara: [00:00](#) Please edit that out. Wink, wink.
- Kortney: [00:01](#) Oh, there's no winking.
- Kara: [00:07](#) Please, please.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [00:23](#) 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: [00:41](#) Hello, hello. Sarah Mackenzie here. This is episode 137 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. On today's show, the Read-Aloud Revival team is joining me to talk about graphic novels. I could almost hear an audible response to that announcement. We either love them or hate them, right? Well, we get a lot of questions here at RAR about graphic novels. Questions like, why do my kids love them so much? And, do they really count as reading? Or, should I be worried if all my kid wants to read are graphic novels? Or, which graphic novels do you recommend?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [01:13](#) So today, we're here for it. Kortney Garrison is our Read-Aloud Revival community director. If you've ever written in to RAR, you very likely heard back from her. And of course, Kortney's a huge reason why RAR premium is as awesome as it is. Kara Anderson is our podcast manager. She's the one in charge of scheduling podcast interviews and lining up guests and making those beautiful show notes.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [01:39](#) We're going to start our conversation in just a minute, but before we do, I'd like to answer a listener question.
- Kelly: [01:45](#) Hello, Sarah. This is Kelly from West Virginia. I have a number of children that love graphic novels. What is your recommendation for graphic novels for middle schoolers and older? Thank you so much for your help. I always appreciate and trust your recommendations.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [02:05](#) Hey, Kelly. Well, this is a perfect question for today's episode because today's episode is all about graphic novels. In fact, we're going to have a whole list of great graphic novels for you based on ages, and that's going to be in the show notes for this episode at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137). We'll have recommendations for emerging readers, young readers, and more suited to you, Kelly, older kids and teens, and those will be at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137). As usual, you'll be able to click the book recommendations right there online if

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that's easiest for you based on book covers, or you can print out the free list and take it with you to the library, which is also really helpful.

Sarah Mackenzie: [02:46](#)

I think we have one other question that's come in recently about graphic novels, so let's listen to that one, too.

Sarah: [02:52](#)

Hi, my name is Sarah and I am from Michigan. I have a question. My daughter is almost nine and she just loves graphic novels. Anything with a lot of pictures, anything that has a lot going on picture wise, that seems to be what she's drawn to. I'm just looking for a way to get her to find other books besides graphic novels that she really enjoys. She says she gets bored if there's not a lot of pictures in the book. So if you have any suggestions, that would be great.

Sarah Mackenzie: [03:24](#)

So you said your daughter's nine, and my hunch is that graphic novels, because they contain so many pictures, are a really good stepping stone between picture books and longer narrative chapter books and novels. And just part of that is because we have been used to ... as we're reading picture books with our kids, giving them a picture to look at with every page turn. There's nothing wrong with that. We're going to talk about it in the show today, about multimodal reading, is what we call it, which is when we're reading not just text cues but also visual cues from images.

Sarah Mackenzie: [03:54](#)

So there's something important happening there and I don't think we need to worry about it so much. It's helpful to know if your child's been reading a lot of picture books and then all of the sudden they go to a book where there's no or very few pictures, that can just be a really big leap, what we're asking them to do inside their minds. So a graphic novel ... naturally, because it contains so many pictures ... does seem like a natural fit.

Sarah Mackenzie: [04:14](#)

I hope that this episode will give you confidence in letting your child read graphic novels. But if you're trying to get your daughter to read outside of just graphic novels, I'm all for that, too, because we don't want them just to read one kind of book, right? And so one of the ways that would be helpful is if you found an author that your daughter really likes the graphic novels of and then expand her reading into some other books by that author that aren't graphic novels. So the first one that comes to mind for me is Shannon Hale. She's written some graphic

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novels like *Princess in Black*, and those are chapter books that are pretty highly illustrated, another really good stepping stone. And then once your daughter really likes Shannon Hale, she might go, "Hmm, now I kind of want to check out *Princess Academy*," which is a middle grade novel that is just fabulous.

Sarah Mackenzie: [05:03](#)

So that's one idea. Jennifer Holm, H-O-L-M, is another author you might want to check out. She's done some graphic novels like the Babymouse series and the Squish series, and she's also done some really great middle grade novels. *Turtle in Paradise* is one that comes to mind right away. So if you can find an author who does both, that might just sort of help her see that she does actually like stories that don't have as many pictures. However, I wouldn't worry too much about her dependence on wanting images as she's reading. I think it's natural. I think she's going to not always want to read books with pictures for the rest of her life, but she's only nine so she's sort of in that straddling period between reading mostly books that have pictures and mostly books that have just text. And so giving her sort of a long jet way to be able to get from one to the next is completely fine and reasonable and developmentally appropriate.

Sarah Mackenzie: [05:51](#)

I hope that helps some, Sarah. Listen to this episode because we're going to be talking about what's actually happening while your child's reading graphic novels, and I think you'll be impressed by how much is actually happening on the page and in your child's brain when she's reading them.

Sarah Mackenzie: [06:04](#)

If you have questions you want me to answer on the podcast, go ahead and go to [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com), scroll to the bottom of the page, and you'll see a button there where you can leave me a message.

Sarah Mackenzie: [06:22](#)

Okay, let's get into the team conversation about graphic novels. First thing I want to do is just make a really quick definition of graphic novel versus a comic book. We even use the terms interchangeably and a lot of times people do. Technically, a graphic novel is one long story arc, so it's like a chapter book or a novel, but it's just told through panels. A comic book is going to be a collection of strips. You know like you would see the *Garfield* comic strip in your newspaper, any other comic strip in your newspaper, and it's just a few panels long? That's a comic, and then a graphic novel is a novel told in a similar form

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using panels, using text, and using dialogue, usually through speech bubbles.

Sarah Mackenzie: [07:05](#)

So before we really launch into this conversation, one thing I want to make really clear is that at Read-Aloud Revival, we don't tell you how to parent your kids. We don't make your decisions for you. We're not going to do that today. Ultimately, you as the person responsible for your children, you know best, and you're the best person to make decisions about what they're reading and how many they're reading and what kind of graphic novel they're reading.

Sarah Mackenzie: [07:28](#)

So what we're going to do today is not tell you exactly what to do, but we're just going to sort of give you another data point. We're going to give you some information about the benefits of reading graphic novels, some graphic novels we like and read with our kids or what our kids read, and hopefully that'll give you a starting place as you're thinking about the way your family interacts with graphic novels. Just use this episode as a data point to make your own decisions.

Sarah Mackenzie: [07:49](#)

I think the overwhelming response we hear from parents at RAR about graphic novels is a worried one. It's the question of, should I be allowing my kids to read these? Or, do these count as "real reading?" Or, are these books making my child a lazy reader? And so, we started our conversation about graphic novels today by talking about some of the benefits, and the first thing I'd like you to consider is just that graphic novels are multimodal.

Sarah Mackenzie: [08:16](#)

Let's talk about graphic novels as a form of storytelling. A movie tells a story. That's a form of storytelling. A novel tells a story, a poem tells a story, a picture book tells a story. They're all stories. They're different forms. They all require different storytelling techniques from the creator and they all require a little different decoding and deciphering on the part of the reader.

Sarah Mackenzie: [08:36](#)

A graphic novel is also a form of storytelling, and they're actually multimodal forms of storytelling, which means they require more than just one kind of deciphering or decoding. They actually require that you decode and decipher their pictures and their text both. I know sometimes I catch myself thinking that text only is the best kind of reading ... a novel is better than a picture book, but that's not the case. Our work with picture books here at RAR has really taught me it's not the case.

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Reading a story in text only is indeed a beautiful kind of storytelling, but so is visual storytelling. And when we think about a picture book, we know that as Jesus Storybook Bible author Sally Lloyd-Jones has told us ... she says this so beautifully ... "Picture books are stories in two languages, pictures and words."

Sarah Mackenzie: [09:22](#)

In the same way, graphic novels are stories in two languages, maybe even three languages. They're stories in pictures, stories in words, and stories in panels, because a graphic novel artist, the authors and artists of these graphic novels, they use panels ... Panels are the little squares or rectangles or similar shapes on the page that separate each illustration in a graphic novels. They use those panels to pace their story, so they actually tell part of the story, too, exactly how they're laid out. So for example, a succession of small panels speeds up the pacing of the story. You'll see a lot of small panels when there's a lot of action happening. Fewer panels slows them down. If you turn the page and there's one big illustration, you're slowing down. It's what paces the story.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:06](#)

So a graphic novel is a multimodal kind of reading. It's going to require different parts of your brain to light up and think about how you're deciphering and decoding the story itself. So let's jump into this conversation with Kortney and Kara. At this point in the conversation, I had been talking about this idea of multimodal reading through graphic novels and how visual storytelling is an important thing to do as we're reading as well, not just reading text. And so, here. I'm just going to plop us right down in the middle of that conversation where Kortney responds to me talking about multimodal reading.

Kortney Garrison: [10:43](#)

Yeah that really reminds me of something that Michael Gurian says. I think he said it on the podcast when he was here the first time. He said that different brains work in different ways, and some brains are highly visual and they process better, more quickly, more efficiently when there is that visual component. So that multimodal form that you talk about, using the pictures and the words and the panels altogether, helps certain kinds of brain work in harmony together.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:12](#)

Yeah. That kind of reminds me that Dr. Gurian was talking about how we want to be working with our brain not against it. And so some of our brains especially are really keyed into that visual kind of learning, then it makes

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sense that we work with it instead of fighting against it and always thinking that just because it might be the way our brain favors learning that it's lesser than text only.

Kara Anderson: [11:34](#)

Yeah as we were prepping for this episode, I was thinking about Jan Brett books and how none of us here, the three of us, has ever questioned, is reading a Jan Brett book to our kids, does that count? She has those panels, and my kids and I would pore over those, especially her winter books. Jan Brett is always winter to me, cozy around the fire with cocoa, and poring over those books and then looking at the panels for a little hint at what is next. And I think graphic novels can do that, too.

Sarah Mackenzie: [12:10](#)

I have never once considered the panels in a Jan Brett book, but now that you say it ... So, for our listeners, think about ... So Jan Brett, we're talking about The Mitten, The Hat, The Three Snow Bears, and Honey...Honey...Lion! So if you imagine a Jan Brett book, they've got these beautiful borders and usually on the left and the right there's those panels that tell you a little foreshadowing of what's coming or what's happening in a different part of the woods or whatever, and I've never once considered ... As I'm reading those, I know how important those panels are to the whole story. That's part of what's so beautiful about a Jan Brett book, but I've never made that link between what's happening there and a graphic novel. So that is-

Kortney Garrison: [12:48](#)

That is exactly what's happening in a graphic novel, is those pictures are telling you extra information, different information, contrasting information that you need to have both, you need to have what Jan Brett is telling us in the text and what her artwork is telling us. And then exactly what you described, Kara, that lingering. That's what picture books invite us to do. They invite us to grab a kid, cuddle them up close, and linger over the picture book, really study those. And that's what Jan Brett is so good at, is giving us an occasion to keep on looking, to look and listen and then look again. But that's what graphic novels invite our kids to do, too.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:26](#)

I think maybe another comparison here is that similarity between what we tend to think of with audiobooks. We talk about audiobooks a lot, right? And we get asked a lot at Read-Aloud Revival, "Do audiobooks really count as real reading?" And what we know is that it's just a different kind of reading. So listening to an audiobook is reading with your ear instead of reading with your eye. And as far

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as recall and downloading information and getting the story into your brain, one's not better than the other. They're just different modes of getting a story into your self.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:55](#)

In a similar way, I think we can consider graphic novels as just another kind of reading. And in general, my gut is sort of when I look at a graphic novel, I think, "This is going to be difficult to read aloud," so I tend to think of them better as read-alones. But then as I was thinking about that, too, I know I did read *The Action Bible*, which is ... it's a pretty fabulous graphic novel version of the Bible. I read that aloud with my three oldest kids when they were younger and it was really delightful. The big key, of course, is that you have to be sitting all looking at the pictures together, so you can't have a kid coloring on the other side of the room because none of the action is described, only the dialogue shows up because you're pointing at the panels to show the action.

Sarah Mackenzie: [14:35](#)

But anyways, let's talk about strategies for sharing graphic novels with our kids, because I think when it comes to reading graphic novels, at least for me, I know that my sort of instinct is, but I don't really know how to read this.

Kara Anderson: [14:46](#)

Yeah, I have an embarrassing confession, which is that when ... Again, these were very new to me when our library started displaying them, and I think they were kind of trying to figure out how to display them best and they put manga ... is that right?

Sarah Mackenzie: [15:00](#)

Yeah.

Kortney Garrison: [15:00](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kara Anderson: [15:01](#)

Manga in with the graphic novels, and I thought that all graphic novels you read ...

Sarah Mackenzie: [15:05](#)

Backwards?

Kara Anderson: [15:06](#)

... the opposite way, backwards. I was so thrown by it that I just didn't even want to open the books with my kids. So there is a great resource, though, called TOON Books, and it has a free guide for parents that we can link to in the show notes at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137) and it helps those of us who are not familiar with the format. And I love too, it has a step-by-step guide for how to approach graphic novels with your kids. And it even

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- includes drawing comics, which for me is huge because I had a child that just ... it brought him so much happiness to draw along with his comic favorites.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [15:46](#) That's by TOON, right? And speaking of those graphic novels and picture books by TOON, I think some of those are by Ivan Brunetti, aren't they?
- Kara Anderson: [15:54](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Sarah Mackenzie: [15:54](#) Kortney, didn't you become pals with Ivan?
- Kortney Garrison: [15:56](#) Well, I don't know if we're pals exactly. I hope to one day be his pal. We got to meet him when the Read-Aloud Revival team went to the American Libraries Association's Midwinter Conference, and I had my phone out to take pictures of book covers of upcoming releases, and then I set it down to have Ivan Brunetti sign my book and I walked away from my phone. So I came back frantically, trying to locate my phone, and along with Ivan Brunetti, another TOON Books author, Kevin McCloskey was there. Kevin McCloskey wrote *Snails Are Just My Speed!* That is an excellent, excellent book to begin with, and it will read aloud as well as read alone. It does both.
- Kortney Garrison: [16:37](#) And so Kevin McCloskey said, "I will call your phone so it will ring and we'll be able to locate it." And so he did, and I was frantically looking around and I didn't know what happened. I didn't find the phone immediately. It took me 10 or 15 minutes, but I did locate it. And later on that day, I saw that there was a message and it was from Kevin McCloskey. He had called my phone to make it ring, but he left a message saying, "Hello, this is Kevin McCloskey. We met at ALA and I really hope you find your phone. I hope you have a really good day. Bye." And I was just so excited because this was an author that I love his work and now I've got a message from him on my phone.
- Kortney Garrison: [17:13](#) So Sarah has a picture of Tomie dePaola on her home screen and I've got a message from Kevin McCloskey on my phone.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [17:22](#) The coolness factor around here is through the roof. And I pretty much think you can call them pals now.
- Kortney Garrison: [17:27](#) That's so fun.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [17:31](#) Okay, let's talk about choosing graphic novels, because just like any time we're choosing books for our kids or

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helping them choose books for themselves that we haven't read before, we're going to bump up against problems. We're going to need to use some discretion, we need some help figuring out what is appropriate, what's a good fit for our kids. So do either of you have any ideas for that?

Kortney Garrison: [17:50](#)

At our library, the librarians have started shelving graphic novels in a really unique way. They use two sections. One is called junior graphic novel with the designation JGN, and one is called graphic novel, which is GN. And so that separation, it's sort of like the difference between a middle grade novel and a YA novel. So the things that are sort of more generally appropriate are in the JGN section, and then content for older kids is in the GN section. And that, for me, helps do a quick, on the fly, I'm in the middle of the stacks at the library, my arms are full of books, there's a kid who needs to go to the bathroom and I just need to know where to steer my kids. And so learning that trick helped us to quickly find a section that was more likely to have books that were a good fit for us.

Sarah Mackenzie: [18:41](#)

Yeah, that's really helpful. At my library, they don't make that distinction. There's just graphic novels. They're kind of in between middle grade and YA, those two sections at the library, and they're lumped together. But they tend to put those emerging reader graphic books, like the picture books like for the one we were just talking about by Kevin McCloskey and Ivan Brunetti, those TOON Books, those are in the early reader section, and then adult graphic novels have their own spot at a different part of the library.

Sarah Mackenzie: [19:03](#)

But anyway, I think it's worth noting that not all libraries do this the same. But I do think, listeners, you can ask your librarian. They want to help you. There's a lot of help if you, say, ask your librarian, "Hey, I'm looking for graphic novels that are especially appropriate for elementary-age kids," if you're looking for graphic novels that don't have potentially questionable content, let them know and see if they can steer you in the right direction.

Sarah Mackenzie: [19:26](#)

I kind of think that standard advice we give here at Read-Aloud Revival stands, that you want to pre-read when you can. We know you can't always, neither can we. So you do want to use trusted book lists and book reviews for helping choose books. We've recommended [redeemedreader.com](http://redeemedreader.com) for their book recommendations

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before, and they're always reviewing new graphic novels. They're a great resource. We'll put a link to them in the show notes. Again, that's Redeemed Reader. And then if you're just in the habit of talking about books with your kids so that when tricky stuff shows up in books, whether that's a graphic novel or a middle grade novel or a YA novel or anything ... I mean, a picture book. Tricky stuff can show up kind of anywhere. And so if you're in the habit of talking about books with your kids, then you can use those conversations as a gateway into a fruitful conversation. Really, I think it's helpful just to know there's not really an easy button here when it comes to choosing books for our kids, and the same thing is true about graphic novels as it is about all the other kinds of books we're going to share with our kids.

Kara Anderson: [20:19](#)

Although I will say, it is wonderful if your child has a friend who's just a year or two older who has really great taste in graphic novels, because my daughter has that and that is one of the ways that we've been able to sort through which are the ones to bring home and which are the ones to leave at the library. But we are going to make some specific recommendations, so we're going to put those over in the show notes at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137).

Sarah Mackenzie: [20:44](#)

Yep, that's right. We've got a book list for you there and you can see the whole list online. You can click on the book covers or you can print out the printable list, which is helpful if you're going to the library, especially if you print out that list and you bring it to your librarian and say, "Can you help me find some on here?"

Kortney Garrison: [21:08](#)

Let's talk a little bit about where to begin with graphic novels and our kids. So like Kara already mentioned, TOON Books in general is a great place. It's a publishing house, and so things by TOON House are great for emerging readers, struggling readers really of any age. They might be located in the library with easy readers, but that doesn't mean that kids who are older will not be interested in them. They're actually very well done, they're funny, they're smart. I think parents will like them just as much as their kids.

Kortney Garrison: [21:39](#)

More specifically, I would start with Ivan Brunetti's Comics: Easy as ABC. It's a primer on how comics work. We talked about how panels work and Ivan is an artist and so he talks about how just small details change things, how drawing a character's eyebrows gives us

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information about how they're feeling. And those sorts of sophisticated visual reading strategies help our kids become the sophisticated readers that we want them to be. And it's a-

- Sarah Mackenzie: [22:09](#) You know what it reminds me of, Kortney? It reminds of Mo Willems's Elephant and Piggie books, which are really like graphic novel type because they've got just the dialogue bubbles. I'm trying to think of some of the Elephant and Piggie books that we have sitting in my boys' room. All of the text, I think, is done through dialogue. But it's amazing to me how a simple change in line changes the expression of Piggie's face from being elated to being horrified to being scared. And it always sort of blows my mind. There's probably four lines on his face total, and that's how he makes him. And so figuring out those visual cues, and they're super funny.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [22:43](#) Beyond those younger kids, the TOON Books, Elephant and Piggie type books, graphic novels can be a really great way to enter into the world of classics, right? And there are a lot of classics being made into graphic novels right now.
- Kortney Garrison: [22:58](#) Yeah. I like to call these classics with scaffolding. It's all of the goodness of classic novels like Shakespeare or Dickens or Austen or even Anne of Green Gables or The Hobbit, but then there's the added scaffolding of the images. By reading these contemporary graphic novels, we have the opportunity to learn the characters and the main action of the plays and novels, and then as our kids are older and they're ready for the originals, they can approach the work of deciphering the antiquated language but inside the context of characters and stories that they already know.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [23:30](#) Yeah, that seems super helpful, especially with Shakespeare because there's a bazillion characters in a Shakespeare play and it can be really difficult to keep up with the actual play if you can't remember who's who or who's dressing up as who.
- Kortney Garrison: [23:41](#) Right. The Marcia Williams graphic novels of Shakespeare plays are excellent for that because all of the Montagues from Romeo and Juliet ... all of the Montagues are dressed in one color and all of the Capulets are in another color. Just getting that clear in your head helps you be able to tackle the next level of what the language is saying and doing.

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- Kortney Garrison: [24:02](#) I also really love using graphic novels so that everyone can learn together at our house. Older kids are working through the classics in the original way and younger kids have access to the same stories through adaptations, and we love to have these kinds of books. Like I said, Marcia Williams books are great to put in morning time baskets because then everyone can have access to the stories.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [24:24](#) Yeah, no matter their age everybody's engaging in the same story then but just from a different mode, kind of.
- Kortney Garrison: [24:30](#) Right. And I used to worry that these retellings were just dumbed down versions of the originals, something that we didn't want to give our kids. But actually ... And I mean, graphic novels are not all created equal, so this isn't always universally true. But a graphic novel is a record of the author's interaction with the text. We get to see their interpretation. The authors are making choices about what to highlight, what to leave out, who's a good guy, who's a bad guy, who has an ulterior motive, and that's the sort of analysis that we want our kids to do eventually. And so seeing an artist do that gives us a really great model.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [25:07](#) Yeah, early on in homeschooling, I heard a lot of skepticism in general about abridged versions of classics, early reader versions, and I think graphic novel versions will probably fit into that same sort of category of, well this isn't the real thing. I think the concern is valid, of course. We're worried that if kids read a simplified version of Heidi, for example, then they'll feel like they've read or done Heidi but they haven't really been exposed to the beautiful language or even the author's complete ideas.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [25:34](#) But what actually I saw happen in my own home a lot of times, specifically with Heidi, in fact, is that my daughter Allison read an early reader abridged version of Heidi and then loved it so much that she was willing to do the hard work of slogging through a book that would have been harder than normally she would be able to pick up because she wasn't really ready to read that book yet when she did. But because she was already familiar, exactly like you said, Kort, with the characters and the plot and the setting, she was able to then tackle the harder language and it just makes you hungry for more instead of making you feel like you've done the book or it's checked off. So I can see that.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [26:08](#) I can see that with graphic novels, especially with those classics like Dickens and Shakespeare that have a lot of characters or are really long so it's a lot of plot to hold in your head as you're trying to navigate through old language, too. Usborne is making a lot of these classics into graphic novels. I know other publishers are. Kortney, you mentioned Anne of Green Gables and everyone's ears perked up when you said that.
- Kortney Garrison: [26:32](#) And Anne is a really great example because I think people have strong opinions about how things should go with Anne. How old Marilla and Matthew should be or how certain scenes should play out, and so that's a really great place. The Anne of Green Gables graphic novel was not my kids' favorite because they had such strong opinions, and so they were making comments about what got left out and what didn't, so that was a really good compare and contrast experiment.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [27:02](#) Well, yeah. So even though they didn't love it and maybe it wasn't their favorite, it encourages them to go back to the real Anne and then-
- Kortney Garrison: [27:08](#) Exactly. And to defend their positions.
- Sarah Mackenzie: And I will take any excuse to watch the movies again. "Well, we better watch them again so you can compare."
- Kara Anderson: [27:18](#) You had said earlier Sarah that there's sort of a parallel between how we view graphic novels and how we view audiobooks, and when I was growing up, I never read any Jane Austen and I think I was a little bit embarrassed about that in later life. I felt like I should have, and so I built it up as this thing that must be really hard just because it had been a gap in my education. And so I thought, "I'm going to try to listen to it on audio first," and what that did was, I learned the story, I learned the characters, I learned that they're funny, those books are funny, and it helped me find an entryway into Jane Austen where I wanted to explore more.
- Kara Anderson: [27:59](#) So I think if kids are intimidated by the idea of some of those big stories and classics, graphic novels can be a way to introduce them to the story and then it becomes familiar and then it totally removes that intimidation factor.
- Kortney Garrison: [28:10](#) Now that we've brought up Austen, I have to tell you about a book that's not exactly a graphic novel, but it is

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by Marcia Williams, who writes lots of classic graphic novels. I was ordering her adaptation of Homer for our new school year and I came across a middle grade book that she had written, so it's lots of text with a few of her illustrations and it's called Lizzie Bennet's Diary. It's based on Pride and Prejudice and it is a hoot. It's out of print. Our library didn't have it. We had to get it through inter-library loan, but it is worth tracking down. It's very witty. It's fabulous to read aloud. Our 12 year old is actually reading it aloud to her brothers, so ...

Sarah Mackenzie: [28:47](#)

Oh, that's the best.

Sarah Mackenzie: [28:59](#)

We'll have a lot of those classics that have been made into graphic novels listed in our book list, which again is in the show notes at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137). And they can be a really good way to introduce classics if you're going to be reading the classic later on in your homeschool or if you have an older child, a teenager maybe, who's reading the actual classic and a younger child who's reading the graphic novel, or you're reading that with them. That can be a great way to stir up dinnertime conversation because now everybody's familiar with the story, which is awesome because then it's sort of an entryway into everything. And it's also, probably ... I'm just now thinking it could be a great way to invite Dad into reading a classic as well if he's not doing a lot of that reading aloud normally. He might be interested in checking out the graphic novel.

Sarah Mackenzie: [29:43](#)

So something happens whenever you're exposed to great stories and great art. I know for me, it always makes me want to start drawing. That's what happens whenever I see a beautiful picture book that has wonderful nature scenes. I think, "I wonder if I could sketch something kind of like that." Just it kind of stirs up that desire to start drawing. And Kara, you talked about how your son wanted to draw and make his own comics as a way to engage in the comics he was reading, so maybe we should mention that there are several helpful resources on drawing and comics that can invite your kids into the experience of drawing and writing stories through the graphic or comic format.

Kara Anderson: [30:19](#)

We'll put some links in the show notes to some books if your kids are eager to try their hand at drawing comics or stories through panels.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [30:28](#) There's one other thing I think we should bring up, and that's the fact that we ... I think we need to be careful not to insult or disparage our kids' reading tastes. I know I will default into this without even realizing it because it's so easy to do. We see a book our child's reading, we're not impressed with it for whatever reason and we think, "Wow, you could do better than that."
- Sarah Mackenzie: [30:50](#) So when I think about myself, I think when someone insults my taste in something ... maybe like sappy romantic movies or some kind of light reading ... it doesn't make me love that movie or that book any less, it just sort of makes me feel a little ashamed, a little embarrassed. It definitely doesn't invite me into a conversation with that person. If they're going to make fun of whatever book or movie I'm watching, it doesn't make me want to go like, "Oh, I can't wait to tell them about what means a lot to me in this or why I like it." So I just think if we're guiding our kids' reading choices, it's helpful to remember that maybe it's better to just fill our kids' shelves, our book baskets, our coffee tables, our bookshelves with really wonderful books so that our kids are being exposed to this wide assortment of true literary treasures.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:35](#) And then also to give them the freedom and space to develop their own unique reading tastes without belittling them, because we don't want to become elitists about books, right? That's not going to invite our kids to want to talk to us about books, it's not going to make them open to taking our book recommendations, and I don't think it's the way to help our kids fall in love with reading.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:51](#) If you happen to have kids who really love graphic novels, probably the best way to steer them toward other books isn't to belittle or make fun of their graphic novels, right? It sounds obvious, but I also think it's something that a lot of us slip into accidentally.
- Kortney Garrison: [32:04](#) Yeah. I think what you said about when someone belittles something that you care about, it doesn't make you want to talk to them more about it and that's kind of what we want to do most of all is share the stories and then talk about them together. And so creating that atmosphere of respect, I think, helps with that. And we don't know always exactly what our kids are getting from a book. We make our own judgments about what they're doing, but that book might be feeding something in them that we

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don't know fully what it is. And we can have faith that out of all of the books, they're getting a balanced diet and there can be things that are sweet treats and deep, nourishing things as well.

Sarah Mackenzie: [32:47](#)

Yeah. I mean, if we think about setting a feast, we set this beautiful feast for our kids of all these literary goodness and these wonderful, rich experiences that expand our kids' horizons about the world and people and classics and all this, but then if they have this little small bowl of marshmallows, it doesn't keep them from eating the whole feast. It's not like all they want to do is gorge themselves on marshmallows for the rest of their life, all they're going to eat is marshmallows.

Sarah Mackenzie: [33:10](#)

I think in the same way, I love Jane Austen now. I didn't read her when I was younger. I love lots of classics and good books, but I also really want to watch *You've Got Mail*, and that's okay. And it doesn't mean that that's all I want to watch. It doesn't mean that those are all the kind of books that I want to read. But I do think if we give our kids the permission to be a whole human being that likes classic and rich stories that they have to think really deeply about and also it has some light treasures or a Calvin and Hobbes book that they love to revisit because it makes them laugh at the end of a long day, that's a good thing, too. So just, yeah, being careful not to ...

Sarah Mackenzie: [33:43](#)

It's kind of similar to something we talked about on the episode about young adult. We have this tendency, I think, as parents, to think our kids should always be reading at or above their own "reading level," right? And one of the things I mentioned on that episode is that as adults, we actually don't read at our reading level. Most of the reading we do is way under our reading level. Most of our novels that we pick up and read just for fun ... and like I mentioned, that episode we were talking like John Grisham, Tom Clancy, that kind of stuff, those are written about the seventh, eighth, ninth grade reading level. The *New York Times* is written at the tenth grade reading level. We can read above that, but that doesn't mean everything we read needs to be above that.

Sarah Mackenzie: [34:19](#)

In the same way, our kids can read things that stretch them, things that make them think, and also things that just make reading one of their favorite parts of their day, which is another part of the goal, right?

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- Kara Anderson: [34:30](#) Yeah. I think that's so important, that you keep your goal in mind for your child. My goal was always that I wanted my kids to fall in love with reading, characters, and stories, and if you would have asked my son when he was nine years old, "What are your favorite books?" he would have told you Calvin and Hobbes, The Hobbit, Garfield, Peanuts, and Tom Sawyer. When we talk about these comic collections and graphic novels, those characters become friends to our kids and they learn about stories through reading them. And so if our goal is that they fall in love with reading, these books can absolutely help them do that and be part of just a whole spectrum of reading.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [35:12](#) Well ladies, I think, believe it or not, we are out of time. As a reminder for our listeners, the show notes are at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137). That's where you're going to find our book list of recommendations. We'll have a bunch of graphic novels to recommend for you there, we'll link to that TOON guide to reading graphic novels with your kids, all the good stuff we talked about on today's show.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [35:39](#) 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.
- Madeline: [35:52](#) My name is Madeline and I am six years old and I'm from Houston, Texas, and my favorite book is The Tale of Despereaux and why I like it so much is because the mouse is in love with the princess.
- Rosalie: [36:09](#) Hi. My name is Rosalie and I'm from Houston, Texas, and I'm four years old. My favorite book is Can I Be Your Dog? and my favorite part of Can I Be Your Dog? is when the mailman gets a new friend.
- AJ Wilson: [36:27](#) Hello. My name is AJ Wilson and I live in Fort Collins. I'm eight years old and my favorite book is The Green Ember because it's like a ton of different stories in one book.
- Brooke Wilson: [36:45](#) Hi. My name is Brooke Wilson. I'm 13 years old and I live in Fort Collins, Colorado. My favorite book is Little Women because of the wonderful characters. My favorite character is Beth because she's so sweet and kind to her sisters.
- Maria: [37:01](#) Hi, Sarah. My name is Maria. I am 10 years old. I live in Urbandale, Iowa. I love books by Astrid Lindgren. I have read Pippi Longstocking, Seacrow Island, Mio, My Son, and

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The Children of Noisy Village. Can you give me some more book titles by her?

Sarah Mackenzie: [37:18](#)

Hey, Maria. You know what? I think you might have read more Astrid Lindgren than I have. I love it when I find an author like that who I just love. So let's see. Did you know that there are several books in the Pippi Longstocking series? Pippi Longstocking, Pippi Goes on Board, Pippi in the South Seas, and Pippi on the Run. So if you haven't read all of those, you've got a few you can read there. And then there's another one called Emil and the Great Escape. I haven't read that one yet, but it looks kind of like Pippi. The main character is a boy named Emil and he's got some adventures. I see a few in that series. Emil and the Great Escape, Emil and the Sneaky Rat, Emil's Clever Pig. Like I said, I haven't read them yet so if you read any of these, will you write in and let me know what you think, because then I'll know what I should read next time I want to pick up a book by Astrid Lindgren?

Speaker 11: [38:13](#)

What's your name?

Toto: [38:14](#)

Name.

Speaker 11: [38:15](#)

Say Toto.

Speaker 11: [38:17](#)

How old are you?

Speaker 11: [38:18](#)

Say one.

Toto: [38:18](#)

One.

Speaker 11: [38:22](#)

And what's your favorite book?

Toto: [38:26](#)

Mama.

Speaker 11: [38:26](#)

Llama Mama. Good job.

Bella: [38:30](#)

Hello.

Speaker 11: [38:31](#)

What's your name?

Bella: [38:34](#)

My name is Bella and we live in California.

Speaker 11: [38:36](#)

How old are you?

Bella: [38:37](#)

Three years old.

Speaker 11: [38:39](#)

And what's your favorite read aloud?

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Speaker 11:	<a href="#">38:42</a>	Fancy Nancy.
Ryan:	<a href="#">38:44</a>	Hi. My name is Ryan and I'm seven years old. I live in Menifee, California. My favorite read-aloud is Magic Tree House 1. My favorite part is when they discover the T-Rex.
JD:	<a href="#">39:00</a>	Hi. My name is JD. I'm eight years old and I'm from China. My favorite book is The Trumpet of the Swan. I like it because Louis wants to pay his father's debt so he works very hard to earn enough money. He is so trustworthy.
Noah:	<a href="#">39:20</a>	Hi. My name is Noah and I live in Waterford, Virginia. I'm eight years old and my favorite book is Magic Tree House Survival Guide. I like that it is lots of facts from my favorite books.
Rook:	<a href="#">39:35</a>	My name is [Rook 00:39:37] and I love The Boxcar Children.
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">39:42</a>	How old are you?
Rook:	<a href="#">39:43</a>	Four.
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">39:44</a>	And where do you live?
Rook:	<a href="#">39:45</a>	Virginia. I mean Waterford.
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">39:48</a>	Waterford, Virginia?
Rook:	<a href="#">39:50</a>	Yeah.
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">39:50</a>	What is your favorite thing about The Boxcar Children?
Rook:	<a href="#">39:53</a>	Jessie finds a boxcar.
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">39:58</a>	Do you think other kids would like this story, too?
Rook:	<a href="#">40:00</a>	Yeah. And there's something else I love. Did you know that Benny finds a dump?
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">40:10</a>	What a fun thing for a little boy to find.
Rook:	<a href="#">40:14</a>	Yeah. But I'm not Benny. Yes I am, I guess.
Speaker 17:	<a href="#">40:17</a>	You want to be like Benny?
Rook:	<a href="#">40:18</a>	Yeah. When I grow up, I'm going to be a train driver.

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- Abby: [40:26](#) Hi. My name is Abby and I'm nine years old and I live in Waterford, Virginia. My favorite book is Anne of Green Gables. I like it because it has so much description and it makes you feel like you're there. My favorite part of the book is when Marilla says how much she loves Anne.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [40:42](#) Wowzers. So many of my favorites in there, kids. Anne of Green Gables, Little Women, Green Ember, The Tale of Despereaux. Good stuff. You guys have exquisite taste. I'm just going to say.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [40:57](#) Hey, thanks so much for joining us for this episode of the podcast. Remember if you want to see our book list of recommended graphic novels, you can get it at [readaloudrevival.com/137](http://readaloudrevival.com/137). Feel free to share that far and wide. Bring it to your library. We also love it when you tell your librarians about us because sometimes that helps them know what you're going to want to be borrowing from the library and helps them make buying decisions, so feel free to print that out and share it with your librarian as well.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [41:24](#) We'll be back in two weeks with another episode. Make sure that you're on our email list so you don't miss any of our excellent resources. You get those at [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com) and popping your email in there, that way you don't miss out on any of our free resources.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [42:01](#) I'll be with you again in two weeks, but in the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.