

EPISODE 139: **Kindness Over Curiosity:**

**Favorite Books Featuring Differently-Abled Characters**

- Courtney W.: [00:00](#) You know, our kids have such a small world view because they are almost in a little bubble of home and school and just the small amount of things that they know. So reading is one way that we can greatly expand their world view and give them those experiences without needing to experience it firsthand.
- Automated: [00:33](#) You are 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: [00:51](#) Hello, hello. Sarah Mackenzie here. You've got episode 139 of the Read-Aloud Revival. I've got a special guest here today and we're going to be talking about great books that feature characters with disabilities and differences, kids who are differently abled. We're going to jump into all that and talk a lot about how books like this can help our kids grow in empathy and compassion. So we're going to get to that in just a minute. Before we do, I would like to answer a question from Melanie.
- Melanie: [01:20](#) Hi, Sarah. This is Melanie Henkins from Oklahoma and I was wondering if you have a place you could send me that is a list of good questions to ask during or after reading? I just wanted something to kind of have to jog my memory as I'm teaching my own children as well as the co-op kids. Also, I wanted to know if you had a list of followup activities, general ones that you could do after a book like retelling or dramatizing, that kind of thing? Obviously I'm a list person.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [01:58](#) Hey, Melanie, thank you so much for your question and, hey, I am a list person, too, so I get it. The best place I have for you to find questions that you can use after your kids have read a book together, you've shared a Read-Aloud or your kids have read to themselves that you want to talk about, is in my book *The Read-Aloud Family*, there is a whole chapter, Chapter 11, set aside that will help you ask compelling questions. And in here we talk about the importance of questions being open-ended and not right or wrong questions because those are the kinds of questions that invite our kids into a true conversation.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [02:30](#) And then I give you 10 questions that you can ask your kids of any age about any book to have a great conversation. So one of my favorite things about these

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open-ended questions is that truly you can ask these questions to your four-year-old or your fourteen-year-old. It's not the question that's developmentally appropriate, it's the answer that's going to be developmentally appropriate.

Sarah Mackenzie: [02:50](#)

So, for example, if you were to ask your child, and this is the sample that I always give, "Who is the most courageous in this story?" And you can fill that with any character trait of virtue. So who is the most kind, who is the most compassionate, who is the most wicked, but let's just use courageous. "Who is the most courageous in this story?" If you ask your four-year-old that question, they're going to give you a four-year-old answer and if you ask your fourteen-year-old that question, they're going to give you a fourteen-year-old answer and then you're going to be able to take that conversation on and it can be a really fruitful, engaging conversation about the story, depending on your child's age. But you don't need a custom list of questions for every different book. You just want a handful of questions that you can use, open-ended questions you can use for any child in any book.

Sarah Mackenzie: [03:30](#)

So The Read-Aloud family, Chapter 11, is my best place for that. I'll give you examples and 10 different questions you can use. Now if you're a RAR Premium member, there is also a masterclass in RAR Premium called How to Talk With Your Kids About Books Even If You Haven't Read Them Yourself. And in that masterclass I basically model what it looks like to ask these questions, a handful of questions, and we talk about the importance of having an easygoing, friendly approach, which, let's face it, is not always our natural default when we're talking with our kids in a school day.

Sarah Mackenzie: [04:01](#)

And so we talk about the importance of having that kind of an approach. And then I just model for you how you can use those open-ended questions to ask your kids questions about the stories that they've read on their own or that you've shared together. So hopefully that will help you. Now, we don't have a place on the website or in the book where I have a list of activities to do after you've read a story, which is because in our family we don't do a whole lot of activities after we've read a story, but I do at co-ops.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [04:26](#) So I am this year teaching a kindergarten-through-second-grade class, a Picture Books Around the World Curriculum. I'm actually using the Beautiful Feet Curriculum for it. And so we're reading stories and doing followup activities. Now, if you want a sort of big generic list that you can pull ideas from to use either in your home or in your co-op for activities following books, the best place I know to find a list like that is actually at [simplycharlottemason.com](http://simplycharlottemason.com). So we're going to put a link to this page in the show notes.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [04:55](#) It's a page of narration ideas. Some of them are speaking, some of them are writing, some of them are drawing, drama or building. Things like dramatizing what they've just read or recording a little radio show or drawing a map of the place they just read about or writing a letter from one character to another. Those kinds of activities. They're in a big list at [simplycharlottemason.com](http://simplycharlottemason.com) and if you go to the show notes for today's episode, which are at [readaloudrevival.com/139](http://readaloudrevival.com/139), we'll have a link there for you to go straight to those narration ideas at [simplycharlottemason.com](http://simplycharlottemason.com) and that's where you'll find a whole list of ideas.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [05:33](#) The only thing I would suggest is that you just keep in mind that the actual reading and then talking about what you've read are actually going to do most of the heavy lifting for you. So for the most part the story itself is enough, reading the story or sharing the story aloud is quite enough and if you don't get to more than that, that's okay. And then if you're going to add something, I'd say the most important thing is to add conversation and discussion, open-ended conversation about what you've read. But of course if you want to extend it and you have a co-op class or a good opportunity to have the kids do something creative or fun to extend the activity, then, yep, I'm going to send you to that list at Simply Charlotte Mason for some ideas.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [06:09](#) So I hope that helps. Melanie, thank you so much for calling in with your question. Hey, if you have a question you're hoping I'll answer on an episode of the Read-Aloud Revival Podcast, go to [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com), scroll to the bottom of the page and you'll find a button that says, Leave a Message For Sarah Mackenzie.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [06:45](#) Our guest is Courtney Westlake, a wife, mom to two kids and a storyteller. Her daughter Brenna was diagnosed at birth with a life-threatening skin disorder, which of course has profoundly affected the whole family as Brenna's fought through skin infections, multiple surgeries, hospitalizations, and many other challenges caused by her condition from motor delays to food intolerances. Well, since 2011 Courtney shared her family's experience on her blog in an effort to inspire kindness and healing and her book, *A Different Beautiful*, explores what her family has discovered in raising a child with physical differences and what she's learned about true beauty.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [07:24](#) She's also compiled a wonderful resource called *Celebrating Our Stories: Teaching children about differences and kindness through books*. So you know she's our kind of people. We're going to talk about where you can get your hands on that resource in a little bit. Today she's here to talk to us about how they use books and Read-Alouds in their home that feature characters with differences. Courtney, I am so glad to have you here. Welcome to the Read-Aloud Revival.
- Courtney W.: [07:46](#) Thanks, Sarah. I'm so excited to be here and talk to you.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [07:49](#) Well, do you want to start out by telling us a little bit more about your family that I didn't mention?
- Courtney W.: [07:53](#) Yeah, you covered a lot of it. I've been married to my husband for almost 12 years. My son, Connor, is ten and Brenna is about to turn eight in December. And, like you said, she was diagnosed at birth with Harlequin Ichthyosis, which is a genetic skin disorder. It's not contagious, but it does affect a lot of parts of our lives. So a lot of our daily life revolves around this disorder, but we have chosen not to let it define us or to limit us or her. So we're just seeking out now the beauty that God has given us because of and despite of her disorder.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [08:34](#) Yeah. And I love how you oftentimes are sharing about how you can use books, in particular, to help your kids think about differences and love others better and love themselves better. So I'm really excited today to dig into the books your family has been using and there are a lot of really wonderful books. Actually, let's back up a little bit. I know you have spoken beautifully on your site and in

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your book about acceptance and how we can all embrace differences. Can we talk a little bit about what that's looked like in your home with your kids or the challenges that you've seen over your time with Brenna's condition and the experiences that you've had, how that's looked for you?

Courtney W.: [09:12](#)

Yeah. Differences can mean so many things, from celebrating our own uniqueness to learning about differences in cultures as or abilities or appearances. And I think reading enables us to imagine how we might feel in situations that we've never been in or to appreciate someone's life we've never met. So it gives us that framework for developing empathy for those we encounter. I read Katherine Paterson wrote one-time stories, the way we make sense of life, and that's especially true for our kids.

Courtney W.: [09:44](#)

So I think, as parents, our goals are we want to show our families how to better understand and appreciate the wonder of our differences. But we also want our kids to learn to see beyond our differences so they can recognize the sameness that we share as humans created in God's image. So I always say, "Kindness before curiosity," because we are all curious but I think we want to help our kids see the humanity in each other first. There is no normal, there's no perfect and there's no, really, ideal. So I don't want people to assume that my daughter's the different one simply because her appearance is noticeably unusual. And I think through reading we can help our kids recognize that and that people are people first despite our differences. But differences are something to be celebrated, too.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:34](#)

Yeah. And the beautiful thing about that is God made everybody different. So we all-

Courtney W.: [10:37](#)

Exactly. We're all his masterpieces.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:40](#)

Right. Yeah, one of the things that I love about asking open-ended questions with our kids about books... One of the questions that we often recommend parents use in our family book clubs, this also shows up in my book, The Read-Aloud Family, is "How are these two characters alike and how are they different?" And you can actually do it with settings or objects or anything that shows up in a

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story, whole stories. "How is this story like that one and how are they different?" Because everything in the world is like everything else and everything in the world is different than everything else.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:07](#)

And I think that one of the things that is so interesting to me, some recent research has shown that kids who read a lot of stories or who are read to a lot as children end up growing up and being more kind, empathetic adults. And in fact adults who continue to read fiction tend to be more kind, empathetic humans than those who don't, and this makes so much sense to me, right?

Courtney W.: [11:27](#)

It does, it does.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:28](#)

Because, like you just mentioned, we're basically practicing empathy every time we read because when you read a story you are slipping into the shoes of somebody else and walking a mile in those shoes or at least getting as close as you can to noticing what that might be like. Taking the time to say, "Oh, my experience isn't 'the norm' and everything else is different. So let me just find out what this feels like," and practicing that act of taking, then, a moment to watch someone else's experience or try to feel like what it might feel like for them. Over and over and over again it ends up being a ton of practice and growing in empathy. So this makes a lot of sense to me.

Courtney W.: [12:05](#)

You know, our kids have such a small world view because they are almost in a little bubble of home and school and just the small amount of things that they know. And so reading is one way that we can greatly expand their worldview and give them those experiences without needing to experience it firsthand.

Sarah Mackenzie: [12:26](#)

So before we talk about great books that will help our kids grow in empathy and books that are wonderful for sharing this experience of reading aloud about people who are either disabled or different than us in some kind of way, let's talk about your book, A Different Beautiful. So who did you write this book for?

Courtney W.: [12:46](#)

I would say I wrote this book for parents like myself who really just needed a reminder about how to recognize, except and celebrate all kinds of beauty and to remember that God's version of beautiful is spectacular and different than what we experience in the world today and how that

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relates to our lives. I was wanting to empower my readers just to live more fulfilled lives based on who we are intrinsically and not what we have or what we look like. I hope readers of my book are challenged to find God's goodness and hardship and to see differences as positive as well as teach their own families about the beauty in difference.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:28](#)

Now, Brenna's condition is a physical difference. People can see it. So let's talk about that and the challenge that has been for you. How much older is Connor than Brenna?

Courtney W.: [13:40](#)

They're about two years apart. So he was just a little over two when she was born and he's never known her to look any differently than she does and never questions it. Her skin disorder means that her body doesn't produce skin like our bodies do. It overproduces skin and she looks like she has a terrible sunburn all over her body and people notice her a lot. So we constantly get questions or people pointing. And what I just notice is that there is such a difference between a kind question versus pointing, scrunching up your nose looking at her in disgust or even saying something really mean, which unfortunately we have encountered.

Courtney W.: [14:23](#)

That's why I think it's so important to start these conversations in our home and using books is one of the best ways to do that because, as we've talked about, it gives us those experiences and that empathy and that way our kids can learn how to see other people as people and learn what it means to be kind and respectful. Because I think sometimes people get confused, like, "What should I do if I encounter someone with a disability or someone looks different?" But I don't think there's a formula that needs to happen. We just need to be kind and respectful like we are with everyone else.

Sarah Mackenzie: [15:09](#)

I know in your resource, Celebrating Our Stories, where you help us dig into books that will help teach our kids about differences and kindness. And you just said it a few minutes ago, you said, "Kindness before curiosity," which I love so much because that is a really easy way to remember that we're dealing with images of God here. We're looking at people. But one of the things that in the very beginning as I was just peeking through that resource earlier today, let me see if I can pull it up here.

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You said, "There is no normal, there's no perfect. There is no 'ideal.' My daughter is certainly not the different ones simply because her appearance is noticeably unusual. What an incredible world it might be if we could show our children how to recognize that others are truly people first despite any differences."

Sarah Mackenzie: [15:53](#)

Let's talk about books. Let's talk about some of the books that have been the most helpful to you and your own family's journey. What comes to mind first? I know you have got a lot of books to recommend. I'm like, "Oh, where do we even start with this?" So what comes to mind first if someone asks you, "Where do I begin if I want to help my kids grow in empathy through reading aloud about people who are different or maybe have a disability?"

Courtney W.: [16:15](#)

One of the books that we have loved for years is called *Different Is Awesome*, by Ryan Haack. Ryan wrote this story about himself. He was born with his left hand missing below the elbow. In the story the boy brings his older brother to school who's missing his left hand. And through that all of the kids learn about his disability, but also about celebrating each of their differences. So the boy in the story, whose brother is missing his left hand, starts to notice all of his classmates' differences and how wonderful it is to see that. So it helps readers realize that we're all different from each other and that being different is awesome.

Sarah Mackenzie: [17:01](#)

Yeah. I haven't seen that book, but I think I have seen a picture. I think it might even be in your research, a picture of Connor and Brenna looking at it together, which is such a sweet picture.

Courtney W.: [17:10](#)

Yeah, we love that so much. It is available on Amazon. And then another one we love is called *Happy in Our Skin*, by Fran Manushkin, I think is how you say her last name. It's a rhyming book. It's really fun to read out loud. But it shares positive observations about everyone's skin from the colors to birthmarks and just shares about the jobs our skin does for our bodies. And obviously that one is a little closer to my heart because of the skin theme, but I think it really helps readers physically see how splendid our world looks with all of our differences in it.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [17:47](#) So specific book recommendations that maybe feature differently abled kids. Do you have any recommendations for us there?
- Courtney W.: [17:54](#) Yeah, I do. There are many that cover specific disabilities or conditions like autism or Down Syndrome or blindness. But there are a few general ones that our family really loves. And one of them is by Fred Rogers, who always knows his stuff, but it's called Let's Talk About It: Extraordinary Friends, and it's just a really open, positive book for kids to learn about differences and disabilities in a way that's relatable and not intimidating.
- Courtney W.: [18:22](#) There's another one called Don't Call Me Special, by Pat Thomas and I admit I was a little put off by the title because it just seemed a little negative. But the book does explain parts of disability in ways that are really easy to understand for kids such as people simply need equipment to help them do their best, whether it's a wheelchair or eyeglasses. And I love that it expresses the sentiment that when we assume things about people, it might hurt their feelings or make them feel left out. So I think that's a really good lesson for kids just to be open and not assume that someone with a disability might not be able to do something just because of their disability.
- Courtney W.: [19:02](#) There's another book that I think it was released in the last year or two by a man living with a rare condition called Spinal Muscular Atrophy and it's called Not So Different. His name is Shane Burcaw and he just has a really funny sense of humor in throughout the book he just answers a lot of questions that he gets asked from people like, "What's wrong with you? How do you do things? How do you play with your friends?" And he just approaches it from a really funny perspective and there's photos to go along with his answers so he shows the way that he lives his life. I think it's just a really great resource for kids and can open a lot of authentic discussions about disability, whether his disability or one that involves a wheelchair or any kind of disability.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [19:51](#) Yeah. I just saw, and I don't know if she got it from your list. She might have, and I can't even remember if it was Kara or Kortney, one of our Read-Aloud team members recommended The Snow Rabbit to me. I think it was Kortney. Have you seen that book?

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- Courtney W.: [20:03](#) I don't think so.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [20:04](#) Okay. So maybe she didn't get it from your list. But it's a wordless book and it's a story about a snow rabbit and these two little girls who are watching the rabbit out the window, and I don't even want to know if I want to give it away. I'm not going to give away the ending, but you don't even realize that one of the girls is differently abled and she's in a wheelchair until halfway through the book and then all of a sudden everything takes on this different, like, "Oh, this is so much more beautiful even than I thought it was on the first pages," because you realize the kindness that her sister is showing her with her actions.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [20:38](#) Again, I don't want to give away too much of this story. But I love it when a book, and this is what a lot of the books you're talking about make me think, but they're not just opening my eyes to how someone else's experience is different than mine, but it actually takes me a step deeper and makes us think what it feels like, what it could feel like, to be in those shoes. And that's a whole other... I almost don't know, as I'm sitting here thinking, I'm just wondering if there's even any other way that's better than a story to really help us walk in the shoes of somebody else. That's kind of how it's done, isn't it?
- Courtney W.: [21:09](#) Yeah. I don't think there probably is, without experiencing something firsthand. I think probably a story is the next best way to feel that.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [21:37](#) Now, are there middle grade novels or longer chapter book, novel-length stories that do the same thing? Because a lot of the books we've talked about are picture books. I think they might've all been picture books so far, right?
- Courtney W.: [21:47](#) Yeah, yeah. I'm sure everyone's mind probably go straight to Wonder, by R.J. Palacio, and with good reason. But there's definitely other novels that I think should rank right up there. I also want to point out that R.J. Palacio has a picture book called We're All Wonders that is simple but it's really beautiful. I don't know if you've read it, but I love the sentence in the book that says, "I know I can't change the way I look, but maybe, just maybe people can change the way they see and if they do, they'll see that I'm a wonder and they'll see that they're wonders, too." And I

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just love that. But as far as other middle-grade novels, *Fish in a Tree*, by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, is really good. The narrator in that book has learning disabilities that she keeps a secret. And I think it's interesting to approach the differences topic from learning cognitive way. So I really liked that one.

- Courtney W.: [22:47](#) And there's another one called *Soar*, by Joan Bauer. The little boy in this book has a heart condition that prevents him from being able to play baseball, which he loves. But then he, and everyone else in the town that he's just moved to, discovers that he's able to offer so much more to the game than just the ability to run bases. I love his positive attitude throughout the book and I am planning to read this one to both of my kids soon because it's just really positive. There's another one I just read recently called *Wish*, by Barbara O'Connor, and there's a lot-
- Sarah Mackenzie: [23:28](#) Actually, I've read *Wonder*, but I haven't read a single one of the other ones that you've mentioned.
- Courtney W.: [23:31](#) Oh, good. Well, add them to your list.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [23:33](#) Yeah, I will do.
- Courtney W.: [23:33](#) They're really good. The narrator in *Wish*, there's a lot of differences going on in *Wish*, so I really appreciate that. But a storyline that really stood out to me was the little boy that the narrator befriends, she describes him as having an up-down walk. It never really gives the backstory on why he has this limp but I think that maybe that was on purpose because I think that it really illustrates her realization that their true friendship matters much more than his difference. It doesn't matter why, it just matters that she accepts him as her friend despite not knowing or knowing about why he walks like that.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [24:16](#) Yeah. Of course we're always talking about how picture books are just as wonderful for older kids as they are for younger kids. Sometimes it takes a little finagling to convince our older kids that that's true, but one of the kinds of picture books that I think is easier to share with older kids, picture book biographies can be a really good way in there because they feel different than a normal picture book. And there's a couple of picture book biographies that I was thinking about this morning as I

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was getting ready for our conversation. I was thinking about Six Dots, by Jen Bryant.

Courtney W.: [24:44](#)

Yes, I love that one.

Sarah Mackenzie: [24:46](#)

I do, too. So this one, listeners, tells the story of Louis Braille and how he became blind. And then what he did after he became blind that actually ended up being this tremendous gift to the world. My seven-year-old, Clara, that was her favorite book for a month. We were all about Louis Braille for a while. And it does that thing that you and I were just talking about about how it helps them think about what does it feel like to be Louis Braille? Not just "Tell me the story of Louis Braille," but what would it feel like to be able to see and then not able to see? Which that book does that really beautifully.

Sarah Mackenzie: [25:20](#)

And then another one that came to mind, I just read yesterday, actually, which was The Girl Who Thought in Pictures. So this tells the story of Dr. Temple Grandin who is autistic, right? I think I'm getting that right.

Courtney W.: [25:32](#)

Yes.

Sarah Mackenzie: [25:33](#)

Okay. And has ended up contributing a lot to the world of science as an adult scientist. But as you're talking about how the difference isn't the biggest, it's not the most important thing about the person, right? That's what this book, when I was reading this book and thinking about Temple Grandin's story, I was thinking, she is so blessed, of course, to have adults in her life, including her mother who saw that, of course, that the difference wasn't the thing that defined who her.

Courtney W.: [26:03](#)

And we always say that about our daughter, too, is that this condition will impact her and possibly change her, but it won't define her because she's so much more than just her skin.

Sarah Mackenzie: [26:15](#)

So we've talked about some books with differently abled characters and some middle-grade novels and why books and stories can help our kids grow in empathy. But there's also something where we want our kids to, everybody's quirky in their own way, too, right?

Courtney W.: [26:33](#)

Yes.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [26:33](#) So do you have any book recommendations that will help our kids celebrate themselves just as they are, as God made them? Just the differences and quirks and all of the different things that make us unique, each differently?
- Courtney W.: [26:46](#) I love books about celebrating yourself because I feel like children are most able to accept and appreciate others when they love and appreciate themselves. Children who feel badly about themselves are not usually able to celebrate their peers with kindness and respect. So a strong sense of self and recognition that God uniquely created them, it provides that foundation for the self assurance that they need to have to love others well. So I love these books and I do have a bunch of recommendations for these.
- Courtney W.: [27:20](#) Brenna's favorite, I'll start with that. Her personal favorite is called Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match, by Monica Brown. Oh, it's so cute. The little girl, Marisol, she loves to be mismatched. She'll wear contrasting patterns on her clothes or contrast her art, or even celebrate her mismatched, as she calls it, physical appearance because her father is Scottish and gave her red hair. And then she also inherited dark skin from her mother's Peruvian side.
- Courtney W.: [27:49](#) So one day in the book, one day her friend challenges her to try matching and she ends up miserable and it takes a teacher pointing out how marvelous her mismatching makes her. So when her family, at the very end of her book, I'm giving it away, but when her family goes to pick out a puppy, she stays true to herself and she finds a dog with one brown eye and one blue eye and names him Kitty. My kids just love this book because it was silly and she was quirky, but it really had such a deep message about staying true to yourself. Connor's favorite, our son's favorite picture book in this topic has been Not Your Typical Dragon, by Dan Bar-el.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [28:34](#) Yes, I've seen that.
- Courtney W.: [28:35](#) Yeah, it's so cute. Again, it's silly and the characters are lovable. In the book, the little dragon discovers he can't breathe fire like all the other dragons, but he can breathe really silly things like bubbles. At first he's a little ashamed and his parents are a little ashamed. Like, "Why can't he

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breathe fire?" But in the end they all realize how special he is for his uniqueness. I just love that book, too. Some other ones that are maybe a little more popular are Chrysanthemum, by Kevin Henkes. Have you read that one?

Sarah Mackenzie: [29:08](#)

Yes.

Courtney W.: [29:08](#)

Yeah. And Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon, by Patty Lovell. I love both of those. A few other ones are Whoever You Are, by Mem Fox.

Sarah Mackenzie: [29:18](#)

Oh, yes. Oh, goodness. We love Mem Fox around here.

Courtney W.: [29:21](#)

I know. She's so wonderful. I really love that book because it talks about how even though everyone is so different from each other, that we're all so similar, too, because we all experience laughter and love and joy. That, of course, goes along with what we've been talking about this whole time. The message we want to drive home to our kids. And then, lastly, I love the book, Zero, by Kathryn Otoshi. I love Kathryn Otoshi's books.

Sarah Mackenzie: [29:49](#)

I don't know if I even know who she is. Okay. I'm going to have to get that.

Courtney W.: [29:55](#)

Her book, One, is just magical when it comes to anti-bullying behavior. It's just wonderful. But Zero is the book that I recommend within this topic and it's about Zero. When she looks at herself she just sees a hole but she wants to count the other numbers that she sees around her. So she tries to force herself into the shape of those numbers. And then one day she realizes that she's not empty inside, she's open. And so when she adds herself onto the other numbers, she discovers that she brings value to everyone.

Sarah Mackenzie: [30:28](#)

Oh, wow. Okay. I cannot believe this. We're already almost out of time, but I'm totally curious to know if you have your own favorites. Are there any absolute favorites that you've run across for you that you think, "Oh yeah, if I'm going to read one, I want to read this one"?

Courtney W.: [30:40](#)

Yeah. As a mom, one of my personal favorites is called Melissa Parkington's Beautiful, Beautiful Hair, by Pat Brisson.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [30:48](#) I have not seen that.
- Courtney W.: [30:49](#) I know. And I've not ever heard it talked about which surprises me because it's a really great book. But the reason I love it is that it highlights that universal message that can come across as sounding cliché, but when it's told through this story, I think it really brings it to life, that what's on the inside is so much more important than what's on the outside. So it shares the story of this little girl, Melissa, who has this long, gorgeous hair, but that's all everyone seems to notice and see about her.
- Courtney W.: [31:19](#) And even her father calls her Melissa Parkington With the Beautiful, Beautiful Hair. And she's frustrated about this because she knows she's more than that. And so she sets out to spread kindness. Throughout the book you can see her doing these little acts of kindness, trying to show the world who she really is, and at the end she cuts off all her hair to donate. And when she comes home, her father begins to call her the nickname that he has and then he changes it to Melissa Parkington With the Beautiful, Beautiful Heart.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:48](#) Okay. So all of the books that we talked about today on the show are in the show notes at [readaloudrevival.com/139](http://readaloudrevival.com/139), because this is episode 139. We'll also have links to Courtney's book, *A Different Beautiful: Discovering and Celebrating Beauty in Places You Never Expected*. And also to Courtney's resource, *Celebrating Our Stories: Teaching children about differences and kindness through books*.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [32:13](#) So this is an ebook that has a lot of book recommendations and if this is a topic that is close to your heart and you think, "Yes, I want to help my kids grow in empathy as we're reading aloud," this is a fantastic place to go for more recommendations on reading about differently abled kids, about kids with differences and just books that help us remember that God made this beautiful assortment of people all over the world and we can celebrate the similarities, the differences and the way God loves them all. So, Courtney, this has been fantastic. I'm so glad we finally had you on. We've been talking about having you on for a hundred years.

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Courtney W.:	<a href="#">32:48</a>	I know. I was so excited. Thank you so much for having me.
Sarah Mackenzie:	<a href="#">32:57</a>	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.
Lydia:	<a href="#">33:10</a>	Hi, my name is Lydia. I live in Pasadena, California and I am six years old. My favorite book is the Magician's Nephew because [inaudible 00:33:28] think uncle Andrew is a tree.
Abby:	<a href="#">33:33</a>	My name is Abby. I am eight years old. I live in Oklahoma. My favorite book is Anne of Green Gables and my favorite part is when Anne gets stuck in a river pretending to be her favorite character from a book.
Speaker 7:	<a href="#">33:48</a>	What's your name?
Olive:	<a href="#">33:49</a>	Olive.
Speaker 7:	<a href="#">33:50</a>	How old are you, Olive?
Olive:	<a href="#">33:51</a>	Four.
Speaker 7:	<a href="#">33:52</a>	And what book do you like?
Olive:	<a href="#">33:54</a>	The Three Little Pigs.
Speaker 7:	<a href="#">33:56</a>	What do you like about The Three Little Pigs?
Olive:	<a href="#">33:58</a>	When the wolf says, "I'll huff and puff and I'll blow your house down."
Speaker 8:	<a href="#">34:05</a>	What is your name?
Grace Downey:	<a href="#">34:06</a>	Grace Downey.
Speaker 8:	<a href="#">34:08</a>	Grace, how old are you?
Grace Downey:	<a href="#">34:09</a>	21.
Speaker 8:	<a href="#">34:11</a>	And what is your special ability?
Grace Downey:	<a href="#">34:12</a>	I have Down syndrome.

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- Speaker 8: [34:15](#) And what is your favorite book right now that you love to read aloud?
- Grace Downey: [34:18](#) The Little Island, by Margaret Wise Brown.
- Speaker 8: [34:22](#) And why do you love The Little Island so much?
- Grace Downey: [34:24](#) I love the beautiful language.
- Speaker 8: [34:28](#) The beautiful language. And what about the pictures?
- Grace Downey: [34:30](#) And the beautiful pictures, too.
- Speaker 8: [34:32](#) Yeah. And you like to paint the pictures, right?
- Grace Downey: [34:34](#) Yes.
- Speaker 8: [34:34](#) Yes.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [34:35](#) Hi, Grace. Oh, it's so good to hear from you. Okay. So if you like The Little Island, by Margaret Wise Brown because of its beautiful language and its beautiful pictures, see if you can get your hands on this book. Maybe you already know about it. It's called Island Boy and it's by Barbara Cooney, who's one of my very favorite authors and illustrators of really beautiful language and beautiful illustrations in picture books. Island Boy by Barbara Cooney. And if you get your hands on it, call me back and tell me what you think because I want to know. Thanks for calling in.
- Jay-Jay: [35:13](#) Hi. My name is Jay-Jay. I'm six years old and I'm from China. My favorite book is Bambi. I like it because Bambi grows up to be the great prince of the forest.
- Catherine: [35:30](#) My name's Catherine.
- Speaker 9: [35:30](#) Do you have a favorite story in here?
- Catherine: [35:31](#) Goliath.
- Speaker 9: [35:33](#) Yeah. What book is this?
- Catherine: [35:34](#) In the Bible.
- Speaker 9: [35:36](#) Why is that your favorite?

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Catherine:	<a href="#">35:38</a>	Because I like David.
Speaker 9:	<a href="#">35:41</a>	David, yeah. What does he do?
Catherine:	<a href="#">35:43</a>	He shoots Goliath with the rock and he fell to the ground dead.
Speaker 9:	<a href="#">35:56</a>	That's right.
Juliette:	<a href="#">35:57</a>	Name is Juliette and I'm in Virginia and I'm four and my favorite book is Piggy [inaudible 00:36:03] because Piggy says the name [inaudible 00:36:06].
Speaker 9:	<a href="#">36:06</a>	That's funny.
Lana Blanchard:	<a href="#">36:09</a>	My name is Lana Blanchard and I am 10 years old. I live in Bridgewater, New Jersey and my favorite book is Fablehaven: Keys to the Demon Prison by Brandon Mull. My favorite part is the final battle between the demon king and the fairy queen.
Emma Blanchard:	<a href="#">36:28</a>	My name is Emma Blanchard and I am 10 years old. I live in Bridgewater, New Jersey. My favorite book is Pollyanna by Eleanor H. Porter. My favorite part is at the beginning when Aunt Polly is introduced to the story.
Speaker 10:	<a href="#">36:44</a>	How old are you, Spence?
Spence:	<a href="#">36:45</a>	Three.
Speaker 10:	<a href="#">36:46</a>	What is your favorite book?
Spence:	<a href="#">36:47</a>	Mr. Putter & Tabby.
Speaker 10:	<a href="#">36:50</a>	Why do you like it? Is it funny?
Spence:	<a href="#">36:52</a>	Yeah. Okay, bye.
Sarah Mackenzie:	<a href="#">36:58</a>	Thank you so much, kids. I love, love, love hearing your favorite books. If your kids want to tell us what they are loving reading or reading aloud, head to readaloudrevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page and look for the button that says, Let the Kids Speak, because that's where you want to leave your message.
Sarah Mackenzie:	<a href="#">37:17</a>	The show notes for today, including all of the books that Courtney and I talked about in our conversation as well as

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a list of Read-Aloud Revival favorites featuring differently abled characters can be found at [readaloudrevival.com/139](http://readaloudrevival.com/139). I'll be back in two weeks with another episode of the podcast, but in the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.