

EPISODE 144: **TAKE THE 31-DAY CHALLENGE**

- Sarah Mackenzie: [00:12](#) 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: [00:29](#) Hello, Sarah Mackenzie here. This is episode 144 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. It's the last and final episode of 2019, we've already got a headstart on our 2020 podcast lineup. You're in for a good year. It's going to be good. In fact, the very next episode here on the show is a special edition. It's unlike anything we've done before. I'm really excited about it, but I'm not going to give you any more hints. You just have to come listen to it. Keep your ears out for that one. It's going to pop into your podcast feed right after the new year as a bonus episode. So now you want to be sure you're subscribed to the podcast in your podcast app so you don't miss that one or any others. To do that, you just go into your phone's podcast app, search for the Read-Aloud Revival, and then click subscribe. And while you're there, I'd love it if you gave the podcast a rating or review that really helps new listeners find the show and get inspired to read aloud with their kids.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [01:30](#) It's what makes it a revival after all, right? The podcast has actually been downloaded over 6 million times in 167 countries around the world. It's nuts, right? It's all thanks to you telling your friends about the show, letting others know about it, and I am just so grateful to be a part of your family's reading life and I'm grateful that you are a part of ours here at the Read-Aloud Revival, so keep up the sharing. We appreciate every time you mentioned the podcast or our book list to the people in your life. If you have a second and can leave us a rating or review in iTunes or your podcast app, that goes a really long way to helping other families find the show. All right. I want to start today's show by answering a question from one of our listeners. This one comes from Karen.
- Karen: [02:18](#) Sarah I have a question for you. I have a child who really likes to listen to audio books and color at the same time and as a homeschooling mom, I'm wondering if I can put other things in front of her while she's listening to stories that would be a little bit more educational, such as letter work, copy work, and maybe even math. I'm not sure about that one, but just wondered what your thoughts were, how much to put in front of them other than something that's a little bit more carefree, such as coloring. Thanks.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [02:52](#) This is a great question, Karen. Thank you for it. Yeah, a lot of children, many children will actually listen better when they're doing something with their hands, rather than if they're required to sit still while you're reading aloud or while they're listening to an audio book. My kids are almost always doing something when they're listening. At least that's true when we're reading a novel or a chapter book or when they're listening to audio books. Of course, if you're reading aloud a picture book and your kids aren't going to be doing things with their hands as often because they're going to be engaged with the pictures. But once we get into those longer narratives, audio books, then it starts to be really smart to help them have something to do with their hands. First of all, I want to mention that we do have a whole list of ideas for things your kids can do with their hands from, how to draw books, to pattern blocks, watercolors, clay, puzzles, geoboards hand lettering.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [03:44](#) There's a whole list there in the show notes as well, so you can get some ideas for what would be good options for putting in your kids' hands when they're listening to read alouds. You mentioned what kinds of schoolwork to do during Read-Aloud time and I probably wouldn't have my child doing something that required a lot of intentional thinking while listening to the read aloud. A big reason that it works for kids to do something with their hands while you read aloud is because it stills their body and then lets their mind really focus on what they're hearing. So what you're actually doing is you're just giving their physical body something to do so that their mind can really pay attention to the story being read aloud. And if you were to give your kids something that requires their mindful concentration, something like copy work or math for example, I think what you're going to find is they probably won't listen to the story as well.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [04:37](#) And that's even true. If your child plays with Legos and they get really caught up in their own imaginary world, you may find they're not actually listening to the story as well. So you kind of have to just be in tune with your own kids to figure out how much can they actually do listening, with their hands while they're listening and still pay attention. In general, if you think of the things you're putting in your kids' hands to do, to keep their hands busy so they're not required to just sit still and listen. Those things, you want the goal of that item, whatever it is, whether it's clay or a

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coloring book or whatever, to just still their body, to help them concentrate because that's really what we're doing when we give our kids something to do while we read aloud. Now you could of course get puzzles, how to draw books, coloring books that correlate with whatever you're learning in school, that maybe we'll just sort of boost whatever you're learning about in history or whatever.

Sarah Mackenzie: [05:31](#)

But I think I would steer clear of having your daughter do actual schoolwork, like copy work and math and that kind of thing while she listens. I hope that helps. Thank you so much for your question, Karen. I appreciate it. What would it mean to you if your kids could make 2020 their best reading year? What if this is the year your kids read more often and they read more often for fun than ever before? Here's what I know. Getting back into the swing of things after the holidays can be kind of difficult, right? That's why several years ago we started our 31-Day Read-Aloud Challenge and we put it in January because we knew it would be a fun and simple way to dive into a new year. We didn't know it would be so popular and it would be so effective, but it has become the most popular event of the whole year at Read-Aloud Revival and it's super effective. We're going to talk about it in a second.

Sarah Mackenzie: [06:43](#)

We're doing it again in 2020 our 31-Day Read-Aloud Challenge is right around the corner. We get started with it on January 1st now is the time to register and you can register for free. Now this episode is going to be all about the challenge, how it works, how simple it is, how effective it is and why. But if you already know you want to get in on it, then go do that right now. You can sign up for free by texting the word *challenge* to the number 33777 or you can simply go to rar31days.com and you register that way. Now the idea is very simple, during the challenge, your kids read aloud for at least 10 minutes on as many days as possible through the month in January.

Sarah Mackenzie: [07:33](#)

Now notice that this is a challenge for your kids, not so much for you and this is really fantastic because a couple of reasons, your kids will get a lot of practice reading out loud, a very important skill in fact, and I'll talk more about that in a second, and they'll also be read to a lot by the other siblings and people in their family who are doing the challenge. So it's wins all around. Last year we had over 16,000 families, over 50,000 kids all over the world participating. I don't

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know, can you get that vision in your head? It makes me so happy to think of 50,000 kids all over the world reading aloud to someone in their life for 10 minutes a day, all month long. That is so much reading aloud. Reading aloud, as we often say here at Read-Aloud Revival is an act of love, right? So when our kids spend 10 minutes a day reading to someone else, they're doing an act of service and it's just gravy that so much good comes of it.

Sarah Mackenzie: [08:30](#)

Let me tell you a few things our participants have told us in years past. More Blessings One, on Instagram, she said, "This challenge saves my sanity, it's the second year we've done it and it helps the kids stay busy and bonded." Kendra Russo said, "My kids are loving the challenge, I have two struggling or emerging readers and a pre reader and after just three days of doing the challenge, I'm already so amazed at their increasing confidence." Be Dear Death also said, "What I want to say about the challenge, all my kids are doing it and it's not only benefiting their reading skills but it's really increasing unity in our home, before this challenge, my kids would never read aloud to each other or me, now they're doing it and they're loving it, we're loving discovering new books together as a family, thank you."

Sarah Mackenzie: [09:17](#)

So here is how this works. The goal of the challenge, like I said, is for your kids to read aloud for at least 10 minutes on as many days as possible throughout the month of January. They actually win the challenge by reading aloud for at least 25 days. We call it a 31 day challenge because there's 31 options. There's 31 opportunities in January, but they win the challenge by reading aloud for at least 25 of those days. Doing the challenge, I think it helps your kids start a brand new year by connecting with ideas and books and best of all right, one another really bonding. And what we find is a lot of kids find themselves enjoying books more than ever, reading more than ever, and really just sharing a lot of meaningful reading experiences with the people they love in their life.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:05](#)

So here's how this works. When you sign up and you do that by texting the word *challenge* to 33777 or going to rar31days.com you're going to get sent a packet, a 31 day packet. And in that packet you'll find a tracker. You're going to want to print that tracker for each of your kids. You can just print it off, it's just a normal computer printout, right? You'll fill in the proposed reward for winning. And I'll talk more about that reward in just a second. You're going to

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hang that tracker up somewhere your kids are going to see it often. Kitchen is a great place because everybody's always in the kitchen, right? On the kitchen cupboards or on a wall that is frequently walked by, on their refrigerator. Just hang it up somewhere your kids will see it often. And your kids will mark off a day, a circle on the tracker for every day that they read aloud to somebody for at least 10 minutes.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:58](#)

Now the first question we always get is how come there are only 25 spots on the tracker for a 31 day challenge and that's because your kids win once they've read 25 days in January. That's because life happens and sometimes we miss a day or two. We really want our kids to focus on their progress even if they encounter hiccups along the way. One of my favorite people often says, progress not perfection. That's Laura Casey. If any of you follow Laura Casey, I am a Laura Casey fan and she says, we want to celebrate progress, not perfection. And we want to do that in this challenge too because yes, there are 31 days in January and your kids are going to forget to do it some days, but that shouldn't derail them. We don't want them to miss a day and then think, oh, it doesn't matter, because every 10 minutes that they spend reading aloud in the month of January is a win. And so once they've hit those 25 days, they have won.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:56](#)

They can read aloud to anybody. They can read to a parent, a sibling, a grandparent, a neighbor, a friend, a pet goldfish, a stuffed zebra. Anything at all. Stuffed animals, pets, Lego guys. I mean it does not matter if they can read aloud to anyone, whether that's a human being or an inanimate object, they can read as long as they're reading out loud, it counts. Now which books count? That's another question we get a lot. They all count. So whether your kids are reading picture books, chapter books, novels, the Sunday comics, a graphic novel, it doesn't matter. It all counts for the challenge. In fact, your kids will probably be more successful if they're reading things that are fairly easy for them because reading aloud is a different kind of skill than reading just with your eyes. It's harder to read out loud than it is just to read with your eyes.

Sarah Mackenzie: [12:48](#)

So even if your kids are capable of reading at a certain level, go ahead and encourage them to read something that's very easy for them. So all books count and they can read to anybody. Now, even if your child's not reading fluently yet,

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they can participate. Pre-reading is a really important part of every reader's journey. Kids who aren't reading on their own, they can participate by flipping through picture books and telling the story in their own words. That totally counts as reading aloud. Now here are a few tips for your pre readers. I would encourage your pre reader to choose books that he or she has heard read aloud many times before. You might be surprised actually at how well they know these stories. Sometimes they'll know exact phrasing or they can recite in a page word for word. It's a sort of astonishing, but even if they can't, it doesn't matter.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:37](#)

For example, one year I remember one of my twins read *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Paul Galdone his version, almost every single day and it was a really pleasurable experience for him because he knew the story well enough that it didn't feel intimidating like he had to create this amazing story. I had read it to him so many times, he was very familiar with it and then he read it pretty much every day during the challenge, that counts, that's an important part of prereading. Another really good option for pre readers is to give them wordless books because they can't get them wrong, right? Sometimes if your child's read to a lot, they might not like to tell a book in their own words because they think this doesn't sound as good as it does when you read it aloud to me, so an easy fix for that is to have your kids read wordless books because there are no words to get wrong.

Sarah Mackenzie: [14:26](#)

There are some absolutely exquisite wordless books and we have assembled a list of our favorites. You can find it at readaloudrevival.com/wordless and I would encourage kids of all ages to try reading aloud some wordless books during the challenge. You just flip through those pages and you talk about what you see, doesn't have to be like narrative or beautiful. Just point out the things that you see in the picture and talk about what you see as you're reading a wordless book. You might be surprised at how rich of an experience that is. If you're not a wordless book fan yet, I really encourage you to try it and see what you think. One thing I would just keep reminding you, especially for your kids who are pre readers or fledgling readers, is that you cannot help your child too much, so feel free to talk to them, coach them, give them hints. Just say the whole page and let them say it back to you.

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- Sarah Mackenzie: [15:22](#) This is first and foremost about connection, so even if you're just sitting there looking at a book and your child looks at you and says, "I don't know what to say." Then you can just look down to the page and say, "I see a little girl with a red cape, what do you see?" And they'll say, "I see a horse." That's it. Great. Turn the page, do it again. I think you'll be surprised at how much their participation and enthusiasm and ability grows and their confidence grows the more you do this. A lot of times at the beginning they're afraid they're going to do it wrong or they think you're looking for something really impressive. So pull that bar down so that they know you're not looking to be impressed. You just want to connect with them.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [16:01](#) Okay, so your kids have been reading aloud 10 minutes a day and they're tracking it on their tracker. And I mentioned earlier that you're going to write a reward on that tracker. There is a spot on the tracker for you to jot down a reward for winning the challenge. What do they get when they have read at least 25 days during January? Now reading is its own real board of course, but sharing a wonderful family experience is another way to celebrate the connections we're making all month long. So we love to offer rewards for our winners. Our challenge winners, our best recommendation is for you to choose a reward that's a gift of your time. Rather than a material gift. Making your reward a gift of your time is a much more compelling reward. Our time and attention is what our kids really want most of all, giving a reward, that's a gift of our time and attention rather than a material gift is always going to be the better way to go.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [16:58](#) In your packet you'll see a whole list of options. Things like camping out in the living room as a family, going swimming at a local indoor pool, going bowling. Going to one of those local pottery painting shops and painting some pottery together or having a book party with friends where everyone dresses up as their favorite book character and bring snacks, something like that. You want to think of a reward that's a gift of your time and attention. Again, you'll find a list of ideas in your packet when you register. Now when you look at your tracker, you're going to notice that there are a few days marked with green circles and every five days we've got a special little circle on your tracker and that's because it's helpful to keep motivated. 25 days can feel like a long time, especially the younger our kids are 25 days can

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feel like a really long time. So we have coupons in your packet that you can print off to use and dole out to your kids for every five days that they read aloud throughout the month.

Sarah Mackenzie: [17:59](#)

So once they get to all of those milestones on their tracker, the day five, day 10, day 15 and day 20 you give them one of the coupons. We have a whole sheet of coupons. These are like mini rewards. There are things like getting to stay up late for bedtime or having donuts or getting to skip a chore or something like that. We also have a whole page of blank coupons that you can come up with your own ideas. So if you have some great ideas for things that your kids would really enjoy. So what's the point? Why are we doing this? Why should our kids read aloud? We know that kids benefit tremendously from hearing books read aloud. But when kids do the reading aloud themselves, they make pretty big leaps in both their decoding skills and their comprehension. And this is true for kids of all ages, not just kids who are learning to read.

Sarah Mackenzie: [19:02](#)

Reading aloud forces the reader to speak every word in order. This is something we don't do when we're reading with our eyes, especially once we've become fast or fluent readers, we are often skipping those little connector words, all kinds of words when we're reading just with our eyes. Reading aloud forces us to speak every word in order, which solidifies those language patterns in our children's minds. So you get the whole language pattern in its correct grammatical form, coming out through your child's mouth and back in through their ear. That is a very powerful practice. It also helps them develop skills and elocution, intonation, pronunciation. These are all very helpful skills for them to have throughout their whole lives, right? Every time that they're speaking and trying to be compelling, these are good things to develop in our kids. And there's, for a lot of our kids, there's not a really good place where they're getting that practice of reading out loud, grammatically correct, sophisticated language patterns, in a beautiful way with the correct intonation, pronunciation, diction, right?

Sarah Mackenzie: [20:06](#)

And so this is a really wonderful, simple and fun way to get that practice in. I think what's even better than that though, is that our challenge participants, when they write us, they tell us their kids are forming incredible bonds with each other. Mom will be making dinner and then go peek in the

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room wondering where the kids went and they're getting all their read loud time in because they want to mark off their tracker. So everyone's huddled around a big sister or brother on the couch while they're being read to. Or you get up in the morning on Saturday and wonder what everybody's up to and you go find that your little kids are hiding halfway under the bed in their room, getting their read aloud time in before the day begins. It is a connector, it bonds our kids together. I would challenge you even if you think, I don't know if we could do this all month, try it for five days. Really.

Sarah Mackenzie: [20:52](#)

So many of our participants have written in to us and said, two days into this challenge, three days into this challenge, five days into this challenge. I'm seeing amazing results in my home. So it's a really powerful and simple fun challenge to do. I think there's a reason this is the most popular event, Read-Aloud Revival, all year long and that's because it's simple, like I said, it's fun and it gets results. Evolving Mojo on Instagram, she wrote, "Thank you so much for your challenge, my seven year old who loved reading and then when it became her homework, stopped reading and started fighting us is now reading all the time after just eight days of this challenge, I am so happy." Anna Lettvin said, "This is even more fun than I thought it was going to be, the first words out of one of my just starting to learn readers mouth this morning was mama, can I read to you, can we read?" This homeschooling mama could really use some fun and enthusiasm during these bitterly cold indoor months.

Sarah Mackenzie: [21:50](#)

And Texas Nina wrote, "We are having so much fun with this, both of mine are pre readers and I love listening to them read the stories to each other or describe what's happening, thank you." Now this year for the 2020 31-Day Read-Aloud Challenge, we're having a little extra fun. Our team here at Read-Aloud Revival is going to be keeping an eye on a couple of hashtags and doling out some extra fun random rewards. So we're going to be on Instagram and Facebook and watching the hashtags Read-Aloud Revival and RAR 31 days. So every time you post about the challenge on Facebook or Instagram and you use those hashtags, maybe you post a picture of your trackers hung up on the fridge or you take pictures of your kids reading aloud to each other, you're going to be automatically entered in for a chance to win one of our giveaways. We're going to do all month long, our team is going to be picking those posts, using those

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hashtags and awarding some random participants with \$15 bookstore gift cards.

- Sarah Mackenzie: [22:50](#) So share, share, share, because every time you share on Facebook and Instagram, you're entered for another chance to win one of those gift cards. We're going to be doing them randomly, just cruising around on Facebook and Instagram, picking winners, and we will be sending you notes, letting you know that you've won and how to grab it. So if you're not an Instagram and Facebook, don't worry, that's not a requirement to be a part of the challenge. It's just a little extra, something fun we're adding this year. So are you in? We hope you'll join us. You can register and get your free packet by texting the word *challenge* to the 33777 or by going to rar31days.com. Hey, the challenge is a lot more fun with friends. Your kids can encourage each other, you can even do little celebrations together or those coupons that you give your kids on the five, 10, 15 and 20 day marks. You can do those with friends.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [23:42](#) You could do your reward at the end by getting friends together, have a swimming party or going bowling or something fun. So invite your friends to join us. It's free. There's no reason not to. They can sign up for themselves by texting. Challenge to 33777 or by going to rar31days.com. Now it's time for let the kids speak. I love this part of the podcast because kids share the books that they've been loving lately.
- Sionet: [24:24](#) My name is Sionet. I live in Ireland. I'm five years old. My favorite book is Swallows and Amazons, by Arthor Ransome and my favorite part is the union.
- Adria: [24:38](#) Hi, my name is Adria and I live in Alaska and I'm 12 years old. One of the books I'm enjoying right now is called Inkspell by Cornelia Funke. I really like it because the characters in this story are really different from fire eaters to silver tones.
- Irina: [24:55](#) I am Irina and I'm five years old. I'm from Kyle, Texas. My favorite book is Ernestine's Milky Way because of the pictures and the berries and all of it and the mountains were paint is great. It was amazing. I loved it and I like the book.
- Mom: [25:26](#) And what line do you like to read from the book?
- Irina: [25:29](#) I like to read, I am five years old and I am a big girl.

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Mom: [25:38](#) And why do you like to read that line?

Irina: [25:41](#) Because it has five-year-old in it.

Mom: [25:44](#) And you're five years old.

Irina: [25:45](#) Yes.

Mom: [25:45](#) Are you a big girl?

Irina: [25:46](#) Yes.

Hazel: [25:47](#) Hi, my name is Hazel, I'm from Oregon. One of my favorite books that have been read out loud to me is The Secret Garden because it's full of adventure.

Barbara: [25:56](#) Hi, my name is Barbara and I'm eight years old and I live in Oregon. And my favorite book that has been read out to me is Beezus and Ramona by Beverly Cleary. Why? Because Ramona is very silly.

Speaker 9: [26:13](#) Hi, my name is [inaudible 00:26:14] and I'm five years old and I live in Oregon and my favorite book is Trim Pets, Lizards by [inaudible 00:26:22].

Mom: [26:22](#) And why do you like it?

Speaker 9: [26:26](#) Because they are really cool and they have really cool sticky fingers and they blend in to stuff.

Hudson: [26:36](#) Hi, my name is Hudson Trent and I am six years old. I live in Washington, DC and my favorite book is the Action Bible because it has Samson in it.

Mom: [26:47](#) What's your name?

Jonathan: [26:49](#) Jonathan Trent. And I'm four years old.

Mom: [26:56](#) Where do you live?

Jonathan: [26:56](#) In Washington DC.

Mom: [26:56](#) And what is your favorite book?

Jonathan: [27:00](#) Trauma in the Swamp [inaudible 00:27:02].

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- Gianna Hassan: [27:05](#) My name's Gianna Hassan and I'm five years old and I live in Springfield, Tennessee. And my favorite book, the Seven to Leaders because it rhymes.
- Ian: [27:19](#) My name is Ian and I'm seven years old. I live in Springfield, Tennessee and my favorite book has been read to me is Mr. Popper's Penguins because it's funny.
- Vincent: [27:35](#) My name is Vincent and I'm three years old and I live in Springfield and I'm three year old. My favorite book is the Rafter because its not scary anymore.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [27:58](#) Thank you kids. I always love to hear the books that you're reading. Hey, don't forget to grab your 31-Day Read-Aloud Challenge packet, you don't want to miss out on this year's challenge. You can do that at rar31days.com or even easier. You can just text the word challenge to the number 33777 I cannot wait to find out what happens in your home when your kids are reading aloud together this January. So much fun. Thanks so much for joining me. I'll be back. Actually, I've got a little secret for you. I'm not even going to make you wait two weeks. I have a special edition podcast coming for you next week, so keep your ear to the ground. Check your email inboxes because you're going to want to make sure you don't miss it. I've been working on this one for a while and I'm really excited to share it with you. We haven't done anything quite like it before, so that's next week. In the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.