

EPISODE 161: **Becoming Your Child's Mentor  
and Awaking Wonder, Sally Clarkson**

- Sarah: [00:00](#) You are two minutes away from a fantastic personal book recommendation. Go to [readaloudrevival.com/quiz](http://readaloudrevival.com/quiz), to get a free personal recommendation from me. You'll answer three super quick questions, and I recommend a couple of books I think will be excellent for your kids' ages and interests. That's [readaloudrevival.com/quiz](http://readaloudrevival.com/quiz), or just text the word QUIZ to the number 33777. It's free, it's fast, and it's kind of addicting. See you there.
- You're listening to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Mackenzie, homeschooling mom of six, and author of *The Read-Aloud Family*, and *Teaching from Rest*. As parents, we're overwhelmed with a lot to do. It feels like every child needs something different. The good news is, you are the best person to help your kids learn and grow, and home is the best place to fall in love with books. This podcast has been downloaded seven million times in over 160 countries. So if you want to nurture warm relationships while also raising kids who love to read, you're in good company. We'll help your kids fall in love with books, and we'll help you fall in love with homeschooling. Let's get started.
- Welcome back to the Read-Aloud Revival. Sarah Mackenzie here, delighted to be with you today. Today, I have a friend of mine on the show, a friend and a mentor, someone who I know so many of you love and look up to. In Read-Aloud Revival Premium, we are constantly talking about how much we love the work and inspiration of Sally Clarkson, and she's here to join me on the show today to talk about homeschooling, and so, I am really excited to chat with her. Sally, welcome back to Read-Aloud Revival.
- Sally: [02:00](#) I love being here. We've had so much fun.
- Sarah: [02:03](#) So basically listeners, what happened is Sally and I were chatting for her podcast, *At Home With Sally*, and we wanted to keep going, so we are going to keep going here on the show, but if you want to hear the beginning of our conversation, and I highly recommend it, so inspiring for anybody who is parenting or teaching children right now, then you want to go listen to that episode, and we'll put a link to it in the show notes as well. Sally, before we keep

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going with our conversation, maybe you can tell my listeners a little bit about your life and work, and your family.

- Sally: [02:33](#) I live in Colorado sometimes and overseas sometimes, because I have four of my five adult children, including my son-in-law, who are studying in the UK or are working in the UK, in England and Scotland. And two of them are finishing their PhDs there. My daughter, Sarah finished her Master's of Theology in Oxford, and Nathan, my son, is a film producer and actor, and he also writes books too in New York City.
- Sarah: [03:03](#) Just a pack of underachievers over there at the Clarkson house.
- Sally: [03:06](#) [inaudible 00:03:06] I never really thought of us as achievers, I just thought of us as readers, and then I cared about character and I cared about God, and so there you are. But no, I think that they are just excited about their lives, and also they have to pay their bills, so that kind of motivates people too.
- Sarah: [03:27](#) It sure does. Well, you've got a new book out, *Awaking Wonder*, and this is a book I highly recommend. I'm looking for the subtitle here. *Awaking Wonder: Opening Your Child's Heart to the Beauty of Learning*, and for anybody who is spending time with children right now, this is the book you want to have on your shelf. But one of the things you flush out in this book, Sally, is you talk about raising kids to be treasure seekers, which I think you're describing as you're talking about your kids, motivated by curiosity and wonder, and then also having the skills to tackle life and to be lifelong learners. And I think that's a hard thing to hold on to in the middle of a homeschool day, when maybe we're not feeling like we're doing the best job homeschooling, and we can't really see the fruit of our labor. We talked about this on the first part of our conversation on your show. So I would like to just revisit, how did you hold onto your vision of raising treasure seekers when you were neck deep in homeschooling and parenting?
- Sally: [04:24](#) I don't know whether to blame it on myself or not, but I was probably quite bored during a lot of school, and that I always had questions, I loved exploring, I loved thinking

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and I finally eventually learned to be quiet so that I wouldn't get in trouble, but I was always relieved when school was out. And actually, I kind of go through this in the book, but I was living in Vienna, Austria, with Clay. Clay and I, my husband, were working at an international chapel there. We had 40 different nations in our church because of the United Nations. The second largest United Nations is in Vienna, Austria.

So there's this huge United Nations area where we worked, and so we had these lunches at our house on Sundays after church, and we had a guy who was from Iraq, who had crawled under a barbed wire fence and escaped from his country, didn't have a passport, so he had trouble there. We had an opera singer, somebody who played in the Vienna Philharmonic, we had two Russian businessmen. We had people who were the Attachés from South Africa. And they were all sitting there, and had some chicken and rice, and strong tea or something like that, and as they were sitting there talking, and they were talking about operas, and artists, and music, and politics, and traditions, and their countries and all, and I remember sitting there thinking, "I would love to know more. I wish I had known all these things." And I graduated from college, I had lived in multiple countries, so I could speak part of four languages, and I was sitting there thinking, "I have never been educated," and I thought, there is so much to be excited about in life.

And so really, that's when the germ of wanting to do something differently with my kids, I thought children are made with different personalities, with different drives, with different interests, and so I thought, how can I so create my home into a place of resource, that I will be able to feed them on the best material that there is in life, the best artists, the best writers, the best musicians? And so, the funny thing is, is that that was such a deep conviction for me because as I had always been so bored in school, and also for my husband. And so we both just said, "I wonder if there's a different way."

And we, ourselves, began reading some books and stories, and kind of had some interesting people in our lives. And then I learned in Europe that people in the educational system there, are much more essay-driven.

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By that, I mean, they'll read something, discuss it, and then the test isn't fill in the blank or multiple choice, the test is write about what you learned in this book, write about the three principles that you drew out of it. And so I thought, oh, that would really require somebody to engage and think, and give their own assessment. I kind of came back, and the hardest part for me was housework. Well, the hardest part for me was when they said, "He touched my toe!", when you're reading one of the greatest stories ever told.

And so, it wasn't hard for me as an idealist, because after I started doing this for several years, I would use a little bit of Charlotte Mason, or a little bit of classical, a little bit of this and that, and finally just made my own because I realized all you need to do is read, disciple, train character, and do math or whatever. But it wasn't hard for me to keep the ideals up, because I was so enjoying learning and being exposed to these great ideas for the first time in my life, it was just hard to keep being a mom and keep the housework going. In other words, I had to really stretch my character to learn how to do what I'd never been trained to do, which is run a house, train children, and keep food on the table.

Sarah: [08:30](#) Yeah, yeah. Well, one of the things I appreciate most when you talk about homeschooling, is that it's very geared toward the actual kids, instead of being purist to any one educational philosophy. So I think that for a lot of us, there is a pole for us to put a stake in the ground and say, "I'm a Charlotte Mason homeschooler," or "I use the classical model," or whatever it is. And one of the questions I know you get a lot, because we get it a lot, is how do I teach my kids? What do I do? And so you have these four adult children who are well read, they're all writers, they love God. And so when people say, "What do I do for curriculum?", what's your answer?

Sally: [09:11](#) Talk to Sarah Mackenzie. The thing is, I do try to lead people to wonderful resources like you. You teach people about what are good books to read. The thing is, we, in our book, *Educating the Wholehearted Child*, it really talked a lot more about what does this process look like, and we had booklists at the end of it. It takes a while. It's taking a risk. It's like stepping out in faith. You have to

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believe in the fact that it works, and then if you practice it... I'm sure you've come across this, Sarah. Have you ever just sometimes been sitting with your children having a magical moment because you entered into this world together of imagination, or of history, or of a biography, and you really cared about the people, and you cared about the characters, and you just had such great discussions, and you're sitting there and you're going, "This is a miracle. This is so important. This matters so much."

Or you're all huddled together, I give this little story at the beginning of the book, under sleeping bags, watching shooting stars together, or you're down at a soup kitchen serving meals, and you have these wonderful conversations about, "What would it be like if we didn't have a home?" and "Look how much we have to give." And so, I feel like as I was captured into the magic of a home that was filled with wonder, and imagination, and discovery, because I wanted to learn, that after a few years, I was astounded at the things that my children were saying that I had never thought until I entered into this world with them.

Sarah: [10:58](#) So good. It feels like, well, actually, maybe we should talk about that because I'm curious how you'd describe the difference between being a mentor and what we usually think of being as a teacher, because what you're describing, mentor is exactly the word that comes to mind that makes me feel like, "Oh, that's what I want. I want to be my children's mentor." But how has mentoring different from teaching, do you think?

Sally: [11:21](#) Well, I looked up the etymology of education, and I found out that for one thing, education, it really encompasses the whole person, like sending someone out, and sending them out with a healthy spiritual foundation, with a healthy emotional foundation, with a healthy character, understanding with a healthy intellect, it's the whole person. So that helped me a lot to realize, okay, so to educate, even in the days of Plato, and Socrates, and everybody else, was about the shaping of a whole person.

I just loved pondering the life of Christ. He was my mentor and he taught me everything I know. And so, he said that,

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"The student will be like his teacher." And so in the book, I talk a lot about this, because I don't think anybody's ever talked about this enough. Your children are going to be drawing from you every day, all the time. And I like to say to women, are you the person you hope your child will become? Because Jesus said, "Your child becomes like his teacher." And I was realizing that, I thought, I need to make goals for myself. I need to be growing intellectually. I need to have goals emotionally so that I am kinder, more patient, more gentle, that I'm life giving to people. I need to be growing in my character, I need to work a little bit harder, because I want my children to learn how to work.

And so, what I'm always telling people, a mentor is someone who looks into the personality and the life of the child and says, "I believe that there is endless potential. I believe that you've been made, your own fingerprints, your own DNA uniquely. I believe there is imagination to unearth, there are strengths there that I just need to help you develop in. I believe that the story you're going to tell in a lifetime is really going to be amazing, because you were touched and designed by the God who threw the stars into place."

So our understanding of teacher is just somebody who covers a certain amount of limited facts during a certain time in the day, and then they give them tests. But a mentor is somebody, and I look at Plato and Socrates, I look at Tolkien and Lewis, I look at Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan.

Sarah: [13:40](#)

Sullivan, yeah.

Sally: [13:40](#)

Yeah. I look at history, and I mean, Michelangelo was mentored, and I look at history and I think, oh, God made us to be relational people, and when we can be in the company of somebody who loves me, believes in me, and is growing along beside me, I didn't know all these things when I first became my children's mentor, but we learned it together, because as I was reading them books, I finally became educated. And so, a mentor is somebody who understands that your relationship with your child, and the way that you believe in them, speak to them, honor them as a human being, draw out their unique strengths, that is really what we are called to do as parents. It's really based

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on who are you? Do you have excellence to draw out of?  
Are you filling up your cup?

I'm always talking about tea parties. And when you put something inside of a teapot, what is inside of it is what going to be poured out. And so, I always say to people, "What is inside of your soul, if I could see your soul?" And I'm going to be talking about this, I'm doing a free conference about the book on the 20th. We're going to give it free for 10 days, it's going to be 10 sessions, and part of what I'm talking about is becoming an excellent person so that who your children are drawing from, is an excellent person. So that's kind of what I mean by mentor, and a mentor is focused on the action, the energy that it requires to speak forward, to garner this trust, meant to coach the child.

- Sarah: [15:32](#) I love this so much. Actually, so you said, a teacher is going to cover a certain amount of material or certain topic, and what I think I'm hearing you say, is that a mentor uncovers it. So it's like uncovering it together. So instead of saying, "Okay, this morning, it's Tuesday morning at 10, which is when we do history, so I'm going to cover the causes of the Civil War. That is what we're going to talk about today."
- Sally: [15:54](#) Right.
- Sarah: [15:54](#) Instead, and a mentor sits on the same side of the table, metaphorically speaking, and says, "Let's find out together more about this," which takes so much pressure off of busy moms and dads who have too much to do and a lot on their plate, but who can sit on the same side of the table with their kids and say, "Let's find out together," which is a completely different paradigm than-
- Sally: [16:18](#) Yeah, and plus, it gives your children time to play. There's so many resources available now, from videos to... And I'm not saying just do videos, but I'm saying there are historical things, artistic things. There's toys, there's games, there's puzzles, go outside, there's dress up boxes. We talk a lot about this. There's so many ways, especially as working moms, and just busy moms, that you can make your home such a place of resource, and then talk about it at the end of the day, or before they go to bed or whatever. There are many ways to shape a child,

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but if you aren't mentoring them, you're probably not capturing their heart, and their heart is where they're motivated to engage in real thinking.

- Sarah: [17:19](#) I think when I first started homeschooling, I expected those moments that you're talking about, those magical moments to happen every day. And so, when they didn't, I thought I was doing something wrong. And so, what I wish I could go back and tell myself is, a lot of it just feels like getting through a normal day. It doesn't feel magical every day, and that doesn't mean you're doing something wrong.
- Sally: [17:40](#) Right, right. And I think I kind of fell in love with mothering more as I went. In other words, once I realized I didn't need to be neurotic, I needed to love them, that they were going to learn anyway. You know what I mean? I mean, as I started seeing my children growing and becoming, I look back and I think, I wish I hadn't been so crazy. I wish I hadn't been so stressed out. I wish I had looked... And where I am right now, because you're right in the thick of it, you have all these 10,000 children in your house, but-
- Sarah: [18:14](#) I do.
- Sally: [18:15](#) ... Joy and Joel are at home right now, they're both doing their PhDs in Scotland. And I sit there and I look in Joy's eyes and I hear what she's learning, and I just think, "This is the best. I love being your friend. I love being close. Let's talk more." And they're both musicians, and so Joel will sit down and start playing the piano, or they'll start singing, he's a composer. And I just go, "Wow, this is the best." And so it's like you said, I just wish I had not wasted some of the time fretting or being angry about the dishes. I do wish I'd had a maid.
- Sarah: [18:59](#) Let's talk about real regrets here. Speaking of Joy, who is your youngest daughter and she's working on her PhD right now, right.
- Sally: [19:07](#) Right. Uh-huh (affirmative)-
- Sarah: [19:08](#) I recently saw her post on social media, I'm going to put the link to the post in the show notes, but she was talking about a take on homeschooling because so many of us around the world, a lot of people who weren't

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homeschooling before are now thinking about homeschooling, or at least educating their kids in some fashion to some degree at home, and her post was so refreshing. I loved her insight that a homeschooling parent's reliance on curriculum is actually based on fear. Can you speak to that a little bit? When I say that, what does that bring up for you?

Sally:

[19:41](#)

Well, I think that because we were never taught to do this, and because we have a reference point and own background, and it's usually some kind of curriculum or whatever, I think that we automatically assume that we have to do what was done to us. Even though we step out and we say we're going to do this very idealistic thing, then we tend to revert back to what we knew. But I think that Joy's also a teacher right now, she's a professor, and she's teaching at her university, undergraduates, and she said, "You can really tell the kids that were just checking off a box and just doing what was required, and then the kids who loved learning, and education, and thinking, and they're inspired."

And she said, "I think fear of not doing enough has a fruit of reductivity. It reduces knowledges to multiple choice, fill in the blanks. It has a kind of a sense of, 'I'm going to pressure you. You've got to do these 10 things,' and fear is not a great producer of great fruit." In other words, wherever you start and move forward, is how you're going to end. And so, if you are choking your children and saying, "You have to diagram that sentence, because it says in the book that you have to do 25 sentences," then who wouldn't go "Well, okay." But I mean, if you think that's education, and you're doing it by fear because you're afraid of missing something, then you're not going to capture the delight that is inside every person, the desire to know, and to figure out.

And so, Joy was actually referring to somebody died recently who had created this whole sort of curriculum that many people used in the home education movement for many years, and she knows a lot of kids who fell away from their parent's values and thoughts, because it was so limiting to them. And so, it came out of the articles that she had been reading about this person, because this person was very indoctrinating and very legalistic, but there was

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very little life giving, or ideas, or interest, or scope or dimension in the way that this curriculum was written. And so unfortunately, people depended on the curriculum out of fear, instead of trusting their own resources, to be able to grow forward in unearthing imagination, and interest, and ideas along with their children.

Sarah: [22:30](#) Well, in that social media post, that same one, Joy mentions that as homeschooling parents, we have this great privilege to quote, "Cooperate with natural curiosity." I was walking through these woods during my home, and I kept thinking about that phrase over and over, "Cooperate with natural curiosity," and I think it's actually the verb cooperate that gets my attention so much because I think for a lot of us, especially a lot of people who are listening to this podcast, following their children's interests, reading lots of books, providing a feast of ideas through read-alouds and library visits, we're used to that. But that cooperation with natural curiosity is I think, there's a hitch there because we are constantly self-doubting that what we're doing is enough. We think to ourselves, "Whatever I'm doing is not enough," and cooperating with natural curiosity is really the key to that. Just cooperating with what's going to happen naturally, when we open books with our kids, when we open ourselves up to the opportunity to have conversations with our kids.

Sally: [23:43](#) Right.

Sarah: [23:44](#) Actually, I know we're running short on time, Sally, and I want to make sure I ask you this question, because one of the questions we hear a lot at Read-Aloud Revival is, "What should I do after I read aloud?" And I noticed *Awaking Wonder*, on page 127 you wrote, "Having a good romp outdoors after our reading times gave everyone a time to breathe, to enter into the recesses of their own mind palace, as Sherlock Holmes suggests. We do not tell our children what to think at this point, we trust them to access the knowledge they have been presented, discussed, and understood, and synthesized. Creative outlets of their own making, make play an important part of their accessing what they have thought and experienced, and giving them time to wonder alone."

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Sally:

[24:28](#)

In the same way that a child learns English or whatever language you're teaching them, by three years old, over a thousand vocabulary words, without a single bit of curriculum, that children who are four years old, ask over a hundred questions a day, "Why are frogs green instead of purple? Why does the puppy dog lick instead of bite?" It's because within them, they have this drive to learn and to know. And so, when we sit our kids around us, sometimes you eat popcorn, if that distracts them, so that they'll listen, or whatever you do, you cuddle up, "Everybody get out your blankets and cuddle up on the couch," whatever you do to kind of outline that book in a positive way that builds the rhythm of them wanting to do it, then you have to trust that their little brains are still going, and they're going to chew on that great story that you read to them for a while.

And so actually, that's why they say that if you are taking a test tomorrow and you study it during the day or whatever, they said that in your sleep, your brain naturally accesses the knowledge that it was exposed to, and synthesizes it into realistic ideas. And so, that's what happens with children. They go out, they play, you give them a pretend box of play clothes that you got at Goodwill, and talk about it at the dinner table that night. "What did you learn? What did you think? What did you love? What did you hate?" And become a question asker, and show interest in your children. Don't make it an assignment, go "I don't think I liked the book as much as I thought," or "This is one of my favorite books we've read," and then you say, "I value so much what you think. What did you think about this?" or whatever.

And so, I think it's you read, you give them time to ponder and to think about it, you engage, and then at the end of that, you ask them to summarize. Maybe you'll have them write a poem or a little story, or just narrate back to you what they're thinking, and those steps are what really deeply put these ideas into the hearts of our children. And so, it's not a real formal process, it's more of a relational process.

Sarah:

[26:40](#)

I love this so much. It's just another way that we can invite kids and our families into awaking wonder, just like the title of your book says, which I think we can all get on board

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with. Sally, thank you so very much for joining me. I always love chatting with you.

- Sally: [26:53](#) Oh, I just feel like we're such kindred spirits, and if only we lived next door.
- Sarah: [26:58](#) I, oh...
- Sally: [26:58](#) Or at least in the next state.
- Sarah: [26:59](#) We'd never get anything done.
- Sally: [27:03](#) Oh my goodness.
- Sarah: [27:06](#) 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.
- Speaker 3: [27:22](#) Hi, my name is [inaudible 00:27:23], and I [inaudible 00:27:24], and my favorite book is Pancakes for Breakfast by Tomie dePaola.
- Parent: [27:33](#) How old are you?
- Speaker 3: [27:34](#) Two.
- Parent: [27:35](#) And why do you like Pancakes for Breakfast?
- Speaker 3: [27:41](#) Because I really like it, because I like it because I like it.
- Zoe: [27:43](#) Hi, my name is Zoe, and I like The Berenstain Bears In the Dark, and I'm four, and I live in [inaudible 00:27:47] Virginia.
- Parent: [27:46](#) And what's your name?
- Abby: [27:51](#) Abby.
- Parent: [27:52](#) And how old are you, Abby?
- Abby: [27:54](#) Six.
- Parent: [27:55](#) And where do you live?
- Abby: [27:58](#) In Ohio.
- Parent: [27:59](#) And what is your favorite book?

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Abby: [28:01](#) Elephant and Piggie books.

Parent: [28:04](#) And who are they by?

Abby: [28:06](#) Mo Willems.

Parent: [28:07](#) And why do you like the Elephant and Piggie books?

Abby: [28:11](#) Because they're really funny.

Parent: [28:14](#) And what's your name?

Rosie: [28:16](#) Rosie.

Parent: [28:17](#) And how old are you?

Rosie: [28:18](#) Four.

Parent: [28:19](#) And where do you live?

Rosie: [28:22](#) In Ohio.

Parent: [28:23](#) And what's your favorite book?

Rosie: [28:25](#) Nibbles.

Parent: [28:26](#) And why is Nibbles your favorite book?

Rosie: [28:30](#) Because it's funny.

Parent: [28:32](#) And what is Nibbles? What does he do?

Rosie: [28:34](#) He nibbles up books.

Parent: [28:34](#) He's a book monster.

Rosie: [28:36](#) And he's a book monster.

Parent: [28:39](#) Yeah.

Jackie: [28:41](#) Hi, my name is Jackie, and I am seven years old, and I live in South Carolina, and my favorite book is Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle. I like it because the kids have their bad habits, and Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle cures them.

Katie: [29:06](#) Hi, my name is Katie. [inaudible 00:29:11].

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Parent: [29:12](#) Yeah, how old are you?

Katie: [29:13](#) Three.

Parent: [29:16](#) Where do you live?

Katie: [29:17](#) In South Carolina.

Parent: [29:18](#) And what's your favorite book right now?

Katie: [29:21](#) Sam and Dave Dig a Hole.

Parent: [29:22](#) Why is that your favorite?

Katie: [29:25](#) Because it has the treasure in it.

Parent: [29:28](#) The treasure in it?

Katie: [29:29](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 9: [29:30](#) Hi, my name is [inaudible 00:29:32], and I am five years old. My favorite book is Princess Sophie and the Six Swans. [inaudible 00:29:41] because it has princesses in it, and I like princesses.

Russell: [29:47](#) My name is Russell. I am 11 years old, and I live in Pennsylvania. My favorite book is the Chronicles of Narnia Book One, The Magician's Nephew. I like it because they can teleport through worlds using the rings.

Aviana: [30:02](#) Hello, my name is [Aviana 00:30:04] Robertson. I am eight years old, I live in Erie, Pennsylvania. My favorite book is Because of Winn-Dixie. I like Because of Winn-Dixie because he's a funny dog, and I like the way he smiles.

Sara Grace: [30:17](#) My name's Sara Grace. I am six and-

Parent: [30:20](#) You live where?

Sara Grace: [30:22](#) In Erie, Pennsylvania.

Parent: [30:49](#) What's your favorite book?

Sara Grace: [30:51](#) Winnie the Pooh. What I like about it, is that Winnie the Pooh tries to get honey from the tree.

Parent: [30:51](#) What's your name?

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- Faye: [30:51](#) [Faye 00:30:51] [inaudible 00:30:40].
- Parent: [30:51](#) Where do you live?
- Faye: [30:51](#) At Pennsylvania.
- Parent: [30:51](#) How old are you?
- Faye: [30:51](#) Four.
- Parent: [30:51](#) And what's your favorite book?
- Faye: [30:51](#) Strawberry Shortcake.
- Parent: [30:54](#) Why do you like Strawberry Shortcake?
- Faye: [30:56](#) Because I like the page where her get so excited.
- Sarah: [31:06](#) I loved Strawberry Shortcake when I was a child too, so I understand. Hey, in two weeks, I'll be back with another episode, this time with special guest, Mem Fox. She is a beloved and world-renowned children's book author. You are familiar with some of her books, I promise. She's also the author of a wonderful book for parents called, Reading Magic, and we're going to talk about it. It's a great conversation, I cannot wait to share it with you. So meet me back here in two weeks, and we'll do that.
- If you haven't yet, be sure to go to [readaloudrevival.com/quiz](http://readaloudrevival.com/quiz), or text QUIZ to 33777, so I can give you a personalized book recommendation. Well, until next time folks, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.