

- Mem Fox: [00:00](#) I'm so sorry you can't see me, Sarah, I made a massive effort with my face. which is 74-years-old, so you could imagine the work I did this morning. Anyway, anyway, I've completely lost my train of thought here.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [00:22](#) You're listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Mackenzie, homeschooling mama 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.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [00:47](#) 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.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [01:13](#) Hello, hello. Sarah Mackenzie here. So glad you're with me today. This is episode 162, and as you might be able to tell from the preview at the very top of the episode, we're having some fun today. Look, the world has been full of a lot of challenging things that make us feel sad or worried. The pandemic alone has been a source, I think, of a lot of constant stories that are not exactly uplifting. So, today I'm going to start this episode with something to inspire you. I read this on the RAR premium forum, and it really added joy to my day because it helped me see that even though 2020 has been full of the unexpected, to say the least, for all of us, there is a lot of wonderful that's also happening.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [02:02](#) So, here is what I read. Heather Clintworth, one of our RAR premium members, she wrote this on the forum. "When COVID happened and when the schools shut down, our family life improved 100 percent. Everyone around me was bemoaning being stuck at home with their kids all day. And I realized, I kind of loved it. I definitely didn't love the cause, but my son was suddenly curious again. We started adding read alouds back into our life, and I discovered Read Aloud Revival when it was recommended to me by some friends who homeschool

their kids when I started asking questions about making homeschooling permanent in our household.

Sarah Mackenzie: [02:43](#) "His love of learning returned, and the past couple of weeks, he's actually reading for fun for the first time in his life. We spent the whole of this quarantine period really reinforcing a culture of reading in our home. Along with lots of time spent in nature and just playing, and it has been beautiful. We've decided to homeschool for sure this year, and assuming nothing goes catastrophically wrong with my first attempts at it, my plan is to continue for as long as it suits our family."

Sarah Mackenzie: [03:12](#) Okay, so I don't know about you, but when I read that, that made me so happy. To think that these less than ideal circumstances which we've all found ourselves to be thrust into, could be the catalyst for something this beautiful and enriching and joyful, and that this boy has found his love of reading and books, and her whole family has found this beautiful new way of learning together. Which so many of us who have been homeschooling for years have been blessed and lucky enough to be enjoying for all these years. And so many others are beginning to feel some of the beauty of that, is really, really wonderful.

Sarah Mackenzie: [03:49](#) I know it's not all peachy roses everywhere, but I thought that might inspire you like it inspired me. I hope just listening to Heather's story about what's happened in her home over these last months will inspire you to really just enjoy the books, and nature, and play, and conversations and all the beautiful things that erupt in our family when we give ourselves space to breath, and we just read good books together. There's so many wonderful things that come from that.

Sarah Mackenzie: [04:19](#) So thank you, thank you, Heather, for posting that in the forum. It lit up my whole week, and I was so excited I wanted to share it on the podcast. Thank you also for telling me that I could share it on the podcast. I appreciate that. I have a feeling it will inspire so many of our listeners.

Sarah Mackenzie: [04:33](#) Okay, today we have a fabulous question from Emily Erickson.

Emily: [04:38](#) Hi, Sarah. My name's Mem. I listen to every single episode of your podcast. Even as a public schooling mom, our bookshelves are full of your recommendations and my

head is full of your encouragement. So, thank you for all you do, and for mentoring so many of us from afar. It's made all the difference for our family. Here's my question: we're brand new to homeschooling and planning on using a lot of books in our learning. I'm both so excited about this, and also a bit nervous, because we have seven kids including three sets of twins. So we have an eight-year-old, two six-year-olds, two three-year-olds, and two nine-month-olds.

Sarah Mackenzie: [05:10](#)

Wait, hang on.

Emily: [05:13](#)

We have seven kids including three sets of twins. So we have an eight-year-old, two six-year-olds, two three-year-olds, and two nine-month-olds.

Sarah Mackenzie: [05:20](#)

Yeah, okay. That's what I thought you said. I was just checking.

Emily: [05:24](#)

As a huge lover of stories myself, I always feel so excited to start our read aloud time, and even though I set my kids up with a snack or activity and make sure that the babies are either occupied or napping, I find that we still struggle to get through even a single page without multiple interruptions. Some interruptions are useful, like questions or comments, or connections. But of course, many aren't. I definitely don't expect perfection out of these times, but I still come away feeling discouraged, and my big three kids are usually a bit disappointed and frustrated with the younger four.

Emily: [05:56](#)

Do you have any ideas or encouragement for us? Maybe how I can handle the interruptions more effectively, or encouragement that these chaotic reading times still matter, because sometimes it feels like they don't. Or maybe even just a glimmer of hope that it will get better. I would so greatly appreciate any thoughts you could send my way.

Sarah Mackenzie: [06:14](#)

Well, Emily, you should've seen my husband's face, not to mention my own, when you said you have three sets of twins. You probably know that we have one set of twins and I think they're pretty hard actually. So try doing that and tripling that. Okay so, first of all, I just think you're amazing and the fact that you are homeschooling this year, and committed to reading aloud with your kids, is so wonderful. And it inspires me so very much.

Sarah Mackenzie: [06:43](#) One thing I think to keep in mind is that you're going to want to set a reasonable expectation of how much you can actually read aloud. So I'm not sure if you're using a literature-based curriculum, or maybe you're just reading aloud books that you're creating your own lists or compiling yourself. But, the biggest mistake I see most new homeschoolers make is that they're trying to do too much. And this includes your reading aloud. Trying to read aloud too many things. Thinking that you need to do so many read alouds.

Sarah Mackenzie: [07:14](#) So, it could help maybe just to say, okay, we're going to start with one read aloud session for 15 minutes or something, and you just do that once a day until that maybe feels kind of manageable, and then you might add few extra minutes onto that session, or maybe a second session later in the day or something. But, kind of setting your expectations lower. I'm hesitant to use the word lower, because the only person whose expectations we have to lower are ours, right? God has expectations for us that are not impossible. I love this quote by Erin Loechner from her book, *Chasing Slow*, where she tells us that we don't need to lower our expectations, we need to live up to the expectations we were created for. And I think that could be a helpful reminder to you that God has given you all these beautiful babies, and his expectation for how much you can read aloud to them is probably lower than yours. The problem is you think you can read a lot to them on your own.

Sarah Mackenzie: [08:16](#) And so, anyway, any reading aloud that you're doing is beautiful and wonderful. Now I also want you to know, the year I had my twins I also had a one-year-old, an eight-year-old, a 10-year-old, and a 12-year-old. And that school year almost all my eight-year old and 12-year-old did is a little math, most days, not even every day, and some audio books. I couldn't even read aloud that often, so I just resorted to audio books. And that 12-year-old, who I'm sure everyone in my life thought I was ruining by homeschooling her in a year that I was drowning just to try and keep up with everything ... Honestly, I sort of wondered the same thing, right? Well, this year, right now, she's going off to college well equipped for her future.

Sarah Mackenzie: [08:58](#) So, I think what I'm trying to say is, I'm taking the longest way possible to say it, one year, or two years, or a season,

or a couple seasons that's lighter on academics or lighter on the number of read alouds you can get to, it's not going to hurt anything. You are creating such a beautiful experience for your kids to be together, to see that Mom's here and she wants to teach us, and she wants to learn with us, and she wants to read with us, even if it doesn't look perfect, and even if you can't get to as much as you wanted.

Sarah Mackenzie: [09:28](#)

I feel that's a tremendous gift you're giving them. And you're sending them a solid message about what's important, them, each other, and books. And that is going to make a huge impact. Probably bigger than you realize. And then just a little extra encouragement that audio books count, and so if your eight-year-old and your six-year-old are getting frustrated by the interruptions coming from the three-year-olds and the nine-month-olds, turning an audio book on for the older ones in a different room and having them listen to it, even if you're not able to listen with them, 100 percent wonderful.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:05](#)

So, finding some good audio books and saying, okay, now you guys are going to color or do Play-Doh, or sketch while you listen to this audio book, and I'm going to be over in this room over here with all of the little ones, and so you come tell me after 30 minutes, set a timer or something. And they can listen without the little ones in the room. That might be really relaxing for them, they might be able to enjoy the story more. You probably get more, quote, unquote, "reading aloud" in, because they'd get all that reading aloud. It doesn't matter if you're not the one reading it aloud.

Sarah Mackenzie: [10:34](#)

So, they'd get all those stories in and maybe feel less frustrated, because they're not being interrupted by the little ones. Which I know is a constant frustration for kids who have a lot of younger siblings, because that is the state of my house and has been for a long time. And so I totally understand that. I hope that helps a little bit. I am wishing you all the best this year, Emily. Call me back anytime and tell me how things are going, because I would love to hear from you again.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:00](#)

Listeners, if you have a question you'd like me to tackle on the podcast, you can leave me a voicemail just like Emily did, go to [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com). Scroll down just a touch,

and you'll see some buttons where your kids can either leave their books recommendations for our segment of Let The Kids Speak toward the end of the show, or where you can leave me a question that I might answer on the podcast. So, feel free to do that, I love to hear your questions.

Sarah Mackenzie: [11:27](#)

Okay, so, who was the owner of that delightful Australian voice that you heard at the top of the show? Well, that was Mem Fox, Australia's best-selling writer, yes, like the entire continent's best-selling writer. She's written over 40 books for children and several non-fiction books for adults. She's a retired associate professor of literacy studies from Flinders University, and she's received a passel of honors, awards, and three honorary doctorates. This lady is no joke. She's amazing, and she is a complete delight. We are talking today about her book Reading Magic, Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever.

Sarah Mackenzie: [12:31](#)

Well, Mem, I am delighted to have you here with me. Thank you so much for coming to the Read Aloud Revival.

Mem Fox: [12:37](#)

Sarah, it's lovely to be with you. I think we started planning this about a year ago. It's only taken 12 months and COVID-19, and everything else for us to get together, and this is fantastic. We made it.

Sarah Mackenzie: [12:49](#)

We made it, we finally made it happen. Well, you're book Reading Magic, Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever, I think is especially poignant for right now in the world. When did you first write this book, actually?

Mem Fox: [13:08](#)

I think it was in the early 2000's, about 2001, something like that, 2002. Yes, a long time ago.

Sarah Mackenzie: [13:17](#)

Yes, because I know I've got two different versions. An updated and revised version, and your first version. But it feels really poignant to me right now and I think that's because so many kids around the world are spending their foreseeable future at home a lot more than normal, out of the classroom a lot more than they're used to, and what I love about Reading Magic, is that his magic you talk about really begins in the lap of a parent in a story read aloud. And I think this might be a time when a lot of parents are feeling ill-equipped on some level to help our

kids academically succeed in this challenging crisis time. Gain reading skill, and love reading, so I think this is good news, that so much reading success can be found through reading aloud.

Sarah Mackenzie: [14:04](#) Actually, I was reading through the book again for the, I don't know how many times, and at the end of chapter 15 this is what you wrote, "Whatever happens in the world of school, continuing to read aloud to our children at home should solve most reading problems, and will always be a lifeline to their happiness, their literacy, and their future." And, I tell you what, that sounds like extraordinarily good news to me.

Mem Fox: [14:32](#) Well, I'm surprised I wrote that, because I love it.

Sarah Mackenzie: [14:36](#) Even better.

Mem Fox: [14:38](#) I love that. That is absolutely true. And the best thing of all about COVID-19, if we can look at something about this ghastly time, is that children who are being forced to learn to read in a way that is boring, tedious, clodding, and unrewarding, are actually almost being saved from that by being taken out of school at crucial moment in their lives, and being locked up at home with parents who love them who don't know how to teach reading, but do know how to read to their children. And it brings the parent and the child together in a beautiful situation in the middle of the horrific situation worldwide. But the kid and the parent are just loving each other, they're both enjoying words, they're both enjoying the story, and the thrill of the story, the plot of the story, the characters in the story, in the most beautifully written language, and they're learning so much so, I know this is so revolutionary.

Mem Fox: [15:49](#) They're learning so much more in that situation than they would have been learning had they been sitting in a little desk at a very young age, bored out of their brains, trying to work out which sound says what, and why, and how they connect. I mean, it's magical, it's a super-moment for kids. They don't know how lucky they are. They have no idea what they have escaped from by being taken out of school at this particular point in their young lives. I'm talking about four to seven year olds. They are lucky to be away from school, thankfully.

- Mem Fox: [16:24](#) One of the wonderful things about reading aloud, we always focus on what it does for the child, but what it does for the grown-up who is reading to the child, is it bursts the bubble of tension that is in there during the day, or is there at that moment because of something that's happened in the house, or in the world. It bursts that bubble of tension. That big balloon of tension just flattens and comes down, and the child and the parent are, for a moment, at total peace in spite of everything. At total peace. It is a divine, divine moment. It's just gorgeous.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [17:14](#) Well, I love how in the book you talk about how as parents we don't need to be reading teachers to help our kids learn to read, and you say, "It's precisely the laid-back, hang-loose, let's have fun, relaxed and comfortable role that is so powerful in helping children first to love reading, and then to be able to read themselves."
- Mem Fox: [17:39](#) Exactly. My dad was a very fine educator, whom I adored, my dad. But I also admired, tremendously, the way he taught, and the philosophy that he had about learning. And one of his little sayings that he used to remind us of, was, "A laughing child likes learning," one reason why I like the, "a laughing child likes learning," is because you can't be tense and laugh at the same time. If you're tense, you can't learn. If you're laughing, you can't be tense.
- Mem Fox: [18:17](#) So, if you're laughing, you're much more able to learn. And there's so much laughter, and sweetness, and relaxation, and fun, and humor, and gorgeousness around reading aloud, that children pick up an enormous amount. They hear the words at the same time as they're looking at the words, they're picking up the combinations of letters that make different sounds, but it's not being picked apart in a boring lesson. It's just happening. I'm not saying that every child learns to read by just being read to. I would never, ever, ever say that. But what we as parents and grandparents and carers are doing for the children, is making them open to the things that teachers will later try to teach them.
- Mem Fox: [19:04](#) The best thing that my grandson has had happen to him, in maths, which is not his strongest point, obviously he comes from a very language rich family so that's fine, but the maths is not good. And prior to this, he's about 10 at the moment, prior to this it has been a terrible struggle

because of the tension associated with it. The absolute best thing that his divine teacher has done for him this year is to remove the tension. Make him relax. Just go with the flow, enjoy, see what you can do, don't get uptight, and the learning is happening because of that, because the tension has gone.

Mem Fox: [19:47](#)

And we associate learning to read with so much tension I don't understand why. I've got no idea why we associate it with so much tension. Why do we make it so difficult? We put hurdles in children's way all the time in the teaching of reading. I'm absolutely thrilled that parents don't know how to teach reading. It's the best thing about parents. It is the absolute best thing, that they do not know how to teach their children to read, and then they can point out little things like the ends of words rhyming and so on and so forth. And then you can say, can you hear it, it's the same sound at the end, listen to this. It's time for bed little mouse, little mouse. Darkness is falling [inaudible 00:20:25]. How, it's the same. But that would pointing out something, but it's still beautiful. And it's a game, it's not a tense, hard thing.

Mem Fox: [20:39](#)

I was just thinking this morning in the shower, I'm so sorry you can't see me, Sarah, I made a massive effort with my face. Which is 74-years-old, so you could imagine the work I did this morning. Anyway, anyway, I've completely lost my train of thought here. Yes, I was thinking in the shower this morning about this interview, and at the role of accents in phonics, people who teach phonics think that there is one sound for every letter, or for every combination of letters. And I was thinking about the fact of my being an author. And you look at the two letters, A-U, at the beginning of the word author, now in Australia and in English, English, and Australian English, and New Zealand English, we say author, as if it were, O-R, okay?

Mem Fox: [21:38](#)

Now in the certain states it's still spelled A-U-T-H-O-R, that is the spelling, but the pronunciation of author in certain states is author. Which is right, which is the A-U sound. Is it author, is it author. And then you look at those two letters in laugh, the word laugh, L-A-U-G-H. Now it's not laugh, even though we say author, A-U, it's not laugh, we either say laugh, in English, English, we'd say laugh, in Australian English we'd say laugh, and in American English people usually say laugh. And the sound changes

all the time. Phonics is not a fixed thing. The difference between phonics and the other way of teaching reading, is that one is a way of making sense of what's on the page, and the other one is making sounds of what's on the page. Sounds, don't necessarily make sense. We are after making sense. And that's why it's best to start with stories, because stories make sense.

Sarah Mackenzie: [22:56](#)

I found this fascinating, in your book you say, "Only 50 percent of English words are spelled phonetically, and billions of people in China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, learn to read when phonics are not possible in their written language." So, I think that just sort of reiterates what you were saying. Phonics is a piece of the puzzle, but it's not actually the beautiful puzzle.

Mem Fox: [23:18](#)

No, no, it's not. It's one third of the puzzle. And it's important. And we have lots of names that are peculiar to people who aren't Australian because they come from Aboriginal people. And there's a very famous and excellent university in another state from mine called Wollongong University, now, if you've never read the word, Wollongong, and it sounds like a crazy place, you could say, how could a university be called Wollongong, it has no dignity. But of course it does, because we all know that it's an excellent university. So, but if you are coming to Wollongong for the first time, phonics is useful. It's so useful. You're sort of going, Woll-ong-gong, Wollongong, that's useful. It doesn't solve every problem, because unfortunately our spelling system is so terrible.

Mem Fox: [24:18](#)

I'm reading Peter Pan at the moment to my grandson who could read anything much more difficult than that, his language is astounding. Surprise, surprise, surprise. I mean, it surprises us even, as a family. We often look at each other and sort of try not to catch each other's eye because of the way he speaks and the language that he brings to his explanations. It is just divine, it's so, so gorgeous. But, I have noticed that one of the reasons why he wants me to read Peter Pan, is not because he's never read it, which he could do by himself, but it is actually the bonding between him and me.

Mem Fox: [25:03](#)

We're not often together at night, he doesn't really go far away, but we're not often together at bedtime, obviously, he's 10 years old. But when he's here, or when I'm there,

and we say, let's do it, let's have some more Peter Pan, neither of us can stop it, we say, oh, let's do that a bit more. Oh, let's just read a bit more, let's just read a bit more. But one of the things that's happening, of course, I'm noticing as the author of Reading Magic, is that the more I read Peter Pan to him, obviously, the more vocabulary he's getting. He'll stop me and say, what's a, blah, blah, for example a schooner. The other day we were reading another book, not Peter Pan. "What's a schooner?" It was The Mysteries of Harris Burdick, was the book. You know that book? Oh, it's fantastic.

Sarah Mackenzie: [25:53](#)

I do.

Mem Fox: [25:53](#)

It's brilliant. Just pictures with the first line of the story, marvelous. And he said, "What's a schooner?" And I said, it's a large ship. And he pronounced it incorrectly as well, so, just by reading to him he's getting more language.

Sarah Mackenzie: [26:13](#)

Yeah, brilliant.

Mem Fox: [26:14](#)

The more I read, the more language he gets, the easier it is for him to read and to understand anything that comes in front of his eyes. But, it's just a cumulative thing, it's like a snowball rolling down a snowy hill. It's just more and more snow attaching, attaching, attaching, attaching, until it's a big ball down at the bottom of the mountain. And that's the child's understanding of how to read.

Sarah Mackenzie: [26:39](#)

Yes, I love your analogy, that reading is like driving a car. Most adults can drive a car, but we can't take one apart and put it back together.

Mem Fox: [26:56](#)

Going back to this A-U, author thing, and the A-U in laugh, and all the different pronunciations of those, there is a word for that, where you have two letters combined to make a sound, there's a word for it. All right? And I don't know, it's a graph-something or it's something-graph, a grapheme, I've got no idea. Now, why do children need to know what a phoneme or a grapheme is? Why do they need to define that when an author of my standing, and of my lifelong contributing to high level of children's literature around the world, does not know what that is? I do not know what that is because I do not need to know what it is, I do not need to know how my engine works, but my goodness. And I drive a car. And I do not like people to pass me unnecessarily, so I'm not quite the best driver in

the world because I'm a little bit too aggressive, I like to be in the front.

- Mem Fox: [28:08](#) I know how to drive a car and know how to make it go really well. I know how to make it go fast and slow. I know how to brake it, I have no idea what is going on under that front bit of the car. Which we call a bonnet, but you call something else. What do you call that front bit?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [28:24](#) We call it the hood.
- Mem Fox: [28:25](#) Hood, yeah, underneath the hood.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [28:28](#) Although a bonnet is a much better word for it.
- Mem Fox: [28:31](#) It's pretty cute, isn't it?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [28:33](#) It is, yes.
- Mem Fox: [28:33](#) Whether it's the hood or the bonnet, neither you nor I can understand what's going on under there. But we would be in a bad way if we couldn't drive. But we can drive. We'd be in a bad way if we couldn't read, but we wouldn't be in a bad way if we couldn't define all those tiny little bits of language that make up English.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [28:52](#) Yes.
- Mem Fox: [28:54](#) Yeah, that wouldn't matter.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [28:54](#) Yes.
- Mem Fox: [28:55](#) And yet we focus on that, many teachers focus on that. Many programs and phonics focus on that sort of thing. Oh, it just kills the love of language. It kills the love of reading and writing and listening. Oh my goodness, I could go on and on and on. I could go on, and on, and on.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [29:11](#) When I think about what we really want to do when we're raising readers, is raise kids who become adults who keep reading, and who actually do the bulk of the reading in their life after they're adults. Since their adult life is the longest section of their life.
- Mem Fox: [29:35](#) Exactly.

- Sarah Mackenzie: [29:36](#) Right?
- Mem Fox: [29:36](#) Yes, exactly.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [29:37](#) And, so then when we think about, how do we read as adults, and yet we have this whole different measuring stick, or this different idea of a child's reading life, they should like a certain kind of book, they should be reading a certain kind of book.
- Mem Fox: [29:50](#) It's nonsense, isn't it? I looked at my own grandson absorbed in his craze about birds, and he has dozens of adult books about bird watching, and we're not even bird watchers, he was introduced to it by a friend of ours. And I'm thinking, my God, I think this kid has been reading this book about puffins in Scotland for 40 minutes. And it's not something that I would ever read. And who am I to say whether that is a good or a bad book?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [30:22](#) So that just reminded me of a funny story. One of my kids, when she was about four, I think, she might've been five, she found one of my birding field guides that was laying around, and she was looking at it and pouring over the pictures and flipping through it, and then she closed it, went off to do something else, and came back, and she said, "Oh, mama, can you help me find the bird I was looking at?" And I said-
- Mem Fox: [30:45](#) Oh my goodness.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [30:45](#) Yes, and I said, "Well, sure. Can you tell me what it looked like?" And she said, "Yes, it had feathers and a beak."
- Mem Fox: [30:54](#) Oh, that's marvelous. I reckon I can picture the book. Is it Sibley's book of birds?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:03](#) It is Sibley's book of birds.
- Mem Fox: [31:04](#) There you go. There you go. It was my American editor who introduced Theo, my grandson, to birds, and he has Sibley's book of birds.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [31:32](#) You write that, enthusiasm from all corners has to bubble around a book, and, I mean I think as we're all listening to you we're thinking, of course, I mean enthusiasm bubbles from you, I can feel it. And that's how I feel when I love a book as an adult reader, is enthusiasm bubbles from every

corner. So I want to talk book suggestions if you're up to it. I'm curious to know what some of your favorites are to read aloud with your grandkids, or were your favorite to read aloud with your kids, or anytime you can grab a small human and read to them.

- Mem Fox: [32:05](#) I mean, really, famous books like, Goodnight Construction Site, I mean every household with a boy in it, needs Goodnight, Goodnight Construction site. It's divine. Hilarious, gorgeous, it's just wonderful. There's another one which we adored, called Whatever. It's by William Bee, B-E-E.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [32:33](#) Okay.
- Mem Fox: [32:33](#) I'm just looking for the publisher, and just wondering whether it's an English book. I know it's not Australian. Oh, yes, it's English. It is hilarious. It's very, very simple. It's got very few words on the page, and it's as funny as a fit. And it's about a kid who refuses to be impressed, just refuses. So whenever he's told something fantastic he says, "Whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever." And I do think that he gets eaten up by a lion at the zoo because he just says "Whatever," which is quite funny. Oh, I know how it ends, I have to tell you how it ends. Because I've got to sell you this book [inaudible 00:33:18]. But, okay, he goes to the zoo and he's with his dad. And he's inside the tiger, right? The tiger's eaten him.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [33:27](#) Okay.
- Mem Fox: [33:28](#) "Dad, I am still in here you know," and the father says, "Whatever." End of the book. Oh, it's so funny. Very few words on the page and in big print. It could be a reader.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [33:44](#) Yes.
- Mem Fox: [33:45](#) But it's brilliant. It could be a reader. It's absolutely marvelous. The Diary of a Wombat, which is an Australian book.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [33:53](#) Oh, yes.
- Mem Fox: [33:55](#) You know that?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [33:55](#) Yes, I do know that one.

- Mem Fox: [33:56](#) There's very, very few words on the page, but overly funny, about this wombat. Oh, just one more here, oh I love this book. This is new Australian book, and it's called I See, I See. And it can be read upside down and back to front, right? Oh, this is extraordinary. But the wonderful thing about is that it almost forces an interaction between the parent and the child, because the parent can see one thing, and the child can see the other. And that is totally different, the sort of upside down-ness of it, and so, the to-ing and fro-ing between the parents and the child is just gorgeous. The author is R. Henderson.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [34:48](#) Okay, well, we're about out of time, there's just two little things I want to mention. One is just that I loved this so much. In your book you tell a story about a mom who was worried because her daughter could read but she wasn't reading, and this is what you wrote, "The mother's anxiety about her daughter's reading level was very real. She thought she had a big problem on her hands. But when the child was given these essentials: encouragement, time, books, magazines, light, silence, warmth in winter, and coolness in summer, and the comfort of being allowed to read in bed every night, the problem was solved."
- Sarah Mackenzie: [35:28](#) And right now especially, with everything happening in the world, this is gift that we can all give our children, is coolness in summer, and warmth in winter, and light, and time, and lots of things to read, and to read together.
- Mem Fox: [35:42](#) Sarah, you left out the most important one, silence. The noise of the television, it needs to be off for people to be able to sink into the other world that they need to sink into. Which is the world that the author has created for them. And imagine the peace of that. The peace of mind for the child, and also, for heavens sakes, the peace of mind for the poor, stressed, worried, anxious parents in the house. That moment of silence when everybody has the television off. They may be doing other things other than reading, but the television is off. The sound has gone, the world is more peaceful, it just feels right.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [36:42](#) Well, before we go, I would be remiss not to bring up someone we both loved very much how passed away rather suddenly earlier this year. I'm talking, listeners, of course, about the inimitable Tomie dePaola, a very good friend of both mine, and yours, for much longer than mine.

I would love to hear a favorite memory you have of Tomie who was such a beacon of light and joy, and I remember when I asked him, I was at his house and I said, "You know who I need to have on the podcast, I need to talk to Mem Fox," and he about leapt out of his chair with, of course, "You haven't talked to Mem Fox yet? What are you doing sitting here talking to me?"

- Mem Fox: [37:24](#) I remember his 60th birthday party. He was so theatrical, Tomie, and he was so over the top, and he was sort sitting on top of the grand piano singing to all of us, and it was just the way he was sitting, it was hilarious. Anyway, but he was just gorgeous. And I kept seeing him at conventions and events, and we would see each other again and again. And then at one event he was the speaker, and I decided that I would sit in the front row because I adored him. I loved hearing him speak. He was so lively and so clever at talking about his illustrations let alone his writing. Such a clever explainer of his work, and so entertaining.
- Mem Fox: [38:12](#) Anyway, I thought, right, I'm going to get there early and I'm going to sit in the front row. Well, he made me the butt of his jokes for an hour. And I laughed so hard at one point, I slid off the chair. Those flip chairs, you know they flip up and they flip down?
- Sarah Mackenzie: [38:28](#) Yes, yes.
- Mem Fox: [38:30](#) And somehow I was sliding further and further down holding my sides, and then I slid completely off the chair, he made me laugh so much. That is Tomie for me. Just a big bundle of joy.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [38:42](#) He was just a bundle of joy, absolutely. Oh, I can picture it even. And I'm sure he had the time of his life.
- Mem Fox: [38:49](#) He did. Thank you Tomie.
- Sarah Mackenzie: [38:54](#) Well, Mem Fox, this has been glorious, thank you so much for sharing this time. I hope we get to connect sometime again in the future. Thank you, so very much, for coming on the show.
- Mem Fox: [39:05](#) It's been a great pleasure.

Sarah Mackenzie: [39:10](#) 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.

Abby: [39:26](#) Hi, my name is Abby, I'm six. And I'm from Houghton, Ohio. Oh, and my favorite book is Boxcar Children and Narnia. I like [inaudible 00:39:40] because it's so easy adverturous, and I like Narnia because it's so magical.

Speaker 5: [39:47](#) What's your name?

Joshua: [39:47](#) Joshua.

Speaker 5: [39:49](#) And how old are you, Joshua?

Joshua: [39:50](#) Four.

Speaker 5: [39:50](#) And what's your favorite book?

Joshua: [39:53](#) Cars and trucks that go.

Speaker 5: [39:55](#) Yeah, Richard Scarry's Cars and Trucks and Things That Go? And who do you like looking for on those pages?

Joshua: [40:05](#) Gold Bug.

Speaker 5: [40:05](#) There, good.

Joshua: [40:05](#) And some paintings don't have Gold Bug on it.

Speaker 5: [40:05](#) Yeah, we like looking for Gold Bug.

Sam: [40:07](#) Hi, my name is Sam. I am eight. I am from Princeton, Ohio. My favorite book is Green Ember and Harry Potter. Harry Potter because it's so magical, and Green Ember because I like rabbits.

Milly: [40:23](#) My name is Milly and I'm seven years old and I live in Falls City, Nebraska. And one of my favorite books is Vanderbeekers to the Rescue, because Oliver wants a tree house sleep over.

Speaker 9: [40:37](#) Hi, my name is Simeon. I'm five years old, I live in Chicago, and I like Battle for the [inaudible 00:40:55].

Em: [40:55](#) Hi, my name is Em and I'm five years old. And I live in Rapid City, South Dakota. My favorite book is Little House

on the Prairie picture book. My favorite part is when they get together as a family and with their old, bold dog Jack.

- Speaker 11: [41:17](#) Hi, my name's [inaudible 00:41:18], I'm three years old, and my favorite book is Otis. Because he helps his friends, they're animals, and the animals help him.
- Will: [41:30](#) Hi, my name is Will, and I'm five years old, and I'm from Ohio. My favorite book is The Sailors of [inaudible 00:41:40], and it's by-
- Speaker 13: [41:42](#) Jonathan Emmett.
- Will: [41:44](#) Jonathan Emmett and-
- Speaker 13: [41:45](#) Ed Eaves.
- Will: [41:46](#) Ed Eaves, and, oh, my favorite part is when [inaudible 00:41:54] got excited.
- Charlie: [41:59](#) Hi, my name is Charlie, and I am eight years old, and I live in Nashville, Tennessee. And I like Vanderbeekers and Owl's Diary.
- Evory: [42:11](#) Hi Mrs. Mackenzie, I am Evory and I am 10 years old. I live in Nashville, Tennessee, and my favorite book is Amulet, because I think it is very adventurous.
- Hayden: [42:21](#) Hi, my name is Hayden, and I'm eight years old, and I live in Nashville, Tennessee. And my favorite books are Vanderbeekers and Anne of Green Gables. And I like it because a they're both funny.
- Speaker 17: [42:33](#) What's your name?
- Speaker 18: [42:36](#) Alex Christopher Brown. [inaudible 00:42:38].
- Speaker 17: [42:39](#) And how old are you?
- Speaker 18: [42:41](#) Five.
- Speaker 17: [42:42](#) And where do you live?
- Speaker 18: [42:43](#) In [inaudible 00:42:44].
- Speaker 17: [42:45](#) What state is that, do you know?

Speaker 18: [42:47](#) Tennessee.

Speaker 17: [42:47](#) That's right. What is your favorite book?

Speaker 18: [42:51](#) Henry Huggins.

Speaker 17: [42:52](#) And what is your favorite story in the Henry Huggins books?

Speaker 18: [42:58](#) When he throws the football into the car.

Sarah Mackenzie: [43:02](#) That Henry Huggins, I tell you. We really like the Henry Huggins audio series that is on Audible. There's several Henry Huggins stories there, and that's really fun. There's also a Ramona Quimby collection there that's great too.

So we'll put links to both of those in the show notes. I hope you enjoyed this episode as much as I did. I had such a great time having a conversation with Mem Fox. In two weeks I'll be back, this time with Alan Jacobs, who you may recognize as the author of, *The Pleasures of Reading*, and *An Age of Distraction*. He's also one of my very, very favorite people to talk with because he wakes my brain up and helps me think. We did a great episode with him last January, and I cannot wait to talk with him again about his new, upcoming book which I've gotten a sneak read of. But more on that in two weeks. For now, you know what to do, right? Go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.