

EPISODE 164: **Our Favorite Way to Read through History (and a new FREE resource)**

- Sarah: [00:00](#) So for this special edition of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast, I invited the team onto the show because we've got a brand new completely free resource for you. This is a picture book biography list that contains over 130 titles, and we've organized them by time period or type, picture book biographies about athletes or artists or musicians or inventors. This is going to be an amazing resource for you to use in your homeschool to study geography and history and science, all across the curriculum. It's completely free. To grab it just go to readaloudrevival.com/164 or text the word biography to the number 33777.
- Sarah: [00:57](#) 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 7 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: [01:48](#) Well I'm here today with Read-Aloud Revival team members, Kortney Garrison, and Kara Anderson for an episode we've been working on for some time now. So first, let's do super quick intros for anyone who isn't familiar with all of us on the team yet. I'm Sarah. I'm the founder and host of the podcast and my husband and I have six kids aged seven through 18 at the time I'm recording this podcast. We've homeschooled since the very beginning. And our oldest is a freshman in college this year.
- Kortney: [02:19](#) I am Kortney and I have three kids who are 14 and 11 and seven. And we have homeschooled from the beginning. Here at Read-Aloud Revival I am the community director. I help with research and writing and spend lots of time inside RAR Premium mentoring and encouraging all of our very excellent members.
- Kara: [02:43](#) And I'm Kara Anderson. And I have two kids, 13 and 16. This is my first year homeschooling two teens. We've

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homeschooled since almost the beginning. I actually have a story where I quit once for a little while, and then I came back to it and we started again doing it a little differently with much lower expectations. And now we've been at it ever since. And I'm the podcast manager here and I do lots of work behind the scenes, getting the podcast ready for air and research, like Kortney said, and helping with book lists and all kinds of things.

Sarah: [03:20](#) Today we're going to talk about how we use picture book biographies in our homeschools. We've actually done a picture book biography episode before. It was episode number 122 Picture Book Biographies We Love, but we're really excited because the resource we made for that episode was a giant book list of our favorite biographies. And we've expanded it, revised it and made it better than ever.

Sarah: [03:45](#) So all of our favorite picture book biographies are still listed in one place. I think there's something like 130 titles on this list currently, but the big improvement we made this time is that we've categorized the books for you to make it easier to use - more helpful than ever. So you're going to find picture book biographies sorted by time period and by category, for example, artists or athletes, musicians, inventors and explorers, scientists and mathematicians, biographies related to US history, that kind of thing. It is a fabulous resource for your homeschool. I'm so excited about it.

Kortney: [04:23](#) On our new list you'll also find out who the biography is about. Sometimes from the title it's not always evident and you can find out where in the world geographically, the story takes place. So you can tie the picture books to your geography and your history learning.

Kara: [04:39](#) So to get that new expanded picture book biography book list, it's going to go specifically with this episode, go to readaloudrevival.com/164 or just text the word biography to the number 33777. And we'll get that right out to you. I would recommend printing it out and maybe tucking it in a notebook, a binder or someplace where you can have it to make little check boxes. So you can keep track of which books you've read or which ones you put on hold at the library or whatever. It can be a really good resource for

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learning history, humanities, science, and geography in your homeschool.

- Sarah: [05:19](#) Yeah. One of the things that I love so much about it is that it's a useful list for all different ages, right? And I think we're going to talk more about this in a little bit. I want to share a little later about how I use picture book biographies at home with my high schoolers, as well as my young kids.
- Kortney: [05:33](#) So you might be wondering why we would use a picture book biography. Well done picture book biographies contain several different components, the text, of course, but also the illustration, the design of the book as an object itself, how it's shaped and what it looks like. And then something called back matter. So let's talk about each one of those in turn.
- Kortney: [06:02](#) Let's start with the text. Picture books are written with quality language that elevates the text above what we normally find in research or in our everyday speech.
- Sarah: [06:12](#) And this, I don't know, this is one of my favorite things about a really good picture book biography. Is a lot of times they're delicious to read aloud. The language is so playful and interesting. Okay. So I want to give an example. This is a new picture book biography. I'm going to hold it up. I know our podcast listeners can't see it, but you two ladies can. This one is called Jonas Hanway's Scurrilous, Scandalous, Shockingly Sensational Umbrella. It is a picture book biography about Jonas Hanway, who was the first British man to use an umbrella in England.
- Sarah: [06:46](#) So just consider this, I'm going to read the first few pages. *"London was a rainy place, no matter which way you set it. On some days, it drizzled, on others, it mizzled, on others, it pelted and showered and spat. When that happened, the only options were to stay in doors, travel by coach, or just get wet. By 1750, the people had gotten used to it. "It's just what we do," they said. Jonas Hanway did not agree. He was a grumpy man who disliked change as a general rule. When something became popular that he didn't like, he was never quiet about it. But there was one thing that Jonas liked less than change and that was getting wet."*

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- Sarah: [07:34](#) *"On rainy days, he would pull on his thickest boots, button up his sturdiest coat and throw on his largest hat. Yet, no matter how fast he walked or which route he took, when he arrived at his destination, his socks were soggy, his shirt was soaked and his wig looked like a wet cat. 'This simply won't do,' he said. So he left London and traveled the world, searching for a place where it never rained until he came to Persia and there in the court of the Shah, he saw something strange. It was scurrilous, scandalous, shockingly sensational, or was it?"*
- Sarah: [08:16](#) *"In reality it wasn't so strange. Umbrellas were ancient. They could be found in cities all over the world, but not in London. The people of London thought they were silly and foreign and frilly. 'It's not what we do,' they said. Jonas Hanway did not agree. So on one particular, mizzling, drizzling, pelting, showering, spitting day, a scurrilous, scandalous, shockingly sensational thing happened. Jonas Hanway stepped out of his house on Queen Square with an umbrella."*
- Kortney: [08:49](#) That's wonderful.
- Sarah: [08:51](#) That's all I'm going to read. It's so great. The pictures are excellent, too. The illustrations are so wonderful. They're hilarious. They remind me a little bit of Nancy Carpenter, but these ones are done by Eileen Ryan Ewan. And I should say this book, picture book biography, is written by Josh Crute. And considering that, and then comparing it to if we were to read a couple paragraphs from a dry textbook or a Wikipedia entry about Jonas Hanway, it's so much more effective and engaging. It pulls us right in. The language itself, pulls us in.
- Kara: [09:28](#) Yes. And we've so often talked about how the language in picture books is even more sophisticated than the language in those readers that you would be maybe handing your kids so you can expose them to more sophisticated language. And that is definitely a great example of that.
- Sarah: [09:47](#) Actually, now that you say that, it's a good time to point out that the language in picture books is often even more sophisticated than language in novels that we hand our kids at that age. So not just the readers, but also chapter books and novels. And of course, the reason for that is

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that publishers expect picture books to be read by an adult to a child and they expect most novels to be read by the child themselves. So they are more careful about making sure that that fits into a certain reading level. There's no such thing as a reading level with a picture book, which makes them absolutely exquisite when it comes to vocabulary and word choice, language patterns, all of that. It's elevated to a different degree than it will be in something that your child's expected to read on their own.

- Kara: [10:28](#) And of course, that's only half of it because like you said, you're getting the pictures, which tell the other half of the story. And we talk about how a picture book is like an art museum in your lap that you can gather your kids around and enjoy the pictures together. You get immersed in the story of a historical picture book too, because the art helps to take you to that time and place in a way that, a picture is worth a thousand words.
- Sarah: [10:59](#) Well, actually, now that you say that Kara, it kind of reminds me that a lot of times when I'm reading a passage from a history textbook, or trying to tell my kids about something that happened, I feel like I have to place them in time and I'll say, "Okay, this happened when... this was when people had horses and carriages. They didn't have cars," or something. But in a picture book, that information is right in front of their eyes. It kind of puts them right in that time period.
- Kortney: [11:25](#) Picture books, they seem to be immersive. We don't just read them and gloss over the top. It's like we get to dive into them. Those pictures really sort of take us in.
- Sarah: [11:37](#) Yeah. Immersive is such a great word for it because that is exactly how it feels. So the other piece, we talk about the text and the pictures, picture books are a work of art in themselves and their design is actually part of what tells the story too, the artifacts, the thing that you're holding in your hands.
- Sarah: [11:56](#) And I will put a picture of this in the show notes, but you really have to get your hand on the book to be able to see the spot glossing on the cover of this Jonas Hanway book, because of course, it's got Jonas Hanway himself with an umbrella, and a rather grumpy self satisfied look on his face. It's kind of funny. And it looks wet because the spot

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glossing with the rain drops dropping off the umbrella, makes you feel like, you can feel the sogginess of his situation, looking at the cover. And so, it's so fantastic. And that's another element that we don't get from a typical history book, but you get it with a picture book because the actual thing, the art director, is trying to make the actual book itself, the design of it, tell part of the story.

Sarah: [12:42](#) Another example of that is Balderdash! John Newbery and the Boisterous Birth of Children's Books, which is another fantastic picture book biography, written by Michelle Markel, illustrated by one of our favorites, Nancy Carpenter. And what I love about that book is it looks like an old book. The way that the pages are laid out...

Sarah: [13:00](#) the color, the heft of the pages, the design of how things are laid out, it goes back to that thing you said, Kortney, about it being immersive, because you hold the book and it feels like you're getting a different experience than you would with just words and just pictures.

Kortney: [13:18](#) You know what I just thought of is the Family Book Club we did for Miracle Man, and the text, the way that John Hendricks uses text to tell that story, too, in the picture book form. That's such a powerful part of that book.

Sarah: [13:55](#) Yeah, it's true. I think he has a new one out too on the parables of Jesus that's coming out this year. Yeah. One other example of this that comes to mind is Prairie Boy, which is a picture book biography. We actually did this one for our Family Book Club in RAR Premium. This one's written by one of our favorite biographers, Barb Rosenstock, and illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal. This is a picture book biography about architect and designer Frank Lloyd Wright. If you hold the book in your hand, you'll see that it's shorter and it's wider than many other books, and that shape of the object says something about the subject. It helps tell the story of the kind of designs that Frank Lloyd Wright did. Even if you're listening to this and you're thinking, "Yeah, but I never noticed that stuff, my kids don't notice that stuff when I'm reading," it doesn't even matter so much. It might not be something you notice overtly while you're reading, but you'll feel its impact nonetheless, whether or not you're focusing on a specific part of the storytelling, it's having an effect on you and helping tell the story in some intangible way.

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- Kara: [15:03](#) That makes me think of the book, Hello Lighthouse, which was also a Family Book Club pick, and it's long and tall, and although it's not a biography, it's definitely a not-to-miss reading experience, I think.
- Kortney: [15:18](#) Yeah. The design of that book is really special. One of my favorite parts of a picture book biography is what we call the back matter. That's after you get through the story, there's a page or two at the end, and there's maybe some more facts or research, lists of books, a story from the author about why they chose to write this book or how exactly this story came to them. There might be real photographs or a timeline or a picture of an artifact that came from that person. Barb Rosenstock is all about the artifacts.
- Kortney: [15:52](#) Let's talk more about that. We can use these picture books, we can use the back matter to help develop historic context. Last week, in our family, we were learning about apples. It's fall, it's a perfect fall time topic with no sweat nature study. Cindy, our teacher, said to us, she started telling us a story about Johnny Appleseed, the historic person, the tall tale of Johnny Appleseed is based on. John Chapman was born in 1774, she told us. And Joseph, my seven-year-old, says, "Oh, oh, that's between 1726 and 1796." And I said, "Well, yes it is." You've [inaudible 00:16:36] it. I wasn't clear on why those were important dates. I didn't teach him those dates, but he learned them because he loves Nancy Carpenter's illustrations.
- Kortney: [16:49](#) He had spent time reading. We had read aloud Balderdash! That's the 1726 reference. And Dear Mr. Washington by Lynn Cullen, and that's the 1796. He had these two books that are very important to him that he's read, that I've read to him, and that he's poured over, and he has those markers in his mind. And so when he had new information, he had a way to connect it to what he already knew. Those picture books had created a context for him to add in this new information. We did this without timelines or chanting or quizzes. He has those facts. He was given worthy things to contemplate, and he made connections himself that were meaningful. I love that so much. Also, going back to those illustrations, he can now picture what the rest of the world might have looked... Other things that were happening in the world at the time

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of Johnny Appleseed instantly because he's had those experiences through pictures, through the illustrations in those books.

- Kara: [17:53](#) That's one of my favorite things about picture book biographies, is that when you read them aloud with your kids, you know you're stepping into a time or a place with your children. You're experiencing what a real person saw, heard, felt because of that language, because of the illustrations that go with it, even because of the design. I feel like that's one of the best ways that we can build empathy in our kids and compassion. I'm thinking about the books that transport you to a different time, like Moses, when Harriet Tubman led her people to freedom.
- Kortney: [18:30](#) Oh, yes.
- Kara: [18:32](#) Even reading *The Oldest Student*, because it's a book of a woman who I believe learns to read at 100 and something years old, so you're reading her whole lifespan and how much things have changed during that time and why she didn't have the opportunity to learn to read until so late in life. And then they can also take you to a different place with much different circumstances than our own.
- Kara: [19:02](#) In the book *Emmanuel's Dream*, which I know we've talked about before, it takes the reader to Ghana, West Africa in the year 1977, which is the year that I was born. But in Ghana, West Africa, things were very different, and the circumstances that he was born into really shaped his whole future. There's such a unique way to be able to share that with our kids and really let them get this close-up personal experience with a certain time period or place.
- Sarah: [19:43](#) Some of our listeners who might be familiar with the Charlotte Mason philosophy will know that... Charlotte Mason was a renowned 19th century educator and she finds that kids should learn history mostly by lingering over the story of a single person from the past. I think that's because a really good story about one person's experience from the past, it informs the mind, but it also captures the imagination and harnesses the emotional experience. Like you're talking about, Kara, it helps us become more empathetic to really think about what it might've felt like or been like to be in that time. Doing this

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through a picture book biography where there's a feast for the eyes and a feast for the ears and the beautiful language, it really cooperates with our kids' own god-given natural curiosity to hear the stories of those who've gone before us. I think this is the power of a picture book biography.

Sarah: [20:51](#) Okay, so hopefully we've made a good case for using picture book biographies with all ages in our learning, but I thought maybe we could also talk about how to read a picture book biography. What's the best way to go about this? One thing I want to say right here at the top is I think it's important to remember that the story itself is enough. Reading a story out loud with people you love and who love you, it's always going to be the most powerful part of any kind of learning and reading experience.

Sarah: [21:22](#) I know in the past I have sometimes let myself get caught up in this idea that unless we have time to extend the learning with some kind of discussion or craft or writing essay or paragraph or something after, we read the book and then the learning comes after. But actually the principle most important part is reading together. Reading the story is enough. If you are listening to this and all you do is you go and read one picture book biography with a child this week, that is going to be time well spent. The story is enough.

Kara: [21:58](#) Sometimes a specific book captures one particular child or your whole family, and we're going to talk about that a little bit more in a minute, but when you do want to deepen that learning a little bit, open-ended questions are such a great way of digging deeper into a picture book biography. Our kids can feel like, if we ask them something like, "When did this book take place and where was that person born?" They can feel like they're being quizzed and they feel like they're being put on the spot, and then there's a right and a wrong answer. In my family, certainly, that never worked.

Kara: [22:34](#) Instead, asking them open-ended questions like, "Who was the bravest in this story? Does this story remind you of another one that we've read? Does this person remind you of another one that we've read?" The thing is we want to train our kids to become these inquisitive readers who are naturally asking questions as they're reading, and a

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great way to do that is to just have real conversations with our kids about the books and to ask questions that don't necessarily have one right answer.

- Kara: [23:11](#) Something that I think about is the book Step Right Up, how Doc and Jim Key taught the world about kindness. There is so much in that book, but I can't remember ... And my daughter and I have read it so many times. I can't remember the exact date, and they travel all over the place. I cannot remember the exact locations that they go to, but I remember that book and how it made me feel, and I remember the amazing discussions that we've had around it.
- Sarah: [23:42](#) When you think about it, just hearing you say that, where that book take place or what year, it would be something you could Google in approximately .2 seconds, right? But the deeper parts of the story and the connection, the way it made you feel and the bigger themes and the discussions that you have, that's not something you can Google or do on a worksheet, which I think is the power of those open-ended questions, so that's super inspiring.
- Kortney: [24:05](#) Yeah. We want our kids to ask questions when they read and to be delighted and surprised by the answers that they can come up with. I think we sometimes are suspicious of delight though. We think that learning doesn't really count unless we've worked hard, unless it's been hard won. I think there's a good place for grit and for perseverance, especially as our kids get older, but delight can also be a really good teacher.
- Sarah: [24:32](#) Right. I know in homeschooling my kids over the years, sometimes I will think, on our best days, I'll think, "Surely we've forgotten something important." Or on our worst days, I'm thinking, "I'm just not very good at this." But that feels like how it should be, hard, hard won. The key with using a picture book biography is it gets to feel delightful and be just as effective, even if you're having a... It's easy because you're reading a picture book with your kids, but there's so much richness happening.
- Sarah: [25:03](#) Let's talk about what that might look like at different ages. Four to seven year olds, you're reading aloud the book, maybe you'll discuss it, or you might ask your child to narrate a little bit, just something open-ended, like, "What's

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something you don't want to forget about this person?" One thing that I'm realizing is, when we ask a question with a superlative in it, like who was the most blank, or what was the most important part in this story? I know if someone comes up to me and says, "What is your absolute favorite book?" I can't answer. I'm frozen. I don't know. But if they just said, "Hey, tell me about a book you love." Ah, that's easy. I can tell you about lots of books I love.

Sarah: [25:42](#) If we approach our four to sevens not with this, "You have to get the one most important thing out of this book," but we just say, "What's something you don't want to forget about this person?" They're going to naturally in their mind go through the things that they just read, remember the story, and retrace the steps of the biography you just shared to think about what is some.

Sarah: [26:00](#) ... of the biography you just shared, to think about what is something that resonated with them. And I think that can be really valuable. Same thing, really, with your eight to 12 year olds. You can do the same thing and that can be quite good enough. But of course, there is back matter like we were talking about earlier. And back matter can be a really great jumping off point for further research and inquiry. I'm going to read you just, back to this Jonas Hanway biography I'm so smitten with. This is just a little piece from the back matter.

Sarah: [26:34](#) *"When Jonas Hanway saw something he didn't like, he was never quiet about it. Here are two more times he fought to either resist change or affect it. Umbrellas may not have been popular in England, but drinking tea sure was. Tea rooms were popping up all over London and afternoon tea was quickly becoming the new English tradition. Jonas Hanway did not like this one bit. He thought tea was a waste of money and a destroyer of health. And he wrote an angry public letter against the practice. Thankfully, Jonas lost that battle and the piping hot drink remained as popular as ever. Today, you can find his letter on display at Twinings, the oldest tea shop in London."*

Kortney: [27:20](#) That's excellent.

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- Sarah: [27:21](#) Right? That's not the kind of stuff you're going to find in an encyclopedia entry.
- Kara: [27:25](#) No.
- Kortney: [27:25](#) But that is the kind of thing that you are going to remember. Somebody is going to say that every time you get the teapot out.
- Sarah: [27:41](#) Okay, so middle and high school students. So I have two high schoolers currently at home. One who is now off in college, and we've always used picture book biographies in our history studies. The joke last year was because we happened to have so many picture book biography on our shelves about the certain period of time we are learning about last year, the joke was that every day as we are reading our history book, I'd be reading about somebody and then I'd be like, "Oh, I've got a picture book biography about them." It was kind of the joke that I have a picture book biography about every person on the planet actually.
- Sarah: [28:16](#) But what you can do is read aloud. You can discuss again, with those open-ended questions. A really good question you can ask those older kids is, should he or she have done that? With any thing that that a character, and you can do this in any story, but in a biography, you can think about one pivotal thing the person the book is about did, and then ask your kids, "What do you think? Should he or she have done that? And what might the world be like if he or she hadn't?"
- Kara: [28:43](#) That really points to when you spoke with Barb Rosenstock and Barb Rosenstock - she was on episode 151 talking about the, "so what?" of a book and talking about that she gets ideas all the time. And I think she's talked about this in our writers on writing events and the author access event that she's done, that she gets ideas all the time for biographies, but not all of them make it. And she has written a lot of biographies and a lot of great biographies that are on the list: "The Noisy Paint Box," "Prairie Boy," that you mentioned earlier, "Leave It to Abigail!", so many. But she doesn't write a biography about every single person that she begins to research. So by asking our kids that question that should she or he have done that? And what would the world be like if she or

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he hadn't? What would the world be like if that man had said, "No," to umbrellas or his tea hatred, which I just...

- Kortney: [29:51](#) Forget the umbrellas, this should have been Jonas Hanway's Tea. [crosstalk 00:29:55].
- Kara: [29:57](#) I don't like umbrellas, but I love tea. So we just wouldn't have gotten along, but I still want to read the book. So there you go. That's how you know it's a great picture book, right?
- Sarah: [30:07](#) That's right. And you do because the illustrations are hilarious. They really are funny. I'm over here enjoying them all myself. [crosstalk 00:30:14]
- Sarah: [30:23](#) When Barb was talking about the, "so what?" she was saying that when she's writing a picture book, she needs to not just tell the story of a person, but she needs to capture why the world is different since that person was here. It reminded me also that on our most recent wow writers on writing workshop, Jonathan Auxier was talking about creating a hero's journal and it was the idea of making ideas, story ideas, and capturing creativity on the page. One of the things he said to do, he told the kids to do, is to read the first and last line of novels of books because he said, "You can know a lot about what the author was trying to do with the book if you read the first line and the last line." When he said that, I was thinking, "Man, that sounds like Barb Rosenstock's, "so what?"
- Sarah: [31:12](#) So I looked through some of our picture books on our shelf, our picture book biographies actually, and I looked at that first sentence and that last sentence. And if you want to have a really interesting conversation with your kids about how is the world different because this person was here, you can read the first sentence and the last sentence, and that will give you a lot of clues to how the world is different. I think that is such a beautiful testament. You do that a hundred times with your kids when they're growing up and they are going to grow up as people who know that people make a difference in the world, that is what makes the world change.
- Kortney: [31:44](#) Oh, I can't wait to try it.
- Sarah: [31:46](#) Another thing you can do with older kids is we talked about using the picture book biography as a jumping off

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point, especially that back matter, using it as a jumping off point for a research project or an essay or a presentation or any kind of further inquiry, one of our favorite people here at Read-Aloud Revival is author Caroline Starr Rose . She's been here, I think, in every form that we possibly interview somebody. She's been on the podcast. She's been on author access for a family book clubs. She's been a teacher for our wow writers on writing workshops. And she says that her... First off, when she's doing research, is in fact the picture book section.

Kortney: [32:27](#) Yeah. That back matter is the gold, I feel like. There's so many wonderful rabbit trails just waiting to be discovered. The great thing is you can read together, but then you can let your older kids decide what element of the story grabs their interest and draws them in. You don't have to tell them. You don't have to telegraph the past and say, "Here's the most important part about Jane Austen's story." You invite them into Jane Austen's life by reading *The Ordinary, Extraordinary Jane Austen*, and then they figure out what's compelling and what's worth talking about and where the questions still are, and why Jane's life matters; the "so what?" of Jane's life.

Kortney: [33:09](#) And back matter, using it for research is somewhat related to something that Alan Jacobs calls, reading upstream. So you read the delightful picture book and then begin your research with books that that author has already read. In this way, you become a part of a conversation that's already happening. The writing that you do or that your student does that emerges from the research becomes a part of that conversation. It talks back to the original picture book and to all of the other books that were a part of research.

Kara: [33:43](#) A great picture book biography is a great way too, to start a unit study with meaning. When my son was young, he was just, he went through a phase of being so fascinated with everything birds. So we got a John James Audubon biography and he read that, and then he wanted to read more biographies about John James Audubon . The same thing happened with Abraham Lincoln. By continuing to read those different versions of the picture book biographies, and then adding in other layers, videos, other books from the same time period, even visiting locations, I have this picture of my son dressed up as Abraham

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Lincoln at the Abraham Lincoln Museum holding this little meerkat and wearing his top hat in his suit for my sister's wedding. It's the best thing ever. But it makes those... I guess I'm thinking *characters* in the books, but they're real people. But it makes them feel like friends to your kid.

Kara: [34:51](#) I wanted to mention two things. First of all, we talked a little bit about reading picture books with older kids in episode 83. So why read picture books with older kids? That's another resource, but I think that your kids will kind of let you know when a book strikes them, when a topic strikes them and when they want to go deeper. So earlier when we were talking about sometimes just reading the story is enough and that's really true and really the case. I think we get asked a lot around here, "When do you know that you should do a craft with a book?" Or, "When do you know that you should plan a field trip around a book or go deeper?" I think that the best way to know that is to just watch our kids, because if your child has a biography of Abraham Lincoln and they read it every day, that's basically the best indication that you could have that they want more.

Sarah: [35:47](#) I remember when Alison, who's now at 16, well she'll be 17 by the time this podcast comes out, she was younger. We read David Macaulay's, "Castle," and she would pour over it, just study all the pictures and then she would disappear for hours at a time, which was not unusual for her to go be working on some creative project. But when I went down to check and see what she was up to this time, she had this elaborate Model Magic castle where she was copying it. I have a picture of it somewhere. I need to go find it, but where she was copying as much as she could, replicating what she saw on the pages, which is not an easy feat. If you've seen that book, it's rather elaborate illustrations of castles. It was like she was doing her own unit study sort of. But yeah, it's watching your kids and seeing which books pull them in and which ones they just want to dip into and which ones they want to stay in linger in for a while.

Kara: [36:42](#) And that's just another argument for always having really good picture book biographies on your shelf.

Sarah: [36:48](#) I just want to mention too, one other aspect that I think sharing them with your older kids is if in your home, if

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you're treating picture books like they're for young kids, then your teenagers think that picture books are for young kids. But it is not unusual for my kids to walk into a room and see me reading a picture book or a stack of them. It's not unusual for me just to pull them out during my class time. So with my two high schoolers, during history time, I think I mentioned we'll use picture book biographies, but for example, last year we were reading about Harriet Tubman in our main history texts. So for the next couple of days, I was like, "Okay. I've got these other books." And I didn't say like, "Okay. I know they're picture books, but don't worry." None of that. I just started reading them and they don't necessarily pour over the pictures. They don't snuggle up to me or anything. That's not happening with my 15 year old son, but he's listening for sure.

Sarah:

[37:41](#)

Because picture books lend themselves to want to be looked at because you only get half the story through the words, you really do need to look at the pictures, they will naturally kind of lean over and be like, "Can I see that?" or I'll hold up the picture for a second. But if you don't approach it like story time, circle time, we're all sitting on the floor, criss-cross applesauce reading a picture book, but you approach it like, "We're going to read this story about Harriet Tubman. Listen to this," unless in your mind, if you're struggling with it, using picture books with your older kids, you can even remind yourself that what you're doing is you're reading an illustrated short story. That's what you're doing. And short stories have been high literature for as long as there has been high literature. So anyway, that might help too. If you want to use it with your older kids and you're thinking, "How am I going to swing this?" At the beginning, it might feel more uncomfortable, but do it for a while. It'll just be the way your family does things.

Kara:

[38:34](#)

Well, it reminds me of that Charlotte Mason quote that you shared and how much I've learned as a 40 something, something, something year old person. Again, that difference between the way that we were told to do it when we were growing up, which was to have a dry biography and read it and try to get some kind of interesting fact out of it and then write a five paragraph essay about it. And instead, to just delight in them with our kids. So I think when our kids, even older kids, see us being pulled in and see us...

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- Kara: [39:00](#) Even older kids see us being pulled in and see us diving into that back matter and then going, "Okay, wait, we have to look this up." I think that takes away some of that stigma too. I think part of that's leftover from how picture books were treated when we were kids and we don't have to recreate that mistake in our homes.
- Kortney: [39:19](#) Yeah. I think some of the richest rewards come to the parent who's reading aloud. I can model those open-ended questions best by just responding myself. I talk about what I don't want to forget or what the story reminds me of and that language and the evocative art, they're working on me. They're awakening my wonder and my delight. And when our kids see that, that's, what's going to draw them in.
- Kara: [39:45](#) Actually, Kortney, I want to follow up on that because I had seen a question in the forum last week where someone had said, if I asked my kids open-ended questions, for example, who was the most generous in this story or who was most cowardly in this story? They say, "I don't know." So then I don't know what to do. And you were suggesting, I think, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think your suggestion was that what you do is you say, "Okay, well, one of the," and get your answer, what did you notice? Is that right?
- Kortney: [40:10](#) Yeah. Sometimes, I think I do tend to do that, superlative question, so I might add in the extra pressure that doesn't need to be there, so I'm going to try to not do that. But I found that sometimes the conversation goes better if it's not, even just the mom asking the question and the kid answering is enough power dynamics to sort of skew things. So if I just offer my sincere appreciation for the book and talk about what I like about it, it really is just a conversation. And so I am working in those open-ended questions and I have thought about it, I'm not just saying, "Oh, it's so pretty." I do say that too, but, I'm inviting them into a conversation. Just like the book invites us in to their conversation. We can have a conversation that keeps going if I'm willing to talk about what's important to me.
- Sarah: [41:16](#) I think especially with kids who want to please their teacher, a lot of us have a couple of those, or at least one

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of those, right? My answer when I was responding to a question at school, I was always trying to gauge what the teacher wanted. And if your student feels a little hesitant, if your child feels a little hesitant to respond to, "So who do you think was generous in this story?" And then you tell them, "Okay," and they say, "I don't know," you can say, "Okay, well one person I noticed was generous was so-and-so," I was going to say Jonas Hanway, but I don't actually think that's true. You don't think he was very generous. So you could pick somebody, you could even say, "Oh, also that other person," kind of taking the bar down.

- Kortney: [42:02](#) Or even sometimes I'll even give a suggestion or an offering, as an answer that's simpler than what I think, because I want to bring the bar down so they realize I'm not looking for you to you don't have to prove your brilliance to me. I actually really just want to know what's going on in your head. And that is an invitation to conversation that's totally different than I think most of us have had when it comes to answering questions about a reading.
- Kara: [42:25](#) Well and because picture books are relatively short and we've all read them together, you can keep up with your child's reading, which we can't always do when they get to that stage where they're reading really big 800 page books and we just can't quite keep up with that. We can have those conversations very casually and you don't have to have them as soon as you close the book either. Some of our very best conversations about books of any kind have been in the car driving to and from places.
- Kara: [42:53](#) And it's because when you share that book together, it's on your mind too. And something will pop up and you'll recall it, and then you'll just start a conversation saying, "Oh, yeah, remember that where that happened." And the next thing you know, you're getting exactly what you want, which is you're seeing that your child understood the story. And they took things from the story and that they were paying attention. And that's really what those comprehension questions are all about anyway.
- Sarah: [43:19](#) Well, I have a feeling we could keep going for a while considering this is our second episode about picture book biographies, surely there will be a third. But hopefully this

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episode has inspired you listeners to read a picture book biography this week with your kids. It's inspired me. Whether it coordinates with your history studies or whether it coordinates with your lesson plans or not, it doesn't really matter. There is always so much to be gained from reading with our kids and specifically from reading a picture book biography about somebody who has gone before. Again, you probably want to nab our free book list, it's categorized by time period, by category. It lists where each book took place and whom it's about. It's just a really hefty, helpful resource, and it's free. ReadAloudRevival.com/164. Or you can just text the word "Biography" to 33777.

- Sarah: [44:18](#) Kara, Kortney, thank you. Thank you for joining me on the show.
- Kortney: [44:22](#) Thank you so much.
- Kara: [44:23](#) Anytime.
- Sarah: [44:23](#) 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. What's your name?
- Cass: [44:37](#) Cass.
- Speaker 1: [44:37](#) How old are you?
- Cass: [44:37](#) Five, I think.
- Speaker 1: [44:37](#) And where do you live?
- Cass: [44:37](#) In Canada.
- Speaker 1: [44:55](#) And what's your favorite book.
- Cass: [44:59](#) It's The [inaudible 00:44:59] Artist.
- Speaker 1: [45:00](#) And why is that your favorite book?
- Cass: [45:01](#) Because it's my favorite.
- Speaker 2: [45:01](#) Hi, my name is [inaudible 00:45:06] and I live in Ohio and I'm three years old and my favorite book is Cinderella because she gets a new dress from the Fairy Godmother.

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- Speaker 3: [45:28](#) Hello my name is [inaudible 00:45:29] I'm four- years-old and I live in Kentucky and I like the book where the [inaudible 00:45:41] the humans and the aliens [inaudible 00:45:43] in bubbles and they undo the bubbles and save the day.
- Esther: [45:50](#) Hi my name is Esther and I'm five years old and I live in Kentucky and my favorite book is The Wild Robot by Peter Brown and all of her animal friends save her from the RECOs.
- Ezekiel: [46:13](#) Hello my name is Ezekiel, I am eight years old, I live in Kentucky. My favorite book is The Wild Robot Escapes by Peter Brown. And what I like the part is when a bunch of RECOs, like a million RECOs, RECO one, two, three, four, and all those numbers. And I like it when they charge at her, and then she's like, kind of go.
- Micah: [46:43](#) My name is Micah Haygood. I am eight years old and I live in Texas. My favorite book is Robinson Crusoe. I like it because he gets stuck on an island, then he finds a cave, then he turns it into a house, but he really calls it his fortress.
- Speaker 3: [46:58](#) What's your name?
- Speaker 4: [46:59](#) Everett.
- Speaker 3: [47:00](#) How old are you?
- Speaker 4: [47:01](#) I'm two.
- Speaker 3: [47:03](#) What's your favorite book?
- Speaker 4: [47:05](#) [inaudible 00:47:07].
- Bailey Drew: [47:07](#) Hello, I'm Bailey Drew and tomorrow I'm turning seven, and I'm from Augusta, Georgia. My favorite book is Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.
- Jamison: [47:21](#) My name is Jamison, I'm four and a half and my favorite book is The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe.
- John Everett: [47:31](#) My name is John Everett and I'm seven years old and I live in Austin, Texas. And my favorite book is Mouse and the Motorcycle. And oh, that's right, because I like it

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because there's a mouse riding a motorcycle and I also like the movie.

Patrick: [47:53](#)

My name is Patrick and I'm four years old, and we live in Austin, Texas. And my favorite book is Rock.

Speaker 5: [48:07](#)

If You Find a Rock.

Patrick: [48:11](#)

If You Find a Rock. Because there's a bunch of types of rocks.

Noah: [48:14](#)

Hello my name is Noah and I am from Duncan, Oklahoma and my favorite book is Wings of Fire and why I like it is because it's adventurous, funny, and my favorite character is Tsunami.

Sarah: [48:28](#)

Thank you so much kids. You know I always love to hear the books that you're enjoying lately. So I love your messages. Don't forget to grab your picture book biography book list. Like I said, this is a resource that you will be able to use across your curriculum all year long with all ages of kids. Get it at ReadAloudRevival.com/164, or by texting the word "Biography" to the number 33777. It's free and I think you're going to love it. We'll be back in two weeks with another episode of the show, but you know what to do in the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.