

## **BCL 330 Raising Readers in a Digital World with Dorrie McKoy**

Reading is essential to any well-educated life, yet today the average American high school graduate reads at a 7th grade level or below. And even in schools, especially classical ones, where reading is central, many students struggle to read well, and even fewer love to read on their own. Unlike speaking, reading isn't natural, it takes intentional strategic teaching, and not all approaches work the same.

Join us as we explore how to build strong readers and cultivate a love of reading, both in our homes and in our classrooms. All this and more on this episode of Basecamp Live. Mountains.

We all face them as we seek to influence the next generation, get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings. We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Basecamp Live.

Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Basecamp Live. Davies Owens, your host here with you.

I know that many of you listening right now are in the crazy crunch to the end of the school year, so extra credit if we offered such a thing to you for taking time to listen in a very busy season, whether you're a parent or an educator. Kind of that rush before summer is always intense. But many of you I know listen, maybe listening here years after this was recorded, as so much of Basecamp Live is what they call evergreen content, which we love, which means you can listen to something three years from now and hopefully it will be just as meaningful.

I think that's certainly true of this episode when we jump into the topic of reading, which is always going to be relevant. And the ideas that Dori and I discuss are, I think, always rather timeless on this very important topic. Looking forward to seeing many of you this summer at summer conferences.

As always, give me a shout out info at [BasecampLive.com](https://BasecampLive.com). Love to hear what's on your mind. Love to hear your story. And always grateful for so many of you schools that talk up Basecamp Live.

It's what makes these conferences fun, is meeting people who are in schools that are actively a part of the Basecamp Live podcast community, as well as the Zipcast community. And in this episode, just want a quick shout out to Travis Cook, head of school at St. Stephen's Academy in Beaverton, Oregon, as well as to David Stanton, who is now at Hillsdale, but has been the head of school at Oakdale Academy in Waterford, Michigan. So grateful for your schools and your parents and your educators.

It's wonderful to be on the journey together. I look forward to introducing Dori McCoy, as many of you are about to hear. Dori is also my sister.

I have one sibling, and Dori is my sibling. And I'm very blessed to, as you'll hear in this episode, tribute really a lot of my own journey into classical Christian education, education at large, to her. Dori and I are both native Atlantans.

Dori went on to graduate from Gordon College, where she got a degree in elementary education and then a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of New England. She is a deep, deep expert, I would say, in the area of education and in reading in particular. For those of you who know what Orton-Gillingham training means, she is certified and trained in that.

It's really one of the better ways to teach reading. She's also, she self-proclaimed phonics junkie, which you're going to hear more what phonics are, but these are a lot of the building blocks that make reading efficient and is the best way to teach reading. Dori has taught in private Christian schools for over 20 years, half of those in classical Christian schools.

She has a deep learning, a deep, she's got a deep desire to instill lifelong learning of reading of great books. I don't know if we've ever been out somewhere that Dori isn't eyeballing books, be it at a yard sale or Goodwill or wherever you find better books these days that have been set aside by so many libraries, as we'll talk about as well. But through books, Dori has realized that you can really open doors of wonder and empathy and understanding of the world around us in ways that so many children today don't get that experience.

We're going to talk about how to make it incredible. Dori has been married for over 30 years to my brother-in-law and her best friend, Herb. They have their adult son, Alex, and when Dori is not in school, she is likely to be reading or cooking or gardening or taking a walk with her husband.

Dori is an expert in this area of reading, and obviously I'm excited to introduce my sister to you. So we're going to jump right in, but first, just want to say a quick shout out to the sponsors of this particular episode, our friends at Classic Academic Press, Wilson Hill Academy, the Classic Learning Test, and of course, Zipcast. So without further ado, here is my conversation on reading with my sister, Dori.

Dori McCoy, welcome to Base Camp Live. Hey, thanks for having me. I feel so fortunate to get to be on your podcast.

Well, it's taken only, what, eight years to make this happen. So for folks who don't know, Dori is also my sister, which is a big blessing, as I'm going to explain in just a moment. I probably wouldn't be here right now doing this podcast if it weren't for you and your early adventure into classical Christian education.

But yeah, we're so glad to have you here. And I know folks are probably wondering, our parents must have had a weird thing for D names. So Davies, and then my sister, Dori, you're my only sibling, which has been a great blessing.

And yeah, but tell folks, how in the world did you get into classical Christian education multi-decades ago? So yeah. Sadly, multi-decades ago, you're telling our age. So I first began teaching at a school in North Carolina called the Trinity School of Durham and Chapel Hill.

It was in its second year and it was a classical school, and I'd never heard of classical, but I was so excited to have a job teaching first grade. And one of the requirements for the application was to read the lost tools of learning. And it just resonated with me.

And it was unlike any teaching pedagogy I'd heard before, especially coming out of college with a teaching degree. It was just so refreshing. And most of my career that's now spanned 20 plus years has been primarily in first and second grade.

But the last couple of years I've been at the Stonehaven School outside of Atlanta, and I've been in fourth grade, which has been amazing and has just been such a blessing to me. Well, and you're at that, you've had both the perspective of many years of watching the changes that have happened in the way that all children learn and the cultural shifts going on around us. But something as basic as reading, I mean, you think about school, you think about reading, writing and arithmetic, like reading is so basic.

And I was thinking about this podcast, I thought, that's one of those questions that you just assume that reading just happens. It's like somehow children figure out how to walk, somehow they figure out how to talk. And I guess they somehow figure out how to read.

But the truth is reading is a very prescribed process. And so I'm really excited to hear you help us unpack where this practices of reading, best practices in the past, what's happening today and what we can do in the future. I'm really excited about it.

So share us a little bit about the challenges and the understanding of reading itself. We don't just wake up in our pre-K years and know how to read a Bob book. I mean, you have to actually have somebody walk you through that, right? For sure.

And just the teaching of reading over the years, even in the last hundred years, has been a fascinating journey for the United States. And if you're someone like me who loves history and finding out about reading instruction, then it truly is an interesting dive into not only American culture, but reading instruction. And believe it or not, when I came out of college in the 90s, we didn't have really any intense reading instruction.

Whole language, which is where children memorize sight words, use pictures and cues to guess the meaning of words in the texts, was kind of the predominant way of teaching reading. There wasn't really any phonics. And then when I started at Trinity, I had to learn how to teach phonics.

So I had to teach myself how to even teach phonics. And so it's been really interesting how the United States has gone back and forth between the ways of best practices and reading instruction. And thankfully, we now have hard evidence from science through brain scans and

everything else, how the brain actually learns to read.

Because to your point, it is not a skill that we were born innately with. We are born to communicate orally and not in the written form. And over 20% of kids in the classroom may struggle with some form of difficulty in reading.

It doesn't mean it's dyslexia, but it could also be another variety of other learning challenges. So we have to have a program and science is backing it up that is very systematic and explicit. Yeah.

And that's a really good point we're going to get into is that there's been a lot of debate, as is the case in anything that really matters. I think there's reading wars that are out there. And if you're in education, you can really nerd out, I guess, on a lot of these really, really big details.

But I mean, just at a high level for everybody to know, I think we all know broadly, but I was looking at statistics recently that currently in America today of high school graduates across, I guess, broad spectrum, all schools, only 37% of graduates have a 12th grade reading proficiency, which means that most of them are around seventh or eighth grade. So we are massively failing as a country in terms of teaching reading. And so then you read other research indicators like Inc Magazine that came out a few years ago and talks about the literally billions of dollars that are spent doing remedial educational training in reading and writing in corporate America, because it didn't happen in the school.

So again, this is a big problem. And I think COVID put an even bigger light on it for so many families. We saw that certainly in classical Christian schools of so many families for the first time saying, hey, we've got to do it differently, because I had no idea this was going on.

So what is typically going on today in broad American education? Because it's something we should be concerned about. If you've listened to the news at all, you've heard a lot about the reading wars, as you've mentioned. And what that really comes down to is it's either whole language learning, where again, children look at the words and the text and the pictures to try and guess the meaning versus of the science of reading, which is based in phonics, but also has other key elements that need to be included.

It's not just the teaching of phonics. So wait, first of all, what are phonics? Because people are, I mean, I think we've probably heard that, but like, what's a phonic? Sure. So phonics in and of itself is understanding the meaning that the sounds and letters make together and understanding the lettering patterns and how the letters all work together to form words.

But even before children step into the skill of phonics, they need to have what's called phonemic awareness. So that's kind of the first level of the science of reading. And that's really just think rhyming, think word and letter substitution.

So if I say hat, and then say change the first sound to a and then you say, oh, fat. Right. And so being able to rhyme is so important for early reading skills, even before children put words

together, they need to understand how to manipulate sounds.

And then the next tier would be to move into phonics, which is typically around kindergarten today. And that is understanding what the letters are, what sounds they make, what letter patterns and spelling patterns there are. And then from about second to third grade, fluency, which is the third tier, becomes really important.

And that's not just reading speed. That is putting all the pieces of the puzzle together, the letters, the patterns, the meanings, grammar, all that good stuff together, so that what you read not only sounds as smooth as the way we speak, but then from that comprehension comes. And so that's the third tier.

They're just two more. Then there's vocabulary, which children need to be in a rich vocabulary environment and parents need to read, read, read to their children. And we'll talk about that in a minute.

But vocabulary helps build comprehension. And of course, then the end game is comprehension and comprehension has to be taught. It's not just give a child a book and ask them a question or two.

They truly need to be guided through the big picture. How does it affect them? What is it like in their world? And decoding and being able to read words is not comprehension. So comprehension is the end goal of reading.

And for children to comprehend all of the elements from phonemic awareness all the way through have to be in a good reading program. And that's what parents want to hope that their schools are utilizing is something that's based in either the science of reading, along with some reading comprehension elements and instruction. And even Orton-Gillingham, which has for so long been touted as just for dyslexic children, it's now being taught mainstream in many private schools because it's so strong in teaching children how to read.

Yeah. And again, this can get very technical, but I'm excited that we're going to hear after the break get into some very, very practical because I think that's the hard thing is if you're a parent, you're just thinking this is like going in the doctor's office and having enough of a crash course in medicine to be able to help split very technical variances and how a prescription is made. It's like, well, hold on.

I thought you were the professional here. So we're not asking you to become a professional, but I think we do want parents to be at least aware because there are such dramatic differences in the way that schools and I say schools broadly teach reading and have taught it historically. So it's really, really important.

So we're going to kind of give you a toolkit for how to diagnose kind of what's happening in your school. And then most importantly, like what you need to be doing at home, because that is really, really critical. And I think, again, one of the big challenges related to reading is this

kind of outsource mindset.

Well, I hired the school professionals to teach my child to read. And now I guess I'm the hook. And it's like, oh, no, no, hold on.

There's some really, really important. You're not off the hook. So we're going to talk about that.

Yeah. Why don't we take a break actually and come back and we'll unpack some of these really important practical resources for parents. We'll be right back.

Hi, this is Dr. Christopher Perrin with Classical Academic Press. Grammar is a critical tool for a student's development that enables them to write, read, and speak with clarity, brevity, and precision. The well-ordered language series from Classical Academic Press is designed for grades three through seven.

And it will kindle the curiosity of students to learn and understand the structure of language, how it works, enabling them to order and enjoy language, all language. Visit [classicalacademicpress.com](http://classicalacademicpress.com) and use the discount code BASECAMP space live to save 20% off your next purchase. I want to take just a moment during our break and let you know about the great work that's being done by Wilson Hill Academy.

They offer a vibrant, rich, and accredited classical Christian education available to families and schools almost anywhere. With a click of a button, students join master teachers and friends live online from all over the world to engage in deep and lively discussion, solve math problems, conduct science experiments, translate Latin, deliver thesis presentations, and so much more. At Wilson Hill, students make lifelong friends and graduate well-prepared for college and beyond.

Discover what's possible for your family or school at [wilsonhillacademy.com](http://wilsonhillacademy.com) slash BASECAMP. All right, Dory, so if I'm a parent and I'm hearing all of this, I'm thinking there's a lot here that's very technical and we're going to get into what I need to do at home. But just again, real simply, if I walk into a school or I'm evaluating a school, and I know they do reading, writing, arithmetic, and I want to know about reading, like what, again, real simply, is the question that should be considered? I think it's most important for parents to ask how reading is being taught and what materials and curriculums that they're using.

And they just want to make sure that it is a curriculum that utilizes the concepts and the proven methods that are in the science of reading. And so that just is those five steps that we talked about in the first part that goes from phonemic awareness all the way through comprehension to make sure all those key pieces are being explicitly taught. Yeah, that makes sense.

All right, well, let's talk about kind of the domain of the family in the home. And I think there's just so many kind of modern challenges we face. We'll talk about technology intrusion here in a moment.

But at a basic level, what typically or ideally should families be doing? Even from when a child is an infant, parents can start reading aloud to them. And I won't get into all the technical benefits, but it sets up so many good habits. There's communication, there's bonding that happens, and children understand oral language because that's how we first learned to process reading is through listening to it orally.

And so parents need to read, honestly, several times a day to their children, not just like a book at night, putting them to bed. The more you read, the greater the impact. And there are studies showing that like children who read one minute a day have X amount of vocabulary versus children who read even just 20 minutes a day.

The exponential difference is in like the, you know, incredible numbers. And so children who are read to just are being set up for success. And that's where we see that Matthew principle coming out where it's the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer because the more children are read to, the stronger their school skills will be versus children who just don't unfortunately have that luxury of someone reading to them daily.

And I'm always sensitive. I know people listening are either thinking, I mean, the goal of the podcast is not to make you feel guilty or like, oh, I'm failing so horribly here. And certainly, some parents are like, well, you're catching me at a good time because my children are very, very young.

And so maybe I can amend some of my habits. I mean, three times a day, I don't think we're supposed to brush that many times a day. I don't know if that actually happens, but I mean, at least know that you can't overdo it.

I think that's important to know. And then we'll talk in a second about what if you have older children, you haven't done it consistently. But I think that to the point I'm hearing is that there's a real concern I have and see where the idea is that I'm outsourcing to the school to do this thing and I'm not a professional.

So you guys do your thing on reading and I don't have to be involved in what I'm hearing is absolutely that's not the way it is. And even worse, I think, are families that say, you know, they've really had a hard day. I've had a hard day at work.

They've had a hard day at school. They've been reading all day. I think it'd be fun just to let them have some video game time and sort of we'll get to that in a minute.

But reading is really critical, as you're saying. That's a pretty significant variance between readers and non-readers. It is.

And I'll have or you will have a link to just some suggestions and ways and then other people who have books and whatnot to encourage parents at home. Because read aloud is not just picture books and family read alouds are so important. And if, you know, say your family's new to the classical world and, you know, you haven't done read alouds like chapter books and

whatnot, there's never a bad time to start.

With summer coming up, it's a great time to do a family read aloud, whether you have a kindergartner, third grader, fifth grader, eighth grader. Y'all could all read together a book. You could have children take in turns.

That brings in lively discussion. Like you could even start with, you know, reading *The Magician's Nephew* or any, you know, the *Narnia* series or *The Winged Feather Saga* or something that's going to engage everybody and lead to some great family discussion. Well, and I love it.

Again, the benefits are not just all the brain science and the formation of vocabulary, but it's just time together, which is such a rare gift today in the modern world. So, you know, again, I think that maybe it's easy for busy parents to think, you know, any kind of reading is okay. So, I'd love for you to talk a little bit about just not all books are created the same.

And yes, it's great that you went to the library and you found a book and it has race cars on it and now your son really wants to read it. I mean, there's a place for that, but there's a little bit more intentionality when it comes to selecting a book. What advice do you have there? So it's a slippery slope today.

You know, when our children were in elementary school, you know, it was a little safer to go to Barnes and Noble and pick out a book with them. But today, parents really have to know what is out there. And for example, there's a series called *The Land of Stories* that my fourth graders literally just like, it's amazing how quickly they go through the series.

But the problem is, is in the sixth book, the author decided to add in one small sentence in the prologue about how the character has a gay son. And it just completely, so you go from like the six book series that now, like we have the five books, but we don't, you know, give out the sixth one because of that. And it's just, it's crazy.

So it's a slippery slope. So parents need to know what their children are reading. And even if it's a Newbery Medal winner, you still have to be very cautious these days.

I say, you know, 2005, 10-ish at the latest, you can't just assume because it has a Newbery Medal that it's a safe book to read because it is not. And of course, you know, we want to steer our children to the classics anyways. But also we need to make sure that the books our children are reading are true, good, and beautiful.

And, you know, Scholastic has really brought on a whole new genre of just crude, inappropriate books like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Captain Underpants* and *Dogman*. And they're engaging to the kids because they are crude and all those things. And even like the chapter book series that so many parents think is innocuous, *Junie B. Jones*, she's really disrespectful to adults and teachers.



And so we want to make sure that children are reading books, whether on their own or together as a family, that are positive and uplifting and just glorify all the things that as a Christian, we want to be encouraging our children to be. Yeah. And it doesn't mean that, I know this is a, you know, the other side of that argument, or I guess a continuation of it when your children get older is, you know, we don't want to, you know, you can fall in either ditch.

We don't want our children reading pagan books. You know, we want them to read, you know, good, wholesome Christian books. And then, you know, the upper school and the classical schools, and they're reading fairly, you know, pagan books, but there are great books.

So, you know, there are bigger ideas in them and there's sophisticated vocabulary. So you've got to kind of on your little book dashboard, I guess, as a parent, you've got to think about multiple things. You've got to think about like the morality or the theology of the book.

And you have to think about really, I guess, the sophistication of the structure of the wording of the book. I mean, you get a dumbed down Disney book that is very different than a classical book. So.

Correct. And then with so many graphic novels, I tell my students that a graphic novel is like dessert. So first of all, when you say graphic, I'm thinking like, you know, seedy adult book.

I mean, what are you talking about with a graphic? No, no. So it's kind of like an advanced comic book is what graphic novels are. And so they take the story and it goes into almost like caricature.

The artwork isn't, you know, usually very, I guess, elevated for lack of a better term. And just the words are more simplistic, the vocabulary, all those things for the most part. Now, I will say I've recently come across a book just written by, I can't think of his first name, but his last name is Hendricks.

And it's called The Myth Makers. And it's a graphic novel all about C.S. Lewis and Tolkien and what a myth is and how that was so important to their storytelling. So that's an example of, you know, that one is excellent.

But overall, the category, especially for younger children, and I'm talking about, you know, fifth grade and down, you have to be really selective because they're just not quality books. And again, if a child say they do appeal to struggling readers, and I think if a struggling reader, you know, really only gravitates towards a graphic novel, then I would just be sure that you're balancing it with other good quality literature that you're either reading together or, you know, just helping them to understand the value of something that's not just kind of like eating ice cream every night instead of a protein rich dinner. Well, I think the same argument is like why we don't watch so many movies, because the movie, it shuts the brain down as far as imagination and thinking through how's this scene being created.

So even to your point, if a child struggles and you read to them now, their brain is sitting there

having to imagine this particular scene that's being described. The graphic novel would obviously remove that and give them some, you know, some illustrative example, so. Yes, for sure.

And so, right, we want to activate those imaginations as much as possible. To that point, children need to have a lot more time, whether inside or outdoors or outdoors, where they just have unstructured play. Our kids are so overscheduled now.

I have so many students who go from school to play practice or to dance or to sports, and then they come home, they're exhausted and they've not been outdoors. I mean, I know the children playing sports are, but it's not unstructured time. And so there's not as much imagination activation, which they need for writing and for so many other things.

So the more parents can give children unstructured time, play outside, create forts, make things, that's so important. Well, and we're going to take a break here in a minute. I'll come back because I want to think about just how do you create a kind of reading focused home and, you know, it's just access to books to your point, access in terms of time, in terms of physically there around you, and then picking the right kind of books.

I was just going to make a comment. It was interesting. Some of us read the Epoch Times.

Some of you are familiar with that publication. I think just last week there was a full article on this very topic of the difficulty of actually finding quality books today. And there's a story of a woman named Sarah Masaryk, who as a mom just got frustrated.

She just described going to the local library and having to, you know, filter out everything. And so more and more people started asking her, Hey, what books do you have your children reading? And one thing led to the next. And she opened up her own library called the Plumfield Living Books Library.

And she's got about 12,000 books that she lends out to families. So if you're interested, I don't, it's not a sponsor here, but just, I thought that's a, that's an example of just people going, okay, enough is enough. Like it's so hard to find a book and you just, you know, you just, they're not there.

And then people don't read in general. I mean, I remember, you know, 10 years ago, you go on Costco and there's a whole book section. Today you go on there's the, I don't think they even do books.

They got rid of it. They got rid of the book section. There's so the book sections in there.

And even in what's interesting also, just like so many classical schools, the libraries, schools I've been a part of, I remember the librarian would always tell, tell us great stories of, you know, going to the public school book fair and for 25 cents or getting these unbelievable books that they're pitching so they can get, you know, the 3d Marvel Captain Underpants books coming in,

you know, it's just like, and then parents think this is great. So, I mean, we really have to fight for reading excellence. It's just a big struggle.

Well, why don't we take it? Yeah. Why don't we take another break? Cause I want to come back and again, just continue to walk through just some practical guidance. And I really want your take on you know, the, the challenges of electronic based reading.

Cause that again, seems like a lot of parents like, Oh, we read, we read, we've got audible. We've got, you know, the, you know, the, whatever the iPad book thing. So I want to talk about, there's a difference.

All right. Well, let's take a break. Cause I want to hear your thoughts on that.

We'll be right back in just a moment. Hey, Basecamp Live listeners, a recent Pew research study revealed that only 30% of millennial and Gen Z parents live within a 100 mile radius of extended family. That means that many families are missing the wisdom and support of older generations.

And more than ever, we need strong, consistent school communities to walk next to us, providing rich connection and helpful weekly tips. That is exactly why I created Zipcast. Zipcast gives schools a proven platform to communicate more personally and effectively with their parent community.

Imagine as a parent receiving a short weekly audio message from your school leadership, not just announcements, but real insights into what's on their hearts and minds paired with practical wisdom from national parenting and educational experts like Keith McCurdy and Justin Early, along with experts on classical Christian education. We even include short testimonials and parenting tips from fellow parents all around the country. You can listen anywhere and at any time.

And now with Zipcast 2.0, schools can customize their messages even more, offering a truly personal and engaging way to build connection and shared vision. If you're a school leader, not yet using Zipcast, I want to encourage you to consider it for the 25, 26 school year. And if you're a parent at a school that is not yet using Zipcast, take a moment and encourage your leadership to explore it.

It's easy to use, affordable and effective. And in today's fast paced world, Zipcast is a proven tool used by over 60 schools this past school year to deliver encouragement, insights and connections in just 10 minutes a week. We like to say it's about encouraging you on the go with what you need to know.

Check it all out at [zipcast.media](http://zipcast.media) to hold your spot as we have limited spaces available for the upcoming school year. You choose a traditional education for a reason. So why use standardized tests that don't reflect that? Basecamp Lab is proud to partner with Classic Learning Test, which offers online academic assessments that strengthen a traditional

education.

CLT's assessments for grades 3 through 12 provide a meaningful metric of students' abilities, equipping parents and educators and helping students pursue a fulfilling future. Explore CLT's assessments by visiting [www.cltexam.com](http://www.cltexam.com) forward slash Basecamp. So Dorian, when we think about just the intentionality of reading, there's so many things to keep in mind.

As we were talking about, some of it is just as basic as, well, where do you even find a book? Costco doesn't have any more. Where do you get books that are not just trash, low, low, you know, Fruit Loops level books? I mean, where do you really get good books that are also not so heavy that they're boring? Like it's a really hard thing to find. What wisdom do you have? First, you know, as you're saying, finding books can be hard because we do want to have both our schools and our homes to be literature rich, where a child can just go pick a book off the shelf, whether it's a picture book, chapter book, what have you, and they can just sit down and immerse themselves in it.

And so some suggestions for, you know, just how to get books other than like Amazon and all those things, because it does get costly, especially if you have multiple children. First and foremost is encourage your school to have a book swap. We did our first one this year at Stonehaven, and it was amazing.

And so book swaps are a fantastic way for families to literally swap books once children either outgrow them or, you know, it wasn't their thing because they don't like mysteries. And so there are books that are already curated that sort of meet the criteria that we're trying to encourage. And the other is go to Goodwill.

Goodwill has so many good books, you have to dig through the junk. But, you know, if you're equipped with the knowledge of what is a good book, and there's so many wonderful book lists out there, whether you go to Pinterest, or, you know, you just classical school reading list and those sorts of things, and you just Google, you can find just lists and lists of positive books that are true, good and beautiful. And then there are podcasts like Sarah McKenzie with her Read Aloud revival, which is fantastic for encouraging parents and reading.

And so those are just some places, you know, that books don't have to be, I mean, because the cost of a book today is just crazy, especially if it's hardback. Yeah. Well, I mean, a simple way to say it, maybe just out of sight, out of mind, if you walk in a lot of homes, and they look like, you know, show homes, and, you know, the books are there aren't even real books.

That's the new, that's always cracks me up a lot of homes a day you go in, and these are, they're just like, fake books you bought at Hobby Lobby, like, can we even get a real book that's not hollowed out to put on the shelf? So I mean, can we put really... Or I've even seen where they take the covers off so that all the covers match. I mean, it's all colored match, but yeah, it's like... Or they flip them around, so you can't see the spines. Right.

It's all just pages. It's such a tell of where our culture is today. So wait, what's that? It's a book.

Oh, it's a doorstep. No, that's a book. You should use it.

So if you walk in a home, and you ought to have easy access, so you're on board while there's a book, you know, that whole thing. Well, you know, this year, I always, I encourage my fourth graders to do what I put out a 40 book challenge at the beginning of the school year. They're to read 40 chapter books of various genres, including the Bible, throughout the school year.

And I always tell them at the beginning, I'm like, look, you're going to read more than most adults. Most adults on their own may read one book a year. And it's shocking as someone who loves to read, how you could not be reading, but the statistics are really hard and cold and just terrifying.

I think it's worth just saying, I mean, again, without causing undue guilt. I mean, the problem is here, we're talking about the all the extraordinary importance of reading for children and their formation. And then we hit adulthood.

And I think for most of us, because we just live in a cultural moment, again, where book reading is not valued. And so I think it makes it really hard when that's not our habit as an adult. And so children never see us reading.

It's a big challenge. And I think then you get into the whole world of, well, then I read on my phone. Therefore, that's how I read.

So just inject a few thoughts there, because not all words are presented equally. Yes, research is definitely starting to show all these schools were really promoting one to one instruction with all kinds of iPads and this, that and the other. And it's now showing.

And so many textbooks went digital and those things. And children and even adults do not learn well electronically. You need the feel and the touch of the book in your hand.

You need to be able to underline and highlight and put you know, notes in the in the margins. And so children, I would discourage personally. And of course, for my son, he didn't have like a Kindle or anything to like middle school.

But even then, I think they need a true book in their hands, because it's hard to keep what page you're on and just all those things. But research really is showing that the brain reads better and has greater comprehension and understanding when it is not digital. That's really, that's, I mean, that's a huge, probably shock to a lot of folks, especially when the argument is, you know, I hear all the time, well, they're on an iPad, but it's educational.

And you know, they're, they're learning to read. And it's sort of back to the thing we were talking about before. It's like a graphic novel, you know, electrified.

Yeah. Off devices, like, it's just, oh, my goodness. Yeah, just the the prevalence of kids and

devices is frightening.

It is literally rewiring their brains. They can't sit still anymore. And just, you know, as a teacher, we need children to be able to sit still and focus and, you know, engage in a book.

And the more that they're on devices and playing games, and I know we sound like, you know, the biggest fun killer, but it's that's not the point is that it literally is rewiring their brains. I think like so many things right now, you look at just, you know, as a parallel example of, you know, food in our country today. And, you know, unfortunately, you're not at a point where you can just trust that just because it's on the shelf at the grocery store, you can eat it and it's going to be good for you.

I think it's basically what we're saying is you really have to be a savvy, intentional consumer and intentional and just that sort of, oh, but they're on an iPad and you go in restaurants and every table's got kids. It's just it makes me so sad. You can take a book in a restaurant.

They won't throw you out. It's just let people know that that's an important thing. But you're absolutely right.

I remember a few years ago, I often quote Nicholas Carr, who is a journalist and writer, and he wrote a book called *The Shallows*. This was over 10 years ago and just talked about his own grief of going from, you know, 15, 20 years ago, pre-smartphone of just being, you know, could sit down and personally himself read a novel or a book and just how hard it is as an adult. I mean, it's like everybody has ADD and we just can't make ourselves do it.

So at least that's the sense. So then you just find yourself doom scrolling because that seems so much more easy, which it is. And that's part of the main hit.

Right. And that's the problem is we really have to fight against that. So, yeah, well, so to that end, I mean, what if we're if folks listening or maybe their kids are a little bit older or maybe they themselves are like, gosh, I don't think I've read a book in 10 years and I'm kind of doom scrolling.

And like, how do we how do we break that cycle? Because like anything, you can't just, you know, any habit you have to rewire. How do you get started going the right direction? Well, you know, I think it's a timely conversation because summer's right around the corner. And obviously, most many parents today are a two parent working family.

But, you know, with children having summer reading, we want to make it the most positive we can instead of like, oh, you have to read. Right. And like, oh, I hated it when I was a kid.

Like, please don't give negativity to your children about your experiences, even if you didn't like it, because they pick up on it and, you know, try as a family, be like, we're all going to read, you know, and you that can look in so many different ways. You all sit in the room together and read various books. You do a read aloud together.

You could even do audible in the car on the way to the beach and everybody gets engaged in the story. There are a lot of ways. And like I say, this summer is a fantastic way to kick start reading for your family.

And as an adult, again, go to Goodwill. There's so many novels. My husband and I always go and we go to Goodwill on purpose to get books so that they can get wet and sandy and we're not worried about them.

You know, so it's a great way just to go pick up, you know, a new novel to read for you as an adult. And while the kids are playing in the sand, you're reading. And that is such just for them to see a parent reading is so huge.

That's really yes. Again, it's so basic. This is again, and it doesn't require, you know, to eat the whole elephant, so to speak.

So, you know, I think I think that's always the intimidation is I've got to get all the way through this whole book, but just start small, read one chapter. And I think, you know, for me, you know, try and figure out, you know, even as an adult, what you enjoy reading. I know when my son was little, I always wanted him to read, you know, stories that had animals and fantasy and all that.

And he one day was like, Mom, I just really don't like talking animals. Of course, that pierced my heart because I love any story that I was talking animals just about. But he wanted more biographies and he wanted things like Chitty Chitty Bang Bang that had to do with cars and mechanical things.

And, you know, so you also do have to understand as a reader yourself and for your children, like what is interesting to them, because what interests one child will certainly not interest another. And so by reading with your child, you're going to learn those things and be able to provide a more exciting group of books for your child. Well, you know, and you're hitting on something I think really important that is worth mentioning, which is I think, unfortunately, for so many, and I would probably put myself in this category, I didn't, you know, we didn't grow up, you know, with a lot of reading going on.

And so reading, when you say the word reading to most people, it equals like, oh, the homework stuff from school. And I think, you know, classical schools can honestly maybe even be more of a danger here because the books that we do put before them rightfully are substantive and they can be harder and they can require more thought. And so it feels like when I think of reading, I don't always think of something I just immediately enjoy.

And so I think to your point, like, actually, it is okay to read books, again, not flighty Captain Underpants, but books that are about subjects that maybe you have a real interest in. And then, you know, allow that to season maybe your reading selection. So it's not just you have to read, you know, Plato's Republic every day under the tree.

So it's also important to give ourselves and children permission to put a book down if they don't like it. Now, of course, the caveat there is if it's a required summer reading book, unfortunately, you have to finish it. But in my 40 book challenge with my students, I say, you know, there's many a time I've picked up a book that I really thought I was going to like, and I just couldn't get through it.

And so I put it down. Yeah. And I but I also the caveat I give is take it to at least the third or fourth chapter, because some books do begin slowly, and then they really pick up.

But even after, you know, if, if a child gets to like the fourth or fifth chapter, and they're like, I just can't engage with this, put it down, find something else, like, there's no mandatory, every book you pick up, you have to finish. Yeah, that's a really good word. Because that looks really different in the classroom.

But, you know, for pleasure reading, which is really the end goal, because if our children read, then they not only they'll read the Bible, they will be, you know, very informed, critical thinkers in this crazy world we live in. Well, and then last few minutes, let's just maybe address educators, because I've also seen a lot of classical schools in particular have to really think about what is the proper load balance of books. And, you know, 20 years ago, I think it was just we were at a different place in terms of attention spans and energy levels for a lot of children and adults.

And so, you know, we're classical, and we read, you know, whole books, and we read all the books. And it's like, well, at some point, you're boiling the kids in the milk there a little bit with just too much. And then you fall in the ditch of well, you're just making it easy because people they can't.

So somewhere in there, we need to find, I guess, the question is, like, do we need to read 50 great books in 10th grade just to be a classical school? Could we maybe read eight great books and go a little bit deeper and slower? I mean, exaggerating there a bit, but just what's what's some words of encouragement just here to educators and schools as they sort of idealize or optimize, let's be a better word, their reading program. You know, time is always the enemy in school. I mean, honestly, it's like, I think the clock just, you know, goes on hyper speed as soon as we walk through the door at school.

We're always feeling pressed for time. And I think when we're teaching a novel, whether it's in third grade or 10th grade, as a teacher, we really need to take the time to walk through the story with the children and students and talk about, you know, what is this character feeling? Why did this happen? You know, is what would you have done like tie it back to their lives personally? I think when we just assign reading like tonight, you need to read chapters 12 through 15, and then they come in and they write about what they wrote, and you don't discuss it at all, then there's little to no personal connection. And that's where books become living is when we have a personal connection with them.



And without that, they're just, you know, droll and dreary, and especially when the language is more difficult. And children need support when reading the great books, because, you know, they don't unlock all of the great conversations and mysteries of these stories without assistance. They need a guide.

Yeah, well, that's a really in is you're saying living books. I mean, often quote Charlotte Mason, I mean, her, she was quite attuned to this and talked about twaddle, which is a great book back for I guess you would call Captain Underpants that which is just so you've got you got her categories are like twaddle, which is just mindless, unhelpful, unhelpful fluff book. And then you've got sawdust, which I think is a lot of classical books can fall into that where it's just it's just hard reading.

And you're just chewing on the sawdust going is this to what end and to your point, unless someone helps translate that sawdust and not to say all classical books or sawdust, but there's it's just it's hard. It's hard to read, especially when you're dealing with a modern distracted person who's not used to that. And those kind of habits have not been formed.

So well, we're running out of time here. I want just any final comments or encouragement on this topic of helping us to be better readers. I think for parents who feel intimidated by reading and because, you know, again, if you go back to the reading wars, parents, you know, from the last 30 years, reading, they weren't taught to read well in many places.

I can't make that as a huge generalization. But all that being said, you know, parents try and discover your own joy of reading and and just emulate it for the years, your children so that they then have a lifelong love of reading and books. And, you know, it's a process.

It doesn't happen overnight. So give your family time to adjust. If you're just starting a family read aloud for the first time, that 14 year old is not going to want to sit on the sofa and listen.

But, you know, just keep giving it time. And eventually, I think it will really become a precious family. That's a great experience.

That's a great word. Well, Dory, thanks so much for helping us just get a larger perspective on the history of reading and ways to incorporate intentional reading into our homes. It's so important.

And I know that you have seen the fruit of families that have read well to their kids and just the life change that can make. So thanks for your insights. Yeah, absolutely.

Thanks for having me. Well, you did it. You stayed to the very end of the podcast.

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