



How Books Spark Easy Projects and Play, Jennifer Pepito

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Sarah: You're listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that inspires you to build your family culture around books.

Sarah: Hello, hello, it's Sarah Mackenzie for Episode 50 of the Read Aloud Revival podcast. Boy, we have a great show for you today. I've been really excited to have this conversation with our guest about projects and play that can be sparked from books with the smallest people in our family. Before we get into today's interview, I also wanted to make sure you know we have a brand new Master Class starting very soon at the Read Aloud Revival on homeschooling those early years with purpose, passion, and unshakeable peace. I'm teaching this Master Class and we're going to be digging into bookish ways to teach your 3-8 year old at home; the kinds of things I wish I knew back when I started homeschooling. It's going to be a great Master Class and you can find out more about that at ReadAloudRevival.com or just head to the membership page, which is RARmembership.com. We have an unbelievable line up of authors for 2017's Author Access Events in membership. I mean, unbelievable!

People like Patricia Polacco, and Andrew Peterson, and Marla Frazee. Do you know who she is? She's that illustrator of *The Seven Silly Eaters*, which has got to be one of the best illustrated books ever! So, 2017 is truly going to be the best year we've had at the Read Aloud Revival membership yet. I cannot wait to show you guys what we have coming, so you're going to want to head to find out more about what's coming down the pike there. And you can see our calendar, and what's coming, at ReadAloudRevival.com. And just get a peek, and see if something there might be just the key to helping your family fall in love with books. Alright, let's get into Episode 50.

2:40 Meet Jennifer Pepito

Jennifer Pepito is one of those homeschool moms we all want to befriend, because she's still in the trenches with her littles, but she's also got big kids who've graduated, and 22 years of experience as a parent. Her perspective is priceless. A homeschool mom to seven kids, Jen is an author, a podcast host, and a speaker, and she blogs at Willow and Spring. We'll have links, of course, to where you can find her in the show notes, so head to ReadAloudRevival.com and look for Episode 50 for those. She's part of the Wild & Free team, and a speaker at their conferences. I love the Wild & Free conferences. And she's written a book called *Bountiful Homeschooling on a Budget*. And somewhere in the midst of all that, she's got a small family farm, and is an avid gardener. If you peek at her beautiful Instagram feed, you'll quickly see that Jennifer's days with her children are filled with books and projects and I'm so excited that she's joining us today to talk about just that—easy projects and play that can be sparked from



books. So please help me welcome Jen. Jen, welcome to the Read Aloud Revival.

Jennifer: I am so excited to get to talk to you. I so enjoyed hanging out with you at the Wild & Free conference, and this is really precious to have another chance to visit.

Sarah: Oh me too, I've been looking forward to this. So when we decided this would be a great episode, I thought, 'Yes, I love talking to Jen.' And this is going to be fantastic. So tell us a little bit more about your work and your family.

Jennifer: So, I have seven kids. I have a girl, girl, boy, boy, boy, girl, boy. So it's a busy, busy house and all of them live at home. My oldest daughter is a honor's philosophy student at a local university. She's really committed to trying to graduate debt free, so living at home is a good option for her.

Sarah: That's fantastic.

Jennifer: And then, I have another child with some learning disabilities, so she's working her way through college slowly. And another 18 year old who just graduated. And then four that I'm homeschooling still.

Sarah: Wow.

Jennifer: It's busy, busy, busy and fun.

Sarah: Yeah, you've got like the gamut. I love that, because I love the perspective of parents who have seen the, kind of, like, the fruit of their labor and then have younger kids where they go, 'OK, I'm either going to pivot or I'm going to do some of these things that I really knocked out of the park the first time, or these other things that I totally messed up I'm going to change.' I just think that perspective is really unique and super valuable.

4:50 Seeing the fruit of homeschooling

Jennifer: It has been really helpful for me as a homeschooler to see how well my oldest daughter has done. Because she's a really motivated person, so it's not necessarily going to transfer to all my kids, but we were busy having babies. We lived internationally (we lived in Mexico for four years helping with an orphanage) so there were a lot of years where school was pretty bad. Like, we didn't get a lot done, but we did emphasize reading all the time. There were lots and lots of books, and kind of kept electronics to a minimum, so I think that her success in school, and even her and my son's higher SAT scores had a lot to do with all the books that they've read.

Sarah: Oh, I love that! I love hearing that. Because that's one of the things that kind of plagues us, those of us that haven't had any kids take SATs or go off to college, we think 'Are we sure we're doing enough?' and we have to kind of take it on faith when we hear others say "You're doing enough! Books are the most important part, the most important piece of the puzzle."

Jennifer: Absolutely.

Sarah: So, have books and projects – has that always been a major part of your days with your kids?

Jennifer: It really has. Early on I read the Charlotte Mason Companion. I read a few Charlotte Mason books, so I was interested in her philosophy, but I also had a friend in our community who did Unit Studies with her kids all the time, so I got that big Konos book ...

Sarah: Yes!



Jennifer: ... and I can remember we were studying Orville and Wilbur Wright and we made a little airplane out of cardboard boxes, way back when we would read about the Pilgrim's and pretend that our rug was a ship, and we'd just sit there eating saltine crackers for a few hours and pretending we were in that situation. So it's just kind of always been something. I love being with my kids and I'm not always that creative, so a lot of the projects are just that – sitting on a rug eating saltines. But I just love anything that we can do together and that kind of sparks their own play is the kind of thing that we try to focus on.

Sarah: So, that's interesting to me. What are your kids, your older kids, what do they remember from those years? When you chat about what school was like when they were younger, what are the kinds of things that they call to mind?

Jennifer: You know, that's interesting. We haven't chatted about early schooling for a while. But I know that the books are what really stands out for them. You know, the projects were parts of co-ops or bits and pieces of our day. So I'm sure that if I asked them what projects do you remember, we'd have a conversation about it, but it's not a conversation that we've recently had.

7:15 Changes through time

Sarah: Yeah, OK. So, has your homeschooling philosophy changed over the years from those beginning days to now?

Jennifer: No, I think I just feel a lot less pressure. I think that I was trying earlier on to do the projects, and the art, and the narration, on top of all the curriculum and the worksheets, and in the last few years I've realized, you know, my older kids didn't necessarily do a lot of writing even, and they kind of went through the curriculum

haphazardly and they're still great writers, and so now I can enjoy the stuff, like writing and projects and art and making sure that we still focus good on math, but I don't feel as scared about missing out on something or not doing something. So, if I look at a grammar worksheet and it's all about nouns, we might talk about nouns, and just skip that lesson, skip the written part of the lesson, for instance.

Sarah: OK.

Jennifer: So we're a lot more freedom. And the freedom just allows more time for the stuff that we love which is reading and creating.

Sarah: I love this. This is why I love having friends who have kids that have graduated, because they'll look at my plans and go, "Uh, Sarah, you don't need to do this, and you don't need to do that." Those things that I'm not really confident yet enough ... Now as my oldest get older (so, my oldest is going to be a freshman this year) and we have this second batch of kids that are younger, I kind of feel the same way with those very early years in kindergarten, preschool, I felt a lot of pressure to make things really – how do I describe it – like, if we were going to read a picture book about penguins, I'd also have penguin posters on the wall, and I wanted to do a penguin craft, and I wanted all of these things to be really super coordinated, and I put a lot of pressure on myself to, kind of, coordinate their learning instead of just reading really good books to them and leading a really rich life with them, which is what I have the confidence to do now, you know, that I've seen what really matters, I guess.

Jennifer: Yeah. It's interesting too, one thing I really love about the Wild & Free message is just that there isn't necessarily a right way to



homeschool. And if your family is lead to really focus on Latin or classical studies, then that's awesome for you. But if your family is lead to focus on music then it's OK to not do that. The world needs more, a bigger variety of people, and learners and creators, and we do that by following interests, rather than this absolutely prescribed course of study.

Sarah: Exactly! It's more about being authentic to who you are, that God's made you as a family, rather than following any particular philosophy, right?

Jennifer: That's what I believe.

9:50 The special play that books can spark

Sarah: So, what are some books that have stood out to you over the years, as being especially memorable because of that play that you're talking about, that books can spark?

Jennifer: You know, there's a lot of chapter and picture books. I know one picture book that I love is *A Time to Keep* by Tasha Tudor.

Sarah: Oh yes! I love it. It's a gorgeous book.

Jennifer: Yes, and there's a mother who could put us all to shame with her creativity! But even just a few of the small projects, like we read *A Time to Keep* and we put on a little doll fair for somebody's birthday, and so we put on a doll fair, people could bring a beanie baby or whatever, and we had some little mini carnival games, that you had to pay a penny to play, and there were some little snacks, so everything was kind of miniaturized. But it wasn't Pinterest worthy, it was just so fun and creative, and it's definitely a memory that stands out for all of us. And that was sparked from the book, *A Time to Keep*. And

then, of course, the *Little House on the Prairie* books are just full of ideas; buying a little bonnet, and blowing up a balloon and pretending it's a pig bladder. There are some interesting things that they did in those books, but it can definitely spark a ton of fun projects.

11:00 Pinterest worthy projects

Sarah: Yeah, one of the things you just mentioned that I think is so important to remember is we do put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make things "Pinterest worthy" or "Instagram worthy" or we see other people's pictures and think, 'well, if I'm going to do this right it has to be gorgeous' but some of the best experiences we've had that have been sparked from books, as far as from the play that it's inspired, or the family memories we've made, have totally been super simple and casual. So, I'm remembering that when we read *On to Oregon* oh, gosh, years and years ago, it's a book about these kids who are traveling the Oregon Trail (it's actually based on a true story), about kids that are traveling the Oregon Trail without their parents because their parents passed away early on and after that my kids would turn their chairs upside down and that would be their wagon, and they would play for such a long time and pretending they were in the wagon train basically. So it wasn't, it definitely was not Pinterest worthy, definitely was nothing I coordinated or created for them, it was just that story sparked something that they were able to live out, which was really fun.

Jennifer: Really, for me the point of doing projects with my kids is not so I can take a good picture ...



Sarah: What??

Jennifer: ... the point for me is the connection. It's all about the connection. If my kids are having fun, that's perfect; if I'm having fun connecting with them, even better. If it takes me hours to prepare for it and I have to be grumpy and ignore them the whole time, it's totally not worth it. So, for me the projects are really all about connecting with my kids and developing memories with them, and then even giving them the ability, you know, I feel like there's going to be, from all these kids who are being homeschooled or being read to often, there's just going to be an explosion of creativity because they have all these stories going in and so, I feel like we can start to influence media, and art, and music because there's these people who have had all this great, lovely input and eventually there's going to be some output from it. There's going to be movies, and books, and music, and I think that we're already seeing that. Even, actually, my 15 year old just wrote his first young adult fiction. It's called *The Fire Trolls* and that's, really that story came out of all the stories he has read.

13:00 Wisdom from Andrew Pudewa

Sarah: Right. It's exactly like the very first podcast we ever did at the Read Aloud Revival was with Andrew Pudewa, and he was talking about how we can't expect great things to come out of our kids if they haven't had a lot of rich and wonderful language and stories put into them, basically they need to internalize it first before they can be creative. It's that whole idea of needing to imitate greatness, right? Like, we need to imitate great writers and imitate great artists before we can really have our own legs and be super creative.

Jennifer: Absolutely.

Sarah: That's really great. I love how you say, too, that the point of the project is to connect with your kids. Tell me more about that.

Jennifer: I feel like connecting with our kids is probably the best antidote to any of the social ills that people struggle with. I read the book *Hold Onto Your Kids* a year or two ago, and it really was just so impactful for me to realize that even my seven kids are all birth kids, that even in birth kids there can be attachment issues, and when kids aren't well attached to their parents, they're not as interested in carrying on the values of their family. So, what projects do, is it gives us a starting point for connection, something that we're doing together and really, there's a lot of stuff that we do together. We do gardening together, and we read together, that's not necessarily a project, but anything we do as a family where me and the kids are creating happy memories together means that later on when it's time to choose which peers they want to connect to, they're going to be well-bonded with us and our values and it's going to be easier for them to reject values that aren't necessarily the ones that fit with our family.

Sarah: Exactly. OK, so you have a post on your blog where you talk about your son learning to read and making it active. Can you share a little bit more about that?

15:00 Making learning to read more active

Jennifer: Yes, absolutely. I had some readers who are very reluctant and some who are as easy as can be. So, my first child an easy reader, reading chapter books when she was seven, or whatever. The next daughter really struggled, so we ended



up researching all kinds of different methods for helping her to read because her auditory processing was so bad that she really couldn't do phonics and we had to do more sight words, and that kind of lead me into researching Montessori, because Montessori does a lot of hands on work for learning to read; a lot of writing in salt, and matching objects to words, so we've even incorporated a lot of that with subsequent kids, especially my boys, because my boys don't love to sit for a long time, and my youngest is seven, I've been more laid back with him for a lot of reasons. So, for him, reading practice is a lot more fun if I'm flashing a word and letting him hop forward for every word that he gets, or if we're doing an object match where I collect all the Playmobil animals from around the house and we match up the word with the animal or for an earlier reader matching up the phonogram with an object. So any kind of opportunity where you can get them moving a little bit, I don't know how many five, six, seven year olds really there are geared toward sitting for hours at a time, even some curriculum is a little bit better for an active kid. Like Explode the Code there's not a lot of instructions on the page...

Sarah: Yeah.

Jennifer: ... so it's really a great one for a boy to get some phonics practice when you're too busy to play an active game with them.

Sarah: I so agree.

Jennifer: That happens.

Sarah: What about co-ops? I know you've talked a bit about incorporating play and book based projects into co-ops. Can you share some ideas or some thoughts on that?

16:40 What about co-ops?

Jennifer: Yes, I think co-ops are so essential, especially if you're homeschooling. There's a lot that our kids do need from other people. And for me, I am not that creative of a person, so what the co-ops do is they help me be accountable for doing book reports with my kids, they help me be accountable for some of those science experiments that I might naturally veer away from.

Sarah: Yeah, like anything messy.

Jennifer: Yes, yes, yes. Messy or that requires reading instructions, or that requires blowing up my house. Yes, so the way I've done co-ops, I've just chosen a few friends that my kids click with, and then we set up a schedule for the year, and we choose some kind of a spine. So last year we did ancient history and for our family, we mostly just read really good literature geared around ancient history. But then every other week we'd get together with some other families and the kids got to do oral reports and we did some awesome little projects; we had a really good Greek feast while the moms sipped a little authentic beverage from the period.

Sarah: I like the sound of that!

Jennifer: We made a shaduf, which is like this Egyptian contraption that they use for irrigation, so we did some fabulous projects but it wasn't hard and it was only every couple of weeks, and our kids got some time to play with friends, so I don't think co-ops are hard to start, and I don't think they have to cost a lot. I really believe that every family could find a few friends who wanted to learn with them; it just takes a little organization ahead of time to decide what you're going to learn, when you're going to meet, and



who's going to be in charge of what areas of study. It really makes those time periods or those science studies so much more memorable when they get to do a project around it.

Sarah: Yeah, I agree. And I need the accountability sometimes, because I kind of default to the “oh, that sounds like it would take too much work” even if it's not that big of a project or activity that might kids would really enjoy. But if we're doing it with friends, there's something about that accountability that makes it easier, and just gets me going and to do it. I'm thinking in particular, we did a DEAR Day (Drop Everything And Read Day) to celebrate Beverly Cleary's birthday on April 12, and just knowing that we were having friends over that day, we didn't have to do anything spectacular, we didn't do a lot of planning; in fact we pulled most of it together the morning of the event, but just knowing they were coming made us actually do something that my kids will remember, we actually made memories together, instead of me just feeling like, 'Urgh, I'm behind on laundry, and still haven't figured out what we're doing for dinner, and forget it, we're just not going to pull that off today after all.'

Jennifer: Yeah, I think that's a big part of the co-ops; especially in the earlier years when my kids were younger. It's getting easier now for me to do exciting things with just my kids without that accountability. But when there were babies around it would have been easier to just forget about projects altogether but because I had a co-op and we were all going to pretend we were Native Americans and grind acorns and start a camp fire together, there was a motivation to make sure we did some studies around it so we knew what we were talking about. So that's another part of co-ops for me, is that it keeps me

accountable to read the material in-between because if I know that we're doing our science experiments or our Native American studies, whatever it is, I'll make sure we get the reading in, so my kids know what we're doing the projects about anyhow.

Sarah: Right. Right. Let's talk specifically about preschoolers and ways to kind of extend picture books. One of the questions we get a lot at the Read Aloud Revival is 'so I read to my preschool kids, and we love reading, and is that enough, or what do I do after, or how do I know what to do next with the books?' So how would you answer that question?

20:20 How can you extend picture books?

Jennifer: That's such a fun question for me right. I'm actually writing a course, right now, it's basically a 26-week course for the 26 letters of the alphabet and each week has several books based on the letter along with projects. So, for instance, for the letter A, one of the books we're reading is How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World.

Sarah: Oh fun, I love that book. It is absolutely one of my very favorites.

Jennifer: Absolutely. And that book is full of good project ideas. OK, so they visit all these countries. So even just pointing out all the countries on a map, or of course they make an apple pie, so giving your child a little experience safely with a peeler, helping them learn how to peel a carrot is probably an easier starting point, giving them the opportunity to smell different spices, because collecting the spices is a big part of the book, or talking about animals and the different products that come from them. They go



and collect a cow, and I think they collect the whole chicken actually, so there's so many ... what I often do is when I'm reading a picture book, I'm kind of like, logging in my mind a few ideas or I'll even go through the picture book afterwards and jot down a few ideas, so it may not happen naturally when I read the book and then we just jump into the projects, I might need a little bit of time to brainstorm. But I think so many projects, or so many picture books are great sparks for projects. Another one is A Tree is Nice, so reading the book A Tree is Nice and then going out and collecting leaves and trying to identify what tree they came from, or making a leaf rubbing or using a book like, Look What I Made of the Leaf and making a collage out of leaves. There's just so many ... picture books are always imagination sparkers. So, pulling them off your shelf and maybe just glancing through them before you read and jotting down ideas.

Sarah: Do you have any places in particular that you go to get ideas, or do you just actually look through the picture book and then brainstorm from there?

Jennifer: I actually, maybe, every once in a while I'll check Pinterest, but I often don't have time to get on and look at that, so really, it's more often just reading the book. Another one is Stone's Soup, so we'd read Stone's Soup and I'm lazy, I don't want to make dinner that night so I throw soup bones in the crockpot and tell all the kids to go gather stuff and chop it up and put it in. I am a pretty busy mom with all my kids and all the yard work and all this stuff going on, so I'm not so good at researching on Pinterest ahead of time and making up projects, but I think that's a good idea if you have the time. But I think books themselves, when you read, if you have an eye toward what's happening and what could be

sparked from it, I think that the projects are just waiting to be discovered.

Sarah: I love that because so often I think we get tied up in the planning. Well, I can't do projects on How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World because when I went on Pinterest and I saw what other people are doing, now I have to make this long shopping list because I don't have all the materials I needed for that particular project, but if I just read the book with my kids and I saw spices, 'oh, you know what, let's go and see what spices we have in our kitchen and we'll just smell them all and talk about them, and maybe we'll make apple sauce and put which spice do you think smells like it would taste the best in here?' Things like that, that you're totally just reading the book, you know your home, you know the supplies you have at home, you know what your kids are able to do, so instead of getting lost in this big Pinterest goose chase, which is enough to make me stressed anyway, and also can just add more to your list if you're feeling like, 'Now I have to go shopping to get the supplies for this big project.' I guess the question I have for you is if parents are a little overwhelmed with the idea of adding projects to their life, especially with little children, how would you suggest they get started?

24:15 Getting started with projects

Jennifer: Wow, I think that really observing our kids a little bit and seeing what they're already doing, is a good place to start with ideas. And for sure there are books out there like, that big Konos or the Peaceful Preschool curriculum that I'm writing, or the Five in a Row books are another set of books that have great ideas based on picture books. So, going on Pinterest or



reading a book, but the problem is, sometimes we as moms get so busy with the planning and the researching that a lot of that time that we could be connecting is lost and your kids are really better off at having you look them in the face and chat with them about what they're doing or if you see them playing with water, getting out a pot and couple of measuring cups and play with water with them, they're better off having you than all the fancy ideas. So I don't want to discourage people from finding project ideas but I think that it's something that can be done, you know, in an hour in the evening when they're all asleep and you just make a whole big list of stuff, but really, like I said earlier, projects are just all about connection, so if you're having to spend all day long looking at Pinterest and then making a supply list and shopping for everything, then you've lost a whole day of connection, and what that means is that your child has lost the opportunity to know that they're valuable and precious to you because instead of looking at them and enjoying them, you're enjoying your screen.

Sarah: Exactly. So it's basically like what's the simplest and quickest way you can make a meaningful connection with your kids over this book, rather than what's the most fantastic project we could possibly do about this book.

Jennifer: Absolutely. I couldn't have said it better myself.

Sarah: So, projects then, don't have to be big or grand to count, right? Do you have some memories you can share about smaller projects you've done with your kids?

Jennifer: You know, we were out one day on our property cutting down trees. It had to be done, it was an invasive tree. So we had all these big logs

and my husband brainstormed and started stacking the logs around a tree, and made a teepee.

Sarah: Oh fun.

Jennifer: It was completely a part of what we were doing anyhow, and because my husband and I read a lot of books we also have great ideas in our heads. You know, another one, we swim in our swimming pool, and we will pretend that we're explorers in the Endurance, we'll get in a little plastic raft or something, and somebody will come along and pretend they're a polar bear trying to knock everybody out. Really, because we read, and we have stories in our heads, I think the projects are a fairly natural outflow and a definitely it's more 'I just read Little House on the Prairie or Little House in the Big Woods and they were making maple candy, so let's stop by a store and buy some maple candy and pretend that we made it from scratch, or they made butter, so let's throw some cream and some marbles in a glass jar and shake it up really good and make some butter. So, it's definitely not a lot of planning going into this, but it is just being aware – having a mind that's looking for opportunities to interact with your kids and to create special memories with them. And because we do projects with them I see them doing so many more projects on their own. Yesterday I came home and my kids had built this giant beanie baby colony, just like stacked up all the benches, and there was a place for the undersea creatures and they were all there. Kids are naturally so creative, that they're not going to necessarily need a lot of help figuring out their own imaginative games. So, even if you just have to start somewhere, just start reading picture books to your kids. Just turn off the tv or the devices and start reading picture books, and I



think that as you get a mind that's more geared toward absorbing quality literature, and then having some output based on that, it's going to be an easy, it'll start to flow when you create that time. But when we're always zoning out, then there's really no time to brainstorm for something fun or interact with our kids in that way.

Sarah: Right. And it doesn't even take that much time, it's just that if we're not paying attention we miss. I'm thinking of Donald Crews' book *Freight Train* and my boys love books about trains. And all I have to do really is take the dining room chairs and put them in a line in the middle of the living room and say, "All aboard!" and I mean, they're on it!

Jennifer: Exactly, exactly! And from that point, they can get some toy animals to go on the train with them, or they can pretend that they're heading on a train trip to South America, whatever it might be. A big part of the projects is also sparking imagination in our kids. And I've talked to a movie producer and asking her, and a videogame developer, asking both of them what the best component of being successful in those fields were, and in both cases, it was story. And so, as we give our kids story and also give them some opportunities to act our story, then they are developing the skills that they need to someday be these media influencers or great writers, or whatever, eventually the goal for all this input is some creative output, and we're doing that in small bits when they're small children by reading the books and sparking a little project, and then they can take it from there. But, like I said earlier, when our time is all taken up with researching the projects or buying elaborate materials for the projects, it means that we're not connecting.

29:30 The place of screens

Sarah: Exactly. As you were talking one of the things that just flew into my mind was from the picture in *Little Women* of the girls who are acting out stories, that was what they did for fun. Talk about the opposite of going on Pinterest and researching some elaborate project. They were the stories that Jo herself wrote. They were acting them out and that was their play. And so if we give our kids the time and space, and then you made another point that's really important, it's not just giving our kids time and space but it's also turning off the devices and the screens. Maybe not 100%, we don't have to be complete Luddites, go completely extreme, but limited their time in front of the screen in order that they have more opportunity to engage with books and play that's based on those books.

Jennifer: Absolutely. I think you're the first person that I've ever actually heard, besides myself, to use the word Luddite. Which means we're both well read, right?

Sarah: That's too funny.

Jennifer: Yes, absolutely, that's it. It's not like the tv and the computer has to be off forever, but it's just being aware that they're not going to create anything if they don't have a little bit of empty space. And the books are there in part to generate noble and lovely and exciting and interesting ideas about life and humanity and about what can be done, there's so much good that can come from a little bit of free time, really. And that's not free time where they can do anything they want, but free time where it's books or play but it's not a screen because really, screens are just so absorbing, it's hard to step off yourself, it's even hard for some of us as adults to step off ourselves and go do something else.



Sarah: I was just re-reading Jim Trelease's *The Read-Aloud Handbook* and in that latest version, he talks about it is impossible for a parent, even an adult - not just a parent, even an adult, if there's a car chase scene ... maybe it wasn't in that book, maybe was in another book I'm reading, anyway, basically there's a car chase scene happening on the screen and you're reading a really engaging book, it is literally impossible to keep your eyes on the book because the screen is so overwhelming, it overwhelms your senses that you almost can't will yourself to pay attention to the book even if that's what you want to do. And those are grownups. And thinking about how much more powerful that is for our kids.

Jennifer: And it takes some effort. It takes some effort from us as parents to not just take the easy route because it is really easy when our kids are totally engaged in a video game or a device or whatever, to let it be, but the problem is our attention span that makes it possible for us to read the greater books of literature or absorb the vocabulary that is really needed to do well in SAT score and then get some scholarship money or get accepted to the school you want, that comes from reading the great books, and so it's really important that we make time in our kids' lives and keep the devices off enough so that they can develop that attention span they need to be readers.

Sarah: Yeah, and I've noticed lately that it's only easier for me for a very short period of time. So it's easier for me to put my little kids in front of a tv show so I can make dinner in peace but I can guarantee that every time I do it they will be more unruly during dinner if they've just finished watching a show, than they would be otherwise. So I feel like it's a trade off. It's kind of easier for a

very short time, and then we pay for it afterward. Because coming out of watching the screen can be kind of a painful thing.

Jennifer: Right, except you know the one exception I would say about tv shows for little kids are those scholastic shows. Have you ever seen those?

Sarah: Are they like books read?

Jennifer: Yes!

Sarah: Yes, OK, Yes!

Jennifer: So, something like that where it's a little bit quieter and actually is a picture book.

Sarah: It's like they read aloud for your children, yeah.

Jennifer: Exactly. That might be a good way. Because I know those early years when you're trying to make dinner is just like, it's really hard to do anything but somehow hypnotize your children so you can cook the dinner.

Sarah: Yeah.

Jennifer: Something quieter. We tried, like, also the signing time videos.

Sarah: Yes, we love those too.

Jennifer: Nature videos. Although sometimes nature videos they try to make them so dramatic that they're as scary as a Marvel movies or something.

Sarah: I know. Some other really slow, quieter shows are *The Little Bear* series, because they move at a much slower pace than say, *Sesame Street*, and so it's easier on your child's senses, I think.

Jennifer: Yes, and I think that's important just to be aware that if you're going to give your child



screen time there are better and worse things that they can be involved in, that are going to help them be more calm.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. So in Episode 43 I talked to Dr. Daniel Willingham and he wrote this book called *Raising Kids Who Read* which is a fantastic book. One of the things that he made a comment about in that podcast and in his book, is that devices and screens aren't necessarily something that we need to abolish but you do need to give your kids periods of time where they're not an option, because even if you're child's an avid reader, it's hard to work up the will to read a book when there's another easier option. He made the metaphor, he described it with this metaphor of his children love watermelon and if he offers his kids watermelon for dessert they'll be pretty happy, but if he says you can have watermelon or candy, his kids are probably going to choose candy, because it overwhelms your senses just a little bit more. So, with your screens, one of the things I've been trying to remember with my own kids is that if there is at least a period of time every day where screens are absolutely not an option, we're just making it easier for them to choose books, or to choose to play, of course will be sparked by the books they've been reading or that we've been sharing with them, and so I like that approach, because it feels a lot more doable for me as a parent than just saying, "We're not going to do any screens at all because they're ruining you."

Jennifer: Absolutely, having some kind of balance. Even as the adults that we say, "OK here's our screen-free time" so that we can read a book or plug in your phone away from your bed because even as adults it's easy to be just sucked into what's on Facebook even though none of it is interesting...

Sarah: Exactly.

Jennifer: ... instead of reading a book, because it just takes a little more effort to pay attention to a book.

Sarah: Yeah, especially to get started. So is there anything else you'd like us to know or could encourage parents who would like to see their kids play more based on the books that they've been read?

Jennifer: I think being willing to let them make a mess is really important. If your goal is all about having your perfectly organized space, then it's going to be harder for them to have their fun. So even though the book, *Little Men* I love that book for the little scene where Daisy gets a toy kitchen and it's not even a toy, it's a real, working kitchen, where she's cooking pancakes and steaks of all things for her friends. So we have a little porch that is the kid's play area, they can make mud pies all they want back there. You know, having areas in your yard that are set aside for your kids to make messes, letting them build a tent fort if they need to, to act something act. You don't have to manage every project, but letting them have a little space to make a mess, if needed, for their project is important even though it's painful sometimes.

Sarah: So good though, so good to remember. And it goes back to that main goal which you said was to connect with our kids. So, if that's the goal and to give them the space to be creative. Nobody ever became a creative genius without making a lot of messes along the way.

Jennifer: It's true, absolutely.

Sarah: So what's the best place for people to go to get more from you to find out about your



Peaceful Preschool ideas and to just connect with you?

Jennifer: Yeah, so we have a website, it's the PeacefulPreschool.com and the course will be available there. The Peaceful Preschool course is all about setting up a learning environment so you don't have to do everything with your kids. We want to connect with our children but I can't, with this many children, or with other things going on in my life, I can't do every single learning activity with them, so it's really important to me to try and set up our home where it's a rich learning environment; where they're lots of books to choose from and opportunities for science experiments and creativity. So, the Peaceful Preschool course, you can find out about it through the PeacefulPreschool.com and then my Jennifer Pepito Instagram is a great place to connect with me. It's really easy; I love Instagram. It's easy to post on there and kind of encourage people with what's happening in my life without being super weary. I would like to be a more consistent blogger, but boy, that is not as easy as being on Instagram.

Sarah: Exactly.

Jennifer: And I really like connecting with my kids and making jam and growing zucchini's and peaches that are overwhelming me right now, so some things got to give and it's not going to be my kids.

Sarah: Absolutely. Love that! So good. Thank you so much for coming on the show, this has been really encouraging and inspiring for me, and we'll make sure we have links to all of Jennifer's best resources; her Instagram account ThePeacefulPreschool.com; all that good stuff, in the show notes, so head to

ReadAoudRevival.com, click on Episode 50 and you'll be good to go.

Jennifer: Thank you Sarah, I so enjoyed it.

38:40 Let the Kids Speak

Now it's time for Let the Kids Speak. This is my favorite part of the podcast, where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read aloud to them.

Child1: Hello, my name is Brooke, I am six years old and I live in North Carolina. I love the book, The Velveteen Rabbit. The Velveteen Rabbit is a stuffed animal who is so loved that he becomes real. I have a bunny too that used to be pink, he is now red. He is still my favorite bunny, and I sleep with him every night. My favorite part of the story is when the fairy saves the bunny and the bunny becomes alive.

Child2: Hello, my name is Lance I am eight years old, I'm from North Carolina. One of my favorite books is The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson by Bette Boa Lord. I like it because it shows you what it feels like if you're a farmer in a different country. The main character comes from China and she has a hard time trying to fit in. My favorite part is when she is playing baseball and her team mates tell her to run home. Instead of running to home base, she thinks she is supposed to run home to her farm. She also uses a lot of humor in the story like this.

Child3: Hi, my name is Reese, and I'm four. I live in Maryland. My favorite book is Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus cause it makes me laugh if you say no.

Child4: My name is Anthony. (Mom: And what's your favorite book?) Richard Scarry!



Child5: Hi, my name is Kate and I am seven years old. I live in Pearly, Missouri and my favorite book is Magic Tree House book 23, A Twister on Tuesday. I like it because Jack and Annie help save their friend to get to the cellar.

Child6: Hi, my name is Rox, and I'm four years old and I'm from Colorado. My favorite books are the Little Mermaid Books because she has a baby sister and that's because I have a baby in my family.

Child7: Hi, my name is Reagan, and I'm five years old, and I like Fancy Nancy, The Fanciest Dog in the Universe because I like it because it makes me happy. (Mom: Where do you live, Reagan?) Texas.

Child8: My name's Felicity, I'm 12 years old. I'm from Houston, Texas and I really like Till We Have Faces by C. S. Lewis. I really like Psyche. She's a really good character and she's a very good example of humility and love. And I really like it.

Child9: My name is Joe. I'm four years old and my favorite book is Saint George and the Dragon. (Mom: What do you like about Saint George and the Dragon?) I like the part when it gets killed. (Mom: When the dragon gets killed?) Yes.

Child10: Hi, my name is Regina. I'm six years old and I live in Houston, Texas. My favorite book is Muncha, Muncha, Muncha because the bunnies always steal the gardeners.

Child11: Hi, my name is Colette. I'm eight years old. I live in Houston, Texas, and my favorite book is The Green Ember because there's a lot of good adventures.

Sarah: Wonderful! Thank you for your messages kids. Those are my favorite. If your family hasn't left a message yet, be sure to do that. We air every message in the order we receive it, and

remember, you can have your child repeat after you, or read off a page, or do anything else that will help them. We edit and clean up those messages before they go on air. So definitely don't feel like the message has to be shored up and perfect, you know, to send it. It's so much fun hearing about what our young Revivalers all over the world are reading, and I want to hear from your young Revivalers. So, you can do that at ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page there and you'll find out how to leave a message.

OK, if you have not yet gotten the Read Aloud Revival booklist you should do that. It's free and we worked really hard to carefully curate what we think are the very best books for you to share with your kids. You can get it for free at RARBooklist.com. And then remember that the show notes for today's episode, all the links Jennifer and I talked about, books we talked about, those are all in the show notes. You can go to ReadAloudRevival.com. Look for Episode 50 and you're good to go. Thank you so much for joining us. It is truly an honor to chat about books with your families. Until next time, go build your family culture around books.