



## *Episode 4 - Cheat Sheet*

**Tips & Tricks for Reading Aloud**

**Guest: Jim Weiss**

<b>Meet Jim Weiss</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>In this Episode</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Cheater's Guide</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Major Takeaways</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Show Notes</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Action Plan</b>	<b>6</b>

## Meet Jim Weiss

Jim Weiss is the master storyteller behind [Greathall Productions](#). Since 1989, Jim has been producing award-winning audio and video recordings for children that bring classic literature, mythical tales and history to life. Jim and Greathall Productions have received more than 100 major national



awards. In addition to recording fabulous stories, Jim also gives live performances in libraries, stores, schools and community events around the world, and has even performed at the White House.

## In this Episode

In this first of a two-part interview (see [Episode 5](#) for part two), Jim shares tips for creating character voices and engaging stories, and he reminds us it is not important (or even possible) to be a perfect storyteller.

Jim also discusses the importance of telling stories that we love (or our audience will sense our dislike and will follow suit). He emphasizes that storytelling engages our children with great classical literature, and subsequently, serves as the doorway to the both original books as well as the historical era in which the story occurred.

Also in this episode, Sarah talks to Pam Barnhill of [EDSnapshots.com](#) about the importance of owning books in our homes. Pam also provides some practical helps on buying books without breaking the bank, as well as how to display books in kid-friendly ways.

**And for a parent and children, [reading aloud] is  
one of the best ways you have available to you to build  
a relationship and build trust and build love within your family.**

—Jim Weiss

## Cheater's Guide

Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or [listen to the entire podcast](#).

- 6:40 Jim describes his own family history of storytelling, which began with his grandfather.
- 8:22 Should we read or listen to abridged versions of classic stories?
- 11:40 Listening to stories serves the needs of children with disabilities and/or reading challenges.
- 12:59 Jim discusses the many facets of storytelling: learning the story content; an entry point to discussing ethics and history; and the scientific data supporting the benefits of auditory learning.
- 16:15 Storytelling is an incredibly powerful and beautiful way to bond.
- 17:06 How do amateur storytellers handle character voices when reading aloud?
- 23:17 A listener asks how to handle accents when reading aloud.
- 25:40 Jim suggests looking online to find accurate pronunciations and/or accents.
- 27:50 How do you prevent voice fatigue when storytelling (or just talking all day as a homeschooling mom)?
- 32:15 Strategies to address fatigue and sleepiness when reading aloud or storytelling.
- 34:02 Jim mentions two of his recordings specifically designed to help children fall asleep.
- 35:32 Part 1 of the interview with Jim Weiss concludes.  
Interview with Pam Barnhill begins.
- 36:20 Pam cites a British study that correlates a young person's reading ability with access to books in the home.
- 38:12 Tips on how to locate quality used books without breaking the bank.
- 41:26 Once the books are purchased and at home, then what?  
Tips on setting up kid-friendly book displays at home.

# Major Takeaways

## 1. Storytelling engages multiple critical thinking skills our children desperately need, particularly in this visual age:

- a. They learn the content of the story.
- b. A gateway is opened to reading the author's original work and to studying the historical period.
- c. Listening to storytelling teaches our children the skill of narration: how to process the information, then differentiate between critical and non-critical information, and tell it to someone else.
- d. Perhaps most importantly, your family bonds together through reading aloud in a way no other experience can replicate.

## 2. All storytellers forget a character voice at one time or another! Perfection is not the point of storytelling.

- a. Tip for amateurs: figure out the voices of the main characters, and focus on those.
- b. Simply choose a pitch: one character will have a higher voice and one character will have a lower voice.
- c. Focus on volume: excitable characters can talk louder and shy characters can speak quieter. A subtle contrast is all that is needed.

## 3. Books are worth spending money on, but you don't have to buy new ones! How to reduce the cost of buying books:

- a. Shop at thrift stores, yard sales and estate sales for used books.
- b. Amazon.com and BetterWorldBooks.com have great used book selections, sometimes for just a few cents apiece, under "other buying options."
- c. Library book sales are fantastic sites for used books (both donated books and books that are not circulating well). Also look in the library for books for sale on a discard shelf.

## Show Notes

My conversation with Jim:

[Greathall Productions](#) (dozens of great audio recordings by Jim!)

Stories for drifting off at night: [Good Night](#) and [Sweet Dreams](#)

[Jim's video interviews](#) with Rebecca Keliher from [HEDUA](#)

My conversation with Pam:

[Traveling Through the Pages Summer Reading Program](#)

[Better World Books](#) (good deals on used books)

[Book Sale Finder](#) (find a library book sale near you!)

[Pam's Summer Reading Pinterest board](#) (lots of ideas for creative book displays)

Many thanks to all the kids on this episode's **Let the Kids Speak!** The books recommended are:

[\*Charlotte's Web\*](#) by E.B. White

[\*The Mitchells: Five for Victory\*](#) by Hilda van Stockum

[\*The Dutchess Bakes a Cake\*](#) by Virginia Kahl

[\*The Trumpet of the Swan\*](#) by E.B. White

# Action Plan

## 1. Create your top 3 list of books.

Choose books you loved as a child, or those loved and recommended by a trusted source. If you begin with a book you are familiar with, creating different character voices and accents will be easier.

Book 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Book 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Book 3 \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Make room in the budget for buying books.

We want our kids to love the sight, smell, and touch of books. This can't happen unless books are constantly on their horizon.

**Create a basket** at Amazon.com or BetterWorldBooks.com, and make it a goal to maintain it. Save books in your basket(s) as you come across excellent recommendations, knowing you don't have to buy them all at once. \$25 a month can buy several used books in your baskets, and several books a month over the course of several years is the beginning of a wonderful heritage: a family library.

**Call your library** to find out the date of the book sale, and mark your calendar.

**Ask for books for gifts.** Don't allow your kids to be deluged with toys and crafts at every Christmas and birthday. You are the gatekeeper to their world: be very specific with gift requests and always have a book list ready!

## 3. Take a few minutes to assess the vitality of your family's read-aloud culture.

How regularly do we read aloud now? \_\_\_\_\_

Do I wish to increase that level, or just maintain what we have now? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it working well, or do we consistently blow by the time slot? \_\_\_\_\_

If reading aloud needs more prominence in our schedule, what are three conceivable spots for its relocation?

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If your attitude about reading aloud needs a boost, take a few minutes to assess your energy levels alongside the typical flow of your homeschooling day:

Would right after breakfast, before fatigue and crankiness set in, be a good time to cuddle up on the couch for 15 minutes of read-aloud time?

Would this help start off the day on a positive note?

Alternatively, where are the friction points in your day?

When do the kids tend to start resisting seatwork?

When does the toddler need to go down for a nap?

Maybe taking a 15-minute read-aloud break in the middle of the day is the perfect way to effect an about-face in attitudes (both yours and your kids').

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com).