



Cheat Sheet by Allison Burr

Episode 7

A Lifestyle of Reading Aloud

Guest: Melissa Wiley

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Meet Melissa Wiley

Melissa is the homeschooling mother of six children and the author of more than a dozen books for kids and teens, including *The Prairie Thief*, *Inch and Roly*, *Make a Wish*, and *Fox and Crow Are Not Friends*. She has been blogging about her family's reading life at [Here in the Bonny Glen](#) since 2005.



In this Episode

In this episode, Melissa shares some great ideas for how to work reading aloud into the fabric of family life and some tips for tricky accents and dialects, along with a slew of amazing book recommendations.

Beware: your Amazon basket is going to burst after this episode!

Melissa also introduces us to the idea of “pegging” reading aloud to the rhythms and routines of the day and gives an insider’s look into how reading aloud has changed over the years in her family, depending on the ages and stages of her children.

There is also fantastic discussion regarding getting dads to read aloud, how to handle the inevitable twaddle from the library, and how to tackle organizing books that are well-loved and well-used.

Melissa also provides some unique insight into the habit of reading aloud, from the perspective of a published children’s author (and as the wife of a published children’s author!).

Cheater's Guide

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

- 2:14 Melissa discusses her family and her writing schedule.
- 4:16 The formation of Melissa's family read-aloud culture.
- 6:24 The differences (and similarities) of reading aloud with teens as compared to tots.
- 10:00 Recommendations on reading aloud poetry to all age ranges.
- 14:34 Melissa explains the variety of types of reading aloud she does in her home and why she loves pegging reading aloud to meal times.
- 17:38 The logistics of Dad reading aloud at bedtime.
- 20:28 Choosing read-alouds.
- 22:50 Organizing the family library.
- 25:08 Fitting in read-aloud time with babies and toddlers in the house.
- 28:46 Doesn't Mom need her own quiet time?
- 29:48 Melissa's favorite bring-to-a-deserted island books.
- 31:55 Reading aloud from the perspective of a writer and Melissa's non-negotiable: does the dialogue come off your tongue naturally?
- 38:42 Visiting the library and avoiding the twaddle.
- 41:42 Recommendations for book lists.
- 43:46 Melissa's favorite books for early readers.
- 47:25 Handling character voices when reading aloud, using YouTube, and the importance of coming up with a "hook word" to get you in character.

**If [reading aloud] is slotted into a certain time of day,
and there's a routine to it, then that seems to work well for everybody,
especially the little ones, because they know, "Okay, now it's poetry time."
And they like that. They embrace that rhythm
and shape their day around it really naturally.**

—Melissa Wiley

Major Takeaways

1. Implementing a read-aloud plan takes some work on the front end, and it will likely need some revisions.

Let's all heed Melissa's advice here, and remember the importance of practicing a new routine for a couple of weeks before calling it quits and declaring failure! Your kids (and their mama!) might need an adjustment period if breakfast time becomes poetry breakfast, or if quiet time now means read-aloud time with Mom. We need to be strategic and find the nooks and crannies of our day to fill with reading.

2. There is no one set way to foster reading in a family!

Reading aloud will change as your kids change. What works for a houseful of toddlers and preschoolers will not work the same in a houseful of teenagers. Create a plan, work the plan, and then hold the plan loosely, knowing that within a year or two, things will have to shift. But don't despair the change; it simply means your kids are in a new phase and will also be exploring entirely new worlds of imagination and words. Enjoy that!

3. Do not forget the role of Dad.

The blessing (and obligation) of reading aloud is not bound solely upon Mama's shoulders. In fact, one of the true delights in any household is when Dad has the cherished role of reading aloud before bedtime. Hand that responsibility off to him wholeheartedly, and remember not to nitpick the way he does things. Help him select books, but otherwise let him roll with it, and let the kids anticipate the way Dad does things. He likely won't be as worn out from talking to the kids all day in the way that you are, so let him bring some fresh energy to the read-aloud at night, when the kids are rascally and need some calming down.

Show Notes

Melissa and Sarah talked about so! many! books!

[Anne of Green Gables](#) by Lucy Maud Montgomery

[The Chronicles of Narnia](#) by C.S. Lewis

[The Dream Keeper and Other Poems](#) by Langston Hughes, ill. by Brian Pinkney

[Emily](#) by Michael Bedard, ill. by Barbara Cooney

[The Great Brain](#) by John D. Fitzgerald

[Harriet the Spy](#) by Louise Fitzhugh

[Just So Stories](#) by Rudyard Kipling

[Little Bear](#) by Else Minarik

[The Lord of the Rings](#) by J.R.R. Tolkein

[McBroom's Wonderful One-Acre Farm](#) and [By the Great Horn Spoon!](#) by Sid Fleischman

[The Milly-Molly-Mandy Storybook](#) by Joyce Brisley

[Miss Rumphius](#) by Barbara Cooney

[The Mouse of Amherst](#) by Elizabeth Spires

Poetry for Young People: [Emily Dickinson](#), [Lewis Carroll](#) and [Robert Frost](#)

[Red Sails to Capri](#) by Ann Weil

The Prairie Thief, Inch and Roly, Make A Wish, Fox and Crow Are Not Friends, and the Martha and Charlotte *Little House* [books by Melissa Wiley](#)

[The Railway Children](#) by E. Nesbit

[The Secret Garden](#) by Frances Hodgson Burnett

[Three Tales of My Father's Dragon](#) by Ruth Stiles Gannett

[We Are in a Book!](#) and other Elephant and Piggie books by Mo Willems

Many thanks to the kids in this episode's **Let the Kids Speak!** They recommended:

[Cinderella](#)

[The Hobbit](#) by J.R.R. Tolkein

Other links Melissa mentions in the podcast:

[As Cozy As Spring](#) - the post mentioning [Wormwood Forest](#)

[Back to Basics](#)- that giant resource Melissa would bring if she was stranded on an island :)

[Cybils](#): Children's and Young Adult Bloggers' Literary Awards

Jen Robinson's [Book Page](#)

[KidLitosphere Central](#)

[Living Without School](#)- Leoni's blog, which Melissa mentions learning a lot from, specifically her use of pegs

Melissa's [website](#) and [book recommendations](#)

[Scrivener](#) software - Melissa and Sarah use this for writing, and Sarah got going on Scrivener using this incredibly awesome [e-course](#)

[The Writing Process Blog Tour](#) - a post by Melissa

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

Action Plan

1. Decide on three possible pegs in your house.

Would mealtimes work as pegs? Which ones?

If mealtimes aren't appropriate right now, what other things always happen in your house, such that hooking on reading to that time/activity would be natural and would require no further effort on your part?

2. What type of reading would work for your peg?

Breakfast and poetry?

Snack time and history on an audio CD?

Lunch time and Latin?

Shakespeare and afternoon snack?

Chapter books during quiet time?

Is there a genre of reading you just haven't been able to fit in, but could easily be pegged, once you get the hang of it? Examples: a daily devotional, Shakespeare, a biography, picture books.

3. Pick one peg and one genre of reading and start it this week.

Remember, give it a couple weeks to settle into a new routine. If it doesn't work as well as you thought it would, reconsider the peg (and look at your list of other potential pegs) and reconsider the type of reading you are trying to do.