



Episode 9

A University Professor's Perspective on Reading Aloud Guest: Catherine Pakaluk

...stunning data which shows empirically...that reading aloud to your children dramatically raises test scores, dramatically raises performance later in life in college

Sarah: Today, I'm happy to introduce you to Dr. Catherine Pakaluk. Dr. Pakaluk is an assistant professor of economics at Ave Maria University in Southwest Florida. She holds a doctorate and a master's degree from Harvard University—yes, I did say Harvard—and is the mother of seven young children. I'm interested in talking to Dr. Pakaluk because she has a unique perspective as both a mother of many and an accomplished college professor.

Sarah: Hi Dr. Pakaluk! Thank you so much for taking my call today.

Catherine: Hi Sarah! Thank you.

Sarah: Yeah, I'm honored to chat with you. So, could we start by having you tell us just a little bit about yourself and your family?

3:12 Dr. Pakaluk's unique family culture of learning, books, and study.

Catherine: Sure, no problem. I've been married for 15 years, 15 years next month in August. And we're very much looking forward to celebrating our anniversary. My husband and I are both college professors. When we met, I was still in graduate school so we've been thinking about books and learning, kind of our whole relationship, so it is something we spend a lot of time thinking about in my household. Where we live now, we're famous for having actually a floor to ceiling library in one part of our home, and you can't even get to the top shelves because they're 10 feet up, which we had someone build in for us because we just didn't have enough bookshelves or tall enough bookshelves.

Sarah: It's such a wise use of that space that's totally wasted, right?

Catherine: What good is it? I know, and then the kids think that they are these like special books that are way up there that maybe someday they'll come to read.

My husband's a philosopher. His degrees are in philosophy and mine are in economics, and I study more family issues and social issues. I do a lot of work in social thought as well as economics. So the love of learning and study is really something deeply imbued in my household. We think about how to learn all the time. We're kind of doing this reflective thing constantly and we're reading and then we're reading about reading, and then we're reading about reading about reading...

And this is something that is kind of mixed-up and kind of quirky, but we think a lovable character of our home and so our kids' friends all know this. So the neighborhood kids come over to play with our kids and this has been true as long as we've been reading to children together, so that the neighborhood kids come over to our house in the summer and our kids are all sitting there and they've got to do their two or three hours of reading in the morning. And so the neighborhood kids will come over and they're like, "Hey, you, grab a book. You're going to have to read if you want to play with so and so." So we kind of have been known for that style of parenting for a long time.

So that is a little bit about us and gives you a little bit of a sense of where we're both coming from.

5:26 Dr. Pakaluk's views on the role reading aloud plays in preparing kids for college – specifically Dr. Joseph Price's work on the effects of parents reading aloud to children.

Sarah: That's great! So as a college professor, I'm wondering what you see reading aloud—how you see that as playing a part in, not just reading to themselves, but reading aloud to our kids... Do you think that plays a role in getting kids ready for college or helping them succeed in college? Or how do you think that relates? Or do you think of those?

Catherine: Yeah. Preparing for this interview and this podcast I was thinking what could I bring to the table as an economist and I've been eager to share with you the work of one of my close colleagues who does of actual work on studying the actual effects of reading aloud to your children, which is different from just reading.

And I don't know if it's something that you've already covered in your podcast. I'll just mention his name, Joseph Price, an economist.

Sarah: No, we haven't.

Catherine: Okay, well this is just great stuff. Joseph Price is an economist at Brigham Young University in Provo and he's someone I've worked with in different projects. But two of the most interesting research that I think that he's done in his career as an economist, he's actually looked at a lot of the national data sets that looked both at what is going on in the home, what

are parents actually doing with their children in the course of the day: “Now they’re turning on the TV show. Now they’re having dinner. Now they’re reading aloud.” If you look at a lot of families, you might get a number of them that are reading aloud at certain points in time.

And then you’ll also have access to the children’s outcome. How did they do in school? Do they go to college? That kind of thing. So you can start to envision what you could actually look for. So Joe has done a lot of work looking at precisely that, the effects of parents reading aloud to their children. And he produced stunning data which shows empirically— which isn’t the only form of proof but it’s a good one—it shows empirically that reading aloud specifically to your children dramatically raises test scores, dramatically raises performance later in life in college, and that kind of thing.

If you’d like, later at the end I could forward you some of the links to some of the descriptions of his papers. For example, here’s one statistic from one of his papers. One extra day per week of parent-child reading during the first ten years of life increases test scores on standardized test scores by half of a standard deviation.

Sarah: Oh, wow.

Catherine: Now half of a standard deviation, to give you a sense of what we’re talking about—depending on the test, a standard deviation could be anywhere between 15 percentile points on a standardized test or even as many as 20 or 30. So half of a standard deviation could be—we could be talking about 5-10 percentile points on a standardized test.

We’re talking about like that extra day of reading in the child’s early years before the age of 10 could mean the difference between your kids shooting a 75th percentile and an 85th percentile. And that’s a massive difference. These are really big differences. So I do a lot of work in what we call the economics of education and know the literature very, very well.

8:44 An economist’s look at the holy grail of raising students’ test scores.

And the truth is that effects of that magnitude, we don’t see them very often. So to put this in perspective, the kinds of things that a lot of economists go look for when you look at raising students’ test scores—this is like the holy grail—you’d like to raise all kids’ test scores. We’d like every kid to be above average, right?

And you think, what could you check for? What could you look for? What are the kinds of policy things that people care about? What I’m trying to put this effect in perspective for you, I’m saying, think about a policy that might reduce class sizes in a whole system or for a whole district, for example. So maybe you can lower class sizes from 25 children in a classroom to 22, for example. There are mixed results on that. Some of them seem to modestly raise test scores. Some of them don’t seem to do any good at all. So the evidence on class sizes is very, very mixed. It’s very complex. But even the best studies, the ones that show the largest effects for lowering class sizes, don’t show effects on the order of half of the standard deviation.

Sarah: Oh, wow.

Catherine: So I'm trying to give you a sense...

Sarah: Yeah, well, because we always talk about that—lowering class sizes being such a huge improvement for—but if it's something so simple as just reading to our children, one more day a week, that's amazing!

Catherine: Exactly. So one extra day per week... And no one in the data set is reading six hours a day. So this isn't necessarily something tremendously burdensome. It means if you've been used to reading, when you do a day of reading aloud, are you doing 30 minutes? Are you doing 15? Are you doing an hour? Whatever that is, if you add one more day of that, that's the kind of boost we're talking about.

And it should be said that in as far as it is possible in this data, Joe will be controlling for things like income and the educational background of the parents. So this is an effect that you're seeing after already saying, "Oh well, that one's mom has a PhD, and this one's mom doesn't."

So this is on top of that. That's even if you've got the PhD, even if you have good income and you live in a nice place. So these are big effects and are really interesting. And they're very interesting in a climate where we speak very often about an educational crisis, and we don't know how America's kids are not learning and they can't read. You've got hundreds of researchers all over the country chasing after what could produce larger effects and this is a really clear—wow, what a huge effect!

11:11 If a college student has come from a reading culture, professors can tell a big difference.

Sarah: When it comes to college students who've been read aloud to, do you think you can tell when you're working with college students if they come from a family that has done a lot of reading or not? Or is it not really that overt?

Catherine: That's a really interesting question. Can I see in the classroom a difference between the students who've done a lot of reading and the ones who haven't? There isn't a college professor who in this country who wouldn't agree to that proposition. You can always see it and you can see it in a number of ways.

One of the ways you see it, when people have been read to and—we'll just say from a very strong reading culture in the home, if you allow me to kind of conflate these two for a minute, because with my professional hat on I don't know if I can distinguish always between the reading aloud and the reading. But what you see a lot of, what professors all around the country are complaining about, is that students don't have the ability to actually read. Not that they can't read the words on the page, but that if you want to assign them 200 pages of a novel or a piece of work for a week, which would be pretty standard, they can't get through it. They can't get through it, process it.

And you see the kids who've been reading all their lives, it's like that's not an issue. And so what a lot of colleges are doing is a lot of this remedial work, where you have this sense

that they they haven't learned to swim. They can read a paragraph and maybe answer appropriate questions, like they can pass the standardized test. But can they really read at this adult level? And so you're not really seeing it.

12:44 The connection between being read aloud to and oral presentation.

To your point about reading aloud, though, are you seeing a difference there? One of the most clear ways that you can see the difference on the kids who have been read to is actually their ability to speak with confidence in the classroom.

So we have all, myself included, had this experience where you ask students to read things in class. You want to have a seminar discussion, you say let's read this passage aloud. And the book goes around the room and it's sort of discouraging that the book stops. Many students who test fairly well are not capable of actually themselves reading aloud. They trip on how to pronounce words and it's amazing that you think, "Okay, wow, you're in college and you're not sure how to pronounce it."

So I think there's probably a very large connection between being read to and actually oral presentation and some of the—I wouldn't say rhetoric. Rhetoric is building an argument through your speech. But it's kind of a requirement for rhetoric, which is even being able to pronounce words correctly.

13:47 The critical importance of needing to hear through your ear properly formed and highly sophisticated language patterns: let's pronounce words correctly!

Sarah: Well, this reminds me of in the very first episode of this podcast, I talked to Andrew Pudewa from the Institute for Excellence in Writing and he talks about needing to hear from the auditory through your ear properly formed and highly sophisticated language patterns. And he tells this story—I don't remember if he told it on the podcast, or if I've heard him tell it somewhere else—but he tells the story of his daughter who reads copiously in the airport with him and she asks him, "Are we going on 'Hor-uh-zon' Airlines?" and he cannot figure out what she's talking about, until he realizes she means "Horizon" but she's read it probably a million times. But it's not usually a word we use in casual conversation. So I can see that, how...

Catherine: That's right! You have to hear the words. Facetious—facetious is one of those words that if you haven't heard it, you're going to say "fuh-**set**-ee-us"... And you can keep going on the list. And there's almost nothing more than mispronouncing a common word that will cause someone to look at you and put you in a category of stupid or uneducated. It's probably the first, besides just your physical appearance and personal hygiene, one of the first ways that people put you in a box. So we want not to have our children be in those boxes.

15:08 The value of maintaining a collective governance over the English language and ensuring we are pronouncing words correctly in our own home. One solution: audiobooks.

It does mean though, I will say this as far as parents reading aloud in that respect, it does mean that—my husband is wonderful at this, I am a little less wonderful—we actually have to maintain this kind of collective governance over the English language. We actually have to make sure were pronouncing things as well as we can. So there's a little bit of learning we have to do and one of the ways we have tried to correct ourselves as much as possible, and I was going to say I don't know how much you have explored this in your podcast, is actually making heavy use of books read on tape.

Sarah: Oh, yes.

Catherine: It's another kind of reading aloud. There is more than a kind of skill, there's an art, and we frequently will experiment with books read aloud on tape read by people with very different accents than an American accent, like an Australian accent or a British accent or an Indian British accent. And you kind of run through those and that actually—it really helps the children by hearing a variety of ways of saying the word. It helps them to actually zero in on the way we're supposed to be saying the word.

So anyway, this goes back to your point about professional success. I think there's a lot of different channels for that but it's pretty critical, speaking language, oral presentation. and making a good impression—making the

impression, the right impression. We've all known people who are geniuses. This is almost a stereotype of geniuses. They're sort of geniuses but they can't do—they're dressed badly or they can't comb their hair or... [laughter]

So the world does make allowances for some of that. I had a student here at the university who was one of the brightest students I've ever taught, but had a congenital lisp and couldn't... So the world does make allowances for those things. One shouldn't be hung up. But this is very important...

Sarah: It's kind of like spelling right? So if someone can be really articulate, but if they spell things wrong, it kind of gives the wrong impression. I also think audiobooks help me become better at reading aloud.

Catherine: A better reader, absolutely.

Sarah: I also talked to Jim Weiss for the podcast in a few earlier episodes, from Greathall Productions. He's so talented. And that helps me, when I'm listening to any kind of audio...

17:28 Reading aloud makes a particularly big difference in the reading of poetry, which is meant to be read aloud, not just seen on the page.

Catherine: I would also say that the reading aloud is going to make a huge difference, particularly in the reading of poetry. Again, you probably have explored this at length and I'm no poet nor an expert on poetry, but this is a clear place where this is meant to be read aloud. This is not meant to be read on the page.

Sarah: If our listeners are wondering for some good recommendations, the show notes for [Episode 7](#) at ReadAloudRevival.com have some excellent titles there to choose from, good collections that she recommends. I am trying to ramp up the poetry in our own home because I have not been properly attuned to love poetry well, but my oldest daughter loves poetry so I really want to run with that.

Catherine: I'm kind of in the same place. I didn't study a lot of poetry, never in college, just a little bit in high school. It's not the place I'm most comfortable but we have—really, it was when I came to work here at the university. Being a liberal arts college, we have professors who really teach poetry and they really love and understand poetry. So I've been trying to grow and study alongside them, kind of learn something that I didn't ever learn the first time.

I have to say for your readers—kind of a good example—I had read many of Robert Frost's poems when I was growing up, as many Americans do. We have a professor here, a great professor of literature who is also a great fan of Robert Frost and he is fond of having dinners and evening where people just read poetry aloud. And again, I don't have any memorized. He has dozens and dozens, hundreds of poems. He can just sit for hours and recite poetry.

Sarah: Oh what a gift! Oh my goodness.

Catherine: And he's somebody I'd love to connect you with in the future. But in any case, recently we were at dinner with him and we asked him to read aloud one of his favorites from Frost and he read this poem which I have not been too familiar with but I

had heard it before, which is called "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same." And just to hear someone who is really expert at reading poetry aloud, when he read this poem, I almost broke down at the end. It's a short poem that if you read it on the page, you may or may not be completely moved by it, but the difference between how I had understood it before I heard him speak it and after I heard him speak it was tremendous. I really went home with my pencil and I thought, "Okay, I have got to start. We have to change this up. We have got to do more reading aloud of poetry."

Sarah: Well maybe that's why I haven't really loved it, is I haven't done a lot of reading aloud or heard a lot of it read aloud. The only exposure I've had to poetry is what I've read on the page and it does sort of kind of lay flat there.

Catherine: Yeah, I think poetry is like fine wine or classical music. It's the sort of thing that you have to be educated to appreciate, and so if I pick up the poetry of Robert Frost and just start reading it, it's stands to reason I should be less successful than a professor of literature who's lived his whole life deeply imbued in Robert Frost.

So it would be very disappointing if that weren't the case. And certainly, Shakespeare is the same. I mean, Shakespeare is not meant to be read on the page. We often forget that Shakespeare is poetry. And this is true for a great many like the epic poems of the ancients. Two years ago the university sponsored a 24-hour round-the-clock marathon where there was a 24-hour reading of *The Iliad*, all night long. Students would take shifts and they read this. In the last hour, it was taken by someone who has done

a famous translation — I forgot what his name is. But it was just a great event and, again, the sort of thing that in this culture because we're so visual, we have forgotten the importance of the aural tradition and the importance of reading and passing things on aloud. And it's something I have had to be as much corrected in as probably many others. We think it is easier and faster to digest information visually, and it is faster and easier, but it's not necessarily — not actually getting to the same point. We're not exactly doing the same thing.

21:55 What if my child is not literary, or wants to be an engineer, lawyer or math professor?

Sarah: Yeah. So as a professor of economics, can you speak a little bit to a parent who says they maybe wouldn't peg their child as literary or that child might grow up saying, I want to be an engineer. I want to be a lawyer. I want to be a math professor, or just sort of being inclined more to the sciences, math, or business.

Catherine: I have a couple thoughts on that. One in part because I was that child who was a little bit more inclined to the science and math. So I went to this high school that was very strong in the classical liberal arts and weakish in the math and sciences. So that's the background.

Then I went to a big traditional Ivy League school with a lot of math and science and of course I jumped right into the math and science side of university. So a couple things happened in the first year. Right away, what I learned was that, because remember I thought that I got there by the skin of my

teeth and that more or less I was completely disadvantaged compared to all these other kids who were going to these big public schools with huge math and science programs.

So for those parents who have children who are more inclined to the sciences and engineering, it's imperative not to neglect the humanities side, the reading side and the linguistics side.

And so one thing that happened in the first year that I was there, was really interesting. So I noticed that in the first couple of weeks, the other students did seem a little bit more kind of with it, like I was learning everything from scratch.

But in terms of content, what they had already covered — the course goes so quickly at the college level. It's not the same. By about two or three weeks in, we were all at the same place, kind of all equally drowning or treading water. So the little advantage they had from earlier exposure to sophisticated science and math seemed to disappear within about a month.

And then what happened was very interesting. A month later, when you get to that place where you're producing work, studying a lot and even memorizing terms in science, for example, and writing up lab reports, the tables switched around very quickly to where my classmates were coming to me. "How are you doing well in this lab reports? How are you writing them up? Can

you show me what you're doing? I keep getting C's on my lab reports." And these are kids with the AP science classes.

Sarah: Interesting

Catherine: And all of a sudden it kind of hit me—it was like two or three months into my freshmen year, it kind of hit me and I thought, "Oh wow!" You know, you hear the things that you hear about the liberal arts and so this is sort of an apology if you will, but this is the thing, where I spent a lot more time in high school reading and writing, if you will, than I did doing science and math. So then it hit me, I thought, okay, this is the point. The point is not that you're reading because you just really want to be always doing literature. The point is that that does this thing to the brain. It does this thing to the way we think about information, the way we present things, which is inherently superior than mastering recipes of skills, which is what the content of modern science is, generally speaking.

It's inherently superior. So I was able to take a set of skills which I had not formerly applied to science and scientific inquiry and succeed much more easily than my peers who had only spent their high school years mastering recipe-like techniques. It was that moment—it was sort of the end of the Fall semester of my freshmen year, I resolved, I said, "I'm never going to complain or have a negative thought about my education again." And I remember I even called my mom and I said, "I know I was really a pain in high school, complaining about how you didn't send me to a science high school, but I get it. And I'm actually really grateful." And that was it. It was over. Like from that moment

on, I was like an apologist for the liberal arts because it was so profound.

Sarah: This is so fascinating to me.

Catherine: It was so clear and profound and I thought, "Okay, I'm so grateful." And that thing is a very interesting thing and I'm not sure that we fully understand it, but we see it, which has to do with the way that language actually kind of provides an architecture for the symbolic, logical abilities of the brain. But if you spend a lot of time with good authors with good writing, hearing it aloud, you're working on the logical side of the brain.

So for those parents who have children who are more inclined to the sciences and engineering, it's imperative not to neglect the humanities side, the reading side and the linguistics side.

Sarah: So it was like the liberal arts and this steeping yourself in the literature and the written word. It was the training to help you learn how to think well.

Catherine: Yes. Absolutely.

Sarah: I think so often, like right now especially, our culture seems to be that science and math obsessed with all the STEM stuff. But I think if we can think about reading aloud as the best preparation for learning how to think, then we can see the value translating into academic work outside of the language arts.

Catherine: Right.

**26:46 The value of being read to:
bonding and building
relationships.**

Sarah: So what about as our children grow older. Do you think the value of being read to diminishes as they're getting older? For example, do you think it would be more worthwhile to read to a 5-year-old who can't read to herself than to a 15-year-old who can, or do they serve different purposes from your perspective?

Catherine: So what we see in the data like Joe Price's work on reading aloud to children, he sees the biggest effects in terms of what you can measure, and I'm really going to emphasize that, in terms of what you can measure in the children. The biggest effects are for 10 and under. That's where you're really seeing, like if you really want to catapult, change their future, in terms of what can be measured. That's where the reading to the 5-year-old who can't read, that's what you're really seeing there.

But I would say when I think about my children that I've raised who are much older now, that the reading to a 15-year-old is not something to be discounted. But I think that its primary function or its role at that age is sort of a different one. And it's a lot to do with relationship and the bonds that we can form with our children.

And I'll give you one small little example, just to kind of shore that one up, that when I first married my husband, he had six children who were grieving the loss of their first mother. And I was young, I was in my 20s and I didn't have a lot of means at my disposal—didn't know how do you just start being a mom to a

bunch of kids that you don't know very well and they don't know you very well.

**Reading to them every night...
was like a space in which our
relationship was forged.**

So I had this kind of idea, well, what do moms do? Moms read to their kids, that sort of what you should do. So with my girls especially, my older, my step girls—we don't use the language of step very often—but my older adopted girls, if you will—I started reading to them at night. All kinds of things. Of course we read a lot of the typical ones like we read *Narnia* and we read Tolkien and we read a lot of the sort of typical literary things. But also read like hero stories and biographies and stories of saints, just things I could get my hands on.

I—and I think they would say the same if you were to interview them—we all look back on those years when I didn't have babies yet, and I was just reading to them every night. It was like a space in which our relationship was forged. They would get into bed and even the ones at that time they weren't 5, say, but even the older daughter who's 12, she was a little bit older, and sometimes the older boys would creep in. They'd get into their beds and they've got a blanket... I don't know if anyone's ever done this research. I think there's positive endorphins, like something really good physiologically and emotionally happens. They're kind of sitting there and they're relaxed and you're reading and I really feel like that was how I was able to initiate and form a motherly bond with my

adopted children. We had no bonds to start with. It was like starting from nothing.

So those first two years, we all look back on them, because then I had babies and it got much harder to do the consistent every night reading. But for a long time there it was like every single night.

Sarah: I know what that's like because I have an older set and a younger set and...

Catherine: You feel so sorry for those later kids but of course as even Joe Price has pointed out and others—and then of course what happens is those same girls that I read to when they were that age, they ended up turning around and doing the reading for the younger ones more often than I was able to.

So it does pass stuff on, but I would also say this to parents who may be struggling with a teenage relationship that isn't going as well as they wanted to. Or forget about the teenagers, like the pre-teens... I kind of think it's like this magical thing that you can do that if the relationship isn't so bad that they're not willing to sit at the table, but I'd often find that like the 12-year-old who was kind of ambivalent about me at that time, whereas the 6- and 8-year olds, they really didn't care, they were just so happy to have a mom who was going to read to them.

But the 12-year old would say she wasn't going to come listen but then she would come in—she'd come in after the reading started and kind of creep in. It's just this magical thing and it's so simple and if you did it—it's like they experience it as love and it's a beautiful thing. And so I do think that the teenagers, that the older kids, when we're not in the realm of thinking about, gee, we want to raise their test scores or change the future

of their life or something, that this relationship thing is a very beautiful and important thing.

There's a couple of things in my grab bag of tricks, maternal tricks and that is just one of them, the top one. It's really high up there. The next one down is taking a road trip.

Sarah: Oh, man, really? I just got back from a road trip but...

Catherine: Oh you did, it didn't work? They have to be like teenagers. It's not like...

Sarah: A piece of the problem was my husband had to ride in a different car because he had to go back to work early, and I have three that are two and under. So there was no forging of good relationships there.

Catherine: Not necessarily a road trip as much as taking drives with your teenagers. It's one of those things that's up in my book of tricks.

Sarah: I read that somewhere else too where they said you don't have to make eye contact.

Catherine: Yeah, because you don't have to look at each other. This is the key thing, right? You can bring up all kinds of things that are awkward or uncomfortable and you don't have to see each other in the eyes.

Sarah: That's so great!

Catherine: Makes it really easy to start. But that's—now we're really off of subject. But yeah, reading aloud.

Sarah: Yeah that's my favorite way to connect with my kids, I think.

Catherine: And on the other end, you didn't ask me about the 2-year-olds. You said about 5 or 15, but the one-year-olds or the two-

year-olds who clearly have no idea what you're saying but they crawl right up onto your lap. They're very engaged, really interested, doesn't matter if there are any pictures or not. If there's reading going on, they don't want to be left out. Like, get me into this. It is amazing.

Sarah: So how much priority do you think busy parents should try to realistically read aloud? Or what have you experienced in your own life as a working mom, because you've got a busy life?

Catherine: I'm assuming like many busy moms or working moms, that with all of the various good things we try to do in our lives, be it prayer or attention to our family, you kind of go through phases where you drop off and then you kind of have to pull yourself back and remember and get re-centered. And I will certainly say that for me reading aloud is that kind of a thing, whereas I've had more babies and had more demands in my time, it's been something that I've had to call myself back to a lot of times. And certainly I would say that I do think for me it's kind of up there, it's not like in that list of "Well, here's 20 really good things if you have time for, go to museums and read to your kids."

For me, it's over in that other category, reading to your kids or having dinner together as a family. That's one of those things that's so easy to start to slip away and yet we know it's so important. So for me, it's not one of the 20. It's one of the three or four that... Is it a struggle to make that time? Yeah, of course it is.

33:55 Be encouraged: even five minutes a day will add up!

So if you're really, really busy — okay, all you have is five minutes before the kids to go to bed, but there has to be the five minutes. So there's got to be a chunk that is happening. Does it have to be every single day? I mean no, I don't think so. It just has to be enough that your kids would remember. "Yeah, mom did that." Not because it's important that they remember that they are read to, but if your kid wouldn't characterize their childhood as experiencing reading, then you didn't actually succeed.

Sarah: And I think a lot of times, we kind of have this idea that we either have to do a huge amount or none at all. Or I kind of tend to be all or nothing. But I was recently thinking about this. The other day I was in the car. I don't know why it hit me but just sort of out of nowhere I thought, "I wonder how much it would add up to over a year — what five minutes a day adds up to over a year." And so I did the calculations and, of course, if you spend five minutes a day doing whatever — prayer or reading aloud — for 365 days, that's 30 hours in the course of a year. That's amazing!

Catherine: That's amazing. That's exactly right. If you were going to say like, just give me a number, I would say 15 minutes a day and if you are hitting four or five days a week, that's a pretty healthy habit.

Sarah: That's like a chapter I think, about 15 minutes.

Catherine: Fifteen minutes is a chapter, exactly, give or take. You have to know we're not all going to read on Saturday nights,

we're going to do something else, maybe even not Friday nights. But if we're doing Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or minus one of those days, four or five days, I think then you're well on your way to a habit.

And you think about exercise that way, too. Anything that's that important in your life, that's almost like a rule of thumb. It's like 15 minutes, four or five times a week. If you're exercising that way, most of us would be much closer to our ideal fitness level.

Sarah: And I think it's these small habits that we do consistently that seem to make the biggest change. We have to work up less gusto to, "Now it's time to read aloud," if it's just something we do a little bit.

I know if I think I have to carve out an hour for something, it's more likely to be pushed aside. So do you have any tips or tricks for fitting more time in for reading, or what does reading aloud look like in your home?

36:12 Tips/tricks for fitting in reading aloud.

Catherine: I would say probably my best tip or trick is to rethink when you do it. I used to always do it before the kids went to bed at night. That is not working anymore for us because I am too tired. That's sort of the answer. I get to that point and I'm so tempted to just kind of change it or switch it or whatever.

So now, I do have the freedom in the schedule because I'm homeschooling and my little ones are home more of the day. So now it's easier to put it in the morning or at a time when I'm not completely exhausted. So I am much more likely to do the reading after

breakfast. We've cleaned up our breakfast dishes and okay, now we'll sit down and... Or if I'm super, super busy and I can't manage it, well, let's all put on the book on tape. So that there is sort of, even if mom isn't going to sit on the couch, there's going to be a book on tape.

Or, goodness, the podcasts. I'm not really into the podcast universe but—I'm trying to remember, we discovered one when I was still homeschooling my older girls which must have been one of the original read-aloud podcasts. It's called Storynory.

Sarah: Oh, yeah. They're still up.

Catherine: They're still up. But back in the good old days... They ran out of classics. There was a point it was like, "Now you're reading stuff that I'm not sure I really want." But for a couple of years there, we would use those pretty heavily. Or what we would do—and a lot of times we'll still do this—is just read aloud during mealtime especially lunchtime. Again, if you're kids are at school during the day, then you can actually read aloud during dinner time.

It's not that thing where you imagine, not what I did with my kids when my older kids were little where they're all cuddled in bed and I'm not falling asleep. But I would say we often do it over lunch time because if you don't, what's happening at lunch time? Sometimes it's just craziness or...

Sarah: Squabbling.

Catherine: Yeah, so then I'll just eat afterwards or I'll eat before and I'll read, or we'll put on a podcast or somebody else reading aloud.

Sarah: I was going to mention that Books — I think it's [Books Should Be Free](#). I'll look it up and link it up on the show notes. But there's a ton of free audio classics there and I think a lot of those are in podcast form, so when you go to the website you can download them, easy.

Catherine: I really do think they're kind of the classic, if you can do it and if you're not, like totally exhausted, is to read when your kids are actually in bed. I just think it's a beautiful, great thing, or the proverbial reading on a fireplace, is just really great!

But I was going to say the other thing I've also done when I'm really tired and if I wanted to do the reading at night — it's like you trick yourself into something. And I say to myself, "Okay, instead of going where the kids are in bed, we're going to go to mom's bed." People are different about that, but sometimes I'll do this as a kind of — and I have found it's like one of those magic tricks like inviting the children in to sit on Mommy and Daddy's big bed when I'm reading, it helps me because I'm exhausted and I can kind of recline and it's a little bit like, okay, this isn't as tiring as schlepping up to the kids' rooms.

So we will all climb into Mom's bed and I'll read, and I find that's another one of those like the kids just so loved to be sitting in — like they're so honored, right? They're sitting in Mommy and Daddy's bed. And they're all — they fight to be as close as possible.

Sarah: So do you have a favorite booklist or a good resource that you like to choose from when you're choosing books to read aloud?

39:53 Some of Dr. Pakaluk's family favorites: fairy tales, *Anne of Green Gables*, G.A. Henty, and biographies.

Catherine: I wish I could. I do a lot of — meaning I don't have one list. But I do do a lot of borrowing from people's lists. So we do have a lot of collections in my library, it's the various old school fairy tales. So if I'm just looking for something that's just one chapter, we do a lot of Russian fairy tales, German fairy tales. Some of them are a little scary. But we do a lot of fairy tales. Just the way my kids are, they almost all like certain kinds of fantasy books and so sometimes the fantasy cuts across both groups, both the boys and girls like it.

Nothing I'm going to say is going to be new to your readers but I love reading the *Anne of Green Gables* books. Even my boys like them. It sounds kind of funny. Although they'd probably die if they heard me saying this, and they'd be like, "Is anyone going to know that?"

A lot of historical fiction, the old G.A. Henty books are really great. Like I'll go looking for classical books and that kind of things — a lot of biographies of historical figures and saints and warriors and things like that, which I find, again, even the boys and girls will like that because the girls like it because it's just inherently personal. Like it's a person, it's gossip, like reading someone's life. And if you pick something that the boys like...

Sarah: Bethlehem Books. Are you familiar with them? They publish a lot of stuff across the spectrum. It's all historical, like living history kind of stuff, and I think they have a

lot of great titles that appeal to both boys and girls. Because they kind of appeal to that whole character-driven stuff, lots of warriors and fighting...

Catherine: That's great! Obviously through the years, coming in and out of homeschooling, I've relied a lot at different points in time on *The Well Trained Mind* and some of those classic books that present wonderful classical booklists for parents. And just kind of dip into that if you have the one book. I'll kind of dip in and find things.

42:22 An introduction to Ave Maria University.

Sarah: I'm sure that a lot of our listeners are interested in what you do over there at Ave Maria University. Could you give us a little synopsis of what your campus is like and what you guys offer there?

Catherine: Sure. The university is ten years young, just ten years old. And we understand ourselves to be kind of building and providing a very strong classical liberal arts curriculum. We have a very large two-year core curriculum which is about as big as it can be if you're interested in the core curricula that are out there. There's a lot of great ones. Two years is a lot of real estate. That means for two years or four semesters, students take all the same courses. In the last two years, you can pick a major and we have 30-some majors at the moment.

So, for example, if you major in economics here at Ave Maria, you'll take a curriculum in those last two years that looks very much like the curriculum you would have at any regular

school so to speak, any non-classical liberal arts school.

Our campus culture is a lot like a lot of the great liberal arts colleges that you might be familiar with. We have a very artsy faculty, put it that way, on the humanities side. We take Shakespeare very seriously here, for example, as something to be active and to be done as applied. So you can study Shakespeare within a literature major. You can study Shakespeare within the humanities major. You can study in humanities generally here. And you can also study Shakespeare within a minor in Shakespeare in performance. So if you want to just do Shakespeare as a performance subject, you can do that, too.

So that's to give you a flavor of how the humanities works here. A lot of different state backgrounds here. We're very much identified as a strong Catholic college. The last time I checked we were about 85% Catholic in the student body. So right now, maybe 150 or 200 students that are not Catholic, who come from a variety of other Christian and non-Christian backgrounds and all of those things.

And then I should also just mention that people have a hard time envisioning where we are because most people don't spend a lot of time in South Florida, but our campus is extraordinarily beautiful. We're right on the border of the Everglades, the National Everglades. So what you should picture—a lot of students are thinking, "Alligators and snakes..." Yes, there are alligators and snakes on campus, but if you're not familiar with...

Sarah: Wow. [laughter]

Catherine: Have I turned you off?

It's a tremendously interesting and cool place to be for four years. So for example, our biology majors spend a lot of time out in the Everglades looking at things. It's easy to do things that are related to marine biology because of our proximity to both freshwater, like the Everglades is fresh, and then we've got the Gulf Coast and the Atlantic coast very close by.

So all the birds in the world come here in the winter. A few things I didn't know before I came here, but this is a very popular spot for birdwatching, for example, you see all kinds of neat, neat things. My children, for example, have just loved living here because of...

Sarah: Well, because there's alligators on campus so... [laughter]

Catherine: ...because of the abundant opportunities to be outside. Partially it's because of the alligators, but they've gotten into nature in ways that they didn't before we moved here. In part, because you're outside all year here.

Sarah: Right. You can go to AveMaria.edu to find out more about Ave Maria University. So it has been a huge pleasure for me to talk with you today, even amidst all the technical difficulties that I lended to the conversation.

Catherine: No problem. Thank you. It's definitely mutual.

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.

"Hi! My name's Marissa Campbell. I'm 9 and I live in California. My favorite books are *The Chronicles of Narnia* and I like them because they're fun and magical."

"My name is Gretta and I'm 6 years old and I'm from Florida. My favorite book for people to read aloud to me is *Winnie the Pooh*. My favorite part is when Pooh falls out of the tree because he wants to get honey even if there's not any."

Ahh! *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Winnie the Pooh*— very good choices, kids. Well, that's it for today's episode of the Read Aloud Revival podcast. Thanks so much for joining me. This is just a ton of fun for me and hopefully very inspiring for you. See you very soon. Go build your family culture around books!