



Cheat Sheet by Allison Burr

Episode 10

The Art of Choosing Books (and starting a book club!)

Guest: Heidi Scovel

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Meet Heidi Scovel

Heidi is the author of the popular blog, [Mt Hope Chronicles](#), where she offers a plethora of excellent book recommendations. Heidi is a homeschooling mother of four who has been blogging for over seven years. She loves to read and take pictures, and has thoroughly enjoyed leading a parent-child Books Detective Club, which she has written about in great detail on [her blog](#).



In this Episode

In this episode, Heidi discusses the art of choosing good books, how she developed her taste for the best literature, and the ins and outs of her successful Book Detectives Club.

Heidi shares real-life practical experience with the parent-child book club: what types of books work best, what ages work well, and the notion that sometimes, the less advance preparation, the better.

She also confesses that even a book-loving family like her own sometimes struggles with reading aloud, so stay tuned to find some of the tips and tricks that have worked well for her family, along with a smashing list of quality book recommendations.

I didn't want to be constantly telling my kids [at the library]

"No, not that one. No, I don't like that"...
[But] if I bring home a huge stack of books
or we have books overflowing off our shelves,
I feel like it is a constant yes. "Take your pick.
Here's a huge feast spread in front of you.
And you can pick what looks good to you."

-Heidi Scovel

Cheater's Guide

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

- 2:20 Heidi shares about her family.
- 4:32 Learning the art of choosing quality books from an early age.
- 6:01 Library challenges: what to do when you don't have a list of quality books to work from, and the value of maximizing the "hold" shelf.
- 8:11 Give your kids a feast of books -- a big YES, read anything we have here!
- 10:15 Criteria for selecting good books.
- 11:12 Some books soar at private reading but sink for read-alouds.
- 12:53 A peek inside read-aloud time in Heidi's house.
- 16:21 Keep the books tidy? Or let the kids explore and destroy?
- 17:53 Using *Deconstructing Penguins* and *Teaching the Classics* to begin a Book Detectives club.
- 22:50 Socratic discussions and picture books.
- 25:44 Logistics for the book club: how many, and appropriate ages of kids.
- 28:11 Incorporating the *Lost Tools of Writing* into the book club and asking the "should" questions.
- 30:29 The ANI chart: A (affirmative) N (negative) I (interesting).
- 34:12 Preparing for a book discussion with just "should" questions requires less preparation from the teacher.
- 35:18 Discussing books in a meaningful way without having the formal book club chart/discussion.
- 36:08 Training kids how to think and ask questions without prompting.
- 37:21 The beauty of book clubs: a fun atmosphere where your child doesn't have to answer every question.
- 40:14 Heidi's encouragement: don't be intimidated to start a club!
- 41:06 Heidi's three desert-island books.
- 43:38 Where to go for book recommendations.
- 45:57 Sophisticated vocabulary makes for great read-alouds.

Major Takeaways

1. Prepare a feast for your children that will stay with them a lifetime.

Take to heart Heidi's admonition and avoid telling your child **no, no, no** about possible book selections. Rather, give them a big **YES** by providing them with bookshelves that overflow with quality books — a true feast of literary excellence. We talk a lot about twaddle at the Read-Aloud Revival, and it bears repeating again: challenge yourself as a parent to grow in discernment of what is quality versus what is twaddle.

That is not to say that every book consumed by your family should hail from 19th century British writers (though a regular diet of that would be marvelous!). Instead, remind yourself that feeding your troops primarily whole foods, whole grains, and a little sugar makes for healthier and better-functioning bodies than if they are consuming Pixy Stix and Starburst for every meal. The same principle applies to their minds and hearts.

2. Work the list and make the library work for you instead of against you.

Many parents have bemoaned the fact that a majority of the books on the library shelves seem to fall into the junk category. Borrow Heidi's wisdom and maximize the services your library offers: search online for quality books and request that they be placed on hold at your library. Instead of spending an agonizing 45 minutes trying to locate four decent books, you can pop in and out of the library in two minutes with a bag full of quality books. Jamie Martin utilizes the same tactic, which she discusses in [Episode 11](#).

Taking the time to cultivate a book list will exercise your own literary-discernment muscles. When your kids watch you do this, it will help develop their ability to recognize good books as well. We are building up their muscle memory!

3. Launching a Book Detectives Club is not as hard as you think!

Heidi reminds us that one of the keys is a willingness (and a humility) to grow right alongside the kids as you learn which books work the best and what literary discussion techniques generate the liveliest discussion among your crew.

Don't lapse into an *island man* mentality: in other words, you don't have to start the club, host the club, bake snacks for the club, and prepare crafts for the club! It can be as simple as selecting a meeting time once a month, for an hour, after which time the kids run and play

while the moms connect. Hosting homes can be rotated; snacks can be assigned (or deleted altogether). This could turn out to be one of your family's "one things," one of the pillars that defines your family culture. Step out in faith!

Show Notes

Books we talked about during the show:

The 13 Clocks, Many Moons, The Wonderful O by James Thurber

Abel's Island, Amos & Boris, Dominic, Doctor De Soto by William Steig

Deconstructing Penguins by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone

Fairy Books Collection I by Andrew Lang

Honey for a Child's Heart by Gladys Hunt

The Little White Horse by Elizabeth Goudge

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney

On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness, North! Or Be Eaten, The Monster in the Hollows, The Warden and the Wolf King (Wingfeather Saga) by Andrew Peterson

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster

Swallows and Amazons by Anthur Ransome

Watership Down by Richard Adams

The Well-Trained Mind by Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise

Other links from this episode:

Heidi's blog: [Mt. Hope Academy](#)

Heidi's posts about: [picture books, what her kids read on their own, and what they read together](#)

Heidi's posts about her [Book Detectives group](#)

Andrew Kern's talk: [How to Teach Literature Without Killing the Student or the Book](#)

Hannah started a Book Detectives group, too, and she shares about that at [Here in the Lovely Woods](#)

[1,000 Good Books List](#)

[The Rabbit Room](#)

[Story Warren: Allies in Imagination](#)

Heidi likes books recommended by [Sonlight](#) and [Exodus Books](#)

Books Heidi relies on for her Book Detectives group:

The Lost Tools of Writing by Andrew Kern

Teaching the Classics by Adam Andrews

Action Plan

1. Start cultivating your booklist by bookmarking excellent websites.

Begin with [Mt. Hope Chronicles](#). Review Heidi's many suggestions in this episode (time stamp 43:38). Reference the many sources [Melissa Wiley](#) mentions on [Episode 7](#). Periodically check out the ever-expanding reading list at [ReadAloudRevival.com](#).

Creating an ongoing booklist (paper or electronic) ensures you always have a lineup of excellent books waiting for you and also creates a sense of anticipation among your kids for the next great story.

2. Begin laying the groundwork for a Book Detectives Club of your own.

Start with the many resources we have discussed on the podcast: Adam Andrews on [Episode 2](#), Lawrence Goldstone on [Episode 8](#), and Heidi Scovel in this episode (time stamp 17:53).

Next step: list a couple of tried-and-true favorite picture books (as Heidi did) for the first couple of book club meetings.

Remember, both the adults *and* the children are learning a style of literary analysis that can be used with anything from *Ping* to *War and Peace*. Interested in adding another layer of complexity (or excitement!) to the Book Detectives? Start employing the “should” question, as Heidi described, using the *Lost Tools of Writing*.

Remember, leading a group of Book Detectives is an art, and not a science. Be willing to grow and learn with your kids over time.

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