



Episode 10

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

Guest: Heidi Scovel

Sarah: Today, I'm talking with Heidi Scovel, mother of four and blogger at Mt. Hope Academy. On Episode 3 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast, Tsh Oxenreider told us that one of her favorite places to go for great book recommendations is Heidi's blog which can be found at mthopeacademy.blogspot.com. I'll link it up in the show notes, of course.

I've been a long-time reader of Heidi's blog as well and can attest to her excellent taste in books. I thought it would be fun to chat with Heidi about how she chooses books and how she encourages the reading culture in her home.

Sarah: Hey Heidi!

Heidi: Hi Sarah!

Sarah: Thank you so much for taking my call. It's really fun to talk to you in person. I've read you for so long.

Heidi: Oh, I'm so excited to get to chat today. And books—my favorite subject.

Sarah: Awesome! Well, can we start by having you tell us a little bit about yourself and your family?

2:20 Heidi shares about her family.

Heidi: Absolutely. My husband Russ and I have been married for 18 years. And we have three boys that are 12, 10, and almost 8. And then we have a daughter also. She's 3-1/2. And we've been homeschooling from the very beginning. That's something that we talked about when we were dating. So that was something that we were really excited to do with our kids.

Sarah: Wow! Really? You talked about it when you were dating? That's so impressive.

Heidi: Actually, I think it was our third date because he was a public school teacher at the time and I thought maybe I should let him know that I was planning on homeschooling my kids. And so that he wasn't going to waste his time, and I said—I let him know that I

was planning on homeschooling my kids. And he said, "I think that is a fantastic idea!" And he's been on board ever since. So I really appreciated that.

Sarah: Were you homeschooled, or no?

Heidi: I did a little bit of everything. I did public school. I did private school. And I homeschooled for one year during high school.

Sarah: Oh wow! So you had like a gamut to choose from. You had a whole treasure box of experiences to pick from before you...

Heidi: Exactly. I felt like I really could make that decision knowing what each one looked like. And of course, we still leave it open depending on the personalities and needs of our own kids. But so far, it's been great for us.

Sarah: Awesome!

Heidi: And I've been blogging for seven and a half years. I can't believe it's been that long. And that's our exciting life. We read. The boys swim. And I blog...and take pictures.

Sarah: Awesome! And take beautiful pictures. Your photography is always gorgeous.

Heidi: Oh thank you.

Sarah: Well you are often sharing fantastic books in your blog. A lot of people say your blog is their favorite place for book recommendations. Tsh of course did on our podcast on the third episode.

I, a lot of times, if I'm struggling to come up with a book about a certain topic or just need some good recommendations, I'll head over to your blog to mine your archives for some good ideas. Have you always been good at

choosing books? Or is that something you've kind of grown into?

4:32 Learning the art of choosing quality books from an early age.

Heidi: Well, I think I got the bug from my mom back when I was in second grade. My school teacher actually recommended *Honey for a Child's Heart* to my mom and so she purchased the book and she started scouring the used bookstores in search of books on the list.

Sarah: I love that book.

Heidi: I know. It's so wonderful. And so we started our home library that way. And I started my own personal book collection soon after that. And I remember—it must have been middle school or maybe early high school, and my dad built each of us, my two sisters and me—he built large custom wooden bookcases for each of our rooms and I still have the book case that he made me. It's in my boys' room.

But I started collecting books and adding to my shelves and when I got married, I started collecting little kids' books and picture books and before I was even pregnant with my oldest son, I read *The Well-Trained Mind* and that seriously enabled my book-buying habit. And it was bad.

Sarah: Like it needed enabling.

Heidi: Exactly. And so that bookcase started overflowing and then I had to purchase several more and several more. Now those are overflowing, and so I've always loved booklists.

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.

Sarah: That's so great! When I was first a mother I remember taking my toddler to the library and I didn't even know where to start. I felt like I'm sure there are some of books in here that are better than others but I don't know how to pick. So I feel like it's something I've had to learn along the way. I'm much, much better at it now than I was in the beginning but really seriously, what a gift your mom gave you by giving you that skill early on.

Heidi: Well, the interesting thing is that I didn't like going to the library when my oldest was little because it was the same thing. It was just shelves and shelves of books and they were kind of hard to look at because they were stacked close to each other and I much preferred having a list and searching on Amazon and researching things ahead of time, but I didn't enjoy the library when my kids were really little.

Sarah: Well it puts all the books on an equal plane and you know we know that not all books are equal to each other. So it feels...

Heidi: Right. It felt more like I was wading through so much to get to the few books that I enjoyed, where if I started with a list I felt like everything on the list was wonderful and I could go from there. But even now I tend to put books on hold at the library online so I'll do my searching at home and on lists and on Amazon, and I'll go online to the library and put books on hold and then I just go in, grab

all of the hold books off the shelf, and we're good to go.

Sarah: That's good. My kids tend to pull the twaddle off the shelves. Well, actually, I think on our library shelves probably 80% of everything in the kids' department is pretty twaddly. So it's almost hard... I don't really blame them because how do you find the really good stuff when so much of is garbage. Jamie Martin from Simple Homeschool—I'll have to find that post—but she wrote a post a couple of years ago on why she doesn't take her kids to the library. And it was basically that same principle, that she does much better if she puts books on hold online and then goes and picks them up, and that way you can borrow all the best stuff without being distracted or having your little kids have to wade through all the fluff to get the good stuff.

8:11 Give your kids a feast of books — a big YES, read anything we have here!

Heidi: Right. I specifically remember that post of hers, too, and I thought *Oh, I can so relate to that* because I didn't want to be constantly telling my kids, "No, not that one. No, I don't like that." Especially since my older son in particular gravitates towards fantasy, which is to me even more difficult to wade through, that genre. And so I didn't want to be constantly telling him no, where if I bring home a huge stack of books or we have books overflowing off our shelves, I feel like it's 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."

Sarah: Well that's interesting. It also reminds me of something Andrew Pudewa said on the very first episode of our podcast, and I'm going to forgot the analogy now... But basically, the idea was if you give your children good stuff constantly—good stories, good books constantly—their ability to recognize good books is so much stronger. It's like a muscle memory kind of thing. And so they don't really need to wade through the junk. You can do that for them and then that kind of helps train their affections so they are able to pull the good stuff for themselves as they get older.

Heidi: I think that's true and I'm not saying that my kids don't sometimes pick out the very twaddly sort of books but I hope that in general the majority of what they're reading is compelling, good stories that have quirky characters and great themes that are well written. And that they do get used to that and find that the twaddle books aren't quite as satisfying.

Even though they're okay once in a while because I'm guilty of that too. Sometimes I just want a really entertaining easy book to get through. But I don't want a steady diet of that. And I hope that they grow up feeling the same way.

10:15 Criteria for selecting good books.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. So what criteria do you use when you're selecting books for your kids? Do you have certain things you're looking for in a good book?

Heidi: I like books that are well-written and I like books that have interesting characters. I

really like deep, unique characters for the books, and adventurous. I have three boys and so I'm constantly trying to find books that I think will appeal to them.

11:00 Some books soar at private reading but sink for read-alouds.

There aren't really specific qualities that I look for. And there's a difference between read-aloud books and books read independently. There's a few books that are really great for independent reading but don't flow as well for read aloud. And so that changes a little bit.

I remember reading aloud *Swallows and Amazons*. I don't know if you've read that before but it's a fantastic series. And my son has gone on to reread it several times but there was so much technical sailing because they were kids going off on a sailing adventure but there were so many sailing terms and technical explanations for what they were doing that it was difficult to read that out loud.

Sarah: That's actually really helpful to hear you say that. I tried reading aloud *Swallows and Amazons*, must have been two years ago, and I really struggled through the whole first chapter and it was the technical terms that was really tripping me up. So we just put them aside but at that time I didn't realize that... I had heard so many places, on so many blogs, and so many people that I looked up to said this is fantastic, this is a fantastic series, life-changing, sort of childhood-forming fiction and I thought *what is wrong with us?* But really, it wasn't anything wrong

with us. It was just not a good selection for read aloud but excellent for read alone.

Heidi: And I think that's really true because my older son who has enjoyed the adventures that they went on and the ideas, the childhood that that captures in the books, but it was difficult to read aloud. But I feel that way about *The Phantom Tollbooth* because a lot of people say that's one of the favorite read-alouds. And I think the book is full of homophones. If you can't see how it's written, it's not funny because they're using words in different ways but you can't tell when you're reading it aloud how things are spelled and you lose a lot of the humor there.

12:53 A peek inside read-aloud time in Heidi's house.

Sarah: Right. So what does read-aloud look like in your house? And I know your kids read just voraciously independently, so can you give us a little picture of how often you read aloud or what the ratio might look like for reading alone versus reading aloud in your home?

Heidi: Right. And this is where I hope that I can express some reality for the parents who are struggling with read aloud time because we have struggled with that. Even though I am completely on board with the idea of reading aloud and reading aloud to older kids even once they can read independently.

Sometimes the reality of that, depending on your kids, is really difficult. My older son has an attention span that could just go on for hours. I could never stop reading and he could listen. My second son is extremely visual. And so he could not, and I can relate to this because I remember struggling when my mom would read aloud to us as kids. But

if he can't see the words, he can't focus on them.

And so he did not enjoy read-alouds until he was old enough to read for himself and he could sit next to me and he would constantly say, "Where are you? Where are you?" And he would want me to run my finger along the page where I was reading aloud.

And so he enjoyed picture books when he was younger but as far as the longer chapter books, he needed to be able to read along with me. And then my younger son has very little attention span and his mouth never stops moving. So constant interruptions, and he'd just want to talk or he would just slip away and go do his own thing.

And then the baby came along, the toddler...

Sarah: She's a little spitfire, right?

Heidi: Oh my goodness. She's a spitfire and she wants to be included but she is not a sit-still-be-quiet little person. So a lot of times, it felt like read-aloud was this big battle time between either being interrupted constantly or feel like I was disciplining constantly. You can't jump on me. You can't interrupt. You have to sit here. You have to be quiet. So I can relate to parents who struggle with read-aloud time.

Plus, I had kids who read early and inhaled books, and so they'd also lose patience with, "I just want to read that" and the whole stretching books out for a longer period of time, which is actually quite beneficial. It is still difficult on the patience of a seven-year-old.

Sarah: Yeah, because reading aloud takes so much longer than reading a book to

yourself... hours and hours and hours longer to read something aloud.

Heidi: Plus, you can only read aloud for so long in one stretch.

Sarah: Yes. My oldest three, I used to be able to read aloud to them. We would really read aloud for maybe three hours a day—two, three hours, it was insane. We'd read everything. And now I've got three more babies. One's a 2-year old and she's actually fairly cooperative now, but our one-year-old twins are mobile and, you know...

16:21 Keep the books tidy? Or let the kids explore and destroy?

Heidi: Yes I do. I didn't have twins so I can't even imagine. I love the picture on your blog of the twins pulling the books off the shelves because I could relate to that. That's what my whole house looks like, is everything pulled off shelves and dumped out of drawers. I want books accessible to my kids at all times. That's usually what's all over every surface.

Sarah: Yeah, right. It's just not like home décor, like nice to look at, but it's actually a part of your culture so you really want to just be everywhere. I know. I have a friend who told me I should put all the books in our house in one room. And I thought well, no, I want books in every room. But books in every room means that what the toddlers were doing in that picture, it happens all over my house every day.

Heidi: Yes. And I decided early on because I was the kid—talking about what I was like in second grade, but even right after that, I was the one who had this special library closet and I wanted a Dewey Decimal System. I

made up my own organizational system and logged in all the books and had them in specific categories and order. I mean that's the kind of person I was.

But my children are nothing like that. And I mean nothing like that. But I made the decision early on that I want these books to be loved. And perfect on a shelf does nothing, and so all of our books look extraordinarily well loved.

Sarah: Which is what they're for, right?

Heidi: Exactly.

17:53 Using *Deconstructing Penguins* and *Teaching the Classics* to begin a Book Detectives club.

Sarah: On episode 8, Lawrence Goldstone came on to the podcast to talk about his book *Deconstructing Penguins* and to share about how to start a parent-child book group, which was a really great podcast. I loved that book. And you've actually done that in your community. So I want to hear all about your Book Detectives group. Can you tell us about that?

Heidi: I would love to tell you about it because it's been such a fun experience. Several years ago, I read *Deconstructing Penguins* and I was completely inspired. My sister read it right after I did and she said, "Oh, I want to do that. I want to do that with our kids." But I felt really inadequate to that task.

I loved reading the discussions in the book that he had with the students but half the time I was thinking *I would have never*

*thought of that question. I would have never thought of bringing that up or I never saw that in the book. And my education—I had no literary analysis growing up during my school years and I don't understand how that happened. I felt inadequate. I didn't know how to go about discussing any book that wasn't specifically listed in *Deconstructing Penguins*.*

So about three years ago, I was introduced to *Teaching the Classics* by Adam Andrews and I loved listening to that podcast that you did with him.

Sarah: Oh yes. For our listeners, that is Episode 2 if you're looking for that one.

Heidi: Yes. And I watched the videos and had discussion and I had a couple experiences with *Teaching the Classics* right in a row, one summer. And finally, I was so excited that I had found a tool that could be applied to any piece of literature from picture books to Tolstoy or Dickens. And I needed that tool and if you haven't looked at the *Teaching the Classics* syllabus, the Socratic list of questions that apply to any piece of literature in the back of the book is worth the price alone. There's 10 pages of open-ended questions that can be applied to any piece of literature. And so once I had that tool, I thought *I have something to use to lead a book club*.

So I invited—there were probably about 10 parents and 12 kids in the beginning. And when I invited them, I said, "We're going to be detectives," because we talked about the idea that books were mysteries, that stories were mysteries. And that we were trying to look at the clues of the surface mystery of the plot and the things going on in the book to

discover the deeper mystery, which was what the author was telling us about, or the theme or idea that the author wanted to get across.

Sarah: I bet the kids loved that. What kid doesn't want to be a detective?

Heidi: It was really fun because we really talked up the idea of being a detective, and in fact I got little magnifying glasses at the dollar store and passed out magnifying glasses to each of the kids and we had a couple older siblings dressed up as detectives with hats and trench coats and so we really played that up. And the kids were probably at that point between ages 5 and 10. So we had a fairly wide mix. We were trying to do mostly grade school, though.

And we started out reading picture books at the meeting. And then we'd talk about them. And we'd use the story chart from *Teaching the Classics* and we talked about the setting being the crime scene and the questions are where and when, and then we talked about the characters being the suspects. So we talked about who was in the story. And then the kids love the story chart with the bubbles and the kind of triangle shapes.

Sarah: Yes, and if our listeners want to see something like this, I will be linking in the show notes to Heidi's Book Detectives group blog post. And she has a lot of great pictures that show— actually I think after every one of your posts that you talk about your meetings, you've posted a picture of what the whiteboard looks like when you guys are done with that triangular-shaped bubble, right?

Heidi: Yes, and the only thing I'll say is that usually I rewrote the notes because I will not pretend that the notes looked that neat.

Because we were kind of writing down just as we were going and talking about it. So it's usually pretty messy, but the pictures give a really good idea of what the board—the things that we wrote down the board as notes. And it helps for elementary students. Again, the visual representation of that, because they could see as we were discussing, they could see how that looked on the story chart.

22:50 Socratic discussions and picture books.

Sarah: Yeah, and I like how you started with picture books even though your kids were listening to or reading on their own longer chapter books. It's just like Adam Andrews says. that this is the way that you analyze any piece of literature whether it's a picture book or *War and Peace*. And so it's so helpful to do it with the picture book to simplify it and get that very simplified version—get into the habit I guess, right?

Heidi: Right. And the interesting thing that came up is that all of the kids loved hearing the picture book read aloud at the meeting. And in fact, we started with picture books and then in the middle we did some chapter books and had the kids read them and come. But it turned out that everybody enjoyed the picture books so much. even the older kids. that we went back to the picture books for the last few book club meetings that we've had.

But the other interesting thing is that I chose picture books that I had read—a lot of them I had read over and over again—but I can't even express to you how much more I learned and noticed in these simple picture books when we discussed it as a group with the kids,

with the moms that were there. I learned so much about the flow of the story and I also learned how intentional authors are even in simple chapter books—everything, the illustrations, the way the author reads the story, I didn't realize... I mean I just enjoyed them before, but I didn't realize how intentional and how deep even those simple stories could be.

Sarah: Interesting! Yeah Lawrence did say that on the podcast, on Episode 8. He said every single part of a story is there for a reason, and I thought *I bet that will uncover a whole new dimension that I've never noticed before, just knowing that.*

Heidi: Well, I read...we did *Miss Rumphius*. I don't have it in the notes on my blog, but we did *Miss Rumphius* and it's one that I've read over and over again, but I had twenty *Aha!* moments when we were discussing that. And I couldn't even believe the things that we could discuss from that simple picture book.

And I think all of the parents have felt that way. The moms tend to let the kids answer questions as often as possible because they don't want to take over the book club. But the moms still chime in, especially when the kids are having difficulty, or the moms see something. So it's been really fun to do that as a group and not just with kids but with the parents also.

25:44 Logistics for the book club: how many, and appropriate ages of kids.

Sarah: So how many kids are in your group?

Heidi: It's changed a little bit. And now that we're doing individual picture books, because it's hard for everybody's schedules to mesh up perfectly, and so it really varies depending on the month. But I'd say we probably have usually at least six moms and 10 kids.

Sarah: Okay, of what ages?

Heidi: We're now probably between 6 and 12.

Sarah: So if you were giving... if a mom was going "I want to do this," what ages do you think are the youngest you could start—what would be your advice to her as far as the number of kids and the ages?

Heidi: It kind of depends on the kid, of course, because some could do it earlier, but I really felt like around age 6 is when they could start participating and really understanding what we were going for. And also it takes some level of being able to—and my kids are certainly the least perfect among the sitting still and being quiet sort of atmosphere—but they have to be able to pay attention long enough and participate. So I think age 6 is a good place to start if you're doing picture books.

Sarah: And you have all different ages in there. So how does that dynamic work? Your older son is 12, is that right?

Heidi: My older son is 12 but he's very imaginative and he enjoys picture books and he enjoys any kind of story. And so personality wise, he's a good fit for that group. But I know in other groups you might have kids that are ready to do something a little bit more grown up by age 10 or 11.

Sarah: Although I think your comment about how much you've learned—it probably

just feeds the experience to have all these different ages and the different perspectives and they probably add something new and different.

Heidi: That's right because the 12-year-old might see something different in a picture book than a 6-year-old would. But they get to share their ideas and hear the perspectives from different ages.

Sarah: Okay, very cool.

28:11 Incorporating the *Lost Tools of Writing* into the book club and asking the “should” questions.

Heidi: And I was going to mention also we did the picture books and we did the story chart using the ideas from *Deconstructing Penguins* about the mystery of a story. But then we decided to pull in something a little bit different a few months ago and we actually did some of the questions from *The Lost Tools of Writing* by CiRCE Institute.

And they have an invention process, which essentially you're learning to think through a book and think through the ideas of a book and ask questions to essentially make a big inventory of things that you could write about. And so we started learning... And I do have one of those on my blog, at least one, to give you an idea of the questions that we asked.

But we started out just asking the kids say, “What questions can you ask about the story?” And then we said, “Could we change any of these questions into ‘should’ questions?” And Andrew Kern has talked a lot about that. Should a certain character have

done a certain action? It's a great way to open up ideas inside of a story.

Sarah: Actually I think there's an audio... a talk he gave on teaching the literature without killing the book or the student, or something like that. I'm getting the title mixed up now but I'll find it and I'll link it in the show notes because it's... I mean, I'm a huge Andrew Kern junkie myself but that's just such a great talk and he has so much wisdom in there. So on the "should" question is something that he really addresses in that particular talk.

Heidi: Right. And that was a really fun thing because the kids came up with interesting "should" questions. You pick a character and an action and say, "Should they have done that?"

And so we changed the questions that we had asked and we decided which ones could be changed into "should" questions and then we voted on which "should" question we wanted to really talk about. And you can hand kids a "should" question. You can come up with that on your own. You could say, "Okay we're going to talk about should this character have done this action?" But it was kind of fun for them to come up with questions on their own and then feel like they got a say in voting for which "should" question we were going to discuss.

**30:29 The ANI chart: A (affirmative)
N (negative) I (interesting).**

So we set up our ANI chart and *The Lost Tools of Writing* goes into that at the beginning of the program, but you make a chart and you have three columns and in the

first column you have an A, which stands for Affirmative and all the reasons for why the character should have done an action would go in that column. And then the middle column has an N at the top for Negative and all the reasons why a character should not have done the action would go in that column. And then the third column has an I at the top for Interesting and anything that comes up that is not specifically affirmative or negative goes in the I for Interesting column.

And as you can imagine when you have a bunch of elementary students talking, there were a lot of things to put in the Interesting category but it was a way to validate that they were participating and what they had to say was important.

Sarah: And there's not a right or wrong where they're intimidated to say anything because they're not sure what the right answer is or what exactly you're looking for.

Heidi: Exactly. And that's another thing that we found in the book club setting was that kids were just encouraged to share what they knew, what they thought, and there are no wrong answers and so they're getting in this culture of participating and sharing and not scared that they're going to have the wrong answer or say the wrong thing.

Sarah: Right.

Heidi: So the ANI chart, we filled it up and came up with lots of reasons for both the affirmative and negative. And that's pretty much as far as we took it because—you could go further but it's really better for upper middle school or high school, but it was just a way to get kids learning how to ask questions and coming up with ideas from a story.

Sarah: I went to the Two Andrews talk where Andrew Kern and Andrew Pudewa were speaking and Andrew Kern walked us through that ANI system with *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Actually, I think I may have gone to one, the same tour—you went to one in Oregon and ours was in Washington. You went to the Two Andrews talk right?

Heidi: Yes I did. When they were in Oregon and it was fantastic. It was so much fun hearing both of them speak.

Sarah: Yes. I was really blown away by that simple "should" question that Andrew Kern walked us through. Should Edmund have followed the white witch in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and it really just blew me away. He didn't know where the conversation was really going to go. He didn't really know the journey it was going to take. But he was talking about it always end in truth no matter what. If you ask a "should" questions and you follow this sort of ANI framework—the Affirmative, the Negative, the Interesting—and kind of walk through those steps, it always lead you to the truth.

I was blown away by that, I thought *I need to have more of this*. So I love how you've woven *The Lost Tools of Writing* in with *Teaching the Classics* and *Deconstructing Penguins* methods to create your own Book Detective group that really meets your kids where they're at. That's so awesome!

Heidi: Yes, and it's been a great combination because they each have something a little bit different that went together really well. And I like what you said about Andrew Kern not knowing where the conversation was going to go because I

learned a few meetings in that it was almost more fun if I just picked a book and I didn't go through it ahead of time and analyze it in my own head. I just took a book that I had enjoyed previously but then I read it and we discussed it together. Because then I didn't have a specific direction I wanted to force the conversation to go.

34:12 Preparing for a book discussion with just “should” questions requires less preparation from the teacher.

Sarah: In the audio, *Teaching Literature without Killing the Book or the Student* that I'll link in the show notes, Andrew Kern does that as well. He gives an example of what it looks like to talk about a book where the teacher knows exactly the path that she wants the kids to go on, versus talking about a book where you don't really know where it's going to go but you ask a few key questions, the “should” question being central to that, and it was astounding how much deeper and more meaningful the conversation that he really didn't prepare a whole lot for. And he was talking about how the second way, without having the clear path but just having a few key questions—that one takes so much less time to prepare for in advance but offers a much more meaningful outcome. So that was really interesting to me.

Heidi: That's true. And that's really helpful when we as moms are trying to juggle fifty different things, that we don't have to have this perfect plan with these little blanks and worksheets and specific answers, that it's more of a conversation and a relationship.

And then it's easier to pull into everyday life as well.

35:18 Discussing books in a meaningful way without having the formal book club chart/discussion.

Sarah: Yeah so when you don't have a book club meeting and you're not doing the official let's chart this out on paper and look at how the plot, structure, what the author is trying to say to us through the plot, structure or whatnot, you could ask a simple "should" question on your ride to swim practice or on your way to the soccer game about a book that your child's reading that you've read before, or a book that you're reading together, and it just becomes more like a way of life and it doesn't have to be this big addition to our to-do list or a big pressure of... We're so overwhelmed as moms anyway with all these things we need to do. So this makes it a way where we can talk about books in a meaningful way that is just a part of our culture, a part of our family life, and it doesn't add to the strain of what we're already trying to do.

36:08 Training kids how to think and ask questions without prompting.

Heidi: Absolutely. And I think we're also teaching kids how to ask questions. Essentially, we're training ourselves how to think and how to ask questions but I loved it last night, I was reading *The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge to the kids. At the beginning, it's talking about the characters are in a carriage that's lurching along this

pathway and my middle son immediately piped up and he said, "That's a clue as to the time period that it's set in."

Because they're in a carriage so we know that that's probably before cars. And so he's catching details that mean something in the story that he would have just passed by otherwise.

Sarah: And Adam Andrews says that. He says the more often we do this the more it just becomes a habit and so the biggest part is that if you can do meaningful conversations, these intentional book detectives type of scenarios occasionally, just a couple of times, that will train your child to do it on their own, just become a habit of mind. And so that's what your son is doing is sort of asking those questions without having to have the formal class. It just becomes a part of the way that they interact with books.

37:21 The beauty of book clubs: a fun atmosphere where your child doesn't have to answer every question.

Heidi: Right, and having also the Book Detectives set up for once a month or whenever you do it, it's more of a fun atmosphere to discuss that and it's not one child that's having to answer all the questions, because that's something I think we forget at home if we're homeschooling, our poor child in front of us is the one who has to answer every single question.

Sarah: Yeah it's a lot of pressure.

Heidi: But if it comes up we're in a group or a classroom setting, everybody is taking turns in listening to other kids' ideas and so with a

very relaxed, fun, just an enjoyable setting to learn something that's kind of big ideas and that kids might think of as a difficult subject, and so it's not like we're doing with this with every single book. There's a lot of just sitting down and enjoying reading books and not having to analyze it but they're getting these tools in a more fun setting that they can use at other times.

Sarah: Well, and then I guess... Do you find then since you organize these with other families that it happens more reliably because it's on your calendar and it involves other people and so you're planning ahead for this event, for this gathering?

Heidi: I am a big deadline person. Things don't tend to happen unless they're specifically scheduled and there's a deadline of some sort. So that's very true. I would be much less likely to have these kinds of discussions if we weren't doing it with the book club and have that sort of accountability.

Sarah: Well, I could see how that could be pretty fun if you had a group of four or five moms and rotated whose house it was done at and maybe there's some fun snacks and it's something that the kids look forward to once every month or every other month or something. I could see how that could be just a really, really fun habit to get into as a family.

Heidi: And you can take it as far as you want, because my friend Hannah, when they did their Book Detectives meetings they had crafts and food and all sorts of things that were in the theme of the book. And I'm not so much of that sort of planner/craft person and so ours were really relaxed. I'd pick the book

right before the meeting. We sat down. I'd read the book aloud, we'd discuss it and the kids would go play and the moms would have chat time, and so it was really simple. So you can take that either direction.

Sarah: Awesome. Yeah I believe I linked to her before but Hannah's blog is Here in the Lovely Woods and I will make sure I will link to her blog in the show notes as well, because she has great notes on her group. So what's your big advice to moms who are eager to start a Book Detectives group of their own?

40:14 Heidi's encouragement: don't be intimidated to start a club!

Heidi: I think the biggest thing is not to be intimidated and be willing to learn with the kids and understand that— I think sometimes as adults, we expect when we're learning something new to be immediately at this proficient adult level. And we don't give ourselves permission to start at classical education what would be the grammar stage level of a new subject.

And so when things are new, be willing to start at the beginning and start and learn with your kids. I think that's the biggest thing and then just sit back and enjoy the conversation and know that not every little thing has to be planned out.

Sarah: Yeah, that's perfect. If you were stranded on an island... I asked this question to Melissa Wiley and I think I almost gave her a heart attack. But if you were stranded on an island with your family and could only bring three books, what would they be?

41:06 Heidi's three desert-island books.

Heidi: Oh my goodness. And as much as I love lists and I've done this several times in my blog, like *what are the five most important books for your kids to read growing up* and that sort of thing, but then of course as soon as I have to answer it, it does, it like induces a heart attack.

Other than the Bible, I think that if I were stranded on an island, I would want a book full of fairy tales. Maybe like Andrew Lang's *The Fairy Books*. And maybe a poetry or Shakespeare anthology. We do tend to—we've been memorizing a lot of Shakespeare and poetry with the kids. So I think that give back. There's a lot more to involve yourself with if you were going to have a long period of time. And I'll go with *Watership Down*.

Sarah: *Watership Down*, man it's been a long time since I've read that.

Heidi: I didn't read it as a child and I read it as an adult and I could not believe how much I loved the story. I was so surprised that I would enjoy a story about rabbits.

Sarah: Interesting. I haven't read it since high school and I don't think I appreciated it at the time so maybe I need to read it again.

Heidi: And maybe I wouldn't have appreciated in high school because I know there's lots of books that I read the first time and didn't care for at all. But as an adult, I loved *Watership Down*. I actually read it for another book club of mine, so it was all adults reading the story.

And in general, everyone was just amazed at how much they enjoyed the story. And then I

recently read it aloud to the kids and it's probably one of our favorite read alouds.

Sarah: Wow. Very good. Were all your kids interested? All of the ages?

Heidi: My 3-year-old definitely not. And my 7-year-old—he's almost 8, I guess—but he doesn't concentrate very well on larger stories so he'd listen to parts and pieces but my older two at 12 and then 9 loved it.

Sarah: Okay. And where do you go then for book recommendations? Everybody goes to you. So where do you go?

43:38 Where to go for book recommendations.

Heidi: Well I already mentioned *The Well-Trained Mind* and *Honey for a Child's Heart*, which are great resources. There's a 1000 Good Books List online that is—I think it's a classical homeschooling list, but it's an incredible list that's broken down into reading levels and anthologies and poetry and various... but it's called the 1000 Good Books List.

Sarah: Yup. I'll link that up.

Heidi: And I do a lot of searching on Amazon and reading reviews and seeing related books. Veritas Press and also Sonlight, I've actually liked a lot of their book selections. I've gotten many books from both of those companies. The two blogs or online sources that I love are The Rabbit Room.

Sarah: The Rabbit Room, I haven't heard of that one.

Heidi: And Story Warren. Absolutely fantastic. I think The Rabbit Room is possibly

Andrew Peterson's blog. He wrote *The Wingfeather Saga*.

Sarah: Oh, Tsh talked about that in our Episode 2. Her daughter was really liking *The Wingfeather Saga*.

Heidi: Yes, my kids read the first three and were just waiting on pins and needles, begging me for the fourth book, and it just came and they devoured it.

Sarah: I haven't gotten my hands on it yet. I guess I need to.

Heidi: So those are two blogs, and also Exodus Books. There's a lot of great reviews on Exodus Books. They're a homeschooling, literature-based company. They sell literature.

Sarah: I refer to Sonlight a lot as well. I know you mentioned them. I love how they give a recommended age for reading alone and a recommended age for reading aloud because I think that's a really helpful distinction.

Heidi: Yes, it is.

Sarah: Okay, well that is super wonderful. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

45:57 Sophisticated vocabulary makes for great read-alouds.

Heidi: You were talking about the difference between reading alone and reading aloud and I wanted to mention two of my favorite authors that have an amazing vocabulary, an amazing way with words, and can be enjoyed by really young kids but they make read-alouds because the vocabulary is so sophisticated, and that's William Steig. He

wrote *Amos & Boris* and *Brave Irene* and *Doctor De Soto* is one book that he's famous for. But the vocabulary in his picture books are fantastic, but a lot people don't realize that he wrote three short chapter books.

Sarah: Oh, I didn't know that either.

Heidi: And, again, if you have a strong reader, they can read it independently because they are shorter chapter books but the vocabulary is very sophisticated. So that's *Abel's Island*, *The Real Thief*, and *Dominic* are his three chapter books that he's written and I would highly recommend those.

Sarah: Oh excellent! I've never even heard of those. I am of course familiar with *Brave Irene* and *Amos & Boris* and *Doctor De Soto*. But I didn't know he wrote chapter books.

Heidi: Right. And we did *The Real Thief* for one of our Book Detectives and it was one of my favorite Book Detectives meetings that we had.

Sarah: Do you have a post on that one?

Heidi: I do. And then also James Thurber. I don't know if you've heard of him but he wrote the picture book *Many Moons*.

Sarah: No, I don't think I have heard of him.

Heidi: And again, you can tell that he absolutely has a love affair with words. It's just fantastic. But he also wrote two short chapter books that are a little bit edgy, maybe aren't for kids that are super sensitive, they're kind of a little bit darker. But they're absolutely fantastic books, *The 13 Clocks* and *The Wonderful O*.

Sarah: I think I have heard of *The 13 Clocks* but I can't think of it. It just sounds familiar.

Heidi: But again, those make great read-alouds because they're written for children but they have very sophisticated vocabulary and you can tell that the authors love words.

Sarah: That makes a huge difference, I think, when you're reading aloud and it just has some really fantastic delicious words. It just makes a huge difference in the read-aloud experience.

Heidi: Yes, yes it does.

Sarah: Very good. Well, where can our listeners find you online?

Heidi: I am at Mt. Hope Chronicles. Mt. Hope Chronicles is the title of my blog but the address is mthopeacademy.blogspot.com.

Sarah: Perfect. And you have some great categories on your site—picture book, picnic and the Book Detectives group, and The Reading Child—so I will link to all those different categories so our listeners can find your recommendations and your blog posts.

Again, if you're interested in the Book Detectives group, definitely check out her Book Detectives posts because she's got excellent visuals, walks you right through some of her meetings, good suggestions for the books that they've used and enjoyed and then the whiteboard pictures are really, really invaluable.

If you want to get a handle—if you're a visual person like me, and you want to get a good handle on what that actually looks like, you can get it there.

So thank you so much for joining me this has been a ton of fun.

Heidi: Thanks, Sarah. I love chatting with books and it was a fun time chatting with you.

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.

“My name is Simon and I'm 5 years old. I'm from Florida and my favorite book that my Mom and Daddy read to me is *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. My favorite part is when Jesus rises again.”

That's my favorite part too. Hey, your child can be on an upcoming episode. All you need to do is head to ReadAloudRevival.com. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click the big orange button to leave me a voicemail. You can coach or prompt your young kids right through it. I can edit on my end and cut out your adult voice if I need to. So really, there's no pressure for your child to record a perfect message or anything. You can figure out together what your child wants to say and then have them echo you right on the message and I can fix it up to come on the podcast. It's so great to hear from the kids about what they love being read to them, so keep those messages coming.

For today's show notes, with links to everything that was discussed, head to ReadAloudRevival.com and look for Episode 10.

That's it for today. Until next time, friends, go build your family culture around books!