



RAR 64 – Laura Martin

Laura: I had this 7th grade boy in mind that sat there and said, “Mrs. Martin, I don’t read.” And I wanted to write a book that I could hand him and say, “Prove it!”

Sarah: You’re listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that helps you make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.

Today’s guest took her love of books and her love of kids and wrote one of the hardest-to-put-down middle grade novels I’ve ever read. I’ll tell you what, I am not usually a science fiction kind of girl. I would probably normally skip a book with a dinosaur on the cover (just being totally honest here) but my 13 year old and 11 year old both read *The Edge of Extinction: The Ark Plan* by Laura Martin, well, more accurately, they devoured them. And then they told me I had to read them too. So I decided to give the first book in the series a try and instantly became one of Laura Martin’s biggest fans. Laura Martin’s books *The Ark Plan* and *Code Name Flood* are epic tales sure to capture even the most reluctant reader. I find myself recommending them constantly to parents who ask me what their 8 to 14 year old kids who haven’t fallen in love with reading will like to read. Laura is a former 7th grade language arts teacher who for six year years came up with up with creative and inspiring ideas for getting her kids hooked on reading. She was especially drawn to helping boys who so often stop reading for enjoyment around that age. So I am thrilled to have this chance to talk with Laura about writing a series and how we can engage our hesitant readers and help them develop a love for reading that lasts a lifetime. Laura, welcome to the Read Aloud Revival.

Laura: Thank you so much for having me. I’m excited to be here.

Sarah: Well, me too, I’m excited for this conversation and I’ve invited my 13 year old daughter, Alison and my 11 year old son, Drew onto the show because they loved your books – they’re the ones who introduced you to me, so I wanted them to have a chance to meet you. So, Alison, do you want to say hello to everybody?

Alison: Hi, I’m Alison.

Sarah: And Drew?

Drew: Hi, this is Drew speaking.

Sarah: So glad to have them here. This is going to be really fun.

4:30 Where the story came from

Drew: I was wondering how do you come up with the idea for the story?

Laura: Well, I actually came up with it while I was still teaching. I was on fall break and so my mom called me and said, “Hey, how about we go to New York City” and I didn’t have any kids at the time so I could drop everything and go to New York City. And I’m the kind of nerd who, when in New York I don’t want to go shopping or sightseeing, I wanted to go to the museum. And they have a really cool museum- the Natural History Museum. And I was walking through and they had all these really cool dinosaurs displayed but prior to writing this book I wasn’t overly into dinosaurs. I would say I was like everybody else where you look at a dinosaur displayed and you go, “That’s cool” and then you move on with your life, right? So I was looking at all these displays and there’s a little cave off to the side that no one was really looking at because there was this little kind of tiny dinosaur. It was about the size of say,



a Golden Retriever. And I looked at it and I thought, “Humph - you know what? If we did bring dinosaurs out of extinction would we eventually have them as pets? Like, would this be hanging out in somebody’s backyard? So I took out my cell phone and I took a picture of it and then I completely forgot about the idea. Months went by. I went back to teaching. I went back to my life. And then my cell phone popped up that fun little message that says you’re out of storage, you need to delete something. So I was going through these pictures and I came across this random dinosaur picture that I’d taken and I almost deleted it. And then I had this thought. I was like, ‘Oh yeah, I had that idea about what if dinosaurs came back.’ And in that exact moment I had this vision of this girl running to get the mail in a world where dinosaurs were back and something simple like getting the mail isn’t quite so simple anymore. And so if you’ve read Edge of Extinction that’s the very first chapter, is my main character attempting to get the mail. So what’s fun is if you look at the very cover of Edge of Extinction there’s a little dinosaur on the bridge and when we were designing the cover I actually asked, “Could we put that same little dinosaur that I saw in the museum, can we put him on the bridge?” and I just think it’s a really, kind of, neat full circle of where an idea comes from and then actually have it on the cover of your book. And I also think it’s a good testament when you have an idea, even if it’s a really weird, crazy idea like what if dinosaurs come back, you should write it down somewhere because if I hadn’t taken a picture with my phone this book never would have happened. I wouldn’t have remembered that idea months down the road. So, whenever you get a good idea, even if it’s a really crazy idea, it might be your idea so you should really capture it somehow.

Sarah: I love that because it’s not like you had this idea and you knew ‘This would make a really good middle grade novel and I’m going to write it down and it’s going to be a project I’m going to work on right now.’ You just sort of had an idea, snapped it, and then forgot about it, but then it was in a place where you could find it later when you were ready for it. Right?

Laura: And I was actually neck deep in quarrying my very first novel which I didn’t realize at the time, but it was awful and it will never see the light of day, but I got a really good piece of advice from someone that said, “Well, you’re getting all these rejections when you’re trying to get published, you should start another book, because you’ll go ‘Ooh, this one’s really good and you’ll know you have something good coming down the pipeline.” So I had actually got done opening a bunch of rejections for this first book that I was convinced was really good but really it wasn’t. And that’s when I was like, ‘Oh yeah, there’s that idea!’ and I sat down and started writing, and that’s where Edge of Extinction came from.

Drew: Where did you get the characters names?

Laura: There’s actually some funny stories behind where I got those characters names. The main character’s name is Skye and growing up as a little girl I always said if I had a daughter I was going to name her Skye. I was determined. And then I got married and I realized that someone else gets an opinion in naming children (other than just you) and my husband didn’t like the name. So, I said if I can’t use it for a kid I’ll use it in my book. So that’s where the name Skye came from. I just loved it. And then Todd, actually, funny story – I was teaching at the time and there was a guy named Todd, who was a social studies teacher at my school who’s a friend of mine and I



stuck the name in more as a place holder than anything else and I was going to come back and think of something really cool to put in there later but the weird thing about when you name a character and then you keep writing, that character becomes that name. And I got attached to having that character named Todd so I kept it.

8:40 Learning about Loch Ness

Drew: Where did you find out about the Loch Ness Monster and the Scottish League?

Laura: That's funny that you mention that because so much of that is happening in book two and having these kind of sea monsters and when I was teaching we actually used to teach a book called Tales of the Cryptids which a cryptid is an animal like a Loch Ness monster or a big foot, an animal that we think might exist but we have no actual proof other than some sketchy photos and eyewitness accounts, kind of thing. So we used to use that book as a non-fiction book and I would do all these things about Big Foot and Loch Ness Monster because its kind of funny because the book is currently sitting on my computer like ¼ of the way done, has all those things in it because I used to teach this book. So that's where my first contact of that came from and I used to teach with a really cool teacher named Mark Weaver, who's actually Teacher of the Year a few years back, and he used to do a whole entire unit on the Loch Ness Monster and the science behind trying to figure out if this creature's real or not. So I've just always been intrigued with that, and there's something about a sea monster that just sends chills up your spine so when I was writing book 2 I was like 'I have to have these guys in there.'

Sarah: So Drew I have a question for you. I didn't tell you I was going to ask you this but if you were going to recommend The Ark Plan, the first book of The Edge of Extinction to somebody who do you think would like it? So, is there another book they might have liked that would make you think they'd like this one or is there some reason you think they might like it?

Drew: I would think I'd have to say Fablehaven because it has a lot similarities like there's a mission and there's a powerful sort of race trying to stop you, so I'd recommend Fablehaven.

Sarah: OK, so if you're a Fablehaven book lover out there this might be a good one for you to try. You might like this one as well.

Laura: I love Fablehaven.

Sarah: Do you? Oh, we are working with getting Brandon Mull into an Author Access Event at Read Aloud Revival Membership so we don't have a date yet, but he said yes so I'm clinging to the yes email that I got.

11:00 Alison's questions

OK Alison, you have some questions for Mrs. Martin too, right?

Alison: I do. OK, so I was wondering which character's most like you?

Laura: I would say Skye's probably the most like me. But when I was writing it I don't think I realized that but I think it's just part of the writing process because I'm writing it as a first person so when I'm saying, "I did this ... I did that" I think you pull a lot of who you are into your characters whether you mean to or not. So I'd say Skye's probably the most like me as far as kind of being stubborn but being loyal and just kind of going for it. That's kind of the kid that I was and the



adult I turned out to be so I'd have to say Skye. But it's funny because a lot of the people in my life, for example, I have a younger brother named Eric who I really kind of modeled the character Todd off of. I didn't tell him until after the book came out and I was like, "Oh, by the way, p.s. there's a character in there who's you" but it's kind of a fun thing because I didn't even realize until after the book came out and I had friends and family members read it how much of the people in my life I pulled into these characters and they'd go, "Was Ivan kind of like your grandpa?" You know, I'm like, "Oh, yeah! You're right. He is." It's weird things because every life experience you have as a writer ultimately will end up in your stories in some way, shape, or form and I think that's what's really cool about being a writer.

Alison: OK, that makes sense. And Skye's not a bad person to be like at all.

Laura: Oh, thank you.

Alison: OK, are there going to be any more books in The Edge of Extinction series?

Laura: Right now there's not. It's kind of weird that it only has two books in the series which I know is not the norm but when I sold my book originally to Harper-Collins it was just called The Ark Plan there was no Edge of Extinction tacked on yet, they said we like it but we want you to spread it into two books. So if you read Edge of Extinction there's a little bit of a cliff hanger ending at the end because I had to make half way through my original manuscript feel like enough of an ending and then book two is the other half plus some extra stuff so that's why right now there's just two. Now I don't want to say never say never because I would love to write another Edge of Extinction book someday, I have

ideas in my head turning right now, but right now there's just two. Not to say I won't come back to them but I have other projects right now, one sitting on my editor's desk right now actually as we speak. Doesn't have dinosaurs in it but I still think Edge of Extinction fans would really enjoy it. It's got the same feel.

Alison: You should write another Edge of Extinction book, definitely. OK, so what are you working on right now?

Laura: I can't elaborate too much. I actually emailed my agent and asked how much can I tell them? I will say that the one sitting on my editor's desk right now is my new favorite but I think as a writer whatever project you're currently working on seems to be your favorite so we'll see if that one happens or not. It doesn't have dinosaurs in it, it bends a little more toward fantasy than science fiction. I would say Edge of Extinction is more a science fiction more and this one is more of a fantasy. So we'll see what happens with that one and like I said the current book that I'm working on has a lot of Big Foot, Loch Ness Monster kind of stuff going on it so as high interest, I hope, as dinosaurs was.

Alison: Thank you for answering our questions.

Laura: No problem! Thanks for reading the book and enjoying it and telling your mom and taking the time to talk to me today. Thanks so much.

Alison: Thank you for writing it.

14:00 Teaching middle school

Sarah: OK, so you were a middle school language arts teacher for six years. Tell me about that and what that taught you about kids and reading and how that informs what you write now.



Laura: Well, for one thing I loved it. I think middle school is my favorite age group ever, which hugely when you tell that to people they go, “Really?”

Sarah: Yeah!

Laura: But middle school kids are my favorite by far because they still have the innocence and excitement of being elementary school kids but they’re starting to get the put-togetherness of a high school kid, so they’re right in the middle which I think is great. But I did a lot of different things in my class because one thing that I noticed is that when kids walked into my classroom they either identified themselves as a reader or not a reader from day one. And middle school kids are very vocal, for the most part. They’ll tell you, “Mrs. Martin I don’t read, I don’t like reading.” Or they’ll gush at you about this book that they just loved. Not that I came across a lot of lukewarm kids who were kind of into reading it was all or nothing, it seemed like in the middle school. So one of the things that I realized is that a lot of these kids came in and they didn’t know how to find a book that they would enjoy. They didn’t understand how to walk into a library and say, “This is the kind of book that I like” because they hadn’t figured out who they were as readers yet, up until that point a lot of hand-holding had been done in elementary school. So one of the big things that I did is that I tried to get them to understand what kind of reader are You? What works for You as a reader? And what kind of books do you really like? Because I would have kids who told me, “I’m just not a reader” and I said, “Wrong. You just haven’t found the right book yet.” I’m a huge believer in that there’s one book out there that will catch a kid and not let him go and it will turn the tide because once they have that experience of like really falling into

a book and having it speak to them at a gut-deep level there’s no going back. But you’ve got to find that book for the kid and every kid is different and you’ve got to find the book that speaks specifically to them.

Sarah: I love that because recently I asked on Facebook, “What book turned you into a reader?” and I don’t know how many responses there were, I think over 800. It was like everybody knows what book turned them into a reader because they can remember it. And when I was talking to the author Jonathan Auxier, he said the book that turned him into a reader was, well, he really liked the Cam Jansen Series kind of helped him get better at reading and so then it was easier which helps you become a reader, of course, but Matilda was the one that he really remembers and that’s the same one for me. It’s the first big book that I read on my own- the one that I read and realized that reading books was something that I would want to do even if no one told me to and that was kind of a new thing for me. So, what book turned you into a reader? I’m curious.

16:30 The book that turned Laura into a reader

Laura: I would say probably The Chronicles of Narnia series. I don’t know which one we were on, my mom was reading aloud to me every night and I have a younger brother who was apparently being annoying one night and she said, “I’m sorry, Laura, I have to go take care of Eric,” and so I was like, “OK, forget this,” and I picked up the book and I kept going. I think I was right around 2nd grade then and it just went from there. I just devoured the entire series and my mom kept going, “You’re too little to read these by yourself,” and I was like, “But I’m not. I have



this.” So I would say it was The Chronicles of Narnia series. I just remember falling in love with the whole imagination that there could be a world behind a wardrobe, you know, and how cool is that?

Sarah: Yeah.

Laura: So those are probably the ones that really got me started. And then I just kind of took off from there. I had a bunch of different favorites as a kid. I went on a whole horse streak. I remember our library had a little horse sticker on the bindings of the books and I would go through the library and try to find every book that had a horse sticker which is one of the things I actually turned around and used in my classroom is that I broke up my classroom library and I had a huge classroom library, I would shop Goodwill. my husband was always like, “You’re spending more money on books?” but of course I’m spending money on books.

Sarah: Yeah.

Laura: So I had stickers. So if it was a realistic fiction book it had an orange sticker, it was fantasy it had a blue sticker, if it was science fiction it had a green, and my whole library was color coded so that kids who went, ‘You know what, I really like science fiction books’ could easily find more science fiction books because a lot of kids walk into your classroom and they don’t know what kind of book that they like, they don’t understand what a science fiction book looks like or what a fantasy book looks like or what realistic fiction looks like. So it’s a lot of helping them figure that out. So one of the very first things that I used to do in my classroom is that I would put them all in groups and I would just dump a huge pile of books out and I’d say, “Figure out what kind of genre these are.” So

they had to read the backs of the books, they had to go ‘This had creatures like dragons in it so that means it must be fantasy. Or this one is set in real life, there’s no magic, it must be realistic fiction.’ And I had ulterior motives because the pile of books is always the best books I could find, right?

Sarah: That’s awesome.

Laura: Because then they had to read the back of all these books and they walked away going, “Oooh, that one sounded really good” because a lot of times middle school kids won’t slow down enough to go through a whole stack of books to figure out which ones sound good. They just walk into the library, grab something random, go “Oh, I don’t like this, I must not like reading” and walk away.

Sarah: I love it! Yeah, that’s so smart. I actually appreciate our local library. They put the hardback fiction by the author’s last name but the paperback middle grade novels they put into categories like fantasy, realistic fiction, historical fiction, and that has been really helpful to my kids when they became fluent readers but were trying to figure out what books they liked best, because once they would read a couple ... for example, my oldest daughter loves historical fiction so she would read a couple from there and realize she was going to be happy with almost anything from this section. And so she could go there when she wasn’t sure what to read next. It was really helpful.

Laura: And that’s huge, to be able to figure out who you are as a reader. And as adults we do that naturally. We know that we like a certain kind of book and so we look for those certain kinds of books. We forget that you have to learn that skill that it’s not something you just inherently have.



It's something you've got to teach a lot of these kids because they've just been reading the books that have been handed to them and so they're completely lost as to what kind of books they might like. So a lot of times I'd almost interview and say, "OK, what do you like to watch on TV? What is your favorite movie? What are your hobbies?" You kind of have to figure out. And then I'd give them a stack of 5-10 books and I'd say, "Look at these. Find one that you think sounds good."

Sarah: That's so good.

Laura: So there's a lot of figuring out who they were as a person and then, OK, what book's going to do it for you?

Sarah: Totally! So that's one of the questions I'll ask sometimes my kids' friends will say, I'll ask them, "What do you like to read?" And they'll say, "I'm not really a reader, I don't really read for fun." And then I'll say, "Well, what have you liked?" Because I'll think I'm going to help you find something. It's like my own personal mission now.

Laura: Oh, I know.

21:00 The someday list

Sarah: So then they'll say, "Well, I don't know. I don't like anything." So the best next question I think is oftentimes what's your favorite show? Because what people think of is TV and books are totally different but they're really just a different mode of stories and so if you like a certain kind of story that you watch on TV there's a very good chance that a good writer of that same kind of genre will be able to capture the imagination the same way, right?

Laura: Exactly. I used to do book talks in my classroom, every Wednesday before we went to the media center I would have this stack of between 10-15 books and I'd have them on my projector behind me and my kids would get out their notebooks and I'd have them keep something called A Some Day List, a book they want to read some day. I said, "You should always have a list going of this great book that you want to get your hands on so that when you go to the library you have in hand 15-20 books that you would really like to read because you've heard about them, they sounded good. So I would give these book talks, they would write down anything that sounded good in their Some Day List and then we'd head to the library. But one of the ways that I would always pitch books, especially books that were geared a little bit more towards boys, is that I would pitch it almost like a movie. I'd say, "OK guys, so this book's called.. and it's set in modern day but it's got a lot of old elements in it because the knights of the round table are back but instead of riding horses they're driving Lamborghinis. If you like Mission Impossible or that kind of thing this is a book for you. And the boys would just go, "Oh" and they'd write it down because you've made a connection of "Oh that sounds good because I also like [this]."

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

OK, so I know that you say all kids can love reading, just not all kids have found the right book to help them love reading, right?

Laura: Right.

Sarah: And you told me when we were emailing back and forth about it's kind of like jelly beans. So, tell us all about that.



Laura: Yes. Well, jelly beans are one of those candies where if you have a bowl of jelly beans out you'll see people do this all the time they walk up and they take a look and they pick out their favorite color, right? Very few people just take a handful of all of them and walk away; you pick out the reds, you pick out the yellows - so I actually used to use this as a demonstration for my kids. I'd walk in with a huge bag of jelly beans and I'd spread them out and I'd say, "OK, now you only get to eat the black ones." And the kids would look at me like really, I have to eat the black ones? And I'd say, "Now what if that was the only kind of jelly bean you'd ever tried so you just said, 'You know what, I don't like the black ones, I must not like any of these.'"

Sarah: Right.

Laura: And they'd go, "Oh!" And I'd say, "That's what it's like if you read one book, 'I didn't like this book, I must not like any of these books. It's a lot like finding your favorite flavor of jelly beans. There's so many flavors of jelly beans in the world, there's more flavors of books out there. You just have to figure out which ones you like so that when you walk into a library, you walk into a bookstore you know what flavor you're looking for." And I talked a lot about this in regard to the writing process as well. I'd say, "You know guys, the writing process is not what school has always taught you - that you sit down and you do a rough draft, then you do a first draft, then you edit it and do a second draft. That's not a real writing process. If you talk to any author they're writing process is like 'I have to have a cup of coffee and I have to be sitting on a couch or I have to have my laptop on my lap.'" And what it is is a writing process is whatever process works for you so that you can write. And it's the same thing to be a reader. You have to figure out what

your reading process is, what kind of books you like to read, how you like to read them. My brother was the exact opposite kid than me. He was not a reader at all until he found audio books and even today he drives a lot for work, he listens to 5-10 audio books a week and this is a kid my mom couldn't pay to read as a kid. So you just have to figure out what your process is. What works for you to make you a reader?

Sarah: Yeah, I love that. I think a lot of times as parents we have anxiety, too, over our kids liking the right books. I know that this is been true for me in the past. It's true for a lot of parents I meet when I go to homeschooling conferences for example. Parents are really caught up in that they want their kids to like really good books, maybe to the detriment of helping their kids fall in love with reading first, and so instead of helping their child fall in love with reading and then self-identify as a reader they're worried that their kids are not going to love the classics but it's so funny because that same question of what book turned you into a reader, it's not really common to hear someone say, "You know, The Hound of the Baskervilles" ...

Laura: Right.

Sarah: "Don Quixote" I mean, nobody says that. The books that help you fall in love with reading are the ones where you just get lost in it. And I feel like, as parents, we could shed a lot of that worry about our kids liking the right books if at first we help our kids become readers and you do that by letting them fall in love with the stories that they absolutely love regardless of whether you feel like it's the best literature available or not, right?

Laura: And a lot of times parents forget that just because their daughter loved this certain kind of



book and this worked for her as a reader that their son might have a completely different style as a reader and need something completely different. And we're all individuals. A lot of times parents go, "Oh but I loved this book as a kid" and their kid goes, "But I don't." You know?

Sarah: Yeah.

25:30 Gateway books

Laura: So you have to find the book that your kids like. And you can eventually move them. I would call some books "gateway books" because they get them in the door, right, and you get them reading and you get them enjoying a story and understanding the joy of really devouring a book and then you can say, "Oh, if you like this you'll really like this one." It's kind of baby steps; you're leading them through the woods, right, and saying "Well, if you like this one..." and one of the best ways to do that as a parent is to come from a really authentic place of "I just read this, I really think it's cool, it has [this] in it, this character reminded me of your uncle," and those kinds of things will bring a kid in and go, "OK, I'll read it." But they can tell, kids especially can tell, if you're trying to sell something. If you're just going, "Oh, here's a really good book that I think you'll like" but they know you've never read it, you're just going off a recommendation and they'll go, "Eh, no" which is why I think Harry Potter tends to fall flat sometimes. I have kids come into my classroom and go, "I don't like Harry Potter" and I'm like, "But when did you try to read it?" and they're like, "3rd grade." I'm like, "It's not a 3rd grade book or second grade."

Sarah: Right.

Laura: And a lot of times parents go, "Oh, every kid loves Harry Potter. You will obviously love Harry Potter, here you go." And they're not ready for it. So it falls flat and they go, "Well, if I didn't like Harry Potter and everybody likes it then clearly I'm not a reader."

Sarah: Right!

Laura: And that's just one of those things that makes them identify as a non-reader and then they get stuck in that identity.

Sarah: Exactly! Jonathan Auxier on episode 56 he was talking about how he wasn't a reader yet, he hadn't really fallen in love with reading, his mom was so concerned about it she actually pulled him out of school and homeschooled him for a year like with a mission.

Laura: Right, I remember listening to that one. He's like, "Because the most important thing was that I become a reader."

Sarah: I know, I loved it, I just thought, 'Oh my gosh, I need to meet her!'

Laura: He has a brilliant mother.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. And he was saying Cam Jansen was one of the series that helped me realize, "Oh, reading's kind of fun." And he's like, "Cam Jansen is not amazing literature and no one needs to worry that their kids are reading light easy reads like Magic Tree House and things like that because, exactly like you said, they're all baby steps. And what I love to tell parents is remind them that good taste in books is sort of acquired over time, it's something we cultivate, even as adults, too. We're all a little bit different, all of our taste buds are a little different, and we don't need to take it personally when our kids don't love the books that we absolutely adored. A lot of it's timing.



Laura: We have to give our kids permission to abandon a book, too. A lot of kids think that when they start it I have to finish it. You'll see a kid carry a book around the entire school year and maybe read a paragraph at a time because it never grabs them. And I always tell kids if you're not into it by the end of chapter one, walk away, it's OK. You can put it back on the shelf and say I tried and go to something else that will keep your interest because they're so many good books out there. Don't waste your time on one that's not, especially if it's not a good fit for you. Just because your best friend liked it doesn't mean you will.

28:30 Barriers to reading

Sarah: So what are some barriers that kids deal with when they're on the road to becoming voracious readers or people who read in their spare time because they love to? What kinds of barriers do you think they deal with most often?

Laura: I think, like I said, number one is they don't know who they are as a reader. They need to figure out what do I like as a reader, but then a lot of times, especially in the traditional public school setting books can almost be murdered. I know that sounds awful but the way that sometimes you have to teach a book is it gets drug out and you have to analyze every thing and what was the author's purpose and you plot out all these characters. And that's not really a way to enjoy a book. And when kids sit down and actually read a book and enjoy it that's the difference. So you need kids who are willing to go out and do that and not just rely on 'Oh but I read books in school' because they're never going to get a love of reading if the only books they read are the ones they have to write a three page essay on. So, one of the things I always tell

parents is audio books. Audio books are your new best friend and I would always get kids and parents who look at me like, "Isn't that cheating?" like it's the nasty way out. And I always go, "No, because a lot of times if you have a kid who is a struggling reader and they've been labeled as a struggling reader from day one and they can't get out of from under that label they're a kid who has a really hard time getting through a book. And I always say it's like watching a movie in slow motion that keeps freezing – it's brutal and it's no fun and why would you want to watch a movie in slow motion that keeps freezing. If you have them listen to an audio book they're hearing a story as it's meant to be read at the right pace. They're hearing really difficult vocabulary in context which is going to help them in the long run as well and they're getting to enjoy a story without having the problem of sitting and trying to decipher words and get through a book. And also middle school is one of those times when kids are starting to really get busy; their activities are picking up, they're getting more involved in school, which is when a lot of kids fall off the reading wagon, unfortunately, because they're busy, but if you have a kid who's listening to an audio book in the car on the way to soccer practice or a kid who's training for cross-country instead of listening to music they're listening to a book for an hour everyday while they go for a run that's a game changer. It takes those kids who aren't the sit-down-and-read kid and gives them an opportunity to still be a reader.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly.

30:30 Audiobook goodness

And even like my oldest daughter she is a reader anyway but she's also a higher energy extrovert type of person she'll listen to books while she's



doing her chores or going on a walk with me or whatever, and it feels like I can kind of relate to that. I'm one of those people that would have a hard time getting myself to stop and slow down and sit and read as often if I wasn't able to read on the go, which is what I do when I listen to audio books.

Laura: Right, which is exactly what I did, too; right around middle school when I started training for cross-country so I started listening to audio books. I actually discovered Harry Potter on audio which feels like ...

Sarah: So good.

Laura: ... the end all be all of narrators, right? Like, he's on my bucket list ...

Sarah: Exactly.

Laura: ... of people I would love to narrate my book someday. So I started listening and it just doesn't stop; I keep books in my car, if I'm folding laundry I'm listening to a book and my students used to be amazed because I would read 5-10 books a week and I'd always be telling them, "I just read this." And they're like, "Do you do anything other than reading?" and I was like, "Actually, I listened to these on my way to work, I listen to them when I go for a run, I listen when I'm cooking," so I'm not ever really sitting down and reading just because I have a busy life but I'm still able to get through all of these books, so I think it's just one of the best tricks out there and a lot of people don't utilize it, especially since every kid seems to have a phone now that you can put an app on and download a book onto.

Sarah: Exactly.

Laura: At the time when I was teaching it wasn't as common, not as many of my students had cell phones, so I actually went to Goodwill and

bought all these old Discmans and I had them in my classroom that kids could check out because we still had books on CD that you could get from our library and they would sit there and listen to a book on a Discman and they were all like, "What is that thing?" I was like, "This is your iPod's grandmother. This is what came before your iPod. This is how it works." And they were like, "I don't understand what is wrong with it?" "It's out of battery. You always have to charge these." So it was really funny because a lot of kids didn't understand how they could listen to an audio book because it's on a CD. What do I do with this CD?

Sarah: So funny. I'm going to interrupt you just for a second for all of our listeners who don't know Audible is my very favorite place to get audio books. I'm a subscriber so I have a monthly subscription where I get a credit and can get a new audio book every month, but actually at the Read Aloud Revival we pay really close attention to as many of the best audio book deals for kids that we can find and we collect them all. So if you head to ReadAloudRevival.com, look for our Audible deals in the top menu bar there and you can click on that. You don't have to be an Audible subscriber to grab those. A lot of times we find really good books for \$1 to \$5 which is an awesome deal on an audio book and then you can download them to any device: iPad, tablet, you can listen on a computer, on a phone, on an iPod, mp3 player, and listen while they're doing-weeding the yard, doing their chores, in the car, or whatever. We listen to tons and tons of audio books that way and I agree with absolutely everything you just said, Laura, that audio books just enrich your reading life so much.

Laura: They are. So if you tell your kids, and I used to not do a whole lot of take home



homework in my class because the standing homework was you read 20 minutes a night at least so if you have that as a standing standard in your house (at least 20 minutes a night) it's really easy if your son has to go mow the lawn that takes over 20 minutes, say, "Well, you can get your reading done. Listen to the book." Or "We have to drive to so-and-so's lesson you can listen on the way there." And then it makes reading accessible, easy, and fast and not something that they have to sit down and be like, "Oh, I have to do this." It's something that all of a sudden mowing the lawn isn't boring anymore because you're not mowing the lawn you're trying to find the lightning bolt that Zeus lost and now your dad thinks you need to go get it, kind of thing. So, it's fun.

Sarah: And once you get into a book that you just love... I remember one of the first audio books I had heard was Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. It was the first time I ever read it and I couldn't stop reading it but I told myself I was only allowed to listen on the treadmill. I walked so much because I wouldn't want to get off. And I'd be like, "Oh, I guess I better get back on the treadmill." And my oldest daughter, she's funny too, because she'll get into a book and I can tell because the whole house will be tidy and then she'll ask, "Do you have anything you need me to organize?" because she wants to keep listening and I'm like, oh my goodness, more audio books, this is amazing. I'm going to have all my laundry folded forever. So great.

Laura: When I found out that *Edge of Extinction* was going to become an audio book and it is on Audible I freaked out. I think I was more excited about the fact it would be an audio book than I was that it was going to get published because audio books are just like my thing. And I got to

help pick out who was going to read it, which was also really cool because I'd been listening to audio books for years and years and years so I knew these narrators by the books that they'd read and I was like, "Oh, I love her" so it was a really cool experience to get to do that because I'm such an audio book person and when I listened to my own book it was another really weird experience because after writing and writing and writing there's still parts that I'm like, "Oh yeah, I forgot about that" so it was interesting to hear someone else read it and really bring life to your characters.

36:00 Encouraging a love of reading

Sarah: I didn't realize your book was on Audible. I just pulled it up, so we'll make sure to put a link to that in the Show Notes as well. Awesome. OK, so what other tips can you share with parents and teachers who are looking to create that love of books in their kids? Is there anything we haven't touched on that you think would be really helpful for encouraging kids who aren't naturally drawn to reading?

Laura: I think to come from a really authentic place; you've read it and you're excited about it and create a culture of reading in your own house which I know what this podcast is about, but instead of on car rides having everyone get out their iPads and watch movies, have it be a thing where you listen to an audio book and talk about it. Some of my favorite memories we listened to Gary Paulsen's *I am Francis Tucket* on the way to Washington D.C. when I was a kid and I remember my dad then telling us all the history about it and we're waiting to hear what would happen. It was just a really cool thing because all



of a sudden reading is a family thing and not something you do by yourself.

Sarah: Yeah.

Laura: Another thing would be, especially if you have a reluctant boy reader, have them around other people who are readers because, especially in middle school, peer pressure's a huge thing but you can use it to your advantage, and if all their friends are talking about books and reading, which is one of the things I kind of created in my classroom is everyone's talking about books so you might as well talk about books too; creating that culture of 'oh, everybody's reading and now I'm the odd man out if I'm not' is a really powerful thing.

37:00 Writers should listen to books

Sarah: When you're talking to kids who want to be writers, and we have a lot of young aspiring writers and illustrators at the Read Aloud Revival, you say that they should be listening to books even more than they're reading them. So tell me why.

Laura: Well, actually it was your very first podcast where you interviewed Andrew Pudewa about the excellence in Teaching and Writing that I had this light bulb moment for me where I was like, 'Oh my gosh. That's why I'm a writer because I've been listening to books since middle school.' I'm one of those readers who reads quickly and I read fast and because of that my mom has always been confused because I'm a terrible speller. She'd always go, "How do you read all those books but you can't spell?" and I'd go, "I don't know." But it's because I don't necessarily see all the words when I'm reading. And if you've ever seen one of those tests where

they just keep the first and the last letter of the word but they change everything in the middle ...

Sarah: Yeah!

Laura: ... and you can still read it, you're one of those readers. And I always go into schools and I make the teacher go bug eyed because I tell the kids, "Guys, if you want to be a writer, you don't read books." And then I pause and they look at me like 'ahhhh.' And I go, "You listen to books!" And they always look at me like 'You've got to be kidding me. That's got to be cheating.' But it's not because that accurate correct language that you need to make writing sound correct and sound good, you don't get it when you're reading if you're a really good reader. And I always tell the kids, "Doesn't that sound like a rip off? Like, if you're a really good reader that you might not be a good writer." And they're like, "Yeah." "I know, right. But listen to books because you'll get that language in your head that you need" and it was just a light bulb moment for me. Of course, that's why I'm a writer because I've been listening to books not because I've been reading them, because I'm one of those readers who wasn't absorbing sentence structure or how things are put together.

Sarah: I want to make sure that our listeners can find you and your work. So let's tell them the best places to find you?

Laura: I have an author's website which is LauraMartinBooks.com where you can find all the information about my books as well as I have a little blog on there where I talk about all things author and a few of my kids' pictures as well pop up on there as well.

Sarah: They're so cute!



Laura: Thank you! I think so but I'm biased. I'm also on Instagram at LauraMartinBooks and Twitter @LauraMartinBook (because they cut the s off – too many words and I didn't realize it until after I had already signed up and all that fun stuff) and I'm also on Harper Collins website. If you're interested Edge of Extinction has an entire curriculum that you can download for free and you can find that on my website as well if you go under "Teacher Resources." I think you can pull things out of the book, a lot of the non-fiction elements as far as research projects of dinosaurs and that kind of fun stuff but don't kill the book.

39:30 Let the kids speak

Sarah: 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.

Child1: [Mum: What's your name?] Hannah. [Mum: Hannah ?] Telley. [Mum: And how old are you?] Five. [Mum: And where are you from?] Scotland. [Mum: What's your favorite book?] It's The Jolly Christmas Postman. [Mum: The Jolly Christmas Postman. And what's your favorite thing about The Jolly Christmas Postman?] That there's lots of letters in it I can read. [Mum: You can read at lots of other people's letters.]

Child2: [Mum: What's your name?] Samuel. [Mum: And how old are you, Samuel?] Um, four. [Mum: You're four now, aren't you, you just had a birthday. And where are you from?] Scotland. [Mum: You're from Scotland, and what's your favorite book?] Hodgeheg. [Mum: The Hodgeheg. Why do you like The Hodgeheg?] Because there's a hedgehog in it. [Mum: Do you like hedgehog's a lot?] Yeah.

Child3: [Mum: What's your name?] Hope. [Mum: And how old are you?] Six. [Mum: And where are you from?] Um, England. [Mum: And what's your favorite book?] Sheep Pig. [Mum: What's The Sheep Pig about?] It's about a pig who wants to be a sheep dog. [Mum: He wants to be a what?] Sheep dog. [Mum: And why do you like it?] Because it's just a nice book and Mummy says I might be old enough to read it.

Child4: Hi, I'm Nathaniel and I like Obadiah the Bold because he has a spyglass and I'm from California and three years old.

Child5: Hi, my name is Victoria Navarro and I'm six years old and I live in California. My favorite book is Fancy Nancy because everything needs to be fancy in her book.

Child6: My name is Sadie and I'm five years old and my favorite book is Little House in the Big Woods and I really like it because Laura burned her finger but she didn't mind because she really liked it.

Child7: Hi, my name is Rita. I am six years old and live in Saskatchewan, Canada. My favorite books are The Magic Tree House books. I like that the places they go are real.

Child8: My name is Afra and I'm three years old. [Mom: And where do you live?] Saskatchewan, Canada. [Mom: And what's your favorite book?] The ABCs. [Mom: Dr. Seuss' ABCs?] Dr. Seuss' ABC book. [Mom: And what do you like about it?] Everything. [Mom: You like everything?] Everything, everything.

Child9: My name's John. My favorite book is [**40:32**]

Child10: My name is Fiona and I'm seven years old and I live in Colorado. My favorite book is Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets and I



like it when Snape gets on Professor Lockhart and they duel and stuff.

Child11: My name is James. I'm 10 years old and I live in Colorado and my favorite book is The Green Ember and I like it when Pickett saves Smalls.

Child12: My name is Elizabeth. I'm 14 years old. I live in Colorado. My favorite book is Lord of the Rings and my favorite part is when Sam takes the ring when he thinks Frodo is dead and decides to go on.

Sarah: Awesome, thank you kids. I love hearing from you. I love it when you call in and tell us your favorite book recommendation. Hey, at a conference recently, somebody asked me what ages are best to leave messages. We love hearing from anybody. Anybody as little as they can talk into your phone to leave us a message all the way up through the teens. So I love hearing them and I know people who listen to the podcast love getting their book recommendations here too, right from other kids. So good. If you haven't left a message yet you can do it at ReadAloudRevival.com. You just scroll to the bottom of the page. The place on the bottom left you'll see a place for kids to leave messages for this section of the podcast. And on the bottom right there's a place where you can leave a message yourself, moms and dads, you can leave questions about anything that you are wondering about that you'd like us to answer on the podcast. You can even say, "Hey, we recently Bed Knobs and Broomsticks what should we read next?" or "What do I give to kid who loves Harry Potter and doesn't know what to read next?" I would love to answer any questions you have right here on the podcast. Go to ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page, and leave a message on the bottom

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