

EPISODE **85**

Reading ‘Messy’ Books

Guest: Betsy Farquhar

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Meet Betsy Farquhar



Betsy Farquhar is Managing Editor and Staff Writer for Redeemed Reader, a site many of you are probably familiar with.

Betsy studied children's literature at Covenant College and earned a graduate degree in Children's Literature from Hollins University. She taught middle and high school English in several Christian schools and also earned a degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Tennessee. She even served for a short time as a school librarian and currently serves on World Magazine's children's books of the year committee.

In This Episode

Betsy and Sarah discuss "messy" books. Parents - you probably know just what we mean. Messy books are those books that tackle big subjects. Or maybe, they just have stuff in the background that makes us nervous as moms and dads.

The Listening Guide

Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or listen to the entire podcast.

3:38 Meet Betsy

6:25 How Redeemed Reader chooses books

7:17 What makes a book 'messy?'

10:14 Are older books ever messy?

11:38 Why do messy books freak us out?

17:15 What to do when our kids hear/read something messy

19:31 Why are controversial books often so popular

24:06 Ongoing conversations

27:55 Best books for handling messy topics

31:05 Read-alones versus read-alouds

32:14 YA recommendations

37:18 Let the kids speak

Frankly, Genesis is pretty messy. I decided when I did a Bible Study on it a few years ago that I would not be allowed to watch that movie, so it is important to remember that there's nothing new under the sun. But, the difference, I think, between a lot of older literature and a lot of the brand new stuff is that a lot of older literature, Bible included, Shakespeare, even the *Canterbury Tales*, there's an element of hope. - Betsy Farquhar

Quotes and Questions

* **The best gateways.**

“I think that, in so many ways then, that the books that we read with our kids, messy or otherwise, are oftentimes the best gateways into some of those **conversations that are uncomfortable that we don’t really want to have with our kids but we know we need to have with our kids.**”

* **Why is that in there?**

“And that’s a great question to ask kids, because they have to think, ‘Well, the author has control over the story. Why did they put that in there?’ And sometimes it’s to point to our own need of redemption, and sometimes it’s to point to a character’s complete depravity.”

*Add this to your open ended questions when discussing books: “**Why is that in there?**”*

*Or try another of Betsy’s ideas: “**How would you write the story?**”*

* **Hooks.**

“You’re just connecting what they’re reading to real life. And, it’s giving you a little bit of a hook to start talking about that. So, I think that’s a way to continue the conversation.”

Look for hooks as you read - how can you apply what happens to the characters in your book to what is happening all around us - in our school, churches and communities?

* **‘A collective pool.’**

“I think the things that you’re reading are forming a collective pool of information and so when you have these conversations about loving your neighbor you can draw from those examples because it’s a very specific, sort of, an emotional example in the right sense.”

Remember, anything you read or discuss with your kids adds to that pool. Reading together or chatting about books is helping your children develop empathy and understanding.

* **Is there hope?**

“He tackles heavy issues: racism, police justice, what do you do when your mom has diabetes and your dad is out of the picture and you have to live with your aunt and uncle? Just all kinds of issues but **he does them in a way that has hope.**”

Is a given book worth sharing with your kids? Ask yourself, does this book leave the reader with hope?

*Or as Sarah said: “There has to be some kind of redemption, it doesn’t mean there’s always the happy ending, but it does mean there has to be **an overall sense of hope** and ability to help the reader see the world with fresh eyes, kind of, see things new.”*

Show Notes

Books from today's episode:

- Charlotte's Web
- The Family Under the Bridge
- The Penderwicks
- The Giver
- Frog and Toad are Friends
- Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs
- The Great Gilly Hopkins
- The Best Christmas Pageant Ever
- When You Reach Me
- The Read-Aloud Family
- The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street
- Harry Potter
- Bedtime for Frances
- Shiloh
- 13 Reasons Why
- Every Falling Star
- The Watcher
- Somebody on this Bus is Going to be Famous
- Goodbye Stranger
- Disappeared
- Tangerine
- The Thief
- Circus Mirandus

READ-ALOUD REVIVAL

Cheat Sheet Episode 34

- [Long Way Down](#)
- [Under Our Skin](#)
- [Old Yeller](#)
- [Tuesdays at the Castle](#)
- [You Bring the Distant Near](#)
- [The Catcher in the Rye](#)

Other links from today's show:

- [Redeemed Reader](#)
- [Great Homeschool Conventions](#)
- [Read-Aloud Revival on Instagram](#)
- [RAR #67: Reading for the Bigger Story, Jonathan Rogers](#)
- [Order The Read-Aloud Family](#)
- [Worthy YA: The Best Teen Reads of 2017](#)
- [Premium Membership](#)
- Get the RAR Booklist [here](#) or **text the word "books" to 345345**

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit ReadAloudRevival.com.