



RAR 94 – The Lowdown on Reading Aloud to 0-3 Year Olds

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.

Hello, hello, Sarah Mackenzie here, and you've got episode 94 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. Today is an exciting day because we're releasing this episode on March 27th and that means *The Read-Aloud Family: Making Meaningful and Lasting Connections with Your Kids*, the brand new book, is available now wherever books are sold. So, you can head into your local bookshop, you could go to a Barnes & Noble, you could go online, and grab your copy of *The Read-Aloud Family*. I am so excited to get this book into your hands. One of the best ways we can get the message of reading aloud with our kids, little all the way up to teens, is to help libraries know that this is a book their communities would like. So, one way you can help us get the word out about *The Read-Aloud Family* is by requesting that your local library get the book and put it on their shelves, and that way, people who are just browsing through the library can get inspired to read-aloud with their kids as well. If you're reading *The Read-Aloud Family* I would love to see pictures. So, share them on Instagram, share them on Facebook, #ReadAloudFamily so that I don't miss them. I can't wait to see the book in your hands. Today, we're actually going to be talking about the lowdown on reading aloud with 0-3 year olds, because let's face it, reading aloud with toddlers can be a little tricky. I'll tell you what we're going to do here over the next few weeks. Reading aloud with a toddler can be a very different

experience than reading aloud with a 6 year old and that is a very different experience than reading aloud with a 10 year old or a teenager, right? Well, what we're going to be doing over the next couple of weeks here on the Read-Aloud Revival podcast is talking about how to read-aloud with different age groups, maybe the benefits of reading aloud to each age group, the things that might trip you up, the tricky parts of each age, the kinds of things you want to look for in the books you're reading with those kids, of course, I will share a couple of favorites, and some resources that will help you. So, this is going to be a fun couple of weeks. Today, we're going to start with 0-3 year olds and we're just going to work our way up, all the way up to teens, over the next few weeks. It's going to be fun.

2:51 A common question

Before we start with today's episode on 0-3's I wanted to answer a question we're getting a lot lately about the new book I wrote, *The Read-Aloud Family*. Several people have written in and said, "I've listened to all the Read-Aloud Revival podcasts." Some people say, "I've listened to all the Read-Aloud Revival podcasts and I'm a Read-Aloud Revival premium member, do I really need to get the book? Is there anything in there that I haven't already heard you say?" And, here's the thing about writing a book: it's hard to be objective about it because you're really close to it. I spent, well, years actually, preparing to write that book, and then I spent an entire year doing the actual writing, a little more than that actually. So, it's really hard for me to answer those questions objectively. So, what I did, is I asked some of our earliest readers. I went to some early readers who have listened to either all or most of



the Read-Aloud Revival podcasts, all of them also premium members, to find out what they think about the book, because if you've listened to a lot of the podcast and you're a premium member do you need the book? And, I thought maybe they could answer you better than I could. So, the first answer came from Beth. She said, "Yes, definitely get the book. I have heard every episode of the Read-Aloud Revival, and I liked the fact that *The Read-Aloud Family* book brings all that information together in one place with references to the people and sources that go along with a new book list." And then, Mary Beth wrote in and said, "I would 100% still recommend it to families like mine who read-aloud and who listen to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast regularly. The book lists alone are worth the publishing price as is the chapter on asking compelling questions. I found the book to be encouraging toward what I'm already doing but also motivating to continue to read-aloud even more. I feel like it's not only a good refresher but it still offers plenty of new information and lots of new recommendations on the book lists." That is true, I can tell you that objectively. That several of the books, actually many, many, many of the books on the book list are going to be books that you hopefully haven't heard of before. That was one of my goals, and I've been really delighted as I've heard back from early readers that they were shocked at how many of the books on the book list they hadn't heard of before. So, that's really fun. There's almost 400 books recommended in *The Read-Aloud Family*. I've read them all cover-to-cover so I can heartily recommend them. I give you age recommendations and all that good stuff in the book. OK, if you haven't picked up a copy go to wherever books are sold, grab yourself a copy, and then snap a picture, because I want to see *The Read-Aloud Family* in your hands.

5:39 Why read-aloud to newborns and toddlers

Alright, it is time for us to dig into the low-down on reading aloud to newborns all the way up to 3 year olds. So, if you have a copy of *The Read-Aloud Family* you want to read chapter 12, if you have a child in this age range from 0-3. That is called "Books are Delicious" and it's a great chapter specifically for parents of 0-3 year olds. But, let's talk about why. Why read-aloud to kids who are newborn, to babies who a tiny newborns, and then all the way up to age 3? Here's something interesting you might not know, but studies show us that babies who are read to at 6 months of age have stronger vocabularies and better literacy skills when they begin school. So, that's kind of amazing to think that the reading we do with this teeny tiny baby is having an impact on their school success later, but that's how it works. So, that's a benefit, and of course, there's all kinds of benefits to the sophisticated language patterns and the vocabulary you're reading. Even from board books and picture books it's hugely more sophisticated and more correct language than we use in conversation. So, they're getting all that through the ear and that's all academic benefit when they get older. But, I really think the main benefit of reading aloud with kids from 0-3 is because we help our kids associate books and stories with affection right out of the gate. We basically demonstrate to our babies that reading is something wonderful. We cuddle them in our lap and we look at the pictures and they get that automatic and very early appreciation for books as something wonderful to delight in. A couple of things can trip you up when you're reading aloud with little tiny babies. There's a picture of me (I found it not too long ago) with my oldest daughter who is



now 16 and a sophomore in high school. She was 8 weeks old and I was laying on my tummy reading a board book with her. And, her eyes were all big and blue and staring at the pictures. And, I don't think I had stumbled across Jim Trelease's *Read-Aloud Handbook*, actually I know I hadn't stumbled across it yet. But, I was reading aloud with her because I must have had some kind of gut feeling that this was something that I should be doing, or wanted to do with her. And, it's so interesting to me to realize that all this research actually backs up that practice. There is some research that even backs up, sort of the beauty and comfort that reading aloud to our kids in utero does. So, you can even be reading aloud books to your baby when you're pregnant with them. I think it's ... I'm pretty sure ... I don't have the studies on this particular fact, but I think it's the sound of mom's voice and when you're reading aloud, especially if it's a picture book or something the cadence and the rhythm of it is very soothing and so I can understand how that would be really comforting to a child.

8:34 What can trip you up

Anyway, a couple of things that can trip you up when reading with a 0-3 year old is that most of the time it doesn't look like they're paying attention. That picture of Audrey at 8 weeks old, she was paying attention, but then especially once they get mobile they crawl away, they pick up the board book and shove it in their mouth, sometimes once they can turn the pages, they turn the pages faster than you can read the words so you feel like, 'I'm not even reading this and she's turning the pages and I'm getting frustrated.' They are paying attention. Let me say this: they are benefitting from it even when they look like they're not paying any attention at all. A

0-3 year old is getting so many benefits from hearing beautiful language spoken out loud from you even if they're eating the book or not getting all the words on the page. So, I wouldn't stress if your toddler is turning pages too fast and you're not reading all the words on the page, don't worry about it. You don't even have to read the words on the page, you can just point at the pictures and just notice something on each page. Basically, what we're doing is we are prioritizing the time that we spend with our babies, we're fully present with them, and we're helping them associate books with delight and affection. And, that's a really, really important thing to do at this age.

9:49 Choosing books for this age group

When you're choosing books for your 0-3's, in general, you're going to want – remember this principle that good books are stories that parents love to read and that children love to listen to – if you are going crazy reading a book over and over and over again there is a good chance you're just not going to want to read-aloud to your child. And, C. S. Lewis, of course, has the wonderful quote where he says “that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story.” There are a wide variety of board books and picture books that are geared toward 0-3 that are painful to read but there are also amazingly wonderful ones that you won't really mind reading again and again and again. So, you want to look for a couple of things. You want to look for predictable patterns. You want to look for simple and pleasant text. And, illustrations that cause your child to look a little longer than necessary. Now, what do we mean by predictable patterns? Think about Bill Martin Jr.



and Eric Carle's book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* That book is very comforting to a child. It has a predictable pattern where they can predict what's going to happen on each page, and after they've read it a few times they may even be able to read it back to you if they're, maybe, 2 or 3 – they can actually say the words back to you. Books like, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle are also predictable and they have a pattern that is very soothing and comforting and excellent for children of this age. Rhymes are also really good choices for this age. So, *Mother Goose* is pretty much always a win and there are quite a variety of *Mother Goose* books that are really well done. In *The Read-Aloud Family* I think I recommend four or five different *Mother Goose* versions, but really, there's a reason that *Mother Goose* has stood the test of time and that's because the rhymes have a very special place in the life of a child, especially this age. And then, remember: repetition, repetition, repetition. In *The Read-Aloud Handbook* Jim Trelease writes that repeated readings of fewer books are better than a huge collection read infrequently. So, with 0-3 year olds, I would focus less on trying to build up some really big bulky library of books and I would instead curate a nice collection of fewer books that you enjoy reading aloud, that have those good patterns, that pleasant text, those nice illustrations that your child wants to listen to again and again. What you'll probably find with most 0-3 year olds is that rather than having you read them a new book they would almost always prefer for you to read them their favorite books again. So, that's helpful to keep in mind, and it's easier on the budget, too. The most important part of reading with a 0-3 year old is that you keep that joy connection alive and healthy. And, remember that any time at all that you spend

reading aloud with a child who is 0-3 that's a win, even if they start eating the book, even if they throw the book on the floor and then run their truck over it, even if they don't look like they're paying attention.

13:04 A helpful trick

I know with toddlers in my house one of the things that I have found really helpful, once they're about 1 it starts working, it works really well with 2 and 3 year olds, is when they're having one of those completely out-of-control, unreasonable fits I just plunk myself down and start reading aloud one of their books, to myself. And, I don't ever say, "Do you want mommy to read you a story?" because when a 2 or 3 year old's throwing a fit they do not want you to read them a story, they do not want anything, they just want "NO" that they want to shout; they want to show "NO" and scream, right? And so, what I have found is if I sit down just start reading the story, so often once they realize I'm reading (which may take a couple of minutes, a couple of pages if they're being really loud and unreasonable), then they realize, they'll kind of wander over to me and sit down. So many times we've had kids that are just crying and throwing a fit and have been calmed by the pages of a book. And, it's a very simple way to just bring some rhythm and calm to your child's heart, which is a really helpful thing for a 2 or 3 year old, and for you.

14:11 Favorite books for 0-3s

Now, let me share a couple of favorite books for 0-3 year olds. I'm going to share two board books and then my favorite version of *Mother Goose*. The first one I want to tell you about which you might not have seen before is *Hush! A*



Thai Lullaby by Minfong Ho. It's illustrated by Holly Meade, and this book actually won a Caldecott Award for Holly Meade's really lovely illustrations. It's rhyming, so just one of the rhymes from the book says: "Lizard, lizard, don't come peeping. Can't you see my baby sleeping?" In this story each of these critters threatens to wake the baby and the mother says, "Don't come peeping..." there's all these rhymes, and the last page of this book is my favorite. And if you get your hands on it you'll know why. So, *Hush! A Thai Lullaby*. Another favorite board book is *Pancakes, Pancakes!* I already mentioned *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Both of those were illustrated by Eric Carle. *Pancakes, Pancakes!* was written and illustrated by Eric Carle. And, first of all, you should know that you cannot go wrong with Eric Carle. He's written some of the most iconic books, picture books, of all time for children. But, *Pancakes, Pancakes!* is one of my favorites and it's a little bit less well-known, although I think it should be a staple on your shelf. It follows the story of Jack as he needs to gather all of the ingredients his mother needs to make him a simple pancake for breakfast, from threshing the wheat to collecting the eggs to milking the cow – everything that needs to be done to make the pancakes. Really lovely illustrations, and of course, the very last step of all is the best. *Pancakes, Pancakes!* and you should be able to find this one at your local library, but this is also worth having on your shelf. And I should say, for 0-3's, another reason it's nice to have a small collection instead of a huge collection, is that then you can own them because if they're putting the books in their mouths you do not want them to get those from the library because, like, gross, right? So, it's better to have, maybe, a collection of 8-10 books

that are their very own that they can chew on without you worrying about it than rotating the books constantly from the library. The *Mother Goose* version that's my own personal favorite is Richard Scarry. And, you know Richard Scarry, right? He's the illustrator and creator of *The Busy Town* books. But, his version of *Mother Goose* is just my personal favorite. There are a lot of wonderful versions of *Mother Goose*. I think we have several different collections in our own home. There's one by Silvia Long that's really well done. A gorgeous version by Scott Gustafson that's really well done. Of course, Tomi DePaola has his own version of *Mother Goose*. And, all of the rhymes are either the same or similar in all of these books but the illustrations are different. So, I would just go to your local bookshop, or hop online, or go to your library, and look at a few different versions of *Mother Goose* and see which illustrations most appeal to you and your kids. And, keep a collection of *Mother Goose* on the shelf. You will, after you've read it a few times, be able to recite several of the rhymes to your child, which is really lovely, to be able to recite them during bath time or while they're eating, or while you're buckling them into the car seat. It can be a really lovely way to include some beautiful language into your everyday. Now, I list a whole lot of my favorite books for 0-3 year olds in *The Read-Aloud Family* in chapter 12. You'll find the books I just recommended along with a whole bunch more, so you don't want to miss that. So, go ahead and get your hands on *The Read-Aloud Family* to see all my best recommendations for 0-3 year olds. And, if you've missed some of these episodes of The Read-Aloud Revival, episode 19 is called, "Reading Aloud to Toddlers: The Why and How" and episode 35 is called, "Reading Aloud with Toddlers and Other Littles Underfoot." And, both of those episodes will be



helpful to you if you have any kids who are 0-3 in your home. We'll put links to those in the Show Notes of today's podcast. The Show Notes for today are going to be at ReadAloudRevival.com/94, just the number, and when you go to the Show Notes you'll find links to the books I recommended as well as links to those other episodes that you'll find helpful and some helpful tips for reading aloud with your 0-3 year olds.

18:51 Let the Kids Speak

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: Hi, my name is Shannon. I'm 5½. I live in Virginia. My favorite book is *Matilda*. I like it because she ran off and set out to the library to get her own books. And I like when she read all of them, and I like her laugh.

Child2: [Mom: hi, what's your name?] I'm Kate. [Mom: and how old are you, Kate?] Bite a mouse. [Mom: your favorite part in *The Napping House* is when he bites the mouse. And, how old are you?] I'm 1. [Mom: you're 2. And, you're from Beatrice, Nebraska.] Uh huh.

Child3: [Mom: what is your name?] Esther. [Mom: Esther?] Yeah. [Mom: Montgomery? And, how old are you?] 2. [Mom: where do you live?] In Shawnee. [Mom: Oklahoma.] Oklahoma. [Mom: and, what is your favorite book?] The *Priest with Dirty Clothes*. [Mom: *The Priest with Dirty Clothes*?] Yeah. [Mom: what do you like about *The Priest with Dirty Clothes*?] *The Priest with Dirty Clothes*. [Mom: you do like it?] Yeah. [Mom: is it a good story?] Yes. [Mom: yes.]

Child4: Hello, my name is Jamie Montgomery. I am 9 years old. I live in Shawnee, Oklahoma. My

favorite book is *The Green Ember*. I like *The Green Ember* because Pickett defeats *[inaudible]*.

Child5: Hi, my name's Ella, and I'm 10, and I live in Minnesota. And, my favorite book is the *All-of-a-Kind-Family* by Sydney Taylor because the oldest character, the oldest sister's name is Ella, and my name is Ella, and she has very similar personality-type to me, and I really feel like she's me, kind of.

Child6: hello, my name is Madeleine Barton, and I'm 8 years old, and I live in Minnesota. And, my favorite read-aloud book is *The Lord of the Rings*. And, I really like all the adventure and excitement in it.

Child7: Hello, my name is Piper. My age is 6. I live in Kokomo, Indiana. My favorite book is *The Penderwicks* because Jeffery and Hound save her when she runs away.

Child8: [Mom: what's your name, honey?] Pippa. [Mom: it's Pippa. How old are you, Pippa?] I'm 3 but almost 4. [Mom: yes, and what's your favorite book, Pip?] *Emma and Julia Love Ballet*. [Mom: and, what's your favorite thing about that book?] Is because the part where they dance on stage, and stuff. [Mom: they dance on stage?] And, what dancer I like the best is Julia because she's the only one that has all kinds of colors on her dress, but the other one just has green on her dresses. [Mom: and, do you remember who made that book?] Robert McClintock. [Mom: and, where are you from, Pippa?] Connecticut. [Mom: Connecticut.]

Child9: My name is Emma and I live in Colorado, and I'm 5, and my favorite book is *Freddy Goes to Florida*, and my favorite part about it is the *[inaudible]* and find their way back.



Child10: My name is Enoch. I'm 7 years old. And I live in Colorado. My favorite book is *[**inaudible**]* by Sarah *[**inaudible**]*. My favorite part about is he goes away and he doesn't come back.

Child11: My name is Isaiah Emerson, I'm 15 years old. And, one of my favorite books is *The Taggerung*. The series is called, *Red Wall*. The author's name is Brian Jacques. The story line is a family of otters and the dad took his otter babe for his first swim in a river, and a vermin pack saw the dad and son and they shot the dad and took the otter babe for a son.

Sarah: Thank you, thank you, kids. I always love hearing which books you are loving most. Hey, we are going to be continuing with this series on the low-down of reading aloud with various ages, so next week we'll be back with episode 95 on the low-down on reading with kids age 4-7. That'll be followed by an episode on reading aloud with kids 8-12, and an episode on reading aloud with teens. All that good stuff is coming to you right here on The Read-Aloud Revival. If you have not subscribed to the podcast, head to your podcast app and click subscribe; that way you'll know right when a new episode is ready for you. And, don't forget to get your hands on the brand new book, *The Read-Aloud Family*. If you would contact your local library and request that they buy the book that will help us get this message and this read-aloud message to so many more families all over the world. Usually you can go online to request that your library purchase a book for their collection, and that just makes it so those who are not able to buy the book can read it. I would love to help as many families as possible start reading aloud with their kids from babies all the way up to teens. And, I think, this is the way we change the world. Thanks so much

for listening. I will be back next week with an episode on reading aloud with kids who are 4-7. In the meantime, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.