



## RAR 117 – Slow Down Your Christmas with these 15 Read-Alouds for the Whole Family

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. You've got episode 117 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. Well, it's the end of November so Christmas is just right around the corner. The holidays are on everyone's mind and if you're an American I want to wish you a happy Thanksgiving this week. For today's Show I've got some great resources for you to help gear up for the Christmas season with your kids. First of all, we have a young reader's gift guide coming out later this week. If you're not sure what to get as gifts this Christmas for the young readers in your life, in just a day or two, you'll be able to see our whole list of great gifts for young readers and that's going to be up at [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com). Remember too, that if you want the very best resources like these, the ones I'm talking about today, I'm going to tell you about a picture book list, the Christmas novels list (I'm offering up today), the gift guide I just mentioned, all of our free stuff that makes your life easier you really do want to get our Read-Aloud Revival emails. They land in your inbox each Tuesday morning and they always contain book lists and resources that take the work out of choosing books and growing readers. So make sure you're on the list by visiting [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com) and popping your email in there or you can just text the word BOOKS to 345345.

## 2:00 December picture books

I want to make sure you know about our picture book list for December which is packed to the gills with Christmas picture books. In fact, we've just updated that list so we made a mile long list miles longer. I personally read hundreds of Christmas picture books and then I collected the very best onto this list. From favorites like Tomie dePaola's Merry Christmas Strega Nona and The Clown of God to Jan Brett's Ginger Bread Christmas and The Wild Christmas Reindeer to newer titles like 'Twas the Evening of Christmas by Glenys Nellist. Some of our family's favorites like The Baker's Dozen, the Apple Tree Christmas, and Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree. And then everything in between. There's a big old list, something for everybody. We've got dozens and dozens of fantastic selections for you. It's all in our December Picture Book List. You can get that whole list for free on the website. You can also download a printable version of it, which is handy if you're going to the library or the bookshop, and you can check things off either as you borrow them from the library or as you read them aloud with your kids. So, you can get them on the website at [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas). That is where I'm putting everything from today's Show. So, if you hear something recommended on today's Show you want to go to [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas) and you'll be able to find it all there. That Christmas picture book will be linked to right there at [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas) as well. And, when I mentioned earlier that you could text the word BOOKS to the number 345345, if you do that, we actually email you our lists directly including this fabulous list of Christmas picture books, but many, many others as well. So, joining



our email list by texting the word BOOKS to 345345 will give you the list as well.

### 3:53 Meaningful reading

There are some really neat and meaningful things you can do at Christmastime with your reading. You could, for example, I know lots of families who do this, they stock up on Christmas picture books from the library, from their collection they've grown over the years, from thrift stores and used bookstores, and then wrap them and put them all in a basket, so all of these wrapped books in a basket, and then each day one book gets to be unwrapped and read aloud, which, I think, is especially wonderful because it reminds us as we're unwrapping this gift of a book that reading is a gift and it's something to be delighted in and looked forward to, and this is just a fun, fun tradition – so there's an idea if you're looking for some kind of simple way to brighten up the Christmas season and also focus on things that matter most like connecting with your kids and making warm family memories and wrapping picture books and opening one each day is a great idea. I'm just going to admit I've never done this. I've seen families do it and they post beautiful pictures of their wrapped books and I always think 'that's so lovely,' but all that extra wrapping just puts me off, I just can't get myself to do it. So instead, I just fill baskets around the house with Christmas picture books and we read, and read, and read all season long. So, if that's more your style I'm with ya, that's good too. But, there's lots of really fun, simple ways that you can use the Christmas books to just focus on what matters most over this season. Focusing on the true meaning of this season, reminding ourselves that we can connect with our kids and make warm memories without having to

go to lavish extremes, spend a lot of money, or get stressed and harried, sitting down and sharing a story with our kids over the Christmas season is a beautiful, beautiful way to cherish this very special and very important time of year.

### 5:33 Christmas audio

We also have a list of Christmas audio books. So, if you're looking for something to listen to together as a family, maybe you have a drive to get to grandma and grandpa's or you want to listen to something together as a family while you're making gifts or cards or even just while you decorate cookies or sit by the fire, we've got you covered there, too. We've got a list of great Christmassy audio books. You can find that at [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas) as well. If you're looking for longer read-alouds, novels, short stories that aren't picture books but would make wonderful family read-alouds, would appeal to your older kids especially, I've got you covered in today's Show. Now, the list I'm going to share with you today is actually pretty long, too. I promise you I was super picky when choosing what would make the cut but there are a lot of really wonderful Christmas books. So, you want to make sure you head to the website so you can get free access to the whole list, download that printable version of the list, and (are you surprised?) you can get that at [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas) – are you getting tired of hearing me say that, yet? – you really just want to go to that website and get all the things you need there. OK, so what was I looking for in the books I'm recommending today? There's three qualities I was looking for and I read dozens and dozens and dozens of Christmas novels. In fact, I spent the entire fall reading Christmas novels, which is kind of a



weird experience I'm just going to say. We would be going to the pumpkin patch or drinking cider or raking up leaves outside and I would go inside and I would read A Christmas Carol, or I would read all of these Christmas novels and I was really getting into the Christmas spirit, but I wanted to read them and I read tons and tons of them to make this list for you.

## 6:38 3 Qualities for Christmas novels

So, what I was looking for were books that create images that we can picture in our minds. So, these aren't picture books, some of them do have some illustrations in them, of course, but really, stories that are really well told we can picture the images in our minds. And also, the stories need to use rich and lavish language so that these books just beg to be tasted and read aloud. There is a huge difference between a story that, sort of, uses more bland or simple language and then one that uses rich story-telling language that just makes you want to read it out loud. I also was looking for stories that would pique your curiosity. Some of these are shorter, some of these are longer, but all of them, I think, make you want to turn the page and read just one more chapter, just one more part, which I think is really, really helpful, and will just foster some good memories and good story-telling this Christmas. All of the books I'm going to tell you about today do that. Like I said, this list is fairly long so I'm not actually going to be able to describe all the books on this list to you. We would be here all day if I did that. So, I'm just going to describe a few of my favorites and then I'm going to encourage you to get the rest of the list.

## 8:20 Classic collections

So, the first one I want to mention, actually the first couple I want to mention, are a couple of classics. These are actually collections from classic authors you know and probably already love. The first is A Little House Christmas Treasury. This is a collection of chapters from The Little House on the Prairie series by Laura Ingalls Wilder that are pulled and collected together. You don't need to have read The Little House series to enjoy it. It will read more like a Christmas over the years because it has Christmas when they lived in the big woods of Wisconsin, and then it has Christmas as they were journeying down the road, and Christmas all the way through to the last book, The First Four Years, so you don't have to have read The Little House books. If you have you will love it because it's all the Christmas books collected together, so it's pretty delightful. So that's A Little House Christmas Treasury. Another similar one is Christmas with Anne. So, it's similar in that two of the stories from Christmas with Anne are chapters from the Anne of Green Gables books by Lucy Maud Montgomery, but the rest of the stories in Christmas with Anne are actually short stories that L.M. Montgomery published elsewhere, in magazines and that kind of thing. So, if you have Anne of Green Gables fans in your house you probably don't want to miss this one. They'll get a couple of chapters that are revisiting Green Gables in Christmas in Anne but then you'll also get some fresh stories you or your children may have not heard yet by L. M. Montgomery that are just delightful. So that one is called Christmas with Anne.



## 9:50 More recent favorites

A more recent book that I'm sure you've heard me rave about by now is *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street* by Karina Yan Glaser. It was one of my very favorite books of all 2017. This is the story of a large family, a bi-racial family living in a brownstone in Harlem, New York. It's Christmastime as the story begins and the Vanderbeekers have just found out that their curmudgeonly landlord, Mr. Beiderman is not renewing their lease. So the kids make it a goal or a project of their own to try to convince the landlord into letting them stay in their beloved brownstone and they've got till just about Christmas to make that happen. So, misadventures ensue in full force, of course. I read this book aloud to all of my six kids from the preschoolers to the high schoolers and we all loved it. There's a follow up sequel, too. It's *The Vanderbeekers in the Hidden Garden* but this one *The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street* is set at Christmastime so it's perfect to read in December. You'll recognize the next book's author. She's the author of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Her name is Patricia MacLachlan. She is a lovely, lovely story-teller, one of the most gifted, and this is a quick read. It's called, *The True Gift*. I just read this one for the first time and it's one I'm going to be adding to our family's permanent collection. It's a sweet country story, a sweet country family story. It's short so if you find yourself stretched for time in December (who doesn't, right?) this can be a really good read-aloud because it's not a huge commitment. It's short, it's delightful, and everybody can listen in. It's not too heavy for anybody and even your older kids, teens, and all the other adults in your family they're going to enjoy listening to it as well.

## 11:38 A favorite series

OK, I can't wait to tell you about this next series. In fact, I love these books so much that I would say if you're only going to choose one book from this list this is what I would recommend. This is the series by Arnold Ytreeide. There's a collection of these books. The first is *Jotham's Journey*. Then there's *Bartholomew's Passage*, *Tabitha's Travels*, and *Ishtar's Odyssey*. I love these books. Let's start with *Jotham's Journey* which is the first in the series. It's a fictional telling of the Nativity. Jotham is a 10 year old boy and throughout the book he's searching for his family in Israel. He's gotten separated from his family. So, he's searching for his family in Israel at the time our Lord is born. On his journey he meets thieves and robbers and kidnappers. He faces incredible danger. I'm telling you I learn so much about what the world was like in the time of baby Jesus when I read these books. So, here's the cool thing about these books—actually, there's a couple of cool things. So here's one of the cool things about these books: the author's divided up the chapters so that you could, theoretically, read a chapter each day throughout Advent. It's been written almost like a devotional, I think that actually says that on the cover, so you could read a chapter each day during Advent and you'd land at the birth of Christ on Christmas Day. I am never put together enough to get to reading aloud every day. Every time I think we're going to do this one thing every day all throughout Advent, it never happens. So, I just read these like a normal chapter book. So, just like our normal read-alouds—some days I read one chapter, some days I read a couple of them, depending on their length. There are actually little devotional additions at the end of each chapter. I, frankly, usually skip those because I think the stories are



so well told that the kids are quite able to dig out the beauty and the meaning naturally without those prompts, but there have been times I've read those aloud, too, and they're lovely. So, you could use them if you like. But you could use this book as a devotional, a chapter a day, or you could just read it like any other chapter book and split it up however you want. Another cool thing about these books is that Mr. Ytreeide has written the story from different perspectives. So, Jotham meets a boy named Bartholomew and the first book is Jotham's Journey, the second book is told from Bartholomew's view and his experience which is quite different from Jotham's, and that one is called Bartholomew's Passage. And then we have Tabitha's Travels which tells us the entire story from Tabitha's perspective and her own experience. And the newest one is Ishtar's Odyssey. Basically, you could read this Christmas story every year and have a different tale, a different experience of the Nativity. I really think this is a beautiful way to deepen the true meaning of Christmas, the celebration of Christ's birth, and really deepen your family's understanding and appreciation for what this holiday really means. I can't recommend these highly enough. Like I said, if you're only going to get to one book on this list I would start with Jotham's Journey out of everything I'm recommending today. I would recommend Jotham's Journey most. I do want to caution you, however. The life and times during our Lord's birth were grizzly. This was a grizzly time in human history. The books are intense and they can be disturbing to young listeners. There's kidnapping (I'm not going to say exactly some of the different punishments but if you can think of punishments for thievery, stealing with your hands, things like that come up in the story) so if you have younger kids or sensitive readers you want to know that ahead of time. I, generally,

recommend these books for kids who are about 10 and up. I think I started reading them with my kids when my son was 9 and he was fine. So, it just depends on your kid and how sensitive he or she is. If you have young ones I would say you either want to read the book after they're in bed so you can read it with your older kids or do what I do, sometimes I will turn on a movie in the next room for the little kids so that I can read with my big kids. Just make sure you're going with your eyes wide open. You don't want to start reading that book with really young ones in the room and then be surprised that they start having nightmares. So, that's my caution for you.

## 15:44 Short story collections

OK, let's talk about a couple of classics that look like picture books but really are short stories, and therefore, you don't want to approach them like picture books because you'll get frustrated. The first is The Story of Holly and Ivy written by Rumer Godden, illustrated by none other than the fabulous Barbara Cooney. This is an old-fashioned tale of an orphan girl, a Christmas doll, and the spirit of Christmas. It's got to be one of my favorites—very, very favorites. I really think you could skip the library on this one and just buy a copy for your home library because you're going to want to read it again and again. It's got a lot of text so if you pull that book off the shelf it looks like any other picture book, but if you pull that book off the shelf and think you're going to be reading for the next five or ten minutes with your kids a picture book you're going to get overwhelmed. It is a short story so approach it like you would a chapter book and read sections at a time and then put it away and come back and keep going. I think even young kids could really enjoy this one. It's just that you don't want



to try it all in one sitting. It's a short story, beautiful illustrations by Barbara Cooney. Another short story that looks like a picture book but isn't really is *The Nutcracker* written, of course, by E. T. A. Hoffman, illustrated by (this version that I'm talking about right now) Maurice Sendak. It's lengthier. This is a lengthier version than the Susan Jeffers version that I love and recommend in our picture book post. There is a lovely picture book story re-telling of *The Nutcracker* by Susan Jeffers that is just wonderful—that is definitely a picture book. This one illustrated by Maurice Sendak is not so much a picture book, it's more like a chapter book or a really long short story. There's a lot of text and the illustrations done beautifully by Maurice Sendak who you'll know from *Where the Wild Things Are*. He actually designed (I don't know if you know this) the sets and costumes for the Pacific Northwest Ballet's *Nutcracker* production in Seattle, and this is the book version. So you want to read it like a chapter book in bits here and there over time. It's not a sit down and read it all at once. Again, it looks like a picture book but it's not. It's just got really, really beautiful illustrations. I bet your kids will pore over this book because it is a feast for the eyes. And I found that my kids enjoying *Nutcracker* re-tellings and ballet performances better after they've got the story well in hand. So reading a story book like Susan Jeffers' version for younger kids and then this Maurice Sendak illustrated one for older kids (or letting younger kids just enjoy the pictures) will help a lot in them understanding the story of *The Nutcracker*. While we're talking *Nutcracker* let me tell you there is a lovely edition of *The Nutcracker* done by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, narrated by the beloved Jim Weiss who we've had here on the podcast a couple of times and we're going to have him again. It's narrated by Jim Weiss, The

Story of the *Nutcracker* and then the London Philharmonic Orchestra play it. And it is amazing. It's done by Maestro Classics, I love what they do over at Maestro Classics. You can get this one on CD or you can get it as an mp3 to listen to. It actually comes with a 24-page activity book that you can either download or whatever. I rarely use the activity book although I know some of my friends really enjoy that. I just love, love, love these symphony stories—they're just beautiful. It's about an hour long so it's kind of perfect to play in the car as you zip around on Christmassy errands or go onto your way to visit friends and family or find yourself in the car. And you can listen to it over and over. So, that's done by Maestro Classics and it's *The Nutcracker* by the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Remember, I'm putting links to all of this in the Show Notes. So, if you're starting to feel like there is no way I will remember all this, yeah, I know. So, go to [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas) to see it all. Oh, oh, one more short story I almost forgot to mention is *The Gift of the Magi*. This is a classic tale by O. Henry that your older kids will especially love, but the picture book I'm going to link to in the Show Notes is lovely just all the way around, it's just lovely for everybody. It is a very classic tale you might recognize it because I think a lot of us are familiar with this story of the gift of the Magi and I'll put my favorite version in the Show Notes. It's pretty much like a picture book but it's got more text than a lot of picture books so we're sticking it here with short stories.

### 19:55 A couple more classics

OK, a couple more classics for you. One of them is by Elizabeth Goudge. It's called *I Saw Three Ships*. I have never read this before this year; I read it for the first time in preparation for this list



and I was so delighted to have found it. It's the story of a girl named Polly who lives with her two maiden aunts on the seaside during the late eighteenth century. It's symbolic, and it's basically a story based on the legend of the three ships, the Christmas carol I should say, "I Saw Three Ships." It's kind of an imaginative telling of it. I would say it's best for older kids and teens because I think younger kids will probably find it hard to follow. Goudge is a very subtle and spare storyteller in this one so it's short. It's only sixty pages. There are lovely black and white sketches throughout. And I just love this story of hope and optimism. I would recommend this one for a family who already enjoys classics, I think. If you've got younger kids, a fantastic novel that would be really fun to read, is actually just a mini book of Tumtum and Nutmeg's. Tumtum and Nutmeg written by Emily Bearn, there's a whole bunch of their different adventures and they have one called A Christmas Adventure. There's an audio version or you can just get it and read it aloud. It's light-hearted and quick to read, and if your kids have already loved the other tales of Nutmouse Hall, all about Tumtum and Nutmeg they'll really enjoy this one, but they don't have to have already be familiar with Tumtum and Nutmeg or Nutmouse Hall in order to enjoy it. I think I would recommend Tumtum and Nutmeg: A Christmas Adventure for about 4-7 year olds, I think. Kids on either side of that are going to enjoy, too, but I bet kids aged 4-7 will enjoy it best. Did you know that Betty MacDonald the author of the Mrs. Piggie-Wiggle books has a Christmas book? Indeed. I did not know that either. Maybe you did know. It's called Nancy and Plum. Nancy and Plum are two orphans who live in Mrs. Monday's house for children. I'm not going to tell you much about it; it's a very old-fashioned story, it starts and end at two different

Christmases. It's a very good time of year to read. Nancy and Plum by Betty MacDonald. It's a little slower-paced. It's an older classic, so if you're looking for something quicker-paced, skip that one, but if your kids really like an old classic, old-fashioned classic tale that may be a good one to go with. One of my favorite books to read at Christmastime, or actually any time of year—I really love this book, but it's particularly well-suited for a Christmas read is The Family Under the Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson. This book won a 1989 Newbery Honor for good reason. Armand is this curmudgeonly tramp who is living on the streets of Paris and he's very unhappy to share his space under the bridge with three newly homeless children and their mother. It's a really heart-warming story of transformation and love and loyalty and family. I would read this one with kids who are, I'd say, 6 and up or so. I think the whole family could sit in on this one but probably kids who are 6 and up all the way to your teens will enjoy it the best. Alright. Oh, I'm looking at the time.

## 23:08 Santa's childhood

One more, and then you're going to have to get the rest of the list on the website. I do want to mention this one, a new-to-me book that I just recently read for the first time, is called A Boy Called Christmas by Matt Haig. I'm shifting because this is an entirely secular book. It tells a made-up fantasy story about the childhood of Santa Claus and it's just plain fun. I read it in two days because it was such a delight. Haig is really a gifted story-teller. So, it's not historical in any fashion so you and your kids aren't going to learn or hear about the real Saint Nick in A Boy Called Christmas. It is a fantasy story, a Christmas story sprinkled with magic and whimsy. I would say it



reminds me of Roald Dahl's work. If you are a listener who tends to think the work of Roald Dahl is a bit crass or have an aversion to a little bathroom humor or just ... I don't know ... some of the weirdness of Roald Dahl you probably want to skip this one. But if you like the quirky weirdness of Roald Dahl you will probably love *A Boy Called Christmas*. It is a story of the boy who becomes Santa Claus as a child and how he got to become Santa Claus in a fantastical tale. So, it's a story of unending optimism. I think that's really the heart of this story. It's unending optimism, the importance of hope, and the truth of, as the book says, nothing being as wonderful as doing the right thing. OK, so the rest of the list is at [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas). The picture book list is there, the audio book list is there. I will also link to our gift guide as soon as it's up which is coming up very, very soon so you know what to get your young readers this Christmas. And, there's of course, going to be just lots and lots of books there for you to enjoy. There are going to be some books that are really handy for kids to read on their own. So just as an example, Andrew Clements who's the author of one of my favorite books *Frindle* he wrote a book called *The Last Holiday Concert* that I think is probably best as a read-alone. It's a really enjoyable read, I'm not sure it's a great read-aloud, but I think it's a lovely read-alone. I also think all of the historical American Girl Christmas books. I don't think they make these anymore but the old ones are great. Like, *Felicity's Surprise*, *Molly's Surprise*, *Samantha's Surprise*, *Addy's Surprise*, *Josefina's Surprise* ... you get the idea. Those are all really well done, and again, those are probably best as read-alones, so we're going to put those in the list as well. OK, I really do have to stop talking or we're going to be here all day. And, I want to hear what the kids have to

say. So, don't forget to go to [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas) to get everything we talked about. And now, let's hear from the kids.

## 25:52 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 Brooke and I'm 14 years old. I'm from Adelaide, Australia, and my favorite book is *What Katy Did* by Susan Coolidge.

**Child2:** Hi, my name is Abigail. [mum: hi Abigail, how old are you?] I'm 6. [mum: you're 6, and what's your favourite book?] *Granny Smith Apples*. [mum: *Granny Smith Apples*. And where do you live, Abigail?] Adelaide, Australia. [mum: Adelaide, Australia].

**Child3:** Hi, my name is Ethan. I'm 13 years old, and I live in Adelaide, Australia. My favourite book or series of books is *The Ranger's Apprentice* by John Flannagan.

**Child4:** My name is Aman. [mum: how old are you, Aman?] I'm 7 years old. [mum: you're 7, and what's your favourite book that you like to read?] My favourite book is *BFG* by Roald Dahl. [mum: and where do you come from Aman?] Adelaide, Australia.

**Child5:** [mom: what is your name?] Caroline. [mom: Caroline. How old are you, Caroline?] 4. [mom: 4. And where are you from?] Virginia. [mom: Virginia. And what is your favorite book?] *Silly Sally*. [mom: *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood. And why do you like *Silly Sally*?] Because it's silly. [mom: because it's silly. Alright, say goodbye.] Goodbye.



**Child6:** My name is Mary Claire. I am 12 years old and I am from Virginia. One of my favorite series is the Once Upon a Time series by Angela Marie Michaels. They're Catholic re-tellings of fairy tales. I like them because they make you want to laugh and cry and because they're full of good, noble, and heroic characters involved in a worthwhile plot.

**Child7:** My name is John and I currently live in Potenza, Italy. My favorite book is The Trumpet of the Swan and I like it because it is about swans and swans are one of my favorite animals.

**Child8:** Hello, my name is Cecily and I'm 7. And I currently live in Potenza, Italy and my favorite book is Because of Winn-Dixie and I like it because Winn-Dixie and Opal have a lot of adventures together.

**Child9:** My name is [**\*\*inaudible\*\***] and I'm 11 years old. I am currently living in Potenza, Italy. My favorite book is The Trumpet of the Swan and I like it because it is about swans and swans are one of my favorites.

**Sarah:** Thank you so much, kids. I always love to hear what you're enjoying. Don't forget that you can get all of the Christmas lists, the picture books, the novels, the audio books, the gift guides—everything you need to have a great Christmas at [ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/Christmas). Thank you so much for listening. I hope if you are celebrating Thanksgiving this week that you have a wonderful Thanksgiving. And I'll be here in your ear buds next week at the same place, same time. Until then, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.