

Episode 1: Welcome to the At Home Librarian Podcast

Tibby : When you talk about children's books most people can name only a few- *Goodnight, Moon*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, maybe a title they read in school or one their kid just finished reading. Ask them to name another picture book, an easy reader, or another title by Margaret Wise Brown and you'll get a lot of blank stares. I know. I've gotten a lot of those stares.

Alexis : Ask adults how sight words and phonics work in tandem in their own reading and people try to get away as fast as possible.

T : But that sort of surprises me for as literate as our society is. We all learned to read at some point, whether or not we became readers. And for as many of us who have kids, and as prevalent as books are, why do parents and caregivers, and even some librarians, seem so clueless as to the world of children reading and the books that make them tick?

Hi everyone. I'm Tibby and I'm a librarian, parent, unschooler, and a reader.

A : I'm Alexis. I'm an educator and a reader.

T : And you're listening to The At Home Librarian Podcast, a podcast where we examine what it means to become a reader, demystify how that happens, explore beyond the five most famous kids books, and dive into the works of children's book artists and authors and scholars.

A : Along the way we'll recommend books for you to share with the children in your life, help you diversify their bookshelves, and hopefully reassure you that whatever your kid loves reading is okay. There is so much good stuff when it comes to children's books.

T : So, as I mentioned at the top, I am an unschooling parent. This means my children are not enrolled in traditional school and while they are educated at home, we do not recreate a school structure in the home. My kids' education gives them a lot of autonomy when it comes to how and what and when they learn. I'm not going to go into detail here about unschooling because this isn't that podcast, but I chose this path for their education years ago and have come to appreciate it more and more for the approach it takes to learning. However, it also really freaks out other parents, teachers, random people in the grocery store (who have an opinion about it), and also a few of our grandparents.

When I mention this is how we approach education to people, the most common question or comment I get involves some form of hand wringing over my children learning to read, especially if they were to have dyslexia or language processing issues (which, for the record, they don't!). In my previous lives I spent years in a second grade classroom and then many more years in lower, middle, and high school libraries and the experience I gained there has

certainly helped me understand what I was looking at as I've watched my two children approach books and reading.

A : My teaching experience has been largely in traditional school settings, where my approach to teaching in general and teaching reading in particular has evolved immensely. When I was working toward my credential as a student teacher most of my experience was within our public school systems where the focus is on reaching rather arbitrary benchmarks and achieving high scores on standardized tests. Once I got into my own classroom, however, in both public and private schools, my approach quickly evolved into one that is much more focused on the underlying mechanics of reading, cognitive development, and most of all a love of reading and stories of all kinds.

It may seem obvious to those who know any children that all learners are different and therefore everyone learns to read at different paces. However, our educational system ignores that fact and imposes very specific - and often inappropriate - benchmark expectations on all learners. This happens in private schools too, although it can look a bit different and seem differentiated even while it's not really. This attempt to put all learners into one basket is one of the things that frustrates me most about traditional education and it's one I fought hard against in every classroom I've run. It's crucial to understand where each learner is in their reading journey and to help them develop a well-rounded set of skills and tools to help them continue along that journey while also fostering their identity as a reader.

In this space we want to talk in depth about these processes and resources so that other parents and caregivers and educators can feel more confident in helping their children as they learn to read and become readers. I know a lot of caregivers get notes home about their children's reading preferences and reading levels and feel unsure about how to support their children or even feel uncomfortable with the suggestions and requests. One of our first episodes will explain what the process of learning to read entails.

T : Another question we're interested in exploring is what it means to be a reader. I think most of us recognize that there is a difference between knowing how to read and actually wanting to read. I also think most of us believe readers are the people like Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, walking around with their noses in books. But what is that metamorphosis that happens that turns people into readers and kids into readers and do our ideas about what a reader "should be" (nose stuck in a book) put limits on us? Most of us actually are readers, but we've allowed adults (especially teachers and librarians) to tell us, when that identity and process was forming, that we couldn't be readers because we didn't like the "right kind" of books, didn't read "enough", or didn't read the "right" format.

A : We are also abolitionists, meaning we believe another world is possible. One without police or police violence, without systems of oppression and coercion, without poverty and marginalization. And that has, in recent years, influenced how we approach everything, including children's books, education, and reading.

T : This is where unschooling has become critical in my family for living the values we believe in and creating the world we want starting in our home and extending out into our community. I have found children's books to be incredibly helpful for decolonizing my children's education, as conversation starters too, and as tools for critical thinking. You often have to get beyond the mainstream publishing to find more radical books and I'll talk about that as well.

A : It has also extensively informed how I approach all things in my classroom, including reading. Books are so powerful for children to be able to see and affirm themselves, see and understand others, and process the world around them. When books and stories are made inaccessible to some children through attitudes adults place on either those books or the way children approach reading, then those children are denied access to such affirming and explorative experiences.

Abolitionist practices and mindset have also helped me reset where I place my expectations on children's reading journeys, life experiences, and their background knowledge, which in turn helps me to approach each learner where they are rather than where some arbitrary benchmark says they should be.

T : I also just really love kids books, especially picture books. In my years as a teacher, librarian, and parent I'm always so surprised when parents have no idea what's out there for kids to read and the quality of reading materials available. I have a lot of friends that ask for birthday present recommendations for books. I probably shouldn't be surprised, but I am. And despite their obliviousness, I am usually even more surprised at how judgemental they are! I shouldn't be. But I am. Children's literature and picture books can be surprisingly complex and beautiful and I want to impart some of my love and excitement to you, to show you why I love them.

A : Same!

[Break]

A : Welcome back to the At Home Librarian podcast. Throughout this series one of our goals is to demystify the process of reading and we thought we would start in this intro episode with a quick back and forth where we throw out some common misconceptions surrounding reading. We'll be diving deeper into these ideas and hopefully dispelling these myths further in future episodes, but in the meantime, let's just get them out there in the open.

T : Alright, first misconception: People who are excellent readers when young must be geniuses, and the inverse must also be true.

A : The reality, your child doesn't have to be an early reader to be a reader!

T : Misconception: Good reading equals independent reading

A : Reality: Independent reading is great, but so is reading aloud and reading along!

T : Picture books are for “babies”

A : Picture books can be for everyone! Yes, even adults!

T : Children need to constantly be reading books that are challenging in order for them to learn to read

A : The reality is, comfort books are fine! Reading something easy and familiar reinforces learned skills and strengthens the joy of reading. When was the last time you read something difficult?

T : Audiobooks and graphic novels aren’t “real” reading

A : Reading is reading is reading. Stop gatekeeping.

T : A good book is one an adult chooses for you

A : What you consider good may not be what a child finds entertaining. You’re not the target audience after all and your favorite children’s book is not necessarily going to be their favorite.

T : Which can be kind of disappointing, but that does happen.

A : Yeah, that’s true.

T : There are right and wrong things you can do that will make or break your child as a reader.

A : The good news is, there are lots of things you *can* do to enhance your child’s reading life, but there’s no one thing you can do that will guarantee your child is going to love reading, and *not* doing them doesn’t make you a bad parent.

T : That was meant to be fun, and if you found yourself recognizing the myths or relieved by the myth busting, like Alexis said, we will cover these ideas in more depth and with nuance this season. We’re excited to dive in and we’re glad you’re along for the ride.

If you have any questions or comments feel free to reach out to us. We’re on Instagram as [at]athomelibrarianpod. That’s at a-t h-o-m-e l-i-b r-a-r i-a-n p-o-d. And if you like the show please share with the caregivers and educators in your life.

A : Finally, we are going to wrap up this episode in the way we’ll wrap up each episode, with something we’re calling a Reading Spark, which is a short interview with someone about what book or book experience made them a reader or was formative in their relationship with reading. This week we’re going to hear from someone we both know very well and have watched become a reader, Tibby’s older kiddo, Cam.

Tibby : Hi. Can you tell us your name?

Cam : Camille.

T : Thank you. Hi, Camille. So Aunty Lex and I wanted to ask you about reading. Do you have any books that really jump out to you as ones you've loved or felt to you like you really mastered the reading process and being a reader?

C : Owl Diaries.

T : The Owl Diaries. Can you describe what those books are about?

C : An owl.

T : An owl...in diary format, perchance?

C : Yes.

T : Okay. What's her name?

C : Eva.

T : What is it that you like about those books?

C : They're, um, just interesting.

A : Was it more that you really enjoyed the characters you got to encounter with each book or was it what the characters did, more the plot?

C : Definitely the characters.

T : How many books are there in that series?

C : Uh 15 or 16.

T : And how many have you read?

C : All of them except for the one you haven't bought me yet.

T : *(laughing)* You're not wrong. *(laughing)* Do you ever reread them?

C : All the time.

T : I think there was another book too, you wanted to talk about? You were telling me the other night.

C : *By the Great Horn Spoon!*

T : Can you tell me a little bit about that one?

C : It's about the Gold Rush.

A : I have not read that one. Is it fiction or nonfiction? Tell me a little bit about it?

C : It's about a butler and whatever his name is.

T : Jack, I think it's Jack.

C : Well, they go to get gold.

T : Did you read this book to yourself?

C : No, you read it to me.

T : Yeah. It was a read aloud at night. There was somebody else in this house who really enjoyed that book...

C : My dear father. *(laughter)*

A : What was engaging about that book? What did you really connect with in that book?

C : It was hilarious.

T : Yeah, it really was. It was actually a fun one to read out loud. One last question...

C : What?

T : ...do you identify as a reader? Do you identify with books? When you see them do you feel like you want to read them and you like having books around you.

C : Yes.

T : Yeah? Okay. Thank you.