

# Season 3, Episode 30: So Many Good Books + What We Do About Book Ratings

Mon, 3/8 • 50:05

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:10

Hey readers, welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from those strong bookish opinions. So get ready.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:24

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I give five stars to talking about books with you every week, Kaytee.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And a little more sunshine makes me a heck of a lot happier. This is episode number 30 of season three. And we're so glad you're here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:54

Oh my gosh, yes, a week of sunshine makes a really really big difference.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:58

Guys, I give five stars to sunshine. That's what I give five stars to.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:02

Yes, after our week of being you know, in the teens and negative numbers we were we had a high of 84 this week.

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:09

oh my gosh

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:10

Two days, we were up over into the 80s. Yeah, it was flat out poor weather, which is just that's just Texas, I am deeply, deeply beginning to understand that Texas weather is just you, you can never put away your clothes because you literally one day to the next can't have any idea which ones of your clothes you're going to need.

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:30

That's ridiculous. Before we get going any further into this episode, I want to let everybody know that today we are talking about book ratings for our deep dive and rating systems, and how we rate and what ratings mean to us, etc, etc. But before we do that, let's get started with our bookish moments of the week. Meredith

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:48

All right, my bookish moment of the week has me feeling like an adult because I did something this morning is this we record on Saturdays, it's this is a Saturday morning, I did something I have never done before. I registered for and attended via zoom, a book convention, or they're calling it an unconvention. So it was the Lefty Book Awards, which has nothing to do with politics. It's like Left Coast. And they have like Best Debut Novel and you know, Best Novel and just all of those awards and Louise Penny was up for best or All The Devils Are Here was up for Best Novel. And so and these are crime related books, I should specify that. And so which is why it caught my eye and that she was going to be there. And so I you know, zoomed into a couple of their sessions today. And it was really I I mean, we're supposed to hate the pandemic. And we all do for a million reasons. In this case, I feel like I got to sort of see some panel discussions that I just normally, I'm not a go to an event attend an event kind of person. It's not to say never do but it's just not my thing. And in this case, it was really simple for me to sit in and I will I listened to a couple of panels, including a panel on debut authors debut crime authors. And it was really, really interesting. The discussion was absolutely fascinating. So it was it was just it made me feel like an adult reader. Like I'm gonna attend a book convention.

**Kaytee Cobb** 03:12

Now you get like a special honorary diploma in like bookishness?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:17

I feel I feel like I should I feel like I really, really, really enjoyed and found a couple of crime writers that actually hadn't been on my radar that I'm putting their books on my TBR.

**Kaytee Cobb** 03:27

Nice. Alright, well, I actually had a different bookish moment planned. But I'm going to pivot a little bit and go with something that kind of relates to that. So yesterday, today is Saturday. This was Friday, Mindy and I got to go to lunch with a bookish friend, a patron, who was visiting Santa Fe. She lives in Illinois. Her friend, after this really tough year for their family, decided to treat her to a weekend at a spa here in Santa Fe. Which Hi, that's, that's a good friend. And I need more friends like that. Yes, you know, but we kind of invited ourselves. She did invite us, Jillian said, we could come meet her for lunch. So we got to go check out this gorgeous spot in Santa Fe, we all ate outside, they are both vaccinated. We had we were masked, of course, when we met each other. It was so fun to get to meet a listener, a patron, somebody who really loves the show a little bit of that, like starstruck energy around the meeting, you know, but it made me think about how fun in the future it would be to have a live event for Currently Reading and have a bookish retreat of some kind where we got to meet a number of these people, you know, and really get to know the people who've been really like in our corner for years. You know, like it just made me so happy. It was just full of delight. And it made me look toward the future

toward me getting my own adult reader card, where I get to say we're having a bookish retreat. we're renting a VRBO, and everybody brings books and we're just going to hang out and do Currently Reading book club. It'll be amazing.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:55

And I can I there's so much about that. This sounds totally great to me. The whole part of it. Every part of it sounds totally great to me. Except for how absolutely awkward I am in real life situation like I always feel like I'm just I just dread getting together with people in person that I've never met before. And it has nothing to do with the other person or me not wanting to meet them. I just like you and Mindy have all this like, extrovert energy. And I'm like, Can I please just be in my closet talking into a microphone because I'm so much more likeable that way. I mean, not even 100% likeable that way, but like in person, you know what I mean? Oh, God, the in person element just makes me so nervous.

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:39

Would it be worse, if it were a surprise? If I were like, Meredith, let's get together just the two of us and go hang out for a weekend and then all of a sudden, there were like, 20 other people there?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 05:47

No, it would be 1,000% better because then because the reality is, right, once I'm in this situation, I'm I'm really fine. It's not like I like fold up and go sit in the bathroom, it but right, the anticipation of it and my overthinking about, like, my inner critic gets so loud about like, they're gonna think you're not as great as they think you're gonna be, or you're not gonna know what to talk about are all those things. So I'm glad for the fact it's another way, Kaytee that you and I are really good match, because I think you will kind of spur on those kinds of things, which will end up being really good and really positive. But my natural inclination is to not so it's one of those it's a good pairing. Alright, my first book this week is an Agatha Christie novel. And this shouldn't surprise anybody. Because for the past, I want to say a year and a half, I've been actually pretty regularly knocking out these Agatha Christie's and especially, Hercule Poirot is my favorite. And so this is another one of those. This is Sad Cypress. So let me tell you just a little bit about the setup here. So when our story opens, we have beautiful young Elinor Carlisle, and she's on trial. She's been accused of the murder of Mary Gerrard, who is her rival in a love triangle. There is a mountain of evidence against poor Elinor. And really only Elinor has the motive, the opportunity and the means to have murdered poor Mary. But in our story, there is one person who absolutely believed that Elinor is innocent. And that person brings in Hercule to see if she can be saved from the gallows. Now, I loved his book for a lot of reasons. It was actually fairly different in a couple of ways from the other Hercule novels that I have read. It was, this one was absolutely fantastic. I should say from the outset. What was the same is that we get snarky, comforting Hercule you know, he's so smart. He's two steps ahead of everybody. One way that this book was different is he's not as far ahead of everyone else, as he usually is. He's a step ahead, but not like a mile ahead. And that was interesting in the way that the story plays out. Because you have this feeling of like, he doesn't quite seem unsure of himself, as he usually is. So that was interesting. Also, the tone in this book was more emotional, there was more character development. And I don't say that in a way, that's code for that, that it was boring. What I mean is, we actually get to know several of the lead characters in this book in a deeper way than we normally do in an Agatha Christie novel. And I really liked it for that reason, there was more emotion here, there was you cared a lot about several of the the outcomes for several of the

characters. So there's no question that these books have become comfort reading for me, I have to stop myself because that's what I like to listen to on audio. And I like By the way, the David Suchet versions, there's multiple versions that you can listen to, David Suchet is my favorite one to listen to, for Hercule and several listeners have also been messaging me telling me that they also are listening to a bunch of Agatha Christie and are kind of having to force themselves not to listen to them back to back to back. So I'm not the only one. I really enjoyed this one. It was Sad Cypress by Agatha Christie.

**Kaytee Cobb** 09:16

Nice. I like that you're kind of covering a backlist. And my first read this week is about staying caught up on author's frontlist, which I don't do very often. But I want to talk about The Survivors by Jane Harper. Ooh, yes. which just came out in January. And I don't like there's not a long list of authors where I can say, I've read everything they've ever written. And as soon as the next one comes out, I'm getting the next one.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 09:42

Auto buying here.

**Kaytee Cobb** 09:43

Yep, exactly. Yeah. So I'm keeping that streak going with Jane Harper. To be clear, this is not part of her Aaron Falk series, which is The Dry and Force of Nature. And then she has a third novel which is a spin off called Lost Man. That's not related to Aaron Falk. The Survivors, no Aaron Falk this one either. So this is a compelling Australian mystery with a great sense of place. As we know she's really great at. In this one, we have a man named Kieran as our main character. He's visiting his family at home, where he hasn't been in many years and he's bringing back his young wife and young child to kind of meet the parents and be around them. But there's a lot of tension at home. And that's because when Kieran was a teen, his older brother Finn died tragically. And he kind of blamed himself for it. And so do his parents, there's a lot of like, guiltiness around this house. It was really like kind of an accident at sea situation, because this is a like windswept Australian coastal town with these creepy caves that kind of go underwater when the tide is in. And then they're exposed when the tide is out. Of course, you know, somebody is going to die in there, right? Like, they're so creepy. Sure, so creepy. There's like, names carved on the walls on the inside of the caves. so creepy. Okay. So, as we're trying to figure out what's happening with Kieran and his family in this tension, the story becomes revealed slowly over the course of the novel. And in the meantime, a body is discovered on shore, and a girl goes missing. So we have all these like concurrent mysteries happening. There's a lot going on, it's kind of hard to follow, exactly. Whose wife were we talking about, whose girlfriend, whose is this 20 years ago is this now what's going on? There's just a lot of characters to keep track of. However, with the creepy caves, and the creepy setup, and the creepy everything that's happening, the tension in this one, and the plot really move, you just have to really pay attention to who's doing what, where, you know, so it's not a it's not a breezy popcorn mystery. It's a more focused mystery where you have to work for attention. Exactly. So I think it's for that reason that right now on Goodreads, it's actually ranked lowest of all her books. It's not faring well, rating wise. But for me, I really enjoyed it. I still I loved The Dry. I loved The Lost Man I could throw away Force of Nature. This one was right up there with the other two for me though. It just took more of that focused attention, which also I don't think a lot of people have right now, you know, like they don't want to give a mystery, that kind of attention. I had to start the audio on this one multiple

times in order to get myself into the story because I wasn't, I wasn't processing it correctly. I wasn't you know, as puttering while I listened instead of really giving it my full attention. So I do want to say that that's how I think you need to read this book. And in that, if you do that, in that case, it will probably be a hit for you as well. I thought it was propulsive. It draws you completely into the location especially you do get to know the characters pretty well. But it's a little hard to get into it's *The Survivors* by Jane Harper.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 13:01

I have been really really I own this one. I've been looking forward to this she's an auto buy author for me too. In absolutely no one does place as well. I think right now as she does because even *Force of Nature*, which was horrible. It was that was a horrible book. It's like the I can right now remember several scenes from that from them. That horrible book, because she writes plays so well. And of course *The Dry*. So windswept coastal town, I will be really interested to see what she does with this. I have an imprint. I'm wondering if that will make it a little bit easier to kind of keep track of sometimes I think.

**Kaytee Cobb** 13:40

I think so.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 13:41

Okay, so my next pick is we are we're now a week into *Middle Grade March*. And I am so happy to be able to bring you guys not only a good middle grade book, but a great middle grade book and I can't for the life of me by the way, remember how this one crossed my path? So if it was a listener, please let me know. My my system tells me it wasn't a listener but let me know if this sounds familiar to anybody. I read *The Beast and the Bethany* by Jack Meggitt-Phillips. Have you heard of this one Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 14:12

No.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 14:13

Okay, this one is so much fun. You guys this, let me tell you the setup. All right. So we've got Ebenezer Tweezer is our lead character and this guy is not a good guy. All right. Yeah. The fact that his name is Ebenezer Tweezer, tells you a lot of what you need to know about this book because I laughed out loud so many times when I was reading this book. So he knows that beauty comes at a price. He has been trying to stay beautiful for 511 years. And he does that because he has a beast in his in the attic of his mansion. So in return for meals or different things that the beast asks for he has given eternal life and eternal beauty to Ebenezer Tweezer. And then one day the beast becomes, well, the beast over time is becoming greedier and greedier and greedier and one day, the beast says what he wants is he wants a child to eat.

**Kaytee Cobb** 15:20

Ew!

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 15:21

So, Ebenezer Tweezer goes out to procure a child because he very much wants to stay looking young and beautiful. And he meets to his great glory and detriment. Bethany, and the story goes on from there. This book is so hilarious. It's so funny. It's so good. The the Amazon reviews says that it's like Series of Unfortunate Events meets Roald Dahl. I see the Roald Dahl. But it feels like more that meets with the Willoughby's because it's got a lot more humor than darkness to it. Like Series of Unfortunate Events runs a little on the runs quite a bit on the darker side. This is funny. The Bethany character, Bethany is one of the best, you know, co lead characters, She and Ebenezer are the two are the two lead characters, that I have read in forever. She is young, I think she's like nine or 10. She is naughty. She is so naughty, that her orphanage doesn't even they are, they are chomping at the bit to get rid of her. She is so so so naughty. But what's beautiful about this book is that we understand, we are given the ability to understand why she is the way that she is. And she has this very hard outer exterior for a lot of really good reasons. And so the relationship between Bethany and Ebenezer Tweezer over the course of the book is really so much fun to watch. And it ends up being really beautiful to watch. So this would be a fantastic read aloud. But for any of you if you don't want to read aloud to your children, if you just want an afternoon of giggling to yourself, read The Beast and the Bethany by Jack Meggitt-Phillips.

**Kaytee Cobb** 17:12

That sounds so fun. I was a little concerned when we had a rhyming main character's name. I was like I don't know if I can get on board with this.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 17:20

Really, I loved it so much that if we ever get any sort of pet, I'm going to name it Ebenezer Tweezer. I really like it. I like saying it. Try saying it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 17:31

Ebenezer Tweezer.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 17:32

Right. See, it's fun.

**Kaytee Cobb** 17:34

You know why? It's because e's make your mouth into a smile.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 17:37

That's Yeah. Oh, these characters are so so great. They're so great. It's a wonderful book.

**Kaytee Cobb** 17:45

Yeah, I'm gonna have to get it. Dang it. Okay.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 17:48

Oh, your kids will love it. Actually, let me say one more thing about this. If you have amongst your children, and I do what you would describe as a strong willed child, because we don't call them

naughty, right. We call them strong willed. This book is a really great book to read, because it gives you a lot of ways to talk about how sometimes we might be naughty, or it might look like we're being naughty, but what we're really trying to do is process some really hard emotions. And sometimes it can look a little bit different. The way the story is done is just so so great. So it's a fantastic read aloud, begin, feel free to read it on your own, it will have you cackling.

**Kaytee Cobb 18:28**

I love that. I love that. I also have middle grade for my second book. It's not funny, though. Okay. So while I know, I know we're taking it down a second here. So my second book is called Peacemaker by Joseph Bruchac. This is the story of The Legend of Peacemaker, which is written from a middle grade perspective. So Bruchac is an Abenaki writer. And in this story, we follow a young boy of the Haudenosaunee nation as their clan is split by war. At the beginning of the story right here first chapter, this young boy Okwaho, is kind of out hunting fishing with his best friend, and a neighboring clan kidnaps this other child. So now Okwaho is struggling with anger. He's struggling with grief over losing his best friend. And because of the split that happened in the clan, his other best friend is no longer part of the whole situation. So he's just like, he's really grieving friendship. He's having a hard time. There's a lot of emotions. This story takes place 1000 years ago, that's when the legend happened, and Haudenosaunee nation, but it feels very real and present right now because our kids all have these like hard times, right? Where they, you know, their friend doesn't want to hang out with them anymore, or they had to move and now they don't get to be around that person anymore. And so it felt very much like I could hand this to my 10 year old he would absolutely understand it even though he has nothing in common with this child. So this book is about The Legend of Peacemaker who comes and attempts to unite the tribes again. It's about family and community being split by differing opinions, which also feels very present, right? Like we have a lot going on in the US of A right now with different opinions about any number of things. And sometimes it's enough to like, break friendships, right to see whoever it is posting online about this thing that they're doing or that they believe that is not at all in line with what you think or you believe. And so it's it's that, but for middle graders, it's so easy to extrapolate it out to an adult experience, and adult feelings, and adult friendships as well. So it felt very applicable and very, very relevant, even though it has nothing to do with me, you know. So I got this in my Bookshelf Thomasville middle grade subscription in January. And it's a short read, but it's really, really powerful. It's a great Native American author, Native American American story. And I highly, highly recommend it. It was excellent. It's called Peacemaker, by Joseph Bruchac.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:11**

My third book is squarely in my wheelhouse, and all of my murder fans, this book is going to be for you. So get ready because I read a book recommended by my new and very good friend, Marli James listener who recommends books to me all the time, and Gosh, darn it, if they aren't all good when I read them. This is Still Life With Crows by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. They are of course, the team behind a book that we've talked about on all things Murderful with Meredith, and on the big show called Relic. The great thing here is that we are back with Agent Pendergast, who is one of my absolute favorite lead detectives. I just absolutely love him. I am going to keep reading the series not only because this one was so good, but because I really really, really like that character. So here's the setup for this one. And this is another one of those where I'm not going to give you a ton of setup because you just don't need it. So suffice it to say that our setting, and it's an unforgettable setting is a small

Kansas town where some gruesome murders are happening. Is it a serial killer? Is it something else? A Darker force? Is the town cursed? There's a lot of that kind of rumor going around amid the golden cornfields. We've Special Agent Pendergast discovers an evil like he's never ever seen before. All right, so I think I actually liked this book more than I liked Relic and I liked Relic a lot. This setting of the cornfields I will never ever, ever be able to go into a cornfield for the rest of my life after reading this book. Corn fields were already creepy though. They're already creepy. I really wasn't happy about going into them to begin with but now it's a complete no go because this book has just ruined corn if you live in Kansas, don't read this book. Just don't do it. You won't even be able to drive to the store. So it is so it's it's definitely gory. But this is it's really smart. It is you are tearing through the pages. It's a good size. I want to say maybe a 400 plus ish hardback. But I absolutely rip through it so quickly. It's got short chapters. We get plenty of Agent Pendergast. And you just, he's so interesting. He was interesting in Relic. He's even more interesting in this book. And you guys, the ending. You know how there's that other book we're talking about the other day Kaytee with the WTF that ending? This ending? I haven't read that other one. But this ending, omg. I had to go back and reread huge swaths of the book, not because I didn't understand the ending. But because I wanted to go back again with new eyes and see it over again. I probably ended up rereading over half of the book just because I wanted to see it through that new lens. So great, so smart. I absolutely love this book. It's Still Life with Crows, by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:24

Got to specify it because there's some other still life love happening.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 24:27

Exactly, right.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:30

Alright, so my third book today is sorry, it's another middle grade book. And it's the next one in the series. It's Hollowpox: The Hunt for Morigan Crow by Jessica Townsend.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 24:42

Fantastic. I have been waiting to find out what someone seems like. I don't know anyone who read this. Like we all got it. But then nothing.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:53

It's awesome.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 24:54

It's so good.. Oh thank God. Oh, I'm so glad. Okay,

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:58

So this is the third in the series which starts with Nevermoor and then Wundersmith and yes, you have to read the other two you cannot jump into Hollowpox



**Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:07**

And why would you not? What No, not only don't come at Kaytee, why would you not read those other two? Why would you jump in at Hollowpox when the other two are so good, so good.

**Kaytee Cobb 25:18**

Okay, so the great thing about this book though is that I can give you some pretty decent setup without spoiling the other two. So in Hollowpox, we are, of course, still with Morrigan and her classmates at the Wondrous Society in Nevermoor. This time, they're learning they're growing, they're attending classes, they're also seeing some really strange things are happening around Nevermoor. In an amazing, amazing, like, I cannot with the foresight that Jessica Townsend had, writing this book, the main plot thrust centers around a disease known as the hollowpox, which affects Wunimals in Nevermoor. And if you remember, or even if you haven't read this, one of those are kind of like the animals in Zootopia. They like walk around on two legs, they have clothes, they hold jobs, they speak. And then there's also Unnimals in Nevermoor. And they're more like the animals that we see every day. They don't speak, they don't wear clothes. They're like pets or zoo animals, that kind of thing. The way that the Hollowpox affects the Wunimals is devastating. It's so upsetting. And because of that, there are quarantines, there's fear, there's isolation, there's humans worried about if this disease can pass from species to species. It's legitimately like you're you're like going to Instagram and wondering, when did Jessica Townsend write this book? Because how could she have written this and it released mid pandemic, it doesn't make sense. Jessica Townsend totally blew me away again, with her writing her characters her plot, I cannot share about this book without sharing my favorite quote, which of course will not spoil anything. Fenestra is a Magnificat who is a huge cat that takes up like the size of a room. Morrigan can ride on her she's so big. She says "we do not ignore bigotry, because that's how cowardly bigots turn into brave bigots". Oh, if you're new here, maybe that seems like a silly quote for me to pull out. But if you've been here for a while, you know why that one just speaks to my heart. I may get it as like a tattoo or embroider it and like hang it on my wall somewhere. I love it so much. I love it so much. I cannot wait for more from Jessica Townsend. She's fantastic. However, this one is the first one that I listened to instead of reading on paper. And I will not be doing that. Again. I didn't like the way that the characters were voiced in the audiobook. And I think if you started on audio, you'd probably be fine. But having had voices in my head that did not match with the narrator. I didn't enjoy the experience. So all that being said I gave it five stars. I thought it was fantastic. It's Hollowpox: The Hunt for Morrigan Crow by Jessica Townsend. Alright, those were our six current reads. I felt like there were a lot of really good books in there this week. We had a banner week.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:07**

Yes, and three middle grade for Middle Grade March. I think that that's a good thing.

**Kaytee Cobb 28:10**

Definitely. Okay, so let's talk about book ratings.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:13**

This is one of those topics that gets bandied about a lot, right? People will talk about how they rated something. People will talk about how it's rated on either Amazon or Goodreads. My question for you is really just well, first of all, I want us each to talk a little bit about if we each use a rating system of our

own, and if so, why did we choose the one we use? But then in general, how important are ratings to you as an individual reader is kind of is kind of what I want to get to. So when you do you enter your your reading into your reading log, how do you do your rating system Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb 28:51**

So we had a bookish friend post about a writing rubric that she uses. And in my dream life, that's what I do. I use a beautiful rubric that very clearly lets you like grade, different aspects of the book and then you it helps you assign a rating. I'm not that. I'm not that awesome.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:11**

This rubric actually came from Kayleigh Sykora and she sent us this five star rubric which basically run you know, five stars obviously being the best one star being the worst. Here's how her rubric worked. One star is so adorable it this book one star is "it added to my reading experiences".

**Kaytee Cobb 29:33**

That's not my one star,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:35**

Right. two stars is "it added to my reading experience. I thought about the book after reading it but I wouldn't recommend it to someone". Three stars is "it's worth reading, but I wouldn't read it again. I might recommend it to someone but only if I knew that they enjoyed this type of book, specifically", four stars is "I enjoyed the reading experience. It kept me interested and wanted to read wanting to read more. I would recommend it to anyone who likes this kind of book. And then had good good ending or interesting characters". And then five stars is "I loved reading this book and I wanted to read more, I would read it again, I would recommend it to basically anyone. It left me thinking during and after I read the book, it had a very satisfying ending, and characters that kept me engaged throughout the story". So that's her rubric that she shared with us that kind of got us thinking about this. And so there were a couple pieces of that that made me go "ehh". One star does not mean it one star for me means I hate it.

**Kaytee Cobb 30:37**

I hated it. Yeah, I think Kayleigh is probably better at DNFing than I am. That's what that's what I gathered from her rubric because she is very, she's like, filled with grace. This is not the book for me, but it was still done excellently or whatever, right? Right. Whereas I'm like one star, you're a pile of poo. Right? And I hated it.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:59**

A pile of poo rating.

**Kaytee Cobb 31:00**

Yes, yes, it's a small pile, because it's only one star, two stars. There was, there was something that I didn't hate, but mostly I hated it. I mean, it's how that shakes out. Three stars was it was fine. four stars, I really, really liked it. Five stars, I loved it. And if I don't own it already, I'm probably going to buy a copy for my shelves. It doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to reread though, because as we've discussed, neither you nor I is a very big reader. So I'm never committing to a five star read is one that I would

reread. which I think makes me slightly more generous with them. Because it takes what I mean, I've read like five books total, ever. So there's not many of those.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 31:45

So, right, I definitely wouldn't say that five stars means I'm gonna reread it. And I also think that I don't necessarily buy every one of the five star books that I read. But the inverse is probably true. If I am buying a book, it probably is one that I read and decided that it was five stars. So it's not all of them. But they all live within that. Now, when you do your and I interrupted you earlier, when you were you're doing your ratings, do you just do whole stars remind me?

**Kaytee Cobb** 32:16

Well, I in my reading log in my tracker, I have half star capabilities. And I use that quite a bit. On Goodreads they only have full stars. So then I'm sitting there and I'm like, well, surely this was like a three and a half star book. Do I round it up or down? I don't know. And then on StoryGraph, they have quarter star ratings. So you can get a lot more honed in on, how great was it? Where where is it on that in between the I liked it and I really, really liked it. How close was it to really really liking it, or between I liked it and I loved it. How close were you to love, you know.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 32:51

And so I do quarter star ratings. And I always have done quarter star ratings for the 20 ish years that I've been keeping a book journal. And I do find it really useful because I you know, so now for example, when we prepare our, into our 10 best books of the year, I only look at my but I start off just saying I'm only going to look at 4.5 4.75 and five star books. So those will be the only ones that are in that kind of initial group. Now you might you might say, well, "Meredith, why don't you just start with your five star books"? Kaytee, I will tell you the answer to that question. Its because, well, I'm stingy. And so they're often are not a lot of those. Yes. But also what I find is within once I get to 4.25 stars and above, I often will have some movement as I get further away from my reading experience. Yes. So I will have books that I'll I'll look back on my book journal, and I'll be like, oh, I've got that raised as a 4.25. But man, I feel like a year out, I would give that a 4.7. Like it's really stuck with me. Or maybe I did, you know, have more conversations around it or came to a new understanding. And then I'll also have readings that maybe slip a little bit from the very rarely will something slipped from a five star down into the four stars, but within that four rating, there definitely can be some movement. So for that reason, I pull everything that's 4.5 and above, and then I kind of see how I'm feeling at the end of the year about those books. But those quarter star ratings definitely make a difference, For me anything that's three stars and below, I'm never going to recommend it to anyone. I'm never going to talk about it on the show. I'm never you know, I just those were kind of like sure they added to my reading experience, we'll go with Kayleigh's grace filled definition, but they're not ones that added enough for it to for them to be important enough for me to talk about again. But anything that's you know, 3.5 or higher is kind of within the range of at least something that I might consider recommending to people. Right? You know, depending on I might recommend 3.75 star books I gave that rating to, if it's just seems so perfect for that particular person. Yeah, you know, so.

**Kaytee Cobb 35:14**

Okay, so what about other people's ratings? Do you? I mean, if somebody messages... this is my problem right now. I feel like I have a pretty good feel for people I know whether they're gonna have a good recommendation for me or not. So if you message me and say, Kaytee, you have, like, you have to read this book. I'm like, Meredith, it's on hold at the library, you finished typing, and it's on hold on library. If somebody that I don't know, messages me and says, Kaytee, I have been listening to the podcast for two years. I feel like I know your reading tastes. I think that you would like this book. I'm like, but I don't know anything about your reading tastes like how can I trust you? So I'll go to their Instagram account. Or I'll go look at that book on Goodreads and look at people I know, that have rated it to see what they thought about it. But I have a lot harder time trusting just a number or just somebody else's recommendation. I loved it. I gave it five stars. But I don't know you. Who are you? I like you, I like you. But I don't know you.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:12**

Right. That's interesting, because I almost never...you are much more likely to be the place where I get the information about, for example, what good, what the Goodreads rating, or the Amazon rating is for a certain book. We'll be talking about something and you'll look that up and you'll be like, oh, because right now it's getting done that I almost never, ever, ever look at those things on my own, because they have no bearing to my reality. For me, in particular, as a reader, I'm not saying that's true for everybody. But I know that there are so many books that are even in my top five, that do not get great rate, you know, right, get great ratings. So for that reason, I just don't pay any attention to those at all. But maybe even maybe a little more than you, I am more apt to at least if a listener sends me a message. And luckily, it's one of my favorite things that happens all the time now that people will recommend books to us. And the more the longer the podcast goes on, I think the better people are getting at saying, Hey, this is a book you might really like. So I'm very likely to at least get from the library, a book if someone has sent me a message. And now if someone sends me a message, and they're like, Hey, I'm a listener, I think you might really like blah, blah, blah, book. No, probably not. But most of the time, there'll be a, you know, really thoughtful like, Hey, here's why I think you might like it. And here's a little bit of setup to let you know what kind of book that it is, in the vast majority of those cases, I will at least get it from the library. And then when I do that, and I come home with 20 books from the library, it may very well make it through my initial book flight, you know, where I kind of cull through that 20. And then over the course of the next six weeks, it may very well be a book that I read. So I tend to trust or at least be very open to recommendations that come from listeners and there's become a kind of growing number of listeners that are repeat recommenders like I was talking about Marli James. Anne Altman is another one of those where you know, Morgan, obviously, where when they tell me Hey, I think you're gonna really like a book. They've become very, very trusted sources.

**Kaytee Cobb 38:20**

Yeah. I like that. I will add the Amazon is not a source that I go to for book ratings, because that could be any Joe Schmo writing from any point of view, like on Goodreads because there is the social aspect, which mostly I hate, because it makes this like Facebook-esque newsfeed like this person added a book to their TBR and this person rated but I don't care. I don't want to see that. But for for the readers that I know if I go to their review, and I say okay, she's read this, she gave it five stars. We've had other books that we've had in common. It's more like what you're talking about with listeners being like, I feel

like I know, you hear some reasons that this would be a good fit for you. But Amazon, I mean, those reviews, who even knows, they could be paid reviews. Could be like, who knows how they got there? I'm not.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 39:10

Don't you feel like when you just look at for example, the Goodreads rating so not necessarily the review by a person, you know? Yeah, but just the overall you know, like, Oh, well right now it's getting a 4.22 on Goodreads. Does that carry weight with you?

**Kaytee Cobb** 39:27

I do feel like I'm more likely to pick up a book that is overall rated high. Like if I if I was like, Oh no, that does sound interesting. And I went to Goodreads and the overall rating was below a three star I probably still won't pick it up. Even if somebody thinks I would like it. If it's a really trusted source I will but if it's not I'm gonna be like I'm this is this could be trash. Why would I want to read that you know, because so many people disliked it that it ended up with this really low average, but between that three to five star range, it could be have a 3.3 or a 4.8. And either way, I'm, I'll probably pick it up if it's somebody that I trust that recommended it.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 40:07

So how, what percentage of the time when you're considering a book from any number of like, any number of sources, any way that it comes across your radar? What percentage of time do you check the Goodreads rating before you decide if you're going to procure that book.

**Kaytee Cobb** 40:23

So my kind of issue with this is that usually I will go to Goodreads just to read the blurb about it. And then the rating is right there. So I don't necessarily go to look at the rating. But if I go to read the jacket copy, basically, is what I'm reading over there, I may see that it turns out it has a 2.4. And then I'm not gonna read it even if the blurb is interesting. But okay, I'm going there to read about it, rather than to check the ratings. Although StoryGraph is really moving up, in my opinion. And that is now where I'm going more often to do that first check. And for them super interesting. They have all these things that you rate on a book, and it runs along the sidebar, when you look up a book, and first its mood and then you know how fast paced is it? And is it plot driven or character driven? Are the characters lovable? Are they diverse, etc. At the very, very bottom is the star rating based on everybody's reviews of the book. So you get to read all this other information about it before you get to that number, which I really like. Because then I feel like you get a better sense for what the book is before you look at that number.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 41:34

So on and StoryGraph is very interesting because I don't have a Goodreads. I don't do Goodreads I don't have the ability, like import my Goodreads stuff in and so for that I couldn't get all the cool stats that everybody else could get. So sort of like hey, this isn't helpful to me, Does StoryGraph have blurbs. Like can it can can that be that because right now I go to Amazon for exactly what you're describing that you go to Goodreads for. Yeah. So just to read the blurb. I never look at the ratings, or the reviews on Amazon ever, ever, ever. So you can get a blurb on StoryGraph. And that could

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:08

Yeah, it's that same jacket copy. Sometimes it has a quote. Usually it's like "the novel of the summer" or whatever. Like the same stupid stuff they put on Amazon and Goodreads is over on StoryGraph as well.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:20

Okay, but you can get all that other info too. Even if you haven't imported your stuff over there.

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:26

Because that is based on other people's ratings and reviews, not your own experience. Does that make sense? It's not it's not Netflix saying we think that you'll like this because it's other people saying, Yes, I found these characters lovable or No, I didn't.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:41

Right. Okay, interesting. Well, I'm going to start I'm going to start maybe trying to train myself to use that as my as my source for that initial, like, what is this book about? Yeah, and then kind of see how I feel about that information. So interesting. I think this topic of ratings is very, very interesting, because I know some people don't, you know, feel like they don't want to rate a book at all, because they feel like oh, I just can't land on a particular number. And other people, you know, they live and die by by all of these different metrics. So yeah, exactly. So let us know, listeners how you, you know, what is your rubric? How do you, how important are ratings to you both your own, like arriving at your own rating? And then also, how much do you look at ratings before you decide on a book? Like when we talk about it here on the show, if it sounds good, do you just get it? Or do you go someplace else? And kind of verify it and then get it? I want to I think that's very interesting.

**Kaytee Cobb** 43:35

You know what else I want to know if it matters to anybody that listens? If we say this was a five star book for me, or this was a four star book for me? Like, how much does that number matter versus hearing about the book? Because I think that's interesting, too. I want to see stories and posts like, guys, we want all your thoughts on this.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 43:53

Right, right now, very interesting.

**Kaytee Cobb** 43:55

All right. Let's take take a little turn to the books we want to press that now we know are above 4.25 stars.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:03

Definitely, definitely. All right. And in fact, I was thinking along those lines, when I decided to press this book, because I decided that I was going to go back and look at our show, when we started in August of 2018. And I was going to figure out what was the first five star book that I talked about on the show, and I think that it is The City Bakers Guide to Country Living by Louise Miller. I was also thinking about this book recently because Kaytee, last week you and I talked about the Bookish Life of Nina Hill, which

was not a book that was a hit for me, but was a big hit for you. And I was saying, you know, I think my problem was that I was wanting that book to scratch an itch that it was not equipped to. It was just not the right book for what I was the mood that I was in. And so this book, *The City Baker's Guide to Country Living*, is the book that would have scratched that because this is a book that is about it is, it's what I would consider to be light. I guess you could consider it a rom-com, rom-com adjacent. Maybe it's a little, it's got a little more heft than that. But it's kind of got that light palate cleansing kind of element to it. So here's, here's what it's about. So our lead character, who I love is Olivia Rawlings. She's a pastry chef. She's a very famous pastry chef at a very, very exclusive Boston restaurant. She ends up throwing an absolute fit for reasons you'll learn in the book, there's a fire and poor Livvy is going to lose her job. And so she gets out of town and she goes to Vermont, where her best friend Hannah lives. And it's this beautiful Vermont town. You guys have heard me talk about Vermont. I'm obsessed with the entire state. It is what my heaven looks like. So this book has all the Vermont feelings all the maple syrup, all the trees, all the bucolic wonder that is Vermont. Lots and lots of baked goods in this book. So Libby goes and basically she ends up taking a job at the the main inn in this town and hijinks and romance into this book is just sweet. In fact, here's my book metaphor and I'm bringing it back Kaytee from the very first episode of the show, if this book were a pie, it would be a just out the oven. fragrant double crust apple pie made in Vermont at the peak of fall colors. This is what that book is there's so much to love in *The City Baker's Guide to Country Living* by Louise Miller.

#### **Kaytee Cobb 46:35**

I'm glad that you're pressing it. I am doing something a little different today, which is not breaking the rules because I actually got the idea from you, Meredith. On Episode 22 of season two, your friend Michelle pressed a book in your stead. So today because I want to continue my Middle Grade March presses, I went to my favorite middle grade March reader who is Katie Proctor. And I said, if you were to come on the show with me, what would you press into people's hands? When I asked her she knew immediately what she wanted to press and it's *Okay For Now* by Gary D. Schmidt. And you guys this is a good one. I've read this one and I can cosign. So this one has a character named Doug Swieteck, who is a more minor character in Schmidt's previous novel, which is called *The Wednesday Wars*. That's definitely the one that gets a lot of play. Sarah on Read -Aloud Revival revival talks about it quite a bit right. Anne Bogle talks about it quite a bit. This one, though, is so much better, I have to say. So you do not need to have read *The Wednesday Wars* to read this one. Doug has just moved to a new town. His home life is not great. His dad recently returned from the Vietnam War. He's suffering from PTSD. It comes out in an abusive way and their relationship. In the meantime, he's trying to navigate a new school, loss of his old friends. There's additional challenges with his older brother. It's all pretty tough, right? But he forms an unlikely friendship with Lil who is the daughter of the local grocer, and an unlikely friendship with the local librarian who teaches him a lot about birds and Audubon, which is how this book originally came to my hands. Oh, my heart, I love it. So there's a lot to love here. Katie says she loves it because we don't get to read a lot about the 1970s time period. It has a found family element, which of course, you know, I love with the librarian and Lil and the real family elements that are tender and difficult but real and heartwarming. And Doug's character, his arc goes from being really closed off and angry, to more open to everything that's coming his way. It's really great. This is a crying book. You may need a tissue or two, but so just know that going in, but it's completely wonderful. I completely cosign Katie's press. It's *Okay for Now* by Gary D. Schmidt.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 48:56

All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @meredith.reads on Instagram.

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:04

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:08

Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at [currentlyreadingpodcast.com](http://currentlyreadingpodcast.com).

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:19

You can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram and follow us please or via email at [currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com).

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:28

And if you love our show, and you really want to help us yes, follow us on Instagram, rate and review us on Apple podcasts and even more important shout us out on social media because that is such a huge way that we continue to find our perfect audience.

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:45

Yes, your recommendations, your shares your Patreon support are all helping us grow and get closer to our goals. Thanks for doing that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:51

All right, until next week. Happy reading Kaytee.

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:54

Happy reading Meredith