



Season 4, Episode 39: Soldiering On + Our Five Rules for Reading

Mon, 5/16 • 56:24

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 never shy away from those spicy 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. Today 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 sometimes I read a lot, and sometimes not so much.

Kaytee Cobb 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and I'm winding down our school year, which means more time for reading. This is episode number 39 of season four and we're so glad you're here. Those were related.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:56

They were. They were related. And that must feel so good to you to be kind of in that wind down mode and know that you have a couple of months where you can just be in a totally different schedule.

Kaytee Cobb 01:05

Exactly. Yes, for sure.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:07

That's really, really nice. Okay, so first, we're going to tell you right up front that our deep dive today is going to be about our, each of us have our five rules of reading, and we'll tell you a little bit about what was our inspiration or what our inspiration was for doing this particular deep dive, and then we'll get into what we put together as our personal rules for reading, which I think will be interesting. But first, let's get to our bookish moments of the week. Kaytee, what is yours this week?

Kaytee Cobb 01:34

All right. So as often happens, my bite size intro has to do with my bookish moment. I'm a homeschool mom, as I say every single week. That means I'm the teacher for all the things for my kids. And that also means that I am control spice. I get to control the schedule, the assignments, everything about

their learning, because I don't have to coordinate with other teachers or a school system schedule. That means that not everything is perfectly synced up. So we just finished our final week of history, but still have two weeks left of science. So it's just kind of like things kind of trickled down toward the end of the school year. As we get toward the end of the year, and those subjects start to drop off, our schedule starts to open up and my kids are like, so how long is left a spelling? How long do we have to do science, how much is left to writing. And everything has an ending, except for writing. Because we use Brave Writer for our writing program, which takes read aloud books, and then uses those read alouds to teach writing principles. And I don't want to stop reading aloud. We do that all the time. So I just continue to use those Brave Writer books, that Brave Writer program. And every once in awhile I throw a little lesson in there, and we call it a writing lesson. And we do it all year long. And that is one of my favorite things about homeschooling. So I'm glad that they snuggle up on the couch with me. And we can enjoy our reading program even in July.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:56

No do they keep, do you keep them on any sort of reading program during the summer? Or do you just let them free flow it?

Kaytee Cobb 03:02

Actually, once I teach my kids to read, I don't really have a reading program anymore, except for what kind of literature is already built into our homeschool curriculum. I don't have like a specific reading section in their assignment books, except Noah who's brand new, and I do write in his regularly that he has to come read me a book so that he's practicing those read aloud skills and decoding. But that's pretty much it. Otherwise, I just let them do their thing with reading and they're loving it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:30

Yeah, I think that's a good way to actually help them become readers is to not force and force it down their throats all the time.

Kaytee Cobb 03:36

Definitely. What's your bookish moment?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:38

Well, speaking of throat, so the wheels have fallen off the wagon at the Schwartz family. It's it's I don't know what virus has hit us here. But it is not COVID because we keep testing negative for COVID. We tested multiple times. Johnny got sick on Saturday, last. I was in Memphis. By the time I got home on Monday, he was very, very, very sick. Jackson got sick on Wednesday, super early in the morning. And then I came down with it today. Today is Friday. It is really yucky. And the net effect of that it's like all the symptoms, like every symptom, we check the boxes. Yes, it is. It is really it's actually actually worse than I felt when I had COVID. And that was you know, pretty crappy, terrible. But I am glad that I have found a rhythm to my reading so that when I have a week like this one where I just haven't really been able to do much reading at all, that's okay and I'm really, really grateful for that. I have a lot of books kind of, you know, saved up so I don't have to have that stress of like, oh my gosh, I don't have any books talked about on the show. So that is something that I'm really leaning into and feeling grateful for right now. And so for people who don't have to read on any sort of deadline, I think it's something we all

can just say you know what, there are some weeks where we just can't we don't feel like doing it or life won't let us do it. And then there are other weeks where we can really lean into it and just being okay with either one is what I'm aiming for. Okay. All right, well, we are going to soldier on because that's what we do I tell my kids all the time. Sometimes we have to do things even when we're feeling not tiptop. And the best thing to do in that case is to have to talk about books, because really, that's fun to do anytime. So I am glad to be doing this with you today, Kaytee, and I am looking forward to finding out what your current reads are. what's your what's your first one this week?

Kaytee Cobb 05:31

Well I do want to add first of all, I know everybody is going to be really looking forward to you feeling better, because we all are hurting when our Meredith is hurting. So my first current read this week is called Smile: The Story of a Face by Sarah Ruhl. So many of our regular listeners know that I love a memoir to illuminate an experience or a life that I haven't lived. This memoir, though, was very personal to me. Let me tell you about it. Sarah Ruhl is a playwright, and had every reason to celebrate. Her first play was debuting on Broadway. Her twins had been born healthy after what was a difficult pregnancy. So when the lactation consultant walked into her hospital room to walk her through nursing twins and said, "Hey, your eye looks kind of droopy", she thought it might be a comment about tiredness from the ordeal of having two babies at once. Instead, Sarah had developed Bell's Palsy and the entire left side of her face had fallen. She was unable to control her eyebrows, her eyelid and her lips on the left side of her face. This memoir follows her life for the next 10 years as she grapples with what that means for her looks, her speech, her eating abilities, and of course, her smile. Now, why is this personal to me? Because a year and a half ago, my husband came home from a bike trip where he had been battling a sore throat, and by the time he got home, the entire right side of his face had fallen. I as a non doctor thought he had had a stroke and insisted that we rushed to the ER. There after a CT scan, a COVID test and a battery of other tests, the doctors were ready to chalk it up to a regular case of Bell's Palsy. But then, I was the one who found blisters in his right ear. It was shingles and shingles in the ear can cause what's called Ramsay Hunt syndrome, which affects the facial nerve and causes Bell's Palsy. While the general rule of thumb is that 90% of Bell's Palsy patients recover 90% of functionality within 90 days, the numbers are much less promising for damage caused by the shingles virus. For us a year and a half later, my husband still does weekly acupuncture, facial massage, and cannot drink through a straw without holding his lips shut on one side. Much like Sarah's experience in this book. This was not just a short period of inconvenience, but a long term diagnosis, with very unsure recovery times. I ended up giving Smile five stars. And it's not just the personal connection that I have to her story. But because of the way she holds the reader by the hand, and leads us through the personal story and the statistics and the medical knowledge and the way that what seems like a superficial or aesthetic diagnosis can really change a life. Sara had young babies and felt that she couldn't smile correctly. She did research about whose babies whose mothers didn't smile as part of a research project and tore herself apart wondering if she was messing up her kids. Spoiler alert, they turned out totally fine. She went to specialists, avoided award shows. Her life is not mine or my husband's or probably yours listener. But the ways she invites us in makes it feel like it could be and I appreciated it so much. The paper book is not only beautiful that includes photos throughout the story, the audiobook is narrated by Sara herself. Both are great ways to take in this book. This is Smile: The Story of a Face by Sarah Ruhl.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:47

Oh, I'm so glad that you found that book. Kaytee. I really I love that sometimes books can help us understand a situation we've never gone through, and sometimes they can make us feel a lot better about a situation that we have dealt with. And feel really, really heard. Now I'm going to totally surprise you on a couple levels because not only am I bringing a memoir slash essay collection, which I almost never do, but it is in a lot of ways very, very similar to what you just described with Smile. And that's because I read a book called *My Mess is a Bit of a Life: Adventures in Anxiety* by Giorgia Pritchett. So Giorgia Pritchett is a British comedy writer. She wrote on the show *Veep* for HBO and right now she's writing on *Succession*. And she at one point got writer's block and her therapist encouraged her to just start writing stream of consciousness. And this book came out of that project. Anxious from the time she was born, Georgia gives us connected essays and vignettes that let us peek inside her brain from her childhood fears to her struggles to look normal as a high functioning adult with panic anxiety disorder. Is this a memoir? Kaytee, you probably would be better at helping me figure that out. It, it felt like it, but it also felt like connected essays. The format really brings to mind *I Miss You When I Blink* more than *Bomb Shelter* by Mary Laura Philpott. And I liked it even more than *I Miss You When I Blink*, which I gave five stars to. So I really, really, really loved this book. There are several interesting things about it. As I said, I don't normally go to memoir or personal essay collections. And also, this is a book that my husband heard about while he was listening to NPR. He heard the author interviewed. And he said, "She sounds exactly like a British version of my wife." And he bought the book at Barnes and Noble for me, and he brought it home to me and said, "I really think that you might like this". There was something really special to me it since I give Johnny all of his books to read, it was really nice that he was doing it in reverse for me. So all of those things made this book kind of a surprise made it something different in my reading. What is not surprising is that now that he's bought a book for me, and I've read it and loved it, he's asking me every 10 minutes if he can possibly do that again. So I sort of feel like this might become a problem going forward, because I'm just not sure that he's going to be the best source for me. But this one was really, really great. This is a book, as I said, vignettes, loosely connected essays, but some of them are literally just a few sentences long. And I know Kaytee that I'm supposed to read things like this in slow bursts over the course of a couple of days. And I really was very mindful of that as I was reading this book, but I actually inhaled it in one long morning of reading. Giorgia Pritchett, our author is British, and she's hilarious and she's charming. She is just the exact kind of person that you'd want to sit down and have a drink with at the end of the day. She also has a lifelong anxiety disorder. And her essays go all the way from when she was very small, through her dating life, and then through married life where she has multiple children, one of whom is autistic. The essays are vulnerable and funny, and I felt extraordinarily seen. I think this is the first time I've ever read a book where someone seems to have had a very similar experience to me, as a child. We read a lot of books about it, there are a lot of books you can read about anxiety. But I haven't read anybody who presented anxiety and young childhood like 5,6,7, as well as she did in this book. The things that she was scared of, and the ways that people reacted to her fears really hit home for me, and Johnny knew that this would be the case. I love the fact that this is a woman who is extraordinarily successful in her field. And yet she struggles from imposter syndrome, and a very present anxiety disorder that affects her every waking thought. That duality is one that I live with every day and it was really transformative to see it on the page. If you've struggled with anxiety, especially since you were a child, I would highly recommend picking this up. It will do you worlds of good if you don't struggle with anxiety, and you just are interested in the inner musings of a very funny person. You should also pick this up, it may help you

have a new understanding for the people in your life who struggle with anxiety. And it will also do you a world of good. This is *My Mess is a Bit of a Life* by Giorgia Pritchett.

Kaytee Cobb 13:27

I love that. I love, I love that we both found these books that stood alongside us.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:34

Right, right Met us where we are exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:37

Oh, you did okay, good. Good. I feel better about that. I felt like I was I was breaking a rule that you had made for good reason. Right? Like, I know that that exists for a good reason. But I was like, "Oh, I hope she's not gonna be mad at me. But I'm just gonna keep..."

Kaytee Cobb 13:37

Exactly where we are. Yeah, that's really great. And I, I will say that while I do love stretching out essay collections and short story collections, I do think it's totally great to get completely sucked into a story. And with Sarah Ruhl's book. I also read that in a single day.

Kaytee Cobb 14:06

No, not at all. It's I didn't even put that on my rules for reading list. I probably should have though.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:11

Well, we all know that it's a rule. So I think that's fine. All right, what's your next book?

Kaytee Cobb 14:16

Okay, my second book this week is *The Three Mothers* by Anna Malaika Tubbs, which is also nonfiction and that means we're starting out with this show with three nonfiction books. And I don't know how that happened, but here we are friends. It was, this book was brought to my attention by Laura Tremaine through her Secret Stuff book club. She chose this one as her discussion book for February, but I read it in March because I can never make it to the chats anyway. So I just read them when I'm able to. Since she records those discussions and shares them to her Patreon feed, it's easy to enjoy them even if you couldn't attend live, and I've done that many times now. This book's subtitle is *How the Mothers of Martin Luther King Jr. Malcolm X, and James Baldwin Shaped a Nation*.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:58

Oh, that's interesting.

Kaytee Cobb 15:01

Anna Malaika Tubbs, who was facing Black motherhood herself tells the story of these three women, all born within a few years of each other, all giving birth within a few years of each other, and each had to face up to burying her son. She is a scholar, and this is her debut book. She interweaves the stories of Berdis, Alberta, and Louise from birth to childhood to motherhood and beyond, and the ways they raised and shaped their sons into the men that they became. Three preeminent leaders of the civil

rights movement, men whose words we read and quote today. Where did those words come from? Well, as with my children, when they repeat something naughty, that I hoped they wouldn't say, usually they came from the mouths of their mothers. These three mothers talk, resistance and a fundamental belief in the worth of Black people to their sons, even when those beliefs flew in the face of America's racist practices, and led to ramifications for all three families' safety. The foundational truths that they taught their children were based on the conviction that every human being deserves dignity and respect. This book was excellent. I felt that it could have been longer on a number of levels. She had the space to dive deeper, it was only 260 pages into early life and later life, and I wish she would have done so. Of course, the problem here is that women behind the scenes are often erased or considered unimportant. And that's even more the case for Black women. So it's possible that those 260 pages are really all that she could pull together. Also, the author narrates this book. And while I do love a memoir narrated by the author, someone telling his or her own story, this time in a biography format, I felt that it did not serve the story at all. A professional narrator would have been a better choice. I do think it's worth picking up. It's very accessible to the regular reader. So you don't have to be like a history scholar or like a Black history major in college to get into this book. I'm glad it exists. I'm glad I read it. And I'm really glad that Laura discussed it with her Secret Stuff book club. It's *The Three Mothers* by Anna Malika Tubbs.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:07

There's been a few books recently that people have said were narrated by the author that didn't, that didn't serve the work.

Kaytee Cobb 17:14

Yeah. I think sometimes, I mean, it could be that the author is saying I really want to read my own words, but I think sometimes the publisher needs to say, not for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:25

Mmhmm. All right, Kaytee. Well, I'm going to take our reads in a completely different direction. We are not only going to fiction, but we're going to fiction that I'm just going to tell you right up front, all the characters in the book I'm about to talk about are animals.

Kaytee Cobb 17:40

What?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:40

Yeah, there you go.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:41

I'm already, I cannot. Okay, I'm listening.

Kaytee Cobb 17:41

Okay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:41

This is a cozy and I loved it. It's called Shady Hollow by Juneau Black. Look this up y'all. It has the prettiest cover. This book has the prettiest cover. The whole series, it's a three book series and it's got the most gorgeous cover and I also really liked the book. Okay, I'm going to use the setup from Amazon because like with a lot of cozies I like the setups that the marketing department does because they're so like punny and ridiculous and I think it sets the right tone for the book. Okay, here we go. This is the first book in the Shady Hollow series in which we are introduced to the village of Shady Hollow, a place where woodland creatures live together in harmony until a curmudgeonly toad turns up dead and the local reporter has to solve the case. Oh my god.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:45

Okay, I, this is catnip. This is one of those you're either going to be like "Meredith, you've completely are you feverish? You've lost your mind." The answer to that question is yes. But also if it's this appeals to you, it's really going to appeal to you. All right. Our lead character is reporter Vera Vixen. She's a relative newcomer to Shady Hollow, and she is of course a fox. But she's a fox with a nose for news. So when she catches wind, that the toad's death might in fact be a murder, she resolves to get to the bottom of the case, no matter where it leads. As she stirs up still waters, the fox exposes more than one mystery and discovers that additional lives are in jeopardy. This book is so fun. This book, okay, we're this is a cozy mystery. So again, all the rules of cozy mysteries apply. You do not read it when you're not in the mood for it. Right? Understand what you're getting when you read it. And also, the characters are talking animals. Right? You need to be in the right mood. It just so happens that I was in the right mood. So the author Juneau Black is actually a pseudonym for two authors who apparently I was, I was told by Mary Heim started out as booksellers at Boswell Books in Milwaukee, which is the home independent bookstore of Mary Heim. Excellent. I just love that as an origin story. I think that's just really really fun. And apparently they've done really well with this series. So this is basically Wind in the Willows meets The Secret, Book, and Scone society or The Thursday Murder Club. I mean that really is the way to describe the tone of what you're getting here. It's best to think of the characters as humans who have specific animal like traits. I found this to be an interesting exercise. It ended up being a perfectly charming mystery. It has those exact right length chapters, each one containing a little morsel of interest or a new part of the puzzle, leading you along the most delightful path through the mystery and into a very tidy conclusion. There was nothing gory in this book. It was just what we would call gentle murder, which is what you would expect with woodland creatures, right? Although, wow, I could imagined woodland creatures in like,

Kaytee Cobb 20:40

a gore reading.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:41

Yeah, I loved it. And I definitely plan to read more. In fact, I might have just hit the buy button on the second in the series earlier today. And that one just came out on March 1, so the series is still kind of in the midst of coming out. I definitely am not fooling myself into thinking that this is a book for everyone. But it was gentle and interesting. And it put a smile on my face. It was exactly what I was looking for. Just in case that's exactly what you are looking for. This is Shady Hollow by Juneau Black.

Kaytee Cobb 21:12

I am so excited about this. It looks kind of like a delightful book for children and with animals as protagonist. It kind of feels like it could be a book for children. But you're definitely telling us there's murder so I guess I won't hand it to my seven year old.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:30

Yeah, and it's you know, and some of the plotlines it's not like there's anything down and dirty in the plotlines. But there's like, you know, enough stuff that yeah, kids would be like, Oh, this doesn't feel good. Like it's not a kids book. It's an adult. It's a book for adults who like talking animals and I am one of those. I am proudly raising my hand.

Kaytee Cobb 21:48

I don't think that I would have guessed that, though.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:52

Well, did you know that Wind in the Willows is one of my favorite books of all time?

Kaytee Cobb 21:55

I did not know that either.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:57

Right. I have actually like seven copies of Wind in the Willows. It's one of my favorite books of all time. I collect it.

Kaytee Cobb 22:03

Wow.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:04

Yeah. So I do kind of that, you know, it's the woodland creatures like woodland setting. Very gentle and pastoral that always really appeals to me.

Kaytee Cobb 22:13

Okay. I love it. I think this is delightful. I also have some delightful murder for us for my third book. So this is another mini book flight here. The book I'm bringing for my third one is A Bad Day for Sunshine by Darynda Jones. So let me start this out by saying I had read one of Darynda's Charlie Davidson books in the past, because people were like, "Kaytee, you'll love this. It's funny and takes place in New Mexico". And I liked it, it was fine. But then I started seeing and getting direct messages buzzing about A Bad Day for Sunshine. So I dove into her work again. And this time, a gem. This is hilarious, and take place in New Mexico. So you know, it's just like my life, which is also hilarious and takes place in New Mexico. This time, it's Del Sol, New Mexico, which could totally be a real town but isn't. Thankfully, plenty of other things in this book are real, like the day trips to Santa Fe and Albuquerque, the roads, the climate, and the weird little quirky town that we come to see that Del Sol is. Sunshine Vicram is our main character. She was just elected sheriff of Del Sol, the town where she grew up. The problem is she didn't run for sheriff. She was pretty sure her hippie dippie parents who named her Sunshine for

God's sake, rigged the election to get her on the ballot and voted in without her knowledge. They just wanted their daughter and their granddaughter close by, especially if they decided to move into the guest house that they had conveniently and recently built on their property. But coming back to her old stomping grounds, rustles up all sorts of other issues like Levi, the dude she's had a crush on since forever, and her bestie Quinn who's on the police force with her. Her first day on the job turns out to be quite a doozy. As a local elderly woman drops off cursed muffins, which always foretell a crazy day at the police department, and a young girl goes missing just before her 15th birthday. The catch here, the crazy part about it is that she knew she would be kidnapped days before her birthday. She has been dreaming the same dream her entire life and the details never change. Basically, Sunshine has a whole hot mess on her hands from day one. Sunshine has to find the missing girl, deal with her feelings for Levi, who's Hottie McHottie and I had to change his name in my head because my son is named Levi and that wasn't going to work for me and figure out what the heck is happening with the star deputy that never shows up to work and seems to cause temporary amnesia in all the residents of the town. All of this is done served up with a heaping side of green chili and humor. Darynda Jones is snappy and witty, and the police procedural element of this brightened mystery is just like the sun shining glasses on the cover brightened with snarky dialogue and New Mexico sunshine. Even when the story was dark and tense, I still had a big ol smile on my face. I cannot wait to read more from again, a series. There are two books already out. Another one coming later this year. It's a delight, their sarcasm and silliness. It's not Finlay Donovan is Killing It. It's a deeper, richer, coffee flavored chocolate of a book. And I loved it. It was A Bad Day for Sunshine by Darynda Jones.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:32

That sounds really good, Kaytee. It was not on my radar at all. But it sounds great.

Kaytee Cobb 25:36

And the covers are just like, I think I might have to buy the series. And I don't know if I have like murder mystery series on my shelves, but I love it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:44

Are you serious?

Kaytee Cobb 25:45

I only have Still Life as like murders on my shelf. Is that weird? I'm sorry.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:50

I guess because I have so it's not weird. It's not weird at all. I just I just happened to be so murder heavy in my shelves. I just you know.

Kaytee Cobb 25:58

I don't buy a lot of murder books or romances because I'm like, I'm not going into those again. So they can just live in my head kind of thing. I don't know.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:06

Okay. Well, that sounded really, really good. And I fell in love with New Mexico in a way that I was totally not expecting when I went to go visit you and I can't wait to go back again. It's such a beautiful, beautiful state. And so the I love the idea of reading a book that's set in New Mexico kind of brings that to life. It is. Okay, so we're going to be traveling a little bit with my final pick of the day. And this is a book that I absolutely loved. I think it's probably going to be in my top 10 of the year. This is Fifty Words for Rain by Asha Lemmie. Now Kaytee, have you read this book?

Kaytee Cobb 26:40

I haven't. I've seen the cover. It's beautiful. I just wasn't sure if it was a book for me. So I'm excited to hear you talk about it and see if it is a book for me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:48

I definitely think that in the right mood you would love it. This is a book that I think you could hand to a large swath of people and they're really really, really going to love it. I can't figure out where I heard about it though. I swear I thought it was Catherine from Gilmore's Guide to Books on Sarah's Bookshelves Live. But Catherine said no, it's not. But I know Elizabeth Barnhill recommended it in 2020. But this was more recent that I heard about it. But anyway, doesn't matter. It's a great book, and we're going to talk about it now. Here's the setup. So speaking of setup, sometimes I really look forward to setting up a book, because I just know exactly how I want to do it. And sometimes I feel like the setup just doesn't touch the actual book itself. And I feel like that might be the case here. Let me set the stage. We're in Kyoto, Japan. It's 1948 and our lead character is eight year old Noriko we call her Nori. And she's told by her mother, "Do not question. Do not fight. Do not resist". And at the very start of the book, this happens like on page two, at the very start of the book, we're wondering why her mother is taking her to this huge house and abandoning her in front of it with these instructions. Now that I think about it, that actually is pretty good setup.

Kaytee Cobb 28:01

I'm super creeped out.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:02

Right, let me tell you a little bit more. After she's left by her mother at the gates of this huge house in Kyoto, she lives for years in confinement in the attic of her grandparents Imperial estate, and she receives the scalding chemical baths daily to lighten her skin. This happens because poor Nori is the child of her mother, obviously a married Japanese aristocratic woman, and an African American GI who she took as her lover. In 1948 Japan, Nori is a source of intense shame from birth for her very famous royal family. Her grandparents agreed to take her in, but she lives a completely concealed life. They do everything they can to hide her existence completely, like only one servant in the entire house knows that she exists. But when chance brings her older half brother Akira to the estate that is his inheritance and his destiny, Nori finds in him an unlikely ally with whom she forms a powerful bond. But it's a bond that her formidable grandparents cannot allow. And that is where the action of our story really, really takes off. Kaytee this book is not what I normally read at all for a variety of reasons. It's set in Japan in the late 1940s, early 1950s. And it has a level of emotionality that I don't normally seek out in in my books, but it is absolutely gorgeous and I was gasping and holding my breath and crying at various

points throughout this book. The lead character Nori is one who is going to stay in my memory for a really long time. It's just, these characters just come alive in the relationship between Nori and her older brother Akira, you are just rooting for it the entire time. Oh, it's so good. Now I can see there being a criticism that this book verges on the histrionic, it has so much happening in the story. So many things befall this poor child and this young woman that it does almost have borders on a soap opera quality to it. In fact, there are moods that I definitely could be in in my own reading where I would be completely eye rolled over several things that happened in the book. But there's such beautiful language and layered characters that I didn't feel that it was a parody of itself. I was along for the ride the entire way. And I was heavily heavily invested in this story. There's no question that if you love the works of Kristin Hannah, you need to put your hands on this book. That's the exact kind of vibe that it has. You will love it. So this is Fifty Words for Rain by Asha Lemmie.

Kaytee Cobb 30:49

I was like totally tracking with me and then it got to that very last part and I was like, "but she's so mean to her characters".

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:59

Yeah, yeah. This yeah, there's a lot. There's a lot that happens in this book. And in the same way that Kristin Hannah tends to take her characters through a lot. I would say it this is more early Kristen Hannah than Four Winds Kristin Hannah.

Kaytee Cobb 31:14

Okay. Yeah, cuz that's when I officially jumped ship was Four Winds,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:18

Right. I'm talking about The Nightingale and a few books before that. Magic Hour, maybe.

Kaytee Cobb 31:24

When you first started setting it up, and I was like, "Oh, she's like, dropped off at a mansion. And she doesn't even know why she's there. And nobody else knows she's there". I was like, "Is this Piranesei in Japan?"

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:33

No.

Kaytee Cobb 31:34

Okay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:35

No, no. Not at all. This is, it's very interesting, though. And it's beautifully beautifully written. It's just, it's just an amazing story. Kind of the vibe that it gives me more than anything would be other than like Kristin Hannah book, as far as the emotionality of it would be more like a 10,000 Doors of January than a Piranesi. Like just that story where you're just like you're just gasping, you're just living these events along with your characters because we we really fall in love with Nori.

Kaytee Cobb 32:07

Okay, all right. I like it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:10

It's really, really good. Okay, so those are our six current reads. We gave you a lot of different kinds of books today, which I love. Now, let's get into our deep dive a little bit. Let's talk about, we each chose five rules for reading. Now, this is because I lately have started following Ryan Holiday, who owns The Painted Porch bookstore, which is here in Texas, which I haven't been to yet but I really want to, but he also is a really leading voice in a website called The Daily Stoic and in stoicism as a philosophy, which I have become very, very interested in of late. I've been doing a lot of reading around that. So I watch a lot of Ryan Holiday videos. And one of the videos that he did was his I think he did 10 rules of reading 10. Yeah, something like that. So we're just gonna keep it to five because there's two of us, but I thought his were interesting. I don't share all of them. He largely reads for intellectual edification, which is very in line with the stoics and the reason that they read and I read largely for relaxation and entertainment, and that's each one of those are totally okay. But it got me thinking. So Kaytee, what was the first rule of reading that popped in your mind?

Kaytee Cobb 33:21

My first rule of reading Meredith actually harkens all the way back to I think it was episode 19 of season one, when your sweet brother who I very much adore came on and said the audiobooks don't count as reading. So my number one rule for reading, according to, or in opposition to very wrong brother, is that audiobooks do count for reading. I will fight you in my DMs if you come at me about, like I will put up my dukes and argue. But I also want to point any skeptics to Monday's episode of bookend homeschoolers, which was season two, Episode 37, where I learned so much about why audiobooks should count for reading and why our brains process them in the same way that we do the written word and why it helps with decoding it, like so much cool research out there, that anybody that's on the fence, it's like, well, should this count? The answer is yes. And my personal rule for reading, the answer is always yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:22

Yes, I completely agree with you that audiobooks are reading and there's so much science to back that up. I feel like it's just such a ridiculous argument for anyone to make otherwise, so let's just yes, we'll just accept that as fact for sure. Perfect. Love it. All right, my first rule for reading for myself so I'm, so the way I thought about this was these are rules for my own reading, kind of right now in my this season in my life. My first rule for reading is I will choose books intuitively, and this has been serving me so so well. In fact, Fifty Words for Rain is an example of a book that wouldn't have normally been on kind never planning to read it on my radar kind of thing. But I just felt like I wanted to, I wanted to just give it a try. And I ended up loving it. I've been doing this all of 2022. And my reading, my average star rating is really much higher this year than it's been before. And so I will choose books intuitively, meaning I'm not going to have the word should, in my choice for what I'm going to read next, whether it's this should be on Kindle, or this should be from the library, or this should be from this genre, or this shouldn't be in a series, because the listeners don't want to hear about Series books. I've just unshackled myself from

all of that I'm going to read what I feel like reading I'm going to read I'm gonna choose my books intuitively, that's my first rule of reading.

Kaytee Cobb 35:44

I love that. And it feels very on brand, and almost accusatory. But these are our personal rules for reading.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:53

Absolutely, these are I'm in no way shape or form trying to say that anyone else should abide by these rules, because they really are just ones that I found work for my reading. I do think that everyone should think through their own five rules of reading though, because that goes to reader know thyself. If you can codify your five rules, then you are going to be on the road to a happier reading life.

Kaytee Cobb 36:16

I agree. I agree. And for that reason, my second rule is that books are better with friends, especially difficult books, or books that are hard for any reason, whether they're long, or a difficult subject, or outside of your reading comfort zone, buddy reading is my end all be all. I will drop everything for buddy read. I will buddy read something that I normally would have walked away from, because having somebody read alongside me and having somebody to discuss with makes all the difference in the world for my reading life. So rule number two had to be books are better with friends. And that's why we have bookish friends, because they're the best.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:59

Exactly. I love it. I absolutely love that. And you're so right. And you're right in the way that you live it in your life. I think you live that really, really well in your life. And I think you know, I found a way to live that in my life, which looks really different than what you do but still get some of that same buddy reading joy. So I agree books are better with friends. Absolutely. Okay, my second book of reading is I am fully leaning into NRN as an acceptable outcome when I pick up a book. So NRN of course means not right now. This is different to me substantively than DNF or did not finish. This is a choice that I'm making proactively on a lot of you know, on a book, if I pick it up. And for any reason whatsoever, I can decide then an acceptable outcome from the act of picking it up and starting it is to say, "This isn't for me right now. But it might very well be for me at a different time." So that's something else that I have unshackled myself from. I have NRN'd more books in the past six or eight months than I ever have in my life. And again, I'm having more satisfaction in my reading life. So that is an acceptable outcome.

Kaytee Cobb 38:14

I think that is a great outcome. And I am more willing to do that as well, ever since you kind of identified that for us. I think it was just a bookish moment of the week, if I remember right, and said, "Okay, this is this is a real thing that I can set things aside and know that they're not going forever. But I don't have to read that right now." For whatever reason.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:34

Exactly. It doesn't mean the book is not good. It doesn't mean I'm not going to love it. It doesn't mean anything except right now my brain is in one particular mood, and I need to find the book that's really

going to fit into that puzzle shape. Yeah, you know that that other puzzle shape of book will fit into another shape at a different time.

Kaytee Cobb 38:53

Right? You can't force it and you'll bend the pieces.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:56

Exactly. Alright, what's your third rule?

Kaytee Cobb 39:00

Okay, my third rule is squeezing reading whenever you can, that brings you joy, or peace or comfort. And by this I mean I am allowed to cancel plans to read, if that's what's gonna be best for me. I'm allowed to cancel reading and make plans instead if being with people is going to bring me comfort or joy. You're allowed to skip reading to binge a TV show. Even if normally you say "No, I read every night before I go to bed." It doesn't matter. You can say "Tonight, my priority is to squeeze in reading because that is what is going to bring me joy and comfort." Or "Tonight my priority is to be alone with my husband because that is going to bring me joy and comfort." So it's squeezing in wherever you can, as long as it's bringing you joy, peace and comfort.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:46

I love that and it goes right along with my third rule of reading, which is that I will let myself take reading breaks along those exact same lines. Were basically saying the exact same thing. If I have a week or a couple of weeks or a mood or a family circumstance or a work stressful period of time, and reading is just not serving me or my brain is not in a place where it can relax into it, I would rather take some time and do other things that are feeding me in that moment, rather than try to shoehorn books in where they usually would be.

Kaytee Cobb 40:20

Yeah, it does a disservice to the book too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:22

Exactly. We are not servants of our books, and we are not servants of our reading within our schedule.

Kaytee Cobb 40:30

Yeah, definitely. Okay. Hard agree on that one. And I'm glad we both put that as rule number three, it feels like a good hump day situation there. Exactly. Okay. My fourth rule for reading is get rid of books you didn't love and keep the ones that you do. I'm allowed to change my mind about this and later, get rid of books that I first decided, "Oh, I have to keep this one forever," because then I look at it two years down the road. And I'm like, "Why did I keep that one?" That's okay, you can let it go. And if I find that a book just continues to stick with me after I read it, and a year and a half later, I decide, you know, I really do want that one on my shelves. That's okay, too. I can change my mind about which books stay and which ones go. I'm not married to my bookshelves. And I want them to always reflect the reader that I am. And the books that bring me joy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:22

Right. I love that. Absolutely. And that again, goes along with my fourth rule, which is you can organize your bookshelves any old way that you want to, even if it's by rainbow color,

Kaytee Cobb 41:34

Awe. Thanks Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:36

Everybody needs to be able to fully lean into organizing their shelves in whatever way their brain finds the books that they love. Or in whatever way if a rainbow shelf greeting you every day, as you walk into a certain room brings you bookish joy, then who am I to tell you that that's an objectively dumb way to organize your books. It wouldn't work for me. But I really do firmly believe that we all should be able to, I organized by genre, but I don't alphabetize within that genre, which seems like something I would do, and I don't, I don't because then I just feel like the way that I don't want to have to move stuff around based on new books. Anyway, we each should be able to organize our bookshelves and the books around us whether that's lovely rainbow colored bookshelves, or just piles of books on the floor, because that makes you feel comforted. Any way of doing it that works for you is the best way to do it. And you should feel empowered to do it that way.

Kaytee Cobb 42:40

Your rule for reading is that anyone can organize their shelves however they want.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:45

Well, then it's also that I can organize my shelf in the exact way that I want. And I don't have to worry what anyone else thinks of that, right? Because now you know what happened is now a lot of bookish friends are not going to ever invite me over to their home if they have rainbow colored shelves,

Kaytee Cobb 43:00

because they're worried that you're going to stand in their book room and reorient organize their shelves.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:07

I would never...

Kaytee Cobb 43:08

I know you would never,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:09

ever touch someone else's books. I would never touch someone else's books. No, they're worried, I think that I would judge them. And I just I've had a long think about it. And I still think for me that it's not the way that I would organize my books, but everyone should be able to have their books the way that brings them joy.

Kaytee Cobb 43:25

I agree. I love that. Okay, so we're up to number five. My fifth rule is allow books to help you grow. Fiction or nonfiction, lean into the books that stretch you, that open your eyes that increase your empathy, because as readers, that's our superpower is empathy. Right? That there's that George RR Martin quote, the man who doesn't read lives a single life and the man who reads lives a million or I totally butchered that. I don't care. That's the general idea and every book allows me to live a new life. So every single time I open a book that has something new to me in it, it's helping me grow and helping me build my empathy and helping me stretch myself into a whole new human. And leaning hard into that is, is one of my favorite rules for reading.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:15

I love that. Absolutely. Absolutely. Okay, my fifth book is that I, I will not ever set a number goal for my reading because for me, it steals my joy. And it kind of goes to all the rules that have come before this right a number goal makes me feel like I'll be making choices based on and I'll be breaking some of the rules that we've talked about before this in order to get to a certain number so a quantity goal is not something that is important to me in my reading. Now that may very well be because I just know I'm going, I mean I think a lot of people set quantity goals in order to get themselves to read which is a good thing to do if that's where you are in the in the reading season that you're in. I don't have to worry about that. So for the quantity goals are not are not helpful. And I don't set them because again, I don't want any of my joy stolen just because I'm trying to get to a certain number.

Kaytee Cobb 45:09

Or you could do like Mary and set one one book is your goal for the year. Right? And however much you read, you read more than one probably,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:17

It's all gravy paast there. Exact. Exactly. Right.

Kaytee Cobb 45:20

Okay, how do we feel about some of the rules that Ryan included in this reel that you shared with me in order to prepare for the show? Like, like you have to give a book 100 pages minus your age before you DNF?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:33

Well, I mean, I think that's pretty close to a strategy that I use for myself, which is something you know, I'm 48 years old. So for me, that would be what 52 pages. I usually use 50 pages as a, as a gauge or 20% on my Kindle or in an audible and audiobooks. So you know that that one doesn't seem very out of the realm. There were others of his, you know, these were rules for his reading, and again, I love that he has these rules for himself, because he has created exactly the reading life that he wants. And we'll put that link in show notes so that you can you can listen to his I really love I really, you know, enjoy him so much. He's very, very smart. He reads for intellectual edification. So a lot of what he's talking about is, am I reading books that I can do something with, right?

Kaytee Cobb 46:23

He wants us to take notes, or he wants himself to take notes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:26

He wants to choose books based on how is it gonna help me? What is it? How is this book gonna serve me and the way I live in the world, and then also interact with your book in that way, so that you can execute on those things. And again, I love that goal for him. I don't share that as a rule for my reading, because that's not what you're doing. That's not my journey. That's not, That's not the role that reading plays in in my life. So it's much more about being intuitive and making sure that I'm using my reading as a point of comfort and joy. And because that's the role that reading serves in my life. That's the goal that I have for it. So well, I probably only share one or two of his reading rules. As an exercise, I think it's really, really fun for us all to think through what are what, what five rules of reading? Could we have, that if we abide by those, we will have a long and satisfying reading life?

Kaytee Cobb 47:23

And that's what we all want. Cheers to that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:26

Exactly. All right. Well, speaking of that, let's press some books and give people some books that they might want to add to their TBRs and add to that reading life. Kaytee, what do you want to press this week?

Kaytee Cobb 47:38

Okay, Meredith, I don't think it's going to be any surprise to you why this specific book is on my mind today, right now this month, and I couldn't not put it on the precipice. Today, I'm going to press *The Soul of an Octopus* by Sy Montgomery.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:53

Yes, do it.

Kaytee Cobb 47:55

I have to. This book has a fun story attached to it for me, and it kind of harkens back to books are better with friends. So I'm gonna get a little sentimental here and share it, because sentimentality is what you'll find inside. Anyway, way back in 2019, Katie Proctor mailed me her copy of this book with a note on it, that she hoped that I would love it as much as she did. This is the first offline contacts that Katie and I ever had. Fast forward about six months and we met in person for the first time, on the eve of the pandemic in New Mexico in March of 2020. Then she moved home to New Mexico, and our friendship has been going strong ever since. This, my friends, is the power of a book. This book in particular might have been what made it happen, though, it might not have been the impetus of a friendship, if it were any other title, because it takes a really special person to think. I'm not 100% Sure. But I believe you will love this book and fall in love with octopuses the same way that I did. Because that might be a little bit of a reach for some, a stretch. Yeah, exactly. So some very strange people are terrified of octopuses, and this could have gone very badly for Katie. Instead, what happened is, I found inside a memoir mixed with sciency nerdery. Sy Montgomery decided she wanted to explore consciousness through the world and eyes and all eight arms of the octopus. And she set out to do just that. And that's

how we come to meet Athena, and Octavia and Karma, the Giant Pacific Octopuses that she encounters during her research. Now, it's not a secret that I am a recklessly sentimental human, and I will fall hard for fictional characters, real life animals, and everything in between. And that statement is proven again here. I desperately loved this book, and I fell head over heels for the animals that we met inside to the point that I am strongly considering an octopus for my next tattoo and have various items in my home that depict octopuses, especially ones that are reading eight books at a time that bring me great joy. I am so glad for this book, so glad for the friendship that it forged with Katie, and so glad to press it into your hands today. It's the Soul of an Octopus by Sy Montgomery.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:08

Oh, I love that. And I love that story behind that book.

Kaytee Cobb 50:12

It's super special to me, I adore this book. Okay, so our bookish friends, of course will know that the reason this one is top of mind for me today is because one of our Indie Press List books this month features heavily an octopus, including the cover. And in fact, I've chosen that as a June buddy read for our bookish friends because octopuses help forge friendships. So if anybody's interested in budding, reading a book about an octopus, you can jump on Patreon and get the indie press list and get into that buddy read because I think it will be a tentacled delight from start to finish.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:48

Absolutely. And I will say that even I was sucked in, pun intended by Marcellus in the book that you are referring to and I, I loved it. It was a really, really good surprise for me, but I loved it. And that's why we love the indie press list. Okay, speaking of a book that I loved, and speaking of friends making everything bookish better, this book that I'm going to talk about today had completely fallen off my radar, even though it is written by an author who wrote one of my favorite books of all time, and Betsie Ikenberry, a very good in real life bookish friend of mine, and a fantastic follow at @bookishbetsie on both Tiktok and Instagram. Make sure you follow her because she, she's doing great. I know that I'm talking about this, but seriously, her book reviews bring me so much joy. She recently talked about Her Fearful Symmetry by Audrey Niffenegger. And I really like gasped out loud, because I was like, "I'd completely forgotten about that book", which is crazy and so, so good. I was like, "I need to press this book." It's very, very memorable. Okay, here's the setup. This is going to help you understand why I always have issues with with female twins. Julia and Valentina Pool, our 20 year old sisters with an intense intense attachment to each other. One morning, the mailman delivers a thick envelope to their house in the suburbs of Chicago. It turns out that their English aunt Elsbeth, has died of cancer and left them her London apartment. There are two conditions for this inheritance, that they live in the flat for a year before even considering selling it and that their parents cannot enter the apartment. Julia and Valentina are twins and so were the girls' aunt Elspeth and their mother Edie. So there's two generations of twins. Creepy. All right. So the girls moved to Elsbeth's flat, which borders the Highgate Cemetery in London, and they come to know and we come to know the building's other residents. There's Martin, a brilliant and charming crossword puzzle setter who suffers from crippling OCD and trigger warning there because it's very, very, very plainly wrought. We've got Marika who is Martin's devoted, but trapped wife, and Robert, Elsbeth's elusive lover who is knowledgeable about and obsessed with all things related to Highgate Cemetery, which is right next door to this apartment

building. As the girls become embroiled in the fraying lives of their aunts, neighbors, they also discover that much is still alive in Highgate, including perhaps things that shouldn't still be alive. Kaytee, this book is deeply, deeply unsettling. And it's so very good. There's so much to like here. Again, Niffenegger, if that sounds she sounds familiar to you, she wrote one of my favorite books of all time, but a very different book, *The Time Traveler's Wife*. I love her writing. She's very intense, while also being plot driven, and she's never ever boring. You know, that is the big sin that an author could commit to me is just being boring, she does not. She also manages to really artfully cover what both people are thinking and saying, and I think sometimes that's a there's just really an art to doing that. Well. I do have to say, as I alluded to, at the beginning, that I didn't love the 21 year old twins Julia and Valentina at all. I really struggled in my first reading of this book to root for them, but I'm doing a dip in reread when Betsie mentioned this, I think that if I read this book now I think I read it like 15 years ago. I think if I read it now being older and having more distance from 21 I think that I would probably feel differently about those two characters. The ancillary characters though the other characters in the book, they I love them and they absolutely help carry the story through. It's a fast read, although it is a lengthy read and some it has some of the best titled chapters of any book I've ever read. This book is propulsive and unseen pedaling and yes, very, very memorable. This is *Her Fearful Symmetry* by Audrey Niffenegger.

Kaytee Cobb 55:06

And here this whole time I thought it was *The Shining* that made you terrified of girl twins, but turns out it was our good friend, Audrey.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:13

Yes, this is deeply rooted. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me, I'm Meredith at [@Meredith.reads](https://www.instagram.com/Meredith.reads) on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 55:22

And you can find me, Kaytee at [@notesonbookmarks](https://www.instagram.com/notesonbookmarks) on Instagram,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:26

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.

Kaytee Cobb 55:36

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Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:42

And if you really want to help us or if you just want more of the kind of content that we put out, become a patron subscriber, a bookish friend for just \$5 a month. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All three of those things make a huge difference towards us finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 56:01

Yes, bookish friends are the best friends. Come read an octopus book with me. Thank you all for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:09

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 56:12

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:13

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 56:14

Happy reading Meredith