

## **Podcast 465: Raising Leaders with Kerry Beck (Homeschool 101)**

### **Episode Transcript**

**Kerry Beck:** Let's just say you only have three kids and you want to cover five or six subjects. You just become totally overwhelmed and burned out. Where we were reading real classic books and have things that we can talk about—we just started a better place.

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials,

**Julie Walker:** Happy February, Andrew!

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's February, and it's cold in some places.

**Julie Walker:** places,

**Andrew Pudewa:** Here it's always kind of up and down, but, you know.

**Julie Walker:** People ask, do you get snow in Oklahoma? And my answer is, usually every year we get at least a light dusting, but it doesn't stick around very

**Andrew Pudewa:** light dusting. If there's anything that you could actually sled on, the kids are elated,

**Julie Walker:** Exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** For the most part we get ice storms.

**Julie Walker:** That's

**Andrew Pudewa:** That the unpleasant side of it,

**Julie Walker:** an unusual. I grew up in Minnesota. And we got lots of snow, but not much ice. So that's kind of this weird thing. But anyway, this is one of those, every 10 episodes, we focus on what we call Homeschool 101. And so this is one of those episodes. And today we have as a guest on our podcast, a long time friend, Kerry Beck,

**Andrew Pudewa:** It was nice how you said long time, rather than Old.

**Julie Walker:** old, well, and before, before Kerry jumps in, I wanted to just mention this. Oftentimes, people will ask because I'm a homeschool emeritus, I graduated all three of my boys from homeschooling. How did you train leadership into your children? How did this happen? And I would say that a lot of it for me was intentional because I kind of have this business mindset for whatever reason, one of those intrinsic values in me.

And so I wanted to raise my children to be leaders. And one of my sons said to me, “mom, I don't know why you do all this leadership stuff all the time. It's not like I'm going to be a leader or anything.”

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'd like to guess which one.

**Julie Walker:** It's got to be the middle child, right? It's always going to give you a little bit more flack. So I'm excited, Kerry, that you are here today and that you're going to talk to us more specifically about how we can help our children grow as leaders.

**Kerry Beck:** Thank you very much for... Andrew. Thank you all for having me here.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It is a delight always to speak with you. I was trying to remember. When we first met, do you have any idea?

**Kerry Beck:** No, I know. Oh, I came across your curriculum. And then I don't know if we met before or after I brought the girls to Houston to one of your four-day workshops that you were doing. So, that may have been when we first met in person, or it may have been at the Houston homeschool convention, because that was pretty much the only one that I went to back then.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, I think that's gotta be back in the early 2000's.

**Kerry Beck:** Oh, yes,

**Andrew Pudewa:** If memory serves. Maybe even 90 something. I don't remember exactly when I went anywhere, but we have stayed in touch all these years. You were, you had a little company selling curriculum. For a while, I remember we got excited about the Thomas Jefferson education stuff kind of at the same time.

**Kerry Beck:** Well, you actually introduced me to it. You're like, this is a good book. You need to sell this. Because that was back when we sold all different kinds of curriculum and books and everything. And it just really changed the way I thought about homeschooling because like, Julie said, we always want our kids to have that business mindset.

But I don't know that I was as intentional in the beginning with leadership. I sort of moved into that once I read *Thomas Jefferson Education*, and it really helped me refocus and add purpose. I think purpose and intention to our home school.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, I think we both read John Taylor Gatto and his first book, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Education*, and then his subsequent greater tome, *An Underground History of American Education*. And that, for me, that was kind of the hammer. Like, breaking the mold that we were kind of stuck in. I remember kind of thinking, I've never imagined anything other than what I experienced, right?

You go to school and that's school. And so that's what it is. And so for me, Gatto was kind of the first break this crust around yourself and look out into the world and see, wow, there are

different ways of doing things. And then with Oliver DeMille and his leadership education stuff, the book, *A Thomas Jefferson Education*, that was, for me, the first inkling that there was really a different option, a different way to do things. And then you kind of have to rethink your paradigm, like, well, okay, if I don't want to do that, the conveyor belt model, what do I want to do? And that became the path of discovery. I think we both kind of walked on in parallel.

**Kerry Beck:** I agree. And. Actually, the first book I read of Gatto was the *Underground History of American Education*. It is gigantic, but it opened my eyes just so much. Here I was a public school teacher for six years. I had a master's in curriculum and instruction and everyone that found out I was, and I was never going to homeschool, everyone that found out I was going to homeschool, they're like, oh, well, you're qualified.

I was just at my brother-in-law's last weekend in Atlanta, and she just kept saying, oh, you're qualified. I'm like, y'all don't understand, I completely changed what I thought education was. I completely, I had to get rid of that mindset, which is traditional school, public school, conveyor belt, whatever you want to call it.

But I had to get rid of that and replace it with something that I think is a lot better, that I think also was what true education has been historically before the 20th century. I think after the Industrial Revolution, there was so many changes at that time. And there is a quote from, I believe it's Woodrow Wilson back in 1907.

We want one class of individuals to have a liberal education. We want another much larger class of individuals to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to difficult menial tasks. I don't know if I got the whole thing exactly right, but liberal education was like, oh, I don't want liberal education.

It means liberate. Free yourself from the teacher and get away from that. So your kids, when they are educated, they can learn on their own. So they have the tools of learning. They have a love of learning. They can think critically and so on and so forth, but in the industrial revolution, all they wanted were workers.

They wanted followers. They wanted people that could really not think they would just do what someone else told them. And he said that back when he was president of the Princeton, then they moved forward with it. When he was president of the United States, it still took several decades to get there.

But I don't think we realize, I think personally, okay. I think the government was really intentional in moving us in there because the Industrial Revolution is pouring money into the education system. And they didn't want people to think, and here I had to like get out of that mindset and go, no, I want my children to be able to think critically, make wise decisions, to be able to learn something on their own without having to have a teacher tell them everything. I wanted them to have some semblance of independent learning on their own.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, we've learned from Gatto that really it was the big industrial money that created the whole modern discipline of education in terms of something you would go and study, how to be a teacher. And so we see in the teachers colleges, the great benefactors, Ford, Carnegie, Mellon, Rockefeller was huge.

And they weren't keeping it a secret, which is what we tend to think. Oh, it was some kind of covert plot to take over. No, it was. Hey, what we need is a force, a large force of nice predictable, obedient, controllable factory workers, voters, and consumers who will do and buy and vote exactly the way we tell them. And that was an idea that was popular among the elite because that would make our country powerful and strong.

So now we have suffered the side effects of all that and there's a swing back. And I think you're right on that. Really, the liberal education, the education of free people, that was kind of the ideal of the founding fathers, like we can be a country where everyone is educated well, almost to the ancient Greek ideal that every Greek, every citizen of the city-state should be educated and competent to be a leader.

And the original—and I found this just hilariously amusing and speculative in the world today. But the idea of democracy wasn't originally in Aristotle wasn't that you vote for people or that you even vote on laws. It was that leaders would be chosen at random from a pool of qualified candidates who would then make a sacrifice to serve the state for a limited period of time in that leadership role. And, there have been a few elections in the last decade or more where I have honestly thought I would pick someone at random than have to vote for one of these two people.

So, how do we then pursue this? This was the question you and I wrestled with and there wasn't a clearly laid out path. *The Thomas Jefferson Education* was a great philosophical framework. And I suppose we could talk about his seven keys of great teaching. The first one being classics, not textbooks. What does that mean? If you're a, if you're a school teacher with a master's in curriculum, you just kind of think, textbook. And so how do we, how do we move past that?

**Kerry Beck:** Well, that really was true because I remember going to my first homeschool show and there was a particular grammar curriculum. I was like, oh, I'll just get that. They don't have it here. They're going to ship it to me. And after 2 days of being there, and that was the beginning of me changing my perspective of education. I decided not to go that traditional workbook, textbooks scope and sequence route and went with something that was more of a Charlotte Mason approach to it where you actually taught grammar within a classic book, and you used actual books to teach grammar, not a workbook with contrived sentences and whatever.

And so we would actually use the kids' books, whatever they were reading. That's where we would base the grammar. And it was something I could use over and over for several years. I

know y'all have a grammar program as well. That also is based in stories, which I'm just like, we don't need to separate everything out and put it in these individual textbooks.

The other thing I found is when you have a textbook and you've got, let's just say you only have three kids and you want to cover five or six subjects times five days a week, you just become totally overwhelmed and burned out and yet we think that we're giving them a better education, but we get burned out.

We get tired and we get a little short with my children where we were reading real books, real classic books and have living ideas, conversation, things that we can talk about, we just start at a better place. I think when I was a school teacher, my dream was to have a classroom set of a classic book, and I never got that. And so that I knew when I started, even before I started changing my mindset, we were going to use real books and later grew into classics.

But I just believe there's so much more in a well written book and not the twaddle, but something that's really well written. And I sort of compare it because at the time I had girls like, if you look at *Little House on the Prairie* and *Anna of Green Gables* versus the American Girl books, you can just look at the difference in writing and the rich language. And the lessons and the morals and there's just so much more in those *Little House on the Prairie*. The kids actually get, there are consequences if they do something wrong. And the American girl books are short, choppy sentences. They sort of disrespect their parents and get away with it, that type of thing.

So I just think it's real important that we do use classic books. And believe it or not, there are classics, even at preschool age. Don't just think oh, the Iliad and the Odyssey at high school. There are classics of all ages that we should be giving to our kids to read

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, and they're so hungry for the good literature. I'm, as most of us now who met them many decades ago, we have grandchildren. So it's very cool because you get to really observe the children. And your interactions with them in a very free, lower stress way than when you're first having kids and you're dealing with everything all at once.

You often echo something we all, I think we all kind of hope that we can cultivate, but I think it's fuzzy for many people and that would be this idea of critical thinking or thinking for yourself. You look at the political world and one side accuses the other of mindlessly following their, their leader or whatever. And then the other side accuses them of mindlessly buying into their agenda, and so everyone's getting accused of not thinking.

So, how do we teach thinking, and thinking for themselves, and making wise decisions? What are some of the things, and you've got a network of people you've been working with and talking to with your Homeschool Heroes and with the leadership education stuff for years.

What are some of the best ways you could share with our audience here? Because I think we all want that. But, it's really hard not to just tell kids what they should think about something.

And so how does that idea of thinking of yourself and critical thinking develop over the, life of the child from say, age of reason, six, seven, up through adolescence into adulthood?

**Kerry Beck:** Yeah, and I think it really is important. I sort of in my head sort of divided it in between the grammar stage, dialectic or logic stage, and rhetoric. Those lower grades, I do still think there's a lot of foundation you can teach, not teach, but you can encourage critical thinking. To me, those lower grades to more is like just getting them to read and then tell back the story, something called narration. It does encourage them. They have to actually pay attention. They have to think about what really happened. And it, to me, that's sort of a foundation of critical thinking, I think it will grow as they get older, but just having them tell back the story to you is one way. And then asking questions, even at a young age, asking questions about the story.

I usually encourage my moms to start with a literal question because it's just sort of easier before you get into maybe a how or a why question. But as they get to the age of 12 or 13. I always say when your kids start arguing with you, you need to teach them some sort of logic. And so help them present a logical argument. And I think the brain development just sort of clicks in. And it's different ages for different kids. I'm not going to just say it's a certain age, but at that age, I think that's really when we really start delving into thinking about something, not just retelling a story, but asking, why did this happen? How did this happen? Maybe comparing two different characters in the story as well. I always go back to stories and classics because I just think that's the foundation. Just, what is a fun way to learn because it's a little more interesting and you can use books that your kids are actually interested in. It doesn't always mean they have to cover every topic in the world. Find something they're interested in and let them pursue books in that topic.

But one of the things I will do is move from the oral narration to written narration. So they may say it out loud and then they would write it down. But in the older ages, we teach something called a reading journal. And they had to write each day one page. That was it. And so we were reading through a book and whatever their section was, they would write something about it. They weren't telling the story. They were telling about the story. Maybe their opinion. All of these are higher level thinking skills.

And so in the beginning, mom may have to give some prompts to be able to help them get started. Or I also encourage my moms to keep a reading journal as well, and then they could read one of their pages to start to give their kids some ideas of what might be included in that. This allows everyone to sort of be reading the same thing. And I think it's good also that moms model that this is important. This is important to me for you to learn, but it's also important for me to grow. I grew a lot in my own education through homeschooling and especially in those older years. I mean, I learned so much that I've completely missed in my public school years.

But so we would read every day, right? 1 page every day. And then about once a week, we would have some sort of discussion, a Socratic discussion or Socratic dialogue. And the

simplest way I can tell you to have a discussion with your family, and yes, it is possible, is you will ask a question, and then you're going to zip your lips and give them, like, if you have to count to 100, count to 100 in your head, give them time to think. What happens is we've already thought about that question. We already have the answer. We already have 20 or 30 years experience on them. And if they don't answer it in like five seconds, we give them the answer. And that's not allowing our kids a chance to use those critical thinking skills. So ask a question.

Silence is good. And if they don't know the answer, ask another question. You don't want to be answering the question. They're just going to go. You know what? If I sit here long enough, mom will just answer the question and we'll just move on and I won't have to do anything. So, we really need to allow our kids a chance to process that question or whatever the topic is that you're discussing.

So basically just reading, telling back the story, then writing about the story as they get older, and then discussing the story as well. That's just one way that you could use. And that's one way that we actually use to teach critical thinking skills

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, it makes me think of the importance of process over product, because what we imagine is that if we can get the kid to give the right answer or the answer we want them to give, somehow they've learned something, whereas it's that time. It's that letting the question bounce around in your head for a while where you really start to learn how to form a question yourself.

**Julie Walker:** I want to mention a resource to our listeners, and Andrew and Kerry, I'm sure you're familiar with this, the book *Timeline of Classics* by Gail Ledbetter. She has at the end of it a reader response journaling, basically how to do exactly what Kerry's talking about. And I love that. We talk here at IEW about listen, speak, read, write, think.

And when you're writing, you're thinking. And you're having a conversation with yourself. And so this pathway is *Timeline of Classics*. It's something that we sell. We'll put a link in the show notes. But I think Kerry, this is probably a resource that you have recommended before that we carry that perhaps would be super useful. And this is available as a PDF so that you could print out the journal pages and make your own little notebook with this.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And, one thing I think this segues into another topic I want to ask you about is this idea of a reader's journal, and it seems fairly loose, it's not a fill in the blank workbook thing, but it does lean toward them being more responsible for their own time. And of course, part of what we want our kids to grow up is to have good organization skills and time management. And that type. What have you found from your experience or others that you've had on your many events that you've had, inviting many, I like the way you call it, homeschool superheroes, of which I get to be one from time to time. What would you point people towards in terms of that: organization and time management development?

**Kerry Beck:** It's great that you said that because when I did this, I didn't really know. That it would have an effect on my kids. But I have three kids and they're all grown. And like Andrew said, and we've got some grandkids, they all said, Mom, thank you for the things you did to help me be able to manage my time and have study skills.

In fact, my middle daughter, Gentry, even said one time, I was so much more prepared for college than any of my friends because none of them know how to study and none of them know how to manage their time. And I thought, Oh, yay, I'm glad that happened.

But this is just a little simple thing, and it is more for older kids. I do think you need to guide your kids more. You're doing more modeling and teaching in those younger grades. In the older grades, you are coaching. A coach does not go in the game and hit the ball or throw a touchdown. They are on the sidelines, just guiding them along, coaching them, preparing them for the game of life.

So I think you do need to give your kids some tools. These are just, this is just something that we did when they started around ninth grade. They actually had to, we would meet on Monday mornings and plan out their week. Before that I pretty much would give them a little lesson plan for the week and they would do it. But they started to plan what they were going to do. We would talk about what they want to get done for that year, of what we were going to do that week. And usually by January, they pretty much could do it on their own.

Now, I still would touch base with them all the whole rest of their homeschooling years, but that gave them a chance to actually organize their time and get to choose. Okay, I'm going to do this on this day and do something else on another day. And it wasn't just me telling them what to do. It was them taking some initiative and planning their week out as well.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That, and that is something that is almost impossible for a teacher, no matter how good they are in a school, to do. Because the whole environment of the school is designed that you orchestrate and control every minute of a kid's day. And that, I think, is one of the worst things about the institutional model. And then they get out of school and they have to be in charge of themselves. And if they haven't got that in some other way. They're just going to wait to be bossed around and told what to do, what to think, and what to buy.

**Kerry Beck:** It goes back to what schools they wanted back in the 1900s. They didn't want people to think, come into this classroom, I'll tell you everything to do. Then you go off and get a job, and someone's going to tell you everything that you're going to do. And like that goes on in all areas of society, but I agree with you.

**Andrew Pudewa:** One of the things I'd love to have you touch on before we run out of time is another kind of cliched thing. It's side by side with, quote, critical thinking. Everybody wants it. Nobody necessarily knows what it is or how to get there—is this idea of love of learning, right, or lifetime learning.



Okay, that's a goal. I want my kid to have a love of learning. And yet, so many kids, they complain about school, they try to do the minimum. As they get older, they realize it's all just a game called make teachers happy and forget everything as soon as you can. And they will carry that into higher education or even into the workplace in some bad circumstances. So, give us the nutshell kernels of wisdom on this thing called love of learning. What is it and how do you cultivate it?

**Kerry Beck:** One is just the kids would actually enjoy learning. Now, having said that I look at my kids now as adults, and I really believe the proof is in the pudding. They all enjoyed learning. Now, let me just say this. That doesn't mean that every single moment in our homeschool, they loved everything we did. We were cultivating it so that it would be there for them as they grew up and grew into adulthood. my thing about love of learning is letting our kids choose topics that they want to study. Like, in high school, we had 1 required course, and that was a humanities course. And after that, they could choose.

Ashley never finished algebra 2. Ashley and Gentry want to take an astronomy course, and we found one, and they took that online. Gentry wanted to take this sports and the Bible, or I don't know, something. And she took that course cause she was all into sports. And so we did allow our kids some choices, and that those are the beginning of letting them make wise decisions.

And having said Ashley didn't finish algebra 2. She still went on to get a college degree in a year and a half or two years and then came here and got a teaching certificate and taught at-risk kids. So even though she didn't finish algebra two, she ended up okay. And she still was able to pursue what she wanted to do, which was help kids that were at risk and that didn't have families that would support them as well.

So I think a lot of it is letting them have some choices and that can start even with the younger ages. Let them have a choice about, maybe give them, Hey, here's two or three books about the American revolution that you could read, which one would you like and let them make a choice or let them choose. All elementary let them choose science topics, and we just pursued things that they were interested in because it doesn't matter. Like for y'all, like y'all have a whole writing curriculum. There was a time we were studying the Roman. And they, Hunter had to write a paragraph about a person and I'm thinking, Oh, Roman emperor.

Oh yeah. He could learn more about history. This will be great. And I told it to him and he just looked at me like, he was about 11 years old. Okay, mom, whatever. And then that evening I realized we just bought a book about Derek Jeter. He's a shortstop for the New York Yankees at the time and a phenomenal player.

And the next day I said, Hunter. What if you write your paper on Derek Jeter? Well, his eyes lit up. He was excited, and I really believe he did a lot better job writing that paper because he

was interested in the topic rather than making him do the one that I wanted him to do, which was the Roman Emperor.

And at the same time, that led into, we ended up doing science of sports and velocity of baseballs and whatever else we did. So we sort of just tied it all together because he loves sports. And I actually got this from you. You told me that one time. Does it really matter the topic? Let them choose a topic and then they will do a better job on their writing assignment.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, that idea that if they are motivated, either intrinsically or being inspired, then they will learn and retain more than something which is contrived or enforced and so that fits their interests.

Kerry, we are already out of time. I just always love talking with you so much. Can you tell us where people can find out more about what you're doing and the homeschool superheroes and leadership Christian leadership education that you are so passionate now about bringing to the newer homeschool moms who weren't around 25 years ago when we had to kind of start from scratch and figure everything out.

**Kerry Beck:** Yeah, well, I have a website called [howtohomeschoolmychild.com](http://howtohomeschoolmychild.com) so you can get on there. We have podcast. We have different resources that we've written and our major resource is a resource called Raising Leaders, Not Followers and that's a course you can read about that on the website and I do host two events a year.

Andrews alluded to homeschool superheroes week. That's in the summertime. It's to just have a fun time and prepare and help moms and dads get ready for a new school year. And then in February, the last week of February, each year, I host Life Skills Leadership Summit. And so that goes through some of the topics that we've talked about as far as leadership, love of learning, thinking skills.

And the other one is character training because that's really good. That's the foundation of a good leader. So we have a track that's all leadership and we have speakers, all types of speakers there. And then we have a life skills track as well. And so we do cover business skills, tech skills, relationships, organization, communication.

I've started throwing in hands-on like home, like we've got a quilting lady this time and all. So anyway, there's a whole bunch of life skills there that people can have. And the whole purpose of this is to prepare our kids to be able to be ready for as an adult, to be a good leader, whether that's a mom or dad at home, you're leading.

You may not be CEO of a company, but you'll be leading people. And then life skills just so they're prepared for real life and things that a lot of times we just don't get around to because we get too focused on our academics. So those are at [lifeskillsleadershipsummit.com](http://lifeskillsleadershipsummit.com) and [homeschoolsuperheroes.com](http://homeschoolsuperheroes.com).

**Julie Walker:** Of course, we'll put links to everything that Kerry mentioned in our show notes. And wow, what a wealth of wisdom. That is the nice thing about getting older as we get smarter, hopefully, right? If we could only now redo homeschooling, we get to do that with our grandchildren, maybe a little bit. Lots of reading.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Kerry. I'll look forward to when we get a chance to talk again. God bless you.

**Kerry Beck:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.