

## Podcast 478: What's in Your Audible Account?

### Episode Transcript

**Andrew Pudewa:** When we read something really rich, whether it is a sequence of events that is building up this database of words connected to images.

**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, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Julie Walker:** So Andrew, as you know, this is May and in our structural models syllabus, oftentimes we do literature in May.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We have literature suggestions through all the things.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Exactly. Which teachers and parents just love. They're suggestions. They're not necessarily tied to any particular lesson. We just put together a list of literature ideas that we believe is really rich and really be helpful to students either to read them themselves or have read out loud to the parents.

And I wanted to take time during this episode to do two things. One is to talk about the impact literature has on thinking, because of course, how to think is our theme this year. So. Can you help our listeners understand how literature can help people think?

**Andrew Pudewa:** I was actually having a conversation with a friend of mine who for some reason had become, I don't know, a little bit jaded or cynical about education for kids in general, and we got over this topic of reading all these classics, what's the point? Right? What's the point? And so I tried to give him a therapeutic answer because he obviously was needing some motivational counseling there.

But it did get me thinking to the relationship between memory and imagination and then how words are connected with those things. Because when we go, and we have an experience. The experience is not really in words per se, right? You take a nice hike, go to the beach, play games with your friends, go on an adventure, whatever. And a lot of that is sensory impressions that are visual, auditory, tactile, emotional, but literature, because it exists in words is an attempt to fix words to experience.

**Julie Walker:** Right, exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And so when we get into a book and we read descriptions of things, the purpose of those descriptions is to recreate in our imagination something that approximates the imagination of the writer. Now that does something for us we can't get from daily life,

right? It's an anchor for us. So when we hear a description, we see it. When we see something and we want to attempt to describe it, we're going to be limited by the language capabilities that we have now. I always say you can't think a thought you don't have the words to think it in. Well, you can, but you can't communicate that thought to someone else unless you're an artist. But that's kind of moving into a parallel universe for me.

So I've been thinking a lot about how when we read something really rich, whether it is a scene or a character description or a sequence of events, or even the thinking that's going on inside a character's mind or experience—that is building up this database of words connected to images. So then when we go to write something, we're going to have a greater capacity to express what's in our imagination and memory and mind in a much more powerful and effective way. So I think it's just part of this continuous, input output, how reading is so essential to good listening, speaking, and writing in particular.

**Julie Walker:** Mm-hmm. Sure, sure. I know that we did a series of podcasts a year or so ago where I asked you to share your book of the year, and we went back for, I think, as long as you had been doing this as thirty years, maybe not quite thirty books, but it did take us a while to get three episodes, in fact, to get through your books.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think we left off in 2023 where my book of the year was *How to Think like Shakespeare*. If I remember correctly, and of course we interviewed the author Scott Newstalk, and I was just crazy in love with that book for a while. I'm not sure I've decided on 2024 yet, so

**Julie Walker:** We're not going to go there at all

**Andrew Pudewa:** not going to announce that,

**Julie Walker:** No, '24 or so we'll wait a few years and get a next

**Andrew Pudewa:** But if people miss that, they might like to hear that podcast. So link in the show notes.

**Julie Walker:** Link in the show notes. You know it. So I have in front of me, and I know you have in front of you your Audible account, so I thought it would be a little bit of a peek into our respective souls to see what is in our Audible account, what things we would recommend to our listeners, regardless of what it is.

I, of course, have a lot of business type books in my Audible account.

**Andrew Pudewa:** yes.

**Julie Walker:** which I think is hilarious because you are kind of a just-the-facts kind of guy, but yet in your Audible account, you've got this list of great literature.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I would preface that by saying over the past five years in particular, maybe longer than that, I've become very disciplined in my listening schedule, if you will.

Because what I found is that it's easy to kind of get into one direction and just go, and then kind of neglect other things. So this is my regime every morning, or first thing that I can, not always in the morning, but the first thing I listen to is the Bible in a Year podcast.

**Julie Walker:** Mm-hmm.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That way I just get

**Julie Walker:** Mm-hmm.

**Andrew Pudewa:** 20 minutes a day, boom, boom, boom. And I can usually do that while I'm doing other stuff in the morning, making my various morning drinks and things,

**Julie Walker:** Yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And then when I am at the gym, I'm always catching up on podcasts that I enjoy about fitness, health, longevity, brain function, kind of that world of health, wellness, physiology, that area of science.

**Julie Walker:** My brother when he works out, that's his time that he can listen to a fiction book. So he can't listen to it any other time unless he's working out and that compels him to get to the gym or to get on the bike.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I would do that, but I don't really need to. I do like to catch up on these various podcasts. Then when I am cooking or cleaning, then I'm always listening to podcasts pertaining to current events, politics, economics, stuff like that. And there's just not enough time, but you get a few options. You pick one that's good. I really enjoy Jordan Peterson. I think he just brings laser beam focus to such a variety of intellectually engaging subjects.

**Julie Walker:** Sure.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And then when I'm driving, I always listen to books. That way I knock through books and sometimes I'm driving more than other times. And then when I'm listening to books, I try to follow two guidelines. One is CS Lewis' rule, which I think you know,

**Julie Walker:** One old, one new.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, I've heard this a couple different ways, but the way I heard it first and the way I practice it is—listen to one old book for every new book. What's an old book? Well, I just kind of arbitrarily decided if the author is dead, it's an older book. If the author is living, no, and that way I get a balance. And then the other thing I try to alternate is fiction and nonfiction.

So that I get a balance between literature and the more in depth enriching history or science or economics type of stuff. So that's kind of my regime, and it's working very well. I do have

the luxury. A lot of our listeners don't, I don't have kids at home right now, so I have a little more time in my life than I did ten years ago. But that's kind of how I pace things.

**Julie Walker:** Okay, so pick a book from your Audible list. You could share one and why it's on your book list, and I could share one.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay, well, I'm just going to go from recent to distant.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, I'm going to pick and choose.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay. Well, I am almost finished with *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, and there's a reason, so my friend Martin and I are doing a conference talk this

**Julie Walker:** Mm-hmm.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Called Martin and...well, last year we did Martin and Andrew argue about good and great books, and that was a lot of fun.

So we decided to do another one this year. It's "Martin and Andrew discuss painful books." And so *Lord of the Flies* was on the list and I'd read it, I don't know, long, long, long, long time ago in high school. Wasn't a book I ever thought, oh, I want to read this to my kids, but it is a painful book. I think kind of without belaboring the point, I think the gist of these painful books or what we might call broken stories—if people have ever heard my talk, fairytales in the world, imagination and go over the whole healing, broken, and twisted genre categories—is that we have to remember that unredeemed humanity can be very, very dark. And so some of the dystopian fiction that I have enjoyed over the years, as well as this book, like *Lord of the Flies*, where there's a bunch of boys, the oldest one whom is 12, they're on an island, and they just kind of descend into this barbaric state because there's no, there's no moral guide, there's no higher influence, there's nothing to bring them up. So they sink down to this kind of common, horrifying level of unredeemed humanity.

**Julie Walker:** So dear listener, if you think running out and getting *Lord of the Flies* is a good, heartwarming story, don't. Stop. Just don't even bother.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So that's kind of the end of this sequence of books that I've been re-listening to in preparation for talking about them with Martin at our Great Homeschool Conferences this year.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I, the one that I'm going to share, and like I said, I'm just kind of picking around a little bit, but popped out to me was ironically, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh my.

**Julie Walker:** And the reason it's on my Audible account is because I do drive with my grandchildren. And when we're running up and down the northern coast of California, it's always nice to put a book on for them to listen. And we really enjoy listening to *Mr. Popper's Penguins*. I've tried to, they're seven and four, and that was appropriate for both of them. I

tried to start the *Chronicles of Narnia* with them. Lucy, who was actually named for the Lucy and the *Chronicles of Narnia*. She's fine with it, but Nolan is a little young, so, but I do have

**Andrew Pudewa:** He can listen over his head.

**Julie Walker:** books in my Audible account for my grandchildren.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. I, um, also am with grandchildren in the car a bit and I do have some titles. The favorite for Aiden is Zorro and there's several in the series and that's kind of fun because it goes back into the early days when California was really a Spanish colony, I guess, possession. So some of the places that they talk about in that book were places that we lived and grew up and know very, very well. But the Zorro stories are whole books—good, evil, good wins. There's twists, there's turns, there's suspense, there's action. So I have that on hand for them as well as when you reminded me of *Homer Price*. They love those Homer price short stories and so that's always a good default if I've got kids in the car.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. So I also have a few titles that our team here is reading together. We have various book clubs going on. Our customer service team currently is going through, well, we just finished the *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Now we are going through *The Ideal Team Player*, and both of these are stories with, there's a fable connected to the model. So these are business books that Patrick Lencioni has written. We are huge fans.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But he's a good storyteller.

**Julie Walker:** He's a great storyteller. And so as you're learning these principles of how to treat each other and how to be the ideal team player, you are following a story of someone who is a bit of a jerk and how that plays out and then you've got the characters. Are they static? Are they dynamic? You can actually have a literature conversation about some of these stories, and they're not really deep in terms of the story, but they do bring out the principle really well. So we've gone through the first of those books, the *Five Dysfunctions*, and now we're switching into *The Ideal Team Player*.

Another book club that is happening is *The Effective Manager*, and this is Mark Horstman, and he's got a couple other co-authors in here. But even though I went through an MBA program, I never got as clear of an outline of what it means to be an effective manager. So if you are in business or if you're training your kids to be leaders in the workplace, teaching them to be effective managers is a great read for you as a teacher or for your teenagers.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So it would be helpful for parents.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, hundred percent. Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I don't lean toward those books very much

**Julie Walker:** I know you don't.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I did, I kind of broke my rule. I listened to two nonfiction books by modern authors in succession, and they were connected in a very interesting way. The first one is called *Wanting* by Luke Burgis, and he was a student of the work of Renee Gerard, who talked a lot about mimetic imitation. And his premise in that book is none of us really want anything because we want it. We want things because other people want them. And that's what influences us in our choices and decisions and priorities way more strongly than we would imagine.

**Julie Walker:** Sounds like a marketing book.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well it is. It's very much aimed at ... if you know that, then you could hopefully for purposes of good influence people to want the right things. But on the flip side, you start to realize, well, why do I want that? And you realize it's not the thing itself so much as it's what someone else said or thinks or shows about that.

**Julie Walker:** This podcast is perfectly describing that, Andrew, and of course, listeners, these books that we're mentioning, there will be links in the show notes so that you can find them as well.

**Andrew Pudewa:** The other one I think would be perhaps even more enlightening to many parents and teachers is entitled *The Molecule Of More* by Daniel Lieberman. And this is a whole book about dopamine.

**Julie Walker:** Oh yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And it's a little sciencey, but not too bad. But what's very interesting is so many of us so easily get caught into these very short dopamine cycles. Like, we want something and we work for it, and we get it, and then the dopamine goes down. The dopamine in our system exists as a motivational element while we're working for something. Once we achieve that thing, and very often we experience this, there's kind of a letdown. Now I feel this like at the end of a convention on my way home, kind of the adrenaline is down and okay, now I've got to go back.

But he made a differentiation between short-term dopamine and long-term dopamine. And I never really thought about this, this way because if you're into short term gratification, then you gravitate toward things that will do that. So the typical examples would be video games and social media that so many people get caught into, and they get that dopamine thing, they get it, and it goes away, and then they want that again right away.

Long-term dopamine is when you have a project and could be days, weeks, months, and you're building toward this thing and working and concentrating, and so you have this slower but longer release of dopamine that actually produces a much superior effect on the neurotransmitters and all those things. So we are basically happier when we're working toward a long-term goal. And I'm always thinking, how does that translate, not just for me in my life, but in teaching and parenting and helping young people. So those two books just

went together very well because one was on the intellectual, spiritual side of mimetics and the other one was on the scientific side of the neurotransmitters and chemicals in the body and all that. So that was a good phase, and I broke my rule intentionally and that's okay.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. You're allowed to break your own rules. You will laugh at this one, Andrew one that's in our Audible account that, I mean, that's in your Audible account. That's also in mine is *Why We Sleep*.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes. Huge, huge, important

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, and that's of course made it to your book of the year list. But here's, here's a story that I thought I would share with you. I was talking to my son just the other day. He was talking about the importance of sleep and that he's reading this book and I said, is it *Why We Sleep*? And he said, yes. Do you know this book?

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's getting a lot of traction.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Especially in the world of people who are trying to improve themselves in one way or another. If you're on the muscle building side, well, you can't build muscle if you don't sleep well. If you're on the brain function side, well, you're not going to have brain function if you don't sleep well. If you're on the immune longevity side, well, you're not going to have that unless you sleep well.

**Julie Walker:** I have always been a proponent of if you're tired, sleep person. I rarely deprive myself of sleep. I think that is why I'm so healthy

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, and I think very possibly you have a good momentum of that. One of the things he talks about isn't that we don't want to sleep, it's that we have bad sleep hygiene. so we do things like look at screens right up to the minute till we want to sleep and the blue lights messing up the circadian rhythms and all that. Plus watching something intense before you sleep is building up cortisol and adrenaline. That makes it harder to sleep well. And so I highly recommend that book to every person I know, especially. Dads who are in this time of, I got young kids, I've got demands. I'm working hard in whatever I'm doing, and it's so easy to kind of burn the candle at both ends and you don't, there's no net gain on that.

Okay. So the other genre that's kind of in between, I would say literature and history that I've really enjoyed is biographies.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And a well-written biography does kind of everything you'd want a book to do. It gives you real information about a real person that is inspiring and went through

trials and difficulties in life, and came out on the other side and learned lessons, and you vicariously live.

But if it's well written, you're also getting that benefit of literature, where you're getting these beautiful, detailed descriptions of time and place and circumstance and activity that's building that language database in a wonderful way. So I would say one of the best biographies that I have listened to is, it's called well, it's just *Catherine of Sienna* by Sigrid Undset who wrote the fiction trilogy Kristen Lavransdatter's. She won the Nobel Prize for that. She's a masterful, masterful writer. She is dead. So it's an old book, but this book, Catherine lived in the 1300 in Italy, and it was a horrible, horrible world—plague. Constant war. Chaos. Corruption everywhere. I thought if all teenagers would just read this book, they'd stop whining about the conditions of the world they live in right now because we are so much more comfortable than then. But I was very inspired by her life and I think people, even if they're not into reading books about saints, can look back and say, wow, here was a remarkable human being that lived at a pivotal time in history and accomplished phenomenally great things with interesting almost no education.

**Julie Walker:** Amazing. Okay, we've got time for one more.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, well your turn

**Julie Walker:** It's my turn. Well, my turn and then your turn. Okay. One more. And so I'm kind of torn. I have both these in my Audible account and these are both a series of novels. And so I'm going to share my all time favorite novels that I read these almost annually.

It's just one of those classic feeds-my-soul books. And that is *The Space Trilogy* by CS Lewis

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, yes, yes.

**Julie Walker:** Are you ready? *The Complete Works of Jane Austen*. I love Jane Austen, and I love Lewis.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well,

**Julie Walker:** I alternate back and forth with those

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, *The Space Trilogy* is remarkable. In fact, we have a mutual acquaintance, John Mark Reynolds. He told me once he reads *That Hideous Strength* every year

**Julie Walker:** Yep. One of my favorites. Yep.

Speaking of wanting, that may be the reason, and I read it before. But I have heard him say that and *That Hideous Strength* in particular. But if you don't have those other two leading up to



**Andrew Pudewa:** Doesn't work quite as well. It is a read alone, and you can do it. I procrastinated for a long time about reading Wendell Berry. I tried to start, tried to start, and then Martin put it on the list of books we had to talk about last year and, uh, power through, well, I got past that first "I don't really know what's going on here and I'm distracted."

Oh, that book is so beautiful. It was *Jayber Crow*, which I think is a good start. Of course, Wendell Berry wrote a collection of short stories, *A Place in Time*, and then an extension off *Jayber Crow*, *Hannah Coulter*. But really that kind of the beautiful agrarian, the simple life and the, the life well lived. The plot isn't really like a big problem that has to be solved. It's just like go through this guy's life. But the beauty of it, I think we all are just craving this image of a little bit simpler life. And while we can't just go back in time and live like that, nor would we want to, probably it does restore kind of a, Hey, I can slow down.

I can smell the roses, I can experience this, I can contemplate. That I'm working on, this whole idea of attentiveness and contemplation and how hard that is for any of us, but let alone for young people in today's world. So if you haven't done Wendell Berry, it was a slow start for me, but well worth it.

Gosh, we've hardly got anywhere on this list. We have to do part two sometime in the future on this one.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, this has been a great conversation, at least for us, gratifying for us. And of course, I'm over here taking notes of some of these books that you're mentioning, but then I look at my list and go, oh, it's already on there.

So, and of course we are talking about listening to these books. And Andrew, I just want you to close with the idea of reading with your ears. You talk about that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Some people define reading as well, you have to decode stuff with your eyes, and if you're not doing that, you're not really reading. Well, blind people. They don't read with their eyes, they read with their fingers sometimes, or we can read with our ears, and there are some advantages to that.

One thing I would say is that a good reader of an audio book can make a world of difference. Even a mediocre book can be much more enjoyable with a good reader. In fact, *Lord of the Flies*, it's read by the author, and I really appreciate books read by the author. It may not be as sparkly perfect as one of these actors they pay to do it, but you can tell he knows this book. He deeply, deeply understands what he's saying, and a bad reader can destroy a good book. So use the function of preview and be sure that you get a good feeling that that voice and, and that tone and that pace is going to enhance. You're choosing to invest time in, in listening to.

**Julie Walker:** Well, this has been a delight. Thank you, Andrew.

**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

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