

# Podcast 506: The Thousand Good Books Project with Cheryl Winstead

## Episode Transcript

**Cheryl Winstead:** It's a cool thing to see. I never listened to audio books much growing up, and it's amazing how many books they can listen to and really enjoy and sometimes listen to over and over again. You know, the ones that they love, they go back to, and it's a really beautiful thing.

**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:** Andrew Pudewa, do you know what our families love?

**Andrew Pudewa:** They love the whole idea of, well, besides IEW writing curriculum. No. No. They love reading to their kids.

**Julie Walker:** They do love reading to their kids. And I think your talk *Nurturing Competent Communicators* has sparked a revival in reading aloud and the importance of reading aloud.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I hope so because I've been hammering it pretty hard for about 25 years. And of course we've got several people that have kind of gone on board. Sarah Mackenzie among them. But of course, one of the big questions people ask me after my talks is, well, what should I read to my kids? I don't know. I didn't grow up reading, so they need help here.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and I've heard you say before you have so many books on your bookshelf that you won't live long enough to read them all.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh yes. Do you know, I discovered there's actually a Japanese word that means literally piling up books you will never read.

**Julie Walker:** Oh no.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It. It literally means collecting books you'll never read. But it's not a bad thing. It's not like bibliomania

**Julie Walker:** Okay. Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's *tsundoku*. And it's the art of collecting books that you may never read. I'm very good at this.

**Julie Walker:** You are very, in fact, I'm thinking of one of our *Structure and Style for Students* video courses where we had the students write an ode to some inanimate object and you demonstrated how to do that. Because you wrote an ode to your bookshelf. Yes Which I love that. And we'll put a link in the show notes to that.

But I too have a lot of books, and I turned one of the closets in my house into a mini library, and I have so many books on there. But we are going to talk today to someone who has started a project called 1000 Good books. The 1000 Good Books project. So in case we don't have enough books, Andrew, we now have to get one thousand more.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Maybe we don't, because I think their approach to this is a little different than piling up of books that we won't read.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And of course we have Garrett and Cheryl on our podcast today. Thank you so much for joining us.

**Garreth Winstead:** Hi. Thank you for having us.

**Cheryl Winstead:** Thank you for having us.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So what is the 1000 Good Books Project? I have, I believe, some knowledge of where this idea of a thousand good books came from. But give us a little history of why that, why that number, and how did you get going here?

**Garreth Winstead:** Sure. Well, the 1000 Good Books is a turn of phrase that's sort of referencing the Hundred Great Books movement. I mean, it's a phrase that was coined by a thinker and professor named John Senior, and we can talk a little bit more about who he was in a minute. But his idea was that. He ran a humanities program at a university teaching the hundred great books, and he found that by and large, his students came unprepared to really engage with the great ideas of civilization in those a hundred great books because they hadn't been steeped in the literature of all of the things from fairytales to adventure novels. And so he coined that phrase and made sort of a tentative book list that we have kind of tried to put into action.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So the idea is if you read the thousand good books, then you'd be prepared to read the hundred great books as an adult.

**Garreth Winstead:** That's the theory.

**Julie Walker:** Well, a hundred great books doesn't sound as overwhelming as a thousand good books.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, except some of them are pretty tough.

**Garreth Winstead:** It's funny you say that. I actually have a quote from John Senior when he was studying at Columbia, where he talks about that. This is just a great quote. He was working with Mark Van Doran that was a professor there and he said, "I vividly remember

standing before a fine teacher at college who had done a lot to promote the hundred great books and saying to him, 'but I just can't read all those books.' In the middle of the critique of pure reason, I had despaired. 'Of course, you can't,' Mark Van Doren said. 'Nobody can read a hundred books, but here is one. Read that.' And took a volume from his desk haphazardly and handed it to me. It happened to be a collection of Plato's dialogues that helped to change my life."

So, yeah, obviously that problem of piling up books is a big problem. So obviously that's sort of the introduction to what the idea behind the 1000 Good Books Project is. But the format is kind of where I think we're trying to do something a little bit different. We are trying to compile for people a library of audio books and sitting down and reading a thousand books seems very daunting, but using audio books as a way of integrating that into education, into children's lives and free time, and everything, it's a lot more feasible to really steep yourself in this literary tradition.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I know some boys who would be very happy to play with Legos while listening to adventure novels six or seven or eight hours a day, and it's such a great way to redeem the time as well. A lot of our modern life we're in cars so much of the time. We're waiting so much of the time and having those audio books is just such a huge blessing.

I know it was for, for my son and my kids, and now I watch my grandchildren just devouring audio books.

**Cheryl Winstead:** Yes. We've found with our children that part of why this project has gone the way it has is because of our children's love for audio books, and we have found it to be such a great replacement for screen time. It's such a better activity to sit and play with your Legos, or our daughters love the Calico critters and they will sit there and, and listen to these wonderful books for hours and sometimes beg for more time.

It's a cool thing to see. I never listened to audio books much growing up and it was a bit of a foreign concept to me, but Gareth did grow up listening to them, and it's amazing how many books they can listen to and, and really enjoy and, and sometimes listen to over and over again. The ones that they love, they go back to, and it's a really beautiful thing.

**Julie Walker:** So we've, Andrew, we've done a couple podcasts talking about Audible and what's in our Audible account, and in a way, we were helping our listeners choose which books might be beneficial to them. I love that what the two of you have put together is a curated list of books and everything that you're doing. This is not audible. This is your own program. Who's doing the reading?

**Garreth Winstead:** So that's a great question. It's a big combination. We've had sort of several phases in our project. The first phase is finding recordings that are out there that are in the public domain, that are high quality, doing things to raise the quality and editing them. And we add in music to sort of whet the appetite a little bit.

I sort of think John Senior talks about having beautiful illustrations that sort of introduce children to an appreciation of beautiful things. I sort of think of the music that we put in the audio books as the illustrations that sort of make it come alive. And so then we also have begun commissioning professional recordings by professional narrators.

And we're actually, we're just about to, I guess by the time this airs, we will have posted our 50th book, which is a wonderful recording we had produced of *Treasure Island*.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I love the idea of music serving as an illustrative component of an audiobook, because I do think that children, their imagination is very much stimulated, I think more stimulated when they hear a book than when they're still in that kind of decoding phase. Or maybe they're 11, they read pretty fluently, but they see a word they don't really know how to pronounce it or what it means. They just skip it. And then that illustration on the page provides kind of this enhanced imaginative stimulus. I can see that with the music as well. In fact, I was at a conference just a couple weeks ago, and the opening keynote was a man telling, he wasn't really reading it, he was telling it. He had a couple notes, but he was telling a Russian fairytale and he had got a pianist to create kind of an accompaniment to that, and it was absolutely captivating. And what I found was that I could come back—I remembered that story so well that I could basically retell it in almost full detail to my grandchildren. Whereas if I just read them a story, I don't remember it nearly as well as, as the one I heard with that piano accompaniment. So I think you've hit on a really powerful idea here.

**Garreth Winstead:** Thank you. And so I guess talking about the format and all that kind of stuff, one thing that we have struggled with is people, they hear that we're a podcast because we do have a podcast format for the audio books, but what we really are putting together is an audio library, sort of like an audible, but instead of the difficult structure where it's, it's just difficult and expensive to get access to a large library. Our whole idea is we're building our library. We have 50 books now and hopefully that's just going to keep exponentially growing and people get access to it and can listen to the books and have their children listen to them just for a, an inexpensive subscription.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Can you name some of the titles? Maybe a dozen or so that you remember that you think are just absolutely wonderful or, or the, the best of the best. I mean, you got a thousand, so what are the dozen or so that every child should grow up having listened to?

**Cheryl Winstead:** Well we have some classics that people probably have all heard of. *Winnie the Pooh*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *Wind in the Willows* we have *Aesop's Fables*. *Princess and the Goblin*. We have *Treasure Island* is about to be released, which is very exciting. We have some more obscure books as well.

There's a whole series of books by Thornton Burgess. There's *Johnny Chuck*, *Reddy Fox*, *Peter Cottontail*. There are all these animal stories. Our children love these stories and we've

gotten a lot of feedback from our listeners that their young listeners love them too. We have books geared towards older children.

We have around the world in 80 days. We have *Anne of Green Gables*, *Tom Sawyer*, *White Fang*, *Call of the Wild*. We have *Sense and Sensibility*. One of my personal favorites, *Death Comes to the Archbishop* by Willa Cather.

We have *Tale of Two Cities* and many, many more actually. So we're.

**Garreth Winstead:** We're just about to post *Count of Monte Cristo*, which is the longest one yet.

**Julie Walker:** Oh wow, that's amazing. So some of the books that they were listing, Andrew, it made me think of the literature recommendations we give in our materials, whether it's the Hillsdale Writing Across the Curriculum books or our *Structure and Style for Students*, a lot of those titles are in there. It'd be so awesome if these students who wanted to listen to them could just listen to them rather than having an audible account and trying to find them or getting one from the library.

**Andrew Pudewa:** *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is a play, I believe. Is it not?

**Cheryl Winstead:** Not that I'm aware of. It's a novel. Maybe it's been made into a play, but I do not know about it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, okay. I was just wondering if you use different voices of different people for things that would be appropriate for that, or if you pretty much have that one narrator.

**Garreth Winstead:** That's right. So as of right now, everything is one narrator. We're trying to figure out the right approach to Shakespeare plays and things like that. As of right now, we don't have any plays on because we haven't solved that problem yet. But yeah, I think we would love to figure out a way to have a dramatic presentation of some dramatic works.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, it sounds like you've got a fantastic start going there. Now, I know a lot of people listening are going to think, well, do you have to buy all these books or if it's a podcast, is it free? Obviously, you've got to make this work as a business. What's the system for people to obtain these books?

**Garreth Winstead:** Absolutely. So right now we have a podcast channel that we rotate books, and we keep them up there for about a month although we've left up the books that are currently up there a little bit longer for some reasons. But we rotate those through each month and have several books on there for free. For access to the whole library.

It's a subscription, so it's a \$5 a month or \$50 a year subscription, and people listen to them by receiving a link to a controlled podcast and then can play it in any podcast player that they want. And an important thing about that is when people sign up, that money goes into the

creation of new books. And so one of the reasons why we've been able to record—we, we've got four or five additional books in the recording process right now—is because we have had people that believe in the project and are signing up and they're contributing to that building of the library.

**Julie Walker:** I want to point out three things if I can from their website that I thought was pretty interesting. One, you guys are committed to no AI. These are not artificial voices. They're real flesh and blood with souls who are reading these books. I love that. I also love that there's no ads, there's no pause in the middle and that's why membership is so important to fund this so that you don't have to do ads. But the other thing I love, Andrew, is that they've even included a link to your talk *Nurturing Competent Communicators* right there on their website. So, love that, you guys.

**Garreth Winstead:** Well that again that talk and that content was one of the main reasons that we started the project. And again, the first thing we wanted is just to have a big library of audio books to give to our kids. Couldn't really find an affordable solution. And so we set out to create one.

**Julie Walker:** So I am a member, Andrew. I signed up for this. I'm a bargain shopper, so I went for the full year to save the two months that I don't have to pay now \$5 a month. But I love that you guys, along with my membership, I was able to gift this. How does that work? Because I don't even remember, because I know that the people who I had a gift membership that you gave me to give to my friends were super appreciative because they were looking for good quality books as well.

**Garreth Winstead:** So there's a couple ways you can do that. When you sign up, you receive a link to be able to give a free month or membership to anyone you know that you'd like. There's also a mechanism by which you can buy a membership at whatever level and give it to someone else. So there's a link for that mechanism on the website if you look at it.

**Julie Walker:** We'll be sure to include these links in our show notes. But Andrew, we came up with this really fabulous idea literally 10 minutes, not even 10 minutes, two minutes before we turned on the mics to start recording. so you know what month this is, right. This is December. So we are just 23 days away from our Twelves Days of Christmas Giving.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, oh, can we give?

**Julie Walker:** Okay. We can't say much because you know, you can't tell people what the gift is, but we have some plans to come up with something that our listeners who are a part of our Twelve Days of Christmas Giving will be able to receive.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, that's so good.

**Julie Walker:** Isn't that great?

**Andrew Pudewa:** That is fantastic because I always thought, well, I'd like to record a book and give it away, but it takes a lot of time and editing, and it's not so easy to do this, as some people might think, oh, you just sit in front of a microphone and read a book and it only takes you the hours that you have to read the book.

No, there's so much more involved. So, wonderful. Well, I will look forward to hearing what we are able to give away for the Twelve Days promotion, and that of course is something we've done for I don't know how many years, 10 years?

**Julie Walker:** 14 years.

**Andrew Pudewa:** 14 years and people do look forward to it. They'll even walk up to me in July and say, what's gonna be the thing on the twelfth day?

**Julie Walker:** 12th day.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I would just like to finish up by mentioning John Senior's two books in case. These are not books I would recommend for children per se, but young adults and specifically parents and teachers. The first one is *The Death of Christian Culture*, and I would recommend you don't read that one first. It's a little depressing, but the first book I read, and this is the first time I ever heard John Senior's name was *The Restoration of Christian Culture*, and this book had a very profound effect on me in that I kind of was, I don't know, jaded against fiction because of having had bad experiences in high school and college reading and over analyzing or not understanding or hating. And so I spent a good 20 years of reading almost no fiction. And then as a young parent or as a parent of young children, I got this book, *Restoration of Christian Culture*. It completely opened my eyes as to the profound importance of the stories of literature, of the English literature of the Christian West in terms of transferring the values, the character, the symbolic nature of the natural and the supernatural world. It really caused me to say, okay, I've been wrong. I need to read more fiction, and I especially need to read fiction to my children and cultivate that moral imagination in them. So I'm guessing you had a similar experience with that book.

**Garreth Winstead:** Very similar experience with that book and have had John Senior's thoughts similarly impact our lives and our decisions about how to raise our children. And that's a huge reason why we care so much about all this stuff.

**Julie Walker:** So we are out of time, but before we turn off the mics and bid adieu, please give us the contact information. How can our listeners find you?

**Cheryl Winstead:** So the best way to find us is on our website, [1000goodbooks.org](http://1000goodbooks.org), and that's one triple zero Good books.org. So the actual number, and we're based on Substack right now. Our podcast runs out of Substack. So you can join Substack and become a follower on Substack, but you don't have to be in order to listen to the podcast. Go on our website, there's an about page that explains the project. There's a How to Listen tab, and that's really

important. It'll give you all the information you need to know on the different ways you can listen, the different ways you can subscribe, and gift memberships and all of that.

**Julie Walker:** Great. Well, Christmas is coming. Gifting this membership would be a fabulous idea.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It would be more than fabulous. It would have lasting generational impacts, I believe. So I hope a lot of people hear this and do it, and I hope that you just continue to keep going. You've only got 950 books to go, so hopefully, you....

**Garreth Winstead:** When you put it like that, Andrew.

**Julie Walker:** Well, thank you guys so much for being here today. We really appreciate you.

**Garreth Winstead:** Thank you so much for having us.

**Cheryl Winstead:** Thank you for having us.

**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.