Sold a Story: Discussion Guide

Season 2: Episode 1

This guide provides some possible points of discussion for educators, parents, community members and students who listen to *Sold a Story* Season 2 from APM Reports.

For each episode, there are questions for before, during and after listening. You will also find suggestions for things to read and activities to extend the conversation.

As you listen to each episode, think about:

- What moments and ideas in this episode stood out to you? Why?
- What challenged you? What surprised you? Why?
- What in this episode resonated with your own experience?
- What questions do you have?

Episode 1: It's Not Just Reading

In the 1960s, an education outsider named Zig Engelmann begins challenging conventional ideas about what young children can learn. He teaches his 4-year-old twins basic algebra. But he has a hard time getting anyone in education to take him seriously, until a professor gives him a chance to see if his ideas will work in a classroom.



Episode Length	Listen to the episode	Read the transcript
20:47	Apple Podcasts • Spotify • soldastory.org	Printable Transcript
Additional Materials	• Video: Zig Engelmann teaches math to preschoolers in 1966 (clip from 2:58–6:33) • Video: Who was Direct Instruction creator Zig Engelmann?	

Before Listening	If you listened to Season 1 of *Sold a Story* • What moments stuck with you from that season? • Season 1 focused on an idea about reading that turned out to be wrong. How would you explain that idea to someone who hasn't listened to the podcast? • What are you hoping to hear in this new season?
While Listening	This episode is an introduction to the new season. Notice what you wonder and what you feel

	as you listen.
After Listening	*From a teaching perspective:* We hear from teachers in this episode: > Teacher 1: "I've literally been told by my district that I should not be teaching math. I should be facilitating math." > Teacher 2: "I was told very clearly that we are just there to present them with materials to explore. They can teach themselves." > Teacher 1: "The children should be discovering math principles and teaching each other." > Teacher 3: "Everyone is repeating this mantra of like — inquiry learning is best. And the majority of our kids are two to three grade levels behind." ● How are these messages about teaching similar or different from what you've heard? ● How is "facilitating" different from teaching? Zig's guiding principle was: > "When a student doesn't understand something, it's probably not the student that's the problem — it's probably the teaching." ● Do you agree or disagree? Why? *From a parenting or teaching perspective:* During the lesson about telling time, Zig was frustrated with Eric's answers until he understood the cause of his son's confusion. ● Can you think of a time when a child had a logical misunderstanding? What happened? *From a community perspective:* Emily says, > "The kids in this preschool classroom in 1966 were defying all kinds of expectations. Not just because of what they were learning, but because of who they were. They were Black children from a poor neighborhood. And a lot of people at the time — and still today — expected poor, Black children to struggle in school." ● What came up for you when you heard this? *From a student perspective:* Yolanda says about her teacher, Zig Engelmann: > "He was firm. He meant business. You know, it was, we're here to learn, OK? And I'm going to teach you children, you're going to learn. And this is why we're here. We're not here for any other reason but to learn." ● Would you like to be taught by a teacher like Zig? Why or why not?

Wrap Up	In this season, we're going to learn more about Zig Engelmann: "A man who believed all kids could learn, if they were taught. He believed deeply in the power of instruction." • What, if anything, had you heard about Zig before this episode? • What do you think it means to "believe deeply in the power of instruction"?
Extend	*Activity 1* Watch the 1966 video of Zig Engelmann teaching math to preschoolers (specifically minutes 2:58–6:33) VIDEO Count the number of math problems the class solves or the number of responses students give in this roughly 3 and a half minute clip. • What do you notice about student engagement? • What words would you use to describe the instruction? *Activity 2* Compare ideas from Seasons 1 and 2 of *Sold a Story*. In Season 1, we heard from teacher Carrie Chee: "What I'm haunted by is when it wasn't working, I blamed it on children." In Season 2, we meet Zig Engelmann, who said: "If they made a mistake, it was probably my fault." • What went through your mind when you heard these two quotes? Do they bring to mind anything from your own experience?