

Episode 4: The Superstar

Teachers sing songs about Lucy Calkins. The longtime professor at Columbia University's Teachers College is one of the most influential people in American elementary education today. Her admirers call her books bibles. Why didn't she know that scientific research contradicted reading strategies she promoted?



EPISODE 4

Episode Length	Link to Episode	Link to Transcript
33:18	https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2022/11/03/sold-a-story-e4-the-superstar	Printable Transcript
Additional Optional Materials	Using Research and Reason in Education	

Questions and Topics for Discussing “The Superstar”

Before Listening	Episode 3 ended with people talking about a superstar. “She was like a rock star walking into that building. And it was like theater.” “If Beyoncé came and gave a private concert in my district, it would not have been a bigger deal for many of my teachers.” “It felt like you were watching something magical.” Did you know who they were describing? What do you know about Lucy Calkins?
While Listening	What do you learn about Lacey Robinson? Are you surprised that she was drawn to Lucy Calkins’ approach to teaching reading?
After Listening	<i>From a teaching perspective:</i> In this episode, we hear teachers talk about how motivated they were to learn how to teach children to read and write. Lisa Karim: “Everybody was whisper-quiet and there was Lucy, down at the front, with a student, teaching a writing lesson. And it felt like you were watching something magical.” Emily Hanford: “Lisa Karim wanted to make the same kind of magic for her students. That’s why she was there.” Karim: “It was — here’s a person who knows how children learn to read and write. And I want to be able to teach children to read and write.”

	• How much did you know about how kids learn to read when you started teaching? • What motivates you to learn more as a teacher? <i>From a parenting perspective:</i> Emily says this: “Lucy Calkins had an idea about how children learn. And I think that idea was influenced by privilege. Her idea was kind of romantic. That learning is fun and beautiful. That it’s a natural process. Kind of magical. And that a teacher’s job is to unlock a child’s potential. To observe and nurture. To help children fall in love with reading and writing. “I think I used to believe this too. That learning to read was a natural process. That if you read enough to your kids, they’d learn. And I think my belief was influenced by privilege. I grew up in a family not unlike Lucy Calkins’ family. Upper middle class, white, well-educated — both of my parents went to Teachers College Columbia in the 1960s. I even had some monogrammed bath towels. “And as I mentioned in an earlier episode, I think learning to read was pretty easy for me. And it was pretty easy for my kids. Nothing challenged my view that learning to read is a natural process. Until I began doing this reporting a few years ago.” Look at what you wrote during the discussion of Episode 3. • How has your background and life experience influenced the kind of reading instruction you want for your child? Lacey says: “Everybody don’t have to love to read and write. But everybody has a right to learn to read and write.” • When you heard her say this, what did you think? <i>From a community perspective:</i> Lacey says: “I thought I was playing Robin Hood.” • What did she mean by that? <i>From a student perspective:</i> • Does your school do the reading and writing workshop? ○ What do you like about it? What don’t you like?
Wrap Up	• What was Calkins’ idea about how kids learn to read? Where did it come from, and how did she help spread that idea?
Extend	Activity 1

In this 2003 article, [Using Research and Reason in Education](#), Paula and Keith Stanovich wrote:

“Education is so susceptible to fads and unproven practices because of its tacit endorsement of a personalistic view of knowledge acquisition — one that is antithetical to the scientific value of the public verifiability of knowledge claims.

“Many educators believe that knowledge resides within particular individuals — with particularly elite insights — who then must be called upon to dispense this knowledge to others. Indeed, some educators reject public, depersonalized knowledge in social science because they believe it dehumanizes people.

“Science, however, with its conception of publicly verifiable knowledge, actually democratizes knowledge. It frees practitioners and researchers from slavish dependence on authority.”



ARTICLE

- Do you agree that education is susceptible to “fads and unproven practices”? Why or why not?

Activity 2

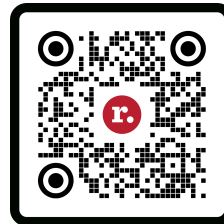
Go to your school district’s website and see if you can determine how your child’s school teaches reading.

- Can you identify the curriculum used, who provides teacher training, and the reading strategies children are taught?

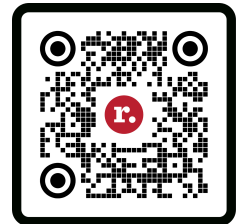
Emily and Margaret have both written articles for parents you might want to read:

[Is my child’s school getting reading right? What to ask. What to look for](#) by Margaret Goldberg

[What to do if your child's school isn't teaching reading right](#) by Emily Hanford



MARGARET



EMILY

We’d love to hear about your *Sold a Story* discussion!

- Email us: soldastory@apmreports.org
- Leave us a voicemail message: (612) 888-7323