

Jody: Well. We are super excited to talk to today's guests because she is a dear, dear friend of ours and what she's going to share is so inspiring to us. We're wrapping up our series today on reading and today we're going to look at the value that the classics can have in any homeschool journey.

Jenni: Well, Jody, I'm excited because I get to introduce our guest, who as you said is one of our beloved friends. Doreen Morgan was nicknamed Mrs. M By her beloved students. She is currently President and Director of My MGM Academy, which is located right here in our hometown of Sarasota, Florida. She has traveled throughout the United States speaking at a variety of home educator and women's conferences on a wide range of topics with a dash of humored sprinkled in whenever she can because she is just a naturally fun and funny person. Previously, Mrs. M Was the owner and operator of a large retail education store. She's an avid reader and storyteller everywhere she goes and we are so excited to welcome her here today on the From Cradle to Calling podcast. Doreen, thank you so much for talking to us.

Doreen: Well ladies, thank you for speaking with me today. I'm very excited to be here.

Jenni: So you have a very, um, unique way of educating students and we know from personal experience that you have a lot of success with your students. In fact, we often send people your way because we know that that you're going to be able to reach them. And so we want to talk to you today about some of the techniques that you use. But let's start off with this. Tell us what the word mentor actually means in the true sense of the word.

Doreen: Well, I go right to my trustee, Noah Webster 1828 Dictionary.

Jody: I have that one!

Doreen: Which actually was a classical all it's own, right?

Jody: Yeah!

Doreen: And so to define mentoring would be to say that it's my friend. It's an advisor; it's a someone who delivers me direction. It teaches, but it also warns me and uh, notifies me of my fault. A mild and gentle approach. Your actual definition, if you think about it, tells us, you know why that's so important. If you were to say, take education and reading and use it for life lesson, everyone needs a mentor, but not everyone can find one. We all desire direction, advice from our friends, and you know, someone we can trust and especially someone who will deliver the bad observation to us kind of gentle. Right?

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: I love that. And that's really, I think what you just described is also really a great definition for parent, or at least it should be.

Doreen: Yeah, yes, absolutely. It should be. Yes, we all need the mentors, but you know, life is busy. It gets very, very busy. And uh, so books can be very trustworthy in this area.

Jenni: All right, so let's talk about that for a moment. So how does a book, how old does a book have to be in order to be considered a classic?

Doreen: Oh, that's a good one. A, the books themselves don't actually have to be old at all. Classic, It might surprise you, actually means a writer whose style is first rate or has refined material? They are usually, um, primary in their own nature. In other words, it's like having the best model of a subject in its purest form. That's what a classic is. It doesn't even actually have to be a book. It could be story. Um, you know, like when your parents share something with you, you could tell a story to your child like a brief snippet of something you learned the hard way that they never forget. You know, timing is everything when you feel prompted, you should share with your child in a non-threatening way because that is part of using classic stories, not just textbooks, books, uh, to incorporate character into their lives.

Jody: I think I've been using that word wrong my entire life.

Jenni: Yeah. And actually, so what you're saying is really inspiring because it means that there are new classics in a sense that are being produced regularly. Like for example, I think I would say in our own homeschool, a new classic that we really draw upon a lot and talk about a lot is the book "Wonder." I don't know if you've read that one, but it's, um, it's about a little boy who has a congenital disfigurement of his face. And the book is told from a variety of different perspectives about how, you know, how his peers are handling this and how his sibling, um, feels about what's happening with him. And, and it's a great story, but I don't think I would have used the word classic until now.

Jody: Yeah.

Doreen: Well you just actually said a key component and that is, it's told from different perspectives, what better way to teach your children character than to have them read a book where you're getting everyone's perspective on the main thing. The main circumstance in that book. It opens up all kinds of opportunities for us to literally pour into our children's lives.

Jenni: Yeah. It gives them the chance to have different vicarious experiences. So they can put themselves in the shoes of a whole bunch of different perspectives. It's again, that's a neat thing. Something we can be looking for when we're looking for classics.

Jody: Well, and very character building from each perspective.

Jenni: Yeah, that's really neat. I hadn't really considered that before, but you're right. That's interesting. Okay. So let's talk about character for a second. So when a child is faced, they're facing a character issue. When's the best time to begin using mentoring type of books and, and how do we go about doing that?

Doreen: It is, there's some kind of good news, bad news kind of thing here. All books mentor, all books mentor. They just either do it really well or quite poorly. And so parents we think, well I have to give the good books to them because I don't want them to be mentored poorly, but that's actually opposite of what we should be doing. We need to try to find the good thing in our, that our child is doing first. So before we even select the books. It can be the smallest thing like a, you know, a teenager making his bed. Uh, remember doing, uh, chores

around the house is actually practicing the behavior with the servant's heart. It's not necessarily just a duty. We're entrusted with our children. They don't work for us. So we want to pick out things plentiful that we can praise them for. And you know, our parents maybe even haven't been this way. You know, if you start right now today, you know, I didn't even understand this in the beginning of parenting and it took up my oldest child really until she was an adult before I really began to praise her properly. That said, I think it's best to read to them books, give them one to enjoy. Maybe that shows the protagonists doing something poorly. If you look at most true classics, they're full of heroes that are weak characters. They're broken, they're morally bankrupt. If I think about, you know what I'm putting in front of them, I realize that they're going to look pretty good when they read about certain characters.

Jenni: Tom Sawyer.

Jody: Tom Sawyer I was just thinking that!

Jenni: Tom Sawyer, getting paid to have other people do his work.

Doreen: What not to do!

Jody: Of course it might give him some ideas. I don't know.

Jenni: No, that's awesome.

Doreen: There's places to go with that too.

Jody: That's true. That's true.

Jenni: He was definitely shrewd. I'll give him that.

Jody: Creative. Very creative.

Jenni: That's neat. So I hadn't considered that before. We can actually put stories before them that are a less than desirable characters, but that gives us a contrast and something that we can talk about and gives them a sense that, okay, well not that bad.

Jody: At least...which is what we say, not to say.

Jenni: We always, when our kids always, when our kids say, well at least I didn't, we always say, you know, you never want to strive for the least.

Doreen: Right. Right.

Jenni: Um, okay. So, um, are, are there any other ways that a poor character can mentor our children?

Doreen: Well I think that there are some very specific examples, like poor examples for mentoring children. I think there's three primary things that I always think about. First of all, we just discussed it. It opens up discussion with you and your child to look at virtues that you might want to have. Maybe they're not even struggling with that issue because you're reading a book that has characters that maybe you can drive and they're not even in driving age yet or

can hold a part time job yet. So they can't identify. But there's virtues in there that we can talk about. The second thing is it's an opportunity to teach them not to judge. This becomes a huge, um, bad habit that can formulate. "Well, at least I'm not as bad as them. I don't do such terrible things." So it really opens up discussion about common ground. I think as parents, we don't talk about it enough, and common ground just says, we're a mess. We make mistakes, and we all need a savior. We all need a savior. It brings this around to even characters in the books that we read. And lastly, I think it allows us to mentor even the youngest child all through adulthood. Sometimes the people who are mentors are not always readily available for us when we're in a crisis. Uh, sometimes your friends are busy, even as adults, uh, you know, the kids are busy or they're doing something or they can't really identify or they say things like, get over it. You know, books are never too busy for you and really isn't it time that we weren't too busy for them.

Jenni: Mm, that's so good.

Jody: You just personified the book. It's a living creature.

Jenni: The book is never too busy for you. I love that. Yeah. And Charlotte Mason living books. Yeah, it's true. So many books do come to life. Um, and they become, they become friends of ours. They become part of our own personal history.

Jody: No. Sometimes I'll read something, and I'm like, wait, did that really happen or was that a book I read that's been happening to me? And I'm like, okay, this is the problem. I'm not really sure if it's, if it's true or if it was the book.

Jenni: Now Doreen, you use books in every subject.

Doreen: Yes ma'am. We do. Across the board.

Jenni: Yup. Um, for even for math, they have the "Life of Fred" books that tell stories.

Doreen: That's correct. That's correct. The best actually the best way, uh, for our students in a, in a systematic way of being relaxed. I mean, everybody's always talking about being relaxed and unschooled and doing your thing and that's all great. But there can still be a systematic approach to doing it and we believe it's through literature. We really do.

Jenni: Can you give us, um, just a short list of some mentoring books that our listeners can begin using in their homeschool.

Doreen: Oh I thought you'd never ask! I certainly can, but first before I do that, let's agree that a book list does not complete any person, even in adults. Uh, educational path. I can read a cookbook all day long, but I need to practice some of the recipes. So kind of like putting gas in a car, you know, it keeps it running rain or shine, but just still need to get that oil change. So it is the same with the classics. We want books to teach as well as mentor, but we, we will also want to look for things that are not always in story format. They don't always have to be fiction. Some examples of some of my favorites are, um, we love to read "Miss Manners Excruciatingly Correct Behavior" by Judith Martin. You might want to hide the title of that one around the kids, but just read a letter or two. So if I saw my child making their bed, I might want to read a

letter about, um, making your bed when leaving a house when you're a guest. It's a fascinating read and really ends up going, wow, who knew that was the thing you're supposed to do? It's a way of learning together and uh, you know, being mildly, gently corrected in way. You know what I'm saying? That's one of my absolute favorites. Uh let's see. One of my other all time favorites is "You're Grounded for Life and 49 Other Crazy Things Parents Say." That's by Joe Joey O'Connor. This book is such a wonderful opportunity to laugh at my parenting skills, especially during a time where I'm repeatedly correcting my child. Uh, you just have to even look at these chapters to see, I've got a copy here, um, where we say, um, you're grounded for life. It's not that I don't trust you, I don't trust others. Uh, you're not going anywhere until your room is clean, one day you'll come home and I won't be here Um, I don't like your choice of friends, uh, all kinds of different topics that are done in a humorous way, but a scriptural way and help you walk through why parents say some of the things that we say. So some of it, uh, it's good to show some humility with our children is what I'm saying. Another one, uh, called "Dancing with Deception" is by Chuck Colson. You might know. Uh, yeah. Yeah. He did a tremendous book called "Dancing With Deception." It's actually news articles that were written. He covers every topic that you can imagine. I mean every topic. Uh, lots of serious topics. They're done in very short little letters. You could sit and just read one after dinner or, or you could assign a couple for them to read and report back to the family what they felt about the letter. A lot of controversial things in there. Good opportunities to discuss. Good stuff. Let's see. Yeah, it is probably one of my all time favorites is, uh, the "Forged Coupon," which is actually a short story by Tolstoy. I know we'll ever, when I say hopefully people freaked out, but he actually wrote short stories, and this was very short. It's about a small thing that just goes, goes awry and it shows the ripple effects for, uh, decades of all whole bunch of different people's lives. And it, you can't walk away, not touched by this book. It was so incredible. I, I have my students read it. Usually certain classes read it each year, you know, it's just one of those good ones. Some surprising ones might surprise you, But even "Robinson Caruso." I can't...When I picked up this book, I said, this is such a guy book, you know, do I want to do it? I...no really every person on the planet should read it. It's a story of recovery from rebellion and mistakes and yeah, we don't realize how much it's about his rebellion towards his parents and his, you know, kind of mundane, boring, kind of set for in life. And what teenager doesn't say they're bored. It's incredible. A book. Uh, it makes you appreciate what you have, especially your family, your possessions. And this guy was with a tough life after, after things happened to him. It's just, I read it every year so impacting on how I need to look around my home and say I am rich, I am rich in my home, my friends, my family, I am wealthy. You know, blessed be the name of the Lord guys because that's, that's what a book like that will do.

Jody: Huh

Jenni: You've inspired me.

New Speaker: Yeah. It, you need to do it. There's a wonderful book called "Hidden Art." I don't know if you know it. It's by Edith Schaeffer. It talks about creativity is a choice. Lots of kids say, well I can't draw, I can't make things; I can't sing. This is the book. Creativity is a choice. That's the whole theme through it.

Jody: Well, you know, I really,

Doreen: the last, go ahead.

Jody: No, I was just going to say I would have to agree with that. Jenni and I, we take art class, and it is, I think in the beginning I would tell you that...I'm not an artist and I'm not an artist, but I do art like it's an outlet and it's fun. And we look forward to is our most favorite thing to do.

Jenni: And yet we would have not ever thought that we were, could create art once we let go of what our idea of what we thought art was and embraced creativity.

Jody: It's so fun.

New Speaker: It really is. So I'm excited that I'm putting that on my reading list too.

Doreen: And there's so many, there's so many think chapters. I mean they talk about the environment being art. Integration being art, clothing, being art. Recreation of gardens, food, all kinds of things other than painting, drawing, sculpting. Uh, there's something in there really for everyone, but the message is clear that creativity is a decision that we make that decision. It's not a gift. It's something we decide.

Jody: That's such a cool perspective.

Doreen: Yeah, it really is. And I think maybe "The Nine Tailors" by Dorothy Sayers, who is one of my favorite authors, she wrote the mystery of crime. She wrote all about it back in the early 1900s she wrote a mystery called the nine tailors and I believe that every kid should read it. It is a fascinating story that taken place in a actually in England and their way of doing things is so unique, but also it, uh, with you just not really, uh, things aren't always the way they seem and that has a lot to do with how we judge in this world. And another opportunity to just speak to our children about it may not be the way you think it is. The bigger picture kinds of things.

Jenni: I need more years in my life because I, there's so many books I want to read. Oh,

Doreen: You said a short list. That's it. I got it.

Jenni: oh my goodness.

Doreen: I do have some final advice. Um, my final advice, and this is to everyone, is to read to yourself. Read out loud when you are alone. Reach the children, reach with adults. Uh, even if it's just short articles. Sometimes you don't have time for a whole chapter or grab an article. Read to your guests that come over, read to strangers, volunteer libraries, nursing homes. That's how my daughter and I got into the art of storytelling. Get your children involved with the power of reading, mentoring tales will come every time they read a story to anybody. If you have a family over for dinner, read them something, you would be, they will never forget your dinner.

Jody: Hmm. That's so cool. I love it.

Doreen: If they walk away and someone has read a story to then it will change your life ladies. It'll change your life. It changes all of our lives.

Jenni: It, it really lets us dive into the mind. Yeah. Of Great Thinkers.

Doreen: Yes.

Jenni: It's like inviting another guest to the dinner.

Doreen: You know, red lettered the way we think when we were kids of classical readers in red lettered, uh, leather-bound special books. There's all kinds of classical material all over for us to mentor every day and everywhere.

Jenni: I think that's one of my biggest takeaways from today is that the classics are everywhere. They don't just have to be in a book. That's a really neat perspective during, thank you so much for taking this time to chat with us. You are always so inspiring.

Doreen: Thank you for the opportunity and for such a relaxed atmosphere. Ladies Love Your blog and what you're doing.

Jenni: Oh, thank you. Our friend. We will have a list of the books that we talked about in our show notes for the listeners.