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SPEAKERS

Chris, Sara

Chris 00:00

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Chris 00:34

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Chris Reeve, and I'm your host. And I am super excited about today's episode because you are going to hear from a literacy expert. I found her through her podcast, and she had so many incredible ideas to share that I think will be perfect for those of us trying to figure out how we fit literacy into everything else we do.

Chris 01:01

It actually managed to cause a brainstorm and me that's like crazy in terms of lesson planning and thinking things through. So you're gonna hear from Sarah Marye, and she is a literacy expert. And I will let her tell you all about what she does, but I think you're going to be really excited for it. So let's get started.

Chris 01:20

Sara, I'm super excited to have you as a guest today. One of the things that I know that a lot of my audience struggles with is how to focus on literacy for some of our students with different kinds of disabilities.

C Chris 01:35

And because of the relationship between language and the difficulties that our students have, and the relationship with reading, it gets really tough sometimes to try to figure out how to include students in literacy routines that are going to be really useful for them. So I'm very excited that you are here. Can you tell us a little bit about you and your background and what you do?

S Sara 01:58

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much, Chris, for having me, I really am excited to come on today. So for those of you who don't know, my name is Sarah Marye and I am the host of The Stellar Teacher Podcast and the creator behind The Stellar Teacher Company. And I am a literacy expert, I talk mostly about how teachers can better support their students in reading and writing.

S Sara 02:21

I spent many, many years working as a first grade teacher, a second grade teacher, and fourth grade teacher, which was ultimately the place that I loved the most. But I also worked as a literacy coach and an assistant principal while I was in the classroom.

S Sara 02:35

And having just kind of that wide range of school experience, I felt like it gave me just this a much bigger picture perspective on how to effectively teach literacy, you know, multiple grade levels and thinking, you know, not just from the classroom perspective, but really looking at literacy from, you know, a whole school level.

S Sara 02:51

And so now I support teachers full time through my podcast and reading membership. And I just I love I nerd out over anything literacy related. I love reading about it, I love learning about it. And I love you know, supporting teachers finding ways that they can be more effective, helping their students fall in love with reading, mastering the reading standards, you know, becoming more competent writers, whatever it is, I love talking about it.

C Chris 03:15

Awesome. I'm very excited that you're here. I actually have not had a ton of guests on the show. And I'm in the midst of changing that. But this was really an exciting one for me, because I heard your podcast and was like, Oh, wait, I need her to like come talk to everybody. Because

I understand reading and I understand like the needs behind it. But it definitely is not my biggest specialty. So I'm very excited for what you're sharing with us today.

C Chris 03:40

Tell me a little bit about what is it literacy routine?

S Sara 03:43

Yeah, so I love using literacy routines when I was in the classroom, and I talk about them a ton. And I encourage teachers to use them. And I feel like it's this phrase that if you spend some time thinking about it, you're like, oh, yeah, I kind of know what it was literacy routine is. But also, I feel like we don't really use that phrase a whole lot. I wish we did.

S Sara 04:00

And so a literacy routine is really any reading or writing activity or task that has a set of repeatable steps. So it's the same process, it's the same steps that they repeat over and over, you're just changing the content.

S Sara 04:16

So you might have a daily routine, you might have like Word of the Week as a daily routine, where it's the same set of steps, but you're just doing a different word. You might have a specific routine that you do for your independent reading time, where they're doing the same set of tasks every week, but they're just doing it with a different text. You might have a routine for your small group lessons where you know, it's teachers teach in routines, so we use system and routines for everything.

S Sara 04:39

I think we sometimes aren't as intentional about really thinking about the steps and processes. So a literacy routine is really just a very intentional set of literacy tasks that you can repeat over and over again.

C Chris 04:49

Awesome. Routines would be really great for a lot of our students because routine is really one of their best areas is kind of knowing what's going to happen next.

C Chris 04:59

Can you give us an example about a literacy routine that would help to build those foundational

literacy skills that a lot of our students need?

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Sara 05:07

Yeah, so I, I have a lot of routines that I've developed that we share with teachers inside our reading membership site or that I've talked about on my podcast. Two really routines that I think are sort of just like essential kind of, regardless of even what grade you teach, but specifically for you know, upper elementary teachers is having some sort of vocabulary routine. So this could be like a Word of the Week routine.

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Sara 05:29

So every week, you're gonna have a different word. But every day of the week, students are going to do a different task. So on Monday, they might look at the word and read it in context and make a prediction for what they think the word means. And then on Tuesday, they would look it up in the dictionary and confirm their meaning.

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Sara 05:46

On Wednesday, they might go to the thesaurus, and they might look up synonyms, and antonyms for that specific word. On Thursday, they might draw a picture of it so that way, it helps solidify their meaning of the word. And on Friday, they might use it in a sentence.

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Sara 06:00

So everyday, they're literally doing just one small, tiny task, but they're engaging with the same word. And they're engaging with literacy skills, vocabulary skills, you know, that are going to help them really just develop their vocabulary. And you could then take this Word of the Week routine and you know, throughout the year, as students are progressing and learning and developing more, modify it to where it might become the root of the week.

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Sara 06:25

So now every week you're working on a specific Greek or Latin root, and you do kind of the same steps, but you're focusing specifically on roots. Or maybe you're looking at a specific affix, so you're helping your students develop their understanding of prefixes and suffixes. So you're looking at words, you're going to be selective about the words that you pick, so it has a specific prefix and suffix, and you're going to break down the word parts.

S

Sara 06:46

And you can, you know, the, the daily tasks that I just shared are just an example. You could have students, you know, on Monday, maybe they break apart the word into syllables. On Tuesday, maybe they identify the meaning of the word. On Wednesday, they use it in a

sentence, you know, whatever it is, you could look at spelling patterns, you could look at the origin of the word, you can look at the pronunciation of the word, whatever it is, you know, you can adjust and modify the routine.

S Sara 07:11

The trick is, is that you keep the same set of steps repeatable, you know, day after day, week after week. So I definitely love and encourage teachers to use like a word of the day or Word of the Week routine, because I think it's just a super quick and easy way to help boost vocabulary.

S Sara 07:27

Another routine that I love and encourage teachers to use in their classroom is a sentence writing routine. And I feel like I mean, and I felt this when I was in the classroom, too. But writing is a challenge for students. Teaching writing is a challenge for I think teachers.

S Sara 07:43

And I think part of the problem is, is, especially in upper elementary, we focus on helping our students write essays, or we help them focus on writing paragraphs, but what our students actually need is support with writing complete sentences. But we don't really ever feel like we have the time to focus just on sentences.

S Sara 08:03

So if you do a really quick sentence writing routine, where every day, you're dedicating three, maybe five minutes to focusing on a sentence, your students are going to get better at it over time. And then because you're focusing on sentences, eventually, their paragraphs will improve, and eventually their essays will improve as well.

S Sara 08:19

So a sentence right in your team might be something like we're on Monday, and I always love thinking about how we can incorporate visuals or you know, some sort of like, concrete object. So you could show your students a picture, or you could have them bring in an object from home, or you could connect it to science or social studies.

S Sara 08:35

But show your students an image and maybe on Monday, they're going to expand a sentence. So they're going to answer who is in the picture, what is happening in the picture? Or when is it happening? Where is it happening, and they're going to then combine those details to form a sentence.

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Sara 08:48

On Tuesday, they're going to look at the same picture and they're going to write four different types of sentences. So they're going to come up with a question, a statement, a command, and an exclamation that can be very basic, but they're practicing forming sentences their faculty to focusing on capitalization punctuation.

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Sara 09:04

On Wednesday, you might give them a fragment that's related to the image and they have to then turn that fragment into a complete sentence. I know we've had so many students who love to write in fragments. So if we can train them to fix their fragments into complete sentences, that's going to be a great skill that serves them.

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Sara 09:20

On Thursday, you could have students you know, give them two sentences, or have students come up with two sentences and then have them practice combining sentences. So can we take two simple sentences, you know, the girl read a book and the girl drew a picture. Can you then combine those the girl read a book and draw a picture into one complete sentence? So practice combining sentences.

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Sara 09:40

And then you know, the fifth activity that I encourage teachers to do is giving students a sentence that has been scrambled and can they unscramble it and put it in a correct order? Because that helps students with understanding really the comprehension behind sentences, but then also, can they construct ideas in a way that makes sense?

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Sara 09:57

And so all of these activities, they're short, they don't take students that long to complete, but they all have a huge impact on helping students develop just a strong writing foundation.

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Sara 10:07

So those are two examples of routines but you could do a poem of the week routine to focus on fluency and comprehension. You could do a, I love doing Picture of the Day to focus on like inferential thinking skills, you could do, you know, a routine around fluency, you could do a routine for spelling, you know, really any sort of literacy need that you have, you can create a routine for.



Chris 10:20

 Chris 10:29

I love that because so many times it's the routine that really, really helps our students get engaged. And I think reading has taken on a such a big, scary feeling for a lot of our teachers who are trying to teach so many things in special ed, that just knowing that just doing those little things, and building on them is often a way that you can get a kid who maybe can't really attend for more than five or six minutes at a time, engaged in literacy. And I think that that is really cool.

 Chris 11:00

Can you talk a little bit about how you see routine literacy routines in the instructional day, and how you think about them for students with disabilities?

 Sara 11:12

Yeah, so I another reason why I love literacy routines is because they have so much versatility in terms of where they fit within a schedule. You know, if you think about it, especially if you're a teacher, even if, well, regardless, if you're departmentalized, or self contained, one of the things that I always hear teachers talk about is I don't have enough time. I can't get through my you know, I always run out of time. I never have enough time. We can't get through small groups, we can't get through our read aloud, we're running out of time.

 Sara 11:38

So as a teacher, we really need to think about how can I maximize and use my time like to the best of my advantage. And so literacy routines really give you a lot of flexibility. First of all, it's because it is a repeatable set of steps. You know, if you tell students oh, we're going to do our Word of the day routine, or we're going to do our sentence writing routine.

 Sara 11:57

Beyond that, if you do it every single day, or every single week, you don't have to tell them, you don't have to give them directions on what to do. So it's a great sort of filler activity, if you realize that maybe you do have five extra minutes before you go to lunch, and you're not sure what to do, you can bring in the literacy routine.

 Sara 12:13

Or as your students are coming in, in the morning, you know, there's kind of that trickle of students coming in and you you know, don't start your instructional day until 7:45. But kids are in your classroom starting at 7:20. And you want them to be engaged, but you don't know, you know, put in the literacy routines, students can complete that work independently. It's productive, it's focused, it's a great use of the time, and you don't have to sort of guide them or tell them what to do, they can do the same thing.

S

Sara 12:38

It also works great as an end of day routine. So the end of the day when it's like hectic and chaotic, bring in a literacy routine. But I also think that they work really well in the middle of your literacy block. So obviously, you can do routines at any point in time of the day. But I think they can work really great for a literacy block.

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Sara 12:55

So you could use them as like the warm up, if you're getting ready to start your reading block, do word of the day, to kick off your your reading block, or do sentence writing routine to kick off your writing block.

S

Sara 13:04

If you have a student who is you know, coming into your classroom for you know, if they're pushing in for inclusion time, or you know, socialization, a routine can be a great thing to incorporate during that time when you have that students specifically in your classroom, because it is going to have that repeatable set of steps, they're going to know how to participate.

S

Sara 13:23

They're going to understand, you know, sort of like how to jump in to what's happening in the classroom and be an active part of that lesson. But then also to it can just be a good way to sort of like, you know, sort of like start whatever that instructional block is.

S

Sara 13:36

Literacy routines can also work as a Literacy Center. So if you have different centers in your classroom, a literacy routine could be like Word of the Week, or the sentence writing routine that I described, that could be a center. You know, so whatever sort of your rotation looks like, you could have a various set of routines in there.

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Sara 13:52

So they really can fit in wherever and I know sometimes teachers are like, but tell me, where do I put, you know, the reality of it is, is wherever you can find five to 10 minutes, put a literacy literacy routine in there. Or if you're looking at how can you bring in a little bit more structure to your literacy block, you know, bring in a literacy routine.

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Sara 14:11

And I think they're great to start or end a specific time block with because it's a good just sort

And I think they're great to start or end a specific time block with because it's a good just sort of, it's a structured way to, you know, again, when you're starting something you want students to jump right in and be engaged in the content. And then when you're ending something you want students to be able to, like fully wrap up the lesson or whatever it is. And I think routines can be a good book end to an entire instructional block.

C Chris 14:33

I love that because one of the things that I talk a lot about is engagement on the podcast, and I know that for a lot of our teachers. One of the things I talk about is always having things in kind of what I think of as your back pocket of things you can pull out with music teachers late or you're waiting to go to lunch or there's a line somewhere the kids can't go to there directly.

C Chris 14:55

And so adding this to the repertoire of things that they can kind of pull out of their hat to keep the students engaged, I think is really, really a great idea.

C Chris 15:05

What do you see the benefits being of using literacy routines with students?

S Sara 15:09

So I mean, I think there's, I could go on and on and on. There's tons of benefits. I think, specifically, you know, if you're looking at a student that has a disability, there's a ton of benefits of incorporating routines. And you've kind of mentioned this to.

S Sara 15:23

You know, if a student has some sort of learning disability, they have some additional challenges that are making it a little bit more challenging for them to access the content. And when you incorporate a routine, you're giving them a predictable set of steps to where they no longer have to wonder like, how am I going to engage? What comes next? What's expected of me?

S Sara 15:44

You're clearly communicating the behavioral expectations for that activity, and you're clearly communicating the, you know, the sort of the independent output activity. So I feel like a routine makes it just a really safe learning space for students to not have to wonder, am I doing the right thing? Am I going to be successful?



S

Sara 16:02

But then because it has that predictable set of steps, I feel like it's a really great way for students to experience success. Because every Monday they do the exact same task, you know, every Tuesday, it's the exact same thing, or, you know, if it's a daily routine, it's it's predictable. And if students do the same thing over and over and over again, eventually they're going to improve at it.

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Sara 16:23

I think it's really easy for students to see their growth and progress when you're using a routine, because they can see, okay, from day one to day five or week one to week five, I'm becoming more confident in this and more proficient and, you know, have mastered this specific skill.

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Sara 16:39

So I really think that for students with disabilities, they're great. And I also think they're great for teachers, though. You know, if you're a teacher that is trying to differentiate and provide specific sort of accommodations or modifications for your students, if you have a routine in place, then you're only really having to make a decision around a modification or an accommodation once and then obviously, week after week, you're going to have to update that on the content.

S

Sara 17:05

But you're not having to wonder how am I going to modify this for the student? How am I going to differentiate this to meet the students needs? You've already made that decision, and you know, what's going to work and then you just sort of let the routine, carry it and you know, put it into place.

S

Sara 17:17

So, especially for students with disabilities, I think literacy routines are just really wonderful, but they're beneficial for all students, you know. I think the fact that they are predictable helps all students feel confident. I love that routines can create a sense of normalcy and consistency. So if you're a teacher who is going to be gone, you know, and you have a sub come in, students know how to do the routine, whether you're there or not. So it's an easy way to sort of keep the consistency when you have those abnormal weeks.

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Sara 17:45

But also they save teachers time, both, I think with planning and with teaching. If you have a routine again, you don't have to wonder how am I going to teach sentence writing this week? Or how am I gonna teach vocabulary this week? It's already been decided for you. And you can

be really intentional about how you're crafting and putting together that routine so you know, it is a good use of your instructional time. So yeah, I mean, those are just some of the benefits, but I feel like I could I feel like I could go on.

C Chris 18:09

Well, and what it made me think of was that it's very similar to the way that I advocate for doing lesson planning for a lot of our classrooms, because there's that feeling of, well, I'm going to read this book, then I'm gonna read that book, then I'm going to read this book, and it's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, back up. How about you read that book, and we can come up with five things for you to do every day about that book?

S Sara 18:29

Yep.

C Chris 18:29

And I don't know that people have always had that experience. It's always been, Oh, we got to do this, or it's already always structured by a curriculum or something like that. And so I think the things that you're describing are really great, because that repetition is really useful for all students to learn, and especially this student. And it really goes well, the idea that it's something that the kids will continue to do, even when you're not there, goes really well with the theme I had this last few months of how do we use our systems to make it easier.

C Chris 19:04

And so they sound like a tool that could make it easier for the students to know what's going on. But also they're tools that really can help teachers expedite their planning.

S Sara 19:14

Absolutely.

C Chris 19:15

And kind of know, this is what I'm going to do. And I just drop things in. And that makes a huge difference because you're not spending all that mental energy trying to think of a new way to teach something, when in fact too many new ways to teach something. It's just going to confuse everyone.

S Sara 19:28

I think we suffer sometimes from a more is more mentality and education. And kind of to your point, we think I need another story and another story and I need a new activity. And I need to do this differently. And there's definitely a place for the new and exciting and the creative, but I also think there's a place for the routines and the systems and let's spend a little more time on one activity versus let's do a lot more activities and not have enough time to really dig in deep.

C Chris 19:54

Right. I think that's so so true. So how do you suggest that teachers get started with Literacy routines in their classrooms.

S Sara 20:02

So I think, you know, there's sort of, this is like a two part answer to the question. So first of all, if you're feeling brave and creative, I would encourage you to come up with your own routine and sort of identify what is the biggest literacy need that your students have, and then see if you can create a routine to, you know, sort of help them with that need.

S Sara 20:23

So for example, right now, we're actually in the process of developing a new paragraph writing routine for the teachers inside our membership, because that is something that they keep on asking for, it's like the constructed response, or our students don't know how to write paragraphs. So we're putting together this routine.

S Sara 20:37

And so first, I'm thinking about, okay, what is the outcome that we want students to experience as a result of this routine? And that is to be able to write a complete paragraph with success and confidence.

S Sara 20:48

So then I need to think, well, okay, well, what steps do students need to take every time they sit down to write a paragraph? So you know, they need to be able to brainstorm, they need to be able to outline, they need to be able to write a topic sentence, you know. So kind of thinking through these steps, and then really thinking about, okay, how can we break these tasks down into really the small, you know, like, bite sized chunks, that it's manageable for a student.

S Sara 21:11

And so really sort of just like think about your end task, think about the steps that students take, and then think about how you can put those steps into really manageable chunks for students. And then that really becomes your process and your routine.

S

Sara 21:11

You know, if I tell a student to sit down and write a paragraph, that's going to be overwhelming for them, if they don't feel confident as a writer. But if I tell them to write one topic sentence, or two, brainstorm a list of three, it you know, whatever it is, that's much more manageable for a daily task, or you know, step one.

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Sara 21:40

And of course, you have to kind of you know, if you're putting a routine together, you might realize, okay, that doesn't that order doesn't work, you might need to flex around with a little bit. But I would encourage teachers to try and come up with a routine that works for specific needs.

S

Sara 21:52

If you're feeling a little bit like, Okay, I don't know, if I can come up with my own routine, then look for a resource that already exists. I have a ton of resources. Like I said, I have routines for vocabulary for sentence writing, for poetry, for reading comprehension, whatever it is, we've got some sort of system in place or routine in place for it.

S

Sara 22:09

So find a routine that already exists. But when you're going to be introducing a routine to your students really, for the first time, you want to think about how am I going to introduce this routine to help my students eventually become successful and independent.

S

Sara 22:23

So you got to sort of do the slow, slow roll, you know, you can't just say, here's the routine, ready, set, go, you got to really introduce it, take your time building up, you know, their stamina, their understanding of it. So you're really got to figure out you know, what part of the day is this going to make the most sense, and then when you're introducing it to your students, you know, you want to do the I do, we do, you do.

S

Sara 22:42

So the first time you introduce it, you're gonna go through the entire routine, modeling it to your students, showing them what it looks like doing the think aloud, you know, explaining why you're, you know, writing this thing here, why you're going to the dictionary, why you're drawing this picture, whatever it is, really modeling it.

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Sara 22:58

The next time you go through the routine, you're going to do it as a whole group, and you're going to have your students actively participate in it. You know, the next time you do it, maybe students do the routine in partnership. So that way, they're doing it independently, but they've got a friend so that way, they can ask questions, you know, they go through it together.

S

Sara 23:13

And then maybe by the time you're on the third or the fourth iteration of the routine, you know, students can start to do some do the routine independently. But of course, you're wanting to come back and review with it.

S

Sara 23:24

So you definitely don't want to be like we're starting this routine, here's what it is go for it, you know, you got to introduce it to your students. And really constantly keeping the end result in mind. The end result is for your students to independently complete the routine, with confidence and with success, meaning you're gonna have to slowly introduce it, give them feedback, provide correction as needed. You know, it eventually will become a very quick and efficient routine. But it does take either a couple of days or a couple of weeks to get up to that level of efficiency.

C

Chris 23:51

And I think that describes good teaching, no matter what your teaching, is that idea of start it and repeat it and build it in small steps, give feedback, let them practice, let them get to the right answer are all things. And building towards independence is a huge thing that we talk about around here. So I'm very, very excited that my listeners got to hear this today because I think it's really something that can be very, very useful in their classes without being overwhelming, which is also huge.

S

Sara 24:22

I was gonna say that's my goal. So I'm glad to hear that this seems like it'll resonate with your audience.

C

Chris 24:25

Yeah, I think it really will. I mean I can see a lot of different places as I've been working on some checklists for systems for lesson planning. And I'm like, Oh, this can go in there and how can I do this? So it just it gives me a ton of different ideas. So I'm really glad that they got to hear this.

C Chris 24:42

Tell us a little bit, I know that you've got a free tool that you can share with them and I would love for them to know how to find you in the internet.

S Sara 24:52

Yeah, absolutely. So I would love to share a free Word of the Week routine with your audience. It is the easiest routine to get started with and it's the one that I kind of talked about at the beginning, it has, you can either do it as like word of the day. So you could do all five tasks in one day. Or you could break it up and do it as Word of the Week. And I include five different words and the materials to go with it. So either this could be five weeks worth of Word of the Week, or five days worth of word of the day.

S Sara 25:18

So I will definitely include the link for that. But then if you're interested in learning about other literacy routines, or just literacy in general, specifically for upper elementary students, I have my podcast, The Stellar Teacher Podcast that comes out every single Monday with new episodes. They're usually literacy related.

S Sara 25:35

But then I also have a reading membership, The Stellar Teacher Reading Membership, which is for third through fifth grade teachers, and it really is your one stop shop for reading teachers. So if you need whole group lessons, small group lessons, Word Study lessons, we have pretty much everything you need.

S Sara 25:50

And like I said earlier, I truly love talking with teachers, I love nerding out over literacy. And so if you have a question about anything we talked about in this episode, or just anything literacy related, reach out to me on Instagram, I am @thstellarteachercompany, and I am happy to answer any questions or just provide any insight that your audience might have regarding literacy.

C Chris 26:11

Thank you so much, Sara. I will make sure that all of that gets into the show notes so that everybody knows how to find you. And I really want to thank you for coming and talking with us today because I think it'll be really, really valuable for all of the listeners.

S Sara 26:23

Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me, Chris. This was a great conversation.

absolutely. Thank you so much for having me, Chris. This was a great conversation.



Chris 26:31

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