

20 - Smart People Read

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Shipley Speaker: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Dr. Heald Speaker: Twice a month we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try. Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast to get notification future episodes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So today, we're so excited as we have Willie Spears here with us. He's an author, a motivational speaker, and he has 20 years of teaching and coaching experience.

He adds value to thousands each year through his business, the Willie Spears Experience. I have actually had the opportunity to know Willie a very long time as we went to the same college at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, and he was even doing great things there. So, Willie, thank you so much for being here today.

Willie Spears Speaker: Thank you all for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, so I want to start out real quick by saying that you just wrote a book called Smart People Read. So where did that come from? What inspired you?

Willie Spears Speaker: Well, that's kind of our slogan.

I've written eight books, and that's kind of the slogan for that part. When I was a young teacher about 20 years ago, our principal came to me and said that my energy, youth, and enthusiasm could change the culture of our school when it comes to literacy. I thought it was crazy.

I didn't understand why he needed me to do that. But after a little convincing, I decided I was going to tackle this and make it my passion. And so, I wanted to do everything I could to create excitement around reading for young people.

So, we developed several book clubs around campus, and then that started my process of writing books that I thought was more relevant to the young people instead of things that they did not know how to identify with. And so, my passion for reading with my very own children, and then later when I started coaching, I would read to my players when we were doing our workouts, and we were doing our ab circuits. And then it got to the point where if I forgot my book, my players got upset because they looked forward to me reading to them every single day.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Wow, Willie. Willie, I was a fifth-grade teacher, and I'll tell you, even in fifth grade, the students wanted to hear read alouds. They wanted to hear someone modeling fluency and asking comprehension and drawing them into the literacy.

So, you talked a little bit about your book clubs. Can you just talk a little bit more about what those might look like?

Willie Spears Speaker: Yes, the big part about it is you let the students take ownership. And so, we would take a scene out of each chapter, and we would act that out.

It was more impromptu, you know, more not to make sure it wasn't a monologue, but we wanted to make sure we took two characters from the book and we had them have a dialogue in front of everyone. And everyone saw the book differently once they saw us express what we saw. Because what happens is, as you're reading the book, you have a way in your mind where the character looks, how the character would act, the different mannerisms.

So that helped us with the book club. And then as social media became prevalent, we used social media to make trailers for the book club. So, if it was a book about basketball, it had a basketball scene, we would shoot a trailer on a basketball court, or we would shoot a trailer like a movie and show different excerpts from the book and that got people excited about it. And then we did everything in our power to put like 12 powerful words. A guy named Larry Bell came up with these words, infer, compare and contrast, formulate.

These words we made sure were infused into these books so that they would help them when it came to standardized testing. And they got to the point where they were telling us, coach, the next book we need to read is this book. Like when we read **Speak**, it really spoke to me.

So now we need to go ahead and read this book about this situation and this subject. And what happened, they ended up taking over the club and they just needed my classroom so they can have their book time.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's awesome.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: That's awesome. I love that. So, I know, Willie, that you enjoy helping others.

So, I just was wondering, as I was getting ready for this, what is your why? Why did you start doing all of these things? Was it back to that story or was there something else?

Willie Spears Speaker: Well, I just never was told I was smart. You know, I was told I was athletic. I was told that I was funny.

But no one ever said, Willie, you're smart. And when I started telling young people they were smart and it had a lot to do with their reading, it changed the way they saw themselves. And so, when you take a kid that says, you know, I want to be a professional football player when I grow up.

Well, I want to be an entertainer. And then you ask the question, well, are you going to trust someone else to read your contract or do you want to want to read your own contract? And the answer is always, I want to read my own contract. Well, then you have to be fluent in reading.

You have to have a passion for reading so no one takes advantage of you. And so that gave me a new passion for it. And my daughter, 15 years old, wrote a book.

And so, when my daughter wrote and published her first book, I was so excited. I mean, she never got the pat on the back, the kudos, the attaboys from playing softball and volleyball and running track as she did when she read a book. And it changed the way that she saw herself.

And so that right there made it more exciting for me to help other people realize their dream of becoming great readers and great writing. And you two know, when you read a book, you escape to a different world. So, during a pandemic, if you want to escape being quarantined, just dive into a book and you can leave this universe and go into another universe where things are much better or much more interesting until you close the book and come back to reality.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love that. Can I jump in for just a second? What was your daughter's book called? I want everybody to know that and where they can get that.

Willie Spears Speaker: It's **Spears Makes Her Point**.

Spears Makes Her Point is a play on the word *spear**. *Spears Makes Her Point**. They can get it on Amazon or williespears.com.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, perfect.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: All right, Willie. I want to know, take me through the Willie Spears house. How did you get your children to have this love of reading?

Willie Spears Speaker: Oh, that is a great question, Dr. Heald.

You're going to laugh at me, but we brainwashed him from the beginning. So, my wife, she's, I mean, academics is important to me. I have a master's degree in education, all that good stuff.

But my wife is a nerd to the one millionth power. She's geek squad all day long. Would rather read a book than watch the latest movie to come out.

So, I married into a great literacy, a legacy, if you will. But before they were born, of course, we read when they were in the womb like everyone else does, but we would pretend to read even when we weren't reading. When they were really little and we were playing Candy Crush on our phone, we would have a book up and have the cell phone inside the book so that they would think all we do is read.

And then for Christmas, we would give them book series. When they were learning little, they would not get toys. They would get book series on Christmas Eve.

The Christmas day, they would actually get toys, but they would look forward to those books. So even today at 16 and 15 years old, they're both reading series books right now. I took my daughter to New York last year to see Percy Jackson on Broadway because she had read the series so many times.

So, we talked about that. And then we only gave them big-time kudos when it came to reading. When Taylor hit a good bar, I said good job.

But when she read a good book, I said, "Tell me more about the book. What is happening next? What do you think is going to happen next?" So that kind of started it. And my son got away from it a little bit.

But now he's back in to reading another series. And he's in some series, something about America. I don't remember.

It's like a cartoon comic book series. He's on a 25th book. And so, they get in the car every Sunday and say, hey, after church, can we go to Books a Million? They have a passion and a reading passion.

And it's their lifestyle. And so, it's a lot to do with how we raise them up and kind of how we brainwash them.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, Willie, I want to know what your favorite book was when you were younger.

And what's your favorite book now?

Willie Spears Speaker: Oh, that's easy. Encyclopedia Brown Boy Detective. I mean, when I was young, that book is some of Judy Bloom's book.

I mean, I love it. Encyclopedia Brown Boy Detective, if you had a crime in the neighborhood, you flip your quarter on a hot water heater. You place it down.

He's going to solve the crime. I mean, he was better than Hill Street Blues, better than Law and Order. I mean, this was my book growing up.

And I loved it. It was a soundtrack of my life, if literacy can be a soundtrack. And right now, I read a lot of nonfiction books.

I love John Maxwell. I love autobiographies. I'm actually reading two or three books right now.

So, it depends on my mood of what nonfiction I read. But I read a lot of nonfiction. My wife and children read a lot of fiction books.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love it. Okay, so as we kind of wrap this up just a little bit, what are three takeaways that you want our listeners to know from you and who you are and what you're doing?

Willie Spears Speaker: But number one, I think all of us are in charge of making sure someone becomes a lifelong reader. And if they start young and they read series books, it'll keep their attention.

Number one.

Number two, there's nothing wrong with your cell phone or television. But be intentional about giving yourself an electronic time out and dive into a book.

You have to be intentional. You have to write it down and say, from five to six or from eight to nine, we're not going to everyone in the house going to turn our devices off. We're going to sit down and read.

And then the last thing I would say is make it fun. Make it exciting. Make the book come alive.

I'm an African American. Our children are African American. When they were young, we would make them do African American history projects and they would have to read books to learn the information.

And we did that because we realized they weren't learning these things. And so that was important to us. And the last thing I would say is I believe everyone; everyone should not take it for granted that we learn how to read at an early age in our country.

And people who don't learn how to read, it's a travesty. So, we should all help. And the last thing I promise, my neighbor, when I was eight years old, I don't remember her name, but she bought me a book, Meadowlark Lemon, The Crown Prince.

It was about the Harlem Globetrotters. And I read that was my first chapter book. I read it cover to cover, and it changed my life because I wanted another one.

And my neighbor bought me a book. So, I would encourage all of us to buy a young person a book. It can change your life.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love that.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Willie I love that. And let's give a big shout out to that neighbor who has helped to kind of mold this great speaker today.

All right, Willie, one last thing, a challenge for our listeners. What do you have?

Willie Spears Speaker: I challenge you to read a book a month. That's my challenge.

It's 12 months in a year. I challenge you to read one book per month. If your goal is one a month, you'll end up at least reading six books in a year.

And someone once told me, man, you're really smart. I said, no, I just read a lot of books, and I can remember what I read. I regurgitate and you think I'm smart.

But the people who wrote those books are the smart ones. So, I encourage everyone to kind of challenge them to read one book a month.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hey, Willie, you know, as we sit here and talk about this, something that might be good for you to start on your website is a book club where everybody does it virtually.

Willie Spears Speaker: I just did! Yesterday! Yesterday! You're pretty good. I just did. Yesterday, it started March 21st.

We're going to do it just for 30 minutes every Sunday evening. We're going to be on virtual and we're going to go through my book, Transforming Your Life from Good to Great, Daily Nuggets of Wisdom. And I'm going to ask people to tell me what their takeaway was from the chapter.

It's 20 chapters. Man, I feel better now. Wow. Thank you. I'm glad you said that.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hey, OK. So, you just mentioned your book. Is there a place that they can go on and get that book if they want to join the book club?

Willie Spears Speaker: Yes. They can go to williespears.com. Willie, like Willie Nelson, and Spears, like Britney Spears.

Those are my two cousins, Willie Nelson and Britney Spears. So williespears.com. Or they can just go to Amazon and type in Willie Spears and the books will come up.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Willie, this has been amazing. I knew that you would be fun to have on the show. We appreciate you so much. And we will have you back.

Willie Spears Speaker: Well, thank you so much. And make sure everybody goes subscribe. I've been listening to the podcast.

And I'm so much smarter for listening to those 10-minute increments. When I go into a classroom, they think I'm a genius. So, you need to go do the very same thing. Subscribe, subscribe, subscribe.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Thank you, Willie. Talk to you soon.

Willie Spears Speaker: Thank you, guys. Bye-bye.