



# Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books & Imagination with Your Children

*Sarah Clarkson*

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## **Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books & Imagination with Your Children** Sarah Clarkson

What is imagination, and why is it vital to childhood education? What role do great books play in shaping a child's perception of self, life, and even God?

In "Caught Up in a Story," Sarah Clarkson answers these vital questions, demonstrating how great books can be a parent's best ally in shaping a child to love what is beautiful, pursue what is good, and grasp what is true.

Drawing on her own storyformed childhood and her long study of children's literature, Sarah Clarkson explores and celebrates the soul-forming power of story to help children imagine, and live, a great story of their own.

## **Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books & Imagination with Your Children Details**

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## From Reader Review Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books & Imagination with Your Children for online ebook

### Kelsey Bryant says

Having grown up “storyformed,” I knew reading was powerful ... but I didn’t fully realize how powerful until I read *Caught Up in a Story*. “Storyformed” is a word Ms. Clarkson appears to have coined (it’s the name of her website, too) that means that a person’s understanding of life has been formed by the great stories they have read. Fiction (and narrative biography), because it immerses you in another life, another world, can teach and transform you like no nonfiction and reference books can. Reading great books grows your spiritual life, interests you in new pursuits, enriches your vocabulary (and by extension your understanding of the world), teaches you how to live life heroically, and gives you hope for the ultimate Happy Ending. Instead of distracting you from life, reading *story* is essential to keeping you focused on God’s ideal for life.

I could go on and on about the benefits of story, which Ms. Clarkson outlines so poetically in her book. But I should delve into the other facets. I loved the way she organized it: associating a point in the classic “dramatic arc” (exposition, rising action, crisis, falling action, denouement), to a particular stage of childhood development, and then explaining the association and capping off each with ten appropriate books. Because she is so well read, I’ve added most of the books I have not yet read to my to-read list.

She advocates fantasy (at least fantasy based on Christian values, like *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*) because it helps children grasp the epic nature of life. I personally think she makes a good point about it (though I’ll never feel comfortable reading or recommending Harry Potter, which she mentions), but if you’re not okay with fantasy, bear this in mind. You will probably still get a lot out of the parts that just talk about general fiction and classics.

Her writing is elegant and welcoming, and she illustrates her reasoning with personal anecdotes. The book is addressed to parents, since they are charged with shaping their children’s moral worldview, but anyone who values reading will find an exciting treasury of insights.

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### Sherry says

I can think of no higher compliment than to say that Ms. Clarkson's prose reminds me of C.S. Lewis's writing, but more female, in a very good way.

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### Stephanie says

I enjoyed reading the perspective of a homeschool graduate, telling tales of how her life was formed by stories. Overall the book was very encouraging--with excellent book recommendations strewn throughout.

There were two slight and minor drawbacks, however--although no fault of the author's. For one, the book is (of course) heavily swayed toward the feminine experience of growing up "storyformed." It left me yearning for Sarah's brother to pen a similar account. As a mother of all sons, I would love to hear the inner workings

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of a boyhood shaped by stories. The book does touch on her storyformed adventures alongside her brothers while growing up--but missing the first-person insight from a boy's mind and heart. Nevertheless, this book still was a great motivational push for me...a push to keep reading aloud to my boys...knowing that by doing so I am shaping their very foundations. The book's overarching theme to read, read, read quality literature to children is applicable to young/old and both genders.

The second drawback is the author's age--Sarah Clarkson is a college student. There is a subtle hint of naivety woven throughout the book...as she has never been a parent herself but has, in essence, directed her book as a manual to: parents. The book is broken up into the different phases of childhood development, giving suggestions to parents on how to use literature to assist the child's formative stages. I appreciated this concise organization and found it insightful on many levels. However, it's one thing to have lived as a storyformed child, but quite another task to teach parents how-it-is-done.... without ever having....done it. It lacked the tried-and-true "here's how I transferred my storyformed methodology in real life, to real children." Instead she paves a path for us based on her own memories of what her parents did for her--and memories are often rosy and lacking the bumps and grit. I would much more have loved her book to simply be an autobiography--because her story is truly inspiring. I loved her philosophy and the insight into her childhood shaped by books, but I struggled to connect with her as a parent in the trenches.

Overall this book was well worth the read, and most of my copy is highlighted. I plan to reference this book often for book recommendations in the various childhood stages.

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### **Elizabeth says**

Absolutely breathtaking read. This author is so wise and I'm sold on anything she writes. I have always been a fan of story and reading to my children...but this took it to a whole new level. Clarkson really understands how story and really good books affect children. Her book suggestions are amazing and I'm just completely sold in this amazing author.

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### **Steve says**

An argument for story-formed living living that shapes our family life.

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### **K.M. Weiland says**

I was incredibly touched by this book. It filled me in a way I didn't even realize I was thirsty for until I read it. Although its ostensible purpose is to advocate for a "storyformed" childhood (and it does a fine job of that), this book is so much more.

It is a "reader's memoir," full of stories about meaningful books the author grew up with. It plunged me back into my own childhood and made me remember stories I hadn't even realized had shaped me so profoundly.

Even more than a walk down memory lane, though, it was an incredible validation to me, as an author, about why I do what I do. It speaks to the Christian walk powerfully and with much encouragement. It's a quiet, unobtrusive book. But epochal for all that.

Honestly, I think it just changed my life.

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### **Amy says**

This is so much more than a "book about books". It challenges us to really KNOW and LOOK FOR the beauty of God in the written word...it drives home the importance of literature as an avenue for children, giving them concrete images of things like character, love, beauty, & valor for them to emulate! I was inspired and challenged about how I view God at times. This is a beautiful book!

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### **Holly says**

When I was a child I cried my eyes dry when The Little Match Girl struck her last match to keep warm and found her grandmother. When The Little Mermaid turned into foam on the waves of the sea, I was moved to deep pity. It was so important to me that The Velveteen Rabbit not be burned with the garbage that even to this day I sleep with the rag doll my mama made me when I was two months old, just to be sure that she stays "real." I once stunned my mother by eagerly eating my green beans at dinner. . .a side dish I normally loathed, despised and abominated. . .and all because I had just finished The Long Winter.

Reading the right stories as a child made me want to be a good, kind, grateful, obedient-- and maybe just a little bit magical--little girl.

As a mother (and now as Marmee) I have wanted to put the right kind of stories in my children's imaginations so that they will aspire to noble things and have a vibrant life of the mind. I strongly believe (and my observations have affirmed) that putting the WRONG kinds of stories into our children's hands makes them more base in their expectation, crude in their demeanor and limited in their interpersonal interactions.

Caught Up in a Story is a short, but potent, rallying call to the heart of parents regarding how and why to invest the time to purposefully craft a child's worldview through great literature.

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### **Jennifer says**

This book is so rich. It is abundant in encouragement and filled with Truth. It deserves a slow, quiet read that I did not give it, but hope to in the future. It has warmed me and validated things I understood in the periphery of my mind but did not have the words to express. Thanks, Sarah.

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### **Candice says**

This is probably one of the most important and encouraging books I've read in a few years. It expounded and clarified the vague sense I've carried since childhood that reading and stories were important and part of my identity. We can truly be changed by what we read, so what we choose to read ourselves and to our children holds eternal weight. Less

## Laura says

A couple of days ago I read Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books & Imagination with Your Children by Sarah Clarkson. It's very short, but would make a good gift for young parents.

For decades one of my go-to baby shower gifts has been a selection of picture books and one or two classic books for older children (e.g., The Wizard of Oz, The Box Car Children, The Secret Garden, etc.) and - when I remember it - a copy of The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease. Sarah Clarkson's book would be another one I would include in that mix.

If you are older, like me, you may be familiar with Annis Duff's lovely books on books and reading aloud: "Bequest of Wings" and "Longer Flight." This book pales in comparison to those, but as they are out of print and this is new (and well-written), it's a satisfactory substitute.

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## Melissa says

Sarah Clarkson has written a book that sums up my educational philosophy on reading and on life: the storyformed soul...that this life is an epic tale created by the Greatest Storyteller and "each of us has but one tale to live as valiantly" or as vile as we can. There are "soul forming, self-shaping" influences in the stories we read.

Favorite quote: "Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten." Chesterton (62)

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## Shiloah says

Sarah is an excellent writer. I enjoyed her stories of healing through books. She filled up my Amazon cart, though I have read many she recommended as well. I especially appreciated her well-thought out argument for the Harry Potter books for Christian families.

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## Bambi Moore says

If you need reaffirmation of the value of reading to your children and providing them with the best literature to read for themselves, this is your book! Some will remember the book Honey for a Child's Heart and this book at times reminded me of it. Great insights on the role, value and spiritual need of imagination that is shaped by good books.

I also think that many young adult ladies (and their parents) would also benefit from Sarah's reflections, scattered here and there, on the temptations and doubts of the teen and young adult years.

## Sara says

This book paints a beautiful picture of raising children who are "story-formed," which means giving them a solid foundation in truth, beauty, and goodness through story so that they are inspired to hope, to persevere through hardship, and to lead heroic lives. This book blew up my "want to read" list, both for myself and with my children, and offers such a beautiful and practical way of equipping our children to face the inevitable hardships of this world. Not exactly a "parenting book," but a wonderful parenting resource nonetheless.

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