



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 188

[thesimpleshow.com](http://thesimpleshow.com)

## Segment One

Tsh: [00:00:02](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider. Hi friends! In this episode, I'm chatting with contributing writer Christine Bailey. As always, we're talking about what we wrote about this week on The Art of Simple. Christine shared with us her day in the life and I've been excited to read this one because if you remember, she's a farmer and I'm intrigued with how she spends her days mostly because they're so different from those of us who live in neighborhoods and to other types of work that don't necessarily involve our literal land. She gets into what's she's learned from the practice of recording a typical day in her life, namely the value of slowing down, of learning to embrace the chaos and our full plates, not necessarily busyness and the beauty of "delightfully misplacing our phones." And then because this week I wrote about what books I read this past month I'm chatting about the why, how, and what of reading more classics. It doesn't have to be pretentious or hard. It can actually be fun with the right mindset. And then in the third segment I'm chatting with listener Lindsay Hopkins about her work as an illustrator, hand letterer and small business owner. So, let's get right into it. Here's Christine sharing what she's learning these days about the value of slower analog work.

Christine, I've actually been really eager to talk to you about your day in the life in particular because I think your life is just so interesting having formerly been in an urban environment and now you guys are like full on farmers. I would love to know more about what you learned by recording your day in the life so tell us more.

Christine: This was actually a really fun practice. I don't think I've ever done this before and it was just really neat. I think that we often get asked the question if we are actually busy or people assume maybe we're not so busy because we live in the country. I guess it was this kind of perception that we're just living slow lives and hanging out on the front porch and visiting with people and we do that a lot. What I realized through this is that I am really busy. I prefer to use the word full. I like that word better. It sounds a little more positive.

Tsh: I actually do that too. I have this weird visceral reaction to the word busy. I like saying I have a full plate more than my schedule is busy. I'm with you there.

Christine: Yeah, just sounds more positive. I honestly am really happy with the things that my days are filled with that. We do have a busy life. But I think some things that I realized and recording my day in the life is first that my peaceful setting really does make the busier days a little bit more bearable. Just because at the end of the day I walk out my back door and it's beautiful. There are birds singing. We live across the street from a really big creek that is year round running and it's almost like a river sometimes and literally on my front porch, hear the sound of water running constantly. Which is so peaceful and we're connected to the earth and just in farming. I literally go outside and pick lettuce for dinner pretty much every day. Those things I think offset the really busy days where I feel like I've literally been running in so many different directions.

Tsh: I have to say, I mentioned this to you before we hit record just a few minutes ago, but I think of farmers honestly as some of the busiest people on the planet in terms of, correct me if I'm wrong, but it almost feels like you guys are so connected to the land you're on that it's not like you can just take a day off from watering or checking on things. I even picture is it even hard to go on vacation? I know that there are seasons, but to me I definitely don't picture you rocking in your rocking chair doing nothing but sipping tea and having a grand old time. I know your plate has got to be so full.

Christine: Yeah it is. Even this morning before I left to record this podcast, I had to rush up to the greenhouse, open the doors, open the covering for the seed trays so it doesn't get too hot before I get back. There's definitely things like that you have to do every single day. If we do want to go out of town, we have to plan ahead and have somebody take care of the farm for us that we really trust and that knows what they're doing. There is that, but there is this feeling of being able to slow down time in a way and that's something that has been on my heart for a really long time, that I've been wanting to explore more. Writing this day in the life helped me realize that that is really important to me as much as it's in my own control. The more I pay attention in those small moments which recording your day, your hour by hour life really helps you do that, that I'm able to pull back the reins on time a little bit more.

Tsh: I think the idea of recording makes you just realize how much more control of your day you do have. Even though a lot of times, especially when you have younger kids, it is reactionary. That doesn't mean that you're just beholden to whatever the day throws at you. I think that's really one of the benefits of both recording your day in the life and of embracing a slower pace day like you just said.

Christine: Yes, I totally agree. And I was listening to your day in the life with Katherine where you guys mentioned that Ted talk and it's so true that we do have the time, we do make the time and we do have the time or things that really do

matter to us. It's kind of an excuse to use that I just don't have time or I'm too busy and using the phrase "I'm too busy" sometimes is more of, there can be a pride thing in it sometimes. I have so many things to do. Out of all of this whole practice of recording my day in the life, I came up with this new little motto that I've been thinking about every day since and it's just this, today I will log more moments in the present so time feels longer.

Tsh: I love that idea, so time feels longer. That's really good.

Christine: Obviously we can't actually down time. I wish we could, but I think there are ways to live in a way that's paying attention that can make it feel longer, you know? That was definitely something that was really impressed on me after doing this.

Tsh: I think the whole idea of moments in the present reminds me of this concept of mindfulness, which only until this year, 2019, I've brushed off or not even really stopped to think about because to me it just sounds like a buzzword or something kind of woo-woo. But ever since one of our cohost, Andrea talked about it as a form of meditation and then I started exploring this idea that you and I are actually going to podcast about in the near future about mindful eating, to me, it just reminds me of this mindfulness idea where you are paying attention in the very present moment to the little things, especially if you engage all five senses as a way of appreciating where you are instead of always thinking about what's next. I'm a future oriented thinker in person, so this actually takes a lot of practice for me. Something like mindfulness meditation is a legitimately good thing to do and is not just this pie in the sky, atheorial idea. There's a real habit and practice to it.

Christine: I agree. I loved that episode with Andrea because that is not something that I have much familiarity with either. I think that's so true, especially now. I know we've talked a little bit about the whole digital versus analog way of living and people are going back to more analog lately and people are limiting their social media and things like that. I think right now, we're noticing that it's harder to pay attention and it's easier to be distracted and easier to not be mindful in the moment. I think there's a return to that right now where people are wanting that.

Tsh: I think in some ways there's almost like we've reached fever pitch, like there's a max capacity any of us can take to constantly being logged on. I think we're all starting to collectively as a culture say, okay, this is enough. We cannot have one more app to check or one more social media profile or one more reason to be online. I think we're hearing a lot of this, maybe it's particular to our demographic of listeners, but I don't know, I think there's something a little more widespread about just this desire to both be more mindful in the present and to literally, like you say, be more analog instead of digital. Like actually not

having your phone with you all the time or writing down things more with pen and paper instead of on an app.

Christine: Yes. It's so true. I actually had this past weekend, Saturday and Sunday, this past weekend felt so long to us.

Tsh: Me too actually.

Christine: I'd love to hear your thoughts, too. Stephen and I were processing it on Monday morning and just saying, why did it feel like that? What exactly was it about it that made our weekend feel that way? Because we did so much work. We had our farm store open Saturday morning. We were up way before that, he was up at six o'clock making cinnamon rolls for the farm store and we were taking care of the chickens and the greenhouse and our girls were involved in everything we did. We were working as a family all day long. But then we literally just spread blankets all over our lawn right by our apple tree. We all brought books outside and we built a campfire and we just laid in the sun reading and my kids had no toys. We just played with each other and talked and read books for hours and sat by the fire. I realized at the end of Saturday night or at the end of Sunday night, that I had no idea where my phone was. I had delightfully misplaced my phone. I had no idea where it was all weekend. I think there is something to that that, that more analog way of living where just time feels like it can stretch on in, in a good way, in the best possible way. I actually didn't find my phone until the next morning and it was under one of the chairs outside covered in dew.

Tsh: Oh my gosh. And it still works?

Christine: It still works, it's an iPhone 10. It was hilarious and I think that really had a lot to play in why it felt like so good.

Tsh: I love that phrase, "delightfully misplaced my phone." I think that's a really good way to describe a good sabbath or a good break from the screen. I think it's really interesting, you know how phones now will give you a weekly report of how much time you spent? I find that to be really handy because I'm almost gamifying it with myself, let's see if I can get that down even more this next week. Because I have a 14 year old daughter and so we've entered the stage of the hybrid intersection of parenting with phones and we set up the parameters provided by Apple where you can create limits for different apps and different times and all that stuff. It's really helpful. But her phone use has gone down tremendously just by setting up these parameters. I think it's simply because I'm right there with her. It's not because of her in particular, we're just not aware of how much time we spend on our devices. I think you're spot on that there really is something to time maybe feeling richer or fuller or like you gain more of it when you're not on your screen. I think it's just because they're inherently

created to be addictive. Before we know it, four hours have gone by and we swore we were on for 30 minutes.

Christine: It is so true. When you even mentioned, writing with pen and paper, I thought about the days that are my writing day, when I get away and I'm on my laptop and I'm trying to write all these things and get all these things out, those days feel like they go by so quickly and all of a sudden I'm like, oh my goodness, it's noon. I still have so much to do and I've actually thought about shifting over to pen and paper instead and just seeing how that goes and then maybe typing it up later after I've taken the whole day to write everything by hand. That'll be an interesting experiment to see if that makes my days more productive and feel like I got actually more done.

Tsh: That's interesting. It's been a while since I've done this, but I have in the past written some blog posts in long form, like a literal yellow legal pad. It's actually been truly enjoyable. I think I did that once, whenever I read that Wendell Berry still would write his books on with pen and paper and then his wife would type them up, which I just think is hilarious because that's like the opposite of "productive". That's not efficient at all. But who says it always needs to be efficient, you know?

Christine: I totally agree. I'm curious what you said that you had some days that felt really long. Do you have any thoughts about what that was like for you or why?

Tsh: Well, you're going to laugh because you're a farmer, so this is small, small scale to you. But we started this last Lent where we, because we live in a fixer upper, our landscaping has been last on our list, but we decided last year, even when we weren't "ready," we were going to start a backyard garden and we made that part of our Lenten practice. This year we're doing it again where we've dusted off the square foot gardening little patches we've made. Basically this past weekend, we replanted stuff and just cleaned out the weeds and re-mulched and tilled the soil and did all that stuff, which is probably what you do all day every day. But for us it was an intentional, okay we're going to dig up the gardening gloves and put on the messy clothes and do this. I think there was something special and magical and a little sacred about getting in the dirt with my kids that made time feel so much slower. Really, both Saturday and Sunday, we spent so much time working on the garden and it was slow in all the right ways. It took a while. There's no way to fast track getting the weeds out or getting the soil ready. I mean you just had to do the manual labor and it was really nice and all the kids, I think there was just something, first of all, the weather's great here right now, like the March and April, really spring is best in central Texas. Everyone wanted to be outside and the sun was shining. I think we just enjoyed time together outside and I don't know if I delightfully misplaced my phone, but I don't remember really being on it much, which tells me that my

priority was more in the present than just thinking about what other people were doing elsewhere and it was really great.

Christine: I absolutely love that and it reminds me, that's how we started. I mean literally, exactly the weekend you've described is our life in Dallas before we even had a farm and we did square foot gardening and we would dedicate whole weekends to that and so I totally know that feeling and it's so wonderful.

Tsh: I think another, another reason why our weekend was nice and slow was because we intentionally did something different on Saturday. We went on a little, I wouldn't even call it a day trip because we stayed in our own town, but we just did a little of hometown tourism, which I'm going to write about later, the concept of. We went on a hike at a place we'd never been to before here in Georgetown, and so we put on our tourist hats without going anywhere and that was a really great experience to do together as well.

Christine: I love that so much. What's interesting about what you described as your slow day and what I described is that we both did work and so our daily lives obviously don't look like the weekend, and it's not that there's the absence of work, but I think there's something about there being the absence of frenzy or chaos, at least for me that makes it feel like have that good slowness to it.

Tsh: Yeah.

Christine: It's not that you're just laying around all day really. I mean, even though we sometimes need those days where it's just pure rest, but there is something so good in work too, but when you're doing it maybe with people that you love and you're doing work that feels like purpose, that has purpose to it.

Tsh: That's a good observation. I think there's something about a way we approach work that can change things. We're so used to thinking that we need to make productivity our end game or efficiency, like I was mentioning earlier, as though that's the marker of a good day's work and maybe it's not so much the checking off of a bunch of things on the to do list, but instead working well in the moment and calling that a good day's work.

Christine: Yep. I totally agree.

Tsh: I'm about to publish an episode where I talk with Emily Freeman and I brought this up already, but there was a tweet that went out a few weeks ago that really stopped me in my tracks and it was so good and it was a pastor talking about he was getting ready for a sermon that he was writing about the Sabbath, and so he was listing five reasons Sabbath is good for us. One of them he said was that Sabbath as a reminder that our work will remain incomplete. I thought that

simple little truth was so helpful for me because it's easy for me to think a good days work doesn't happen until I complete it. To be reminded that it's never actually done is I think a really good helpful way to just lean into the day instead of trying to rush through it.

Christine: I think there's a whole thing we can write on work, that good work or work that feels like play or what makes work enjoyable. I think that could be a whole other topic.

Tsh: It really could. I would love that. Tell me a little bit about any practical thoughts you have for listeners on how they could create this because most of us aren't farmers and we don't get to live by a babbling brook. Tell us some practical ways we could set up a version of this in our own lives.

Christine: I thought of just a couple ways that we can maybe try and slow down time and just make things a little slower in our lives. The first one I thought of was just setting up our lives in such a way that there is minimal rushing or a need for an agenda. Obviously, I know we can't do this every single day and we have things we have to do and there's deadlines and things like that. But for me, when I'm not running my life like a to do list and when I'm not seeing my children as obstacles getting in the way of my day, that really helps. But then on those days when I am just running down this to do list, I'm running over people in just my desire to get things done. Those are the days that just feel Yucky. It feels like, whoa, what did I even do today? The whole day has gone. I didn't really pay attention to anyone. I didn't really enjoy my present moment at all. I think just striving to add in more of those days where you're not having to rush and it goes back to that quote from the Ted talk that we really make the choices of how we spend our time and what our priorities are. Are we filling our schedules and our kids' schedules with so many things that are distractions? And just analyzing that and seeing how we can tweak it or make it better. And I love the quote from Dallas Willard, it's so simple, but he just says, "I must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from my life."

Tsh: [00:19:41](#) I've heard that one. I really liked that too.

Christine: It's so good. It's just a very bold statement that I must do this and ruthlessly have to, because it's fighting against really culture and it's fighting against what everyone else around you tends to be doing. Sometimes it's really going against the grain to do that.

Tsh: It's interesting how we have to be basically really proactive about being slow. It's not the default setting in our world anymore. And so in order to do these things, you can't just wish it would happen. You have to set up perimeters. You have to do things to create an agenda for your day or delightfully misplace your phone. I

think those are things that we can do, we can choose to do and not just wish they would happen. I think that quote is perfect.

Christine: Yes, I think it's a very intentional decision.

## Segment Two

Tsh: [00:23:56](#) Okay, so I love that you wrote about your day in the life and taking with it this idea of slowing down because to me what I wrote about is just my usual monthly column about what I read this past month, but I didn't necessarily want to just focus on the books or even reading in general. I wanted to unpack a little bit this idea of reading the classics. The reason is because I have been a high school English teacher for almost a school year now, which is really fun for me. And with that has come more of a strong opinion than I've had before about the value of reading the classics. I was an English major, I have my degree in it, so I have read so many classics to where I had my fill by the time I was done with college. Getting high schoolers engaged in this idea has brought me back a little bit to the basics of this philosophy and has forced me to add more classics to my repertoire. I was looking at my reading a shelf, what I've accomplished so far in 2019 and I was just laughing at it because I've got some of these classics I haven't had visited in many years all the way to a lot of lighter modern day fluff. I say that with love because I think we need all sorts of writing in our lives. I'm going to start off by saying, when I say classics, I am doing air quotes as I say that word. I think classics needs to be in quotes because what you may call a classic, I might call something else, or even more broadly what one culture might deem a classic for them is different than perhaps our culture.

This idea of reading the classics is really broad. I'm not necessarily talking about some particular lineup. All you have to do is Google classic literature and there's top one hundreds written by just about every publication. Everyone has their idea of what constitutes a classic. But for the sake of this conversation, I want to highlight a few points of what I mean when I say a classic and then I'll get into the nitty gritty. To me, a classic is just some kind of work of art that stands the test of time. Usually it means it's been around a while. That doesn't mean there's not modern day classics, but I do think there's something to be said about the fact that certain books are still read whenever we have so much being published on a weekly basis this day and age that we are still reading books written centuries ago, that we still read Shakespeare. There's something to be said about that, you know?

Christine: I'm excited to hear about this because I'm not good at reading the classics and I'm hoping that I will be encouraged after this.

Tsh: Honest to goodness, I have gotten out of the habit. You know I used to podcast quite a bit with Haley Stewart about books and she would always talk about some classic she read that month and I'd just be in awe, that's really interesting. With everything that I want to read right now, classics don't show up as often as I would like them to. I completely get it and I'm gonna actually, whenever I'm done talking about what I think makes classic, I'm going to tie in something I read recently that just sticks with me about this whole idea. Hang with me if you're listening and are thinking, oh gosh, I don't want to read classics.

To me, another thing that like constitutes a classic is that there is a certain universal appeal. Now that doesn't mean everybody has to like all the same things, but there's something about it that touches readers to their core because they are about themes that are a little more universal that don't have to do with just one specific subset of people, whether it's age or culture. Themes of love, hate, death, faith, all these things, maybe just get to our basic core emotional responses. I think that's something that's a little more universally true about a classic, that it has universal appeal. I think there's also this idea that it's artistically well done, meaning it's well written. I remember whenever I was first thinking about this as a writer myself, like what are the books that have stood the test of time? Usually they're books that are just well done, written by really good writers. I know that's kind of a "duh" thing, but it's hard to find that a lot of times with modern work, that doesn't mean there's not great stuff being published, but you just never know. Just because it's being published now doesn't mean it's because it was written by a great author, if that makes any sense.

Christine: Right, and for it to still stand the test of time that it's interesting to people in our time period to read it. That just proves the quality of the writing.

Tsh: I'm really glad you said that because that was going to be my last point, is that I think a classic has relevance to multiple generations. You can read a book like Jane Eyre that was written in the Victorian time period, the first half of the 19th century and there's so much that we can take away in our own life now about what it means in our regular life about enduring hardships or standing firm on the truth that being true to yourself, knowing yourself. There's so many truths that span beyond the Victorian era from Jane Eyre. I think that's indicative of lots of classics that you can read Shakespeare and really understand the human, what it means to be human. Because it was the same in the 1500s as it is in 2019. To me, that's what it means to be a classic. I say that and then I want to, before I get into the practicals here, there is a person I follow on Twitter named Joy Clarkson. She is delightful.

Christine: Oh yeah. Sally Clarkson's daughter.

Tsh: That's right. She writes a lot about the reading life and she tweeted about a year ago now, I'm going to read this to you. It says, "When someone hasn't read a classic book, I always try to say, oh, what a treat you have ahead of you rather than, I can't believe you haven't read this yet because no one wants to be shamed into reading. We should lead with our delight in literature, not our pretentiousness."

Christine: Oh, that's good.

Tsh: That tweet went viral. I think it's been shared almost 60,000 times now and I really loved that. It stuck with me for months after she tweeted it because I think that is so true that whenever we broach topic of reading the greats, it's so easy to feel a little bit shamed, like I haven't read fill in the blank yet, and you almost don't want to admit it. Instead of just owning it and then hoping the person's response will be like, oh, I can't wait to hear what you think. What luck for you! You get to read this for the first time. What a great experience. I say this for anyone listening right now, that is my posture here. It is not at all to say you have to read these books in order to call yourself a reader, not at all. You get to experience a classic that you haven't yet read and what a great experience.

Christine: That's encouraging because I'm just going to go ahead and confess that I returned *Pride and Prejudice* to the library and I didn't finish it. Oh my word. It was going so slow and I was like, I know I need to read this and this is such a beautiful classic, but I don't know. I'm encouraged. I'm ready to learn from you right now because I really would love to do this.

Tsh: Okay, well I'm going to get into the whole what to do about the "I don't like this book" because I think that's truer for more of us than we would realize. To me, the why behind reading the classics, I've already alluded to this a little bit, but one of the main reasons to me is that it reminds us of our collective humanity that the things we deal with now are not new. I think Solomon, thousands of years ago when he said there's nothing new under the sun, I think we're reminded of that frequently whenever we read these greats that have been around a long time. To me, it's endearing to read about love about loss, about conflict, that happened so long ago that still happens now. I think there's encouragement to find through those books. It slows us down. I think these books that are older, they're often written in a style that maybe we're not used to as much today. While that can be time consuming or a bit overwhelming, that also can just force us to slow down and enjoy the process of deciphering what the author was trying to say. I was reminding the students of this quite a bit this past year when we did our Shakespeare unit that yes, this is English. Yes, it sounds very different than what we're used to you, but this is good for you. This is good for your brain, actually. It strengthens our brain to try something that maybe is a little bit out of our comfort zone. With that it does temper our desire

to feel current or be always on the here and now, and I was reminded of this whenever I would podcast with Haley about this and we talk about what books we had read that past month. For me, it was very tempting sometimes to read a book because everyone else was talking about it or it's on the current bestseller list or you just don't want to miss out on what this book is that everyone's talking about. Whenever you choose to add a classic to your repertoire, you're not exactly doing it to stay current. You're not doing it because everybody is talking about it right now. Probably not. And I think that's good for us. I think it's good to remember, we don't need to always be on the know about every single popular thing at the moment.

Christine: That's a really good point.

Tsh: There are studies that have been shown that reading the classics increases your social perception, emotional intelligence, and personal ethics. I think that's really interesting. Another reason is because modern references, modern storytelling now is full of older references. In fact, there's a theory that there's really no new storyline at all, that there's seven basic plots through all storytelling. But I think aside from the plot, there's even just turns of the phrase or just different concepts that really literally do come from Shakespeare, from Jane Austen, from Dickens, so many of these greats that we enjoy now that you're not as aware of until you've read some of these.

I've noticed this personally as an English teacher this year, even though I'm fairly well read in some of these classics, I had forgotten and I will see Shakespearian phrases or references to Dickens all the time now in the most unexpected places, like some TV show that is not exactly considered highbrow at all. There will be references. It's like it's in our DNA and we're not even aware of it.

Christine: That's so interesting. I never would have thought of a lot of these things.

Tsh: The last few reasons I think it's good to read the classics are on the practical side. One reason is that they're usually free or easy to find. Most libraries have a good collection of the classics. There's a lot of audio book versions out on the Internet that are free. There's easy ways to even read online because these are all out in the public domain because they're old enough and so they're easily accessible in the practical sense. And then also there's often good movies that are made from books. They're not always good, but a lot of them are. It's a fun treat. You get to reward yourself. I've done this with high schoolers this past year. They are always more eager to read the book if they see on our syllabus, we're gonna watch the movie when we're done. No shame in that game. I'm with them. I love watching a good movie adaptation of a book. There's a lot of good ones out there. If you're listening to this and thinking, okay, I'm on board,

but where do I start? There's a lot of classics. Here are a few tips that I've learned from my own life and from these high schoolers that I teach.

The first one is just pick something and honest to goodness go with something that seems easier if you want. That is 100% okay. Perhaps don't dive right into, *Les Miserables* or *Voltaire* or something like that. Go with Winnie the Pooh. Honest to goodness, that's one of my favorite classics. There's absolutely no shame in that. Start easy. It's really okay. With that, the flip side of the same coin is read what you like, so don't feel ashamed if you do need to put down *Pride and Prejudice*, I think that's perfectly okay. I think it's fine. Or maybe try again later. You know what I mean? Don't say, I'm never again reading this to say I'm going to give this a try another time. I think there's also a good seasons to read certain things, so that's why we have be treats, right. You're not really in the mood to unpack the Victorian class system and the plight of child labor while you're on vacation sitting in a hammock. I mean, maybe you are, but it's okay to just say, I'm going to read this another time. It's totally fine.

Christine: That's good. I can see how different seasons we contribute for sure.

Tsh: Yeah, a hundred percent. With that though, I would also add, try to expand your horizons. We do have a lot of just go-tos and they tend to be old white guys to be honest because that's just the way the world has worked for so many centuries, especially in the western world. But perhaps a branch out and see what other classics there are. Look into maybe a different cultures and what they would consider as classics. Maybe on the eastern side of things, perhaps look at a time period that you're not as familiar with or perhaps even think of a sub genre of people from your own culture that you don't know as much about. If you are white, perhaps read a series of classics written by a black authors or Asian authors or something like that. Even from your own culture, from the US for example, there's lots of ways to read classics that aren't just your standard, old dead white guy, basically.

Another thing, don't be a snob about this. Harder and obscured doesn't necessarily mean better. It's back to Joy's concept. You don't necessarily need to read just because you're supposed to "have read" that. There are some newer books out that some people are already considering classics and that's great too. It's not like you have to go back as far as you can in the English language. You don't have to start with *Beowulf* or something like that's written so long ago because that's just what one does. You don't really need to worry about what "they" say. Do what works for you.

To top it off, make this whole experience fun. You don't need to think of this as a chore. Maybe do a book club. There's a book club in town with friends. I'm not part of it just because of time, but I've heard it's great where they do nothing

but read classics and it's their way of, I don't want to say making it palatable, but perhaps just making it a little more enjoyable because they know they're going to go to a coffee shop in town with girlfriends and get to talk about *Middlemarch* or some of these books that otherwise feel a bit daunting, especially if you're going to read it by yourself. A lot of book clubs also add food and that could be fun. Like food from the time period or from the location. I think there's always good ways to just make it a treat to look forward to. You can also just pepper this with your usual reads. If you prefer modern stuff, that is totally fine and not at all saying abandon your book now and only read the classics. Just perhaps toss one in there a few times a year and call it good. There's no way you're going to read it all so don't try to make that your goal. Just read them every now and then. I think that's totally valuable.

Just to wrap this up, I'm going to just toss out a few suggestions of where to start that are perhaps in that category of easier or maybe more accessible is the right term, because the reason they're classics aren't necessarily because they're easy to read, but like I said, they have a universal appeal and they've stood the test of time. Of course, this is all subjective. I hate even saying these are the definitive books you have to read before you die or something like that because everyone has a bone to pick with that in one way or another, I can't believe you didn't mention this or I can't believe you do like this as much as you do. These are just books that came to my mind that I think are maybe good places to start if you're overwhelmed at the thought.

At the top of my list is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, written in 1960. It's not too terribly old, but oh my goodness, is that well-written and worth everybody's time if you can manage it. It's so well written and it's really easy to read.

Christine: Oh, good. I love that book.

Tsh: Yeah, I do too. I'm going to have my students read it next year even though a lot of them already have, I think it's worth reading. I want to make sure they get that book sometime in their high school career. I think it's that important.

Another one, speaking of my English class, is *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. I used to have a habit of reading this every Christmas, during advent. I had gotten out of that habit. I put it back on our reading list for my class because I wanted to give them an easy intro to Dickens. I think some of them had read some of the harder stuff before and they really hated it. I wanted to show them what it would look like to read a Dickens book that was shorter and maybe already known, we know the basic plot from all the movies and it's a great book. It's well written. It's funny in parts and it's short. You can read it in one sitting. *A Christmas Carol* is a good one.

I'm going to run through this list. I'm not going to commentate on every single one, but another few are *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. Perfect. Side note. My daughter was about to read that and then I had to tell her it's not about literally an invisible man. And she was like, oh, really I was hoping this was sci-fi. No, it's a metaphor, but still read it, it's good. *Around the World in 80 Days*, by Jules Verne. That's a good read aloud with kids because it's got a lot of action and adventure and it's fun. *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley is one of my all time favorites. It's perfect classic gothic novel. *Night* by Elie Wiesel. That one is so good. Did you ever read that?

Christine: I haven't. Is it about the Holocaust era?

Tsh: It is. That's what I was going to say. It's a harder read in terms of topic, but it's an easy read in terms of it's short. You can read it in a couple hours and I think it's one of those everyone should read this. This is going to be one of our last books for the high schoolers this year. I think it's important.

*Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. That's another good read aloud with kids. *Sherlock Holmes*, by Arthur Conan Doyle. Those are fun because they're short short stories, meaning they're not whole novels. You could just read a few here and there and get the gist. And of course there's fun movies to watch with that.

And then honestly children's lit, there's so many great children's classics that I think are worth reading as an adult. Even if you don't have kids in your life, they're worth reading. *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White is one of my favorites. The whole *Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis, *Anne of Green Gables*, and that whole series by L.M. Montgomery. And of course *Winnie the Pooh*, by A.A. Milne. I think *Winnie the Pooh* is usually thought of as too young a book by preschoolers. I just read that out loud again for probably the fifth or sixth time to my kids a few weeks ago, just a few of those stories. And my oldest is 14, and my youngest is eight and a half and we were all laughing hysterically. I think those are actually older kid books, you can't start them early. I think we started them when my kids were like three or four. But the humor is not as appreciated until they're older. They really are so good and they're not the Disney-fide version, they're the real legit A.A. Milne. They're so good.

That's just a good intro 101 to classic reading and just to encourage you guys to give it a try and don't feel overwhelmed by it or don't feel like you have to abandon your normal reading routine. Just toss one in there maybe in the next few months before the summer starts and see what you think.

Christine: I love that list. We're actually in our school for next year, the curriculum we're doing is actually going to be built around the Narnia theory. I'm so excited. I know.

Tsh: How fun for you guys. Have your girls read them yet?

Christine: We've read a little bit of the first book together, but I think my oldest was a little bit too young, so I think this is going to be perfect. She'll be nine. I was so excited and just all the history of that time period we'll be studying. We recently listened, I read all the Anne books and in love, I mean some of my favorite books ever, the *Anne of Green Gables* book, but we just listened to the audio book of the whole *Anne of Green Gables* with Rachel McAdams narrating it. It's so good. It is a really, really good audio book. My eight year old was in love with it. She just begged to listen to it every day. I was going to ask her any of these particularly good do you think on audio or do you know if any of these, have you ever listened to any of these on audio that would be particularly good?

Tsh: I love that you brought that up because that was going to be my next comment is that there are so many good classic audio books that I think you would, if you feel maybe overwhelmed at the thought of the literal reading, but you still want to expose your kids to or yourself. That's a great way to do it. I think that's legitimately reading. I like to look more by reading by narrator. And I think Jim Dale and Jim Wise are two of the best audio book narrators and they read a ton of classics and they are also a lot the times on Spotify. If you have a Spotify account, there's all sorts of great audio books on there. We listened to, I'm trying to think what I did with my kids. I know we've listened to some of the Narnia books on audio book, but I can't remember who the narrators are for that one. There's also a really great Jane Eyre narration on, I don't know if it's on Spotify, but I know it's on Amazon and I believe it's read by Thandie Newton and that one is a really good version of Jane Eyre.

Christine: [00:46:14](#) Okay, good to know.

Tsh: I can't remember who the narrator is, but *The Little House on the Prairie* series, those are also good on audio book. And those are good for family road trips because you can listen to them and then just pause and talk and rabbit trail about the time periods. Especially if you're going on a road trip through the US you might be passing a lot of the places, not so much the literal places of that story, but places like that. It's just fun to think about our American history through those stories.

Christine: So fun. I love it. There's some good ones on here I want to try now.

Tsh: Good, I'm glad. That was my goal.

### Segment Three

Tsh: Lindsay, tell me a little bit about your work. What is it that you do?

Lindsay: I am an artist and an illustrator, so it took me a long time to actually admit that I was an artist. I used to just say, "I draw things," but I decided that I actually need to embrace that I am an artist. Mainly, I do inspirational quotes, hand lettering, sweet whimsical illustrations. I like to create things that are going to bring joy to others, even if it's just a simple thing like a coffee mug because I believe we can find joy in the ordinary things.

Tsh: You say you're an artist, which you absolutely are. Tell me a little bit more about your work because it's called Pen and Paint. Is that because of the materials you use?

Lindsay: [00:47:43](#) It started off when I first started creating, I used paints and I painted small little canvases and nursery art. This was back in 2009 when I first got started and then things changed because I began starting my family and trying to paint with small children at your feet during nap time just doesn't really work that well. I started drawing and I wasn't quite ready to get rid of the paint my brand. I decided to name it Pen and Paint, so that it's both ink and different mediums of painting.

Tsh: [00:48:23](#) I'm looking at some of your art right now on your website. And yes, you do the hand lettering thing, but you also actually have, one thing you're really good at is, to me they feel like flat lays, the things you see on Instagram. You do flat lays, but you draw those. I'm just want to picture exactly what you do. You get out a piece of paper and you have a pencil or what?

Lindsay: [00:48:44](#) There's a lot of different things that I do. Mainly it started with ink and paper where I would draw things and then I would edit them digitally on the computer. But then I started playing around with watercolors and incorporating that into vector art that I created, which is through Illustrator. But then I decided I wanted to go a step farther and I started painting digitally. I have a Wacom, which has a special tablet for artists. It basically gives the same effect of if I was using a paint brush but it's on a screen.

Tsh: [00:49:28](#) Yes. I have a friend who does that and I've seen it and it's very cool.

Lindsay: [00:49:31](#) It's very cool. It took me about a year to get comfortable with it and now that is really what I'm drawn to. It just gives me so much more depth in the art that I create and it gives me a little bit more freedom because if I mess

up with ink, it's really hard to fix that. If I mess up a line on Wacom, I can erase it and start right over.

Tsh: [00:49:56](#) And I would imagine it's a little less messy.

Lindsay: Yes.

Tsh: Walk me back. You mentioned something I thought was really intriguing where it took you a while to call yourself an artist. Bring us back a little to the beginning and how you even discovered this was something that you were good at.

Lindsay: [00:50:15](#) In 2009, I started my first Etsy shop after some encouragement from some friends. I was pregnant with my first child and I had a bunch of friends who are pregnant and I wanted to create meaningful gifts for them. I just started painting nursery art, we're talking about 18 by 20 paintings and things so that was really interesting for me to try to figure out how to ship and do online. That's where I first started. Then after my first son was born, 18 months later, we had another son. I was very busy with them and that's where I decided that this was just a hobby. This wasn't something I could do right now. But then in 2011, during nap time, I honestly found a sketch book and a set of pens in a closet. My husband gets on these whims that he wants to create and do things. I found it and I decided I was going to try to draw some things. I started drawing and honestly started sharing it on Instagram, just with friends and people started asking, how can I get a print of that or that really means something to me, just really encouraging me to create. I decided that I was going to reopen my Etsy shop and start selling prints.

Tsh: Okay. Were you always like a doodler when you were a kid? Did you know that you had a knack for this?

Lindsay: I always loved to draw. My room was always filled with pictures that I had drawn. But to be honest, as a young girl in southwest Georgia, the idea of an artist was not, artists were people who painted a big oil paintings or had really realistic watercolors. I even took an art history class in college, but it never sank in that that could be a career. It was more of you taught or you are a stay at home mom or that was the logistics of what I could see doing as a career. I actually became a stay at home mom after I'm working in some nonprofits. I worked at a recovery residence for women and I knew when I had my first child, I really did want to stay home, but I had no idea that I was going to begin a job that was going to provide for my family, for the rest of our life.

Tsh: I think that happens to a lot of us where we start off something simply because we like it and it turns out that we have a knack for also making a career out of and then we never meant too.

Lindsay: I wish that I would have been encouraged by other people that you can do things that you love, that you don't just have to have a job. That was really important so I do try, even my interns are younger girls who are in high school who have interest in art so that they can see that there's more than just what we think.

Tsh: Well, so let's jump ahead then to you started an Etsy shop and I'm guessing things started selling because people asked you to. What happened next?

Lindsay: [00:53:48](#) In 2012 things just really grew. That was the beginning I say, of art prints being a thing. It went from, there weren't very many people that sold art prints to everybody did. I wrote that I was very grateful for and I remember sitting down in my dining room thinking this is real, there is a future and this and I have to decide, am I going to do this or do I just want to keep it fun and not become a business. I believed that I had something to share and so I wanted to go further with it and my husband was very supportive to the point that in 2014, he left his career to become a stay at home dad and homeschool our boys so that I could work on the business.

Tsh: [00:54:51](#) Got it. Okay. I love it when that happens when husbands and wives can collaborate like that and share the workloads. My husband has done that for quite a few years and it's always fun for him when he meets another homeschool dad. It's like finding a unicorn.

Lindsay: [00:55:06](#) Exactly. Most people when they ask where our children go to school, when I say they homeschool, I have to immediately say that my husband homeschools them. I don't home school them because they assume that I'm taking that position.

Tsh: [00:55:19](#) You talked about this fork in the road when you were thinking, is this gonna stay a hobby or is this going to be a business? What convinced you to make the choice you made?

Lindsay: [00:55:30](#) I created a print that had a quote. I'm sure everyone remembers, "She turned her can'ts into cans and her dreams and to plans." I created that print in it got plastered all over the Internet in a good way, but also in a way that it was printed on pillows illegally in China and things like that. That was at the point where I said, okay, I have something to offer that I know people love and connect with that I need to find my own way in this and not just lean on someone else's words because it was honestly, I mean the artwork is probably something that people liked, but it was those words that really dug in that people took a hold of. I actually retired that print. Those were not my words and I recreated it into a print that said, "She stopped making excuses and she started making progress."

Tsh: Yup. I remember that from you.

Lindsay: Because that was the culmination of my past was me making excuses of why I couldn't go forward and have my own business or I wasn't good enough that I wasn't a real artists cause I didn't use certain materials or a certain style. That's where everything came to a head. We're going to do this and I don't know what I'm doing because I'm have no idea how to run a business but I'm going to do this and trust that it will work out.

Tsh: [00:57:03](#) Would you say then that you learned the business side of things on the ground? Like as you went?

Lindsay: [00:57:09](#) I'm learning that every day. I clearly don't know what I'm doing, but I do have some mentors and my husband will just do research on anything. If I say we need to figure out how to do this, he's on it digging in and finding out everything so we can move forward.

Tsh: [00:57:31](#) I think that's really encouraging for people to hear that if they have this idea or maybe a skill that they keep being told they are good at, that doesn't mean you need to know exactly how to turn it into a business before at least starting to see if you've got a viable product and you can learn on the ground. Because that's definitely what I did too.

Lindsay: [00:57:51](#) It's not easy. There's a lot of times that I feel that it so unglamorous and we share pretty pictures on social media and on the website and all that stuff because it's important to me. I do not want put my ugly, messy self out there. I want to be honest and connect, but I can't share everything like that I'm bagging up thousands of cards at a dining room table or something. There's so much work that goes on behind the scenes. I think one of the biggest struggles that I have is how to have a professional business, but at the same time show that, hey, it's still me. I'm here, I'm a person and I've got some people that help me, but we're not a big company.

Tsh: [00:58:44](#) Sure. As an aside practical, I have found Instagram stories to be really great for that. Where you can post your pretty feed and then have a behind the scenes of what that looked like. Shipping or drawing or having somebody else watching your kids or whatever. I always find that as a consumer, I love seeing the behind the scenes of small artists and businesses like that.

Lindsay: [00:59:08](#) I agree. I've really tried. I'm not an introvert at all. I'm very extroverted. I love meeting people, but when it comes to social media, I shut down. It's so hard for me to record myself something or do a video.

Tsh: [00:59:29](#) Yeah, I get it. I liked that you're bringing this up cause I'd love to know what's one of the biggest challenges in your work?

Lindsay: [00:59:36](#) Time. Besides just having our website and the things we sell directly to customers, we also run a wholesale website where we work directly with brick and mortar stores, which I love doing that. I'm always loving meeting new customers that I can supply products for their stores. I'm also a licensed artist. That means I create artwork that gets licensed on products. So I balance those three things along with normal life and motherhood and trying to take care of myself. I think time is just really a thing. There's never enough time. I could work 24 hours a day and I still would have so many things that don't get finished.

Tsh: [01:00:28](#) I think that's so true for so many of us. What's the flip side of that? What's one of your favorite things about your work?

Lindsay: [01:00:34](#) There's so many good things. I think the first thing is knowing that I have created something that really excites another person or brings joy to them. For Mother's Day one year, this girl, she bought a card and she asked me to write the message because she wanted to send it directly to her mom who she hadn't seen in years and it was just that I get to be a part of this. I drew something and created it that is going to connect someone. Even though I do create things like seasonal products and things that are pretty, to me it's more about the fact that when you hold what I designed or created or whatever in your hands that there is just joy there that it's something that makes you smile and that you use everyday or see every day or has a message in it that is going to just send love to someone else. That's the main thing. That's why I do this. That's why I don't stop even when I feel like I have failed and this is going nowhere.

Tsh: [01:01:48](#) I think that illustrates so well how important art is, that art isn't one of these extra add on parts to our life that they are, art is the thing that keeps us going so often. I love that story.

Lindsay: [01:02:01](#) Thank you. I agree. It's so funny, I'm a very practical person. I don't like to spend extra money on frilly stuff and so I'm torn between the fact, do we sell these things and people have to spend their money on it and everything. That's when it always brings me back is this is something that is meaningful for another person. I'm not pushing consumerism, I'm pushing connection.

Tsh: I love that. And honestly, as a consumer, I love supporting artists so much and I think there's so many of us out there that when you put your stuff up for sale, you're actually doing us a service, which sounds crazy, but I would much rather

buy an illustrated kitchen towel from you over target because I love supporting the work of artists and so I love that you sell your work.

Lindsay: [01:02:51](#) That's encouraging to hear.

Tsh: Tell us a little bit since you mentioned that you're practical, about a typical day in your life. I know there's no one official day being an artist and an entrepreneur, but pick a day and give us a little glimpse sunup to sundown.

Lindsay: Right now, we actually have three interns who help. They rotate out because I'm in a small home studio that's basically the size of a bedroom. I can't have everybody with me at the same time. Every day for a certain period of time, I do have an intern come in who helps with shipping orders or folding a new batch of hand towels that we've had made or sleeving cards, something like that. I start off trying to come in and I check emails and I see what orders we have to work on, see what deadlines I might have to be working on. I do the admin stuff first. I want to get that out of the way. Then a lot of times, if I am on a project, I'll start creating and I could just sit and draw for as long as I am allowed possible, even if it's right up until 5:30 when it's time for me to go home. Then some days, we are just packing boxes. It's one box after the other and it feels like, when did I get to create today? It all just fluctuates. Even sometimes I go home at night and after the kids are down and the kitchen is clean, I will start creating again. I like to work. I try to give myself a little bit of time where I'm not working, but especially if I have a deadline, you will see me working up until 10:30, 11:00 at night.

Tsh: [01:04:58](#) Whenever I talk to artists, I'm always curious because you do this because you love it yet is it sometimes hard to draw that line between work and play when it comes to your art?

Lindsay: Yes. I'm very much a workaholic. I have to say, or my husband has to say, you don't have to do that, you can stop and the world's not going to fall apart. I'm learning that it's okay. Comparison is the thief of joy in my life. I'm constantly having to say, it doesn't matter what this brand or that brand or whatever. It doesn't matter that there's Christmas stuff on Halloween. You do what you need to do. You take care of yourself and you create what you want and what you love and let that be.

Tsh: [01:05:49](#) You described that you like to have your kitchen clean the boys are down and then you might get back to work. In general, have you found a way to shut off your brain in terms of work and non-work or is that just always playing in your mind?

Lindsay: [01:06:06](#) I'm finding ways. I started doing some practices of capturing my thoughts and not letting my whole life be through the filter of work because we also, beside for the boys, we have a three year old toddler who, she keeps me distracted as well from that. I'm trying to, even when I'm cooking dinner, I'm trying to step away from the thinking about, well what about this or what about that? Because I'm always having ideas. I have to stop and say, oh, well she wants to help me cook, which is already a hard thing in itself and I want to be present with her or with my boys. We started doing things like special game night once a week or things like that where we're looking at each other, talking to each other and not momma's over here doing laundry and thinking about work or daddy and her having a meeting about work, work, work, work.

Tsh: [01:07:09](#) For someone listening who maybe loves art and would love to figure out how to sell it or maybe just some other form of creative wants to start a business, what bits of advice would you give someone who wants to start doing something like you do?

Lindsay: [01:07:23](#) I think one of the first things would be to shadow someone who does. I think it's a really good idea to spend time with someone, especially if you were wanting to run an online business. Because my interns are like, oh this isn't how I thought it was going to be. They think, oh, we just draw and take pretty pictures, that kind of thing. I think shadowing someone would be wonderful because you can see how their flow goes and their day goes. Then the next thing I would say is don't be afraid to create. One of the biggest things I have is when I'm drawing, especially on a blank piece of paper. I'll get so frustrated because I'll mess up, and somebody said one time to me, it's just a piece of paper. That's all it is. If you mess up, if it looks horrible, who cares? Do it again. You know? When she said that, it is just a piece of paper. Why am I making such a big deal about this? Take time to draw every day or create every day, which can be really hard. That is what started me in the beginning. Every single day my boys would watch Sesame Street and I would take out a sketch book and I would draw. Doing that for a year changed what I could offer. It gave me strengths. And it's funny to look at the things when I first started because I look at them and I cringe. Then I know it was a process and I'm glad I experienced it because if I had not started then I would not be where I am now.

Tsh: [01:09:04](#) All those practices of doing it again and again and again is how you got better.

Lindsay: Yes.

Tsh: How do you recharge as a person? Anyone I talked to about their work, they're full, whole people with things besides work. I'd love to know a little bit. What do you do just to feel like a person?

Lindsay: On the weekends, we love to get out and explore. Whether it's go for a hike or drive down to a cute little town nearby because there's not much where we are in our small town. We'll go for ice cream and walk around the downtown or we'll just try get out as a family and they do something together. Also, I love just spending time with my husband by ourselves. Anytime that we can have our kids go the grandparents, we will pick up dinner or we'll walk around Target together just to get out in the world and just have time alone where someone else isn't demanding your attention.

Tsh: [01:10:12](#) Is there anything good you're reading right now?

Lindsay: Yes, I'm reading *The Mindful Catholic*. It's by Gregory Bottaro. I think that's how you say his last name. That is one of the things that ties back into when you're dealing with work and things constantly in my mind. For a long time I struggled with anxiety about my business because I don't have a business degree. I think even if you do have a business degree, you would probably have anxiety about your business when you're the sole provider and you're selling retail stuff, you cannot predict whether or not people will purchase from you. I've been using this book to evaluate what is true, what is not true, how to handle those thoughts that come in and how not to just be on autopilot all the time. Especially when it comes to those thoughts entering in some, usually I'm listening to books because I like to listen while I create and I just plow through books. But this one we got as an audio book, but also we have a hard copy too just to sit down and it has little practices at the end of each chapter that focus on meditation so that you can listen to your body and let your mind stop and be still.

Tsh: [01:11:43](#) Thank you so much for this chat. It's been really fun to get a little glimpse behind this Instagram feed turns to a store that I've loved for so long. I think you do great work and it's so lovely and keep doing what you do.

Lindsay: Well. Thank you so much, Tsh.

Tsh: [01:12:03](#) You can find Lindsay Hopkins' online shop Pen and Paint at [pen-and-paint.com](http://pen-and-paint.com) where you can also find ways to connect with her on social media, especially on Instagram. You can find Christine at [christinemariebailey.com](http://christinemariebailey.com) and on Instagram @organicstine and to keep up with me, I'm on Twitter @Tsh and Instagram @TshOxenreider and of course at [theartistsimple.net](http://theartistsimple.net) where you can find my writing as well as Christine's. Head to the show notes for this episode, number 188 at [thesimpleshow.com](http://thesimpleshow.com) where you can find all sorts of things, links to things we talked about, where are you can sign up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things, how you can become a patron and support the work it takes to create the show for just a few dollars per month as well as how to connect with Christine and myself. The show is

produced by Chad Michael Snavely and Jesse Montonya and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my furry intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening, I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll catch you back here soon.