



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 194

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

Tsh: [00:00:03](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hey friends, in this episode I'm chatting with contributing writer and Managing Editor of The Art of Simple, Andrea Debbink, where as always we're talking about what we wrote about this week. Andrea has already talked on the pod before about how she's getting more and more into nature. Well, she always has since she was a kid, but even more so recently as an adult where she's been embracing this side of her even as a city dweller. In this chat she talks about what she's been learning about the importance of learning the names of things like flowers, trees, frogs, the stuff we usually drive by and don't think about. Andrea gets into the why of why paying attention to these things is important. And she also gets into the how, giving us some practical tips and tools so that we can get into this wherever we live.

And then this week I wrote about what I've been learning about myself having successfully finished a year of teaching high school English for the very first time. Well almost, there's still a few weeks of the school year left since I wrote more about my inward journey of what it was like to say yes to something I thought I'd never say yes to you. I thought it'd be fun here on the pod to talk about the broader, more social side of what I've learned after a year of teaching high school English, I am still very much a beginner here and will continue to learn as I keep going, lord willing and boy howdy, do I have a new found respect for you full-time teachers listening. I mean I already did but wow, am I so much more aware of how much weight your role carries? I chat with Andrea about the beautiful thing that is the high school English classroom and then in the third segment because of weird, somewhat boring logistics that I won't get into here, for the third segment. I am joined by Hayley Stewart who I normally talk to in the first week of every month, but it's worked out that I'm sharing our chat here still early on in May, just in the second week. As always, we get into the liturgical calendar and what's in store for us this month.

Before we get into this episode, a quick announcement, we have started a casual just for fun book club within the community of patrons who support this show. We're reading the lovely memoir by Gerald Durrell called *My Family and*

Other Animals. It's the true story of his experience in the early 20th century when his family left everything and moved away from England to a Greek island. It's funny, it's charming and it's short and there's actually a really great PBS Masterpiece series that we can stream right now. If you'd like to join in on this book club, now is a great time to become a patron of this show. In case you didn't know, the show actually costs a lot of money to create and I'm thrilled to offer it to you for free, but because it's not free to create, listeners can really help offset the cost with just a few dollars per month.

When you do that, you get access to this community where we do fun things like book clubs, the secret podcast called *The World at Home* and even get together in person like we're doing this fall. My dream, honestly, is to eventually be fully listener supported here, ad free and everything. But we can't do that without a solid foundation of dedicated patrons who make the show possible. I think one day we can actually truly get there. If you'd like to join in on this fun book club we're doing, take the leap and finally sign up to be a patron. I know you've been thinking about it. I know you remember that it's a thing anytime I bring it up here on the pod, but then you forget by the time the show ends. So go sign up now. Hit pause if you need to, and then come back here. Either look for the link to join the community in the show notes of this episode number 194 or head to TheSimpleShow.com where you'll find a link there.

Let's get right into the heart of this episode. Here's my chat with Andrea where she starts us off sharing what she's learning about the art of learning more about nature.

[00:04:07](#) So Andrea, this week you wrote about what you're learning about naming things in nature, meaning learning the names and what that says about how about you and your life. It's been really insightful to think more about your connection with nature. I'm excited to hear what you have to tell us in this conversation about nature in which you're learning. Get us started.

Andrea: [00:04:28](#) This week, I wrote about a practice that I have developed probably over the last three years that's really helped deepen my experience with nature and also has really cultivated a deeper sense of stewardship that I feel when it comes to the natural world in general. Going back, I've loved nature since I was a kid and outdoor activities like camping and hiking, paddling and have always been a regular part of my life and I've always cared about nature from a conservation perspective. I was definitely the kid that was creating posters for save the whales and I wanted to adopt a wolf. There was an adopt an animal integration program when we were kids and I really wanted to do that. I've always cared about nature, but it wasn't until a few years ago that I realized how ignorant I actually was about nature that's around me every day. Whether that's the plants, the animals, the ecosystems. It's interesting because on this

topic, I recently listened to a Ted talk by Emma Maris, who is an environmental writer. The title of her talk is "Nature is everywhere, we just need to learn to see it". One of her main points is that we need to start valuing the nature that's around us every day, not just the national parks or the wilderness areas or the big, large scale nature. That really I think hit on a lesson that I've been learning, just in these past couple of years teaching myself the names of things in my own natural environment. That's really what the gist of the post is about. Where that all started for me was a few years ago, my husband and I were sitting at dinner one night and our windows were open and we live next to a city park that has a couple of large drainage ponds and every spring and summer they're full of frogs and we hear frogs at night.

This is a sound I'd heard my entire life. I grew up next to lakes and ponds and hearing frogs. For the first time I remember turning to him and saying, I wonder what those are, what species those are. For whatever reason I decided to start looking it up and went on my phone and looked up the frogs in my state and listen to their calls. Within a matter of 15 minutes I was able to identify, there's actually like four or five different species of frogs out there and now I know I can pick them apart. It was such ordinary, not super exciting piece of information, but for some reason it really sparked curiosity in me. It shifted, I think for me, my relationship to my local environment, because the next night when I heard the frogs again, it wasn't oh, here's that background noise that's so familiar to me. It was okay, there's the chorus frog. Oh, there's the tree frog. I knew them in a different way.

Tsh: [00:07:08](#) Yeah. That's really cool. What's funny about that is as soon as you started talking about looking something up, I thought of this past weekend, Kyle and I were on our front porch looking at the yard that we've had for two years now and we both said, what kind of tree is that? I don't know. Let's find out. We did our research and we asked around, we discovered the kind of tree we had. It wasn't that I didn't know, but I finally realized there is a way to know, I just need to take the time to do it.

Andrea: [00:07:38](#) Exactly. That's what's so interesting about just living in the times that we're living in is that information is so readily available. Like whether it's a guidebook or an app or just googling something, it's actually pretty easy to find that information. It reminds me of a couple of years ago, I was posting quite a few photos of wild flowers that I was seeing on the different hikes that I was going on. One of my Instagram followers had commented to me, wow, how do you possibly know the names of all these flowers? Thinking I was some sort of amazing naturalist or something. Well there's Google, I just look it up, which isn't that hard to do. Starting with those frogs and learning their calls from there I just started investigating more things in my environment. I started learning the

names of the wild flowers, the trees, and it's actually been a hobby that my husband and I pursue together. We actually bought three different field guides. We have a bird guide, tree guide, and wildflower guide to our state. Now we take those whenever we go hiking or camping and we're always learning about the wildlife in our environment.

Tsh: [00:08:46](#) So I'm curious, whenever you talk about knowing the name, for example of wild flowers, are you talking about the botanical Latin name or are you talking about the common name?

Andrea: [00:08:53](#) Just the common name. The Latin name is usually available too, but my memory's not that good.

Tsh: That's what I was going to say. I can't believe you can memorize all that.

Andrea: That would be amazing. That would be next level. That's the other thing too, obviously most of us live in places that are seasonal. I might teach myself the names of some flowers one summer and by the time they come back next summer, I'm like, what is that one? When you don't see it all the time, it's very easy to forget. But one of the things I also go into in my post this week is just why I think this is important because I think it's more than just now I know some cool trivia that I can impress people with or just have in my head. I think for me, learning these names and becoming more familiar with the natural environment around me has really, it's really enriched my experience. But it's also shifted my perspective from being an observer of nature to a participant and realizing, hey, I'm a part of this natural world. Actually in my post, I use an example from when I used to be a barista at Starbucks a few jobs ago and when I was a barista at Starbucks, I really learned about the importance and the power of names and their ability to forge connection and build community. Because I don't know if most coffee shop customers realize this, but there's actually a lot of layers of community within a coffee shop that I didn't realize until it was a barista. When I was working there, if a customer comes in for the first time, they're anonymous, they're nameless, you don't know them. But if they come in over time and start ordering the same drink and start forging and these patterns, well then you start to know the customer by their drink order. That's actually something that was common among the baristas I work with. We know our customers buy their drink order, but the customers that were really a part of our community and were consistent part of our world, we eventually ask them their real names and they knew we knew them by their real names. It just struck me even working as a barista how knowing someone's name changed your relationship to them. And that took them from being this anonymous person that bumps up against your life to being a person you actually cared about. Because the customers that we knew by name, we'd see them coming and we'd start their drink order and we knew about their families and about their lives. I don't think it's too much of a

stretch to say that I think the same principle of the power of names also applies to our relationship with nature.

Tsh: And to take that analogy of a coffee shop further or at least meeting people, I don't know if you've had this experience Andrea or listener has, because I'm sure that you have, is whenever you do find out someone's name, like your barista and then you forget it, you feel this weird like I can't ask again. But really you can. It just happened to me recently at our new coffee shop. I walked in and the guy said, "Hi Tsh". And I was like, oh no. Finally, I ordered and then I said, "By the way, remind me your name again. I'm so sorry." He said oh no big deal. And he told me his name and it was just that. It reminds me of what you were just saying about summer comes along and you forget the name again. It's okay to just re-ask in a way.

Andrea: Especially when you're dealing with baristas. In my coffee shop, we were all dressed alike. We probably looked pretty similar, it was easy to confuse us.

Tsh: Well, even at our indie one over here they don't have uniforms but they are all blonde with beards and Kyle and I were like, I think that is a prerequisite for working there. You have to be very cool and have a beard and be blonde. To me, I don't want to say they'll look the same, but there is a pattern that makes it hard to remember the specifics of each person. I'm getting there. The more you go, the more you interact, the more you actually remember unique names and personalities. I guess the same goes with nature here.

Andrea: Absolutely. Going on from there, the other point that I was talking about this week in my posts is how, we've actually talked about this book before. I promise I read more than just two books. I know in another podcast I had talked about the book, *The Nature Fix*, which I still just love. I need to actually buy a copy because I find myself referencing it all the time. There's a great section in *The Nature Fix* where Florence Williams is talking about the power of awe, like as an emotion and actually awe is an emotion that scientists have only recently begun to study, but I guess some people in the psychology community consider awe to be a power emotion, which I'm not exactly sure what that is, but it's supposed to be like right up there with joy and compassion, just like these powerful core emotions that we have that compels positive things.

In *The Nature Fix*, Florence Williams is talking about awe as something that blows your mind. How in nature, nature actually has more of an ability than other life experiences to provoke the feeling of awe. It's weird, she cites a study at the University of Houston where they were studying awe and happiness and comparing the two emotions to each other. And when people were provided with experiences that provoked awe they actually tended to be more compassionate, more generous and more patient than the people that just had

experiences that made them happy. It's a very powerful emotion and something that can be brought about by nature. I think that's another important reason to actually be connected to nature and to get out in nature and learn what you can because it's just opening yourself up to those experiences that will provide awe.

Tsh: [00:14:21](#) When I think about it, it's so easy to equate awe with something like the Grand Canyon or going into the mountains or seeing something epic. In the Pacific northwest, it's everywhere. But your point made at the top, I think is really worth thinking about, wild flowers in the cracks of the sidewalk can provoke awe if we slow down enough to look at them.

Andrea: To that point, something that's also really interesting in this study is that they found that when it came to nature, images that provoked awe, they didn't even have to be experiences that you were having in the real world. Like people actually experienced all watching a video of a waterfall. They didn't even have to be there. It was the nature itself that was bringing that about

Tsh: [00:15:06](#) In a way that makes sense. I think about the series Planet Earth by BBC. That is pretty awe inducing. I mean you watch it and you just think how in the world. It's pretty remarkable.

Andrea: [00:15:17](#) My husband and I are watching the Netflix series One Planet, which is like Planet Earth. It's also narrated by a David Attenborough. It's one of those things that we were just sitting on our couch, watching this TV show, but just the stuff that they're showing on the screen is just amazing.

Tsh: [00:15:36](#) A little side note that I didn't know I'd bring up. We as a family right now or watching this BBC series that's a little bit of, I don't know if you would call it a parody, but it sort of is, it's called Round Planet and it's also by the BBC but it's funny. It actually is about nature and they have different, the rain forest the frozen tundras or whatever. But it's done with pretty funny commentary. I'll put a link in the show notes of that. My kids find it hysterical, after awhile I'm like, okay, this is a bit cheesy and hokey, but they think it's hilarious.

Andrea: [00:16:10](#) That sounds awesome. Because I've seen a lot of those sorts of nature shows, so I'm familiar with a lot of the tropes and it would be cool to see a humorous take on that.

Tsh: [00:16:18](#) They do it so well. And because it's done by the BBC, it's like they're making fun of themselves basically because they're the ones that do this the best.

Andrea: [00:16:26](#) Before I move on from the whole idea of awe, I just wanted to share one quote that I've come across recently in my own reading by Rachel Carson, she wrote *Silent Spring*. She was a big environmentalist back in the fifties and sixties. She actually was writing about awe, I don't think she would have said this at the time, but there's this great quote that I came across from her where she says,

"The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction."

I think that really hits home. The reason that I think awe is so important is that it leads us to care. Once you stand in the woods or you see a cool animal or something, it moves you to care about that thing. And certainly I think the environment needs us to care about it and the natural world needs us to care about it.

Tsh: [00:17:18](#) That's true. Have you ever read a book, I don't know if you would have read this because it's actually about parenting, but it's called *Last Child in the Woods*.

Andrea: Oh yeah. Yep.

Tsh: Okay. In it, he gets into, I don't want to get into the danger of, he talks about how we're actually endangering our kids more by not letting them experience nature and keeping things too groomed and manicured is his point, actually makes us more unsafe out in the world, not safer. But he does get into that a little bit as well. If we want our children, the next generation to care, we have to expose them so that they know why to care. I think that that's a great example of that case, that kids can experience the awe probably more naturally than we can as adults, but we just have to make sure we surround them with it and not, even in big cities where we live to keep them around nature, even in small doses.

Andrea: [00:18:14](#) It's interesting because actually Emma Maris in that Ted talk actually talks about that same idea. It's funny, I've never actually heard this described this way, but she actually claimed that national parks are the least kid friendly nature places that you could take a kid. And her point with that is national parks and public lands are so highly managed and they have lots of rules about how you can interact with the environment and of course those rules are there for a reason to protect the ecosystem but that kids actually want to tinker with the environment. They want to build forts and climb trees and make things and to that end she was actually talking about how like an abandoned lot that's overgrown with plants was probably a better place for a kid to interact with nature than a national park where you're just looking.

Tsh: [00:19:00](#) That's hilarious. It reminds me of these adventure parks that I don't know if you've seen. My kids love those when we travel and they basically have very few rules, and they are allowed to do all sorts of things. They're fantastic. It also reminds me of this one quote. I think it's like a proverb from some Scandinavian country so I could be getting this wrong, but it says,

"The safest place in the world for a child is up in a five foot tree."

The idea behind that is this guarded, well thought out danger, in the sense when it comes to the natural world, let them climb trees, but they don't need to be the huge redwoods, they can be up five feet, that that's how they learn to interact by, by letting them do that. Same idea there.

Andrea: [00:19:47](#) In conclusion for my post, one of the things I ended with was sharing how people can start having this experience for themselves and start learning about their own national environment because I think it can be daunting. It was daunting for me at first but I found one of the easiest ways to start teaching yourself about nature is just to start with whatever's nearest to you or most common. For me it was the frogs, and then from there it was what are the birds that are coming to my bird feeder? What's the plant? For you, it was the tree in your front yard. Start small, start with the things that you might see every day or every week. From there, there's so many guide books out there that you can actually get and take along with you when you're in the outdoors. Of course beyond that, and I struggle with this one cause I don't necessarily like to have my phone when I'm out enjoying nature. But a positive thing about having your phone is there actually are a lot of apps that'll help you with identifying wildlife and plants and things like that. There's probably about five or six of them that I've found that I can include in the show notes. There's an app called PlantSnap where you can take a photo of a plant that you don't recognize and then put it into the app and it will actually help you figure out what that is.

Tsh: [00:21:10](#) Okay. I'm glad you said that because I heard of an app like that a few months ago and then I couldn't remember what it was called. That is so cool that you can do that.

Andrea: [00:21:18](#) They have very similar apps for trees, for birds, for animal tracks. There really are a lot of different ways to learn and to kind of gain that knowledge. Lastly, I would just say, once you do get the knowledge, share the knowledge because, and this is also something that I share my post, I've taken my little guide book out to a hiking trail and two different people stopped and asked me what I was doing and helped me identify plants and that builds connections between people, but it also just helps other people to learn when you share.

Tsh: [00:21:52](#) I love that. I'm also going to add to the show notes some books that Kyle really likes. He used to be on the search and rescue team in Oregon and he loves, his dream job is to be a park ranger. He adores the natural world. He collects, well, I say collects. He has the Texas and Oregon edition of this book series called *Roadside Geology*. And when you look at them, they don't look very impressive. They look almost handmade, but they're genuinely good because they're great for road trips where it will help you identify things in different parts of that particular state. If you're in this general county or part of the state, be on the lookout for these sorts of rocks, I think it mostly has to do with the landscape, so the topography and the rocks and stuff. But I think it also does get into a little bit of the trees and the wild flowers as well. But that's a really good way, we keep them in the car and so that way if we're like on some back country road and we see some stuff, he'll whip that out of the glove compartment and take a look and research it. So it's fun.

Andrea: [00:22:53](#) I want to look those up now for my next road trip.

Tsh: [00:22:56](#) Yeah, there you go.

Segment Two

Tsh: [00:27:45](#) I am very thrilled that you shared all that information because I've been getting into it a bit more as well, I say "it, being more interactive with the natural world and I think that's really cool that you are as well.

My post took, I don't want to say a different turn, but it's about something else. This past week I wrote about how, the fact that it's May means it's near the end of a school year. That made me realize, oh my goodness, I am almost done with my first year of teaching high school English, which I cannot believe. First of all, I still can't believe I even said yes to this because, I get into this in my post, but I was not looking for another job when my kid's school offered me this position. I just wasn't, I already had a full time job.

I love working for myself and you know, I had very little teaching experience. I was more, I get into the post about this, that maxim, like those who can't do teach, I felt the opposite. Those who can't teach do, I do write books, I don't teach people how to write. I felt a bit overwhelmed, but in my post I get into what I learned about myself by saying yes to something hard or maybe not hard but maybe risky. I didn't know if I'd be any good at it at this thing I was saying yes to. I learned so much about myself this year from that yes that I gave last summer. I get into the post about more of that personal side of reflecting what it meant for me to say yes.

In our chat today, I thought I'd get into a little bit more of the actual art of teaching high school English and what I have learned about that. So to preface, I have to say this is not in any way comparing what I do with full-time teachers, the world over, this is a very part-time gig for me. I literally teach one day a week and I teach one class. It's a two hour long class, but I teach just once a week. I don't even have, I have nothing but awe for these teachers that do this full-time. And so I'm not at all comparing my experience with theirs, this is just me as a part-time teacher who mostly writes full-time for a living. I only know what I know from my own experience. For me it's been this, it's a teaching a class of 16 high schoolers once a week at a very unique Socratic method, learner driven school. What that means is they, this school really relies heavily on guides instead of teachers. And as a guide, a primary role we play is asking questions and helping the kids wrestle with the answers and talking about it with each other and really providing an environment for them to try new things, to fail well, to get better, that kind of stuff. I'm just saying that this is what I'm learning from this experience of teaching in a place like this.

The first thing, and this is the biggest duh of all, is that teaching is hard, man. I know that's so funny and all of you listening who have been public school teachers for any length of time, you're like duh, tell me something I don't know. Or heck, it doesn't even need to be a public school teachers, any kind of teachers. This is obvious. I knew this going in so this wasn't the biggest surprise of my life. But it's still different than when you're actually living in the trenches of it. You can theorize the challenges of teaching, but when you're in the trenches doing it, it becomes very personal and very real. When you have a kid who is just not getting a concept and it stays with you, it weighs on you and you take it home and you think about it and you want what's best for the kid. You also know that ultimately it's not your job for them to successfully overcome this learning hurdle they have. It's their job. It's their job to learn and grow from it. It's your job to lay out the table, to set the table for them to come and experience it.

Yet it's just interesting how much I just wasn't expecting how much, in a way care, about these kids and about their learning experience and about their growth. That's been surprising to me.

Andrea: That actually is something I've heard from other friends of mine who are teachers, just how it's not a job that you clock out of at the end of the day, either you're at home actually grading or whatever, or you're just constantly thinking about your students and caring about them. It's not something that you can just turn off.

Tsh: Somebody asked me not too long ago, what's the best part of your job? And it was so easy for me to say the students and I mean that without any sort of irony. I genuinely love these kids. When I think about these particular faces and names,

I'm in it because I care about them more than anything. It's really surprising how much it stays with me and I really do teach two hours. It really adds up to 10 hours when it comes to grading and prepping and all that stuff, which is another way it's hard. But that amount of time compared to my full-time job is not that much of a percentage of my waking hours. And yet they just linger in my head for so much of that. It's really surprising. Actually speaking of that, teaching is hard. I really have been surprised at how much more time I spend in preparation and in grading than I do actually in the classroom teaching. That's not to say there's something wrong that needs fixing there, that's just how it is.

I now go back to all my high school or just my educational years with all the teachers and think, they spent so much time that I was not aware of preparing to teach and grading stuff. I'm just in awe. I am in awe of teachers and how much time they spend on our kids.

The second thing I have learned about teaching high school this year is how far the Socratic method goes. It really goes a long way. I mentioned just a few minutes ago what, what that means is basically asking questions and letting them dialogue with it. I've just really been surprised. What I am learning is I can create a whole lesson plan for the day, but I need to park at this spot of our class where we're dialoguing and interacting about the book we're reading to where by the time I get to the meat of what I think we should be learning, teaching, we don't have that much time anymore.

Over these past few months, I've had to learn to let a lot of that go. In a way it's a little bit easier for me because really I ended up only needing to prep about 15 to maybe at most 30 minutes of actual teaching time in a full two hour class because the rest of it needs to be interacting with the material. I think of that in real life when it comes to either parenting or relationships or even just trying, creating something, how far asking good questions can go, and then really pausing to listen instead of coming with an agenda of, I'm going to make sure you know these three things, but really having a learner's posture by just tossing out a question and seeing what happens.

Andrea: [00:35:02](#) That sounds like a really cool way to learn. That definitely wasn't a method that was used in my own high school experience. But I'm curious, were you familiar with the Socratic method as a way of teaching before you started this job? Or is that something you learned as you started?

Tsh: Well, it's funny. All the adults involved in the school, we all say we are doing this because we wished we learned it this way. We want to emphasize to the kids, do you know cool it is that you get to go to school in a place like this? Because we all feel that way. I had heard of the Socratic method in theory, like I think maybe even in college, in philosophy classes, just the idea of the Socratic method,

more of an idea but not so much like what does it look like in the classroom. I hadn't known before my kids started going here. It's a school wide idea that we embrace. I knew that my kids had that and they even help, I don't want to say train, but they encourage the parents to keep that up at home. It might look like something like a kid coming up to you and saying, where are my socks for the 12th time? Instead of saying they're in your top drawer, like they always are. You would respond with something like, where do you think they are or where have you found them in the past, or something like that. Or even when it comes to something bigger, I don't want to say like you don't want to give straight answers and you want to be cryptic all the time. But if they ask you some question about how does lightning and thunder work? You can reply with, oh that's a great question. Where can you find that information or where's a good place to learn more? And that might then encourage them to go to your bookshelves and to dig up some books that you have already sitting there where they can then learn it for themselves. Because all the science shows in the world that we learn best when we teach ourselves. Whenever we seek out the information ourselves instead of being lectured to, like these are the things that are important to know and I'm going to take notes about them. It's whenever you have an innate desire to learn about them on your own and then you go and find your answer. And that's totally true for me as an adult. Like what you were just saying about googling the names of plants and flowers, they will stick with you rather than if you go to a lecture that you didn't ask to attend about some topic that is not a huge interest you, that doesn't mean that kids don't need to learn certain things even if they're not interested that they totally do. That's the general idea of a Socratic method.

For example, this past week in class or the week before in class, we talked about *Night* by Elie Wiesel and I would just lob out questions. I ended our discussion with, so if this is a really hard to read because they all talked about how this was really depressing. I just wanted to stare at a wall for a while because I mean, it is about the Holocaust. I said, so why do we read this? If this is depressing, why do we bother? I just left it at that and let them wrestle with the silence a little bit. And then they just started tossing out really great thoughts about because if we don't, then we'll forget or because history is doomed, we're doomed to repeat it. You know, those kinds of things. And they came up with that. It wasn't me telling them why it's important to read it. It's very simple, it's not complicated when you say it, but it's much harder to do than you realize because it's easier in a way just to tell people things instead of let them figure it out. I've been really surprised at how well good questions, how far good questions can take us.

The third thing I've learned from this year teaching high school is how much I really enjoy being around teenagers. I don't want to say I didn't think I would, but you know, my oldest is 14 so we are fresh into the teen years. I would say

this is true in my own life as a parent, how much I've enjoyed her entering these teen years because it feels, it's just a different type of parenting. It's a lot more about having good conversations. It's a lot more about not having black and white answers and just letting them wrestle with stuff. And it's a lot more like actual sense of humor, and actual interesting topics. Whereas you know, in the toddler years you endure a lot of dumb jokes. You endure talking ad nauseum about Lego or something like that. And that's not to say there's not still versions of that in the teen years. But anyway, I think I'm just surprised at how much I've genuinely enjoyed being around 16 teenagers once a week and I didn't think I would. I don't know if I had this vision of going home from school exhausted and like, oh, I'm glad I don't have to deal with them for another week. No, I actually really look forward to being around these kids and it's because I think maybe teenagers get a bad rap sometimes. That they're surly that they have bad attitudes that all they want to do is rebel. That has not been my experience at all. Now, I know it's a little bit of a controlled environment. Those who go to a school like this perhaps already are learning about what it means to be in charge of their own learning. But I don't know. I think in general teenagers are more adept and curiously minded and open to ideas and good at interacting with adults and then we give them credit for, we just need to maybe provide that opportunity more. Meaning we need to actually take the time to interact with teenagers more I think.

Andrea: I've definitely heard that. I have a friend who is a high school teacher, a high school history teacher and her favorite part of the job, like you said, is the students. She's constantly defending the reputation of teenagers to other people and you know, talking about the same things that you're saying, just how interesting they are and that cool age where they're investigating the world and investigating themselves. I think they definitely have an undeserved reputation.

Tsh: I agree. And plus, it sounds silly, but they keep me feeling young. I don't think of myself as old at all, but sometimes I'm in awe when I think about like how long has it been since I was in high school. That is impossible, it feels like I just graduated and yet being around them makes me, it validates that. I'm still young. I still am not that far removed. Last week they asked me, Mrs. O, have you seen Endgame yet? And I said, yeah, Oh, what did you think? We had this fun conversation about the Marvel Universe and it was fun. My girlfriend's didn't say, so have you seen, let's talk about it. I would have loved that conversation and now I get to have it with the 16 year old boy who's super into Marvel. And that was just really fun.

The fourth thing I have learned from a year of teaching high school English is that honestly, reading hard stuff and writing regularly is good for us. It sounds so cliché, it builds character, but honestly it really, really does. I can say this on the

other end, on the adult side, because when I was a teenager, I mean English had always been my favorite class, but it's still, it wasn't my favorite to read *The Scarlet Letter* or to read *The Odyssey*. Of course I'd prefer to read my own books, but looking back now I can see why that was such a good thing for me. Whenever I assign these books and these kids are pretty honest and they'll say uh, this is hard, or this was not my favorite. And that's okay. I'm not asking you to absolutely adore Jane Eyre, although you have to tell me why, you know? And that's okay. But I've been very much reminded that these books are good for us and because I'm reading them to now, I mean most of these I had already read before having a degree in English, but it had been so long that I wanted to reread them. It's good for me too. It's good for me to keep reading the classics, to immerse myself in an old language and different ideas that maybe seem out of date, authors that have been gone a long time, that are talking about things that seem really relevant to us and in 2019 all that stuff.

Then also writing regularly is really good for us as well. The first part of the year, I didn't have the kids write as much. I had them just write a couple of essays and then turn them in and I found myself aware of how little they were actually doing on a weekly basis writing. I changed my method to shorter essays, but every week that they would turn in, it meant a lot more grading for me and so a lot more time. But they're writing got a lot better because they were just practicing. I mean these were short essays, but they were practicing and it was a reminder to me too, as a writer that just keeping myself writing keeps me a better writer. Do you know what I mean?

Andrea: Yes. Just working those writing muscles on a regular basis.

Tsh: That's right. Then the fifth thing, and it's part of that fourth thing right now, is just I guess the beauty of leading by example. I simply mean that when I think of the year and how I started and felt entirely unqualified to teach that I find myself on the other end now, not so much saying I am qualified, I know exactly what I'm doing, but a lot more confident in my ability to teach this class because a lot of it is leading by example. It's me, myself, reading these books. It's me writing. I know what it's like to really have to wrestle with the sentence and not understand how to say it right. To have to interact with these ideas on a regular basis myself. I will talk about like, yeah, I wasn't sure what he meant when he said this. I had to go dig it up and look it up myself. Or whenever they ask me a grammar question, I'm a professional writer and they'll ask me and I'll say like, I don't know. That is a really good question.

Side note, it's kind of funny. Grammar has been the hardest thing for me in this year of teaching because it's very instinctive to me. I don't sit there and think about like our, my verbs parallel or is this infinitive split? I just know it sounds right. You know? And so it's been really hard to have to for those kids who

maybe it's not as, as an instinctive and they need to know the rules. I'm like, oh no, what are these rules? This is definitely part of what I am learning and I hope to get better this next year because I've said yes to another year, so I'm gonna be doing this again. It's funny that I would say this because I didn't think I would do it more than a year. I felt like I was just helping them out because they needed a teacher. But I've found that it's been worth it. I mention this in my post that it's been good for me as a person and I think one of the most surprising ways it's been good for me because I was nervous about this taking away from my work time, my actual job as a writer, but I've needed to get out of my head more than I've realized. When you're self employed, when you work from home, when you mostly interact with words all day, sometimes you can go days on end and you're mostly up in your brain and not really out in the real world having conversations. It has been so good for me to have a weekly routine where I know I'm not going to be home. I know I'm barely going to be writing, I'm going to be interacting with other human beings in the real world and that has been just what I needed and it's made those other four days a week better. I feel like my writing and reading has gotten better.

Andrea: Not to put you on the spot, but going back to something you said a few minutes ago when you were talking about the different books that you were teaching this year, did you have a favorite book that was like your favorite book to teach?

Tsh: That is a great question because I the last essay the kids are going to write is tell me what was your favorite book that we read this past year. I was trying to mull over which one was my favorite to teach and I'm going to sound like one of those, I love them all because I do, I will say some were definitely harder than I thought they would be. I really love teaching *Jane Eyre* so much and I don't know if that's because it's one of my personal favorite books of all time, but I felt like we had such good conversations. These kids, I think only a few had read it before and so they didn't know the spoiler at the end of like what is going on. It was so fun to just be thinking, Hah, you don't know what's happening. You have theories and you're wrong. It's fun to just sit with that. I surprised myself how much I like teaching *The Odyssey* because *The Odyssey* is not classically easy to read, but it was fun to really get into mythology and how foundational that is to so much of our other literature. It's just good to know *The Odyssey* because we see Greek mythology all throughout our western writing. Then some books that I found I liked as a reader, but they were harder to teach, like *A Christmas Carol*, was a bit of a challenge to teach. I think looking back, I can say it's almost because the story is so familiar yeah. That it was surprising to have to help them extract maybe meanings and words and backstories and all that stuff. And then of course, I mean I already mentioned *Night* by Elie Wiesel, that it's just hard because it's a hard book. Like the content itself, it's nonfiction, it's about the Holocaust. We have to talk about it. It's good, but it's not easy, you know? It's

been really fun and I think, I mean, just for purely selfish reasons, I think this has been one of my favorite takeaways from teaching these classes. I get to geek out and be a full fledged book nerd with these kids and get into some of this literature and the backstories of the authors and why they wrote what they wrote for the time period they were in. I could just really get into that. It's been fun to have that part of me ignited again, as an English major who hasn't done this in a long time.

Segment Three

Tsh: [00:48:41](#) Okay. Haley, let's get into the liturgical calendar for May. What do we have in store this month?

Haley: Well, the fun part is that it's basically all feasting. Because we are in Easter. We made it through Lent. Made it through holy week. And Easter isn't just, I mean, I grew up, Easter is Easter Sunday and you have a big dinner and you're with your family and maybe you do Easter egg hunts. But it wasn't until I discovered the liturgical year that I was like, oh, Easter's 50 days long. It's really long. It's one of the longest seasons.

Tsh: That's right. We actually talked about this a little in last weeks Simple episode when I was talking with Christine because she was talking about feasting. This works out beautifully. That was one of the benefits I found to discovering the liturgical calendar as well. It's not that nonstop chocolate and sugar all the time. It's just more of a mindset that's a beautiful counterbalance to Lent.

Haley: It's Lentt, when we would maybe desire something and say, hey, I'm going to check that desire because it's Lent. I'm going to offer this thing that I want up as a sacrifice of Jesus. That instead we're going to celebrate the risen Lord. So yes, we'll rent that movie and do family movie night. Yes we can go out to eat on a day when we wouldn't usually go out to eat. Yesterday we almost flagged down the ice cream truck. My kids are always like, can we do the ice cream truck? No, it's Lent. And then today I was like, oh we could do the ice cream truck, but it was already down the road and the kids were like, no, our one chance. Just saying yes to more things. Remembering it's a season of feasting is really fun. And this year I did something that I hadn't done before, but I think I might do it in the future is I had a few little gifties in the kids Easter baskets that I set back for other days during the first week of Easter. Very small things. Either treats to eat or had some little saint dolls and things that everyone got. I'd bring him out in the morning of Easter week after Easter Sunday just to be like, hey, it's still Easter. Instead of just throwing everything out there at once. I think I'm going to do that again because it worked well.

Tsh: [00:51:09](#) For my kids, a little bit older what we did, I feel like this is sort of the equivalent of what we were just saying, a form of feasting is, I asked them a few days before Easter Sunday, hey guys, do you mind? My oldest is, I mean, sorry, my youngest is almost nine and my oldest is 14 so the whole Easter basket thing is not so much like they don't like it. In fact, they do still get silly about it and we did an egg hunt and all that. In terms of the things in it, they don't feel like they're missing out if they don't have something. So I asked them, hey guys, do you mind if instead of Sunday morning Easter baskets with stuff in them, we just go to the movies and we spend that money instead because I actually showed them the math behind it. Believe it or not, all these little things that are in your baskets add up and look at the cost here, we can go to the movies. They said, sure. We went to see Avengers and that was our feasting and it was great.

Haley: [00:52:06](#) I love it. That's such a good idea because this year my oldest is 10 and I was like, what do I put in his Easter basket? He is aging out of the little things that I would usually put in there. That's a brilliant idea. Just bring out the basket with a little bit of chocolate and movie tickets.

Tsh: [00:52:24](#) That's right. It gets expensive when they're teenagers. What do you want? AirPods. Not so much.,

Haley: [00:52:33](#) Eastertide goes all the way until Pentecost, which I believe is next month in June. We've got May to feast and remember the risen Lord. That is all very fun. I think it just, it hits the time of year really well because at least in central Texas, wildflowers are blooming. It's beautiful to be outside and it feels like a new start with Easter, which is great.

May 1st is the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker. So Joseph, Jesus' foster father, he has another feast day in March, but this is a feast day that specifically is honoring him as a worker and patron of laborers. It's specific to that and I think they intentionally put it on May 1st because it's the international day of the worker.

Tsh: That's right. It's May Day.

Haley: [00:53:37](#) It's all tied up, it's all connected there. It's intentional.

Tsh: That's literally this week of this episode. This is May, so wild.

Haley: It's flying by at a terrifying speed. I love any reason to celebrate Saint Joseph because I just love him and his humility and I love that he never says anything out loud in the scriptures. There's no quotes from Saint Joseph at all, which makes me think that maybe he was just a pretty quiet guy. Just happy to be in

the background doing the right thing, following God. I don't know. I just find him very endearing, if that makes sense.

Tsh: I never thought of that actually. That's a good point. I like that.

Haley: I love that. Saint Joseph, this is an interesting fun fact about Saint Joseph. He's the patron of a happy death, meaning a good death where you're prepared for death and it is you're moving into eternal life. Part of that is because since he wasn't present during holy week in the scriptural account, it's assumed that he had already passed away when that happened because otherwise he probably would have been at the foot of the cross with Mary and Saint John. There's the idea that if that's the case then it could have been that both Jesus and Mary were at his bedside when he passed away and what could be a better death than to have Jesus and Mary on either side of you as you're dying. I like thinking about that too. I love Saint Joseph. Then a feast that is new to us to celebrate is on May 21st is the Feast of the Mexican Martyrs. In the 1920s there was a lot of anti-Christian political stuff going on. President Elias Calles was very anti the church. There were just lots of Christian martyrs during that time in Mexico, which I think it's interesting to think about because especially being in Texas that's so close geographically and I don't really think about Christian persecution being on this continent very much.

Tsh: Yeah. I know the sound's very western minded, but sometimes it's good for us to even remember that it wasn't only in the medieval period or 500 years ago that, 20th century martyrdom was a real thing and even 21st century.

Haley: Totally. I think it helps me shift my perspective to towards reality more when I remember martyrs closer in time and closer geographically. There were lots of martyrs during that time. They call it the Cristero Wars, were between Christians and a atheistic government at the time. There were lots of priests where when the priesthood was outlawed in certain areas who were working underground and who then would be discovered and executed Blessed Miguel Pro is one of these, he's really cool. It's actually not his feast day this month, but he was one of the martyrs in the period. But he gets his own feast day cause he's extra awesome. He was executed and the president had his execution photographed because he wanted to put it on the front page of the newspaper. To be like, hey, we're really getting you guys. But Blessed Miguel Pro was ready for his execution, holding his arms out, modeled after the crucifixion. He blessed his executioners and said, I forgive you. His last words were Vivo Cristo Rey, long live Christ the King. People cut out these pictures to inspire them to keep fighting for the faith. It actually completely backfired what the president was trying to do because he became such an inspiration to people.

Tsh: [00:57:43](#) A little question because cause I'm sure some people are wondering, how as a family do you recognize this? Do just talk with your kids about the event that happened?

Haley: [00:57:54](#) Yes. We talk to our kids about that a little bit, about the bravery of people who are willing to keep following Jesus even when it wasn't allowed. We usually have Mexican food, which is very easy to find in central Texas. It's not a hard feast to celebrate.

Tsh: Nor is it painful. I feel like we've had this conversation before, but I feel like coming from Texas, Mexican food is pretty much just food to me. This was a big thing in our marriage, marrying an Oregonian who for him, he likes Mexican food, but it's not a daily staple for him. Whereas I could have tacos five days a week.

Haley: [00:58:30](#) There have been times where I realized, oh my goodness, the last eight meals I've had were some form of tacos, like they were either breakfast tacos or fish tacos or black bean and sweet potato tacos. Oh, I need to branch out here. But they just work for everything, Tsh.

Tsh: [00:58:45](#) They really do. There's so easy and who doesn't like tacos? I mean, at least in our family, everybody eats tacos and it's nice when I know it's a meal that I know my kids will eat.

I know that there are other feast days, but you've covered May 1st, Saint Joseph. May 21st, what is the name of this again?

Haley: The Feast of the Mexican Martyrs.

Tsh: Okay, the Feast of the Mexican Martyrs. Beautiful. And then of course Eastertide 50 full days.

Haley: It's still going.

Tsh: This is very fun. And next month we will talk a little bit about Pentecost and what that means and moving into ordinary time. I cannot believe we're already almost there. It's amazing.

Haley: [00:59:22](#) I know, it's bonkers.

Tsh: [00:59:32](#) You can find Haley on her blog at CarrotsforMichaelmas.com and on Twitter and Instagram @HaleyCarrots. You can find Andrea at AndreaDebbink.com and on Instagram @Andrea.Debbink and to keep up with me, I'm on Twitter @Tsh and Instagram @TshOxenreider and of course theartistsimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Andrea's. Head to

the show notes for this episode and number 194 thesimpleshow.com where you can find all sorts of things, links to things we talked about, where you can sign up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things as well as how to connect with Andrea and myself and don't forget about our community book club. Join in by finally becoming a patron of the show for just a few dollars per month. It really means so, so much. Look for the link in the show notes of this episode. The show was 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.