



Teaching Liberty to Kids
Guest: Connor Boyack
May 5, 2014

Connor Boyack is founder and president of [Libertas Institute](#), a public-policy think-tank in Utah.

WOODS: I had to have you on because you have done something that many, many parents have wanted me to do, wanted somebody to do, and you're in the process of not just this one immediate project, but a longer term project of bringing the liberty message to a younger audience. I get emails all the time asking, what can my fourth-grader read? What can my fifth-grader, my third-grader—and my answer is, “I don't know. Nothing.” I really don't know. And now you've come along and changed that.

Let's start off with Frederic Bastiat's book *The Law*, because that's really the cornerstone of all this. What's the central point in that book *The Law*? When did that book come out?

BOYACK: It was written in 1850 in France.

WOODS: So it's a long time ago. And yet libertarians read and swear by this book, and it is a tiny, little book. Even an American adult could sit down and read it. So what's the—

BOYACK: With that short attention span.

WOODS: That's right. He's got a bunch of points in there, but there's probably one central point, his major thesis, that people walk away with when they read it. What is that?

BOYACK: Oh, I don't—you could draw many, really. The main one that I focus on is legal plunder, this notion that things that are wrong for us to do individually do not become right just because someone in the government is doing it. If it's wrong for you or me to do, if we can't steal someone's property, we can't empower a government agent to do it on our behalf. I think there are lots of actual concurrent themes, but that's the one that I like to focus on the most.

WOODS: I think that is the major theme, and especially his overall point about the law, which is that if the law is not something universal and that applies equally and in the same respect to everybody, then the law has been corrupted. It's not the real law.

BOYACK: Yeah.

WOODS: And then legal plunder is a subset of that because that's an example of the government being able to do one thing and we can't do that same thing, so it can't be the law.

BOYACK: Well, and like you say, this book, you can sit down and read it in an hour and a half. You can find it for free online. Our institute, Libertas Institute, we're out of Utah. We've printed over 10,000 of them. We sell them at cost for \$1 on our website, [LibertasUtah.org](#). I found it through the years a very effective tool for persuading people to first understand liberty but then become its champion. It played an instrumental role in my own educational development years ago, and it's so small, and it's a fun read, right? It's not any of this dry, boring crap that you often get from libertarian circles. This is a fun book. Frederic Bastiat has a really fun personality. I really wish we had even more of his writings and more biographies and things like that because his mind is very sharp and he's a witty guy. So it's a fun book to read.

The problem, as you noted a moment ago—I used that book as kind of a missionary tool for liberty. There is plenty of other material out there, but it's all for adults. For my colleague at work, or my aunt, or my neighbor, I can pick and choose based on their educational background, their interests, their reading level. There is all sorts of different things you and I can recommend to any adult, but we've had this dearth of material that we can give to kids.

I am a father. I have two kids, and as I think about them as I have fielded the same questions you have from homeschoolers, especially—they want to customize their curriculum. They love liberty. What can I do for my kids? And there's a few products out there like the Uncle Eric books. And that's primarily your pre-teens or your teenagers; like *Whatever Happened to Penny Candy*? A really good book, but it's still kind of a, you know, a teenage-level type of book.

WOODS: Yeah, definitely. Now that's Richard Maybury, whom I've also had as a guest on the program, and you're right. I've been thinking about my own eldest daughter, who is on the verge of turning 11, but even a couple of years ago I was looking around because she is so curious and she is such a voracious reader, and she wants to know what I am up to and what I do, and I looked into that book, and it just seemed there was no way she'd be quite ready for it at that point. So you're right. That's the key gap. So what's the age range that you think your book—you're doing a series, I presume, in the Tuttle Twins series. This is one is the *Tuttle Twins Learn about the Law*. What are you aiming at in terms of age range?

BOYACK: We've tested this and feel good about the age range as 6 to 10 years old. I have to qualify that. We've had even four- and five-year-olds who have liked the book. Our book is 62 pages long. It's full of fun, colorful illustrations. So even if the subject matter is a little bit above, or even the reading ability or comprehension is a little above a five-year-old or even, you know, some of the more advanced four-year-olds, they are liking it because of the story, and the characters, and the colors, and the drawing. And then while our range is 6 to 10, we've even had 11, 12 and 13-year-olds who like it because it's maybe below their level in terms of being too childish, but the material inside—the ideas are fresh. They are not getting it in school. And so all the test readings that we've done, we've found that they are still willing to read this more childish book even though they are outside or above that age range because they don't learn about this stuff anywhere else.

And you're right, this will be a series of books. Think of *Berenstain Bears* or *Amelia Bedelia*. Each book is a different concept. My kids love *Berenstain Bears*. In one they learn about hygiene, and in another they learn about the golden rule, and they teach a value in each book, and that's kind of the approach that we're taking. There's two characters, Ethan and Emily Tuttle. They are nine-year-old twins, and just through the stories that we share through, you know, them being in class or them going to the grocery store, them being on the playground, they are going to learn throughout the series of books in each book, a different principle of liberty. So this first book is essentially a children's version of *The Law*, so we take the same core concepts that are in Bastiat's book, and we distill them down, wrap them in a fun story. Just real quick, for example: what happens in this book is the kids are talking to their neighbor, and their neighbor grows a garden, and he says, I've got this other neighbor who loves my tomatoes. Whenever I take them to her, she just loves them. Do you think it would be okay for her to come and steal them from me? And the kids are like, obviously "no," that's horrible, no way, and the guy says, "Well, I know you guys have an uncle who is a police officer. He's part of this government. If he came and took the tomatoes to go give to that neighbor, would thought be okay?"

And the kids are like oh, you know, trick question, no, I think that's not okay, and so he reaffirms to these kids that there are things that are right and wrong, and just because someone has a badge or someone is part of the government—if it's wrong for you and me to do, it's wrong for anyone to do.

There are various kind of stories and scenarios in the book that reaffirm this plunder and legal plunder. Of course, because we're talking about plunder, there's a pirate character in the book, and we make it really fun for the kids. What I have found, which is kind of funny, is that this stuff is common sense for kids. Especially the younger kids who haven't been indoctrinated in the system and haven't been made to compromise their moral system, it's actually very simple. Of course it's wrong to steal. Of course you don't make exceptions to that. So we're not really bringing anything revelatory to kids. A lot of it is just common-

sense ideas that really kids already get. We're just trying to reaffirm them. We're trying to help them justify in their minds and give them the foundation of morality even in politics, to say there are things that are right and wrong and that applies to all these different issues. So in the book we try to step them through a few fun ideas and show them how it might apply, but so that's the first book.

Other books, for example, the kids might be in a playground and there's a bully, and so they learn about the non-aggression principle. It's okay to defend yourself, but it's wrong to be the bully. So we'll use a few examples there and we've taught the non-aggression principle to a six-year-old. The characters might be in a grocery store, and they are with their mom, and they are, you know: mom, why are there 15 bags of potato chips? And so the mom maybe shares a story about her great grandfather growing up in war-torn eastern Europe and how they barely had bread, and so she's teaching prosperity and abundance through capitalism. Another book that we've got planned is a children's version of "I, Pencil," where the kids learn about something as silly as a pencil. They go to a manufacturing plant on a field trip, and they see how elaborate the process is. They are learning about division of labor, and so a lot of these different aspects and ideas of liberty—we'll throw each one into a book and then end up with a whole series where a parent could take their six-year-old, buy them the set, and off they go. They get a really powerful, solid foundation of liberty at a young age.

WOODS: Connor, as I listen to you describe this, I'm sure my listeners will agree with me that the surprising thing about it is that it's taken so long for someone to have this idea. I'm looking at a PDF of the book in front of me right now, and it is superbly executed. There's nothing amateurish about this. The illustrations are beautiful, and I am pretty sure the illustrator is the same guy who helped us make some ads when I was involved in Revolution PAC for Ron Paul. This guy is absolutely top notch.

So now let me get back to a point that you made, though, which is that a lot of the ideas that we're trying to convey as libertarians, when you get right down to it, are quite simple, and that's part of the beauty and elegance of the whole system: we say that all we're really doing is building upon and expanding upon and elaborating on principles that you were taught by your mother.

BOYACK: Right.

WOODS: So although it may be at times difficult to write for such a young audience, to get them to understand certain things, the benefit you have is that the concepts you're trying to understand are concepts that not only are intuitive to them, but are concepts also that have been taught to them pretty much from the moment they attained the ability to reason.

BOYACK: Yeah, you think of any good parent teaching their child what Matt Kibbe of FreedomWorks just used as the title of his new book: *Don't Hurt People and Don't Take Their Stuff*. These are very simple ideas that every child learns, as you mentioned. We're simply trying to, as I said, reaffirm that and show that that doesn't just apply to their friends on the playground or their siblings. This isn't just an insular thing that these principles somehow don't apply once you get into the government or once you start talking about going to town halls and city councils, and then all of a sudden set that moral system aside, and we're operating here under different parameters. We're trying to show these kids what we libertarians believe in that those ideas, those principles, apply to geopolitics as much as they do to family relations. So we're excited. We've got such a good reception. The book's just started shipping. Our illustrator, as you noted, is top notch. In fact, we were at FreedomFest together in Las Vegas a couple of years ago, he and I, we shared a room, and we were just brainstorming. Hey, we've got to work on something together, you know? And nothing really germinated until about a year later, which is a year ago, where we got the idea and said, we need a kids' version of *The Law*, because as I said, we print these things by thousands. People buy them left and right and share them all over the place. So it's a really core part of our work. And so being so deeply involved in promoting *The Law* it wasn't difficult for me eventually to have the idea that we need to make this for kids as well, and from there the ideas just started spinning. Every great work of liberty we can now boil down for kids, turn into a fun story, have it be part of this series, and the classical liberal, libertarian library that we enjoy as adults, all of a sudden now we have the counterparts for our kids, that we can say, here are the very basic ideas, and then we can have those conversations.

We're not trying to propagandize these kids. We're not trying to force them to believe anything. We're trying to give parents who believe in these ideas a resource so that they can start a conversation with their kid, and so their kids have a foundation against which they can test things. So if they see a news story or hear a teacher say something in school, they have more of a foundation against which they can say, well, I learned this, and I think that might not be wrong, but without these books and without parents proactively trying to explain what they believe in very simplistic terms, as you said, there's really not been a lot of resources that we've had as parents. So as we got into this a year ago and started planning it and doing all the behind the scenes and initial stuff before we actually started writing the book and getting involved in that, we were doing market research. What's out there? Is there anything? Who would be our competition? And honestly I was amazed, as a parent myself, that there was like nothing, a huge void in the marketplace.

So we're excited to fill that void. We're excited, and we've had people from all over the country already doing pre-orders and getting really excited. You can get it at TuttleTwins.com. Those are the characters, TuttleTwins.com. You can pay in Bitcoins if anyone has crypto, you could pay that way or with a credit card or PayPal account, so we've had these things flying in already, these orders, and I am just excited. It's a fun project for me to do as a father for my own kids. I think they have been more excited about the book, honestly, than I am. I was just reading it to them again for the like 28th time just a few minutes ago before this interview. So they are excited. I hope your listeners are excited. This, I think, is a huge void in the market, and again, more generally as we look at the Ron Paul homeschool and what you are doing as part of that, I think there's a larger movement afoot to take our message to the rising generations. So we're excited to be a part of that.

WOODS: I will make a quick plug for that. As of this fall, this coming fall of 2014, most of K-11 of that program will be ready to go, and then by the end of 2015, the entire program will be ready to go. But people are already using it now, even with just a handful of grades ready. K-5, the first six years, in other words, are going to be available for free. So you can have six years worth of home education geared toward a tradition of thought that you believe in for nothing, and taught by people you trust. The opportunities we have today boggle my mind. So the site there is RonPaulHomeschool.com. That's easy to remember.

I do need to ask you one tough question, not quite a gotcha question, but close. If you're going to take a message like Bastiat's that the law has to be consistent, and that if I can't do something then morally speaking the government can't do it either, isn't that an anarchist manifesto, then?

BOYACK: (laughs) Well, we're training a bunch of six-year-olds to be anarchists.

WOODS: Not bomb-throwers, because then that would violate the non-agg—well, I don't know if that would necessarily violate the non-aggression principle in some cases, but we don't believe in that, you know, we don't believe in doing that.

BOYACK: It depends who you're throwing the bomb at and why. No, you know, in fact many people have said that if Bastiat had a little bit more time, then he would he would have ended up an anarchist just because his writings are clearly foundational in that. The book is 62 pages long, and because we're writing for kids, that's not your non-fiction type of 62 pages. It's light text here and there. So it was hard enough to take *The Law*, which itself is short, and boil it down to its core concepts, wrap it in a story, and still have that be short.

WOODS: Oh, no, no, no. Hold on. Let me make clear: I am not criticizing the book or anything. What I want to know is, if the kid reads the book, a really, really astute kid reads that book, at the end is there a chance that that kid will say, "Well, wait a minute. Then what is it that government is allowed to do?" If government can't do anything that we can't do, what is government allowed to do and what is the implication of what the parent ought to say to that?

BOYACK: Right, I didn't mean to imply that you were criticizing. What I was trying to get at was there was a lot of material that we couldn't pack in the book, and so what happened is you have the core foundational stuff, where a kid who is smart will probably ask a question like that. I think it will ultimately depend on the parent. Is the parent going to tell the kid, "Oh, well, there are these exceptions," or, "Here are these nuances," and you know, is the parent going to encumber that child's foundation with all of these exceptions that we find in society and around us as justification for what the government does? Or is that parent themselves going to be slightly or fully anarchist? Are they really going to be absolute in these principles and tell their kid, no, you know, when the government is doing this, this is wrong, this is problematic, this is a violation? I think ultimately it depends on the conversation that this book generates, because this book can only do so much in so limited a number of pages and be simplified enough for kids to want to read it and be able to get through it. I think the conversations are what's going to matter.

WOODS: Right.

BOYACK: So that's entirely going to depend on the parents and their own philosophy and their own attitude. So I am excited to see what those conversations end up being. In our test readings that we've done with families, it's been fun to hear about those conversations and have parents themselves—this book in the end ultimately educates parents as much as kids. Think of a Glenn Beck conservative, Tea Party father whose kid hears about this or the mom. They get the book. The father sits down to read it. He himself is having to grapple with these things. He is getting questions from a six-year-old, like, why is it okay to do this? And so it's educational as much for the parents in the end as it is for the kids, and seeing those conversations happening, having people grapple with these simple, ideological foundations, I think the potential for benefit is just overwhelming. I am super-excited for it.

WOODS: You know, of course, I am bringing up a semi-toxic word when I say anarchist. Of course, I don't mean dumb-guy, left-wing anarchism, Russian beards and the whole thing. I think in terms of private property, and if private property is sacrosanct, then nobody can violate it, and that has very radical implications. But Bastiat himself did believe that government had a role. He never came out and said that government, because it is necessarily an aggressor against private property, has to be rejected altogether, and most people who read his book *The Law* don't walk away with precisely that message, either, but it does get them thinking in new and exciting ways that are discouraged in the typical classroom or in American society. We get caught up in minutiae. We get caught up in trivial questions, trivial questions that take for granted the existing system. I always give the example of whether the top marginal tax rate should be 39.1 percent or 38.7 percent. That's a trivial question that means nothing. Should you have an income tax at all is a good question, and you are raising good questions. TuttleTwins.com is the website. The book is *The Tuttle Twins Learn about the Law*. What's the next one that we can expect?

BOYACK: We're actually going to let the market decide that, so as we get more people buying the book, we'll send out email, and do social media, and let people give input. We have a lot of ideas, but we'd love to let the market decide, let parents decide, what they want to see. As we get our marketing campaign off the ground, get a bunch of books out there, and get kids reading it, we'll begin having those conversations and let people decide. Ultimately I have no preference. I want to do what parents want to do, and the sky is limitless. We have so much material out there that we can now simplify for kids. We're really excited about what's on the horizon. I would love to end up with 10, 15, 20 of these books. The potential is huge. The market for libertarianism is getting bigger and bigger, with concurrent efforts like the Ron Paul home school. We're going to see even more of it. So I am not one of those pessimistic libertarians. I am extremely optimistic. With stuff like this, with other projects going on, I think the potential for our message, its reach,

its impact, is significant, especially going forward. So TuttleTwins.com is where you can grab a copy of the book and many more to follow, we hope.