



Episode 312: Pencils and Central Planning: A Children's Story
Guest: Connor Boyack
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Connor Boyack is the author of numerous books, including two volumes in the [Tuttle Twins series](#).

WOODS: You were on episode number 300, and now you are my first guest as I come back in 2015, and that's because you've written another book. You had two books come out one right after the other. You remind me of me back in 2005. I think I wrote three books that year. You had one come out in December. We talked about that episode 300, [TomWoods.com/300](#). That was *Feardom*, for which I wrote the foreword, and today we're talking about another entry in your brilliant and extremely necessary Tuttle Twins series for children.

I want to make sure that people listening don't turn this off because it's about and for children. The themes, of course, are timeless, and the importance of educating children is important to all of us. Tell us about *The Tuttle Twins and the Miraculous Pencil*—the second entry in your Tuttle Twins children's book series.

BOYACK: I'm glad, Tom, that you made that distinction, because we've actually been a little sneaky in how we're educating adults while we're educating kids.

WOODS: That's right, yeah.

BOYACK: It's been a little bit sneaky, but it's been very effective. So this is the second book. You had me on your show. We talked about the first, *The Tuttle Twins and the Law*, and that was based on Bastiat's book *The Law*, and that has been so well received that we have a series planned. But that was our trial book. We wanted to see: is there a market for this? Is there going to be a good reception? Is it going to spread by word by mouth? Are people going to recommend it to others? That book has done so, so well. In fact, I thought it would spread mostly through libertarian circles, people who have read *The Law*. They want to expose their children to these same ideas. It's actually spread through homeschoolers more than any other group that we have seen. You think about this homeschooling moms who have their mommy blogs, and they go blog about it, and 30 people buy the book for their kids. So the first book did really well.

WOODS: Wait, before you go on: did I read this correctly, or did I dream this, that you've had at least one foreign language translation of that book?

BOYACK: Yeah, we translated that into Spanish. We have Swedish coming out soon. I've got a French libertarian who really wants to translate it into French, which, of course, is the original language of Bastiat's book. And so that book has had the greatest reception, which leads us to want to do translations because there's a market for it. We want to cater to that.

WOODS: Yeah, right.

BOYACK: So that's been great. We have about 8 to 10 books planned total in the series, and for those who haven't yet familiarized themselves with what we're doing it's called *The Tuttle Twins*, TuttleTwins.com. The Tuttle Twins are two characters, Ethan and Emily, and they learn about liberty through—we do a fun story. So the kids are engaged. I've got an illustrator, Elijah Stanfield, a liberty-minded guy who is just phenomenal. We get so many compliments on the quality of the art that is done for our books.

WOODS: It is great. I can testify to that. It is such a beautifully done book. It is not in any way amateurish. It looks like a children's book. It does not look like, well, some guy had a libertarian idea, and he scribbled some images. It is a beautiful book.

BOYACK: And Elijah will appreciate that. He really does good work. What we're trying to do is bring the principles and concepts of liberty to a younger generation. This started out with myself being the father of two young kids a couple of years ago looking online trying to find materials that I could use to expose them to liberty and Austrian economics or what have you. And not finding, not only not very much, but nothing. There was a little bit about, "Hey kids, here's what the Constitution is," or, "Here's American history." But there was nothing on the core concepts of liberty. And so being an enterprising guy, I said: let's fill that market void. So we did the first law book. The second one is based on "I, Pencil" by Leonard Read. It's a fantastic, brief essay—for those who aren't familiar with it—about how the free market works, how spontaneous order facilitates the production of goods.

He used the pencil, of course, to show that here's this simple object; we all take it for granted. It's just a common pencil, and yet no single individual knows how to make it. It requires the combined labor and ingenuity and cooperation of countless people who may not even share the same language or religion or continent, all coming together to work on a single pencil. It's a fantastic essay. You can find it at fee.org. Just Google it online. It's great, and it helps adults understand how an economy should, and actually does, despite government interference, function.

So we wanted to take the same concept, take it down to the kids, because kids are entitled, especially in our culture. I spent a few weeks in Africa a few years ago, and you get immersed in that environment, and then you come back, and your eyes are opened, and you're like, oh, my gosh, not only do adults have the problem. Kids have these problems. They are entitled. My

kids: they don't eat a meal that I slave over cooking or my wife slaves over cooking, and we sit down, and we try to understand. We spent money on this. Dad has to work to earn this money. Kids around the world don't have this wonderful food, and you have it. You shouldn't take it for granted. So we wanted material that would bring the concepts of "I, Pencil" to kids, and help them understand the shirt they are wearing, the backpack they carry, the book they read, whatever it is requires so many people coming together. It requires such elaborate processes.

As we did our little beta testing for the story as we were developing the book, it was fascinating to hear, with some of the little focus groups we did, the conversations that were coming out between parents and children, where children were really understanding and no longer taking for granted—at least as often—the toys that they had and the things that they did, because now it was fascinating to them that these things even existed. Of course, the story is based on a pencil, but it's applicable to anything.

The first book was about basically the proper role of government; Bastiat's *The Law*. In the second one, we wanted to talk more economics and market and bring these same ideas to kids. We're so excited because we wanted to do about 8 to 10 books in the series, and the momentum is there. It's been selling very well, and that's very encouraging to us.

WOODS: Well, I'm glad you put it that way because what we're trying to recapture in children with this book is not just the idea of liberty, which they are probably learning about for the first time, but the idea of wonder. Children would have an attitude of wonder instead of entitlement. It's hard these days, especially when little miracles are performed all the time by all these gadgets we have that amaze you and me—because we grew up in a regular world, and now suddenly, as Jeff Tucker would say, we're in a Jetson's world. I don't know what happened between then and now, but I'm amazed, and every day there's at least one new thing that I can do that blows me away. And I don't want my kids to grow up, as you put it, with an entitled attitude, like I'm entitled to have a watch that can tell me how old Ian Anderson is by asking it verbally. I don't want them to have that. I want them to grow up saying, it is astonishing that this is possible both technologically and from the point of view of the division of labor. It's amazing that any device even of 1/1000th this simplicity is possible because of all the different steps that you need to go through.

With "I, Pencil," the point that Leonard Read was making is that it's not enough to say, all you need is some wood and some graphite and some rubber. It's that each one of these things, as you note in the book, has its own family tree, we might say, that goes into producing it. The way that Milton Friedman popularized the essay was to say that when you go to get the wood, you realize you've got to chop down the wood with something, and to chop it down you're going to need a saw, and for the saw you're going to need iron ore. You have to mine the iron and all this stuff. You've got to produce steel. You need rubber for the tires to transport the steel. And you realize that there are so many people and so many processes, and they don't even know that they are involved ultimately in the production of a pencil. And not one of them could encompass in his brain all of these technological processes. This is something that should

fill all of us with wonder, and I think that children in particular ought to have that natural attitude of wonder. It should resonate with them.

I'll say before I stop talking here that I read this book of yours to my daughter Amy just the other day, and I soon as we got done reading, she turned to me and said, "That's exactly how you explained it to me." I had forgotten I had told her this whole story when she was younger, and she had remembered it, and it rang a bell when I explained it to her.

Now it's good that the children have the attitude of wonder. Maybe we don't have to explain to them at age seven why therefore central planning doesn't work. What is your ambition with this book? Are we trying to push them in that direction, or at this point are we satisfied that they understand how interconnected the world is?

BOYACK: I think more than anything what we're striving for is to facilitate conversations that aren't happening. Like you are listening to Tom Woods: of course they are going to be getting fed these types of lessons and concepts as they are growing up, but in 95% of families, that's not happening whether they are liberty-minded homeschoolers, unschoolers, or if they are sincere parents who do put their kids in public school, and they are definitely not getting it there. So the kids aren't getting exposed to these ideas. We want to supplement parents who perhaps on their own initiative are bringing these concepts up, but more likely than not, that's not happening.

And so what we were really intrigued by, it was almost an unintended consequence of our first book. We wanted to teach the concepts of Bastiat's *The Law* to children. And so we put the book out there—very well received. We get all this feedback, and what we found—it was not our intention—was that adults were learning along the way. It's kind of this sly, subtle thing, which for us has now become intentional with the second and then future books in that a child would be sitting with a parent. Perhaps they are too young to read themselves. Perhaps the parent is just having some family time reading along with the child. And the child is reading the concepts and Bastiat's *The Law*, but in our little children's story. And they get down and they say, well, mom, if plunder is bad, then why are taxes okay? You know? And they start asking these very raw, fundamental, tantalizing questions that parents haven't even considered.

So at the end of the book what we say is, hey, parents, this was for your children. Here's where you can go read the original version of Bastiat's *The Law*. Here's where you can get a study guide. Here are some suggested questions that you can have—the same thing that we're doing at the end of the pencil book for parents, leading the adults to the original sources, the original stories or essays upon which our books are based, providing them with questions. We have activity workbooks, so the child gets done reading our *Tuttle Twins and the Miraculous Pencil*, and the parents can go get a 21-page activity workbook so that they are doing crossword puzzles and word searches and mazes and service projects and study group discussion questions, reinforcing these concepts for the kids. Because, again, all we're trying to do is drive discussion. Myself as a parent: I don't want to sit down with my five-year-old and inculcate the

raw ideas of Austrian economics. I want to give them a conceptual foundation so that as we have informal conversations in the years ahead, where there's a current event that happens or whether some economic change in our family circumstances, they have a foundational reference point so that they can go back and understand all of these things that are happening because they have been given the basic narrative or story or concept that we can point them back to. And if we don't give them that foundation, they're not getting it in public school. Many homeschooling parents don't understand it themselves and therefore can't give that to their children. We just want that foundation to be there. We want these ideas to be in the back of their minds. Just like with your daughter, where you say that, oh, yes, you remembered the story, and we can discuss it again. If I'm discussing with my children about how this new iPad that we bought, I can reference the story and say, hey, let's think of the family tree of this iPad, and suddenly, it's not just this new object that they get, and they can play their games, but I can infuse the discussion with an appreciation for where this actually came from, and they can begin to appreciate the free market and freedom and spontaneous order and the wonder of all these people that are working together. We just want to be able to allow parents to point back to the ideas and no material out there—no educational material that I've encountered after an active search—is providing this to children and parents.

And so for us it's a pretty ambitious project. We're very careful, recognizing the implications of what we're doing and how important it is for a lot of the families that have been buying it, but over time we hope to end up with somewhere in the ballpark of 8 to 10 books. They won't all be based on another work like Bastiat's *The Law* or Leonard Read's "I, Pencil." We might do one on the non-aggression principle. So think of a bully at a playground, that it's okay to defend yourself, it's not okay to be the aggressor, and have the story wrapped around that. Some of that may just be a concept standing apart from any literary work that we're using. So we haven't solidified the plan of books going forward, but we have a lot of ideas. We get a lot of feedback from parents who have maybe read a book that they like, or they try to explain to their five-year-old—I always laugh with people that the epic, final book in our series, if I can pull it off, will be *Human Action*.

WOODS: (laughs) The children's book.

BOYACK: Right. I don't imagine that's possible at all, but we'll consider that a success if we're at all able to pull that off.

WOODS: Well, two things occur to me as you're talking. The first is, up until recently, when people would say, I know there are things like the *Uncle Eric* books that maybe my early teenagers can read, and I know there are books that as you get older you can read, but what's something that can be suggestive in terms of liberty ideas to kids who are younger than this, and pretty much the answer I've had to give them up until now is, I don't know, nothing. I can't think of anything. This series is filling that gap. I knew it was only a matter of time, because I thought to myself, this movement is being populated more and more all the time. We have more and more people interested in it all the time. There's no way this gap is going to persist,

and then, of course, simultaneously with this, this Ron Paul homeschool program has gotten started, and that's a K-12 program, and, again, this is something that engages the kids, even at a young level, with really, really interesting and important ideas.

The second thing I was thinking of in both cases—both your project and the one that I'm working on with the Ron Paul homeschool—they also work for parents. Parents can learn simultaneously with the children. That's not to say that the parents are stupid. It's not to say the parents don't have knowledge. The parents themselves know, as I myself know, that I would have given my right arm to have the kind of educational opportunities that our kids have today thanks to these types of resources. And now parents who say, oh, isn't it a shame that I didn't get this kind of education, well, they can get it too. They can listen to these audio files in their car. They can sit down and discuss these books with their children. They can go and read the originals. You've made it easy. I'm trying to make it easy for everybody to be as knowledgeable as possible so that we can be formidable debate opponents, and push this conversation forward in the whole country.

BOYACK: What I love most—I've written four books for adults, general market, whatever. I have done two now for kids, and it's really interesting writing a children's book. It actually takes a lot of work. The story itself isn't long, but it's kind of a mixed thing where these ideas themselves are not difficult. They're not complex. A child can understand the non-aggression principle. Don't hurt other people. Don't take their things. Every child is told that by their parents. The hard part is helping seed the story with enough application to the real world that it makes it relevant. So if we just have a story about don't hurt people, every parent is going to agree, every kid is going to agree. They're going to walk away thinking, well, yeah, we teach every kid that; big deal. But if we throw in just a couple of subtle stories to help them see how that applies to the government, how that applies to politics, how it applies to relations with your neighbors or people in another country, then we start forcing, or rather encouraging, conversations that didn't exist.

It's been fascinating for us to get some of the feedback where kids—these kids are taught these concepts foundationally. It's not that this is not new information to them. We have to help children, and then, of course, even the parents understand that all the exceptions that society layers onto those fundamental, core truths of don't hurt people, don't steal their things, are not, in fact, exceptions. They are justifications for things that should not be done. So we try and introduce these ideas to these kids or to their parents that help them see that these are enduring truths. These are things that apply not just to your four-year-old that shouldn't be hitting their sibling; it applies to you as well. It applies to the police officer. It applies to the government.

So we're not overt in it. We're not trying to come off in these books as too preachy or especially preaching to a libertarian choir, because most of customers are not libertarian. The average person who buys a Tuttle Twins book, we're finding, is an independent-minded, homeschool mom who is more often than not conservative. But they don't really understand freedom. They

don't understand what liberty is. They don't really get any of these ideas. So as you said earlier, they themselves are being educated along the way.

The fun thing for us is, our book is targeted between 5 and 10 years of age, but because of Elijah's illustrations, we're getting three- and four-year-olds who are sitting there and they like seeing, oh, there's the butterfly, and there's the cat, or whatever, and they like the drawings, and so they're getting sucked into these stories. And then we're even getting 11, 12, even up to 14 and 15-year-olds who are reading our books and liking them not because they feel like they should be reading a children's book—it's beneath them age-wise—but because they've never heard these ideas anywhere else. None of the books they've been assigned or provided by their parents have introduced these concepts to them, and so they are intrigued by the story.

So it's a careful line that we have to do when we're developing these books, recognizing that we have a target audience, but the benefit is running the gamut in terms of age—the parents as well. So, yeah, it is easy to dismiss this as, oh, you're just going after the young children, but the effect that we're seeing is much more widespread than that. So it's very encouraging to us, as I say, where there was a market void before this, as you know, with the *Uncle Eric* books and stuff, there's some resources for teenagers, but there's been such a void for so long. And especially as homeschooling is just exploding, we want to be able to satisfy that demand and really create a stronger foundation for a much larger liberty movement 5, 10, 20 years from now.

WOODS: Well, the book we've been talking about today is *The Tuttle Twins and the Miraculous Pencil*. TuttleTwins.com is the headquarters for these books. Connor, I would like to ask what the next one's going to be or what your time table is for 2015, but I don't want to impose any external deadline or anything on you—put more pressure on you than already exists except just to say thank you for the work that you've done already.

BOYACK: Well, I appreciate that, Tom. We did two books in 2014. This book came out just the second week of December. So we'll probably do one book in the Summer or Fall of 2015 and then another book early 2016 and late 2016. We haven't decided what the next one will be. We're kind of letting the market decide. So if any of your listeners have read the first book or got the second book, if you have an idea, any of you listeners, please let us know. There's a contact form at TuttleTwins.com. We're really trying to satisfy the demand of parents out there, and so we've got some ideas. I'd love to do a book on homeschooling modeled after some of the work of John Taylor Gatto about the true history of the American education system. Maybe the kids go to Sudbury School, and they see what freedom looks like in terms of education. Maybe they have friends or a cousin there, and they can see that these kids can do whatever they want, and they are learning all these fun things, and they don't have to sit in a boring classroom. So we might do an education book like that. I want to do *Creature from Jekyll Island* for kids—talk about monetary policy and then some of this stuff. We've got a lot of ideas, but we haven't yet decided the third. If anyone has ideas out there, we'd love to hear them, but we are going to get going probably in the next few weeks or month or two in starting to solidify

which book and then developing the plot. So times of the essence. If anyone has ideas, we would love to hear them.

WOODS: All right, everybody, remember that the show notes page for this episode will be TomWoods.com/312. We'll link to both the *Tuttle Twins* titles as well as *Feardom*, Connor's book from a month ago. If that's your most recent Connor Boyack book, you're behind the times here. We've already moved on here. We're talking about pencils.