S11E6- The Woo Cycle with James and Marlou

Ashley:

Hello, and welcome to The Resilient Kid Podcast with some very special guests today.

I'm going to let them introduce themselves because they'll do it so much better than me. Whenever I have a young person on the podcast, I feel like it's a bit of a kids' takeover, so I absolutely want you to lead.

Hello! Who are you? Tell us who you are.

James:

I am James.

Ashley:

Hi, James! And who have you got with you today?

James:

My mummy.

Ashley:

And tell me, what's Mummy's name?

James:

Marlou.

Ashley:

Hello, Marlou! So, Marlou has been a guest on the podcast before. She's an old friend of the show—we've had you on before. Today we've got you with James. James, how old are you?

James:

I just turned eight on Saturday.

Ashley:

Amazing! Happy birthday. Did you have a nice time?

James:

Yep.

Ashley:

Oh, cool! What did you do for your birthday?

James:

Shows. Loads of them.

Ashley:

Shows? Tell me—what's that?

James:

The first one was a dress rehearsal.

Ashley:

Oh, I see! So you were in a show? How fancy! What show was it?

James:

One was Achilles , and then The Lion King .

Ashley:

Amazing! They are two big hitters for musicals, aren't they? And what parts did you play?

James:

I played Hera, but I don't have any lines.

Ashley:

Oh, how fantastic! That is such a good part though. Lines or not, that is amazing. And in The Lion King ?

James:

I was Zazu.

Ashley:

That's a very funny, very cool character. Congratulations—that's amazing! And on your birthday as well. Awesome. Well done. I can already tell we're going to have a very interesting conversation. So tell our audience, James... Why are you here today? Why have I asked you to be a guest on this very special Kids' Takeover podcast? What have you got to show us or tell us about today?

James:

The Woo Cycle.

Ashley:

The Woo Cycle! Yes, of course. What is it? Bearing in mind nobody can actually see us because we're recording audio today... What is The Woo Cycle ? I haven't got a copy here because it hasn't actually been released yet... Oh—but you have! I love it. Tell everyone... What is it?

James:

It's a book.

Ashley:

And who did you write it with?

James:

My mummy.

Ashley:

Yes! Which is exactly why we've invited her back too. So can you tell us... What's it about? What's The Woo Cycle all about?

James:

It's about Lena and her mum talking about the Woo Cycle.

Ashley:

I'm very lucky, listeners, because not only can I see the beautiful James and her mummy, Marlou... ...I think I can also spot Lena in the background. Am I right? Is that Lena behind you? Beautiful! So... Who do you think is best placed to tell us about The Woo Cycle ? Would that be you... ...or Mummy?

James:

Me.

Ashley:

Go on then. Tell us all about it. What is The Woo Cycle ?

James:

It started when Bowie went to the bathroom and saw Mummy bleeding.

Ashley:

Okay.

That is so interesting. And I'll tell you why. I think that happens a lot. As mums, we're busy, children come in and out of the bathroom all the time...

...so I actually think that happens in lots of families. So what happens next?

James:

She says, "You're bleeding. Are you okay?"

Ashley:

Why? What's the worry there?

James:

Because she sees blood and thinks it's a harm.

Ashley:

Yeah. Absolutely. So tell me a little bit about what happens next.

James:

I'm not so sure.

Marlou:

Can I help?

James:

Yeah.

Marlou:

So Bowie is James' little sister. She's four now, but when this happened I think she must have been... Maybe even two.

James:

Maybe two.

Marlou:

James was six. Bowie said, "Why are you bleeding?" And I said, "It's because I have my period." "I'm on my period." Bowie then left the bathroom and sat on our bed. James sat with her. And James actually started explaining to Bowie what that meant. Didn't you? Can you remember what words you used?

James:

No... Because it was a while ago. And you've only told me once. So... no.

Ashley:

Okay. So if I asked you then... Why did you write the book? Why was it so important?

James:

To help children understand that sometimes blood isn't a harm.

Ashley:

Brilliant. I think that's a mission that you and Mummy share, isn't it? So... Would you be able to explain periods to other children, like you explained them to Bowie? Because I'll tell you why. I think there are some parents listening who don't always have the words. Or if they do have the words... ...they're not always easy for children to understand. I think this would be absolutely perfect if you could explain it. Then younger listeners can hear it from you...

...and probably understand it much better.

James:

Okay.

Ashley:

Take it away.

Marlou:

Maybe explain it the way you explained it to Bowie... About the womb making a bed for a baby.

James:

Oh yeah. The womb makes a bed for a baby...

...and if no baby comes to stay...

...it clears the sheets.

Ashley:

Oh my goodness. I have never heard it described like that. And all I can say is...

That is the perfect definition. I absolutely love it. It's so easy to understand. No wonder you're an author! That is just perfect. You're brilliant at this.

Ashley:

So tell us a little bit about Lena then.

What happens to her in the book?

James:

At the start she comes in and sees her mum bleeding.

Then, for the rest of the book, her mum basically describes that it's not a sore.

Ashley:

So why did you call the book The Woo Cycle ?

James:

I don't really know.

Ashley:

Is this a question for Mummy, do you think?

James:

Yeah.

Ashley:

Excellent.

We have to bring you in somewhere, Marlou!

Marlou:

Thank you, I appreciate that!

When James was explaining to Bowie what periods were and why there was blood...

...she referred to the woo .

Instead of saying womb , she said woo .

Ashley:

Wow!

Marlou:

It was basically just you giving it a little nickname.

Maybe not on purpose, but I think that's what you'd heard me say.

You heard womb ...

...and you thought it was woo .

So we thought...

Do you know what?

That's actually a really lovely word for a little character.

A nice nickname.

It was important for me—and for the mission of what we want to achieve with the book—that it wasn't just about introducing periods.

It's actually about introducing periods as part of a cycle .

By introducing the word cycle , I just felt like it captured the story in the book.

It just felt right.

Ashley:

I love it.

So tell us a little bit about that cycle, James.

So Lena has noticed this blood.

Her mum has explained that she's not hurt.

That this is just a normal thing.

Can you tell us a little bit about the cycle?

James:

Every month she bleeds.

And it's not really a harm.

But it will repeat...

...until it stops.

Ashley:

Excellent.

And who chose the name of the little girl in the book?

James:

I think it was Mummy.

Marlou:

Okay then...

It was me!

Ashley:

Excellent!

Marlou:

It's actually been well over a year.

This book has been a long time in the making.

Ashley:

I bet.

Okay...

James, are you alright if I ask Mummy a couple of questions?

James:

I'm fine.

Ashley:

You get a rest.

Well deserved, by the way!

So Marlou...

Tell us a little bit about why this book , and why now?

Marlou:

The work that we're doing with Period Reality is all about educating people about, and advocating for, living in sync with your cycle.

It's about those biological, natural rhythms that we all have—men and women—that are so often overlooked in the way we've designed society.

Obviously, in our home, we talk a lot about these cycles.

When we talk about what Mummy does, they're just day-to-day conversations.

I'd been writing little notes about the words I heard James use when she talked about periods, and the questions she asked.

One of the first big things happened when she was in the supermarket with her dad.

We're both Dutch, and in the Netherlands the word for a cotton pad and a menstrual pad is the same word.

He'd asked her to pick some up in the supermarket.

She was four back then.

She came back with menstrual pads.

He said,

"Oh... I meant the other ones, babe."

"But do you know what these are for?"

She said,

"Yeah."

"It's for when Mummy has her period."

He asked,

"What does that mean?"

And she said,

"It's when there's blood coming out of Mummy's baby hole when there's no baby inside."

I thought that was such a good way to describe it.

It was maybe a little bit too graphic, so we haven't put it exactly like that in the book.

But that's when I started making notes.

Then, when I overheard the conversation between James and Bowie—and James used that metaphor that the womb makes a bed for the baby, and if no baby comes, it changes the sheets—I thought it was such a beautiful metaphor.

That wasn't actually how I'd explained it.

So in my head there had already been this translation between what I'd shared with her and how she'd made sense of it in her own words.

I thought...

That could make a really beautiful story.

In all honesty, I also had a volunteer with Period Reality who was an illustrator.

She'd just designed our four characters that we use to talk about the four different parts of the cycle.

The original idea was...

I'd ask James to draw some pages.

Maybe the illustrator could digitise them.

We'd get it printed on one of those online photo book sites.

And if one or two people ever read it...

That would be great.

But then it became the perfect mix.

James became really excited.

From the beginning I could tell she was interested in the language, the manuscript and the story.

Then the illustrator became really passionate about it.

She is just incredibly talented.

Once we got started...

We realised...

This isn't going to be a DIY project.

We're going to have to do this properly.

It's just been an incredible journey.

Ashley:

I love that.

And how insightful is James?

She's taken the information she's overheard—or that you've shared with her—translated it into language that makes sense to her, and created her own narrative around it.

That is just amazing.

I actually think we need to listen more to our young people.

Instead of trying to put our own language onto everything...

...maybe we need to hear how they're already making sense of it.

We started this series a couple of weeks ago talking about language...

...the words we use...

...the narratives we create.

That's one of the reasons I really wanted James on this week.

It fits this conversation perfectly.

Before I ask James to come back...

Is there anything else you think parents should know about educating young children around periods?

Marlou:

I think you just described it perfectly.

Sometimes we need to listen more.

Especially with conversations like these, parents often don't feel confident.

They're worried about the language they should use.

They're worried about saying the wrong thing.

Or they simply feel awkward.

This is such a perfect example of what happens when we explain things in a matter-of-fact way.

The book is aimed at children aged four to eight.

Originally we thought five to eight, but during the research phase we had parents saying,

"I would absolutely read this to my four-year-old."

What we've found is that, by sharing openly—and hopefully giving parents some language through the book—it helps them have these conversations in a gentle, age-appropriate way.

Children simply accept it as fact...

...and then move on.

I think that's true for so many of these conversations.

If you don't have them...

Someone else will.

And they don't have to be scary.

They don't have to be big.

They don't have to be awkward.

One of my favourite pieces of feedback came from dads who had read the book with their daughters.

One dad said,

"I think I'd always subconsciously assumed this was a conversation she would have with her mum. Now I'm actually excited that she might come to me with questions."

I absolutely loved that.

It's not often that dads don't want to have these conversations.

It's just how things tend to unfold.

Whereas this book gives dads a way in.

During the research phase we also had lots of parents reading it to little boys.

The response was exactly the same.

I think that's a really important message.

It doesn't matter whether they're ever going to have a period themselves.

Or whether they have a womb.

It's simply a beautiful way to introduce the topic.

There's nothing to be scared of.

Actually, it can turn something people might feel nervous about into a really beautiful, nostalgic memory.

That's what I hope.

I hope families create memories together by reading this book.

Ashley:

I think you're absolutely right.

When I'm recording the podcast on my own, without guests, I often use case studies from families I've worked with.

One of them is about a dad whose daughter spends weekends with him because Mum and Dad aren't together anymore.

He said,

"It's not that I'm scared of having the conversation... I just don't know if I've got the words."

If we introduce these conversations earlier...

If we're all speaking the same language...

If periods become something we simply accept...

Children actually accept it far more easily than adults do.

It's about removing the embarrassment.

Giving parents the words.

Giving children the words.

And then they'll interpret it themselves...

Just like James has.

I remember my own children saying baby basket instead of womb .

I'd never used that phrase.

I'd probably said,

"That's where the baby grows."

And they turned that into,

"Oh... so that's your baby basket?"

It's amazing.

We really do need to listen more.

Definitely.

Marlou:

Absolutely.

The book also creates opportunities to have a broader conversation.

Earlier you asked James to explain the cycle.

There's a gorgeous page in the book where Lena is sitting on a bench with a male figure—you might assume it's her dad, but it doesn't have to be.

They're looking out over the ocean, and above them are all the different phases of the moon.

If you want to introduce the idea of cycles...

You can.

You can explain that, like the moon, we have an average 28-day cycle.

But if that's not the conversation your child is ready for...

That's okay too.

It's still a magical illustration.

You simply turn the page.

There's another page that says,

"Some days Mummy rests. Some days Mummy runs."

It's about normalising the idea that we don't always have to be switched on.

We don't always have to be productive.

We don't always have to be running around.

Sometimes we do.

Sometimes we don't.

I think the illustrations create opportunities for parents, carers and educators to go deeper if they want to.

If it fits their family.

If it fits their language.

If their child is ready.

But even if they don't...

The illustrations themselves are beautiful.

Children can simply enjoy the story.

Ashley:

They really are beautiful.

Your illustrator is absolutely exquisite.

The artwork is stunning.

Marlou:

Maya Moore.

Ashley:

Isn't that a name that's ready to be famous?

Maya Moore.

And this is the first book she's illustrated.

I'm hoping this is going to launch a very successful career.

Remember that name...

Maya Moore.

We'll make sure we put her Instagram and details in the show notes so everyone can go and look at her work.

Now...

Marlou...

You know I love talking to you...

But I think it's time we brought back the real star of today's show.

Is James ready for a few more questions?

Has she had enough of a rest?

Marlou:

There she is!

Ashley:

There she is!

The star of the show is back!

Ready?

Amazing.

Ashley:

James... What's your favourite part of the book? It might be a picture. It might be a character. It might be some words.

James:

I like how they rhyme.

Ashley:

Oh! Can you give me an example?

James:

"Lena ran to the loo... Mum was bleeding. What should she do?"

Ashley:

Amazing! I love that. That's brilliant. Okay... Second question. Actually... I've got three questions for you. Do you think there might be a Book Two? Would you like to write another book now that you're becoming a famous author?

James:

Yeah.

Ashley:

That's exciting!

Very exciting.

James:

How does Ashley know...

...that I'm hoping to be famous one day?

Every job I want to do...

...I want to be famous doing it.

I want to be a singer when I grow up.

I want to be as famous as I can be.

Ashley:

Well...

I've got an extra question for you then!

Why do you think you want to be famous?

James:

Because everyone will know my name wherever I go.

Ashley:

Can I just say...

That is an exclusive here on The Resilient Kid Podcast!

So when, in a few years' time, we hear about this famous James taking over the world...

I interviewed her first!

Just saying!

Okay...

Last question.

I'm very lucky because I get to come to your book launch.

I feel incredibly grateful.

But not everyone is as lucky as me.

So...

When can people get hold of this magnificent, beautifully illustrated book called The Woo Cycle?

James:

Let's say...

Three sleeps.

Ashley:

Three sleeps!

Amazing!

What's the actual date, Marlou?

Marlou:

The 9th of July.

Ashley:

Perfect!

And because this podcast is released on the 9th of July...

If you're listening today...

The book is out today!

How exciting is that?

So...

Where can people buy it?

James:

On Amazon.

Ashley:

Brilliant.

We'll make sure we put the link in the show notes.

Okay...

I promise...

One final question.

What would you say to mums, dads, carers and teachers who want to talk to children about periods...

...but feel a little nervous?

What advice would you give them?

James:

Make it sound easy.

Ashley:

Make it sound easy.

I absolutely love that.

Honestly...

I don't think I've ever heard anyone explain periods more simply or more beautifully than you did today.

Thank you.

You've been absolutely brilliant.

Ashley:

Before we finish...

Marlou...

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Or James...

Anything else you'd like to tell everyone?

Did you enjoy writing the book with your mummy?

James:

Yeah.

She took me out of clubs...

...and we went to restaurants for meetings.

It was fun!

Ashley:

I love that!

So instead of after-school clubs...

You went off for business meetings in restaurants!

That's exactly what grown-ups do.

We meet in cafés...

We have meetings...

We make notes...

I'd say you're already very good at work!

Especially if all your meetings happen in restaurants!

I love it.

James...

Marlou...

I am so excited about this project.

I can't wait to see you both in person.

I genuinely can't wait for the world to get their hands on this book.

And James...

I can't wait for the world to know your name.

James:

Thank you.

Ashley:

Thank you both so much for joining me today on The Resilient Kid Podcast.

Honestly...

Even though this has only been an audio conversation...

I can see the beautiful Marlou...

The incredibly insightful and talented James...

...and just over on the screen behind you...

The beautifully illustrated Lena.

It really feels like a collaboration between all three of you.

I can't wait to hold a physical copy of this book in my hands.

Please...

Go out and buy it.

Share it with family and friends.

One thing that really stood out for me today, Marlou, was what you said about grandparents.

I think this book gives grandparents the language too.

Sometimes they're from a generation where these conversations didn't happen.

This gives them a gentle way to start.

Not just with granddaughters...

But with grandchildren.

So thank you both.

This is a very special book that's about to go out into the world.

And I feel incredibly lucky that we've had this little glimpse behind the scenes...

Not only meeting the soon-to-be famous James...

But seeing just how much love has gone into creating it.

Thank you.

James & Marlou:

Thank you.

Bye!

Ashley:

I'll put all of the details in the show notes.

Go and get yourself a copy.

Visit the website.

Take a look at Maya Moore's beautiful illustrations as well.

And thank you so much for listening.

Take care everyone.

Bye for now.