

Hacking High School, Part 1

Transcript of Episode 385, Part 1

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the *Arts of Language* Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

So, Andrew, Episode 385, but there are not 385 episodes available on our website.

Andrew Pudewa: Why is that?

Julie Walker: Because it's me, listener. It's my fault that you cannot find Episode 1. I was so nervous when we first started doing this podcast almost 400 episodes ago, and I didn't want you, dear listener, to suffer the way I suffer when I find a new podcast that I love.

I want to go back to the very beginning and listen to them all and binge listen. Only, 385 episodes is way too many to listen to.

Andrew Pudewa: Nobody would ever do that. So, I suppose it's actually a mercy. We are eliminating some of the older episodes

Julie Walker: And that is what we're hoping that you, dear listener, will appreciate the mercy we're extending to you. And so we do something called the exploding ladder, where when we release a new one, we sometimes go back and explode the previous one.

Andrew Pudewa: So people get stranded on the roof and then have to jump off and break their leg. That's kind.

Julie Walker: Well, no, there's more rungs to climb up to the helicopter that will rescue them.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, or this is like Jacob's Ladder. It just goes all the way to heaven.

Julie Walker: All the way to heaven. Yes. And so I feel like after all these episodes, we're kind of slipping into a rhythm, and we've done this now for, oh, I don't know, probably since COVID in 2020.

Andrew Pudewa: And your job is to be sure the rhythm does not become a rut.

Julie Walker: Exactly, exactly. So Episode 385, if it ends in 5, we're specifically speaking to new homeschoolers

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, okay.

Julie Walker: And we talked about the possibility of doing this episode ten episodes ago at 375. So this episode is based on your convention talk *Hacking High School*.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. Very popular talk this year so far.

Julie Walker: And so the whole idea is you can homeschool high school, and Andrew Pudewa has some tricks to help you homeschool high school.

Now, you know a word to those of you who have their students in school, because you know, we have many listeners who are homeschooling only part-time because they're homeschooling after normal school hours, and also to so many teachers that a lot of what Andrew is saying today can actually apply to your situation in other areas.

Andrew Pudewa: Right.

Julie Walker: So, hacking high school.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, originally I was going to title this Just Don't Do High School. You, however, vetoed that title.

Julie Walker: I did.

Andrew Pudewa: It's a little bit, I guess, too radical.

And here's the real irony is right after I thought I want to do a talk called Just Don't Do High School, I got in the mail a book called *Skip College*. So I just thought, well, if you don't do high school and you skip college, what do we end up with—a bunch of thirteen-year-olds running the world?

But, hacking high school, hacking means using, I guess, not common information to apply to a situation to get a better result.

I guess that might be a fair definition of hacking. And some people are trying to hack biology, and other people are trying to hack computer systems.

Those seem to be things that have their own preset way of operating, but with information and diligent application, you can hack them.

Julie Walker: Which actually when I think about someone hacking a computer, that doesn't give me a warm, fuzzy feeling. It makes me a little nervous.

Andrew Pudewa: It would if you were a hacker; it would give you a very warm, fuzzy feeling because you could make that thing, do stuff that nobody else could make or do.

So, well, I did a talk several years in a row called *Cultivating Language Arts – Preschool through High School*, and like a lot of talks it, it was front heavy.

Yeah, I spent a lot of time on the preschool and primary and elementary years and middle school, but then by the end I had only five minutes left to talk about high school. So the best I could do is essentially just read a list of things you could possibly do. So this talk unpacks many of those things.

Julie Walker: Great. Okay, so picking up where we left off, and I know we'll have a link in the podcast to your talk *Cultivating Language Arts – Preschool through High School*, and I'm pretty sure we've done a podcast or two on that. So high school, those are years where a lot of homeschooling parents go, "Ugh, I don't know if I could do this."

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. One of the things I have long thought is that the education system in this country is very upside down in that the ideas of self-directed learning, exploration, experimentation, discovery, self-expression are educational ideals that are pushed in the younger years, and then very often there's just no time in the high school years.

I think that should be the opposite, right? And I'm not opposed to any of those things, but by pushing them in the elementary years, you lose out on the cultivation of the basic skills of reading and writing and calculating and being organized and learning to use basic information to think and do stuff.

And that so often needs to be direct instruction. And that's proven. That is research based research proven. We see it particularly in, say, the classical renewal in the schools world, the homeschool world. And yet in high school it's like, okay, now we have this grind. We have to jump in and start knocking off credits to put on a transcript so that we can be ready to get into college, get into a university. And so my basic argument is you don't have to do that.

Julie Walker: Okay, so what are some of those hacks that I can employ to my high school students?

Andrew Pudewa: So, these are some things that some people can do. Some of them are things that almost everyone can do. It is definitely more of a smorgasbord of ideas because you couldn't really do all the things that I'm about to say.

Julie Walker: I'm so glad you said that, Andrew. Sometimes we get overwhelmed with your great ideas. We want to do them all.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, and also it's important to keep in mind that if you're doing one thing, you're not doing something else. So to incorporate one of these ideas into your life, whether you're high school or in school, whether you're homeschooling high school, hybrid school, whatever, you will probably have to let go of something else.

Julie Walker: You mean whenever you say yes to something, you have to say no to something else?

Andrew Pudewa: Theoretically. Okay, so the first thing that I have been very enthusiastic about for many, many years is this area of competitive speech and debate and/or mock trial speech

contests. This kind of all falls in the same category. The old word is *forensics*, which is the science of proving stuff.

But speech and debate was once called forensics in that you're arguing to prove a point. One of the things that I appreciate so much about students who get involved in speech and debate is it is really the integration of those, the five core language skills that we talk about.

So listening. Well, if you're gonna respond to someone's argument, you'd better hear it well.

Speaking, being ready on the drop of the hat, so to speak, to say something organized, intelligent, applicable, understandable by both the other team and the judges. And so communicating verbally to particular audiences rather than just chatting, which is what so many people spend most of their time doing when they're speaking.

Of course, reading. You know, a lot of preparation, careful reading, close reading, rereading.

Writing, if you're gonna give a speech, you better write one and have it decently well. And even if you're in policy debate or Lincoln Douglas debate, you have to write your affirmative constructive, or you have to write out big chunks of your negative responses to various affirmatives, and then it all is about how well can you think about something.

But even more than that, this world of competitive speech and debate and the debate in particular forces everyone to look at both sides of a resolution of a proposition, of a policy, of an idea. And this seems to be increasingly important in our world today because there's just so many people who only see one side of something and cannot even hear the arguments of the opposition. And, we can't have a kind of civil democratic process unless we are able and willing to listen to all sides when it comes to making decisions. And so I think above anything I know competing in debate creates what? And I really don't like the term because it's such a buzz word thing, critical thinking. In that you're really forced sometimes to actually argue both sides of an issue and be prepared in that way.

Now, if you are homeschooling, there are two great leagues. There's the NCFCA, National Christian Forensics and Communication Association. There's also Stoa, which is not an acronym, but it is a Greek word meaning porch outside of public building where people would stand around and discuss stuff—a stoa.

Now, these two leagues are primarily homeschoolers although in today's world we have hybrid schoolers and online schoolers, and so the definition of homeschooler has expanded, which I think is good. And for schools, there's the National Speech & Debate Association. Public schools all over the country can participate and have teams.

I think there's also one for Christian schools as well. So there are a lot of opportunities, and this has been going on for a very long time, and so you don't have to figure out how to learn to do it. There are curriculums, there's clubs, there's organizations, there's experienced coaches almost everywhere.

So I would look at that as one of the best ways to enhance high school in that you're going to learn some skills that are perhaps more applicable than anything else you might learn in the "real world."

Julie Walker: Sure.

Andrew Pudewa: It will take a lot of time, but I believe it's a worthwhile investment of time. So if you have to spend maybe a little less time slogging through a physics book or a literature anthology to do it, I'd say it's a good trade off.

Julie Walker: Right, because there's travel involved to go to the tournaments even if it's in your local community. If you do well, then you continue to travel.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and the other thing particularly, and I don't have experience in the public school debate world, but in the homeschool debate world, I would say the social environment is superior to anything I've seen anywhere. And so kids make really good friends. In fact, I know a few people who married their debate partner.

Kids make lifelong friendships. There's a level of respect. There's a level of appreciation. There's a level of cooperation and teamwork.

It's just such a high, high level. I could go on and on about that, but that's the first thing I would say. And I would guess that the high 90%, maybe pushing 98, 99% of kids who do speech and debate in high school will look back and say, "That was the most valuable or one of the most valuable things I did as a kid."

Julie Walker: Sure. And moms and homeschooling parents can give credit for all kinds of things for high school credit, you know.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh gosh. Yeah, you could put a whole lot of things on a transcript there.

Connected with that is the study of logic and the study of rhetoric. These are ancient liberal arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, the trivium. People in the classical education world are more in touch with this. But really anyone can get a book with the word *logic* on the cover and start learning in a way the traditional ancient art of argument.

They can learn to think so logically, here's a premise, here's another premise, here's a conclusion. Is this a valid syllogism? If not, why? And you can learn the fallacies both in a formal and informal way. So whether you are calling yourself a classical educating family or class or school or whatever, even if you're not, I would suggest that the study of logic for two or three years around that upper middle, high school level, say eighth, ninth, tenth grade, will have lasting benefits.

And I actually taught logic: *Traditional Logic 1*, *Traditional Logic 2*, *Material Logic*, and *Aristotle's Rhetoric*.

Julie Walker: Four years of logic.

Andrew Pudewa: Four years I taught, and some of the kids got more out of it than others, but what I noticed is that in my teaching of it, it actually changed the way I am able to hear and think about things and to find logical fallacies in statements and arguments that other people make. It just really changed the way I would say I listen and think about what I hear very significantly, and I'm profoundly grateful for that.

Julie Walker: Sure.

Andrew Pudewa: And, I am hoping that when my grandchildren are old enough I will kind of go through that same cycle again.

Julie Walker: Right. Teaching logic.

Andrew Pudewa: And so, whether or not you're in a classical education world, I would recommend that you look for some good materials to teach logic even if it's something very simple like *The Fallacy Detective*.

Julie Walker: That's a good book.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, by the way, we should send all of our listeners to—it's free online. It's the cutest thing in the world.

It's called *Love Is a Fallacy*.

Julie Walker: Oh dear.

Andrew Pudewa: It's a short story, very short story. I don't remember the author, but it's very cute, and every teenager would love it. Every parent would love it. It's great.

Julie Walker: Link in the show notes.

Andrew Pudewa: And to that degree, engaging students in kind of a Socratic-style discussion about what they're reading.

And this is something, again, that takes a lot of time. You can say, "Here. Read these chapters of this book. You're going to get a quiz." But to then say, "Let's read this together and talk about it." Well, it's going to be a much slower, but I would argue much deeper, more meaningful process.

And in that context of Socratic discussion, students have to learn to listen to each other and to respond to each other with appropriate comments and questions. And unfortunately schools are just not well equipped to do this because of the time commitment, the curriculum, the transcript, the all of that.

So, incorporating it into a homeschool or as some kind of supplemental activity that can be done with a family at home. On the performance side—and I do think that performance opportunities are extremely valuable, and competition in general tends to hone skills.

But I've noticed that when kids get into drama or musical theater or declamation is kind of a specific thing where you memorize a speech by a famous person and then you give that speech as if you were that famous person. Even going so far as to perhaps dress like that person or emulate the accent or speaking style of that person. But so it's kind of, you know, half memory, half delivery, half performance.

Julie Walker: Well, and we spent a lot of time when I was homeschooling my boys in the world of theater and performance. We did not go down the debate, speech and debate pathway just because both are so time consuming. You can't do both.

Andrew Pudewa: Absolutely. Some of my kids did do both, and it did take a tremendous amount of time.

Julie Walker: I can't even imagine, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: But again, it's one of those things as an adult you look back on and say, “Well, that was very formative. You know, it got me outta my shyness. It gave me a chance to cooperate and work with other people.”

And very often you hear the story of a child who says, “No, I don't want to do debate. No, I don't want to give a speech. No, I don't want to be in a play.” And then after the first time they do it, it's like “Well, that was kind of cool.”

So I would encourage people to look into that. A lot of times people say, “Well, I don't have that in my area.”

Well, where we lived for ten years, '99 to '09 in the central coast of California, the closest debate club was ninety miles away. Well, we can't do that. So we started our debate club.

The community theater, there weren't a lot of opportunities for kids and kids' parts. So we started the Central Coast Homeschool Theater Ensemble.

And so you can do this, and it only takes a few families. You don't have to have a big group. But if you want something for your kids and it isn't there easily accessible, then go ahead, start it, and you don't have to know everything about it. We started the debate club totally ignorant.

We knew as little as any of the students. But we learned along with them, and I was very, very happy that eventually, it was the year after I left that California Debate Club, one young man won the National Stoa Policy Debate Round.

Julie Walker: Nice. Congratulations.

Andrew Pudewa: So, you can go from zero to something over time.

The thing that got me really interested in doing this talk, *Hacking High School*, was the idea of college credits and dual and enrollment. And this is something that sometimes just never occurs to people because they think the way things always have been is you go to high school, you get a good enough transcript, you take your SAT or ACT, and then you apply to a college, and if you have good enough numbers, then you can get into a better college. And that's what everybody has to do.

Julie Walker: And you start out with zero credits.

Andrew Pudewa: So, truth is that is not what everybody has to do. In fact, there are many ways to game that system, and I would think among our listeners, a very high percentage of our listeners who have high school age students, fifteen, sixteen, those kids could easily start taking college classes in one of many different venues or formats.

And the idea of dual enrollment or dual credit is that you take a college or university level class, and you get credit at the college or university level, and hopefully that is a accredited school, so the credits are transferable, and you can also put that on a high school transcript and get dual credit or dual enrollment.

And people have been doing this for a very long time. This is not a particularly new idea.

Julie Walker: It is certainly gaining popularity, though.

Andrew Pudewa: It is definitely gaining popularity, particularly with some of the colleges and universities that are increasingly needing to bring in the highest quality of students to their school. And so this can be as simple as being a high school student going to the local community college.

Essentially all you have to do is pass a reading test that says you can read at a college level, which most homeschool fourteen-, fifteen-year-old kids can do, and then you can start taking classes.

Julie Walker: Well, and I would just caution just some of our listeners, of course, all the cautions that you want to throw out there. But the first one I want to mention is a lot of colleges don't actually issue credit until they've reached that golden age of sixteen.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, actually the specific term that's used is a junior.

Julie Walker: A junior. Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay. And there is no rule anywhere that says you have to be a junior when you're sixteen.

Julie Walker: This is true.

Andrew Pudewa: If you skip a grade, we talked about this a few episodes ago, you would be a year ahead.

Julie Walker: It's true.

Andrew Pudewa: If you skip two grades, you could be fourteen. In fact, I just heard on a news podcast yesterday about an eleven-year-old girl in Mexico who just received a master's degree in engineering.

Julie Walker: Oh my word.

Andrew Pudewa: She finished high school at nine or something, eight or nine. So that obviously is an extreme and unusual circumstance, but for a hundred years there have been kids that are much younger, but through their intelligence and work ethic and opportunity have gone far ahead of their age in terms of grade level.

So we can challenge that paradigm a little bit. And if parents say, "Oh, you have to be a junior." I say, "Well, who's to say your fourteen-year-old isn't a junior?"

Julie Walker: True. Yeah, I like it.

Andrew Pudewa: But the thing about the dual enrollment is, like I said, you can start very easily community college. There are also many schools that offer online for-credit college-level classes to high school age students.

And the list is too long to even name right now.

Julie Walker: But I would be remiss if I didn't mention our own partnership. We have many students who are going through the *Structure and Style for Students: Year 1 Level C*, which we created for high school students, and colleges, two in particular, have said those students are doing writing at a college level, and we can do dual enrollment and how do we do that?

Well, link in the show notes, but we're working through an organization called Christian Halls International to kind of help curate getting those credits.

Andrew Pudewa: Christian Halls International is a great organization. Their vision is brilliant. There's also another one, Unbound.

Julie Walker: Oh yes.

Andrew Pudewa: We had Jonathan Brush on a podcast some time ago. They also are able to have high school students do their program and get college credits as they are moving through those last two or three years of childhood if you want to call it that.

Although sixteen-year-olds doing college classes, they seem pretty grown up

Julie Walker: Well, and I just want to speak to that really quickly too, that homeschooling mom that's maybe entering those high school years or maybe it's just a few years out. The lovely thing about homeschooling high school, if you've done it right up to this point, is those kids really want to own their own education, and all you have to do is coach and guide and write the checks.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. And on the, on the finance side, what's interesting is most of the schools, especially the private schools that offer online or distance learning college credit courses for high school age students do so at a much lower cost than if those kids are then eighteen and, and do that. So there's a financial benefit to doing this at a young age as well. And one of the things is these schools, if they can get you a year or maybe two years of college credits before you "finish high school," you are more likely then to go to that school to finish your degree.

Julie Walker: Oh, it's a marketing strategy. I love it!

Andrew Pudewa: It is a market, but it's a win-win really. And you don't obviously have to go to that school if they're transferable. But I know any number of kids who finished their high school years with an associate's degree worth of credits. You know, a full two years of credit. And the benefit there is number one, you're kind of outside the whole system.

Like if you have an associate's of arts degree or you have two years of college credit, a school you're applying to isn't really going to care very much about a high school transcript. You can put one together, but it's kind of moot at that point. Also, a lot of times they don't even need you to take an ACT or SAT test because you're a proven factor.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: And the fact that you've succeeded and usually with pretty good grades, well, they want you, that you're going to have a very high chance of success in their institution. And I actually know people, I have met people who finished their bachelor's degree by the end of high school, and I know one girl who finished her masters in curriculum instruction by the age of twenty.

Julie Walker: Wow.

Andrew Pudewa: So really, and she's probably smart and she works hard and she's a good reader and writer. I know that. But I wouldn't say she's so far exceptional that there aren't many other people who could do that.

And then one last thing, and I know we gotta keep going because we always run out of time, but one last thing that a lot of people don't realize is that, especially today, the rigor level of college classes is really not much different than the rigor level of high school classes and certainly not much different than the rigor level of high school classes a few decades ago. Right? What is different? Let's say you take biology in high school as most people do. Well, you go take first year biology in a college or university.

It's the same stuff. It's the same stuff. Usually the only difference is in high school they'll stretch it out over a whole year, and in the college or university, they'll compress it into one semester. And in a way it's almost convenient to have it a little more compressed because then you can go deeper and focus on it.

And you think about high school, well, you probably have six, seven classes. Well, how many classes do you generally have in your first year of college? Three or four. So, it's essentially the same kind of thing. And one last thing I would point out to parents who may be thinking, "Well, that's kind of, I don't know. I'm worried about the environment. I'm worried about what my young person"

Julie Walker: Fourteen-year-old.

Andrew Pudewa: "will encounter." I think it's actually safer to go into a college environment, either virtual or in person at a younger age while you're still living at home. That way if there's some kind of goofy stuff that comes up from the professor or from the reading or video materials they provide or from other students, if you're living at home, you can talk that stuff through and your kids have questions and they're gonna encounter, say, philosophies or concepts that may conflict with the worldview they have been brought up with.

Julie Walker: Sure.

Andrew Pudewa: And they're going to want to talk about that. Well, that's a lot better than if they go away to a different city and they're living in a building with a whole bunch of other eighteen-year-olds.

Julie Walker: And then who are they going to talk to?

Andrew Pudewa: And who are they gonna talk to? So, in a way it's actually safer to send a kid to college when they're a couple years younger or a couple years older than the super majority of kids.

And I want to say one more thing about community colleges because there's up side and down side. They are public schools, so they have to kind of do public schoolish curriculum guidelines, but I have found that the teachers at community colleges very often like teaching more than teachers in universities because if you're a professor at university you're either a graduate student or you're on the publish-or-perish tenure track, and so you're in this kind of political, academic rat race, and teaching students is not the most important part of your life. People in community colleges, they don't want that. They don't want the stress, the craziness. That's not their career objective. They actually like teaching.

That's why they're there. So I would say that my observations of my kids who did take community college courses is those teachers were superior. They were better. And one last consideration is the social demographic is actually much more diverse. If you send a kid off to the state university and everybody is eighteen years old, it's a very narrow demographic, but at a community college, you've got kids possibly younger than you even, people in their thirties,

forties, seventies, people from different countries and culture, and everyone is there primarily to learn and get a better life out of better education, whereas so often kids just go off to college because that's the thing to do rather than having to, to work hard to make that happen. So I think you get a greater diversity of people, kind of a higher quality in many ways of people wanting to make the most of that experience. All right. So, there we are with part one of *Hacking High School*.

Julie Walker: Thanks, Andrew.

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