

Connect Corner: Cinderella

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Welcome to our new column, *Connect Corner*—an opportunity to critique books, shows, movies, video games, and any other relevant media content from the perspective of a child and adolescent psychiatrist. To kick off this column we begin with a more traditional form of content: books. When the JAACAP Connect Editorial Board met this past October at the AACAP's 66th Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL, we started our gathering by sharing a favorite children's book. We reflected on the stories that touched us as children and the ones we have discovered as parents.

The story of *Cinderella*¹ was a favorite of mine as a child. I could read it to myself and I went back to it often. At some point I lost interest, ready to move on to chapter books. My copy was packed away in a box of things I had outgrown, waiting for a time they might be useful again. I didn't give the story much thought until 25 years later when that box was opened to see if anything in it might be wanted by my young daughter. She was curious about my *Cinderella* book, so we pulled out my well-worn copy and I started reading. When I got to the part where the prince falls in love immediately due to Cinderella's beauty, I paused. Through my adult lens of experience the story felt very different. It seemed like Cinderella's value was determined by how beautiful she was, and the message of overcoming hardship (her difficult life) by letting someone else (her fairy godmother) make her beautiful so that a man (the prince) could fix her life was hardly a lesson I was eager to impart to my young daughter. As a result, like any good editor, I did some creative editing since my daughter couldn't read and I could change the words to whatever I wanted. In our version the prince is captivated by Cinderella's good ideas and at the end they go to college.

Perhaps it's not fair to review *Cinderella* with our modern perspective, but as a parent I find myself thinking very much about the books I guide my children

towards. Especially since, as any parent knows, you may well end up reading a book over and over and over. The beautiful story, *Rosie Revere, Engineer* by Andrea Beaty, illustrated by David Roberts, is a book I discovered a few years ago.² Written in rhyming verse filled with rich vocabulary and entertaining alliteration, it is a joy to read out loud. The delightful prose is matched by the intricate and playful illustrations that fill each page. And unlike *Cinderella*, the lessons are powerful and inspiring. Rosie is driven to create and build, applauded by her family, but when she encounters a setback she retreats. Rosie eventually decides to take a risk and try again, only to feel like she has failed again. It is in this moment of perceived failure that Rosie's great-great-aunt Rose delivers her lesson: "the only true failure can come if you quit".² It is a message that resonates well and one I know all children must understand to grow and thrive. The challenge of working through difficulty, through perceived failure, is one that all of the families I work with face. And it is those children who find a way to persist who will develop the grit to be successful in the path they choose.

There is another component of *Rosie Revere* that stands out because of what is noticeably absent. There is no discussion of girls being discouraged to pursue math and science. Rosie is just another child fascinated by the world and eager to explore engineering. There are no qualifiers like, "even though she is a girl," or "despite others saying engineering is easier for boys." Many stories contain details like this and when I read them to my daughter she is puzzled. It is a stereotype she must understand eventually, but in this story, the fact that Rosie's interest in engineering is not considered special is an even stronger way to stand up to the bias we know exists. Rosie's story is about developing grit, not about overcoming sexism to pursue math and science. It is simply implied that to pursue engineering as a girl is a normal thing, another lesson I feel good about sharing.

For more great books check out these favorites from the JAACAP Connect Editorial Board:

Goofy and the Enchanted Castle by Walt Disney Company

A lovely (and fun) story about the importance of friendship, humility, and benevolence aiding oneself and others.

– Chase Samsel, MD

Not a Box by Antoinette Portis

This book really capitalizes on the power of imaginative play and serves as a springboard for all kinds of fun bedtime discussions in our household.

– Misty Richards, MD, MS

I Like Myself! by Karen Beaumont

I started reading it with my daughter and her friends. Great story about appreciating yourself inside and out.

– Nicole Cotton, MD

A Barrel of Laughs, A Vale of Tears by Jules Feiffer

My third-grade teacher read this wonderful tale aloud to our class each day. It was the first book I can recall that transported me to another world as Prince Roger learned to use humor and understand sorrow as his adventure unfolded!

– Adam Sagot, DO

The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown

A beautiful book that celebrates the bond between a child and its mother, yet captures an inevitable hint of loss: the child must grow up, grow away, to which the mother, or any parent, can only bravely respond with unfailing devotion. My daughter and I have shared many special moments reading this book together.

– Jessica Jeffrey, MD, MPH, MBA

The Araboolies of Liberty Street by Sam Swope

I read this with my children 15+ years ago. It takes on the challenges we face in embracing diversity.

– Douglas K. Novins, MD

Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss

I loved the story *Green Eggs and Ham* as a child and enjoy sharing its message about being curious, adventurous, and open to trying new things with my kids.

– Michael Kelly, MD

The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Maybe not a typical children's book, but there is so much wisdom and heart packed into those pages. This book is great for people who want to remember what it is like to think like a child, and when I was our fellowship director, I used to give a copy to all of our incoming fellows.

– David Rettew, MD

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster; illustrated by Jules Feiffer

Both as a child and as an adult, I have loved the book's big messages packed into infinite tiny moments of charm, whimsy, and wit. And Feiffer's line drawings marry beautifully with the text.

– Oliver Stroeh, MD

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein

My favorite children's story is Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, which I've always found both sad and beautiful. Rereading the story as a parent has added such depth about unconditional love that I doubt I fully grasped as a child.

– Anne McBride, MD

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr.

I enjoyed it myself, but also really enjoy reading it to my son with the predictability, bright colors, and fun animals to identify.

– Justin Schreiber, DO

The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf

He the lover of flowers. A most peaceful bull.

– Andrés Martin, MD, MPH

References

1. Disney Book Club. *Cinderella* (Disney's Wonderful World of Reading). New York: Random House Books for Young Readers; 1974.
2. Andrea Beaty. *Rosie Revere, Engineer*. New York, NY: Abrams Books; 2013.