

1. In your journal, note the thoughts and feelings that this essay brought to mind for you. If you wish, you might recall a time you saw a member of your family in a new way, distinct from her or his family role, and then present your memories in free verse poetry. Be prepared to share your personal response in a small group.
2. At age four, how did Jacox perceive his father? Why? How and why did this perception change? Do most young people experience a similar change in perception? Explain your answer.
 - "Dad was both brick and mortar ..."
 - "I thought he was stone ..."
 - "... a heart that proved to be a weak link in a chain of strengths."
 - "My father never was the tower of strength I imagined him to be."
 - "... one day stone, the next day wax."
4. What feelings does the author have for his father? Which phrases or sentences best convey those feelings?
5. Jacox extends a *metaphor* for effect: "I think that most teenagers think of their parents as fenceposts. They just stand there, unmoving, holding things up, holding things back ... keeping things out or keeping them in, depending." Write at least two original extended metaphors of your own to describe how most teenagers see their parents.
6. In the role of the father, write two journal entries: one you would write the evening before telling your son about the heart operation, and one you write after that conversation.

CINDERELLA UNDRRESSED

Barbara Brotman

Once upon a time, there was a pretty but vapid girl who lived with her stepmother and two stepsisters. They were poor, but they welcomed her into their family.

The girl, however, spent her days sitting among the hearth cinders, feeling sorry for herself and descending into fits of pique, during which she gave her clothes and toys away to her perplexed stepsisters.

"I don't care anyway because I'm going to marry a handsome prince, and he's going to make you sorry for the way you treated me," Cinderella, as she named herself, proclaimed petulantly.

Her stepsisters both got master's degrees, Anastasia in finance, Drizella in chemical engineering.

Cinderella met a prince who was dumber than she was. When he tried to have her stepfamily beheaded, Anastasia picked up a cell phone and bought the kingdom.

Cinderella and her dim prince married and spent the rest of their days as servants to her stepfamily. The go-getter sisters lived happily ever after.

Disney it isn't, deliberately. In fact, it is an anti-Disney version written by Richard Conlon, a resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists Workshop.

He found himself dismayed at Disney's *Cinderella* when his six-year-old daughter, Emma, watched it.

"I thought it was a nice enough story to start with," he said. "Then I realized that Cinderella was not doing anything for herself. She was just sort of letting everyone else take over for her."

"The overall message was that it's OK if you do that because a fairy godmother is going to come and everything is going to be OK."

That wasn't the sort of message he wanted his daughter to hear. "I just wanted to point out that maybe there was another way of looking at this," he said. "Maybe the story happened another way."

Conlon is by no means the first to hope so. Fairy tales have raised feminist hackles for years.

"There is a growing consensus among those who study fairy tales that the classical fairy tales, particularly those of the Grimms, present... models of women who are passive, dependent and often guilty because of their curiosity," said Donald Haase, chairman of Germanic

and Slavic Studies at Wayne State University and an authority on the Grimm Brothers' tales.

"Millions of women must surely have formed their psychosexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded and of the nature of reward itself, in part from their favorite fairy tales," critic Marcia Lieberman wrote in a 1972 essay, *Some Day My Prince Will Come*.

Cinderella has aroused particular antipathy. In her 1981 best-seller, *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*, Colette Dowling used the story to define a state of psychological dependency that she described as "the chief force holding women down today."

Lieberman wrote that "Cinderella and the other stories of this type show children that the girl who is singled out for rejection and bad treatment, and who submits to her lot, weeping but never running away, has a special compensatory destiny waiting for her.

"... The child who dreams of being a Cinderella dreams performe not only of being chosen and elevated by a prince, but also of being a glamorous sufferer or victim."

Or does she?

Roger Sutton, editor of the *Bulletin of the Centre for Children's Books*, said there was no evidence of such literary cause and effect.

"If we say kids reading *Cinderella* will grow up with the expectation that a prince will save them, do we then say that the kid who reads a story about a strong heroine is going to grow up to be a CEO?" he said. "I don't think that's anything we can predict. We don't know how individual children read individual books."

"It's similar to the issue of violence on TV," Haase said. "If a child watches violence on TV, does the child become violent?"

Regardless of whether or not reading about dippy heroines induces real-life dippiness in girls, fairy tales have provided satiric grist for a number of prominent authors, including Roald Dahl and Judith Viorst.

In his anthology, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*, Jack Zipes described several. "In (Tanith) Lee's *Princess Dahli*, the underprivileged princess rebels against her rich relatives and finds a poor prince of her own choosing.

"In John Gardner's *Gudgekin the Thistle Girl*, the poor girl refuses to be humiliated by the prince, who must learn to respect her integrity. In Richard Gardner's *Cinderelma*, a young woman succeeds in attending a royal ball through her own initiative and reaches a mutual decision with the prince that they are not suited for each other."

Conlon joins the list with *Anastasia and Drizella*.

1. In your journal or in a small group, note the thoughts and feelings you had while reading this news article. You might focus your response on either of the following:
 - whether or not you agree that fairy tales influence children's self-concepts and aspirations
 - what you remember of the fairy tales you have read or heard
2. Some people quoted by Brothman argue that fairy tales do influence children. Others disagree. Which argument is the more convincing? Why? What, if any, additional evidence would you want before supporting either side?
3. According to the article, the tale of Cinderella has raised "particular antipathy." What specifically have critics criticized? Do you think these criticisms are valid? Explain.
4. How has the author made this article interesting to readers?
5. Choose a fairy tale that could be perceived as having a negative influence on girls or boys. Rewrite the fairy tale in a way that makes it a more positive tale for these readers.
6. As a class, visit your local public library (or the library of a nearby elementary school) and read a sampling of books for children in grades one through three. Compile a list of books you would recommend for their positive role models. Include the title, the author, the publisher, the ISBN (International Standard Book Number), and a one-paragraph commentary on the story's appeal. Consider publishing your list and making it available to families.