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# An Unconventional Once Upon A Time: A need for a children's book describing the challenges of a deployed spouse

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An Unconventional Once Upon A Time

An Unconventional Once Upon A Time:

A need for a children's book describing the challenges of a deployed spouse

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## An Unconventional Once Upon A Time

### Abstract:

There are many texts that focus on a child's experiences and difficulties when a parent is away in the army or at war. Currently, there are no books that provide the perspective of a parent or spouse's struggles in dealing with their loved one who is away, and taking care of what is left at home. This independent study had a purpose of not only providing another resource for children to cope, but to allow for them to gain perspective of someone else's experience as well. The story written speaks not from a child's perspective, but from one of an adult dealing with having her loved one serving during war time. The fairytale element to the text is meant to act as a child-directed element in order to engage students. The purpose of this text and research is to provide information and awareness for those suffering, and for others to understand the difficulty and be able to provide support for one another as well.

# An Unconventional Once Upon A Time

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### Section 1: Rationale

The topic of my story is one that is very personal and dear to my heart. Two years ago, my husband proposed to me in my Pre-Kindergarten classroom. He wrote a children's story in which the plot was the story of how we met and how we got to that current point in our lives. On the day of the proposal, I was asked by my cooperating teacher to complete a read aloud titled *Always & Forever* at the end of our school day. I did not think twice when I was handed the text, and sat down immediately with my students. It was not until I opened the first page that I noticed what story the book told. Immediately I was taken aback by the pictures of myself, which gave away what this book contained. The story did not have illustrations, but rather pictures of me and the man who became my husband throughout the years of knowing each other.

Once realizing what the book was, I shared our story with my students. As I read the text, I relished in the students responses and comments regarding something so personal and emotional for me. I was overwhelmed with the feeling of sharing something so personal with not just my students at the time, but with my head teachers, vice-principal, and principal of the school who were all in the room watching. Since this experience, I have found myself believing that the power of reading something personal is something that should not be ignored, but embraced. The National Council of Teachers of English support this idea and explain, "At the same time, the interpretations readers construct with texts as well as the types of texts they read are influenced by their life experiences" (NCTE, 2004, p.1). Since the story was important to me, I read it with curiosity and excitement to see what would happen at the end of this book. What I was able to feed off of was my student's excitement. Once they realized that the real life images in the story were

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ones of myself, they could not contain their excitement in having their teacher in this fairy tale story they were hearing. Even though my students did not understand what was happening at the time, they were still able to infer that this was a big moment, and they were letting their excitement and happiness for me exude. This was evident through their excited faces and comments throughout such as “Oh my goodness that’s Rachel!” Using this story as read aloud experience, I try my absolute best to use texts that not only excite myself and my students, but ones that will be relatable and important to our hearts as well.

This memory is one that is very important to me not just because it was a momentous time in my life. It linked a memorable experience with my love for literature and allowed it to not just be any other read aloud, but a personal one. This experience taught me that authors write their books with such passion. They write not just for themselves, but for their audiences as well. This is because authors want to share their passions with readers, and have them feel as they feel. Authors think of their work as I had felt about my personal story. I felt an appreciation and awe for these authors for speaking their minds through literature.

Now that I am writing my own story, I was inspired by the many authors I admire. I decided to write this story by making myself anonymous as the main character, and changing the story so that the characters were a princess and prince. These generic characters were chosen because I felt it would add a fairytale element to my story, and would engage young students. This idea is supported through research which explains that fairytales allow for imagination and fantasy to develop. It can also enhance children's creativity, as well as learning a moral lesson (Nepean Tutoring, 2013). With this in mind, I wanted the story to become a more modern day version of these fairytale lives, which is

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why I connected it to my personal story which is shared above regarding my husband's marriage proposal. When deciding on this for my story, it occurred to me that it is not rare to feel that your momentous occasions are fairytale worthy. This is how I felt about this time in my life. Using a Princess and Prince as my characters excited me, and allowed me to represent my story as the fairy tale I imagine it is.

Another major idea from my story is dealing with a loved one who is in the army and deployed. The time before we were able to really date and be married revolved around my husband being in another country in the army. We were not married at the time, but dealt with similar feelings and issues that spouses may deal with when their loved one is away in such dangerous circumstances. When reflecting on this idea for this text, it should be acknowledged that literature is unique due to the range of topics it can cover. We see that children's texts do not shy away from difficult issues such as having a sick parent or when children are being put through divorce. Choosing to talk about a loved one in the Armed Forces is no exception. One especially unique thing is that all these military related texts deal with the perspective from the children during this hard time. Even though this is for very significant reasons, literature from the perspective of a spouse or parent is minimal. This made me wonder why, and it is because of this finding that I was determined to begin a story that can be used along with these other great texts, and provide a different story and point of view. With this in mind, when I began my writing I made the decision to focus on how spouses, or significant others may feel when dealing with this time in both their lives. I wanted my book to be for our young readers who can benefit from understanding another person who may be dealing with this difficult time. It can be helpful for our students to remember that it is not just their parents who are away, but maybe a

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parent's significant other as well. As an adult, there is sometimes a deeper understanding and level of worry one may be faced with. Providing a text that students can use to understand a different perspective and level of worry can have a great effect on how they deal with their own feelings too.

The US News Statistics show that since 2001, there is an estimated four to five million children nationwide whose parents have served in the army. Knowing this statistic, military children can be described as strong, resilient and adaptable (Collins, 2015, p.1). Supporting this, Soldiers Magazine discusses the positive qualities these children encompass, and it also addresses that no matter how strong these children are, they are still just children dealing with very adult difficulties. Aside from the typical struggles children deal with such as their academics, bullying, friendships and more, military children have a higher rate of acquiring major stress and anxiety. When discussing the difficulties that these students may encounter in school, the experts on the U.S. Army website explain that psychologists can be utilized in schools as resources for children to take advantage of. Additionally, it is explained, "We get to talk to teachers...Sometimes with permission we can sit in the classroom" (Collins, 2015, p.1). The effects of having someone or something in your academic environment such as a psychologist, can act as a resource and can be a great support for these children.

Bibliotherapy is known to be one of the most helpful resources when dealing with specific needs for our students. According to the *Good Therapy* [website](#), bibliotherapy is a therapeutic approach that uses literature to support good mental health. Research suggests that military families look to make connections with others in similar positions to their own. Lori Levin, Vicki Sherbert, and Kaylee Myers explore this idea in their research



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article titled *Will You Come Home- Using Literature to Meet the Needs of Military - Connected Students*. They explain that there are three steps these types of texts explore for these students. The first is to identify with the character. The second is the emotional release, and the third is when audiences gain insight and want to move forward. Through these steps, using literature relating to a family's military experiences allows one to feel at ease and as if they have something to travel through these three steps with (Levin, Sherbert, & Myers, 2014, p.50).

Building on this idea of using bibliotherapy as a way to help our students, Lesley Koplow addresses this idea in her book *Creating Schools that Heal: Real Life Experiences*. She explains that bibliotherapy is a highly accessible way in which we can reach our students when they may be dealing with a difficult situation. Koplow explains, “It invites children to recognize an issue and to explore its meaning for them through open-ended discussion and follow up projects” (Koplow, 2002, p.143). This idea of using literature as a way for children to explore what they are feeling is something unique. Children can take what they are reading and essentially apply it to their everyday lives by seeing their favorite characters and stories portraying what they may be dealing with inside. This is another reason why in my text, the characters remain unnamed. The story is meant to be relatable and not associated with someone specific. It is meant to act as a way for children to relate and imagine themselves in the situation.

Studies completed by the US National Library of Medicine explain that most research compiled regarding military families revolves around the spouse who is deployed, and not the one left at home. With this in mind, a study was conducted to find the psychological insights that can be found in our military spouses due to stress, worry and

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responsibilities. It can be described through the study that “Worry, loneliness, assuming dual roles ...have been described as key characteristics of the deployment experience”

(Robin, 2014, p.1).

Bruno Bettelheim is a child psychologist who is well known for his work relating to children and the importance of enchantment. His text *The Uses of Enchantment* explores the meaning and importance of fairy tales in young children's lives. In the text, Bettelheim discusses the emotional and symbolic importance of fairy tales in children's lives. He discusses that perhaps our traditional fairy tales act as a way for children to deal with their fears and anxieties in symbolic terms. He believed that if students could understand and interpret a story in their own way, they would be able to get a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. In discussing a child's need for magic Bettelheim explains, “Whatever our age, conforming to the principles underlying our thought process carries conviction for us” (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 45). This quote explains the significance in using fairy tale stories with our students. It explains that a story that is significant to us or is aligned with our principles are the ones that will carry the most importance for us.

In support of the fairytale aspect of this text, an online article titled *Fairytale Dreams: Disney Princesses Effects on Young Girls*, introduces the idea that young girls are majorly influenced by role models such as Disney Princesses. Ashley Bispo explains, “Disney Princess images have an immense impact on the minds of young girls” (Bispo, 2014, p. 1). With this idea in mind, we can understand that any princess type of character found in children's literature can have a great impact on the reader based on their stories, actions and more. The princess in my story explores some struggles that not every other princess deals with. With this in mind, young readers can see that the lives of these

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Princesses are not necessarily glamorous, but that they deal with real life issues such as having a loved one away at war. On the surface, most of the struggles fairytale characters may deal with are not always the main focus.

### **Section 2: Child Development**

The target age for my text is for children 8-11 years old. In knowing the specific ages, it can be determined that these are monumental times in which children are really beginning to find their place in their world. At the beginning of this age range, children are forming relationships, and trying to find their place when in groups of peers or with family at home. Towards the older ages of this range, children are becoming content socially, but still want to form those relationships and maintain them with those who are important to them. From a cognitive standpoint, children are beginning to see the “bigger world.” They are starting to wonder about things that are fair and just, and may apply this to their own lives and what may be occurring (Wood, 2007, p.100). With this in mind, it can be determined that at these ages, military children specifically are dealing with these issues, and are wondering how they fit into a more complex world in which their parent is away at war. Students are also looking for adult patience and clarity on certain topics due to more anxiousness and worries they may be experiencing. When we move towards the older end of our target age, it seems that these children are moody and sometimes sensitive. These children need adult empathy, especially at home to help them cope with the social and physical changes that are taking place (Wood, 2007, p.136). With these aspects in mind, it can be determined that having resources that will support these changes and benchmarks should be used to their best abilities.

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When it comes to exploring the psychosocial areas our children endure, Erik Erikson is the leader in understanding the stages. He describes this time in a child's life as the Industry versus Inferiority stage. His psychological research focuses on the psychosocial stages children endure, and what influences them. With an emphasis on this age having great effects on a child's ego, we find that a child must deal with the demands to learn new skills and a sense of failure and incompetence (McLeod, 2013). While trying to make their way in the world, children's egos are encouraged by their ability to accomplish certain social demands. Erikson explains that if this initiative is not encouraged by a parent then the child will inevitably become inferior and doubt his or her abilities (McLeod, 2013). This point is a great one when thinking about the children who are affected by a parent who is away. If they lack the role model who will encourage this, then it can be determined that these children may have a harder time, and even need to fail a few times to develop the ability to succeed on their own. Thinking about my text as a support, children can connect their own struggles to the ones described in the text and notice their successes and failures as being a part of the learning process as well.

Additionally, typical children of ages 8-11, specifically ones with a deployed parent are at a point in their lives where they are beginning to worry about a variety of events occurring in their lives. They are able to piece things together in order to determine a conclusion such as the idea that their parent is going to war, and war is dangerous. We also see that their feelings are beginning to develop in reaction to these conclusions, which can influence them as well. According to Anita Chandra and Andrew London in their journal *Unlocking Insights about Military Children and Families*, children who have a parent that is deployed are at risk to develop increased anxiety, and emotional stress (Chandra &

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London, 2013, p.189). The overall point of my book is to be used to provide a different perspective and a way to help students deal with these difficulties in their lives. It can also be determined that opening up this topic of conversation in a classroom with a read aloud could allow other children to express something from their home lives as well that may be affecting them.

Lucy Sprague Mitchell is one of the most influential theorists when looking at education. She advocated for educators to teach to the child based on intense observations and inquiries about each individual. Mitchell stresses that, “Children's learning and development must be understood in the context of family, community and culture” (Nager & Shapiro, 2007, p.6). She stresses that teachers must have an understanding of a child's home life, since it is ultimately connected to what happens in the classroom. The children's realities of what is happening at home needs to be accepted and dealt with when they come to school, since it inevitably is affecting their learning.

The text *Literature for Young Children* is one that supports emergent literacy and provides professionals the tools to recognize and select appropriate text that impacts the lives of our students. This text explores the idea that books have major opportunity to offer our children. It is explained, “Books provide a rich source of data from which children can begin to gain information, make inferences and check the validity of inferences they make” (Giorgis & Glazer, 2013, p.120). From a developmental standpoint, books provide the opportunity for our children to develop the necessary skills in order to comprehend stories and everyday challenges in life. Providing them with text that allows them to make connections and infer feelings is something important for them to be exposed to. Children will also be interacting with my text in order to possibly search for others who may be

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experiencing similar feelings to their own. Giorgis and Glazer explain, “As children learn to ‘read’ another's feelings, they also become more sensitive to those feelings” (2013, p. 237). It can be determined that fostering a child’s ability to see from the viewpoint of others is something to help develop at this age. This text explains how literature that supports what a child is enduring can help them talk about the character, how the character felt, and how they themselves may be feeling in similar circumstances. Helping children recognize the different viewpoints is especially important, and can be assisted by using literature to present different experiences. This is evident through my text due to the perspective not being from a child, but being from a spouse or adult. This can allow children to see how someone else may be feeling in a similar situation.

### **Section 3: Literature & Source Review**

In this review I will be looking for children’s text across multiple categories, which inspired the writing of my book. I will provide an annotation for each mentor text, and some thoughts about how these books support my work, and where they may be lacking. From this, I will use my text as one that can fill in the possible gaps I find in my research. The books that I will be reviewing, including my own are fiction and categorized by the need that they meet for a child. There are three main themes that I am exploring using children’s literature for the purpose of this thesis. The first area that will be explored are typical fairytale books of unconventional princesses and a prince’s. We will also look at different types of princesses and prince’s and unpack what actually makes them who they are. We will begin to see that in these stories, a princess can always be defined in different ways based on the context. Their royalty may be based on family, legacy, money, or even a way of living. This section will also highlight that even when we look up to these fairy tale

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characters, they deal with real life altering situations similar to other people. The second category that will be explored includes literature that addresses children who may be dealing with a parent away at war. The third area that will be explored will be specific texts relating to separation. The texts will be used in order to determine how one may feel when finding themselves separated from someone they love and miss.

### Unconventional Fairytale/Royalty

**Not All Princesses Dress in Pink** (Ages 4-8) Yolen, J., Stemple, H. E., & Lanquetin, A. (2010). *Not all princesses dress in pink*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

This book can be used to teach young girls that not all princesses fit in the stereotypical box we expect them to. The book begins by explaining that not all princesses dress in pink, but rather may wear socks that smell. The book continues to explain that princesses can take part in everyday activities that normal children do. In an upbeat rhythm, the book describes other princesses who do things such as roll in the mud, or use power tools. With each description of what the princesses can do, none include them wearing the stereotypical pink. At the end of the story, the princesses gather at a ball. Rather than wearing what would be expected, the girls "Fox trot in blue" or "Hip Hop in overalls." The author also depicts these young ladies in all shapes and sizes. They are not clean cut, but rather are sometimes dirty, exhausted, serious and most of all, authentic. The digital illustrations in this text are fun, colorful and engaging for any student. Small fairy tale references were slipped into the illustrations such as a Rapunzel- like character leaving her tower using monkey bars. This read aloud should be done in order to facilitate a discussion regarding stereotypes, and the ability to be different. This text impacts my thinking and

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relates to my story due to the ability for a princess not fit the stereotypical views, but to be themselves.

**A Little Princess** (Ages 9-13 ) Burnett, H Francis. (1905). *A Little Princess*. CreateSpace Publishing.

This chapter book tells the story of a young wealthy girl who lives in India with her father. Her father is a captain in the army, which leaves his daughter in an unsafe environment in which she needs to be sent away to boarding school in London in order to receive a formal education and be safe. At first, Sara is treated like a princess due to her father setting up special accommodations for his daughter. Once news arrives that the captain has passed away while at war, Sara Crewe shocked to be treated terribly by the school's headmistress. While dealing with her new life of servitude, Sara befriends a new neighbor who she confides in. He turns out to be a friend of her father's, and has been searching for her. Later on, this man becomes her legal guardian and helps save Sara.

This text can be used as a read aloud in a larger unit on a specific topic. It can facilitate a range of discussions. One is the difficulty in change and dealing with a parent who passes away while in the military. Additionally, this book can be used to prove the point that finding a friend in a time of need is helpful and can be a support. It can also be used as a larger read aloud in one's classroom since it is a longer text and includes more to unpack once reading it. This text impacts my text due to the connection of princess-like characters and everyday people enduring difficult situations. It also includes the military component, which can make a connection as well.

**Princess Smartypants** (Ages 5-8) Cole, Babette (1997). *Princess Smartypants*. Puffin Books.



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Princess Smartypants is a revisionist's fairy tale that explores the idea of a princess not having to wait around for a prince, and taking action to create her own destiny. This princess is no ordinary princess, and does not agree with her parents' plans to be married. She devises her own plan to ruin the search for her husband, and creates her own happily ever after. The illustrations in this story allow for children who may not understand the play on words to have a reference, as well as keep the reader entertained. My story connects to this text because it focuses on a princess taking her destiny into her own hands and pushing the boundaries with what a princess is perceived as. This text may be used to facilitate a unit or discussion regarding a royal princess creating her own destiny and happiness, and the ability to find a silver lining when things seem to be hard.

**Cinder Edna** (Ages 6-10 ) Jackson, Ellen (1994). *Cinder Edna*. HarperCollins

Both Cinderella and Cinder Edna are neighbors. They work day in and day out for their evil stepmothers, similar to the classic Cinderella fairy tale. The only difference between the two women is that Cinderella had good fortune to be rescued by a fairy godmother. Edna on the other hand was strong and self-reliant. She took initiative to create her own happily ever after, which resulted in her finding her prince too. The two princesses handle their problems in very different ways. Cinderella sits by waiting for her happiness to come, as opposed to Cinder Edna who "whistles while she works," learns practical skills, and takes on extra jobs to ensure she creates her own success and happiness.

The rest of the classic fairy tale story is told with the two characters versions mirroring each other. We see that as opposed to Cinderella, Edna pays for a new dress for the ball, and meets a prince who is the brother, and complete opposite of the well known prince charming from the Cinderella fairytale. The story continues when the princesses

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need to leave and their princes are searching for them similar to in the original story. When Edna's prince searches for her he does so using details about what he has learned about her, as opposed to what his brother is doing in using a glass slipper due to his knowledge of Ellas personality being limited. The illustrations in this text are done so that the two main characters can be compared and contrasted. The illustrator uses a range of beautiful colors, and is always the center of a very busy background. This book can be used to discuss that anyone can create their own happiness in a negative situation. Additionally, it should be explained that if we take initiative we will always see results. The character in this text displays this, and acts as a model and support for the character in my book.

**Prince Cinders** (Ages 5-9) Cole, Babette (1987) *Prince Cinders*. Puffin Books

Prince Cinders leads a hard life. According to the text he is “small, spotty, scruffy and skinny.” Aside from this, the prince is bullied by his three big hairy brothers who leave him to complete chores while they go out with their princess girlfriends. This all occurs until one night, when a small dirty fairy falls through the chimney and wishes that all the prince's dreams come true. Unfortunately, the fairy's spells do not turn out exactly as planned. When trying to change him into a big hairy prince similar to his brothers, the fairy changed him into a giant hairy gorilla. Due to the type of spell it was, the prince could not see that he was a gorilla, and went to meet up with his brothers at the nightclub. The night did not go as planned and the prince headed home feeling defeated. When looking for a bus to take home, he sees a princess and asks if he is in the right place. When the princess seems to become scared due to the prince being a gorilla, the prince turns back into himself and the princess thinks this man saved her. Out of embarrassment, the prince runs away and loses his pants in the process. The princess took the pants and was determined to find the

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owner. When having all the eligible men try the pants on, no one fits into them. The princess saw Prince Cinders and decided he should try the pants as well. Once they fit, the princess proposed and the two lived happily ever after. This comical version of the classic fairy tale shows that a princess can choose her prince, as opposed to sitting and waiting around for him.

The illustrations in this book are very colorful and match the mood and humor of the story. The cartoon-like characters are set against watercolor backgrounds, and sometimes we see the watercolors bleed to the edge of the page as well as sporadic page borders as well. These illustrated borders help tell the story of what is happening on that specific page, and perhaps how paramount the situation is that is occurring. This text can also be appealing to not just young girls, but boys due to the character change of the classic fairytale. A discussion can be had regarding the acceptance of who we are, and not wishing for something that someone else has. This text inspired my work due to the unconventional use of a prince versus a princess. This was considered regarding my text since I focused on a spouse, as opposed to a child dealing with someone deployed.

### Military Children

**Year of The Jungle** (Ages 5-9 ) Collins, Suzanne (2013). *Year of The Jungle*. Scholastic Press

*Year of the Jungle* is written by the well-known author Suzanne Collins, who is responsible for the very popular *Hunger Games* book series. This Autobiographical picture book flashes back to how the author felt in 1968 when her dad was a soldier during the Vietnam War. The cartoon-like illustrations help keep the story of this text light and upbeat while talking about this difficult time in her life. There is a scene in this book depicting a war scene, and displays the author's fear and concern. A lot of the emotions depicted by the

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main character of the text are through facial expressions, such as when Suzy's eyes get very big. The text continues to explain that her father comes home physically uninjured, but explains that he "stares into space. He is here but not here." This book addresses a very moving child's view of how being away at war can affect a military family. The illustrations in this book were created using the ink and the Corel Painter method. This method allows an illustrator to create artistic digital looking pictures and to kids, can look similar to a T.V. cartoon. This book can be used to provide a relatable point of view for our students in which they can begin to not only understand what is happening while their parent is away, but the after effects that may occur. Additionally, it depicts the appropriate emotions that a child may be feeling when in this situation.

**Night Catch** (Ages 6-10) Ehrmantraut, Brenda (2014). *Night Catch*. Elva Resa

The story *Night Catch* is a story about a father who is sent around the world while in the army. He tries dealing with being away from his family, and finds help from a northern star. With help from this star, this dad can play a nightly game of catch with his son. This story is a play-off of the game catch, as the father tells his son that each night if he blows hard enough, a star will reach him in time to then send it back to his son. This story is especially important because it is told from the perspective of the father, as opposed to the child. The illustrations in this book are simplistic but created with beautiful colors. The astrology illustrations are also done very well, and add an ethereal and intimate aspect to this story. This story shows that a bond can be maintained even while a parent is deployed, and it has an impact on my text due to the perspective being from a parent as opposed to the typical child.

**Hero Mom** (Ages 6-8). Hardin, Melinda.(2013) *Hero Mom*. Two Lions

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*Hero Mom* is a fictional text that explores the lives of seven children dealing with their mothers being deployed and away from home. The moms in this text are described as superheroes who make our world a safer place. This book is especially important due to the fact that it addresses that there are women as well as men deployed and away from their families. This book is also unique because it sheds light on the different jobs a military mom may have while in the army. It helps inform our military children so that they feel they know more about what their parent may be doing while away. The illustrations in this text are soft and created through the use of watercolors and sketches. This book can be taught and facilitated to create awareness for our young readers regarding a soldier's sacrifices when having to leave their family at home. It impacts my text in addressing the specific struggles one may feel when deployed and informs others of what they are experiencing.

**An Unconventional Once Upon A Time** (8-11) Adams, Rachel. (2016) *An Unconventional Once Upon A Time*. Bank Street College of Education

This text acts as a resource and support for students in explaining the emotions and difficulties of a spouse or significant other being deployed. The text follows an unnamed princess who leaves for an adventure in the south of her country in order to attend a princess academy. Her parents agree to send her thinking it will help her become more prepared for when she takes the throne. While away, the princess meets a man who she calls her prince. The two fall in love and plan to move back to the north where she is from when her time in school is over. Their plans become interrupted by a war that has broken out within neighboring countries, and the sudden drafting of this man. We see the princess support the man she loves even though she is disappointed and scared. The text continues to follow their stories while being apart, and we see the two keeping in touch and planning

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to wait out the war so that they can eventually be together. With her time to accept the throne approaching, the princess ends up having to make a difficult decision to lose contact with the man she loves. We see the aftermath of this, and at the end of the text we are relieved to find that the two are reunited and accepted by her parents. This text not only explores the themes of a spouse being away, it also explores a princess and the struggles she endures. This text can be used in a classroom to discuss the topic of understanding a parent's struggle with their spouse being away. It shows a different perspective for children, and will allow them to empathize with others. This text does not contain illustrations, and acts as an interactive read aloud so that students can conjure up their own images and ideas of what is happening in this text.

### **Separation:**

**You Go Away** (Any age) Corey, Dorothy. (1999) *You Go Away*. Albert Whitman & Company

This text explores what it is like when a child is separated from his or her parents. This book does not need to be limited to dealing with the emotions of being separated from a parent, but can be used to deal with separation from someone else as well. The repetition and patterns in the book can help to relate to young readers, and allows them to become engaged. Additionally, the colorful images help depict what is occurring in the text. The point of this story is to help reassure our children that typically when a parent goes away, they are always meant to come back. The illustrations in this text are simple and are open to interpretation. They are created through clearly defined lines and watercolors. The use of multicultural families and involvement of caregivers in the text allows for children to see multiple scenarios. This text can be used in a small group or one-on-one to address the feelings associated with separation and anxiety for children.

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**The Invisible String** (Ages 5-9) Karce, Patrice. (2000) *The Invisible String*. Devorss & Co

This text explores a simple approach in allowing our students to deal with the difficulty of separation and loneliness. The text discusses two siblings who learn that everyone has an invisible string that connects them. It is told that no matter the reason for separation, one is always connected to the one they miss through their love. Because of this, the book discusses that the connection we feel to the people we miss inevitably allows for every person in the world to eventually become connected. The book is illustrated in watercolors and certain lines that highlight the expressions and emotions of the characters. This text would be very helpful in facilitating a conversation with those students who may be feeling insecure, and who are trying to work out their feelings of missing a loved one.

**My Father's Shirt** (ages 3-8) Huss, Sally. (2015) *My Father's Shirt*. Huss Publishing

This text is about a boy whose father is in the military and away from home. The boy misses his father terribly and has trouble coping. His dad comes up with a method and suggests that when feeling lonely, the boy wear one of his dad's shirts as a tangible reminder of his father's love and presence. In return, the boy finds this method effective, and is able to handle things easier. The illustrations in this book are colorful and fun for children reading it, and it displays cartoon-like pictures that make it engaging for the age range it targets. This book can be used to help children be reminded that there are coping mechanisms they can use in order to deal with being separated from a parent. It can show that using strategies is a helpful way to deal with these emotions and is worth trying.

### **Medias Exploration of the Unconventional Princess:**

Aside from literature being an extremely important source of information for students, we see today that there is an element of growing media, specifically in film that

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can support our idea of the unconventional royalty as well. The growing rise of films choosing their fairytale princess as more than the ordinary one in distress has increased with movies such as *Shrek*, *Frozen* and even the beloved movie *Princess Diaries*.

**Shrek** Katzenberg, Jeffrey, Williams, H. John, Warner, Aron (Producer), Jenson, Vicky, Adamson, Andrew (Directors). (2001) *Shrek* (Motion Picture), United States: DreamWorks Animation, DreamWorks, Pacific Data Imaging

In the movie *Shrek*, we are introduced to Princess Fiona who is plagued by a curse that transforms her into an ugly ogress each day at sunset. She has been locked in a dragon-guarded castle and is saved by the ogre Shrek, who is mistaken as her knight in shining armor. In the beginning of the movie, the princess is portrayed as the very classic one we see in fairy tales. This means that there are expectations of how she should be rescued, who she should marry and so forth. Fiona also seems to be snobby and selfish in what she wants to accomplish. Later, the princesses true self comes out, which shows that she is in reality very down to earth and independent. Unlike other princesses, Fiona is also an expert in combat fighting and martial arts. In addition, her ogre appearance is unconventional in all ways since she is depicted as more unattractive, instead of human. This film is a cartoon and very comical and visually appealing for children. This does not need to necessarily be watched in full in a classroom setting, but can be referenced since it is a very popular and well-known film. Clips can be shown depicting the princesses unique qualities as a support for the idea that a princess does not need to fit the stereotype of being beautiful and reliant on their prince.

**Frozen** Del Vecho, Peter (Producer) Lee, Jennifer & Buck, Chris (Director). (2013) *Frozen* (Motion Picture), United States: Walt Disney Pictures

Queen Elsa of Arendelle is a fictional character who is born with the ability to create and control ice and snow. On the outside, Elsa looks regal and reserved, but in



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reality she lives in fear with her secret. One night when they were children, things go terribly wrong when Anna, Elsa's sister gets injured while playing in Elsa's ice and snow world. After this incident, she isolates herself and spends every waking moment trying to suppress her growing powers. One day, when triggered, Elsa accidentally sets off an eternal winter that she cannot stop. She leaves the kingdom to isolate herself even more and does not plan to come back. Anna, her younger sister tries to follow and convince her sister that her power does not need to define her, and that she can learn to control it. The movie ends with Elsa returning to her kingdom and controlling her powers. Additionally, now she embraces herself and her powers and is reunited with her sister as well.

This movie is a cartoon and very visually appealing for young children. It can be used to depict another two unconventional princess characters. It can also show that we can trust in our family and friends in order for them to help us in a difficult situation we may be enduring such as not believing in ourselves, or when feeling helpless.

**The Princess Diaries** Houston, Whitney, Chase, Martin Debra, Iscovich, Mario (Producer) Marshall, Garry (Director). (2001) *The Princess Diaries* (Motion Picture), United States: The Walt Disney Company, Walt Disney Pictures

The Princess Diaries is a movie based off of the bestselling book by author Meg Cabot. The movie is about a quirky girl named Mia who discovers she is the heir to the throne of the fictional country of Genovia. This country is ruled by her grandmother whom she never met until then. Mia always tried to be invisible and is happy with her two best friends, but sometimes wishes she was more popular and liked by others. One of her best friends, Michael has a crush on Mia, but she cannot notice because she is focused on being liked by the more popular boy in her school. Once Mia finds out her new secret, she needs to grapple with this new lifestyle change. Her grandmother proceeds to give her a full

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makeover and teach her everything she needs to know in order to one day take over the throne. Mia struggles with trying to keep her best friends happy, while dealing with newfound popularity at school and around the world. At the end of the film there is a big ball that is an opportunity for Mia to be presented to all the most important people of her country. She impresses them all with her funny, quirky and down to earth personality. At the end of the movie, Mia confesses her feelings to Michael and apologizes for how she had been acting and treating her best friends. She explains that he liked her for who she was before she became a royal, and it is noted that the fame, money and a new lifestyle did not influence his feelings.

This movie can be used to show that an everyday princess does not need something such as great wealth to be a princess, but to be herself and win over her people. This is an ultimate story supporting an unconventional princess, and can be used to make this point to students. The book by Meg Cabot can be used in assistance to this movie if chosen to do so.

### Online Sources for Military families

**Sesame Street For Military Families** Sesame Workshop (2016). *Sesame Street for Military Families*. Retrieved From <http://www.sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org>

The Sesame Street for Military families is an online resource created by the well known Sesame Street corporation. While Sesame Street may be a bit juvenile for this age group, they have made their mark by helping families from teaching the A, B, C's, to the difficult issues such as deployment. They are much more than just a television show, but a support as well. This page is a resource for families to talk, listen and connect with other families too. The website is also broken down into categories such as deployment, military homecomings, grief, injuries and more. When selecting which page to look through, there

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is a video for children as well as information for parents to help be as prepared as possible for a family member who may be away. There are many coloring documents one can download for parents and children such as pages to color and help identify the emotions of the characters. There are also goodbye cards for children to help deal with their closure of saying goodbye to someone. There are also guides that parents can download to look over how they may discuss this situation with their children.

**Military Spouse** Military Spouse (2015). *Military Spouse*. Retrieved  
From: <http://militaryspouse.com>

This is another online resource that is targeted towards supporting wives of those deployed. This website is broken down into categories targeted towards specific situations you may find yourself in while a spouse is away. Categories such as Military Marriage, Parenting, and Deployment are just a few of the categories you can explore. It also provides news for any ongoing changes happening for our military families. Unlike other resources, this is specifically for military spouses, and not for children.

In conclusion to this literature review, it can be determined that the sources provided in relation to my themes are numerous. With this in mind, the only gap I found was in children's text focusing on others such as a spouse enduring this type of situation. This is why my text acts as another resource that children and parents can utilize since it provides a different perspective. With this in mind, the literature that I found explored a sibling or a parent who is deployed and is important and a helpful resource. These texts only explore one area for children and restricts them to only think about their own experiences, as opposed to having another perspective and an understanding others feelings as well. Additionally, a plethora of texts relating to the theme of an unconventional princess or prince determines that these texts are ones in which readers are looking for

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access to and recognize that heroes come in many forms. In regards to other themes addressed in this bibliography, texts regarding separation are available to help these children, as well as online resources for children and parents to access if they are experiencing this feeling when someone they know is deployed.

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### Section Four: Original Book

*Cover: Illustration of a scenic view of a fairytale land. Buildings made of tan stone, with an elegant castle in the far distance.*

**Once upon a time there was a very unique and beautiful princess. She had long, brown, flowing locks of hair, freckles that covered her nose, and her eyes were the type that could give away any secret or emotion she was feeling. The princess lived with her parents, who were the king and the queen of the land of Islear. The princess was loved by all, and they awaited the day for her to be married and take over the throne as their leader. Despite this, she was no ordinary princess, and did not understand why she needed to be married when there was so much else to see in not just the world, but in her country too. She longed to have an adventure and be able to explore.**

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*Split; Left side: Princess is excitedly packing suitcases with her parents and other royal help standing back watching nervously.*

*Split; Right Side: Royal car drives down a narrow path towards its destination with the princess hanging out of the window looking excitedly at what is around her.*

**When a slot opened up to attend the most refined princess academy in the south region of her country, the princess jumped on the opportunity for an adventure and begged the king and queen to allow her to attend. In their attempt to prepare their daughter to be a successful queen, the princess was sent to the south for her adventure.**

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*Split; Left side: elaborately decorated room holds a great amount of guests dancing, standing around and eating.*

*Split; Right side: Man kisses the princess' extended hand and the two look at each other longingly. Big shy smiles are spread upon their faces, everyone in background looks on the encounter.*

**While there, the princess attended a ball for all training heiresses. Upon arriving, she met a very special man. He was unlike any of the others with his tall stature, dark hair, and bright blue green eyes. She knew, immediately he was special because of his caring nature and the way he spoke to her which not as a princess but as a typical girl. She also sensed that this night would not be the last time she saw this man. Once he introduced himself, she knew that he would always feel like her prince.**

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*Split; Left side: Princess and man holding hands running and exploring the city. The two are laughing as they explore.*

**Following the events of that night at the ball, the two went on walks and adventures together until the wee hours of the night.**

*Split; Right side: The two are sitting on a rooftop, the man becomes serious and looks at his princess to tell her how he is feeling. Princess is blushing and is leaning forward smiling as she hears what he has to say.*

**One especially starry night, the princess and her prince were laughing and having a great time. Suddenly, the man grew serious. He looked her straight in the eye and exclaimed, “My heart belongs to you now, and will always belong to you in the years to come.” The princess smiled at her prince and he immediately knew she felt the same.**



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*\*Background color grows darker and less colorful using colors like tan, gray and black\**

*Split; Left side: People are peering out of houses, speaking with urgency and looking at each other with worried expressions and body language. They are looking for armor and weapons. Princess and man are walking through the scene looking confused and worried.*

**The next morning, word of war spread through the land. The people of Islear needed to defend themselves against the neighboring country who were upset due to conflict over land.**

*Split; Right side: King and queen are on the phone with their daughter. The princess holds the phone down and covers the receiver with her hand and looks at the man who is sitting next to her listening. The man has a solemn look on his face as he is peering downwards.*

**Upon hearing this news, the King and Queen said their daughter must return to her kingdom immediately so that she would be safe. The princess asked her prince to leave with her, but with a sad look on his face he explained that he could not.**

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*Split; Left side: The man is intently reading his draft letter. The princess sits next to him holding onto his arm and tries to console him*

**The man had been drafted as a soldier into the war and would be deployed down south in order to fight for his land. When hearing this, the princess told him she understood. But behind that smile was sadness and fear.**

*Split; Right side: The man turns and takes the princess's hand and looks in her eyes. She has tears in her eyes but is trying to smile at him.*

**Seeing this look on her face, the man promised he would return to her. He explained "My heart belongs to you now, and it will belong to you then." He asked her to wait and not lose faith.**

**The princess smiled at her prince's bravery and courage. She promised she would not lose faith, and finally understood what a real life hero may look like.**

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*Split;left side: Dark scene with soldiers in background, man in his uniform leaning sadly on his arm while writing his letter to his princess.*

*Split; Right side: Princess leaning out her window reading her letter.*

**Once apart, the two wrote letters to each other longing to see the other. The man would write about his time during the war, and would always end his letters with “My heart belongs to you now and it will belong to you then.” Again, he would then plead that she wait for him and not lose faith. The princess kept these words dear to her heart as she waited for her prince to come home.**

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*Split; Left side: Princess sitting at breakfast table poring over newspapers with a worried look on her face. Her parents and other staff members are peering at her with curiosity and worry.*

**Everyday, the princess would read the newspaper waiting for updates on the ongoing war. She did so with a knot in her chest. During this time, She was surprised at the nervousness and fears she experienced for her prince, which she had never experienced with anyone before.**

*Split; Right side: Room is covered in newspapers and letters from the man. The princess sits on the floor with all of this surrounding her.*

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*Split; left side: King and queen on a pedestal addressing a crowd at a press conference. Princess is standing on the side with her hand to her mouth and hurt eyes looking towards her parents.*

**One day, the king and queen announced that due to the ongoing war down south, they would speed up the process and have their precious daughter marry and take her position as queen sooner than planned. An advertisement would be sent out immediately. When hearing this news, the princess knew she had to tell them about her prince, but did not know how to do it.**

*Split; right side: Advertisement to begin the process of finding a prince for the princess, which looks more like a wanted sign than one to find a husband for their daughter.*

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*Split; Left side: princess sits looking bored in her throne as a stack of applications sits on the table next to her*

**The king and queen ordered an advertisement to be sent out to gather the most eligible bachelors to come before the princess. Every time she met a new one applicant the princess thought that each of them was just too strange, and not interesting enough for her.**

*Right page continues from left: eligible bachelors line up waiting anxiously to meet the princess.*

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*Split; Left side: Scene changes, we are in the war zone with the man sitting on his bed at base reading a letter he keeps in his boot from the princess.*

**While the search continued in the North, the prince was still down South serving his country and hoping the end of the war was near. During a moment of weakness, the man pulled out a letter from his princess that he kept in his boot. While reading the letter over and over, the prince felt a piece of himself missing. Even though he felt proud of the work he was doing, he felt that the one he should be fighting for was up north.**

*Split; Right side: Prince is walking the streets of the town which looks somewhat rundown.*

*He sees an advertisement on the street and is reaching down to get it.*

**On his day off, the prince strolled the streets where he had only memories of laughing and talking with his princess. As he walked, a newspaper lay on the street. The man saw the princess's face next to an advertisement asking for the most reputable princes to come and win over her hand in marriage. Upon seeing this, he knew he had to return and fight for his princess, but did not know how while he was still loyal to defending his land.**

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*Split; left side: Watercolor blended background with text surrounded by elegant border*

**Back in the Islear kingdom, the princess continued to miss her prince as the pressure became greater to be married. But her parents did not know how she felt. If they knew, they would never accept her prince who was not of royal blood as they were.**

*Split; Right Side: Princess is in a heated discussion with her parents. They seem upset and the princess is crying as they are yelling at each other.*

**She decided she could not hold in her secret anymore. When she told the King and Queen, they did not understand. In their royal world, why would she sabotage marrying a real prince for a commoner she knew in her past?**



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*Split; Left side: letter from the princess explaining why she cannot wait for him.*

**Feeling a responsibility to her land, the princess wrote and told the man they cannot be, and that they need to lose contact. The man thought he had known what to do before, but now felt defeated by her decision.**

*Split; Right side: The prince is reading the letter with a surprised and hurt look.*

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*Split; Left side: Royal family exiting their car, and looking around at the run down area of their country. People are gathering and peering from houses and shops waving with eagerness and excitement.*

**A few months later after the war had passed, the princess and her parents returned to the southern part of their land to inspect the damages that had been caused by the war.**

*Split; Right side: Crowd of people surrounding the royal family*

**When they arrived, the family was immediately overwhelmed by all the people and hullabaloo happening in the city. Everyone was thankful and wanted to meet and kiss the hands of the royal family.**

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*Split; Left side: Princess looking uncomfortable and looking around.*

**The Princess felt overwhelmed by all the attention and was frustrated in being back in this familiar place where the beginning of her love story began. She found herself scanning the crowd, as if she would find someone or something familiar.**

*Split; Right side: Princess looks shocked and her hands fly to her mouth as she exclaims, “Could it be?” Her parents are turning towards her trying to make sense of what is happening.*

**As she was about to turn away, the princess SNAPPED her head back. “Could it be?” she exclaimed out loud.**

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*Split; Right side: Man in worn out uniform is moving through a crowd towards the princess who is standing with her parents. The two are looking at each other and smiling in disbelief.*

**Immediately she noticed the figure moving towards her. He did not look like the other citizens crowding around her, because he was wearing his uniform and moved forward with urgency.**

*Split; Left side: The princess has tears in her eyes as she stands and waits for the prince to make his way to her. Their eyes are locked as others move out of the way for him to make his way through.*

**Seeing him in his worn out uniform overwhelmed the princess with emotion and happiness that he was safe. The two locked eyes immediately and smiled in excitement as the man continued to push his way through the crowd towards the royal family.**

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*Split; Left side: Man bowing to the king and queen while he explains he loves their daughter*

**When he finally made his way to them, the man turned directly to the king and queen.**

*Split; Right side: The King and queen hold each other's hands as they listen to what the man has to say*

**He explained, "My heart belonged to her then and it belongs to her now. I may not be a real prince, but I know I am her prince." Seeing how happy the princess was to see the man, the king turned to his daughter's prince and thanked him for defending their land. The king and queen then looked at each other lovingly and understood that this was meant to be.**

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*Right and Left sides: Display of a wedding scene with a lot of guests in the background dancing, celebrating and toasting the couple. The King and Queen are in the background bowing their heads in happiness and acknowledgement of the new rulers of the land.*

**The very next month the princess and the man were married in a festive ceremony with all of their closest friends and family. They assumed their positions as rulers of the land of Islear, and lived happily ever after.**

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### Section Five: Applications

In deciding who I should read my book to, I settled on reading it with a small group from my fifth grade class. I chose six students, who I already knew were of differing levels of comprehension. I was aware of their specific levels due to our Fountas and Pinnell assessments that we recently completed. Typically, levels are not relevant for read alouds, but I wanted to make sure students could fully comprehend topics we would discuss. I had previously sat with each student and calculated an idea of where they were in regards to their reading comprehension and based on results, felt that they indeed could benefit from a story where they would be pushed to think about characters and a plot that needed a good amount of inferencing. With this in mind, I felt that the students range of skills could contribute to the conversation and reading of the text. As Louise Rosenblatt explains in her transactional theory approach, “The text is simply ink on paper until a reader comes along” (Rosenblatt, 1987, p. 1). This idea resonated with me, and motivated me to read this story with my students, and have them develop ideas to almost become the creators of the way in which the story is perceived in our time together.

When thinking about the grouping of my students, my story can also bring up some topics that not all students are comfortable with. Knowing this, when I thought about who to place in my group, I tried considering certain students’ home life situations such as divorced parents, or siblings who are away in college or in the army too. Based on this,, I wanted to make sure that the students I chose would be able to handle our conversation and use what they learn to benefit them. In the group there were four girls, along with two boys. I did this so that I could see a range of learners in regards to their comprehension abilities and life experiences. I wanted these abilities to mesh in order for students to comprehend a

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story with this specific topic. This was also done with the purpose of allowing students to learn from each other, and to have them provide support through this story. With this in mind, I decided that this text was not meant for a whole class, but small group due to the emotional topic that this text can be used to address.

When beginning the lesson, I explained that the book was relevant to our current realistic fiction unit, and that the students would practice reading between the lines due to some implicit information we needed to understand. I chose to take this route with my lesson due to the ideas taught by Debbie Miller. She explains in her text *Reading with Meaning*, “The strategies of questioning and inferring are particularly helpful in teaching children how to take the conversation deeper” (Miller, 2002, p. 95). Using what we have learned in order to delve into the text is exactly what I wanted students to practice, and would be done through the idea of “reading between the lines.” Moving forward with this idea, after I decided where to go with my lesson, I proceeded to discuss the title with the students. We identified what the word “unconventional” means, and what this title can tell us about the story. With knowing the type of content we would be exploring, the lesson was set up in a way in which there would be a good amount of support in order to facilitate discussion. Support included lower and higher order thinking questions, which would allow students to really reflect and think about the text. From there we proceeded to read the story, and stop every few pages so that we could do some close reading of the implicit lines, and to analyze what may be occurring in the text. Students had great input and ideas, which were discussed throughout the session. In preparation for this lesson, I found specific places in the story that I was going to stop, and planned the types of questions I wanted to ask. Stemming from this, rich conversations such as why characters may have been



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experiencing certain emotions at certain times is just one example of how students were using what they already know, and what they read in order to make connections.

Supporting this idea of conversation as a result of reading, the ASCD explains, “Put simply, talk, or oracy, is the foundation of literacy (Fisher, Frey, Rothenberg, 2008, p.1). The author explains that verbally responding can allow children to gain a deeper understanding of what they are learning.

Following this interactive read aloud, we explored the idea of who a good audience may be for this type of book. I had thought that this was an idea that students touched upon before, but realized that they may not have in previous reading units, and that it was something to continue working on in the future. Once this conversation concluded, students completed a reader's response in which they expressed connections to some characters, and other ideas they had in conclusion to the read aloud. Connections were chosen as a way to reflect so that I could see if students were able to think about themselves in context of a significant situation such as the one in the story. Also, making connections is a skill that we look for our students to make, and helps show evidence that they really understood the deep feelings and experiences a character endured. Debbie Miller explains in her text *Reading With Meaning*, “I’ve learned that children love to grapple with complex social and moral issues, and they often have clearer heads than some grown-ups” (Miller, 2002, p. 66). With this idea in mind, teachers should not shy away from exposing their students to making these connections, but rather embrace it.

Overall, the reading of my story was a positive experience. I did not tell my students that this story was based on something I experienced, but rather chose to let them make their own connections. I was excited and nervous to share such a personal story, but

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enjoyed remaining anonymous and seeing students grapple with this topic. Since the book can come off complicated due to the vocabulary and implicit ideas, it helped to ask prompting questions, and have students discuss what was happening every few pages. Furthermore, asking authentic questions was something I wanted to focus on in this lesson. A goal of mine was to ensure that I was not asking a lot of questions, but rather ones that really pushed the students. This was done through prompting questions such as “What do we already know about this character?” or “How is this person feeling based on what just happened?” With this in mind, I felt that some scaffolding was needed during the discussion for students who struggle with the inferential thinking. Allowing the opportunity for them to take part in authentic conversation, no matter their level of comprehension, was important to implement into a small group, or any lesson at all. In Taberski’s text *Comprehension From the Ground Up* she discusses the idea of accountable talk and it needing to be fostered and developed over time. Taberski writes, “Ask fewer, but higher level, questions that lead students to think and dialogue” (Taberski, 2011, p. 94). Due to there being multiple implicit lines included in the text that are important to the understanding, asking the most appropriate questions and having authentic conversation is key. Even though some of the questions and ideas were difficult for some, I would still have chosen to include them if redoing this lesson.

After reading the book, I asked the students how they felt about the story, and if they enjoyed listening. Being that I had a range of learners, I should have considered more in the moment that their reactions to the story would differ based on their understanding of what happened. When thinking back to the reading of the text, there were times when students became confused with details that I told them were not important, and should

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move on because they do not impact the story. An example was when the princess had to go back home when the war broke out due to her parents request. It was explained to the confused student that sometimes when our parents worry about our safety, they want us to be home with them to be safe. Once this was explained I told the student that this was something she did not have to fully understand, but just accept that it happened in the story. In addition, questions students asked were ones I expected them to develop based on details such as the characters relationship, or other details I purposely left open for interpretation. The students did not necessarily notice the lack of names, but when asked, they provided answers that were right on track such as “There are no names because it can be about anyone.” Once this was brought up, more discussion was able to take place based on an author's specific decision.

In regards to overall reactions, the boys had some different reactions than the girls. One of my male students did not connect to the story at all, and reacted saying “Maybe this should be read to younger students because it is a fairytale.” This specific student typically gravitates towards graphic novels, and does not venture into the fairytale genre. When the male student made his comment, a female student responded to him saying, “I have to disagree, there were words in this story that I did not know until they were explained, so it would not work for younger students. Just because it has princesses doesn’t mean it’s for younger kids.” The male student explained that he understood, but maybe it was not a story for him. Based on the second student's reaction, I can tell that she notices a lot about text complexity, and really thinks about these aspects when reading. Other reactions included that it was an “interesting book,” as well as “It made me feel good and loved by my family and it opened my eyes from the people in the army.” This was a reaction made by a student

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who also felt that a take away from the text was that we watch over the people we love. Her answer made it seem that her connection was real and very appropriate. Also, I was able to infer from students' reactions that they were engaged and excited. Reactions I noticed were from comments such as "Don't stop just keep reading!" Or "I predict that she will see him later on in the story from what you just read." Even though I had one male student who did not like the book because it was "cheesy," he still participated with ideas such as "He was feeling scared because he was going to be going off to war." I made sure to praise this idea because our students may not feel these emotional connections towards others and should be able to transfer these ideas to other texts as well. This student was able to pinpoint how the character was feeling at the time of being drafted, and it was an important idea to help understand the story.

At the end of the read aloud I handed out a reflection sheet in which I wanted to see the students respond to the reading (See worksheet in appendix A). If I were to read this text again, I would change this summative assessment and include different questions such as "What was the problem/solution of the story?" and move on from there to break down what happened. Something that was not clear was in regards to knowing if these students had experience in making connections between themselves and a character before, and in talking about who a good audience may be for a book. Even though this was hard for them, I now know that it is something I should focus on in preparation for this read aloud. Another change I would think of making would be to even use our dialogue and discussion as an informal assessment. Sometimes my students become overwhelmed by worksheets and get caught up on the language of questions instead of being able to just write and display what they know or learned. It can sometimes not display their authentic learning,

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which is something to be considered. This was the case with one student specifically who I had to sit with and explain that this was not supposed to be a stressful activity, but rather just a way to see what she is thinking in reaction to this text.

When reflecting on the students writing from the activity, I was pleased to see most of the group making connections to the character and identifying with someone that they miss due to a similar situation. I was pleased that students began to make text-to-self connections, and know that this is something complicated and beneficial for them to do. When completing this reflection activity one student wrote, “I miss my cousin who passed away because she was sick.” A connection like this is important and shows that the student took notice of the danger of someone in the army, and the potential that they may lose their lives as well. It can be determined that students were able to talk about the author's main message, and give examples such as “You should always believe,” or “Even if half the couple is in the army they still both care about each other.” When unpacking the students writing, it was seen that the question regarding an appropriate audience was difficult for most of the students. The only student who really connected to this question was one who was preparing to say goodbye to her sister who was joining the army. When asked who may be a good audience for this text she wrote, “Someone who is in the army and left someone special behind.” This student clearly made connections to the text and since she found it relevant to her life, was able to determine an appropriate suggestion.

When thinking about how a teacher might use this book in the classroom, I would recommend that it be used in a small group lesson as opposed to a whole class one. In a small group, one can discuss a specific topic, and there is opportunity for rich discussion if the group is limited so that each voice can be heard. Some discussion the teacher might

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want to facilitate would be in the unconventional fairy tale aspects of this story. For example, the teacher can review what students consider royalty or a princess. Based off of this, a discussion can be had regarding the princess in this text, and why her and her love story are more “unconventional.” This can open up rich conversation about not placing people in boxes based on their status, as well as showing that fairytales can be present for anyone in everyone's lives. Another way that the teacher can implement this text is in exploring the feelings a student may be having when someone is away, and even deployed as this text explores.

Background knowledge is always a significant piece when we try to make meaning from any sort of text. It allows children to better access information in a book due to the prior information they can apply to really understand what is occurring (Miller, 2002). In regards to background knowledge of my specific text, students will need to have some background regarding specific army related words such as “deployed,” “drafted” and more. I stopped in the middle of reading the text in order to check that students understood these words since they were important to the overall understanding. Even if students had known what they meant, I would have paused to discuss them as a review regardless. If students are not familiar with these words they can be discussed as you go along, or in advance if that is a more appropriate method for specific learners. This text can also be used when exploring a realistic fiction unit, or a fantasy one as well due to the fairytale elements included. In addition to this, it can be included on a need basis, if a teacher finds that a student may benefit from a text in which they can relate to the emotions and experiences of the characters.

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There are some, yet minimal explicit concerns that a teacher may come across in this text. The minimal concern consists of the possibility that conversation can become intense due to the topic and conversation which may lead to what army life is like, as well as why someone may be scared for a loved one to be deployed. When reading the text to my students, I posed the question “Why may the princess be feeling this way when finding out the man is being drafted?” Students had great insight, but teacher facilitation was necessary when students started to explain, “She’s scared he may die” or “She is scared he may get injured.” While this is an accurate portrayal of the emotions the character was feeling, I wanted to make sure that this idea did not scare students, since most of them knew of someone who was in the army, or is joining soon. A teacher may want to proceed with caution when discussing these ideas, and make sure they are prepared and equipped to talk about the idea of a loved one putting their life on the line. This concept can be abstract to young students. Unpacking the emotions and details can therefore be hard for some, and should be considered. This is another reason why a teacher may choose to read this text to a small group, so that if approached with a difficult topic one will be prepared to deal with it in a more intimate setting where more discussion can be appropriately facilitated.

Thinking back to the overall experience, I feel that I am able to look at this lesson and feel confident that it was effective in what I wanted to accomplish. Something I wanted was for my students to feel connected to the text, and be interested in the story. I feel that my students were excited about the different events occurring, and that they formulated great ideas and questions during the discussion. Seeing their excitement and eagerness to continue the story allowed for me to be equally as excited and captivated too. From this experience, the idea that children need to be interested in a certain topic in order to do great

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work was really reinforced. I know this due to my one male student who did not love the book, and needed extra probing in order to be a part of the discussion. He really helped show me that we do our best work when we are excited and interested in what we are reading. I also learned that we do not need to shield students from difficult topics, but need to know how to best help and approach them. Children are capable of such great insight and connections, and when given the right tools and strategies, they can really learn to grapple with these topics. I look forward to having the opportunity of sharing my book again, and really hope that it can be a helpful resource for my future students.



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# An Unconventional Once Upon A Time

## Appendix A: Reflection Worksheet Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was the author's main message?

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2. Have you ever felt similarly to a character in the story? (Example: having someone you care about who is far away).

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3. Who might be a good audience for this book? Who would benefit from the message that the author is trying to teach?

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4. Thoughts, ideas, reflections...

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