CRITICAL LITERACY IN FAIRYTALES:

THROUGH THE EYES OF A PRESCHOOLER

by

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Abstract

Critical literacy theory says that students can make connections between a text and the meaning of its words, thereby, connecting it to societal ideas around them. Critical literacy in the classroom has often been tied back to various texts, including fairytales. When most think of critical literacy, the common idea is that it is used in an upper elementary classroom and the grades following. Various articles provide lots of insight into the minds of students in relation to critical topics; however, one age group has not been given much of an opportunity to participate in these discussions. This paper applies critical literacy to this age group--preschoolers. Through four fairytale lessons, students engaged in critical discourse with questions preplanned and facilitated by the researcher. This study aims to show that even young students can think critically about topics if they are challenged and provided with questions that push them to think about a topic.

Introduction

This case study aims to investigate and analyze how young children respond to fairytales. In my own life, I have often heard adults question what fairytales are teaching young children and how they may influence children's beliefs about life. Many argue that fairytales often push outdated societal views (Su-Jeong et al., 2019). Growing up I loved fairytales and had never really considered what kind of influence these stories may have had on me, which sparked my interest and motivated me to do this study. With this study, I wanted to utilize critical literacy (Meller, 2013) to determine and observe exactly what these children are taking in from the stories, based on how they respond to the story itself. For example, do these stories really push misogynistic views? What do these stories teach us about appearance in relation to character? How can I use critical literacy to start these conversations in the classroom? Ultimately, these questions guided me towards the purpose of this study, as I wanted to know how children responded to fairytales through the use of critical literacy, to really see children's viewpoint on critical topics and what they are really taking in from the stories.

The purpose of the story is not only to see how children respond to fairytales through the use of critical literacy but to also offer another viewpoint on this topic, specifically the viewpoint of pre-k students. While researching I found many case studies where researchers used critical literacy in fairytales with elementary school students (Bourke, 2008). However, I did not find many that were targeted towards younger children, specifically preschoolers. I began to wonder how this age group would respond? Would critical literacy even be effective with children this young? Can they grasp these critical topics and have conversations about them? Ultimately, I decided that society

often underestimates the ability of this age group and determined that these students could add valuable insight into this topic, with the proper support. By creating questions that are age-appropriate with vocabulary that they can understand the meaning behind. I concluded that these students would be able to contribute to the discussion. By conducting this case study, another perspective will be added into this larger conversation of the use of critical literacy in fairytales and how children respond to these. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do young children respond to fairytales?

Literature Review

Upon designing this study, I delved into the world of research to find the why of my research and to establish some background of critical literacy in the classroom. The journals ranged from fairytales used in critical literacy conversations to studying the fairytales that I had chosen for this study. Before beginning the research process, I had to identify the topic I wanted to look into further that would best support my idea for the study. The process of researching and writing journal entries helped to inspire some of my overall ideas and practices regarding the case study.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Literacy

I was inspired by Bourke's (2008) use of point of view within his research. Throughout the entire research process, he consistently asked students to put themselves into the story. He found that many students associated colors with character, as in good and evil. Many times, the children themselves found it difficult to imagine evil ever defeating good, so when posed with questions regarding this alternate ending, the

students tended to believe that this was false and would not happen. While Bourke's (2008) research revolved mainly around race and the implications of race in fairytales, his research tied in well with mine, as I wanted to use fairytales to create larger conversations regarding critical topics, such as gender. Through the use of point-of-view questions, he was able to encourage conversations of this nature, in an age-appropriate way to further understand students and how they perceive race and character. Bourke (2008) quoted; "Critical literacy, as I illustrate in this article, is the act of approaching texts wearing a set of eyeglasses through which the reader examines and questions the familiar and comfortable (Jones, 2006)."(p.304) This quote highly influenced my research question, as I wanted to examine the "eyeglasses" that the students responded through in critical conversations, leading me to decide on the research question of "How do children respond to fairytales?"

Fairytales

When thinking of the kinds of topics I would want to approach with this study, Meland's journal brought forth great ideas for me. In Meland's (2020) study, he claims that fairytales tend to push the idea that a woman's life is love and marriage. This struck a chord with me, as I had not thought of fairytales from this perspective. To me, fairytales were fantastical, not pushing outdated views in any form or fashion. However, after hearing this point of view not only from Meland (2020), but from personal interactions with others, it provided me with a basis of topics I could address when using fairytales that portray princesses. Meland (2020) stated; "There is a lack of reflection, and no one tries to give the children a more open mind perspective about how girls and boys are portrayed. This may indicate that gender roles in fairy tales are taken for granted."

Because of this, I knew I wanted to create these open conversations, through the use of critical literacy, and see what exactly young minds absorb from the text and how they respond to the questions about the topic. Meland also discusses how physical characteristics often connected to intrinsic characteristics of characters, via children. Building on this, I wanted to design lesson plan questions that also reflected this theme, to see how and if children connected the two in their responses.

Ultimately, I chose to go with four fairytales, all of which had varying underlying critical concepts. I chose *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* to focus on the topic of gender and all aspects relevant to this, specifically the themes mentioned above about a woman's life in relation to marriage and children. With these being traditional princess stories, following the damsel in distress plotline, I was interested to see the students' opinions on these topics and how they would be brought out through my questions. The other two stories I chose were the *Three Little Pigs* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. Within *Little Red Riding Hood*, there were some themes of gender, specifically the naivety of Red and the stereotypes placed on girls, and also the use of a male hero, the woodcutter, and how he impacted the storyline. This does stray from love and marriage; however, it does add to the conversation of the depiction of female characters and their interests. Lastly, the *Three Little Pigs* was the only story I did not connect back to gender. I did this to offer a variety of substance, and span across multiple critical topics, as I did not want to solely focus on gender. I did still want to play into the open mindedness mentioned above and the use of multiple perspectives, as we focused on equity within this story and looked at the relationship of the brothers and the wolf.

Read Alouds

Regarding students' responses and how I will analyze them, I believe Lawrence Sipe's (2002) approach is most fitting. In Sipe's article, he discusses the 5 types of expressive engagement in students. These 5 types include: dramatizing, talking back, critiquing, inserting, and taking over (Sipe, 2002, p.479). As a teacher, I can help guide these students through each type of expressive engagement by encouraging students' responses. For example, when asking students to place themselves in the shoes of the main character in the text, not only does it get them thinking, but it also allows me to see how they relate to the story. Their opinions on what a character should or should not do, could lead to some critical and important conversations regarding gender roles, classism, and etc. These conversations are how I will be able to gauge how students respond to and interpret fairytales, therefore answering my two main questions.

Overall, when researching the current journals on critical literacy in the classroom, I found that there was a pattern of children above school-age being included in the conversation. I rarely found one that revolved around the responses of younger students, preschool aged. Therefore, I wanted to expand the conversation of critical literacy in the classroom, as well as the cognitive abilities of younger children.

Methodology

This case study involves qualitative data collection and analysis. Thematic analysis will be used to interpret this data. The case study took place over the course of four weeks in the spring semester of 2023. Once a week for four weeks consistently, one fairytale was focused on. For this study, I used Dyson and Genishi (2005) to help set up the design and procedures within my case study. The setting up of a case study process goes as follows; identifying the background of the case (this includes my literature

review and the background of the students), formulating research questions, and designing a study around the participants (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.59).

This is a case study rather than action research due to the fact that I am not looking to immediately solve a problem or issue but rather studying a phenomenon of student responses in regard to the use of critical literacy. In this study, I acted as a participant-observer, as I was involved within the actions of the study while observing the actions and words of the students. When compared to Dyson & Genishi's (2005) role in their case studies, they did not participate in the study, but rather observed the classroom. This differs from my own, as I not only observed but I also played a role within the activities of this case study. So, I was influenced by the ways in which they observed the students, taking scratch notes as they did, but I also had to complete my observations after each lesson when I rewatched the videos and formulated the transcripts.

Participants and Site

The site selected for this study is a preschool and daycare located in eastern North Carolina. Approximately 13 students were involved within this study ranging from four to five years old. All names used within this thesis are pseudonyms.

Data Sources

Table 1

Data Source Table

Data Source	Qualitative Data Analysis
Video recordings of all four lessons	Analyze for patterns in children's responses, facial reactions, and gestures.

Transcript from videos	Analyze for patterns and themes.
Researcher reflections and notes	Analyze for patterns and overall ideas in children's verbal responses.
Lesson Plans	Create lessons to prompt conversations and responses from students, along with guiding questions for when the conversation has died down.

Throughout this case study, I collected many forms of data, as seen above in the table. The video recordings were taped through WebEx and saved to my device, where I then translated them all by hand. The transcripts were also kept private on my computer. The transcripts were printed out to use for coding and had their own folder that they were kept in to keep everything organized. My scratch notes following each lesson were kept in this folder as well, which was where I created a table, inspired by the scratch note template used in Dyson and Genishi (2005). Dyson and Genishi tremendously aided me in the process of this research, as they walked me through the process in how to create and conduct a case study, ensuring that my findings clearly were supported by the data and evidence I had collected.

Curriculum Development

For this case study, I developed a curriculum that spanned across four different fairytales, commonly known by many children. For each fairytale, I created questions relevant to critical literacy and the theme I had chosen for the particular story, which encouraged the students to think further about the story and its characters. While some

questions varied from book to book, other essential questions stayed the same for each book. These include:

- How did this story make you feel?

- What did you notice about the characters in the story?

- How do you relate to this story?

- What would you do if you were in the main character's shoes?

- Did you like the ending? Why or why not?

The four stories I chose included: *Cinderella* (Watson et al., 2002), *The Three Little Pigs* (Banta & Jones, 2004), *Sleeping Beauty* (Teitelbaum & Hapka, 2004), and *Little Red Riding Hood* (Watts & Ewers, 1993). Before deciding on these stories, I looked into each one and examined the many versions of each story. Although I ultimately decided to use the "classic" versions of the stories, reading through the different versions of each story provided me with great insight as to where I could go with my questions, the multiple perspectives I could tie in, etc. I decided to use the classic versions of each story in order to create a sense of consistency, without introducing too many new ideas all at once. I knew the students most likely had a background with the original stories so I felt as though this would be the most effective way to create a discussion as they would not be focusing on what was different in the story but rather focusing on the critical questions at hand.

For each fairy tale, I created researcher memos (see Figure 1). I did this because it provided a source for me to go back to and build my knowledge on the topic at hand.

Figure 1

Journal Entry Excerpt

APA Citation: Jackson, E. (1998). Cinder Edna. United Kingdom: HarperCollins.

Main points from article

-   Cinderella and Cinder Edna both lead similar lives with different endings. Cinder Edna is Cinderella's neighbor so their stories are both told simultaneously

-   "Money doesn't always buy happiness"

-   "Outlook is everything"

-   Shows the importance of attitude, perspective, and abilities rather than beauty.

Key quotes from findings

-   "Who needs a fairy godmother? Cinderella isn't the only one on her block with a wicked stepfamily, but Cinder Edna has better things to do than sit in the ashes feeling sorry for herself."

-   "Even with her ragged, sooty clothing Cinderella was quite beautiful. Edna, on the other hand, wasn't much to look at. But she was strong and spunky and knew some good jokes"

Personal Reflections

I believe this version of the story can be used to start many conversations regarding how looks are often made to feel more important to women. How society pressures girls into feeling like they have to marry into wealthy families and keep up their appearances to be happy. With my students being so young, this book offers that comparison between the two different stories and could allow students to place themselves in the shoes of both girls and make the connection to how differently their lives ended up. Some discussion questions I could ask after reading this are: What was the difference in the two girls' endings? Who do you think is happier? Why would she be happier if she wasn't with a

Unit Plan

I first started by creating a unit plan to conceptualize all of my ideas for each story to clearly see each connecting factor and plan out a general idea of what this case study unit would be about and how I would approach this. To develop the unit, I first researched the fairytales I wanted to use, and found background on the author and when it was published. After this, I read through each fairytale and brainstormed which critical topic I could best connect to each of the stories. Throughout this process, I was meeting with my mentor to discuss these ideas, and ensure the critical topics were supported within the unit plan.

Here is the central focus paragraph from focus of unit section in the unit plan. It shows the purpose behind the concepts I wanted to focus on throughout the unit, how this will be meaningful, and how the content is relevant to the students and their everyday life (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Central Focus Paragraph

Central Focus Paragraph:
The topic of my unit is fairytales, and specifically I am looking at the lessons that they teach. Since I won't be able to track students over their lifespan to determine what they teach, I am focusing on how children respond to these stories and utilizing critical literacy in discussion to help me evaluate some of the stereotypes that are taken from these stories. The content I will be covering ranges from the "evil" step-family stereotype, to the battle of good and evil and how those traits are represented physically in fairytales, gender roles in heroism, and the importance of physical beauty in these stories. This content is important to students because these could be the ideas that they are taking from these beloved stories. It is important to let children enjoy the stories, yes, but they also need to be able to recognize the messages behind them. By having critical conversations at an age-appropriate level, I can assist students in battling these ideas and analyzing the stories that they read, an important skill set when they become literate. As they grow older, students will be tasked with reading many different kinds of texts and they need to be able to participate in critical discussions about the text and analyze them for deeper meaning. There are always hidden meanings behind stories and the messages they preach. This skill can also help them as become more involved in media. Many people today are on some form of social media, and messages are shown everywhere online. By learning at a young age how to take what seems like an ordinary text and analyze it to determine what message it is trying to send, it can help students to become more aware of the bias, prejudice and etc behind the text. Throughout these four lessons, students will engage in age-appropriate conversations that will be facilitated by me. The questions being asked will help to lead them to speak about what they have gotten from the story, without me telling them what to say. It is incredibly important to me that their responses be the priority of this case study, as I am evaluating to see how children respond to fairytales, not adults. Through these questions, I am hoping to have questions of gender roles, vanity, and more explored.

Here is the research alignment section from the unit. It shows how I aligned each lesson and story with the research I had done previously (see Figure 3). I completed this for every lesson to ensure every part of this unit was aligned. I created it because it aided me in keeping my case study aligned throughout, consistently connecting back to research and assuring that each piece of this case study flowed. See Appendix B for the whole unit.

Figure 3

Research Alignment Excerpt

Lesson #	Instructional Decision	Alignment to Research *(justify your use; cite)*
1	- Dress up as Cinderella - Discussion of Step Parents	In Su-Jeong's article (2019), they talk about how many students realized they had negative stereotypes of stepmothers and sisters, through the story of Cinderella, which gave me the inspiration to focus my discussion of this story around the relationship of the stepfamily and Cinderella. I will focus not only on the relationship but also how they're depicted (large noses and feet, not as conventionally pretty as Cinderella, etc.)

Lesson Plan

For each story, a lesson plan was created. Each lesson plan included background, lesson objectives, an explanation of the critical topic, and designated questions for certain pages that were intended to encourage the conversation.

Each lesson had five total sections. First was the overview of information about the text. This consisted of who the author was, the critical topics that were chosen, and a summary. This section helps to provide some background to the book itself and create a main focus of the text

(see Figure 4). The lesson plan template I used was the historical read aloud template from

Wrenn & Gallagher (2021), based upon Krutkta & Bauml (2018).

Figure 4

Section I from the Cinderella Lesson

Lesson Title: _____**Cinderella**_____

I. Information About Book

Author & Information about Author	Jane Werner was a children's author who wrote under many different pen names. She is most known for her work with Little Golden Books, where she wrote books ranging from fairytales to Christian stories. Werner was born in 1915 and passed in 2004.
Socially Important Topic	- The value of beauty - The stereotype of step-family being "evil"
Brief Summary of the Book	Cinderella is an orphan who lives with her evil stepmother and stepsisters. They force her to do all of the housework and are incredibly rude to her. When she decides to go to the ball she calls upon her fairy godmother who makes her "beautiful" until midnight. She meets the Prince and he falls in love. While running away she leaves behind her shoe, which the Prince uses to find her and they live happily ever after, while the stepmother and sisters are left to be miserable.

The next section is where the standards are listed for the lesson. This section explains

how the lesson plan aligns with standards for preschoolers in NC, and how those standards will

be met through the lesson (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Section II from the Three Little Pigs Lesson

II. Standards

How does this book align with required Pre-K standards/expectations?	Everyday students in the Pre-K class are expected to have group time per State requirements. This book will be used during an interactive read-aloud, where students will participate in a whole group discussion, which meets this expectation. They are also expected to work on their emotional and social development as well as their language and communication skills. Through the use of this book, discussion on social topics revolving around equitable access and the importance of inclusion/aid to others will help students to grow not only in the social and language aspect of participating in a discussion but also developing their ability to think deeper about a text and connect it back to their own lives.

Section III provides the critical topic or main focus of the lesson in regard to critical literacy. This varied from story to story, as each story focused on different topics. Section IV then describes the lesson objectives or the goals that I wanted the students to meet for that specific lesson (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Sections III & IV from the Sleeping Beauty Lesson

III. Critical/Social Topic

Critical Concept (ex. Race, gender, sexuality, social class, oppression, equity, etc.)	- The importance of appearance for women in stories (Gender) - Male Heroism (Gender)

IV. Write 1 or 2 learning objectives based on the book, standard (opt), and equity concept skills you've identified. Students will participate in group discussion of Sleeping Beauty and the role of gender within the story, speaking at least once. Students will make text to self connections verbally through a facilitated group discussion of Sleeping Beauty.

Lastly, Section V describes the questions that will be asked for each marked page, how they relate to the critical topic, and the reflection conversation at the end (see Figure 7). These

questions were altered to fit the story and the critical topic, but the essential questions were

carried throughout every story discussion, most often used in the reflective conversation

followed immediately after the reading of the story.

Figure 7

Section V from the Little Red Riding Hood Lesson

V. Plan for Teaching

● First, explain how you will set purposes for the read-aloud *(think about what you want them to think about, explore, or learn from the reading).*

● Next, write 4-5 main questions and related follow-up questions. You will identify and explain the equity concept in the appropriate column.

● Finally, explain how you will end the lesson after reading the book and discussing the questions *(think about what equity concepts you want to reinforce from the book and discussion).*

Engagement: *(How will you engage your preschool students before, during, and after the read aloud?)*

Before the read-aloud begins, I will walk in dressed as Little Red Riding Hood. This will help to catch students' attention as they aren't used to their teachers dressing up for their lessons. As we read the story I will use various voices to distinguish the dialogue that is written. For example, when Red is speaking my voice will sound younger, lighter, and higher in tone, and when the wolf speaks I will use a growling tone and deeper inflection. There will also be a plush wolf brought in to use as a prop/ interactive character within the storytelling.

Set purposes for the read aloud: *(Script: What will you say to students at the beginning of your lesson?)*

At the beginning of my lesson, I will tell my students what is expected of them. I will say something along the lines of "Today we are going to read a story. As we read, I want you to really use your listening ears because I will be asking you some questions while I read, and after we get done reading! Look at the illustrations as we go along as well because these will help you with our discussion."

	Questions (with page numbers or identifier like first word on page)	**Explain how your question relates to your <u>critical concept</u>.** *(How does it challenge master narrative about the concept? How does it encourage critical thinking about the concept?)*	

Q1	**Page #: 7**	
	Main Question: What would you do if you were Red?	This question relates back to the theme of naivety in girls, as it helps students look further into Red's actions and what this may say about her character. This could lead to questions over whether or not she is smart, why she would ever trust a wolf, etc.
	Two Focused Follow Up/Probing Questions: Would you talk to the wolf? Why or why not? Why do you think she decided to talk to the wolf? What does this say about her?	

Before finalizing any of the lesson I had the lessons checked over by both my mentor and the classroom teacher. I also self-reviewed myself, and took all of the feedback from both professionals and myself and organized it into a matrix of changes (see Figure 8). Through this I read the feedback and created revisions to strengthen the lessons to ensure all goals were being met and that all practices were appropriate and engaging.

Figure 8

Matrix of Changes

	Feedback	Revisions
Cinderella	- "It can be challenging to keep some preschoolers on task for an extended period due to short attention span. Perhaps you could add another activity between the book and questions, such as a song and dance." - Review implications of ugly/pretty and change to more appropriate language.	I changed the wording of ugly/pretty to talking about a good or bad heart and how that matches up with outer looks. I also added in a brain break where students will dance to "A Dream is a wish your heart makes" to help refocus while also still being relevant to the book.

Data Analysis

  Before beginning my analysis, I first read through each of the transcripts and made notes in margins as I went. I compared these notes to the scratch notes I had made after my visits with the students. These notes mainly focused on interactions and quotes I found interesting or what I had questions about, at times connecting them to ideas I had seen in my research beforehand. The process I followed in how I analyzed the data was heavily influenced by Dyson & Genishi (2005). Starting with the first read of my transcripts, then moving on to complex coding looking for patterns within the data and creating categories of these, relating them to the context of the study (p. 83).

  To analyze this data, I first printed off each transcript. I went through and coded to determine how many codes I had. I did this by using highlighters and the notes I had previously made, to highlight important quotes and interactions that seemed to occur consistently throughout all four transcripts. For each color or shade, I created an index that assigned a code to each of these colors. I then took this index to create a codebook, where I listed out the name of the code, an explanation of the code, and an example for each. This led me to have around 22 codes. Before moving onto double-coding, I peer debriefed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with my mentor, Dr. Wrenn. During this peer debriefing we talked through the codes, checked into where I was at with the codes, and started brainstorming connections that we could already see forming. We did to ensure I was on track and continuously connecting everything back to my research question.

  Double coding was then applied to ensure I had not missed any codes and that the ones I had located were strong. To double code, I reprinted out my transcripts and went through them again with highlighters, color coding quotes that I believed went together, without referencing

my first set of coding. I did this to ensure I had not missed any, and I am glad I did, as I had

missed a major theme during the first round of coding, so this process was successful. After I had

double coded, I used constant comparative coding to then connect my codes from each of the

transcripts to one another.

Following this, I collapsed the codes up into themes, grouping them together by what I

felt fit together best, and then naming the theme. For this process, I first started by making a

Jamboard where each of the themes were shown on sticky notes, and the codes related to them

were placed around them. I consistently compared this Jamboard to my codebook, scratch notes,

and transcripts to triangulate the data and ensure all themes were heavily supported. After this, I

used the Jamboard to then create a master codebook (see Appendix A), where the themes and

evidence to support them were listed in an organized and clear format.

Reliability

An audit trail was created to document the methods, procedures, and decisions used

within the study to show reliability. I triangulated data by using the video recordings, the

transcripts, and my researcher notes, to make sure each of them matched and that they all fell

under the themes, confirming my findings and providing evidence for each. Throughout this

process, I was consistently peer debriefing with my mentor to ensure all of the findings were

heavily supported, providing her with my data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) After I had created my

themes, I met with another professor at ECU to establish trustworthiness within my study to test

the sturdiness of it, before moving on to writing my findings.

Researcher Position

My interests may have impacted this study in the way that I as the researcher was

searching to see if students inherently held outdated views based on these fairytales. To ensure

my interests did not obscure the data, I used multiple data sets, triangulating between my transcripts, videos, and scratch notes, to make sure that they all matched. I also debriefed with two professors to establish that these claims and findings were well supported.

Findings

When analyzing the data from both the transcripts and my own field notes, I found four themes that covered the general ways in which these children responded to fairytales. These four include responding through a family lens, responding through an "I" lens, responding through a peer lens, and finally responding through the character lens.

Responding through a Family Lens

The first of the themes is responding through a family lens. By this, I mean that the students were responding from the perspective of what they know about family and its dynamics. Considering the participants were 4 to 5 years old, it is self-explanatory as to why they would respond in this way, as family is everything that they have. The most commonly used words in this theme were marriage and babies. In particular, I noticed that students stressed the importance of having a family unit, and often used that as the driving force behind many of the characters in the stories' motivations. For example, when asked why they thought the prince may want to save Sleeping Beauty, Ariel said "Maybe to get married so she can be a grown up with him." Here Ariel used what she knew about marriage and about couples and assumed that the driving force of motivation for the Prince to want to save Aurora's life was to get married and become a family. This pattern followed into another story as well, such as when asked why *Cinderella* needed to change for the ball to impress the prince and Bristol stated, "So she can have babies!"

excitedly and assuredly. (See Figure 9) Repeatedly within the transcripts from the video

recordings, students are heard mentioning marriage between two characters and how that relates

Figure 9

Excerpt from Cinderella

Researcher: Is it more important to look pretty?

Class: *Nodding heads*

Researcher: Why is it more important to look pretty?

Bristol: Because if she looks pretty, she can marry the

prince!

Researcher: So that's really important?

Bristol: Yeah, I think so

Researcher: So, you're saying she needs to change

what she is wearing so she can find the prince to

marry? Is that important? Why does she have to find a

prince?

Bristol: So, she can have babies!

to their future. Oftentimes, this was tied to physical traits. In a conversation revolving around

why the fairies in the *Sleeping Beauty* would give Aurora the gift of beauty a student replied,

"Because they are gonna get married so she can become a grown-up". This insinuates that beauty

plays a larger part in regard to the future of a character, and hence is incredibly important to

these students. To them, beauty plays a significant role in one's likeness to be married. The

students took the family connections further by relating the story to their own family. Whether it

was comparing the story to their family or recollecting a memory with their family, students

tended to automatically connect the two. When discussing the dragon in *Sleeping Beauty*, and

Figure 10

Excerpt for Sleeping Beauty

Researcher: Why does Prince Phillip want to save Aurora?

Ariel: Because he wants her to come alive.

Bristol: Maybe to get married so she can be a grown up with him

Fisher: My daddy married my mommy

Corrigan: Why did she touch the spindle Ms. Mallory?

Researcher: I don't know what do you think?

Ariel: Because it was part of the spell

Bristol: Yeah, cause Maleficent put a spell on her as a baby.

Researcher: What would you do if you were Prince Phillip?

Ariel: Because he wants to marry her

Researcher: Would you go through a forest of thorns for someone?

Morgan: Yeah

Abe: No!

Cecilia: Yeah, my dad was dressed up like a dragon for Halloween

Corrigan: My dad is fiery like a dragon!

how hard it was for the Prince to save Aurora a couple of students chimed in by making

connections to their own family. Cecilia said, "My dad was dressed up like a dragon for

Halloween!", while Corrigan said, "My dad is fiery like a dragon!". Both students connected a

visual from the story to their father, reinforcing the idea that students respond through the

mindset of family. Another occurrence of this phenomenon was during the same conversation

when a child stated that the prince would want to save Aurora because he wanted to get married. After this child said this, Fisher stated that his daddy and mommy had got married. (Figure 10)

Based on the evidence from the transcripts, students repeatedly connected family and the structures of family to the text and used that mindset to answer the discussion questions.

Responding through an "I" Lens

The next lens is responding through an "I" lens. This was by far the most prominent way that students responded. In this category falls all the times that students responded by connecting the story to themself, whether that was describing what they would do differently, how something made them feel, or simply expressing that they didn't know. I found that within this

Figure 11

Excerpt from Sleeping Beauty

Researcher: So if you were Aurora what gifts would you want?

Ariel: Ooo I would be smart! Cause sometimes I get smarty mouth! (giggles)

Corrigan: I would want to be a big boy!

Bristol: I would like to be pretty with a lot of makeup

Cecilia: And my mommy likes to put on a lot of makeup

Abe: Getting everything I like!

Fisher: I want to grow up!

Maui: I want to get an airplane.

Cole: Yeah, and I like swords cause they're my favorite.

pattern, students saw the story through their own eyes, and often placed themselves inside of the

story and the plot. When having a discussion of the gifts that beauty was given, I posed the question "If you were given a gift when you were born, what gift would you want?" The answers ranged from squishmallows to marrying a prince, however, they all answered based on their own wants, some uninspired by the gifts mentioned in the book (Figure 11).

I also noticed that they would pose similar responses, even when not directly asked what they would say or do in the situation. During the reflective conversation at the end of the *Three Little Pigs* I asked the students why Red didn't notice the wolf was dressed up as her grandma. Bristol exclaimed "I'd say Big Bad Wolf get outta my house!" In this scenario, the child was not asked to declare what they would say, however, they felt it the best way to respond to the question at hand. Bristol found that the most efficient manner in which to explain how she felt about the story would be to put herself into the plot line and tell the class what she herself would say. This interaction displayed a larger theme, of students automatically putting themselves inside the story, whether being asked to or not.

Responding through a Peer Lens

The third theme is responding through a "peer lens". For this theme, students respond through the perspective of their peers. This means they may add on to their classmates or imitate actions/phrases to show that they are in agreement or see it the same way as their peers. This entails the ways in which students built off of their peers or used their peers' responses to influence their own. As children, they are highly impressionable and peer relationships are incredibly important. It comes as no surprise that students found themselves following in their classmates' footsteps when responding to questions. For example, during a

the *Three Little Pigs*, I asked the students to infer what may happen to the house made of straw in our world, outside of the story. One student started to motion with their arms waving to resemble the wind. Immediately, one by one, the students began to wave their arms, until the entire class was waving together. Following this unanimous action, Corrigan stated that the wind could easily blow the house down (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Excerpt from The Three Little Pigs

Researcher: You think it's gonna be super weak? So, you're saying that if I went outside right now and got some straw from the farm, and I built a house out of straw it wouldn't last?

Whole Class: No!

Researcher: Why not? What could happen to it?

Fisher: Well, I went into the woods with daddy, and it was super cold.

(Morgan starts waving arms and other kids start motioning like wind with their arms)

Corrigan: Because the wind could blow it over and then

So, an action led to the response from Corrigan, explaining what the students were modeling. In a similar scenario, the students were describing how a character's facial expression insinuated how that character was feeling at the time. The same phenomenon occurred once again. I asked; "What face is he making that makes you think he's mad?". Corrigan responded, "mad face!". Morgan then began to arch his eyebrows and frown as if he were angry, pointing to his eyebrows, and exclaiming "His eyebrows!". In agreeance, the other students followed along by all making angry faces, similar to that of Morgan's.

Going beyond imitating one another, students often built off of each other's responses, meaning one student would answer the question, and another would add on to this initial response, inspiring one another in a sense. While discussing *Little Red Riding Hood* and the physical attributes of the wolf, which would be later connected to how "bad characters" are portrayed, students built upon one another's responses. Morgan discussed the large claws of the wolf, noting it was what he noticed first, and Corrigan added on by saying "Yea he has sharp fingers so he can stab the bread!" (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Excerpt from Little Red Riding Hood

Researcher: What do you notice about how he looks?

Corrigan: His eyes are like baby eyes!

Hailey: He looks bad!

Bristol: His smile makes him looks bad.

Ariel: Everything he has on his body makes him look so bad.

Morgan: His claws!

Corrigan: He has sharp fingers so he can stab the

Morgan provided an answer, while Corrigan used this answer and expanded it further by inferring the possible use of the wolf's claws. In a sense, Corrigan understood what Morgan was saying and saw it the same way, but rather than just simply agreeing, he decided to explain further what Morgan was saying.

Responding through the Character Lens

Lastly, the fourth theme is responding through a character lens. In this theme, students responded through the perspective of a character. This means that they were looking at the story through the eyes of the character, rather than themselves. This includes assuming how the characters may feel in a moment, comparing characters, etc. Looking at the story through the

Figure 14

Excerpt from Little Red Riding Hood

Researcher: I want you to think back to Sleeping Beauty, how does he look different from the Prince?

Corrigan: The prince has different boots

Morgan: The clothes look different

Rhett: He has a different belt

Bristol: The Prince didn't have a mustache

Researcher: Who do you think is older?

Ariel: The woodcutter!

Researcher: Was the prince tall or short?

Multiple Students: Tall!

Researcher: Is the woodcutter tall or short?

Corrigan: Uh, shorter

Fisher: My papa's got a big tummy cause he's short.

Researcher: What does this teach us about heroes? Do heroes always have to look the same?

eyes of a character was a major goal of these lessons, as I wanted to include the use of multiple perspectives in critical literacy as mentioned earlier in reference to Bourke.

As students were looking through the lens of the characters, they were assessing the way a character may feel about a situation based on prior knowledge of the character and physical

attributes. When looking at The *Three Little Pigs*, I asked students how they thought the third pig may have felt about the other pigs laughing at his work. Students then replied that they believed he was feeling mad and that his feelings had been hurt. The book did not explicitly say how the third little pig was feeling however students were able to think critically about this situation and examine features within the text and illustrations to help guide them to a conclusion on how the little pig was feeling. It is important to notice here how this differs from the "I" lens discussed previously as students did not say "I would feel mad" or "It would hurt my feelings", but rather they stated how the pig himself may have been feeling in this moment, regardless of their own personal feelings about the situation.

Another way that students responded through the character was by making comparisons across stories within the unit. By comparing them, students are having to look at each character for what they look like, act like, their background, and more, and then make those strides to explain how they are different. Comparing is a skill worked on throughout elementary school; however, I found these students had no problem comparing characters when given the correct supports. In a discussion of "heroes" within the books, I asked the students to compare the woodcutter from *Little Red Riding Hood* and the prince from *Sleeping Beauty*. I wanted to gauge how the students described the two heroes and have them compare the two in order to open a conversation about how heroes may look different, challenging that single story so many are given. The students were able to accurately compare the two characters, discussing their looks, outfits, and age (Figure 14).

Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study are that students respond through various lenses, viewing each story through multiple perspectives and using each lens in each story. The use of

multiple perspectives in a discussion is an important and crucial skill that can be developed early on, through processes such as the ones used within this case study. These findings relate to existing research in the way that students utilized these "glasses" to place themselves (and others) inside of the story, as found in Bourke's (2008) research.

The underestimating of preschoolers and their ability to think and respond critically is a common mindset, however, after completing this case study, I believe these students proved that critical literacy can be used within a variety of age groups and does not have to be reserved for school age and above. Students were able to, with the right questions for support, think critically about social topics such as beauty standards, gender, the identity of a hero, and share their thoughts on these topics. Going beyond questioning, the importance of how students interacted with text and the actions they took helped to guide me in my understanding of their responses. By this I mean during my watching of the videos, I commonly saw Sipe's (2002) 5 types of expressive engagement. When students would insert their opinions without being prompted or when students critiqued a character, I was able to use this to help me determine the motivation and ideas behind these choices, helping to lead me to my final findings.

Students' responses or the "glasses" that they wear to view fairytales can be plentiful as they view the stories from multiple points of view. After completing the study, I found children often respond through four main points of view: themselves, the idea of family, their peers, and the characters. All of these lens' are a large part of a child's world, so it is only natural that they see these stories from these points of view. This builds upon Bourke's (2008) research where he utilizes point of view to have students think critically about topics within the books. His research revolves mainly around race, whereas mine shows a common theme of gender, offering new evidence that point of view can be used to talk about various critical topics. Just like Bourke, I

found that students responded through these different perspectives and were able to effectively place not only themselves inside of the story, but to also look at the story from different viewpoints.

It is important to note that students were able to in fact look through these various "eyeglasses", a complex skill, placing themselves into different roles and standpoints. The different lens' brought out multiple critical topics, meeting my objectives for each lesson. When students were responding through a family lens, they followed the statement made by Meland (2020) in regard to how much importance they placed on the female characters and their need to get married and start a family. When looking through the character lens, I found that many students ended up discussing the relation of physical characteristics to the "heart" or intrinsic character of someone inside of the story.

Ultimately, young children have the ability to participate and understand critical topics during a critical literacy lesson, when they are given the fair chance to be heard and talk freely about their thoughts. Limiting students and the conversations that can be formed around fairytales creates a missed opportunity to not only discuss critical topics but to allow students to show teachers their beliefs and why they believe them. Rather than asking students to always listen, one should be open to listening to student responses, as they are more capable than many know.

In the future, I believe this study could be incredibly impactful in both the conversation of critical literacy in fairytales and the conversation regarding preschoolers' ability to participate in discussions of higher order thinking. As someone who is going into education, specifically elementary, I believe this study offers me great insight as to what I will be able to do. I learned through this case study, how to properly scaffold discussion questions to motivate students to

discuss critical and important topics and have acquired the skills to do so. As I continue into my career, I plan to utilize these processes and integrate these conversations and read aloud into my own classroom, not only to create these discussions but also to develop my students' discussion skillsets. This case study motivated students to build upon their discussion skills, by collaborating, respectfully disagreeing, and having healthy discourse. My hope for this study is that if educators were to see this, they will become open-minded and try to utilize these ideas within their own lessons and push students to think beyond the text, evaluating the way these stories relate to our own world.

Limitations

Due to the size of this study, there are some limitations. There were only 13 students in total that participated, all from one preschool, which placed a limit on the reach of this study. Had I worked with various preschool classes, at different locations, my results may have varied more. Also, the study only lasted a month, spanning across four Fridays, limiting the number of results I could have found, as I only had four lessons and four sets of responses to pull from. This could have impacted the results of the study in the sense that I may have found more prominent patterns had there been ten lessons.

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Appendix A

Master Codebook

Theme Name	Description	Examples
Responding through a "Family" Lens	Student is responding from a perspective of what they know about families from their own life. This theme focuses mainly on family life in terms of marriage and babies, and this being the most important part of life.	1. "Why is it important she meet's her prince?" "Maybe to help her get a baby." 2. "Why do we think Flora decided to give Aurora the gift of beauty?" "Because they are gonna get married so she can become a grown-up" 3. "So you're saying she needs to change what she is wearing so she can find the prince to marry? Is that important? Why does she have to find a prince?" "So, she can have babies!"
Responding through an "I" Lens	Student is responding from a perspective of themself. This includes placing themselves into the story, offering up what they would do, etc.	1. "It made me feel very happy!" 2. "Well I saw a mouse and it looked evil to me, but it had big eyes, bigger than my friend's dog!" 3. "Well, I'd say Big Bad Wolf get out of my house!" 4. "Do you ever feel like Cinderella?"

		"Yes, because sometimes I like to clean the house for my mommy" 5. "So sometimes even when people are mean to you, you might still be nice to them?" "Yea cause **** and ****** didn't let me play with them the other day, but I was still nice to them."
Responding through a "Peer" Lens	Students respond through the perspective of their peers. This means they may add on to their classmates or imitate actions/phrases to show that they are in agreement or see it the same way as their peers.	1. "What do you notice about how he looks?" "His claws!" "Yeah, he has sharp fingers so he can stab the bread!" 2. One kid starts waving arms to represent wind blowing down the house and the other students begin to wave their arms too. 3. "What's different about her clothes in these two pages? Does one dress look better than the other?" "I think the ballgown dress looks better" "Yeah, me too!" 4. "What face is he making that makes you think he's mad?" "Mad face!"

		(Kid pointing to eyebrows and squinting) "His eyebrows!" Everyone proceeds to make angry faces
Responding through a "Character" Lens	Students respond through the perspective of the character. This means they are looking at the story as the character, rather than themselves. This includes assuming how the characters may feel in a moment, comparing characters, and etc.	1. "I want you to think back to Sleeping Beauty, how does he look different from the Prince?" "The prince has different boots" "The clothes look different" "He has a different belt" "The Prince didn't have a mustache." 2. "So how would it be different?" "Her grandma would have her clothes." 3. "So do you think it just made him mad or do you think it hurt his feelings a little?" "It just made him mad!" "I think it hurt his feelings a little too!"

Appendix B

Focus of Unit

Compelling Question for your Unit:
How do children respond to fairytales?

Write at least 2-3 unit goals:
What are the big takeaways you want students to have after completing this unit? These should be broader than lesson learning objectives and summarize the key takeaways.
- Stories have larger meanings and are not always the guide to life.
- Talking in a group setting is not scary and can lead to really fun conversations.

Instructional skills supported in your unit:
- Ability to talk in group settings about their personal thoughts related to a text.
- How to make text-to-self connections.

Central Focus Paragraph:
What is the topic of your unit? What concepts/content will you be covering? Why is this content important? How is it connected/relevant to the everyday lives of students? How will you make the content meaningful?
The topic of my unit is fairytales, and specifically I am looking at the lessons that they teach. Since I won't be able to track students over their lifespan to determine what they teach, I am focusing on how children respond to these stories and utilizing critical literacy in discussion to help me evaluate some of the stereotypes that are taken from these stories. The content I will be covering ranges from the "evil" stepfamily stereotype, to the battle of good and evil and how those traits are represented physically in fairytales, gender roles in heroism, and the importance of physical beauty in these stories. This content is important to students because these could be the ideas that they are taking from these beloved stories. It is important to let children enjoy the stories yes, but they also need to be able to recognize the messages behind them. By having critical conversations at an age-appropriate level, I can assist students in battling these ideas and analyzing the stories that they read, an important skillset when they become literate. As they grow older, students will be tasked with reading many different kinds of texts and they need to be able to participate in critical discussions about the text and analyze them for deeper meaning. There are always hidden meanings behind stories and the messages they preach. This skill can also help them as become more involved in media. Many people today are on some form of social media, and messages are shown everywhere online. By learning at a young age how to take what seems like an ordinary text and analyze it to determine what message it is trying to send, it can help students to become more aware of the bias, prejudice and etc. behind the text. Throughout these four lessons, students will engage in age-appropriate conversations that will be facilitated by me. The questions being asked will help to lead them to speak about what they have gotten from the story, without me telling them what to say. It is incredibly important to me that their responses be the priority of this case

study, as I am evaluating to see how children respond to fairytales, not adults. Through these questions I am hoping to have questions of gender roles, vanity, and more explored.

Fairy tales selected:
Write a quick summary of each fairy tale explain how it supports your compelling question.
Cinderella: Cinderella is an orphan who lives with her evil stepmother and stepsisters. They force her to do all of the housework and are incredibly rude to her. When she decides to go to the ball, she calls upon her fairy godmother who makes her "beautiful" until midnight. She meets the Prince, and he falls in love. While running away she leaves behind her shoe, which the Prince uses to find her and they live happily ever after, while the stepmother and sisters are left to be miserable. It's the classic story of an evil stepmother, a trope which has been done in other popular fairytales such as Snow White. This supports my compelling questions as I will inquire about this step relationships and have children compare to their own lives or ponder why the stepmother must be evil.
Three Little Pigs: Three pigs decide to each build a house. They each build them out of different materials. An evil wolf comes around and blows the first 2 houses down because they are not strong enough. The third pig built his out of brick and it withstands the wolf. I wanted to use this story to talk about equity and specifically equitable access to resources. Through this story I will be using multiple perspectives to help involve the students in the story by asking them what they would do differently.
Sleeping Beauty: Aurora is a princess who is given three gifts at birth, one of which is beauty. She is also cursed and told that she will be put to sleep at 16 and can only be awoken by true loves kiss. She pricks her finger and falls into a deep sleep. The prince that she had met before in the woods comes to her and kisses her and awakens her from Maleficents evil curse and they live happily ever after. The main focus and point of this story is the fact that a man had to save Aurora. I really want to focus on the role that love, and marriage has in this story and how the prince is the one to save her by true loves kiss, implying that love is most important. I also want to discuss the role of physical attributes in the story. Why couldn't one of her gifts be wisdom?
Little Red Riding Hood: In this story a little girl named Red is on her way through the woods to her grandmother's house. In the woods she meets the wolf who asks her where she is headed. Upon telling him where she is headed, he proceeds to eat her grandmother and dress up as her. Red sees the wolf and falls for it at first, before she realizes it's the wolf and saves the day. The main purpose of using this story is to highlight the role that the girl plays in the story. As compared to Sleeping Beauty, in this story a girl saves the day, which is an unusual trope for fairytales. I want to use this to compare the two and create a conversation about gender roles, how heroes may look different in different stories, and if there can be more than one "hero".

Teacher Candidate Names: Mallory Smith	
Grade Level: PreK	Unit Topic: Fairytales

Content Outline of Unit

Demonstrate comprehensive content knowledge of your topic. Options for this include: traditional outline, 2-3 page paper, visual option (series of infographics, graphic organizer, prezi/powerpoint, etc.). You need to have at least 6 sources.

Sources:

Bourke, R.T. (2008), *First graders and fairy tales: One teacher's action research of critical* Reading Teacher, 62: 304-312.

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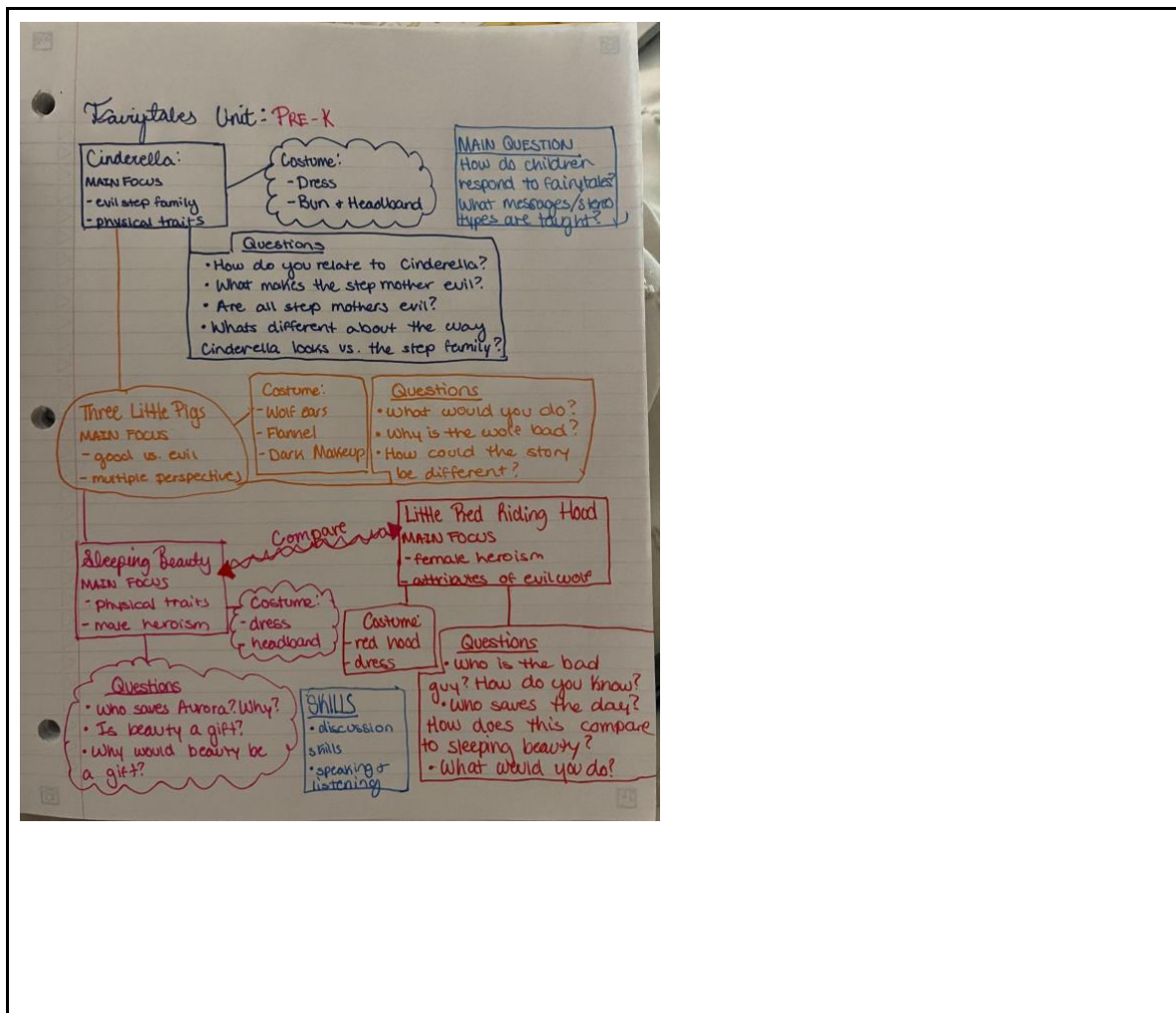
Coherence of Lessons

Unit Compelling Question:
How do children respond to fairytales? What message is taken from these stories?

	Learning Objective *(Copy and paste from existing lesson plans)*	Resources and Materials used in the Lesson (List and Link Major Resources Used in the Lesson Here)	Engagement & Questioning *(What are you doing to engage students in the lesson? What questions might you ask during your lesson?)*
LP1	Students will participate in a group discussion of fairytales, speaking at least once.	- Cinderella Little Golden Book - Cinderella Costume	- How do you relate to Cinderella? - What do you think of the Evil Stepmother? Why? What makes her evil? - What do you notice about how the characters look? What's different about Cinderella and her stepmother/sisters? - What is the story trying to teach us?
LP2	Students will make a declarative statement regarding what they would do differently in the story and justify it with at least one reason.	- Three Little Pigs Little Golden Book - Wolf Costume	- What would you do if you were one of the little pigs? - Is the Wolf a bad guy? Why or Why not? - How would the story be different if all the pigs built a brick house?
LP3	Students will participate in a group discussion of fairytales, speaking at least once.	- Sleeping Beauty Little Golden Book - Sleeping Beauty Costume	- Who saves Aurora? Why do you think he saves her? - What are Sleeping Beauty's gifts? Why do you think beauty is one of them? Why is being beautiful a present?
LP4	Students will compare two texts verbally through a group discussion. ;	- Little Red Riding Hood Book - Red Riding Hood Costume	- Who is the bad guy of the story? Why is he the bad guy? - Who saves the day? How is this different from Sleeping Beauty? - What would you do if you were Red?

Research Alignment

For this section, explain how your instructional decisions align with research.

Lesson #	Instructional Decision	Alignment to Research *(justify your use; cite)*
1	- Dress up as Cinderella - Discussion of Stepparents	In Su-Jeong's article (2019), they talk about how many students realized they had negative stereotypes of stepmothers and sisters, through the story of Cinderella, which gave me the inspiration to focus my discussion of this story around the relationship of the stepfamily and cinderella. I will focus not only on the relationship, but also how they're depicted (large noses and feet, not as conventionally pretty as Cinderella, etc.)
2	- Dress up as the Wolf - Discussion of good vs. evil	In the article by Bourke (2008), the author talks about how he used the discussion of "what would you do" to segway students into a conversation of good and evil in books, specifically how perspective influences a story. I would like to use a similar technique by asking students what they would have done if they were a little pig to discuss how the pigs' errors change the story, and how that affects the intent of the wolf.
3	- Discussion focus on the importance of physical attributes in these stories - Dress up as sleeping beauty	In the article by Meland (2020), it talks about the importance that is placed on physical attributes in fairytales. I will use this research to help guide my conversation as we discuss the gifts that are to sleeping beauty, how she is illustrated, and etc. We can also talk about the importance of having a love interest in the

		story, and how love quite literally saved her life.
4	- Discussion focus on attributes of the Evil Wolf - Discussion of Red (female) saving the day - Dress up as Red	Meland (2020), once again helps to support my reasoning behind using this story. I want to compare Little Red Riding Hood to Sleeping beauty through the lens of the hero. In Sleeping Beauty, the Prince saves the day, whereas in Little Red Riding Hood, Red helps to save the life. We will focus on battling these gender stereotypes and discuss how this changes the story and what would be different about it if a man had saved the day.