Unlearning the Myths That Bind Us
Critiquing Fairy Tales and Films

By Linda Christensen

I was nourished on the milk of American culture: I cleaned the dwarves' house and waited for Prince Charming to bring me life; I played Minnie Mouse to Mickey's flower-bearing adoration; and, later, I swooned in Rhett Butler's arms — my waist as narrow and my bosom every bit as heaven as Scarlett's. But my daddy didn't own a plantation; he owned a rough and tumble bar frequented by loggers and fishermen. My waist didn't dip into an hourglass; in fact, according to the novels I read, my thick ankles doomed me to be cast as the peasant woman reaping hay while the heroine swept by with her handsome man in hot pursuit.

Our students tackle the same pop. They learn that women are passive, men are strong, and people of color are either absent or evil. Our society's culture industry colonizes their minds and teaches them how to act, live, and dream. The "secret education," as Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman dubs it, delivered by children's books and movies instructs students to accept the world as it is portrayed in these social blueprints. And often that world depies the domination of one sex, one race, one class, or one country over a weaker counterpart. My student Omar wrote, "When we read children's books, we aren't just reading cute little stories, we are discovering the tools with which a young society is manipulated."

More than social primers, these tales, filled with ducks and mice and elephants in green suits, inhibit the ability of older students to question and argue with the texts they read. Children's literature is perhaps the most influential genre read. As my colleague Bill Bigelow noted, young people, unpro-

tected by any intellectual armor, hear these stories again and again, often from the warmth of their mother's or father's lap. The messages, or "secret education," linked with the security of their parents' arms, underscore the power these texts deliver. The stereotypes and world view embedded in these stories become accepted knowledge.

Too often, my high school students read novels, history texts, and the daily paper as if they were watching a baseball game — they keep track of who's up, who's out, and the final score. They are consumers. Many students don't know how to read. I don't mean they are illiterate. They can read the words. They can answer multiple choice questions about who said "to be or not to be" and who wore a scarlet letter under his vest. But they just "walk on the words," as Brazilian educator Paulo Freire says, instead of wrestling with the words and ideas presented.

My goal is to give students the tools to critique every idea that encourages or legitimizes social inequality — every idea that teaches them they are incapable of imagining and building a fundamentally equal and just society. Children shouldn't be taught that domination is normal or nice or funny. That's why we watch The Little Mermaid and read The Ugly Duckling in my high school English classes.

Exposing the Myths: How to Read Cartoons

We begin by reading the preface and first chapter of Ariel Dorfman's book The Empire's Old Clothes, subtitled, "What the Lone Ranger, Bobar, and other innocent heroes do to our minds." I ask students to read Dorfman and keep track of their responses in a dialogue journal which consists of a paper folded in half from the top to the bottom. They quote or paraphrase Dorfman on the left side of the paper and argue, agree, or question him on the right. Dorfman writes in his book: "Industrially produced fiction has become one of the primary shapers of our emotions and our intellect in the twentieth century. Although these stories are supposed to merely entertain us, they constantly give us a secret education. We are not only taught certain styles of violence, the latest fashions, and sex roles by TV, movies, magazines, and comic strips; we are also taught how to succeed, how to love, how to buy, how to conquer, how to forget the past and suppress the future. We are taught more than anything else, how not to rebel."
Thus, according to Dorfman, children's and popular literature function to maintain existing power relations in society and to undercut the possibility of greater democracy and equality.

I ask students if they agree with Dorfman's notion that children receive a "secret education." Do they remember any incidents from their own childhood that support his allegations? This is difficult for some students. The dialogue journal spurs them to argue, to talk back, to create a conversation with the writer. Dorfman is controversial. He gets under their skin. Many of them don't want to believe that they have been manipulated by children's books or advertising. As Dorfman writes:

"There has also been a tendency to avoid scrutinizing these mass media products too closely, to avoid asking the sort of hard questions that can yield disquieting answers. It is not strange that this should be so. The industry itself has declared time and again with great forcefulness that it is innocent, that no hidden motives or implications are lurking behind the cheerful faces it generates."

Dorfman's desire "to dissect those dreams, the ones that had nourished my childhood and adolescence, that continued to infect so many of my adult habits" bothered Justin, a senior in my Contemporary Literature and Society class a few years ago. In her dialogue journal she responded:

"Personally, handling the dissection of dreams has been a major cause of depression for me. Not so much dissecting — but how I react to what is found as a result of the operation. It can be overwhelming and discouraging to find out my whole self (image has been formed mostly by others or underneath my worries about what I look like) is years (17 of them) of being exposed to TV images of girls and their set roles given to them by TV and the media. It's painful to deal with. The idea of not being completely responsible for how I feel about things today is scary. So why dissect the dream? Why not stay ignorant about them and happy? The reason for me is that those dreams are not unrelated to my everyday life. They influence how I behave, think, react to things. My dreams keep me from dealing with an unpleasant reality."

In looking back through this passage and others in Justin's dialogue with Dorfman, Justin displayed discomfort with prying apart her ideals, with discovering where she received her ideas, and yet she also grudgingly admitted how necessary this process was if she wanted to move beyond where she was at the time. Her discomfort might also have arisen from feeling incapable of changing herself or changing the standards by which she is judged in the larger society. In a later section of her journal, she wrote, "I'm death equals a generation living by rules and attitudes they never questioned and producing more children who do the same."

Justin's reaction is typical of many students. She was beginning to peel back the veneer covering the injustices in our society. She appreciated the importance of reconstructing a more liberatory set of possibilities for girls and women, but at the same time was overwhelmed by the hugginess of this task — unsure if she would have anything to hang on to after she began dismantling her old values.

Charting Stereotypes

To help students both dismantle those old values and reconstruct more just ones, I carry two objectives with me when we begin this study of children's culture: first, to critique portrayals of hierarchy and inequality, but also to enlist students in imagining a better world, characterized by relationships of mutual respect and equality. We start by watching cartoons and children's movies — Bugs Bunny,
Popeye, Daffy Duck, and Heckle and Jeckle videos in one class; in my freshman class we also watch Disney's The Little Mermaid. On first viewing, students sometimes resist critical analysis. Kamaul said, "This is just a dumb little cartoon with some ducks running around in many of the cartoons. When women do appear, they look like Jessica Rabbit or PlayBoy Bunny guides. We know that the appearance of people of color in classic children's movies—Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White. We look at the roles women, men, people of color, and poor people play is the same film. We also cover men's roles. As they view each episode, they fill in a chart. Here is a partial sample from the ninth grade class evaluation of The Little Mermaid:

Women's Roles:
- Ariel: Pretty, white, shapely, kind, Goal: Marry the prince.
- Ursula: Fat, white, meek. Goals: Get back at Triton,power.
- Maid: Chubby, confused, nice, white. Goals: Meals on time, clean clothes.

People of Color: None, although Sebastian the crab is Jamaican and the court musician.

Poor People: Servants. No poor people have major roles.

After filling in a couple of charts, collectively and on their own, students write about the generalization of children might take away from these tales. The ninth graders are quick to point out the usual stereotypes on their own. "Look, Ursula the sea witch is ugly and smart. The young, pretty ones only want to look at her: the old, pretty ones are men because they are losing their looks." Kenneth noticed that people of color and poor people are either absent or servants to the rich, white, pretty people. Tyler pointed out that the voices of men are limited as well. Men must be virile and weak power is to be old and the object of "good-natured" humor. Both the freshmen and the seniors write critiques of the cartoons, targeting parents or teachers as an audience. Mr. A, a senior two years ago, attacked the racism in those Saturday morning rituals. Because of her familiarity with Native American culture, her analysis was more developed.

"Indian in Looney Tunes are also depicted as inferior human beings. These characters are stereotypical to the greatest degree, carrying tomahawks, prancing their faces, and sending smoke signals as their only means of communication. They live in tipis and their language reminds the viewers of Neanderthals. We begin to imagine Indians as savages with bows and arrows and long black braids. There's no room in our minds for knowledge of the differences between tribes, like the Cherokee alphabet or Celilo salmon fishing."

A Black Cinderella?

Kerry, a freshman, scolded parents in her essay, "A Black Cinderella? Give Me A Break." "Have you ever seen a Black princess, an Asian, a Hispanic in a cartoon? Did they have a leading role or were they a servant? What do you think this is doing to your child's mind?" She ended her piece, "Women who aren't White begin to feel left out and ugly because they never get to play the princess." Keay's piece bristled with anger at a society that rarely acknowledged the wit or beauty of women of her race. But she wasn't above in her feelings. Sabrina W. wrote, "I'm not taking my kids to see any Walt Disney movies until they have a Black woman playing the leading role. They wanted the race of the characters changed, but they didn't challenge the class or underlying gender inequities that also accompany the lives of Cinderella, Ariel, and Snow White.

Kerry's and Sabrina's anger is justified. There should be more women of color who play the leads in those white-on-white wedding cake tales. But I want them to understand that if the race of the main character is the only thing changing, injustice will remain. We read Mary Carter Smith's delightful retelling of Cinderella, "Cindy Ellen, A Mulatto Fairy Tale," which reads like a fairy tale—bubbly, warm, spilling over with infectious good humor and playful language. In Smith's version, Cindy Ellen, who lives in East Baltimore, was "our pretty black sister, her skin like black velvet." Her father, "Joe, so many good men, was weak for a pretty face and big legs and big hips." Her stepmother "had a heart as hard as a rock. The milk of human kindness had curdled in her breast. But she did have a pretty face, big legs, and great big hips... Well, that fool man fell right into that woman's trap." Cindy Ellen's step-sisters were "two big-footed, ugly
Rethinking ‘The Three Little Pigs’

By Ellen Wolpert

There’s scarcely a parent or young child who isn’t familiar with “The Three Little Pigs.” It has a simple plot line, is easily remembered, and it’s so much fun imitating the big bad wolf as he huffs and puffs and “blo-o-ow” the house down.

I find the story is also useful to talk about the stereotypes in as many of our favorite tales.

I first became aware of the story’s hidden messages when we were doing a unit on housing several years ago at my daycare center. As part of the unit, we talked about different homes and the many approaches to solving a basic human need: a place to live.

An Interesting Question

During the discussion I suddenly thought to myself, “Why are brick homes better than straw homes?”

To this day, I’m not completely sure why that question popped into my mind. I do know, however, that I had been sensitized by the movement for a multicultural curriculum, which had taught me to take a questioning approach to even the most seemingly innocuous materials and to look beneath the surface for hidden assumptions.

After thinking about it, I realized that one of the most fundamental messages of “The Three Little Pigs” is that it belittles straw and stick homes and the “lazy types” who build them. On the other hand, the story extols the virtues of brick homes, suggesting that they are built by serious, hard-working people and strong enough to withstand adversity. Is there any coincidence that brick homes tend to be built by people in Western countries, often by those with more money? That straw homes are more common in non-European cultures, particularly Africa and Asia? I once realized some of these hidden messages, the question became what to do about it. In my experience, the best approach is not to put down such beloved tales and refuse to read them, but to use them to pose questions for children. One might explain, for example, that in many tropical areas straw homes are built to take best advantage of cooling breezes. In some areas, straw homes are on stilts as protection from insects and animals or to withstand flooding.

Such a perspective then becomes part of a broader process of helping children to understand why homes are different in different parts of the world — and that just because something is different doesn’t mean it’s inferior.

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Writing as a Vehicle for Change

I hoped the essays they wrote critiquing cartoons would free students to look deeper into the issues—to challenge the servant/master relationship of the materialism that makes women appealing to their men. For some students the cartoon unit exposed the wizardry that controls our dreams and desires—our self-images—but others shrugged their shoulders at this. It's OK for some people to be rich and others poor; they just want to see more rich people of color or more rich women. Or better yet, rich themselves. They accept the inequalities in power and economic relationships. Their acceptance teaches me how deep the roots of these myths are planted and how much some students, in the absence of visions for a different and better world, need to believe in the fairy tale magic that will prolong their lives.

Mira and her classmates wrote their most passionate essays of the year on this topic. But venting their frustrations with cartoons—and even sharing it with their class—seemed an important, but limited task. Yes, they could write gothic essays. Yes, they honed their arguments and sought the just-right examples from their viewing.

Through critique and the discussions that followed they were helping to transform each other—each comment or observation helped expose theengine of our society, and they were both excited and dismayed by their discoveries. But what was I teaching them if the lesson ended there? Ultimately, I was teaching that it was enough to be critical without taking action, that we could quietly rebel in the privacy of the classroom while we were practicing our writing skills, but we didn’t really have to do anything about the problems we uncovered, nor did we need to create any thing to take the place of what we’d expelled. And those were not the lessons I intended to teach. I wanted to develop their critical consciousness, but I also hoped to move them to action.

But for some students—especially the seniors—the lesson didn’t end in the classroom. Many who watched cartoons before we started our study say they can no longer enjoy them. Now instead of seeing a bunch of ducks in clothes, they see the racism, sexism, and violence that swim under the surface of the stories. Pam and Nicole swore they would not let their children watch cartoons. David told the class of coming home one day and finding his nephews absorbed in Looney Tunes. “I turned the TV off and took them down to the park to play. They aren’t going to watch that mess while I’m around.” Radiance described how she went to buy Christmas presents for her nieces and nephews. “Before, I would have just walked into the toy store and bought them what I knew they wanted—Nintendo or Barbie. But this time, I went up to the clerk and said, ‘I want a toy that isn’t sexist or racist.’”

Students have also said that what they saw in cartoons, they see in advertising, on prime time TV, on the
news, in school. Turning off the car-
toons didn’t stop the sexism and rac-
ism. They couldn’t escape, and now that
they’d started analyzing cartoons, they
couldn’t stop analyzing the rest of the
world. And sometimes they wanted to
stop. During a class discussion Sibrina
S. said, “I realized these problems were
just in cartoons. They were in every-
thing—every magazine I picked up,
every television show I watched,
every billboard I passed by on the
street.” As Justice wrote earlier, at times
they would like to remain “ignorant and
happy.” The following year it became
even more evident than ever that if we
stayed with critique and didn’t move to
action students might slump into cynicism.

Taking Action

To explore the passion and allevi-
ate the pain, Tim Hardin, a Jefferson
English teacher, and I decided to get the
students out of the classroom with their
anger—to allow their writing and their
learning to become vehicles for change.
Instead of writing the same classroom
essays students had written the years
before, we asked students to think of
an audience for their cartoon analysis.
Most students chose parents. A few
chose their peers. Then they decided
how they wanted to reach these. Some
wanted to create a pamphlet which
could be distributed at PTA meetings
throughout the city. That night they
went home with assignments they’d
given each other—Sarah would watch
Saturday morning cartoons; Sandy, Brooke,
and Cameron would watch after-
school cartoons; and Kristin and Toby
were assigned before-school car-
toons. They ended up writing a report
card for the various programs. They
graded each show A-F and wrote a brief
summary of their findings:

“DUCK TALES: At first glance the
precocious ducks are cute, but look
closer and see that the whole show is
based on money. All their adventures
revolve around saving money. Unfor-
luckily Scego and the gang teach children
that money is the only important thing
in life. Grade: C”

“TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA
TURTLES: Pizza-eating Ninja Turtles.

What’s the point? There isn’t any. The
show is based on fighting the ‘good guy,’
Shredder. Demonstrating no concern for
the townpeople, they battle and fight,
never get hurt. This cartoon
teaches a false sense of violence to kids:
fight and you don’t get hurt or solve
problems through fights and swords in
stead of words. Grade: D”

“Popeye: This show oozes with
horrible messages from passive Olive
Oyl to the hero ‘man’ Popeye. This car-
toon portrays ethnic groups as stupid.
It is political also—teaching children
that Americans are the best and con-
quar all others. Grade: F.”

On the back of the pamphlet, they
listed some tips for parents to guide
them in wise cartoon selection.

Most of the other students wrote ar-
ticles they hoped to publish in various
local and national newspapers or maga-
zines. (See p. 83) Caitlin wrote about
the sexual stereotyping and adornment
of beauty in children’s movies. Her ar-
ticle describes how she and other teen-
age women carry these messages with
them still.

“We should think about the images we
see in the media. They impact us in
different ways. Some images are positive,
and some are negative. The media has
a great influence on society.”

“Women’s roles in fairy tales dis-

tort reality—from Jessica Rabbit’s oph-

to Cinderella’s tragic story—show the

In the Barbie syndrome starts as we be-
gin a life-long search for the perfect
body. Crash diets, fat phobias, and an
obsession with the materialistic become
compliments. The belief that a prod-
uct will make us rise above our com-
petition, our friends, turn us into ad-

cates. The fix is that Calvin Klein push-

up bra, Guess jeans, Chanel lipstick,
and the latest in suede flats. We don’t
ought to see it; deception is good taste.
And soon it feels awkward going to the
mailbox without makeup.”

Caitlin hopes to publish her piece in
a magazine for young women so they
will begin to question the origins of the
standards by which they judge them-

telves.

The writing in these articles is
tighter and clearer because it has the
potential for real audience beyond the
classroom walls. The possibility of pub-
lishing their pieces changed the level of
students’ intensity for the project.

This new interest and momentum could

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new and improved children's movies.

After filling in a few charts, collectively and on their own, students write about the generalizations children might take away from these tales. From experience, I've discovered that I need to keep my mouth shut for a while. If I'm the one pointing out the stereotypes, it's the kiss of death to the exercise. Besides, students are quick to find the usual stereotypes on their own. "Look, Ursula the sea witch is ugly and smart. Hey, she's kind of dark looking. The young, pretty ones only want to hook their men; the old, pretty ones mean more because they are losing their looks," Kenneth noticed that people of color and poor people are either absent or sent to the rich, white, pretty people. Tyler pointed out that the rules of men are limited as well. Men must be wild and wield power or be old and the object of "good-natured" humor. Students began seeing beyond the charts i'd rigged up for them. They looked at how overweight people were portrayed as buffoons in episodes after episode. They noted the absence of mothers, the viciousness of step-parents.

Later in the unit, Mira, a senior, attacked the racism in "One Saturday morning ritual. She brought her familiarizing with Native American cultures into her analysis: "Indians in Looney Tunes are also depicted as inferior humans. These characters are stereotypical to the greatest degree, carrying tomahawks, painting their faces, and sending smoke signals as their only means of communication."

### Help Me Syndrome

**By Hasina Deary**

It's a typical cartoon scene: Pepele off smiling or taking a sad gummer doing whatever Pepele does to make us laugh while Olive Oyl who's just not a job janger around. Olive is skinny to the point of hospitalization. Pepele obviously does not share his spinach. Olive Oyl in her frail condition has a tendency to be unattractable to Bluto's frequent affections. Hulul is the big, attentive bully who Pop- eye greets with from cartoon to cartoon. Olive is whiled away by the bear or thrown kicking and screaming over Bluto's shoulder. Her only salvation is knowing that Pepele will be coming to save her. "Help me, help me, Pepele!" Ripogically, he enters Olive's call for help. Pepele, her hero. He struggles with his can of spinach, but in the end the tattooed avenger saves Olive Oyl. It is so silly. Olive Oyl's only redeeming quality as a woman is the fact she is never stuck in the kitchen. Pepele, the strong and courageous, also prepares his own meals.

Why wouldn't Olive ever smart enough to lock the doors so also couldn't get in or clever enough to save herself? It is a disquieting example of the "Help Me Syndrome" so often portrayed in cartoons.

In Sleeping Beauty, the silly little princess quickly her finger, causing an entire kingdom to simmer. Pepele was restored after the prince rode into town, fought with a wolf in a dragon's form, then laced the Sleeping Beauty, all is well, another princess saves.

Why are women constantly in need of male rescue? Does the industry feed on women's subserviency (fantasy to be solved by a make-believe Prince Charming)? It might be said that these are old cartoons and women today have existed. But Disney's three latest performances have at least one scene where the character's life is jeopardized, only to be spared by her male counterpart.

In The Little Mermaid, Eric steers a ship's course through the evil Ursula's torso, freeing Ariel from the curse. After Belle from Beauty and the Beast tries to leave the castle, she is attacked by loyal-aided villains. Lucky for her, the beast comes and fought off the angry hounds. A spirit relief is breathed, another pretty face saved. Even in Aladdin, Disney's most progressive cartoon, Aladdin, the street- smart hero, first comes to princess Jasmine's aid when she nearly has her hand cut off by being accused of thieving. In the end of the movie, we see jasmine trapped in a huge heartless. Her cries for help are drowned out by the sand that fills the glass. Finally, Aladdin breaks the glass to save Jasmine. Ahh.

While the theme in Disney's three recent cartoons are a step up from the non-stop public whining of Olive Oyl, they still lack independence and basic survival skills. They may be called a heroine, but by no means are they the woman hero, instead, they are merely girls in need of rescue. The misconception that females must be male-dependent is reiterated, even if they basically have things going for them, still awaits more than her "provincial life." So they want more, but never can they attain it by themselves.

Rarely do we see brave women saving others. Wonder Woman is the only woman cartoon character I know who has ever been the rescuer. She saves men, women, and children (but mostly women and children). Of course, she has to have Super Heroine powers to do it. She couldn't just be Mindy MacGyver, the normal girl, who uses her mind to solve problems. Instead, cartoons are made about beautiful girls who sing and Earl, and bright-eyed, assistant princesses who are all capable of thinking, but ultimately succeed because of the love of a man. I think it is time to change the outdated formula of love and near-death rescue scenes. I challenge the cartoon makers to find a new happy ending.
Looking Pretty, Waiting for the Prince
By Lila Johnson

As a senior, Lila Johnson uncovered the "secret education" that cartoons, advertising, and the media slipped into her life. She wrote this article to educate others about the inaccurate visions Disney & Co. sell children.

My two brothers and I waited for our daily cartoon fix. We hungered for the vivid reds, blues, and yellows that raced around our screen for an insane hour or so.

When we were away from the tube, we assumed the roles of our favorite characters: Bugs Bunny, that wise-cracking, carrot-munching rabbit; Yosemite Sam, rough and tough; Tom & Jerry; and Popeye, that all-American spinach-guzzling sailor. We took our adopted identities outside and to school where our neighbors and friends did the same.

Now, as a senior in high school, I see that cartoons are not just light-hearted, wacky fun; animated material touches on such sensitive issues as roles of men and women in society, and people of color.

Cartoons are often the steppingstone of the cultural stereotypes we learn and remember, as I do today. The idea that Indians are savages -- tomahawks and mocassins, beehives and war paint -- the bad guys who pursue my favorite cowboy, or the belief that Arabs have nothing better to do than to tear away desserts in riots while srasing fierce swords and wielding like alien creatures.

These notions don't just occur to my brothers and me magically. We saw Indians in our afternoon cartoons and on some of our favorite Disney movies like Peter Pan. We witnessed villains behead their way through violent episodes of Popeye.

What is not seen in relation to people of different cultures can be as harmful as some of the things that are seen. People of color are rarely seen as the heroes of animated presentations. I can think of only one Disney classic where a person of color is the principal and heroic character -- The Jungle Book. Not an impressive feat.

Children search for personal identity, in first grade I adored Brenda Bundzel, a girl in my class. She wasn't a cartoon character, but she could have been. She had shiny blonde hair and blue eyes. She had a happy smile and a sweet voice. She could have been Cinderella's younger sister or Sleeping Beauty's long lost cousin. For those reasons, I longed to be just like her.

Look at old photos of myself now, and have decided that I was pretty cute, but not a traditional cute, and that's exactly what bothered me then. My father is African-American and my mother is German and Irish. But the two together and I'm the result of olive complexion, dark curly hair, brown and green eyes, all wrong, at least according to the "fairly tale book of standards."

The pride that I had in myself as a person with a colorful heritage did not blossom because it was crushed. The pride that I had in myself as a female was following the same path.

Women's roles in cartoons lack the cleverness and depth of their male counterparts. Instead, they are faced with loneliness and ignorance. Women are often in need of rescue -- they seem incapable of defending or helping themselves. When they aren't busy being rescued, they spend their time looking pretty, waiting for a prince.

In first grade, these illustrations moved me to action. They influenced me to push aside my sticky and musty bike and turn to exercices and diets. I had to start prac- ticing perfection if I was going to be happy. Weak, helpless, liming, I struggled to be all of those. Then, I could call myself a princess, an awkward one, but a princess nonetheless.

At the same time, my brothers were guns and swords like they were attached to their hands. They tossed aside their piles of books and tubs of clay -- heroes didn't need or create -- they fought for their very muscles and writst invisible villains. They dressed, ate, talked, became miniature models of their violent heroes.

Sometimes it was fun, like a game, playing our parts. But we began to feel unhappy when we saw that some things weren't quite right. As I said -- I wasn't Brenda Bundzel or Cinderella. My brothers, never destined to be kings, went to great lengths to grow big, but gullions of meals and daily measurements didn't help. It wasn't a game anymore.

I have some fond memories of those afternoons with my brothers. Yet, I know that I still also remember them for the messages I swallowed as easily as ginn drop. My newfound awareness has enabled me to better understand those messages I absorbed and the ones I observe daily whether on billboards, in movies, or in magazines. I see them in a new light. A critical one. I don't have to be a princess to be happy or pretty. I don't need to rely on characters to learn about real people.

I proudly exercise myself as an excellent, creative, responsible, open-minded individual who will never be reduced to a cartoon copy of a fictional being.
Charting Stereotypes

Young children often learn some of their first lessons in front of the TV set. From cartoons, children learn how boys and girls act, what our society values, and how to react to people who may differ from the mainstream. As you watch the cartoons today, begin to think about the education that children soak up while they view. Of course, I can hear you already: “Cartoons are innocent fairy tales.” Keep that assumption, but also imagine for a moment that children might learn some lessons. Using the chart, take notes on the following questions as you view:

- Who plays the lead?

- Who plays the buffoon?

- Who plays the servant?

- Look at the race, station in life, body type of each character.

- What are the characters’ motivations? What do they want out of life? What’s their mission?

- If there are people of color in the film, what do they look like? How are they portrayed? What would children learn about this particular group from this film?

- What about women other than the main character? What jobs do you see them doing? What do they talk about? What are their main concerns? What would young children learn about women’s roles in society if they watched this film and believed it?

- What roles do money, possessions, and power play in the film? Who has it? Who wants it? How important is it to the story? What would children learn about what’s important in this society?

- How does the film portray overweight people?
# Charting Stereotypes

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