

Reading classic fairy tales can be fun, but the abundance of stereotypes - girls needing to be rescued, waiting for romance to make their lives worthwhile, and focusing all their effort on finding the right guy - can be frustrating.

Some authors have used the classic elements of fairy tales, and changed them to add more interesting characters (especially girls) and problems. This month's book selection is one such example. Author Ursula Vernon takes the elements of classic fairy tales - an infant princess, an evil fairy, and a curse - and adds a funny, strong, and independent character named Harriet.

One thing I love about Princess Harriet is she does not let others define her behavior. For example, when other characters tell her to act like a proper princess, she always responds that she *is* a princess, therefore any way she acts is, by definition, like a princess. This reminded me of the cool #likeagirl campaign (youtu.be/XjJQBjWYDTs) from a few years ago. Have you watched this video with your daughter? If not, it might prompt an interesting discussion, especially after reading this book!

I hope you'll enjoy this entertaining story. If you do, you could seek out other examples of twisted fairy tales to read and discuss. (See the end of this discussion guide for other recommendations.)

Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As grown-ups and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and catching up.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

This month's book is about a character who proves herself in the face of immense challenges. In real life, sometimes challenges come to us (a test at school, for example) but other times we give ourselves challenges in order to grow (like joining an athletic team, or learning a new skill). Pair up or stay in one group to discuss this question:

- *What is something you've never done that you'd like to try?*

Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

You might decide to start the discussion with every member saying her favorite part of the book before reading discussion questions. Some groups might have time to get to all of these questions, but many groups will pick one or two questions and spend the whole meeting discussing those. Feel free to come up with your own discussion questions, or bring up any ideas that came up while you were reading.

- Have you ever read a book like this before (a twist on a classic fairy tale)? Which do you prefer - the classic version or the “twisted” version, and why?
- In the classic fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty,” the princess hides away to stay safe from the curse. But in this story, Princess Harriet is glad to be cursed. How does she make the most of the curse Ratshade put her under?
- Why does Harriet thank Ratshade for the curse? Are her words a diversion, or do you think she actually means it?
- In what ways are Harriet and Wilbur alike? In what ways are they different? How does their friendship develop over the course of the book? Do you have close friends who are very different from you?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Ratshade does not believe that princesses can be a threat - which is actually a *good* thing, because she leaves herself unprotected when Harriet snips off her magical tail. Has anyone ever underestimated you like that? Tell about a time when you proved you could do something that others didn't think you could. How did it feel to be doubted? How did it feel to prove yourself?

You might also decide to have a conversation about how other people's expectations might affect you. When others doubt you, how do you keep your determination and confidence? What do you think of the following strategies?

- Ignore the comments
- Tell the people to quit expressing their negativity about you
- Give yourself a positive pep talk
- Seek out people who support and encourage you

Are there any other strategies that you would suggest? Feel free to share advice and stories, or maybe talk about which strategy you'll try the next time you encounter someone who doubts your abilities.

Girls and grown-ups might decide to share around the circle so everyone has a turn, or give time so anyone who wants to share can do so.

Closing, 5 minutes

Make sure you've chosen a date for your March meeting before parting ways.

Further Reading

If you really loved this book, and you'd like to read more books like it, here are some suggestions. If there are other books you would like to recommend, we'd love to hear them! Please share them on our **Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook Group** so our community can keep growing our list of great titles. (Note: Depending on your young reader, some of these books might be too sophisticated for her or be better suited for reading aloud.)

When Jessie Came Across the Sea by Amy Hest, illustrated by P.J. Lynch - A lyrical story of a young girl who emigrates from Europe at the turn of the century. Though her heart aches for the grandmother and home she left behind, she eventually puts down roots in her new country.

Earwig and the Witch by Diana Wynne Jones - A practically-perfect book by a most beloved master of fantasy stories. In this short illustrated chapter book, Earwig is perfectly content to boss around all of the people at the orphanage when one day a witch adopts her and takes her home to be her assistant. Little does the witch know that Earwig is not a girl to be trifled with.

The *Hamster Princess* series by Ursula Vernon - Princess Harriet's hilarious adventures continue!

The Princess Academy by Shannon Hale - The girls from Miri's village attend an academy in the hopes of being chosen as the Prince's bride. When the academy is attacked by bandits, Miri organizes the girls to fight back. A great read-aloud for younger kids. Also check out other fairy-tale inspired books by Shannon Hale, including the graphic novel *Rapunzel's Revenge* and the early chapter book series *The Princess in Black*.

Zita Spacegirl by Ben Hatke - Zita travels through a portal to another planet in order to save her friend Jonathan.