

Discussion Guide for
JOE CINDERS
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In the Beginning:

The Cinderella tale most children are familiar with is the film by Disney. However, Cinderella tales have been around for over a thousand years, with the first recorded one appearing in China. More than five-hundred versions have been collected from around the world, representing many different cultures. She is sometimes called an “Ash Girl” because she humbly tends the fires. Some versions portray Cinderella as an active, sometimes vengeful character, not the passive “wins the prince for her beauty” type. Some use no magic.

Did you know that the use of a glass slipper in the story is actually an accident of vocabulary? The French telling by Perrault refers to a slipper “de vair,” which means “of fur.” But in recording an oral telling, someone wrote down “de verre,” which sounds the same but instead means “of glass.” It really does make more sense that Cinderella would wear a fur slipper rather than glass slipper.

The Story Behind the Story:

The idea for my cowboy version came about during a car trip to visit a friend. My husband and I were driving from Tucson to Salt Lake when a guy in a speeding red pick-up veered in front of us. “How rude!” I said to my husband. “Who does he think he is, Cinderella rushing off to the ball?” As we continued up the road, I began to think what fun it would be to turn Cinderella into a cowboy in a red pick-up. I started to make other changes, too. *Stepbrothers* instead of *stepsisters*. A “princess” (a rich rancher) instead of a prince. And a magical fairy godfather instead of a magical fairy godmother. Because it was a desert/western setting, other changes were needed in word choice and voice.

In writing *Joe Cinders*, I wanted to make Joe do something to impress both the reader and Miss Rosalinda. She doesn’t fall for him just because he’s cute or he has some magic help.

Some elements of the “standard” Cinderella story include:

- a setting with lots of hard work
- mean relatives
- a party invitation
- help from a magical person
- new clothes
- new transportation
- new helpers
- a party
- a lost “shoe”
- a scene where the shoe and its owner are reunited

How are these elements shown in *Joe Cinders*?

What does Joe do to impress Miss Rosalinda?

Does Joe take revenge on his stepbrothers or does he help them?

How did the use of a desert setting and cowboy characters make the word choice special?

What are some other settings or characters you could use to make a whole new Cinderella story? For example: outer space, under the ocean, animal characters, or other cultures.

Compare *Joe Cinders* with these other tellings:

- Princess Furball* by Charlotte Huck
- The Rough-Face Girl* by Rafe Martin
- Cinder Edna* by Ellen Jackson
- Big Foot Cinderella* by Tony Johnston
- Cinderella Skeleton* by Robert D. San Souci
- Little Gold Star* by Joe Hayes

Further Resources:

Library Sparks magazine, April 2008. Librarian Toni Buzzeo turned *Joe Cinders* into a readers’ theatre play. (page 49)

How to Get Your Child to Love Reading by Esmé Raji Codell, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2003. *Joe Cinders* was a “Potato Pick” choice as an example of a fractured fairy tale. (page 268)