

Operation: Military Kids Reading Collection



Birth through Kindergarten

****Brisson , P. (2011). *Sometimes We Were Brave***

A young boy's mother is deployed in the Navy. His mother asks him to be brave, but he doesn't feel brave. As time goes on he finds out that bravery means something different than he thought. The story shows how a Navy family adjusts to deployment.

****Bunting, E. 2005. *My Red Balloon***

Today's the day a little boy's Navy Dad comes home after being at sea. As an excited crowd waits for the ship, he holds a Welcome Home red balloon tied tightly around his wrist so that his father can find him on the dock. He loosens the string and sadly watches the balloon float away. Of course, his daddy still finds him and all is well. Gently told, this story shows the joy felt when loved ones come home after serving our country. Realistic details such as the sailors standing on the deck in their dress whites and members of the crowd snapping pictures add authenticity. Similar in tone and theme to Mindy Pelton's *When Dad's at Sea* (Whitman, 2004) and Sarah Wones Tomp's *Red, White, and Blue Good-bye* (Walker, 2005), this book's soft, watercolor illustrations reflect the diversity of the Navy's personnel. This is another sensitive, caring title for service families and those who work with them.—*Pamela K. Bomboy, Chesterfield County Public Schools, VA*

****Demarest, C. 2005. *Alpha Bravo Charlie.***

Not your typical alphabet book, this uses the military alphabet, which designates a distinctive word to stand for each letter to minimize misunderstandings during verbal communication. The large-format volume illustrates each letter with its corresponding U.S. Navy signal flag and a scene from the American armed forces. The words representing the letters range from *Alpha* to *Zulu*. Other words beginning with same letter appear in the caption: "Tango / A tank thunders across the terrain" and "Foxtrot / Foot soldiers wear bulletproof flak jackets." In an appended author's note, Demarest discusses the history and purpose of the military alphabet. Younger children will probably be most interested in the many colorful illustrations of military personnel and equipment. Composition and subject matter are varied and dynamic, contributing to the vivid sense of urgency and engagement in many of the scenes. *Carolyn Phelan.*

****Holland, T. & C. Ford. 2006. *The Soldiers' Night before Christmas.***

This version of the Clement Moore poem takes place on a U.S. Army base in the desert. The narrator wakes up when he hears a crash, and sees a Blackhawk helicopter giving the all clear to nine Humvees and a jeep, all loaded with gifts. Sergeant McClaus calls the drivers by name: "Now, Cohen! Mendoza! Woslowski! McCord! Now, Li! Watts! Donetti! And Specialist Ford!" When the caravan leaves, the sergeant calls out, "HAPPY CHRISTMAS, BRAVE SOLDIERS! MAY PEACE COME TO ALL!" Cartoon illustrations help to make this a lighthearted, even humorous, retelling that will probably be most appreciated by military families who already know the original version.—*Virginia Walter, University of California, Los Angeles*

****McBride, S (2008). *My Mommy Wears Combat Boots***

My Mommy Wears Combat Boots is based the personal experience of a soldier and a mother who was seeking a way to explain why she needed to leave her child again and go to war. Young children are very limited when it comes to communication skills, and often have a difficult time expressing guilt, frustration, anger, loneliness and sadness and often don't realize that it's normal to feel all of this and more as the result of their mom's deployment. Books about mommies going to war are few and far between, and *My Mommy Wears Combat*

Boots is for mothers in uniform everywhere that are seeking a way to explain to their children the emotions associated with deployment and a way to positively channel those emotions when they are away.



****Parr, T. (2005). *Feelings Book***

[This] small, simple, and sometimes very silly books feature brightly colored single-page cartoons of stick-figure-styled animals, people, and faces. In the first title, Parr shows that feelings are always changing. "Sometimes I feel like standing on my head" and "Sometimes I feel like celebrating my birthday even though it's not today" mix with "Sometimes I feel lonely" and "Sometimes I feel cranky." On the last page, the author encourages readers to share their feelings with "-someone you love." Overall, this is a nice addition to titles about the topic. In *Underwear*, Parr continues his series of books about "Do's and Don'ts." One double-page spread couples "Do Wash your underwear" with "Don't Use too much soap." Another advises, "Do Go shopping for underwear with a hippo" but "Don't Let her try it on," accompanied by an illustration of a hippo in ripped panties, size XL. This zany title is sure to send listeners into peals of laughter during storytime. *Holly Belli, Bergen County Cooperative Library System, West Caldwell, NJ*

****Pyne, G. *Lulu's Rose Colored Glasses***

Lulu's Rose Colored Glasses is a celebration of optimism and viewing things from a different perspective. Young Lulu encourages her mother to see the world a new way by inviting her to try her rose colored glasses. Her mother, who is sad, doesn't see the wisdom in her young daughter's invitation at first. Slowly, she realizes there is a bright side to things, if only you open yourself to them. The surprise ending made me so tearful I had to stop reading to my children for a moment. *Lulu's Rose Colored Glasses* signifies how we parents can truly see the world through our children's eyes, if only we try.

****Redman, M. (2008). *The Wishing Tree***

Amanda understands her dad is making the world a better place, but it doesn't make his deployment any easier. After mulling over ways she can support her dad, Amanda creates a small wishing tree in her room, writing her hopes and prayers on yellow ribbons that she ties onto the branches. As Amanda wishes for her dad to enjoy good meals, make new friends, and return safely, the little tree comes to life with yellow ribbons of hope.

****Spelman, C. M. (2003). *When I Feel Good About Myself***

This simple treatise on self-esteem doesn't tell a story per se, but instead serves as a pep talk that connects a number of platitudes: "Somebody loves me just as I am"; "Some things- are hard. But that's OK"; "I feel good when I can help"; etc. The central character is a plump, spunky guinea pig. Her self-assurance and cheerful attitude are winning, and the watercolor-and-pencil illustrations play a large role in keeping the message light. Reminiscent of the immediacy of Jane Dyer's art, they are playful and show, up close, the support of family and friends, indoors and out, and in all seasons. The book could serve as a healthy reminder of the importance of treating oneself and others with respect. *Martha Topol, Traverse Area District Library-School Library Journal*

****Taback, S. (2007). *I Miss You Everyday***

In rhyming lines, a young girl tells a faraway loved one about her loneliness, and also her solution: "I'm going to wrap myself just like a present . . . and send myself your way." Minimal words and whimsical, bright, textured illustrations follow the girl as she wraps herself in brown paper, jumps into a box (with holes for her sneakered feet), and walks to the post office, where she imagines being stamped, processed, and sent by plane and truck to the address of her loved one (who is never identified). Her final instructions: "Tuck me in and read a story and everything will be O.K." The book's title is also the text's refrain, and the words' repetition, along with each page's clear focus on the yearning girl, reinforce the story's potent sense of separation from a favorite person. The loved one's open-ended identity leaves lots of room for kids to imagine their own scenarios. Both upbeat and poignant, this partners well with Libby Gleeson's *Half a World Away*. *Gillian Engberg –Booklist*



****Ziefert, H. (2007). *When Daddy Travels***

These delightful lift-the-flap books will be lifesavers for families in which an adult travels for work. With engaging, child-friendly illustrations and simple, clear text, each story begins with a parent leaving on a business trip. "When Mommy goes away for a meeting, Lily and George try to be happy. But they are not." On the next three spreads, the children list the reasons why: "When Mommy is away, she can't help Lily and George get ready for bed" or "When Daddy is away, he can't give Lily and George a bath." Rather than wallow in sadness, however, they reveal something that the missing parent can do to be a part of their children's day (call, send email, etc.) under a large flap. Next, a two-page rebus succinctly illustrates either parent's itinerary, from taking a taxi, catching a plane, and going to a meeting to the reverse trip. Each book concludes with a warm welcome home. Both the format and topic automatically limit the audience, but these are great resources for the right families. The flaps are large (most are nearly the size of the page) and well constructed, making these titles reasonable choices for those libraries that invest in this format.—*Piper Nyman, Brookmeade Elementary School, Nashville, TN*

****Ziefert, H. (2007). *When Mommy Travels***

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Grades 1 – 4



****dePaola, T. (2007). *Why? The War Years***

World War II is raging in Europe, and Tomie finds that life has changed in many ways. Now he has to wear an extra sweater to school because they're trying to conserve coal. Then tragedy brings the war home to the dePaola family, and all Tomie can do is ask "Why?" Just as he did in *I'm Still Scared*, the first installment of *The War Years*, Tomie dePaola touchingly illuminates the emotional confusion of a child's life during wartime.

****Ehrmantraut, B. (2005). *Night Catch***

This warm book is written in the words of a soldier father talking to his son. The father is going away, so as a connection he invents a game of pretending to send the star Polaris back and forth between him and his son. The concept of the time difference is introduced and both father and son are shown sleeping and awake; the father in the desert and the son in America. The endnote information about and diagram of the North Star add to the utility of the book. Military parents and children could use this book as a start for a "Night Catch" game of their own.

****Gantos, J. (2003). *Jack A Drift: Frouth Grade Without a Clue (Jack Henry)***

The story of young Jack Henry continues in this prequel to the previous four books, which takes place when Jack is nine. His father has joined the navy and the family is moving to Cape Hatteras. Jack jumps off the pages as he falls in love with his teacher, referees a genius contest between his brother and his friend, and learns from his father how to brood. Some of the best scenes are between Jack and his dad. Both of them try to come to terms with who they are and what they believe about the world in general and themselves in particular--always cheered or egged on by Mrs. Henry, who sees her men's weakness and loves them anyway. Jack never sounds like a nine-year-old in the narrative, and the form sometimes oddly juxtaposes the sense of recent happenings with a long look back. That dichotomy is balanced by Gantos' wonderful writing, which is witty, smart, and unafraid to tackle tough topics. A worthy addition to the series. *Ilene Cooper-Booklist*

****Greive, B.T. (2005). *The Blue Day Book for Kids: A Lesson in Cheering Yourself Up***

The deceptively simple, imaginative story line reflects a child's sensibility about the symptoms, causes, and cures for those times when children feel tired, grumpy, left out, or think that nothing ever goes as they planned. Even on days when brussels sprouts are served at dinner . . . a cherished toy must be shared . . . a homework avalanche looms . . . or a silly mistake is made in front of friends or family, *The Blue Day Book for Kids* provides children with a literary umbrella to laugh off the unexpected rain life can bring.

****Hoff, S. 1993. *Captain Cat***

"Captain Cat joined the Army. . . when nobody was looking." And so begins the story of a striped feline who strays onto an army base and steps right into military life. Newly independent readers can easily follow Captain Cat's adventures through the large-print text and the numerous large full-color cartoons filled with picture clues. Hoff has maintained his deft touch with a title that's sure to appeal to youngsters. --*Gale W. Sherman, Pocatello Public Library, ID*

****Ingram, L. & Lee, M. (2008). *That's My Hope: Featuring a Gallery of Multi-generational Artwork***

That's My Hope is designed to foster communication and understanding among children and adults regarding disability, trauma, injury, illness -- and resilience and hope. *That's My Hope* is designed to foster understanding and communication among children and adults about disabilities, trauma, illness -- and hope. Twelve children and 16 adults contributed artwork and shared real-life vignettes, including: the service and sacrifice of war, surviving Hurricane Katrina, juvenile diabetes, amputation, cancer, stroke, polio, homelessness, premature birth, and more. The real-life vignettes blend with the fictional story of a young girl and her father who suffers a

traumatic injury and becomes an amputee. Father and daughter share a love of bike riding before his injury -- and again afterwards when adaptive bike riding is introduced



****Lee, M. (2005). *The Hero In My Pocket***

The Hero in My Pocket gives children a voice in their grief. Suitable for 6-12 yr-olds, this unique book helps children honor their own thoughts, feelings, and memories while honoring the loss of a military service member: Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airman, Coast Guardsman, or Merchant Marine. The book is not limited to widow or widower parent-loss; a child's grief for a fallen hero may be a parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt/uncle, cousin, step-relation or other relative, friend, teacher, et al. Design includes interactive HERO PAGES for the child to draw or write; family-centered military themes; and warm, patriotic artwork by children. Book can be used in individual or group settings.

****Madison, A. (2008). *100 Days and 99 Nights***

Esmerelda Swishback McCarther has spent most of her seven years living in four different countries on four different continents with her military family. Arriving back in the United States, she and her brother begin school in a suburb of Washington, DC. Unfortunately, her father must leave for a tour of duty—100 days and 99 nights. Saddened and fearful for him, Esme gives him the precious remnant square from her "blankie" to take with him. While he is away, she struggles to remain dutiful and strong, traits that her family values. Madison authentically portrays the stresses experienced not only at home but also in the classrooms of children whose loved ones are away at war. When Esme and her friend Martina spearhead a project to help the troops by collecting scrap metal, the entire community becomes involved and the news reaches her father, who proclaims Esme a hero. This is a light yet realistic novel about a reality well known to many American families. All branches of the armed forces are featured in some capacity although Esme's father is a sergeant in the Army.—*D. Maria LaRocco, Cuyahoga Public Library, Strongsville, OH*

****Marsh, C. (2003). *Someone I Love Went Off to War...What Do I Do Now***

This is a book of activities for children to do while their loved one is away and offers suggestions on ways to make time pass.

****McElroy, L. 2005. *Love, Lizzie: Letters to a Military Mom.***

This addresses a now-common issue: how a child deals with the absences of a parent serving in the military. Much of the book consists of handwritten letters, full of news, gripes, and questions. Lizzie looks about eight or nine, and some of the questions she must know the answer to; for example, "Can you ask if you can come home just for the [soccer] game?" But separation, anxiety, annoying little brothers, and holidays and other events apart from Mom are also discussed. Lizzie draws maps to send to her mother of new and important events, like a new ice cream store and the visit to grandparents in Florida. The bright and friendly art features a lively Lizzie, often still having fun, and a full-page of snaps of Mom in her fatigues. A checklist entitled, "When a parent is deployed," is included. *GraceAnne DeCandido*

****Norman, G. (2009). *Stars Above Us***

Amanda is afraid of the dark, so her father takes her outside one night to look up at the stars. Still, her room is dark and scary, so Daddy brings home paper and paint to make stars that glow in the dark and pastes them on her ceiling. When he goes away, he tells her that he will be able to see the North Star just as she can. He gives her a puppy called Bear, another name for the Big Dipper. Only when he calls from his military post on the other side of the world do readers understand that Amanda's fear of the dark masks a deeper fear for his safety. An unspecified length of time passes, Bear grows, and the family is reunited at last at the airport. Realistic watercolor illustrations, many of them dark and still, are strangely comforting. This quiet, hopeful book speaks especially to the children of military personnel serving abroad, though it will resonate with any child separated from a parent.—*Mary Jean Smith, Southside Elementary School, Lebanon, TN*



****Pelton, M.L. 2004. *When Dad's at Sea***

Emily's father, a Navy pilot, is leaving for a six-month deployment on an aircraft carrier. Each day he is gone, she removes one link from the paper chain he made for her, so that she can mark the days until his return. She misses him, but finds comfort in his e-mails and calls, and she even makes a new friend. The time frame of the story and the use of sensory details create a strong sense of Emily's loss, her slow adjustment, and her joy at her father's return. Steele's impressionistic, delicately colored watercolor paintings sensitively depict Emily and her surroundings. *Carolyn Phelan*

****Penn, A. 1993. *The Kissing Hand*.**

In her foreword to Penn's sugary tale about Chester, a young raccoon who would rather stay at home than go to school, Jean Kennedy Smith notes that the story is "for any child who confronts a difficult situation, and for the child within each of us who sometimes needs reassurance." It's obvious message is delivered by Mrs. Raccoon, who tells her son that "I know a wonderful secret that will make your nights at school seem as warm and cozy as your days at home." She then kisses his palm, and Chester feels the kiss "rush from his hand, up his arm, and into his heart." Whenever he gets lonely, she advises, he is to press his hand to his cheek and "that very kiss will jump to your face and fill you with toasty warm thoughts." As it may for youngsters in comparable situations, this "secret" works for Chester, who in turn kisses his mother's palm so that she, too, will be reassured. Sprinkled with hearts and flowers, Harper and Leak's paintings of the raccoons and their woodland habitat are pleasant if sentimental. *Publishers Weekly*

****Testa, M. (2003). *Almost Forever***

This seemingly simple novel in blank verse captures the feelings of a six-year-old girl when father goes to be a doctor in the Vietnam War for a year. We learn about the fear the family feels of their father never returning. Important things to a child like changing where they live and changes in her mother's behavior are highlighted. It also captures well the idea that children do not necessarily understand what is happening to them and their families, and cannot change many things in their lives even if they do understand, they can only observe.

****Wilson, K. (2007). *How to Bake an American Pie***

Wilson serves up a celebration of our country, its founders, and the immigrants who built it with this rhyming recipe. With frequent references to America the Beautiful, the tribute includes tangible geographic ingredients such as fruited plains, fields/of amber grains, and purple mountain majesties. Less-tangible fixings include meekness, might, courage, liberty, justice, freedom, dreams, forgiveness, and customs/from faraway lands. As the bakers add these essentials, the larger-than-life pie rises in its cast-iron melting pot. While the rhymes are clever, they are also saccharine: The secret ingredients/cannot be bought,/so borrow/from Heaven above./The key to it all/is to pour in the pot/plenty of/faith, hope, and love. Colón's signature cross-hatched ink-and-watercolor illustrations, both sunny and whimsical, are the key ingredient in this otherwise syrupy dish. An amiable cat and dog sporting chefs' hats first preheat the world—a giant globe over a campfire—and then consult a cookbook, roasting wieners while they wait. A huge rolling pin flattens fields where giant apples, pears, and berries dwarf two grazing cows. Immigrants in period costume, suitcases and American flags in hand, free fall into a safety net guarded by the furry bakers. Observant readers will spy the strategically placed American symbols including the bald eagle, Statue of Liberty, White House, Mount Rushmore, and Columbus's ships. Kelly DiPucchio's *Liberty's Journey* (Hyperion, 2004), which features striking art by Richard Egielski, covers similar ground with less sentimentality.—*Barbara Auerbach, New York City Public Schools-School Library Journal*

****Woodson, J. (2004). *Coming on Home Soon***

As in their award-winning picture book *The Other Side* (2001), Woodson and Lewis tell a moving historical story of longing and separation. The setting here is the home front during World War II, and Ada Ruth's mama leaves to find work in the city ("They're hiring colored women in Chicago since all the men are off fighting in the war"). At home with Grandma, Ada Ruth holds on to memories of Mama's love and writes to her. Times are hard, and for a long time "no letter or money coming." Ada Ruth takes in a stray kitten, and even though Grandma says they can't keep it, Ada Ruth does, and its purring softness is big and warm on her lap. The race, class, and gender struggle is part of the larger drama ("A colored woman working on the railroad!"), but for Ada Ruth, it's the waiting, quietly expressed in her simple, poetic first-person narrative. Lewis' beautiful watercolors establish the setting, not the South this time, but a spacious rural landscape with snow and icy storms, and inside, the loving portrayals of the women in warm, neat rooms with an empty chair. Period and place are wonderfully specific; the yearning is timeless. *Hazel Rochman-Booklist*



Grades 5 – 8



****Ellis, D. (2008). *Off to War: Voices of Soldiers' Children***

In interviews with approximately 40 children, all of whom have at least one parent who is serving, or has served, in Iraq or Afghanistan, Ellis shows just how hard it is on the family members left behind. Ranging in age from 6 to 17, young people from Canada and the United States talk about the things that are on their minds. Worry about their parents' safety, pride in their service to their country, and confusion about why such service is necessary are all intermingled with the everyday concerns of friends, school, and "just getting on with life." Common themes run throughout; many of those interviewed mention how important it is to maintain a normal life and to find people they trust to talk to, and how hard it is when they are not around other families who are experiencing the same issues. Accessible and utterly readable, this book offers a glimpse into current home-front life, and is a primary source of what it means to have a family member serving in a war. While students may find some of the reading repetitive, the book is an excellent resource for opening discussions about the current events.—*Jody Kopple, Shady Hill School, Cambridge, MA School Library Journal*

****Franklin, K. L., (1999). *Dove Song***

Bobbie Lynn is eleven when her father leaves for the Vietnam War and their mother insists on moving to be closer to where he leaves from, Washington State. Bobbie Lynn has to start another school and is even starting to make a friend with the strange Wendy when her father is listed as missing-in-action. Bobbie Lynn's mother becomes so depressed that Bobbie Lynn and her older brother have to feed her, but they are scared what will happen if they reveal their problems to the authorities. The severity of Bobbie Lynn's mother's problems and the effect on her family make this a wrenching book, but it paints an ultimately heart warming picture of the power it shows of community and friendship. Like Richard Bradford's *Red Sky at Morning* this book shows the possible disintegration of a family with a parent who cannot cope without the absent military member. This book won the Minnesota Book Awards in 2000.

****Hannigan, K. 2004. *Ida B:--and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster,and (Possibly) Save the World.***

Ida B is happy with her life. She talks to the trees in her family's orchard, enjoys being homeschooled, and is trying to be a good steward of the earth. But after her mother gets cancer, part of their land must be sold, and Ida B is forced to start public school, something her parents promised she wouldn't have to do after a bad kindergarten experience. Once her world changes, Ida B changes, too; her sunny disposition turns steely gray. As Ida puts it, she hardens her heart, and the very resilience of her anger is something to behold. First-time novelist Hannigan avoids many of the pitfalls of new writers, bypassing obvious plotting; Ida's mother's cancer, for instance, is a reference point, not a story line. What this really concerns is the fury children can experience, the tenacity with which they can hold on to their anger, and their inability to back away once the emotion no longer serves them. Hannigan gets it down brilliantly. Sometimes Ida's fourth-grade, first-person voice sounds like Junie B. Jones with a linguistic bent gone wild, but it's definitely unique, and Ida's ability to articulate her feelings will warm children, who will understand just what she's talking about. *Ilene Cooper*

****Mochizuki, K. 1995. *Heroes.***

The creators of the estimable *Baseball Saved Us* move from a WWII setting to the Vietnam-era '60s with this affecting tale of a Japanese American boy. When Donnie plays war with his friends, he must represent the enemy—"because I looked like them." He hates always being the bad guy and wishes he could prove that his father and uncle both fought bravely in the U.S. army. They, however, are reluctant to come to his aid: "You kids should be playing something else besides war," says his dad. Once again Mochizuki and Lee adroitly focus kids' attention on a pervasive social problem by giving it an individual face; they make their points in an age-appropriate fashion, neither trivializing the issues nor condescending to their audience. Mochizuki captures his protagonist's hurt, confusion and pride-emotions capably matched by Lee's atmospheric artwork. Produced with

the same technique here as in the earlier book-images scratched out of beeswax on paper-his burnished paintings exude the patina of age and the glint of hard-won experience *Publishers Weekly*



****Mead, A. 1999. *Soldier Mom***

Set during the time of Operation Desert Storm, the story is told through the eyes of an 11-year-old American. Jasmyn Williams and her 10-month-old brother go to stay with their mother's fiancé, Jake, when their mother is called to active duty in the Persian Gulf. Besides being worried about her mother's safety, Jasmyn resents her many new responsibilities; she now must cook, clean and baby-sit her brother in the afternoons and has less time for basketball. She fears she will have to relinquish her captain's position to haughty Bridget O'Donnell. The narrative is drawn-out in the beginning and rushed at the end, but the reactions and emotions of the heroine are consistently authentic. The author makes no excuses for the harshness of government policies, and her writing remains sharply focused on Jasmyn's adjustments to change, her growth as an individual and her gradual acceptance of Jake as a substitute parent. *Publishers Weekly*

****Peck, R. 2007. *On the Wings of Heroes.***

In Davy Bowman's Illinois neighborhood, life is friendly and happy, with time for boisterous hide-and-seek games and stories on the porch. As he explains, "Nobody was a stranger...Everybody played. Dogs too, yapping at our heels....They ran wild like the rest of us." But that is before World War II, which sends the narrator's older brother into the army, makes his dad somber, brings his troublesome grandparents into town, sends his mother to work, and changes everything. Peck's masterful, detail-rich prose describes wartime in the United States, where coffee and sugar are rationed; rubber, metal, and even milkweed fluff are collected for the war effort; and sacrifices are made by everyone. Peck's characters are memorable. A classmate's mom comes to school to terrorize her daughter's timid teacher: "A giant figure appeared at the classroom door. We hadn't seen a woman this big since Mrs. Meece came for her girdle." Each episodic chapter about Davy, his family, and his neighbors fits seamlessly into the emerging story. Readers will cheer for these folks, and be submerged into the homefront world of people who: "Use it up, wear it out,/Make it do or do without." This book is an absolute delight.—*Lee Bock, Glenbrook Elementary School, Pulaski, WI*

****Skeers, L. 2007. *The Impossible Patriotism Project.***

This timely picture book shows a child wrestling with the meaning of patriotism. As Caleb thinks about a school assignment ("Make something showing patriotism") and hears about other kids' ideas--a paper-mache Liberty Bell, a multicolored U.S. map--he feels increasingly confused. "Patriotism is more than a map or a statue. But how do I show that?" His poster-board display featuring a photo of his absent father, a soldier in desert fatigues, illustrates the child's deep, personal connection to the abstract concept. The setup feels artificial, but Skeers paces things well to maximize the dramatic impact of Dad's military role, which is revealed relatively late in the story. Expressive watercolors from Hoyt (illustrator of John Lithgow's *I'm a Manatee*, 2003) sensitively capture the commingled pain and pride of military separation but also make room for welcome silliness, expressed through anthropomorphized national symbols that run riot inside Caleb's head. A discussion starter on patriotism with special relevance for children affected by deployment. *Jennifer Mattson*

****Sullivan, J. L. (2007). *Annie's War***

World War II is over, but anger and suffering continue on the home front. When Annie, 10, joins Grandma for the summer in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1946, the family is still grieving for Annie's daddy, who has been MIA, as well as for Daddy's brother, Billy, whose wartime experiences have transformed him into a raging bully. When Grandma takes in Miss Gloria as a lodger and bookkeeper, neighborhood racists, including Billy, attack the newcomer as "darkie trash" and set a cross aflame in the yard. Based on events in Sullivan's childhood, this debut novel tells this story of lost innocence through the eyes of a child who is trying to make sense of what's going on around her. Miss Gloria is much too sweet to be true, but her sadness and strength come through, as does a realistic view of bigotry and courage, grief and kindness. *Hazel Rochman-Booklist*



****Wolf, V., E. (1999). *Bat 6***

At the turn of the century, two rival Oregon farm communities have put their differences behind them and come together once a year to watch their sixth-grade girls' teams play softball. In the spring of 1949, the "50-year girls" excitedly anticipate their moment of glory. *Bat 6* is their story, reconstructed just after it happened. The narrative is comprised of firsthand reporting from girls on both sides. This year, each team has a ringer. For the Bear Creek Ridge Mountaineers, it's Japanese-American first-baseman Aki, whose family has just moved back to the community after spending most of the war years in an internment camp. The Barlow

Pioneers' marvel is their center fielder who calls herself Shazam, a troubled youngster who does everything, except her schoolwork, with an unsettling, single-minded intensity. Her father was killed at Pearl Harbor and she has maintained a deep-seeded hatred of the Japanese ever since. In the book's pivotal scene, Shazam violently attacks Aki during the big game, and play (and time itself, for that matter) is suspended. The period details and use of the vernacular are right on the money and always reflect the adolescent female point of view. At some point comes the liberating realization that it isn't necessary to keep the multiple voices straight and that the well-crafted account has taken on a life of its own. Wolff delves into the irreversible consequences of war and the necessity to cultivate peace and speaks volumes about courage, responsibility, and reconciliation all in a book about softball. *Luann Toth, School Library Journal*

****Voigt, C. 1986. *Dacey's Song*.**

The four Tillerman children finally have a home at their grandmother's rundown farm on the Maryland shore. It's what Dacey has dreamed of for her three younger siblings, but after watching over the others for so long, it's hard to let go. Who is Dacey, if she's no longer the caretaker for her family? Dacey finds herself in new friends, in a growing relationship with her grandmother, and in the satisfaction of refinishing the old boat she found in the barn. Then, as Dacey experiences the trials and pleasures of making a new life, the past comes back with devastating force, and Dacey learns just how necessary -- and painful -- letting go can be.

Grades 9 – 12



****Conroy, P. (1976). *The Great Santini***

Ben is being raised in a Marine family in the 1950s. His father is authoritarian, compulsively competitive and sometimes abusive. The military figures large in the family's life as Bull Meecham rules the family and the Marines rule Bull Meecham. It is a well-written and satisfying book. This book was made into a movie of the same name in 1979 and has been reprinted many times.

****Ellis, D. 2003. *Mud City*.**

In the third book in the Breadwinner Trilogy, orphan Afghan refugee Shauzia leaves the rough Pakistan border camp and joins other homeless children on the streets of the city of Peshawar. Her dream, left from the time before the Taliban when she was still at school, is to reach the ocean and a place called France. Instead, disguised as a boy, she must beg and scrounge for food and find odd jobs. In the end, she returns to the refugee camp and to the tough camp leader, Mrs. Weera, whom Shauzia thought she hated. The story is strong on message, and in a final note, Ellis fills in the recent history about Afghanistan, the Taliban's restrictions on women, and the millions of new, desperate refugees. Middle-school readers will be caught up in the cause and in the elemental survival adventure, especially because Shauzia is no sweet waif; she's mean, insolent, and rebellious. Her struggle with the rough Mrs. Weera reveals that they are both strong and brave. Royalties from the book go to help homeless kids. *Hazel Rochma*

****Ellis, D. 2002. *Parvanna's Journey*.**

This sequel to *The Breadwinner* (Groundwood, 2001) easily stands alone. After her father's death, 13-year-old Parvana, disguised as a boy, wanders alone through war-torn Afghanistan looking for her mother and siblings who had disappeared in the tumult of the Taliban takeover of Mazar-e-Sharif. Early in her journey, Parvana comes across a baby, the only survivor in a bombed village. She takes him along, as both a burden and comforting company. Taking shelter in a small cave, she discovers an angry one-legged boy who is starved for both food and human companionship. Imagining treasure in their cave, they dig, only to find a cache of bullets—a scene that epitomizes what childhood has become for these young people. The three continue Parvana's search, stopping for a time in an apparent safe haven on the edge of a minefield where an eight-year-old lives with a near-comatose grandmother. When their refuge is destroyed, the four children join a long line of refugees, arriving finally at a camp. A bittersweet ending offers some hope for Parvana and her family, but readers are left with a horrifyingly realistic picture of the effect of war on children. While the reading is not difficult, the grim content cries out for discussion. An unforgettable read.

Kathleen Isaacs, Edmund Burke School, Washington, DC

****Myers, W., D. (2008). *Sunrise Over Fallujah***

Robin's parents aspire for him to go to college, but following September 11, he feels compelled to join the Army instead. By early 2003, Robin has completed Basic Training and is deployed to Iraq where he becomes part of a Civil Affairs Unit charged with building the trust of the Iraqi people to minimize fighting. Civil Affairs soldiers are often put into deadly situations to test the waters, and Robin finds that the people in his unit, who nickname him "Birdy," are the only ones he can trust. Robin quickly learns that the situation in Iraq will not be resolved easily and that much of what is happening there will never make the news. Facing the horrors of war, Robin tries to remain hopeful and comforting in his letters to his family, never showing his fear or the danger he actually faces. The story of teenagers going to war today is an important one, and it is not told often enough. Myers writes an important book to have in any collection to recognize that many teens will choose to join the military instead of, or before, going on to college. Robin is only eighteen, and it is difficult to watch his innocence erased as war leaves its mark on him, but it is the reality for many young men and women. *Stephanie Petruso*



****Paulsen, G. (1998). *Soldier's Heart***

In spare, almost biblical prose, Gary Paulsen writes of the horrors of combat in a Civil War novella that puts a powerful, more contemporary spin on Stephen Crane's classic *The Red Badge of Courage*. Based on the life of a real boy, it tells the story of Charley Goddard, who lies his way into the Union Army at the age of 15. Charley has never been anywhere beyond Winona, Minnesota, and thinks war would be a great adventure. And it is--at first--as his regiment marches off through cheering crowds and pretty, flag-waving girls. But then comes the battle. Charley screams, "Make it stop now!" disbelieving that anything so horrible could be real. Paulsen is unsparing in the details of what actually happens on the battlefield: the living men suddenly blown into pieces, the agony and fear, the noise and terror, the stinking corpses. After many battles, Charley is wounded and sent home an old man before he is 20, his will to live destroyed by combat fatigue--leaving him with a "soldier's heart." Paulsen has received the Margaret A. Edwards Award, the ALAN Award, and several Newbery Honor awards for previous work, but this superb, small masterpiece transcends any of his earlier titles in its remarkable, memorable intensity and power. -Patty Campbell-Amazon.com

****Rottman, S. L. (2009). *Out of the Blue***

Stu and his mom are heading to Minot, North Dakota, where she will assume command of the Air Force base. But this time it will be just the two of them. His brother is away at college, and their father has abruptly decided to move to Nevada. With his family scattered and his mother preoccupied with military duties, Stu finds himself on his own and adrift in this new environment, caught between a respect for the regimented life of the military and an aching desire for independence and freedom. As he struggles to find his way, he is pulled into his neighbors' dysfunctional family drama and becomes an unwitting participant. When tragedy finally strikes, Stu must come to terms with his own culpability. Once again, award-winning author S. L. Rottman has crafted an absorbing young adult novel that powerfully depicts the emotional turbulence of teenage life and the difficulty of negotiating complex human relationships.

****Sherman, M. & Sherman, D., *My Story***

My Story: Blogs by Four Military Teens is a series of blogs by four military teens that highlights their feelings and experiences before, during, and after parental deployment. It provides support and education for all military teens and pre-teens by honoring their unique joys and sacrifices, addressing their fears and hopes, and exploring how parental deployment affects their lives. Although the four youth in "My Story" are fictional, the stories are real—the blogs are a compilation of real life experiences of military kids the authors have been honored to meet and learn from. "My Story" can also serve as a tool to educate civilian youth and adults about the military family experience.