Books For Military Kids

Kindergarten-3rd

Pilot Mom

Jenny’s mother is a tanker pilot in the Air Force and is about to leave for training for two weeks. Jenny is proud of her Mom, but also worried about the dangers she is in, so her mother has arranged to take Jenny and her friend K.C. to the air base to show them what Jenny’s mother does. They start by helping Jenny’s Mom fill up the pockets on her flight suit, and Jenny gets to add her lucky silver dollar. At the end Jenny’s father’s arrival shows that the family unit will still be intact and strong despite Jenny’s mother’s absence. The watercolor and ink illustrations emphasize the sky and the majesty of flying but also capture the characters’ range of emotions.

My Father Is in the Navy

Sara’s father is in the Navy and away on his ship. In this calm story Sara goes about her daily life with her mother. She knows that her father is coming home and that her mother is excited but she is worried because, “I didn’t remember him”. In the satisfying ending she finally sees her father and remembers him. This book was written about the childhood experiences of popular fantasy writer and Newbery winner Robin McKinley whose father was in the navy. Martine Gourbault’s pastel colored pencil illustrations complement the text about Sara’s secure life with her mother and her kitten.

When Dad’s at Sea

Emily’s Dad is a Navy Pilot and is away for months at a time. Emily and her parents make her a paper chain with as many links as days her father will be absent. Emily is so angry that she destroys it but her parents make another one. Time is shown passing with events such as Halloween and then Emily makes a friend who has a father on the same ship. The warm colors of the watercolor illustrations almost glow on some pages.

4th-6th

Soldier Mom

Jasmine’s mother is called up from the army reserves to go to the Middle East. This book is set in 1991-1992 and the first Persian Gulf War but many children with parents in the reserves who are currently being called to active duty to a U.S. base or being sent overseas will be able to identify with Jasmine’s shock and disbelief. Jasmine is forced to curtail her beloved basketball to help look after her baby brother.

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 feel 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.
Middle School

Operation Homefront
Mother Rosalys is a part time kindergarten teacher who joined the reserves to pay for her schooling. Her three children thought her weekend warrior life was a joke until she was called up. “Before, they were Weekend Warriors and knew it. Now it’s real, and they know it. I don’t want it to be real”. After Rosalys leaves, the family compulsively watch the news and their family starts to crumble as the house and the four-year-old brother are barely looked after. By the end of the book they pull themselves together and gain a new perspective on Rosalys and themselves.

Shut Up
“In her need to support her two young boys, Maria Barajas, a single mother, joins the National Guard to supplement her meager income as a sales clerk. years later, in less peaceful times, she is sent to Iraq, leaving her boys behind in the care of her sister.”

High School

The Yokota Officer’s Club
This riveting read would suit teenagers who are strong readers. The story opens when Bernie is 18 and is returning to her family from her first year at college. Descriptions of her present day in Guam are mixed with flashbacks to her childhood. The flashbacks describe events in her childhood that lead up to a surprising climax that explains the disintegration of the happy family she once knew. As Bernie arrives on an Air Force base in Okinawa that she has never seen before, “I recognize in the distance, the comfortingly familiar bulk of the commissary, the BX, the endless stretches of runway sweeping out to the sea”.

Red Sky at Morning
Josh is seventeen and lives a privileged life in Mobile, Alabama where his father owns a shipyard. Near the end of World War II, his father volunteers for the Navy. When he leaves Josh’s father arranges for Josh and his mother go to a village in the New Mexico mountains where he feels they will be safer. Josh settles in to the new life, making friends, growing up and finding beauty in the new landscape. However, his mother, removed from her known life, friends and family falls slowly apart. Josh’s father is not present in much of the book but his absence looms over everyone.

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 dominates the family’s life as Bull Meecham rules the family and the Marines rule Bull Meecham. It is a well-written and satisfying book.

The Great Santini
WARNING: This book contains intense, graphic violence and disturbing scenes. Bethany’s father is in the Navy. He hasn’t been around much for years, so to Bethany his latest deployment to Iraq is just a continuation of her normal life. Things change when he is kidnapped by insurgents in Iraq. Told in varying viewpoints, this is an intense, plot-driven thriller that draws you in. This book raises issues for older teens who can form a deeper personal understanding of war and the effects of parents’ choices on their children.