



Reading Guide for



By Michael Buckley

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About the Books

Orphaned after their parents mysteriously disappear, sisters Daphne and Sabrina Grimm are sent to live with the grandmother they've never known. They had been told that Granny Relda was dead, when in fact she was very much alive and living in upstate New York. In *The Fairy-Tale Detectives*, Granny introduces the girls to the unusual assortment of characters who inhabit Ferryport Landing, a town on the Hudson River where many strange and mysterious crimes have been occurring. In Ferryport Landing, Sabrina and Daphne learn that they are descendents of the famous Grimm Brothers and that those famous fairy tales were actually histories of a magical parallel world. Described as "Nancy Drew meets Shrek," the Sisters first cases focus on Jack and the giant who is rampaging through town, smarmy Price Charming, who as mayor of Ferryport Landing has broader political ambitions, and a plot to kidnap Granny Relda.

The Sisters Grimm: The Fairy-Tale Detectives sets the scene for the series, which will be comprised of eight books.

In Book Two, the Sisters Grimm start school at Ferryport Landing Elementary. Daphne's lucky enough to get Snow White for a teacher—she loves little people—but poor Sabrina is stuck with Mr. Grumpner and a class of mildly psychotic sixth graders. When Mr. Grumpner is murdered in a particularly unusual way, it is up to the Grimms to find the Everafter who did it. If only Sabrina can get over her distrust of all Everafters. But how can she trust folks who just might be responsible for the disappearance of her parents?

In Book Three the Sisters Grimm, intrepid detectives of fairy-tale crime, come face to face with their parents' kidnappers, the mysterious organization of Everafters who call themselves the Scarlet Hand. One of them turns out to be the world's most famous fairy-tale character and the other, the Jabberwocky, an unstoppable killing machine. Without Mr. Canis (a.k.a the Big Bad Wolf) fighting at their side, the girls have little hope of rescuing their mother and father. That is, until their long-lost Uncle Jake returns home with stories of a weapon, now missing, that can kill the Jabberwocky. Can the Sisters Grimm save the day?

About the Author



Michael Buckley was born in Akron, Ohio and attended Ohio University from which he graduated with honors. Prior to his success in the children's writing profession, he held many odd jobs including professional stand-up comic, lead singer of a punk-rock band, pasta maker, and intern at the *Late Show With David Letterman*. He moved to New York City in 1996 and worked in television, developing programming for Discovery Channel, TLC, MTV, MTV Animation, and *Rugrats* producers Klasky Csupo. He is married and lives with Daisy, a west highland terrier, in a little apartment on New York City's upper east side.

Buckley's interest in writing began in junior high school. He loved comic books and would plot them out and write his own. In high school he tinkered with poetry and short story writing. Working as a stand-up comic, Buckley wrote jokes, so humor comes naturally to him. His college work included a specialized combination of journalism, creative writing, art history, applied art, and filmmaking that culminated in a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Although his educational experience helped prepare him for a career as a writer, he credits his almost endless rejection by women as the key to being able to tough it out in a very difficult field. On a more serious note, Buckley also credits his love of books as a child for his success. "My parents were not wealthy people but they managed to find a way to get me books even when the checking account was empty. I had more books than the library at my kindergarten school. To be a good writer you have to be a good reader and I had a great foundation to start from."

As a child, Buckley was a huge fan of *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. He also read a lot of books by Mark Twain and anything else "I could get my hands on, especially comics." He loved Spiderman and the Hulk, and credits comics with helping to increase his vocabulary. Surprisingly, he did not read a lot of fairy tales as a child, recalling that, "I think I spent more time seeing the films based on the stories than actually opening the books. Unfortunately, having the Disney versions as my only frame of reference was a real setback. I didn't know much of anything when I started writing this series and had to scramble to read the original tales once I realized how misinformed I was. Don't get me wrong, the Disney films are beautiful, but they've got nothing on the originals."

The idea for writing the Sisters Grimm books came to him while he was looking through a collection of Grimm fairy tales. "It dawned on me that I'd never heard of a book about the sisters and did a lot of research to make sure it hadn't been written. I've always enjoyed stories and movies where you get to visit a magical world that is right in front of your face, like *Men in Black* or *Harry Potter*, so the Sisters Grimm living in a town full of fairy tale characters was almost a gift from above to me." He did most of the research for the series in libraries with a little done online. In preparation for his work, Buckley read books by Grimm, Andersen, Lang, Baum, and alternate versions of stories from other cultures. For instance, Buckley found that *Red Riding Hood* is a tale told in almost every culture on earth. Each is a little different and I wanted to find the truest part of the story. It was also important that I balance what I thought a kid would know from the films with what I thought a kid should know from the original stories. Hopefully, the reader will go back to the library or bookstore after reading my book and ask for the classic stories they've discovered in the Sisters Grimm."

Pre-Reading Activities

Discuss the origins of fairy tales and what makes a story a fairy tale. Identify the main elements of a fairy tale, including magic, characters that are good or evil, a journey or quest, and a happy ending. Talk about how fairy tales differ from folk tales.

Review the premise of the book with the students. Two sisters discover that they are descendents of the famous Grimm Brothers and that the fairy tales are really historical chronicles of a magical world. Be sure that students are familiar with Grimm's fairy Tales. Point out that while many of the characters in *The Fairy-Tale Detectives* are from these stories, many are from other books, folk tales, and other fairy tales. If time permits, read aloud one of the original stories. You might choose "Jack and the Beanstalk," "The Three Pigs," or "Little Red Riding Hood," since characters from these stories are mentioned in *The Fairy-Tale Detectives*. (Note that "The Three Little Pigs" is similar to Grimm's "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids" and the origins of "Jack and the Beanstalk" is not known but the story was popularized by Joseph Jacobs.)

Introduce the main characters. Information about them is available at www.sistersgrimm.com/newsite/mwcharacters.html. Sabrina is the older sister and she is tough, stubborn, and determined. Her sister Daphne has a good sense of humor and is filled with hope. Granny Relda Grimm can be very secretive but looks at life as a series of opportunities.

What are family secrets? Monitor any personal experiences shared for appropriateness, but talk about the reasons people keep secrets. Note that Granny Relda's close friend, Mr. Canis, has a secret—he was formerly the Big Bad Wolf!

Questions for Group Discussion

The Grimm Sisters are "sleuths of fairy tale crime." What "crimes" can you think of that have been committed in fairy tales? For example, was Goldilocks guilty of breaking and entering at the Bears' house?

Grimm's fairy tales have universal appeal and the original stories have been translated into more than 160 languages. Talk about the common themes in fairy tales and why these ideas and concepts extend across cultures.

Relda Grimm "moonlights" as a detective even though she is a grandmother. Talk about stereotypes, what images we have of grandmothers, how they look and what we expect them to do. Then talk about the grandmothers or other elderly women whom the students know and what kinds of activities or work they do.

The Fairy-Tale Detectives is a mystery. Talk about what elements make it a mystery and what clues helped the Sisters solve the case.

Interdisciplinary Teaching

Vocabulary/Use of Language

Look at other versions of fairy tales, especially those that have come from or been recast for different cultures. *Red Ridin' in the Hood: and Other Cuentos* by Patricia Santos Marcantonio or *The Brocaded Slipper and Other Vietnamese Tales* by Lynette Dyer Young. While the stories are familiar, names and vocabulary may be different. Make a list of the characters in the cross-cultural tale and match them with the names from the more familiar tales. Do the same for any unfamiliar words

Create a list of fairy tale starters and endings. Discuss what makes these good beginning and endings for a story. Then ask the students to think up new starters or endings for fairy tales. Examples of traditional starters and endings include:

Once upon a time...

...and they lived happily ever after

There once was a boy...

Many, many years ago there lived...

Now, you shall hear a story that somebody's great-great-grandmother told a little girl many years ago...

...snip, snap, snout. This tale's told out.

Writing

Working in small groups, have students select a fairy tale of their choice (or assign fairy tales to ensure variety). Rewrite the fairy tale with a contemporary setting and situations for modern readers.

Assign students to write up a "crime alert" bulletin or police report for a fairy tale crime. Include who is "wanted" for the crime, what crime occurred, a description of the culprit, and any additional information about past activities, known associates, any reward that is offered, or possible hangout locations.

Literature

Many of the characters and situations mentioned in *The Fairy-Tale Detectives* are from other works of literature. Assign students to look for allusions or references to other stories and search out the original work. References are made to characters from Shakespeare, *The Wizard of Oz*, and more. Share copies of the books in which these characters appear and encourage the students to read the original works.

Theater/Drama

Michael Buckley says "I was inspired (in writing the book) more by movies I saw when I was young, like *The Goonies* or *ET*. Ask students to think about the movies that have inspired them and discuss why they found the movies to be influential. Select a movie based on a fairy tale to show the class. Suggestions for films that are short enough for classroom viewing include *Stories to Remember: The Snow Queen and The Wild Swans*, *Lon Po Po*, *Princess Furball*, or *Faerie Tale Theater—Little Red Riding Hood*. A list of contemporary stories with an American twist, based on the Grimm's fairy tales and created by Davenport Films is online at www.fromthebrothersgrimm.com.



As a class, select one fairy tale to be dramatized. Assign students to be the writers, script coaches, director, stage manager, and actors. Alternatively, select a fairy tale to turn into readers' theater or select a readers' theater script from a site like Aaron Shepard's Home Page at www.aaronshp.com. Try *The Enchanted Storks: A Tale of Baghdad*, a nineteenth-century European fairy tale that became popular in the Middle East (note that Shepard provides permission for non-commercial use of his scripts).

Geography

Buckley may have been inspired by the castle on Bannerman Island in the Hudson River near Poughkeepsie, NY. Visit www.bannermancastle.org to learn more about this historic site. What historic sites in your area of the country might provide inspiration for a story?

The original Grimm's fairy tales are set in Germany. Buckley's stories are set in the Hudson River area of New York. Locate Germany on a world map or globe. Then locate New York and the Hudson River. The Hudson River is an American Heritage river because of its cultural and historical heritage and its value as a natural resource. Buckley wanted his stories to be set in an isolated area where it is possible that a community could exist without outside interference. Show students pictures from *Hudson River: An Adventure from the Mountains to the Sea*, by Peter Lourie. What geographic features of the Hudson River make it an ideal location for Ferryport Landing? Look at a book on Germany, such as *Germany A to Z*, by Jeff Reynolds. Be sure to point out on a map the areas, from Frankfurt to Bremen, that make up the Fairy Tale Road. A list of sites where fairy tales are set is online at www.travelforkids.com/FuntoDo/Germany/germany.htm. Are there features in common that make both Germany and the Hudson River suitable for fairy tales?

Careers

In *The Fairy-Tale Detectives* the characters have careers. For example, Snow White is a teacher, the three pigs are policemen, and Prince Charming is a politician. Select a character and research the education, skills, and experience needed for their job. Decide whether the character is well suited for the position he or she has chosen.

Jack was really looking for a publicity stunt that would restart his career as a "giant killer" and return him to his former glory. Pick another character and list ideas for ways that character can improve his or her career, do something to return to the spotlight, or create something that is newsworthy.



Activities

Relda Grimm is the keeper of Snow White's magic mirror. Provide the students with cardboard to create their own picture frame (or use transparency mounting frames sold through office suppliers), aluminum foil, and a variety of stickers, self-adhesive jewels, and other craft materials. Let students create and decorate their own magic mirrors.

Provide lunch-size paper bags, construction paper, crayons or markers, glue sticks, faux-fur fabric, and other craft supplies for students to create a paper bag puppet of their favorite fairy-tale character.

Internet Connections

Brothers Grimm: Fairy Tales, History, Facts and More

www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm

National Geographic presents twelve unvarnished tales from the famous brothers. Open the treasure chest to find a map of the Fairy-Tale Road through Germany, *National Geographic* articles on the Brothers Grimm, links to other Grimm resources, and more.

Grimm Fairy Tales

www.grimmfairytales.com/en/main

Interactive, narrated, animated versions of several fairy tales plus biographical information, games, and other fun stuff from Kids Fun Canada.

Related Readings

If your students enjoyed Michael Buckley's books, suggest some of these other "fractured," or retold, tales.

- Guarnaccia, Steven. *Goldilocks and the Three Bears: A Tale Moderne*. Abrams, 2000.
Lasky, Bruce. *New Fangled Fairy Tales*. Meadowbrook, 1998.
Levine, Gail Carson. *Fairy Dust and the Quest for the Egg*. Disney Press, 2005.
Light, Steven. *Puss in Boots*. Abrams, 2002.
Martin, Rafe. *Birdwing*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2005.
Stanley, Diane. *Bella at Midnight*. HarperCollins, 2006.
Vande Velde, Vivian. *Tales from the Brothers Grimm and the Sisters Weird*. 1995.
Yolen, Jane. *Twelve Impossible Things Before Breakfast*. Harcourt, 1997.

Teacher Resources

Grimm, Jakob. *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*. Norton, 2004.
Annotations explore the historical, cultural, and psychological meanings of forty stories that are presented with 150 illustrations by a range of artists, including Arthur Rackham, make this an authoritative collection.

Grimm's Fairy Tales

www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimtmp

This site, hosted by Carnegie Mellon, contains e-text versions of 209 of the stories collected and retold by the Brothers Grimm.

The SurLaLune Fairy Tale Site

www.surlalunefairytales.com

This personal website hosted by a librarian serves as a portal to fairy tale and folklore studies, featuring forty-four annotated fairy tales, with their histories, cross-cultural tales, and illustrations.