

**Literature Circle Guide to *The Sisters Grimm: The Fairy-Tale Detectives*  
by Michael Buckley**

### **Book Summary**

In Book One of the Sisters Grimm series, we meet two sisters, Sabrina and Daphne, who have been sent to live with their mysterious grandmother, Relda Grimm. From their first day in Ferryport Landing, the sisters begin to unravel a mystery that reveals a family secret. Sabrina and Daphne learn that they are descendants of the Brothers Grimm, whose famous book of fairy tales is actually a history book. Snow White, the Three Little Pigs, the Big Bad Wolf—they're all alive and now neighbors of Granny Relda in this community of Everafters, as magical folks like to be called.

But life is not a fairy tale in Ferryport Landing. Someone has set a giant loose on the town, and it's up to the sisters Grimm to stop the giant and find the Everafter behind its murderous rampage. Is it Mayor Charming, formerly Prince Charming, who may have plans to get his kingdom back? Or Jack, the erstwhile giant killer, now working at the Big and Tall store?

### **Author Information**

Michael Buckley has written and developed television shows for many networks. He lives in New York City and the Sisters Grimm books are his first.

### **Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions**

1. What difficulties do Sabrina and Daphne encounter in the foster homes in which they stay?  
**On page 4, Daphne and Sabrina tell Ms. Smirt that Ms. Longdon “swore her toilet was haunted”; that Mr. Dennison “made us sleep in his truck”; and that “Mr. and Mrs. Dennison handcuffed us to a radiator.”**
2. What are the rules of Granny Relda’s house?  
**On pages 29--30, Granny Relda gives the girls two rules: “First, never let anyone or anything into this house without asking Mr. Canis or me if it is OK,” and “Second, there is a room down the hall that is locked. It’s locked for a reason and I ask that you stay away from it for the time being.”**
3. What is the secret to unlocking the door to Granny Relda’s house?  
**On page 14, upon first bringing Sabrina and Daphne home, Granny Relda opens a dozen locks and “rap[s] her knuckles on the door three times and [says], ‘We’re home.’” On pages 129--130, when the girls and Puck attempt to enter the house without Granny Relda, the keys alone don’t open the door. Puck reminds them that they’ve forgotten to tell the house you are home.”**

**Daphne remembers that Granny Relda always knocked three times and announced, “We’re home.” This is the secret to unlocking the door.**

4. Mr. Canis is Relda’s helper, driver, and assistant. But he is also something else. What is he? What are some of the clues to his secret identity?

**Mr. Canis is the Big Bad Wolf. His name is the first clue, as “*canis*” is the genus name of the dog family, which includes the wolf species, or “*canis lupus*.”**

**There are several more hints throughout the story to indicate his identity. On page 27, when he warns the girls to keep their bedroom window closed, the text reads, “he growled” rather than “he said.”**

**On page 97, prior to the giant’s appearance, Mr. Canis detects the danger by sniffing the air. Both he and the dog, Elvis, “had the same expression. The two of them were smelling something they didn’t like.”**

**On page 192, Sabrina notices that in photographs, his eyes have a “bright blue color” which she believes to be a trick of the flash.**

**Later, on page 267, Jack the Giant Killer tells Granny Relda, “If you want to sic your dog on me, Grimm, then do it.” Mr. Canis then “turns into a wolf the size of a rhinoceros,” with eyes of an “achingly bright blue color.” All wolf pups are born with blue eyes.**

5. Many of the citizens of Ferryport Landing have jobs that relate to their fairytale backgrounds. List some of them and explain the connections.

**Snow White is a school teacher. She is “very good with little people like yourself,” as Granny Relda tells the girls. (page 94) On her desk is “a stack of apples.” (page 153)**

**Jack the Giant Killer works in a “Big and Tall” clothing shop (page 95) called “Harold’s House of Big and Tall.” (page 174)**

**At the end of the story, Hamstead, Boarman, and Swineheart, the Three Little Pigs, reveal that prior to becoming policemen, they worked “in construction.” (page 283)**

6. What are the bugs that attack Sabrina and Daphne in Granny Relda’s back yard? Why do they attack?

**The bugs are pixies. On page 27, the girls see what they believe are lightning bugs outside their bedroom window. Later that night (pages 37--39) when the girls decide to run away, they are attacked in the yard by a biting swarm and realize they aren’t lightning bugs at all. On page 40, Granny Relda tells them that these are pixies.**

**Puck sent the pixies to attack the girls for “trying to steal the old lady from me,” as he says on page 123. He is jealous of the attention the girls receive from Granny Relda.**

7. Are there any characters that you think would do a better job than Prince Charming as mayor of Ferryport Landing? Explain your answer.  
**Answers will be a matter of opinion. Granny Relda may be an obvious choice, but there would be a question as to whether the Everafters would vote for a human, much less a Grimm. Puck is too mischievous, and Canis is not a leader and struggles with his dark side. Mirror is very dignified, but does not seem to be able to leave his realm within the magic mirror itself. Charming’s background as royalty may make him perfectly suited to be a politician.**
8. If you lived in Ferryport Landing, would you rather be an Everafter or a human? Use examples from the book to relate the advantages and difficulties you would encounter.  
**Answers will vary. The Everafters are prisoners within the city limits, but they do indeed have special talents and magic powers that could be fun. Humans, on the other hand, are free to come and go, but they are clueless as to the true nature of the town they live in. They are at the mercy of the spells and magic all around them.**
9. Puck says he is a villain. Are his actions villainous? Give some examples and explain.  
**Puck is not a villain, although he is certainly a “trickster” and very immature. He does send the pixies to attack the girls, but it is only out of jealousy. He frequently complains, as when he says cleaning is “women’s work” (page 155) but Daphne understands that he just “needs to feel that he’s important.”(page 169)**
10. The girls often encounter resentment towards their family from the citizens of Ferryport Landing. Why is this?  
**On pages 66--70, Granny Relda reveals the history of the Grimm family. She explains that after persecuted Everafters settled in America, there were rising tensions with the humans. After rebel fairytale characters planned to invade a neighboring town, the Brothers Grimm asked a witch named Baba Yaga to cast a spell that would prevent the Everafters from leaving Ferryport Landing to keep the “fragile peace.” The spell will last as long as at least one member of the Grimm family remains alive within the town.**  
  
**The resentment of the Everafters becomes even more apparent when the girls attend Mayor Charming’s ball in disguise and overhear several of the guests discussing “how wonderful the world would be if the Grimm family dropped off the face of the earth.” (page 229)**

Earlier, on page 208, Sabrina has realized that “Ferryport landing might have been the home to many of the world’s fairy-tale creatures, but it was also a prison they were never allowed to leave.”

While many Everafters are friends to the Grimms, there are others who would prefer their freedom. There is much room for discussion as to whether the Everafters should or should not be permitted to mingle freely with the rest of the world.

11. Jack uses many words unfamiliar to the girls, such as “barmy,” “gob,” and “corking.” Explain what you think these words mean from the examples of how Jack uses them.

**On page 173, Jack the Giant Killer says “My name was once synonymous with bravery and daring. That was until the spell that trapped me in this barmy town.”**

**On page 175, Jack says of his plan to escape his jailer, “Then the little one here [Daphne] will hit him in the gob with a club or something and snatch his keys.”**

**Once the girls have successfully tricked Ichabod Crane into giving up the jail cell keys, Jack exclaims, “Corking! I told you it would work.” (page 181)**

Jack is very “English” in his manner. There is room for interpretation based on context, and discussion of slang terms, colloquialisms, and the usefulness of dictionaries. There is also room to discuss with students how use of unfamiliar words can add to a character’s personality.

While other dictionaries may differ, Merriam-Webster OnLine ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)) lists “barmy” as an alteration of “balmy,” meaning “crazy, foolish” in its British use. This is likely what Jack intends. However, the definition of “barmy” itself is also “full of froth and ferment” which certainly also applies to Ferryport Landing.

The same source lists “gob” as a Scottish Gaelic term for “mouth.” Some students may decide through context that Jack means the guard’s shin, as he follows up with his comment by saying “all you have to do is hit him in the shins.” However, it is certainly more likely he meant “mouth,” or perhaps “face,” by “gob.”

The listing for “corking” includes “‘extremely fine’—often used as an intensive especially before ‘good’ (‘had a corking good time’).” In context, Jack’s delight in his exclamation does indicate he means something along these lines.

12. What is “The Scarlet Hand”? Do you think Sabrina and Daphne heard the last of them? Why or why not?

**The Scarlet Hand seems to be a secret membership of Everafters who resent the curse that keeps them in Ferryport Landing. The girls’ first hint of their existence is the red handprint found on their parents’ abandoned car. (page 6) Jack the Giant Killer has the same red hand painted on his shirt. He reveals that The Scarlet Hand took Daphne and Sabrina’s parents away. (page 260) He also says that the group gave him the magic bean he used to bring down the giant. (page 275) On page 280, Granny Relda says, “This Scarlet Hand, whoever they are, used strong magic to take your mom and dad away from us, but we aren’t going to give up. We’ll find them, I promise.” (pages 281--282)**

**This promise, and the fact that by the end of the story we still do not know very much about The Scarlet Hand, would indicate that the girls will cross paths with this shadowy organization again.**

**There is an opportunity to discuss how unresolved threads in a story can keep readers interested in more to come.**

13. How does reading fairytales help the girls solve the case?

**The key event in which fairytales help the girls is when they help Jack escape from jail. The deputy on guard is Ichabod Crane from “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Sabrina devises a plan to scare Crane by disguising Daphne and Elvis as the Headless Horseman, forcing him to give them the keys and flee. (pages 176--180)**

14. Decide whether Mayor Charming is a hero or a villain. Explain your answer.

**In the story, Mayor Charming is neither a hero nor a villain. He is very rude to the girls, and for much of the story they believe he is behind the giant’s attack because of his suspicious behavior. Ultimately, however, the girls learn that Charming has actually been investigating the case himself, and had sent the Sheriff to detain them in order to keep them out of harm’s way. (page 246) He is not a hero, however, because he has selfish reasons for doing what he does. On pages 254--255, he reveals that, while he resents the Grimms and the curse, he has also benefited by gaining wealth, power, and respect in the town. He says that if the world knew the secret of the town, life “will change and my position as its ruler...I mean mayor, might be challenged.” He tells the girls that when the crisis is over, “I will be your enemy again.” On page 257, he says, “The only allegiance I have is to myself.”**

**There is room to discuss whether Charming will always be this way. He did help the girls, after all. On page 251, Daphne hugs him in gratitude, and “for a brief moment, Charming seemed to enjoy the hug, but then he pulled away from her.”**

15. Sabrina's attitude towards Granny Relda changes over the course of the book. What does she think at the beginning? Why does this change by the end?
- Initially, Sabrina thinks that Granny Relda is an "imposter" and a "lunatic." The girls' father had told them that she was dead, and there was no reason to disbelieve him. Although Relda Grimm is certainly unusual, throughout the story she treats the girls only with kindness. When Sabrina finds the photograph of her parents with Relda, she realizes the family resemblance is undeniable and that the woman is indeed her grandmother. (pages 107--108) In nearly losing Relda to the giant and getting her back again, Sabrina understands that this is her family. Indeed, at the end of the book, "Granny's hug felt like home." (page 277)**

*Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1--3; Comprehension: 4--6; Application: 7--8; Analysis: 9--10; Synthesis: 11--12; Evaluation 13--15.*

### **Activities**

1. Reading fairytales helps Sabrina and Daphne with their crime solving. Make a list of how other kinds of books might help people with their lives.
2. Write a short paragraph about a character from your favorite fairytale or myth that describes him or her suddenly facing the modern world. Think about how your character would react to school, the lunchroom, gym class, or anything else that would be unfamiliar.
3. Draw a map of Ferryport Landing. Show where the characters live and work, and mark the locations of major events in the story, such as where the giant smashes the farmhouse, and where the girls first meet Puck.