

**Literature Circle Guide to *The Sisters Grimm: The Unusual Suspects***  
**by Michael Buckley**

**Book Summary**

Eleven-year-old Sabrina and seven-year-old Daphne, a pair of orphaned sisters, are sent to live with their mysterious grandmother, Relda Grimm. Relda lives in a strange town in New York State, known for its extraordinary number of unexplained and unusual crimes. In this environment, the sisters begin to unravel a mystery that leads to their ancestors' magical beginnings.

Sabrina and Daphne discover that they are descendants of the Brothers Grimm, who were actually detectives of magical phenomena. The brothers were responsible for investigating the inexplicable events surrounding the Everafters, a parallel race of magical beings. The two sisters soon learn it is the Grimm family's legacy to keep the Everafters in line, and that they themselves are the sole heirs to this challenge!

In *The Unusual Suspects*, the Sisters Grimm start school at Ferryport Landing Elementary. Daphne is 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 the folks who just might be responsible for the disappearance of her parents?

**Author Information**

Michael Buckley was born in Akron, Ohio. As a child he was a fan of *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, and comic books of all sorts. Before publishing his first book Michael held an assortment of interesting jobs, including stand-up comic, lead singer of a punk rock band, pasta maker, and intern at the *Late Show with David Letterman*. Michael has written and developed television programming for many networks, including Nickelodeon and Discovery Channel. He lives in a little apartment on New York City's Upper East Side.

**Illustrator Information**

Peter Ferguson is a comic book and editorial artist. *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous*, published in 2006 by Tricycle Press, was his first picture book. He is also the illustrator of two young adult novels, *The Anybodies* and *The Nobodies*, by N.E. Bode. Peter lives in Montreal, Canada.

**Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions**

1. What are some of the unusual foods Granny Relda serves at home?

- On page 112, Sabrina and Daphne feast on soup that tastes like warm butterscotch pudding. However, it is actually camel hump soup, made using only the second hump because, as Relda quickly explains, “The first hump is a little tough, and besides, it’s the second hump that has all the flavor.” On page 127 the two sisters enjoy glow-in-the-dark waffles for breakfast.**
2. The Queen of Crows speaks English and what other language?  
**We meet Widow, the Queen of Crows, on page 116, and learn that in addition to English she speaks the language of her flock, Crow-ish.**
  3. List three of Puck’s pranks that make Sabrina angry.  
**Puck treats Sabrina like an aggravating brother would treat his sister, though on page 278 the Wolf speculates that Puck’s behavior is a result of his affection for Sabrina. On page 24 we learn of some of the many pranks Puck played on Sabrina: “He’d dumped a bucket of paint on her, rubbed her toothbrush in red-pepper seeds, filled her pockets with bloodworms, and put something in her shoes.” He also left a giant, hairy tarantula in her bed, morphed himself into a chair and pulled himself out from under her when she sat down. Puck’s teasing continues when he joins Sabrina in school. He sticks a sign on her back that reads, “Pleased to meet you, I’m Smelly Stinky-Pot,” and then pretends to gag on her imaginary fumes. (pages 146–147)**
  4. Explain why Sabrina feels pity for Ms. Smirt in Mr. Sheepshank’s office.  
**On pages 42–45 we witness Ms. Smirt flirting with Mr. Sheepshank, the school counselor. She giggles and smiles uncharacteristically, adjusts her clothing, asks him to call her by her first name, suggests an unnecessary dinner meeting, and gives him her business card with home phone number. Sabrina’s sympathy is ignited when she spots a book entitled *Finding Mr. Right* in the caseworker’s handbag and sees clearly that Mr. Sheepshank has no interest in Ms. Smirt. Sabrina’s sympathy does not last long.**
  5. Describe Mayor Charming’s limousine.  
**William Charming’s limousine is described on page 80. It is a long white limousine with a silver stallion hood ornament. On page 247 we learn that Mayor Charming sometimes drives it very fast.**
  6. Why are Wendell’s feet covered in white chalk in class?  
**Wendell’s feet are covered in the chalky dust from his explorations of the secret tunnel. The chalk is mentioned most notably on the following pages:**
    - 94—The chalk remains in the classroom following Mr. Grumpner’s murder.
    - 139—Wendell arrives late to class again, leaving a trail of chalky dust behind him.
    - 141—Sabrina connects the two chalk incidents, recalling that both types of chalk made her sneeze.

- **218—The children enter the secret area past the boiler room and find a long hall carved out of stone. Dusty shovels line the hall.**
7. Principal Hamelin and his son Wendell share the ability to charm living creatures with music. Are they also similar with regard to whether Sabrina and Daphne believe they are good or evil? Explain your answer.  
**Principal Hamelin seems good at heart and neither Sabrina nor Daphne ever seems to think he is evil. Sabrina wants to help Hamelin when he is in danger. (page 271)**

**Like many of the Everafters who are held prisoner in Ferryport, Principal Hamelin is eager to leave the town. (page 269) He does not explain why; it could be to gain control over the arguably weaker non-magical humans or perhaps simply to see the world.**

**Hamelin does not want anyone to get hurt (page 269) and thinks the “mission” has gone too far (pages 219, 255) but feels powerless to stop Rumpelstiltskin because of what the evil creature might do to Wendell.**

**Hamlin tries to help Sabrina stop Rumpelstiltskin’s evil plan. (pages 257, 272)**

8. Give three examples of things that should convince Sabrina that Everafters are not all bad.

**Some examples:**

- **Mr. Canis is devoted to helping and protecting Relda and her grandchildren. He is trying to make amends for his past behavior, even though his own people call him a traitor. (pages 104–105)**
  - **Puck tries to help Sabrina when she is in danger. (pages 277, 289)**
  - **Snow White is kind and helpful to all, Everafters and humans alike.**
  - **Wendell tries to stop the bad behavior of other Everafters and befriends Sabrina and Daphne.**
9. “Foreshadowing” is a storytelling clue that hints at something that might happen later in a story. Re-read pages 58 to 62, where Sabrina is talking to Mr. Sheepshank. What does Mr. Sheepshank say that foreshadows his plans as revealed by the end of the book?  
**The following phrases of Mr. Sheepshank foreshadow his plans:**
- **“Letting your feelings out is healthy.” (page 59)**
  - **“It’s a natural human emotion to get angry....you’ve got to let them out...or you’re just going to explode...” (page 61)**
  - **“Someday this place will be nothing but a distant memory.” (page 61)**
10. Do you think the girls will ever see Mr. Canis again? Explain your answer.  
**Students’ answers will vary. Answers should pull from the text and related readings. It is likely that Mr. Canis will return for the following reasons:**

- He is a main character of the story.
- After making the startling transformation to the savage Big Bad Wolf at the end of Book One, Mr. Canis had a difficult time returning to his human form, but he was eventually able to do so. (page 11)
- Mr. Canis’s dedicated efforts to calm his inner demon are mentioned on pages 82, 83, 91, 92, 111, 185, and 282.
- Relda has great faith in Mr. Canis’s ability to both win the battle between his good and evil sides (page 92) and take care of himself. (page 283)

11. What is Mr. Canis’s struggle with himself? Compare his dilemma with Sabrina’s attitude toward the Everafters.

**Students’ answers will vary. Mr. Canis struggles to control his “real life inner demon,” (page 11) which changes him from the hospitable and subdued man who helps Relda to the savage Big Bad Wolf who eats people. At the end of Book One, Mr. Canis willingly tapped into his wolf side to protect Granny Relda and her grandchildren. Since then he has had to fight to maintain control over his evil side by staying well rested, (page 11) avoiding stressful situations, (page 82) keeping his emotions—especially anger—in check, (page 111) practicing yoga to stay calm, (page 83) and never forgetting the bad he has done in the past. (page 185)**

**Both Mr. Canis and Sabrina must work to control their tempers. Mr. Canis must do so because anger can turn him into the Wolf. Sabrina must keep her temper in check because it makes her blind to the good in people (page 173) and creates negative and unjust stereotypes. (page 236) In this adventure Rumpelstiltskin grows more powerful by getting energy from Sabrina’s anger. (page 267)**

12. What do you think is the identity of the mysterious girl in the cloak at the end of the book? Explain your answer.

**Students’ answers will vary and might draw upon their knowledge of various fairy tales. Based on her garb, some might say this girl is Little Red Riding Hood. (page 287) Some students might guess that “the puppy” the mysterious little girl refers to is Elvis, Relda’s Great Dane. This might mean the girl is an evil sister of Sabrina and Daphne.**

13. On page 178, Granny Relda tells Sabrina, “If you cannot learn to control your hatred, your hatred will control you.” What happens in the book to prove this statement correct?

**Rumpelstiltskin uses Sabrina’s anger to grow stronger and gain power for the Scarlet Hand. (page 267)**

14. Why do you think the Big Bad Wolf decides to attack Rumpelstiltskin instead of eating everyone in the room?

**Students' answers will vary, but will draw from the action on page 282. Sabrina says that the Wolf wanted a fight.**

15. Is the magic barrier that surrounds Ferryport Landing fair? Why or why not? **Students' answers will vary, but should use examples from the book to support their claim. Some could argue that the barrier protects the rest of the world from evil Everafters like Rumpelstiltskin, who have an unfair advantage over humans. Others might say that the mixing of Everafters and humans encourages diversity and understanding.**

*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. One of the books in Granny Relda's library is called *Magical Mutations of Insects, Reptiles, and Kitties*. Make a list of five funny titles of your own that might be found in Relda's library. Be imaginative!
2. Write a letter to Sabrina telling her why you think she shouldn't be so angry with the Everafters.
3. Puck's bedroom is everything he could ever want. Write a short paragraph describing your own perfect room, or draw a picture of it.