



# The Brothers Grimm: Two Lives, One Legacy

*By Donald R. Hettinga*

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Children everywhere are familiar with the fairy-tale world of the Brothers Grimm, who made “once upon a time” a part of our universal vocabulary—but few people know much about the brothers themselves. Inspired by their desire to document their national literary heritage, the two devoted brothers spent most of their adult years collecting and publishing German Märchen and Sagen, fairy tales and legends. This thorough and compelling biography addresses the social, political, and historical influences that shaped the lives and stories of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

What emerges most clearly in this biography of the men who preserved "once upon a time" for generations of readers is their distinctly different personalities and enduring friendship. The elder Jacob Grimm proved the natural scholar, writing widely on poetry, music and language, while Wilhelm possessed a gift for teaching and storytelling. The two were inseparable; even after Wilhelm married, Jacob lived with the couple. With conversational language and colorful historical references, Hettinga (Presenting Madeleine L'Engle) makes the account accessible ("Once upon a time, a very real time in fact, a time when George Washington was still General Washington and was just thinking about becoming the first president of the United States," he begins). He effectively places the brothers' childhood in the context of what is now Germany, but at the time was one of numerous fiefdoms within the Holy Roman Empire thus explaining the many mentions of kings and queens in the tales the siblings collected. The brothers did not turn to studying the German fairy tales that would endure as their legacy until the French-controlled government forbade all Germans from working and writing in their own language. "They collected the fairy tales because they hoped the stories would help remind their countrymen of what it meant to be German," the author asserts. Black-and-white etchings, paintings and drawings round out the volume, which ably portrays the personalities of the two brothers and those who influenced them. Ages 9-14.

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From School Library Journal

Gr 5 Up—Once upon a time, a turbulent time in Europe when the Holy Roman Empire's power was waning and Napoleon's armies were marching into country after country, two brothers with an exceptional devotion to scholarship, to their cultural heritage, and to each other developed an interest in collecting and preserving the German folk and fairy tales they feared would be lost by a generation uninterested in telling the old stories and singing the old songs. Many adult readers are familiar with aspects of the brothers' lives, including their work as lexicographers and librarians, but no book for young readers presents the Grimms' intertwined lives against the larger background of early 19th-century Europe in such fascinating detail as this absorbing new biography. It is packed with information about European political and social conditions and the siblings' enormous personal struggles with poverty and ill health. Students will find it an excellent resource for term papers, yet it is written so clearly that it makes for enjoyable pleasure reading. Illustrated with numerous archival photographs and drawings of significant people and places in the men's lives, the text is followed by an annotated bibliography of their publications, the author's "A Few Words About Sources," and a time line that clearly ties events in the Grimms' lives to world events. Impressive for its skillful combination of scholarship and readability, this biography belongs in all collections.

*Ginny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA*

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From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Gr. 5-8. When one thinks of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, it's obviously their collections of folktales that come to mind. But the Grimm brothers were also respected teachers, librarians, lexicographers, and scholars known throughout the German states and abroad. Hettinga writes the story of the brothers, born

only a year apart, with their passion for Germanic "household" tales as only one small part. Mostly, this is about Jacob and Wilhelm's devoted relationship to one another (young readers may find their sentiments a bit overwrought) and the political forces that swirled around them and deeply affected how they lived their personal and professional lives. Remarkably, Hettinga makes the Grimms' lives interesting without concentrating on the one element most familiar to children. Although he assures readers that quotes and descriptions are accurate, he provides no individual source notes. More detailed is a list of publications of the Brothers Grimm and bibliographies. The book includes photographs and historical illustrations, and there's a complete list of the tales as well as a time line. The handsome cover art will draw readers into this well-conceived, well-executed biography. *Ilene Cooper*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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**James Gardner:**

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