



MOVIE NIGHTS

FOR TEENS

# THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES

**Rated:** PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 36 minutes

**Starring:** Freddie Highmore as Jared and Simon Grace, David Strathairn as Arthur Spiderwick, Mary-Louise Parker as Helen Grace, Sarah Bolger as Mallory, Joan Plowright as Aunt Lucinda, Nick Nolte as Mulgarath, Seth Rogen as the voice of Hogsqueal, Martin Short as the voice of Thimbletack

**Director:** Mark Waters

**Themes:** Devastation rent by workaholic or disloyal fathers, family conflict, teamwork, trusting others, abandonment, consequence of ignoring warnings, coping with anger,

the challenge of battling an unseen enemy

**Cautions:** About 10 exclamations of “oh my god.” An evil gremlin starts to say the s-word before an explosion turns it to goo. Violent conflict and scenes of peril are intense and a bit graphic, with the siblings getting grabbed, gouged and bloodied by evil creatures out to kill them. A boy stabs his “father” with a knife, aware that it’s really a shape-shifting ogre. Fantasy elements involve enchantment, mythological creatures and alternate dimensions, but except for noting that a charm was placed on an object, the film avoids spells and occult themes.

## Story Summary

*“Do not dare to read this book. For if you take one fateful look, you barter at your life’s expense and face a deadly consequence.”*

Imagine finding that ominous warning attached to an old scrapbook that had been bound up and locked away in a secret room for 80 years. Would the temptation to peruse its weathered pages be too much? It is for Jared Grace. And once he breaks the wax seal and unleashes a mystical force beyond his imagination, it’s up to him, his twin brother (Simon) and their older sister (Mallory) to set things right. They must guard the coveted book—Arthur Spiderwick’s field guide to an unseen world right outside their door—by battling vicious goblins, a reptilian mole troll and their hideous master, a shape-shifting ogre bent on seizing the book and using its secrets to annihilate everyone.

The adventure begins when the Grace family moves into the creepy old home of Aunt Lucinda, who has been institutionalized. A ring of toadstools encircles the house. They find salt on the windowsills, as well as stockpiles of honey and tomato sauce in the kitchen. Strange place. But they’re too distracted by internal squabbles to think much of it. As the children snipe at each other, Jared fans flames of discontent with a sullen attitude and deep-seated anger toward his mother, whom he blames for their broken home, unaware that Dad left them all for another woman.

Then Jared hears something scurrying *inside* the wall. It’s Thimbletack, an excitable critter charged with protecting the book. Lucinda’s father, Arthur Spiderwick, spent his life compiling. Indeed, before being swept off to a heavenly dimension, Spiderwick discovered a culture of sprites, fairies and hobgoblins living in the woods. He studied them obsessively, chronicling the rules of their world until he realized that the ogre Mulgarath could use those secrets for dastardly ends. But Arthur couldn’t bring himself to destroy his life’s work. So it became Thimbletack’s chore

to keep the book out of evil hands, safe within the charmed perimeter of toadstools that serves as a force field around the house.

But Jared has *read* the book. And now the enemy knows where it is.

Gnashing, clawing goblins waste no time targeting the children, who use a special spyglass to see their otherwise invisible foes (that is until a friendly, bird-munching hobgoblin named Hogsqueal spits in their eyes, opening them to the enchanted realm). Mallory’s fencing skills come in handy for self-defense. The peril feels real and genuinely scary at times. And while no humans die, their attackers leave deep gashes and teeth marks. Indeed, the stakes are high in *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, a borderline PG-13 in the *Gremlins-meets-Jumanji* tradition. But that’s oddly appropriate considering the film’s primary metaphor: A father’s abandonment leaves his family vulnerable and scarred, and infidelity is not a victimless crime. The film’s least subtle moment involves Mulgarath climactically entering the house disguised as Dad, which doesn’t fool Jared. The boy’s eyes are opened on multiple levels. Armed with the truth, he stabs the monster, which flies into a rage and chases him onto the roof before meeting its doom.

Jared and his siblings aren’t the only ones with unresolved father issues. Arthur Spiderwick himself, while not technically unfaithful, was a workaholic so consumed with compiling his field guide that it literally swept him away from his little girl. In a touching denouement, he returns after 80 years apart from his daughter, Lucy, to apologize (“I was so captivated by all the magical creatures that I lost sight of the one I had”). But he can’t stay. So she asks to go back with him and, restored to her 6-year-old form, departs with her daddy to make up for lost time.

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### Before You Watch

Take your family to a large park or field for a fun competition. Divide into teams, each designating one member as the “seeker.” This person will be blindfolded and guided—strictly with verbal cues—toward an object (flag, ball, cone, etc.) placed in the field. Each team shouts instructions to help its blindfolded seeker be the first to reach the prize. Give everyone a turn as the seeker. This game will test your communication skills and challenge the seeker to trust others when blinded (like the Grace children must do before their eyes are opened to their invisible enemy).

**Bible Bookmarks** Ex. 21:17; Num. 22:21-34; Psalm 68:4-5; Prov. 3:5-6, 14:16-17, 15:1, 21:23; Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Eph. 4:26-27 and 31-32, 6:1-3 and 10-13; 1 Tim. 1:13-14; James 1:26, 27

### Talking Points

**1** Ironically, the family’s name is Grace. Discuss the dictionary definition of *grace*, as well as how it’s used in Romans 5:17, 1 Timothy 1:13-14 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Cite examples of how Mom and the kids could have shown more grace to each other early in the film amid stress and upheaval. Is someone you know going through challenges that could be eased by extra grace from you?

**2** Jared ignores the warning not to open the book. He immediately regrets it. The consequences pile up, getting more and more devastating. Have you ever ignored a warning and suffered fallout? If so, when? Did you assume you could avoid paying a price for your actions? Why? And what did you learn from your mistake?

**3** Arthur Spiderwick’s life was consumed with compiling the book, which he couldn’t bring himself to destroy. As a result his family suffered—not just his immediate family, but also relatives in future generations. How is Arthur like workaholic parents who put jobs, hobbies or other pursuits ahead of their children? Do you know people like Lucy who have suffered emotionally from a missing dad? How do Psalm 68:4-5 and James 1:27 apply to situations like these?

**4** If someone were to share the gospel with Jared, Simon and Mallory by describing God as their “Heavenly Father,” how do you think they’d respond? Why? Why is it helpful to know someone’s circumstances before witnessing to them? Ask, “In light of the Grace family’s situation, what might be a *better* way to describe God to them?”

**5** With which character do you identify most? Why?

**6** Talk about the symbolic significance of Mulgarath morphing into Jared’s dad. How does Mulgarath’s selfishness devastate the Grace home *physically* much the way their father’s infidelity and abandonment damaged it *emotionally*? What does it take for the family to emerge victorious?

**7** Whether in the midst of a family crisis (like the Graces) or at a spiritual level, we need to be aware of invisible foes or challenges in order to deal with them effectively (Eph. 6:10-13, Num. 22:21-34). Do you think characters in the film who *could* see the creatures were frustrated trying to share their perspective with those who *couldn’t*? How so?

**8** Now imagine how it must have felt to be the one under attack and blind to the truth. How did Mallory behave differently before and after Jared tossed her the seeing stone? How did Jared’s ability to deal with his father’s disloyalty change once he had all the facts? Is there a lesson there for your life? Have you ever struggled to work through a situation, only to learn something later that made everything clearer and easier to deal with? Talk about that. Also, be encouraged by Proverbs 3:5-6 and the knowledge that God *always* has all of the facts.

**9** How are Jared and Thimbletack kindred spirits in their struggle to control anger? For a biblical view of anger read Proverbs 14:16-17, 15:1 and Ephesians 4:26-27 and 31-32. Is this a challenge for you?

**10** How did you feel when Jared lashed out at his mother, blaming her for their problems and saying he hated her? Soon after, his words haunted him and he regretted being so cruel. Look at how harshly the ancient Israelites dealt with disrespect toward parents (Ex. 21:17) and how God wants children to treat their moms and dads (Eph. 6:1-3). See how Proverbs 21:23 and James 1:26 address the need to be careful with our words.

### Follow-Up Activity

Stroll through your own backyard or a nearby park together, sharing conversation as you enjoy God’s creation. You may not find fairies or sprites, but you can explore the hidden world right outside your door. While you’re at it, take advantage of online field guides tailored to your area, such as the ones available at [enature.com/fieldguides](http://enature.com/fieldguides).

### Just for Fun

Freddie Highmore’s mother, Sue Latimer, also serves as his agent. While it’s not uncommon for the parents of young stars to represent them, she works with other actors too, including Harry Potter himself, Daniel Radcliffe.

—by Bob Smithouser