



The Best of John Bellairs: The House with a Clock in Its Walls; The Figure in the Shadows; The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring

John Bellairs

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The House with a Clock in Its Walls; The Figure in the Shadows and The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring are three magically eerie tales gathered in this one-volume edition. The series opens as Lewis Barnavelt, a newly orphaned ten-year-old, comes to live with his Uncle Johnathan. Little does Lewis know that Uncle Johnathan and his next-door neighbor, Mrs. Zimmerman are witches. Lewis finds that he himself owns magical powers, and soon is thrust in a supernatural battle between good and evil. The second tale focuses on Grampa Barnavelt's old coin. Lewis thinks the coin is an amulet, but when he starts to wear it around his neck, bizarre things start to happen - and not all of them good. The last tale shifts the focus to thirteen-year-old Rose Rita, who is embittered because she cannot go to camp like Lewis. so Mrs. Zimmerman offers Rita an adventure of her own. But when a magical ring disappears, Rita gets more of an adventure than she bargained for. John Bellair's vivid characterization and and excruciatingly suspenseful plots make this series a thrilling ride!

The Best of John Bellairs: The House with a Clock in Its Walls; The Figure in the Shadows; The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring Details

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From Reader Review The Best of John Bellairs: The House with a Clock in Its Walls; The Figure in the Shadows; The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring for online ebook

Karissa says

I was absolutely obsessed with everything by John Bellairs when I was in the 10-11 year old age range. Being that the movie “A House With a Clock in its Walls” is supposed to release soon, I thought I would go back and give this childhood favorite a re-read. Honestly this was a bit disappointing; this story and book just didn’t hold up very well over time for me. This is one of those childhood favorites I kind of wish I hadn’t gone back and re-read.

I was a bit disappointed on how much of the story focuses on Lewis and him struggling to keep his “friend” interested in him. There is lots of talk about baseball (which I had forgotten about) and a lot of discussion of history which was okay. In the end though the majority of this story is fairly...well...boring.

I did still enjoy the mystery behind the ticking in the old house Lewis moves in to. I was also impressed by the magic in this book and how dark and mysterious it is. I think if you took out all the weird catering of Lewis to a boy who obviously didn’t like him and all the strange baseball references; this could make a pretty good movie.

Overall this is one I wish I hadn’t re-read. My childhood memories of it were much better than the actual book itself. I wouldn’t really recommend to modern middle grade aged readers. A lot of references and topics in here are fairly dated and the story wasn’t all that exciting.

Stephanie Mohler says

I loved these books when I was a kid- still love them. They’re comforting and creepy. The House With a Clock in its Walls even has illustrations by Edward Gorey- my favorite!

Barb Dixon Palmieri says

I have owned John Bellairs books but have never read them, until now.

This book is a good balance of mystery and horror for children. I would suggest 8-10. While Lewis (the main character) is a rather sensitive child, I’m not sure if this is the best story for a sensitive child. There is wizardry and witchcraft in this book. It isn’t too graphic. For the bulk of this book, Lewis is trying to get his only friend to remain his friend and will try just about anything. This message bothered me and I do wish that had been toned down. Lewis does find that everyone has something to contribute and everything does end up right with the world.

Glenys says

These were some of my favorite books as a child. I think I'd have to consider John Bellairs one of the greatest children's writers ever. The stories are so wonderful and engaging, the characters so full of depth...I still enjoy re-reading them! Bellairs manages so successfully to create a world that children can relate to, one where magic is lurking around every corner (and behind every wall ;)), where good prevails over evil, and the most unsuspecting children end up being the heroes. It's the same sort of world that I remember playing in with my friends for so many hours on end while growing up. These sparked so much inspiration in me growing up, including sparking my interest in learning Latin. I remember the first time I read "The house with a clock in its walls" and how completely drawn in I was. These are certainly stories that I am going to hang on to so I can pass them on to my children :)

Tara says

Yes - a trilogy of kids' stories that I'm 5-starring, but seriously - these stand the test of time for being accessible narratives for kids while not avoiding mature topics of death, evil and of course wizardry. And even in plenty of instances managed to give this 40-something the willies when reading it at night!

J.K. Grice says

I don't really recall the works of John Bellairs when I was a boy, but I found this collection many years ago in a bookstore, and it looked like fun reading. These 3 books are great YA stories, and perfectly engaging for adults as well. I enjoyed the mystery, the characters, and the magic that Bellairs so skillfully brings to the reader.

Andrew says

Saw the movie trailer and it prompted me to revisit this delightful series. Of the three, thought Figure in the Shadows was weakest, but still clipped along.

Stephanie says

These were such well written characters in their awkward pre-teenage years. Lewis was not like the other boys and Rose Rita was "a pretty funny kind of a girl". I loved the friendship between Jonathan & Mrs. Zimmerman and the relationships the kids developed with them. Magic was learned & used in order to defend against evil. The stories were suspenseful and just the right amount of scary. I loved these stories as a kid and enjoyed reading them again as an adult.

Cindy says

The first 3 books in the series, copyright is in the 70s for all 3. The books take place in southern Michigan in the late 40s, early 50s. Lewis comes to live with his uncle after his parents die. His uncle is a magician & his neighbor, Mrs. Zimmerman is a witch. Lewis' best friend is Rose Rita who is a year older than him. These stories have a spooky, paranormal theme. They are appropriate for late elementary age & up. Apparently, the series went on for 12 more books, by different writers. I've only ever read these 3 though.

Augusta says

This review celebrates not just one of John Bellairs books, it is meant to celebrate them all! I found them when I worked in a children's bookstore (long ago) and read them from first to last copy. Afterwards I shelved them until my boys (now men) were ready to read them. the oldest liked them but had other interests bookwise so again they were shelved until the youngest found them and he loved them ! Now it is time for 3 of my grandkids to "discover" them and I will enjoy watching them ...in fact, I may just revisit Johnny , Anthony, Rose Rita myself:)

Tim Susman says

I remember John Bellairs from a long time ago growing up, and was quite pleased to reacquaint myself with his work. I thought of him as YA, but after conversations with friends, I think it's more technically middle-grade; the transition to young-adulthood is what occupies most of the protagonists of these three books collected into one volume.

"The House With a Clock in Its Walls" and "The Figure in the Shadows" follow Lewis Barnavelt as he comes to live with his uncle Jonathan following the death of his parents. The parents' death serves mostly to bring Lewis into this new world, which turns out to be a world of magic. Uncle Jonathan is a parlor magician; his good friend and neighbor Florence Zimmerman is an accomplished witch. Jonathan's house is full of all kinds of magical contrivances, but one of them was put there by the former owner: a ticking clock that will bring about the end of the world. Lewis, in an attempt to use magic to impress a popular boy, inadvertently helps this along and must also attempt to prevent it.

"Figure in the Shadows" follows a similar track, as Lewis now has a best friend, Rose Rita, who is more of a boy than he is, by many standards. A bully has set his sights on Lewis and Lewis feels ashamed that Rose Rita is protecting him, so he seeks out magical help and then, once again, has to undo it.

"The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring" follows Rose Rita and Mrs. Zimmerman during a summer when Rose Rita is worried about growing into girlhood and giving up the tomboyish things she loves so much. Mrs. Zimmerman runs into an old nemesis, and Rose Rita is left on her own to do what she can to save her friend.

All three of these books deal with transitions, whether from one life to another or from one stage of childhood to another. Lewis and Rose Rita both struggle with what they want to do versus what they feel they should do or will be expected to be like, and though Jonathan and Mrs. Zimmerman serve as examples

of people who have defied all of society's expectations, the children must work out their issues for themselves. The characters are wonderful and vibrant in Bellairs' work, and the setting and magic are terrifically engaging. He manages to create genuinely frightening images and beautifully grotesque decorations for his worlds.

Quirky characters and wonderful magic are enough to recommend this book to anyone who likes good MG stories, or good dark magic.

Ken says

This edition includes the first three books of the Lewis Barnavelt series by John Bellairs.

I picked this YA book up in trade at my favorite used bookstore. I dropped off a bag of books for which they gave me \$125 of store credit. I got this hardcover edition for \$1.25 of that store credit and was out of pocket \$0.18 (\$0.12 tax plus \$0.06 handling fee). I hate to use the cliche, but...WINNING!

This series of stories is set in New Zebedee, Michigan. Lewis Barnavelt is orphaned when his parents are killed in an auto accident. Lewis is sent to live with his quirky Uncle Jonathon who, despite his claims of being nothing more than a parlor magician, is actually a fairly talented wizard. With his neighbor Florence Zimmerman (who is also a witch) and his best friend Rose Rita, the group face several dark-themed adventures.

The three books included in this edition:

The House with a Clock in Its Walls - 4 STARS

The Figure In the Shadows - 3 STARS

The Letter, the Witch, and the Ring - 4 STARS

4 STARS for the collection, favorited

Taty Igidbashian says

I chose this book because the cover caught my eye and the title seemed interesting. Basically, it's about a boy named John Bellairs and he goes and visits his uncle who is rich and they travel to a place called New Zebedee and in that house are clocks in the walls. They don't know a first where the ticking was coming from and John hears it. I thought the author's writing style was very descriptive and it made me want to read the whole book in one day. I really would recommend this book to people who are into suspense.

Carrie says

I loved this series as a child and had waited to re-read them with my own child. While they weren't as funny as I remembered, we enjoyed reading them together.

Greg Kerestan says

The paradox of John Bellairs/Brad Strickland and the Lewis Barnavelt series is this: John Bellairs at his best is a better writer than Brad Strickland. However, John Bellairs at his worst is not as good as Brad Strickland. "The House with a Clock in Its Walls" is the best thing Bellairs ever wrote, and it's the first Lewis Barnavelt novel. However, after that point it seems that Bellairs's attention all went to the stronger but less iconic Johnny Dixon series, and the Barnavelt stories don't truly pick up again until Strickland begins co-writing and eventually takes over entirely.

Though there are distinct similarities between the two, the Lewis Barnavelt stories are a little more whimsical and adventurous, more likely to delve into adventure with horror accents than horror with adventure accents the way Dixon books do. (Strickland counters this in the last few novels, bringing in direct metafictional references to turn of the century weird fiction by Lovecraft and M. R. James.) Nonetheless, despite books 2 through 5 essentially coasting a bit on the good graces earned by book 1, this series picks up a good bit once Strickland takes the wheel, though it never reaches the highs of "The House with a Clock in Its Walls" again
