



Reading Group Guide for  
*Once Upon a Tim*  
By Stuart Gibbs

**About the Book**

Tim is just a peasant, but he dreams big. He wants more out of life than to grow up to be a woodsman like his father. Unfortunately, the only route to success in the kingdom of Wyld is to be born a prince. Still, Tim is determined. He is brave and clever and always tries to do the right thing—even though he rarely gets the credit for it.

Then news spreads that Princess Grace of the neighboring kingdom has been abducted by an evil stinx, and Prince Ruprecht needs a legion of knights to join him on his quest to rescue her. Tim finally has the lucky break he's been waiting for, the opportunity to change his station in life. And even though he doesn't know how to ride a horse or wield anything more deadly than a water bucket, he's going to do whatever it takes to make sure his dream becomes a reality.

## Discussion Questions

1. As the novel opens, readers discover that while this story includes both a prince and a princess, it's not about them. Instead, they meet Tim, and he immediately shares that he is a peasant and "being a peasant *stinks*." Based on what you learn about peasants in olden times, discuss what makes their lives so difficult.
2. What is your initial impression of Tim? What about Belinda, Ferkle, Ruprecht, and Nerlim? Are there ways in which these characters surprised or disappointed you?
3. Though it is not his choice, Tim reveals that the only clothes he owns are the ones he's been wearing for two years. If you had to pick and wear the same specific things each day, what would you choose and why? In what ways are you luckier than Tim?
4. Tim shares that there are *many* things worse than going to school. Consider the list of tedious tasks he offers. (Chapter 3) Which of these do you find to be the worst and why?
5. In *Once Upon a Tim*, readers learn that while all peasants have a terrible life where they mostly focus on survival, there are some differences in opportunities for males and females. How are the expectations and gender roles different for Tim than they are for Belinda?
6. For most people in "olden times" (what we might refer to as the Middle Ages), an individual's fate was believed to be set. How do Tim and Belinda prove that despite that belief, it's still possible to find ways to change their fate or choose what happens to them in the future?
7. Tim, Belinda, Ferkle, and the other peasants live in a system of government in which the royalty of the kingdom of Wyld (King and Queen Goodheart and their son, Prince Ruprecht) are in charge. Why is this problematic? What are some of the signs that the king and queen aren't very smart or good leaders? Can you think of examples of good leadership in *Once Upon a Tim*?
8. While discussing her capture and the belief that the stinx is dangerous, Princess Grace tells them, "You can't believe everything you hear." Do you agree? Are there things that look scary, but really aren't? Can you think of any examples from real life?
9. Belinda tells Princess Grace, "Let me get this straight . . . You could have rescued yourself at any time, but you stayed because society has taught you to wait for a man to come and save you?" (Chapter 15) Why is it so important that Belinda helps Grace learn that women can do anything that men can?
10. Given what you learn from *Once Upon a Tim*, what makes Ruprecht and Nerlim so disappointing?
11. In what ways is Ferkle more than he appears?
12. In what ways is this story about hope for Tim, Belinda, Ferkle, and even Princess Grace, in

spite of the difficulties they encounter?

## **IQ Booster Vocabulary Activities**

*Once Upon a Tim* is filled with big vocabulary words that are fun to learn and use, and that make the story more engaging. Use the following activities to help readers practice using and learning these words so they can sound like geniuses too.

### **Vocabulary Relay**

Print out IQ Booster words from *Once Upon a Tim* on one set of cards (copy this set a few times) and definitions, context, or sentences (fill-in-the-blank) in which they could be used on another set (just one set).

Mix up the words in a pile in the middle of the floor, and jumble up the definitions, context, and sentences to keep with you. Break students into teams of four or five.

Call out the definition/context/sentence and give students some think time (8–10 seconds) to talk about what word it might be.

After the discussion time, call out “Word!” One member from each team runs to the center and tries to find the word in the pile. Consider having multiple sets of the words so more than one team can get it. Check to make sure they’re correct, and then discuss it briefly before the next round.

### **Vocabulary Bingo**

After the group has learned at least twenty-five different vocabulary words from *Once Upon a Tim*, bingo is a great option that students love to play that will provide a great opportunity to review. Students simply write a vocabulary word from the novel in each space of their bingo card (you’ll need to create a template). Use review and discussion of *Once Upon a Tim* to provide the definition of one of the words and have the students find the vocabulary word and cover it with a bingo chip. The first player to get five in a row, four corners, or blackout (when every spot on the card is filled) wins the game.

### **Picture This: Vocabulary Word Draw**

Drawing detailed pictures of a word’s meaning is another powerful tool to help students learn, understand, and retain a new vocabulary word. Choose the six words prior to making copies, or ask the students to choose the six trickiest words.

### **Act It Out: Vocabulary Word Performance**

Instead of making drawings that depict a word, students use their actions to help create a meaningful connection to the word. Offer students a chance to perform as a group or one at a time in front of the class for the others to guess the vocabulary word and write it down.

## **Additional Extension Activities**

### **1. Design a Dwelling**

In *Once Upon a Tim*, readers get to explore medieval homes that are magnificent or incredibly modest (including the stinx's cave). Tim offers a detailed description of his family's home (chapter 1), and Belinda's hut is likely very similar. Given what is learned about these characters from the novel, select one of them and design a dwelling they deserve. Dwellings can be created on paper. To extend the project, consider 3D models using shoeboxes, paper rolls, craft paper or paint, glue, and a lot of imagination!

### **2. Choose Your Own Adventure: Create a Quest**

Though the journey to save Princess Grace is perilous for Tim, Belinda, and Ferkle, it's also one filled with thrilling adventures. Drawing inspiration from their experiences, work with a small group to create an original quest. Be sure to determine who your characters are, what the goal or prize is, what the biggest obstacles are, and what surprises you might find along the way. As a bonus feature, create an original map of your setting similar to that offered in chapter seven.

### **3. Make a Mythical or Menacing Monster**

Throughout *Once Upon a Tim*, readers encounter Tim's fr-dog, as well as several fantastical monsters along with some scary ones while on the journey to find and rescue Princess Grace. Whether it's bloodthirsty butterflies, gargantuan grasshoppers, elephantine earwigs, Brobdingnagian bees, a sea serpent, or a pair of terrible trolls, these creatures strike fear in Tim and the others on the quest. Ask readers to work independently or with a partner and use their vast imaginations to create an original monster, being sure to offer a description and features that make the creature fierce. As an added activity, have them draft an original story featuring their monster.

### **4. Create a Comic**

*Once Upon a Tim* is filled with delightful illustrations by Stacy Curtis. Using Stacy's illustrations as inspiration, select a favorite scene from the novel and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic for that scene. Use either a digital comic strip creator (<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/>) or a printable comic book storyboard sheet (found online) to begin to design the storyboards for their selected scene.

*This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an associate professor in the Library Science Department in the College of Education at Sam Houston State University. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.*

*This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes. For more Simon & Schuster guides and classroom materials, please visit [simonandschuster.net](http://simonandschuster.net) or [thebookpantry.net](http://thebookpantry.net).*