

# Talking about *The Princess and the Goblin*

by George MacDonald · the free ebook lives at [youngreaderguide.org/books/princess-and-the-goblin/](http://youngreaderguide.org/books/princess-and-the-goblin/)

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## Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Which would you rather carry into a dark place: Curdie's pickaxe and a pocketful of made-up rhymes, or Irene's invisible thread?
2. The goblins cannot stand singing. What song would you use on them? Everyone has to actually sing their answer.
3. Jessie Willcox Smith painted eight pictures for this book. If your family could hang one on the wall, which one?

## The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Irene promises Curdie a kiss for walking her home, and her nurse refuses to allow it — so Irene tells her king-papa the whole thing, and he backs the promise. Irene says a princess must keep her word. Is a promise still a promise when the person you made it to isn't there to collect? What's the smallest promise anyone at this table has gone to real trouble to keep?
2. The night Irene runs from the goblin creatures, the thread doesn't lead her home — it leads her into the mountain, straight toward what she's afraid of, and out the other side with Curdie. When has the right way felt exactly backwards to you? How did you know whether to keep going?
3. Irene brings Curdie to the tower to meet her grandmother — and where Irene sees a queen and a fire of roses, Curdie sees a bare attic with a tub and some withered apples. Neither of them is lying. How can two people stand in the same room and see different things? What would it take for Curdie to see it — and is there anything he could do to make it happen faster?
4. The goblins live just under the mountain because, generations back, their ancestors fled the daylight kingdom and its taxes. They've been down there nursing the grudge ever since. Nobody in the book ever asks whether the goblins have a point — so ask it at the table. Do they?
5. The grandmother could keep Irene perfectly safe by keeping her in the tower — instead she gives her a thread and lets her walk into the mountain with it. Why give a child a guide

instead of a wall? Where does your family give threads, and where does it build walls?

## The big *one*

Save it for last.

*Curdie doesn't believe in the grandmother until nearly the end of the book — he needed to touch and see, and Irene believed all along — and the book is gentle with both of them. Who in this family believes easiest, and who needs to touch the thread first? Does a family need both kinds?*

## Do it *together*

**String the grandmother's thread.** One person is the grandmother: take a ball of string and lay a route through the house — under the table, around a chair leg, up the stairs — ending somewhere warm (a lamp lit in a dim room is exactly right). Everyone else takes a turn as Irene: eyes closed, one finger on the thread, following wherever it leads, no peeking ahead. Rule from the book: the thread only works one direction, so no turning back. Trade roles until everyone has laid one and walked one.