

## The bad beginning (Aug 1999)

**Author:**[Snicket, Lemony](#)

**Illustrator:**[Helquist, Brett](#) - ill.

Ages 9-12Fiction 

**Series:**[A series of unfortunate events, 1](#)

**Description:**After **the** sudden death of their parents, **the** three Baudelaire children must depend on each other and their wits when it turns out that **the** distant relative who is appointed their guardian is determined to use any means necessary to get their fortune.

**Book Appeal Terms:**[Definition of Appeal Terms](#)

**Genre:**Humorous stories; Metafiction; Page to screen

**Character:**Exaggerated; Quirky

**Pace:**Fast-paced

**Tone:**Bleak; Darkly humorous; Suspenseful

**Writing Style:**Witty

**Min/Max Grade level:**4 - 7

**Accelerated Reader:** [IL: MG, BL: 6.4, AR Pts: 4](#)

### Booklist:

Books for Youth, Middle Readers: Gr. 4-7. Alas, the poor Beaudelaire children! Violet, Klaus, and baby sister Sunny suffer all sorts of misfortunes, beginning when their parents die in a fire and they become wards of a distant cousin, evil Count Olaf. Author "Lemony Snicket" (a pseudonym, perhaps?) points out in an opening note, "It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing," and then proceeds to recount the story with relish aplenty. The droll humor, reminiscent of Edwin Gorey's, will be lost on some children; others may not enjoy the old-fashioned storytelling style that frequently addresses the reader directly and includes many definitions of terms. But plenty of children will laugh at the over-the-top

satire; hiss at the creepy, nefarious villains; and root for the intelligent, courageous, unfortunate Beaudelaire orphans. ((Reviewed December 1, 1999)) -- Susan Dove Lempke

**Publishers Weekly:**

"If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book." So cautions Snicket, the exceedingly well-mannered narrator of these two witty mock-gothic novels featuring the misadventures of 14-year-old Violet, 12-year-old Klaus and infant Sunny Baudelaire. From the first, things look unfortunate indeed for the trio: a fire destroys their home, killing their parents along with it; the executor of their parents' estate, the obtuse Mr. Poe (with a son, Edgar), ignores whatever the children have to say; and their new guardian, Count Olaf, is determined to get his hands on the Baudelaire fortune. But by using their individual gifts (Violet's for inventing, Klaus's for reading and researching and baby Sunny's for biting) the three enterprising children thwart the Count's plan--for now. The author uses formal, Latinate language and intrusive commentary to hilarious effect, even for readers unfamiliar with the literary conventions he parodies. The peril in which he places the Baudelaires may be frightening (Count Olaf actually follows through on his threats of violence on several occasions), but the author paints the satire with such broad strokes that most readers will view it from a safe distance. Luckily for fans, the woes of the Baudelaires are far from over; readers eager for more misfortune can turn to *The Reptile Room*, for an even more suspenseful tale. Exquisitely detailed drawings of Gothic gargoyles and mischievous eyes echo the contents of this elegantly designed hardcover. Age 9-up. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Cahners Business Information.

**Library Journal:**

Gr 4-6-This series chronicles the unfortunate lives of the Baudelaire children: Violet, 14; Klaus, 12; and the infant, Sunny. In *Bad Beginning*, their parents and possessions perish in a fire, and the orphans must use their talents to survive as their lives move from one disastrous event to another. Surrounded by dim-witted though well-meaning adults, the Baudelaires find themselves in the care of their evil relative, Count Olaf, a disreputable actor whose main concern is getting his hands on the children's fortune.

When Olaf holds Sunny hostage to force Violet to marry him, it takes all of the siblings' resourcefulness to outwit him. Violet's inventive genius, Klaus's forte for research, and Sunny's gift for biting the bad guys at opportune moments save the day. However, the evil Count escapes, only to return in *The Reptile Room* just as the children are settling into a far more pleasant life with their new guardian, Uncle Monty, who is promptly murdered by Olaf and his cohorts. Though the villain escapes again, and beloved Uncle Monty is dead, the children are safe...for now. While the misfortunes hover on the edge of being ridiculous, Snicket's energetic blend of humor, dramatic irony, and literary flair makes it all perfectly believable. The writing, peppered with fairly sophisticated vocabulary and phrases, may seem daunting, but the inclusion of Snicket's perceptive definitions of difficult words makes these books challenging to older readers and excellent for reading aloud.-Linda Bindner, formerly at Athens Clarke County Library, GA Copyright 1999 Cahners Business Information.

**Kirkus:**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* The Baudelaire children--Violet, 14, Klaus, 12, and baby Sunny--are exceedingly ill-fated; Snicket extracts both humor and horror from their situation, as he gleefully puts them through one terrible ordeal after another. After receiving the news that their parents died in a fire, the three hapless orphans are delivered into the care of Count Olaf, who "is either a third cousin four times removed, or a fourth cousin three times removed." The villainous Count Olaf is morally depraved and generally mean, and only takes in the downtrodden yet valiant children so that he can figure out a way to separate them from their considerable inheritance. The youngsters are able to escape his clutches at the end, but since this is the first installment in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, there will be more ghastly doings. Written with old-fashioned flair, this fast-paced book is not for the squeamish: the Baudelaire children are truly sympathetic characters who encounter a multitude of distressing situations. Those who enjoy a little poison in their porridge will find it wicked good fun. (Kirkus Reviews, July 15, 1999)