

## About this book and series

**Title:** *The Sugar House Mystery*

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**Series:** *Butternut Village Mystery Series*

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**Author:** Jay Spenser

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### Description

*The Sugar House Mystery* is the first in a series of high-quality mystery novels for middle readers (ages 8–12). The protagonists are Allie Lopez and her cousin Riley Travis, both eleven years old. Allie and Riley live in Butternut, New Hampshire, a picturesque New England village that is the fictitious venue of this series. Riley is completely at home in the woods; Allie's a city girl whose veterinarian mother has moved back to Butternut following a divorce.

Book length: 21 chapters, 155 pages.

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### Plot elements

*The Sugar House Mystery* takes place at Patterson Lodge, a country estate inherited by successful New York mystery playwright Gray Patterson, who has renovated the house to open it as a bed-and-breakfast inn for mystery fans.

The story opens as Allie and Riley accompany Allie's veterinarian mother to Patterson Lodge to treat an injured barn owl. Learning that very strange things have been happening at the estate, the children set out to help the beleaguered playwright solve the mysteries surrounding his ancestral home.

In the chapters that follow, Allie and Riley:

- Explore Patterson Lodge and its outbuildings (a barn, a stable, a carriage house, and a sugar house where maple sap is turned into syrup).
  - Follow the clues in an oil painting to discover a will hidden in a secret compartment of the playwright's desk.
  - Research the enigmatic Mississippi riverboat gambler who built Patterson Lodge more than a hundred years before.
  - Find and explore secret passages and hidden rooms within the great house.
  - Escape from an abandoned mine shaft in which they have been trapped by the person behind Patterson Lodge's troubles.
  - Gather the suspects in the estate's parlor to unmask the guilty party.
  - Decipher the will's cryptic verses to discover a fortune in gold.
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### About this series

Set in the present, the *Butternut Village Mystery Series*:

- Is action packed in the best tradition of old-time movie serials.
  - Imparts understandings of different areas of science (in this case, geology).
  - Makes research by the children an exciting part of solving every case.
  - Combines excellent mysteries with large doses of nature, including:
    - *Deep New England woods and their denizens* (chickadees, owls, moose, beavers, bears, bobcats, raccoons, fireflies, snapping turtles, etc.).
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<b>About this series</b> (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <i>Natural wonders and phenomena</i> (wilderness, caves, geology, meteor showers, the Milky Way unspoiled by urban light pollution, and so on).</li><li>■ <i>Outdoor activities</i> (swimming, hiking, canoeing, camping, climbing trees, rock climbing, caving, horseback riding, birding, biking, skiing, skating, participating in archaeological digs, and so on).</li><li>■ Fosters a sense of well-being through portrayals of:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Believable characters with foibles, failings, and challenges.</li><li>■ Realistic interpersonal relationships.</li><li>■ Seasonal New England activities and other enjoyable doings.</li><li>■ A pristine natural environment (safe, friendly woods).</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Audience and appeal</b>	<p>This series is targeted equally at girls and boys between the ages of 8 and 11 (middle readers). Children may read these books for themselves or have them read to them. The fast-paced chapters are sized for bedtime reading.</p> <p>Appeal is enhanced among juvenile readers because this series:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Combines <i>mystery</i>, <i>adventure</i>, and <i>nature</i>—elements all children love.</li><li>■ Avoids negative undercurrents and menacing tones.</li><li>■ Ends each chapter with an event or revelation that sustains interest.</li><li>■ Is universal in its appeal despite its deep New England setting because:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Ethnic diversity is a natural part of every story.</li><li>■ No cultural hegemony or cumbersome accents portrayed.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>About Butternut</b>	<p>Butternut Village is patterned after a real village in the Mt. Monadnock region of New Hampshire. The series factually depicts the inhabitants (human and otherwise), geography, and other aspects of this region. For example, New Hampshire actually has significant gold deposits, as depicted in this story.</p> <p>The butternut tree (<i>juglans cinerea</i>) lends its name to this mystery series and its fictitious venue. With stout, gnarled branches spread wide, the gaunt but graceful butternut contributes to the unique character of New England woods.</p>
<b>New titles</b>	<p>The author, a professional writer, is now finishing a second title (<i>The Phantom Airplane Mystery</i>) and has more than a dozen more story ideas sketched out.</p>
<b>About the author</b>	<p>Jay Spenser is a former assistant curator of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Flight in Seattle. He has written many books of fact and many dozens of feature articles. One of his works of history won the highest award in its category in national competition from the Society for Technical Communication (STC). Another book, which he ghostwrote, was a bestseller. Jay lives in Seattle with his wife, son, and daughter. Today an aviation historian and aerospace writer, he spent much of his childhood in New Hampshire and loves writing for children.</p>

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**Note:** This mystery series and a complementary copy of this first title are available on request to interested publishers. I'm also seeking an illustrator for a possible collaboration. Thanks. *Jay*