


# Understanding words – 1

Words are the building blocks we use to communicate with others. It is important that we understand what they mean and that we know some ways to work out their meanings in different sentences.

Read the recount.

## The case of the Cottingley fairies

1. In July 1917, in the village of Cottingley, England, 10-year-old Frances Griffiths slipped and fell into a stream in her back garden, soaking her dress. When her mother scolded her for being careless, Frances said that she and her cousin, 16-year-old Elsie Wright, had become distracted while playing with fairies. Frances's mother sent her straight to her bedroom for giving such a ludicrous excuse. Frances was so upset that Elsie suggested they take a photograph of the fairies to prove her story. The girls soon persuaded Elsie's father, Arthur Wright, to lend them his camera and they disappeared off into the garden to take a photograph.
2. Later, Arthur developed the photograph in his darkroom and saw a picture of Frances with a group of tiny winged creatures dancing around her. Elsie claimed these were fairies, but her father took little notice. A few months later, the girls borrowed the camera again and this time took a photograph of Elsie with a dancing gnome-like creature. The girls both gave their word that the photographs were real, but Arthur was angry and refused to let them use the camera again.
3. A few years later, Elsie's mother brought the photographs to the attention of a photographic expert, Edward Gardner. He announced that they were genuine. He was certain they had not been tampered with in any way to create the fairy images. In August 1920, he took his own camera to Cottingley and asked the girls to take more photographs. They soon produced three more images containing fairies. Gardner showed these to a number of people, including the author of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, Arthur Conan Doyle. Doyle, a firm believer in supernatural beings, was convinced the photographs were real. He wrote two magazine articles about his belief in the fairies and the photographs soon became famous. There were many sceptics, but also a wealth of believers. The photographs became the topic of numerous heated debates.
4. For more than 60 years, Frances and Elsie were interviewed about the photographs, but they gave evasive answers to any direct questions. However, in the early 1980s, they finally confessed to their hoax. The fairies were paper cut-outs which Elsie had traced from a children's book. The girls had then used hatpins to hold each cut-out in position. However, Frances insisted up until her death in 1983 that she really had played with fairies in her back garden and that one of the photographs was valid.