



SHOESTRING OPERA

presents...

Hansel and Gretel



• STUDY GUIDE •

Discussion Questions • Classroom Activities • Background
Written by Molly Thom • Assisted by Anne Rankin

Graphic Design by Krista Donnelly www.kdonnellydesign.carbonmade.com

Table of Contents

Introducing Shoestring Opera's Hansel and Gretel	3
Introducing the Characters.....	3
Introducing the Fairy Tale	4
The Brothers Grimm	
Other Versions	
Introducing the Opera	5
The Voices and Instruments.....	6
The Composer.....	6

EXPLORING THE THEMES

Being Frightened	7
Solving Problems	7
Sibling Rivalry	7
Disobedience	7
Acknowledging Differences	8
The Witch.....	8
The Difference between Fantasy and Reality	8
Halloween.....	9

EXPLORING THE ARTS

Music	9-12
More about the Cello.....	13
Art	13

ACTIVITY PAGES.....	14-15
----------------------------	--------------

SHOESTRING OPERA.....	16-17
------------------------------	--------------



WWW.SHOESTRINGOPERA.COM

To book: Prologue to the Performing Arts
info@prologue.org • www.prologue.org • 888-591-9092

Introducing Shoestring Opera's *Hansel and Gretel*

Hansel and Gretel live with their single mom next door to a very strange lady who practices night and day on a cello. They wonder why is she always sweeping her front porch. Who knows? “She might be a witch, with an awful twitch, who rides the air with a broomstick switch!” Thoroughly spooked, the children fall asleep and wake up to a wild roller-coaster ride through the land of the fairy tale, complete with a wondrous gingerbread house and a crazy old witch—who plays the cello!

- This is a new version of a very old story, as well as a new version of an old opera.
Who knows the fairy tale where it all began?



Character
Education



Drama



Language



Music



Social
Studies



Visual
Arts

Introducing The Characters

- Hansel, a younger brother who teases and pesters his sister
- Gretel, his older sister, a well-behaved little girl
- Anne, their next-door neighbor who plays the cello
- The crazy old witch



See student activity pages 14-15.



- Introduce bits of dialogue from each character, ask the children to decide what they learn about the story and the characters from these selections.
- Ask the children to imagine what these characters look and sound like. Keep a record for post- show discussion



Introducing The Fairy Tale

Hansel and Gretel is a very old story. In one of the original versions (written by the **Brothers Grimm**) Hansel and Gretel are a young brother and sister who get lost in the forest and are threatened by a child-eating witch living in a house made of cake and candy. The two children save their lives by outsmarting the witch.



Who knows the fairy tale?

- Have the children who know the fairy tale tell it in detail.
- The teacher can begin the story and have the children add what happens next.

Who are the Brothers Grimm?

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were German professors who together specialized in collecting and publishing folklore during the 19th century. They were among the best-known storytellers of folk tales, and popularized stories such as *Cinderella*, *The Frog Prince*, *The Goose-Girl*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Rapunzel*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Snow White*. Their first collection of folk tales was published in 1812.



Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in an 1843 drawing by their younger brother Ludwig Emil Grimm



- Have the students tell some of these other Grimm's fairy tales.



- What do fairy tales teach us? Discuss.



Other versions of the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale:

The fairy tale may have originated in the Middle Ages during the Great Famine (1315–1321), which caused desperate people to abandon their young children to fend for themselves.

There are many other old European tales about children outwitting ogres. *Hansel and Gretel* is like both *Charles Perrault's Hop-o'-My-Thumb* (1697) and *Madame d'Aulnoy's Clever Cinders* (1721), in which abandoned children find their way home by following a trail. In *Clever Cinders*, the heroine burns up a giant by shoving him into an oven just as Gretel does to the witch. A house made of candy is found in a 14th-century manuscript about the *Land of Cockayne*.

A Russian folk tale exists in which the evil stepmother (also the wife of a poor woodcutter) asks her hated stepdaughter to go into the forest to borrow a light from her sister, who turns out to be Baba Yaga, a child-eating witch.





- What other stories do you know about ogres or witches?
- What other stories do you know about children who are lost?



What do these stories have in common?

- Children who are in danger
- Children who cleverly get out of danger
- Worries about food
- A mother or stepmother who wants to avoid hunger
- A witch who lures children to eat her house of candy so that she can then eat them
- How is Shoestring Opera's version different from the Grimm's fairy tale?

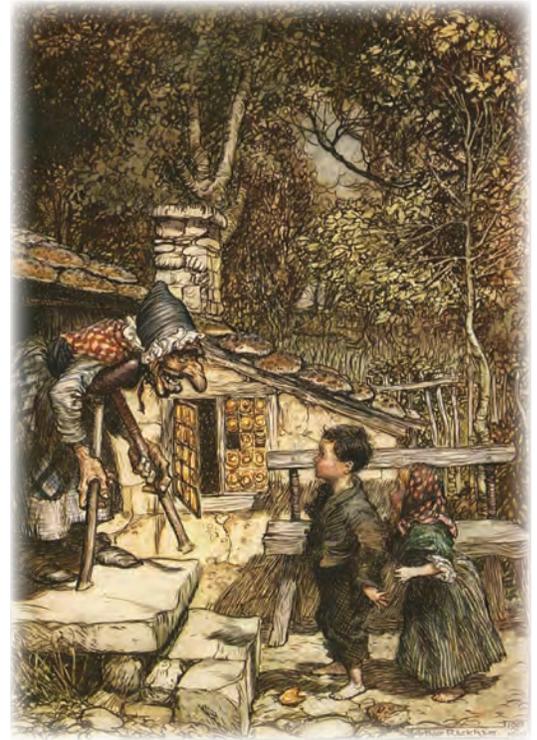


Illustration by Arthur Rackham, 1909



Introducing The Opera

What is an Opera?

It is a story that is sung. It differs from a play in that the music and singing carry us to a place of high emotion that words alone cannot reach.



- Give the students the lines of dialogue (see pages 14-15) and have them sing them aloud as they think the voices might sound. **Note:** Have fun with this exercise and let them exaggerate as much as they like; this is a great way to get all the biases about Opera out in the open and get all the self-consciousness over with.



Introducing The Voices and Instruments of Shoestring Opera



The human voice is the oldest musical instrument in the world. Shoestring Opera's two principal singers have trained their voices for many years so that they can sing loudly without the use of microphones, sing softly but still be heard in a large space, and do many special things with their voices that untrained singers can't do. Gretel sings in a high voice and is a **soprano**. Hansel sings in a lower voice and is a **baritone**. Our cellist, *Anne Rankin*, has also studied voice and now makes her debut singing, playing and acting the famous role of The Witch.

The **cello** is a musical instrument with four strings and is played with a bow or sometimes plucked. It is a member of the strings family, like the violin, viola, double bass and guitar. Listen for the difference in sound when the cello player plucks her instrument with her fingers instead of using her bow. This is called *pizzicato*. Normally a cellist sits on a chair to play. When Shoestring Opera's cellist turns into a witch, she can magically move around with her cello attached to her!

The **piano** is a member of the **percussion** family even though it has strings like a cello. Little hammers inside the piano strike the piano strings to make them sound. Shoestring Opera's pianist will probably perform on an electric keyboard, which is easier to transport than a real piano. Pianists study and practice for many years to be able to move all ten fingers both together and separately at slow and super fast speeds, quietly and very loudly.



Introducing the Composer

ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK (1854 – 1921) produced his first musical composition at the age of seven. His parents disapproved of his plans for a career in music and encouraged him to study architecture, but he persisted in his determination to be a composer. Humperdinck's reputation rests chiefly on this well-loved fairy tale opera, *Hansel and Gretel*.



Exploring the Themes



Being frightened:

- What's the scariest dream you have ever had? Tell. Write. Or Draw.
- What makes you really frightened? Tell and draw



Solving problems:

- Have you ever been lost? Tell. Write.
- Make a board game: you are lost and have to get home
- What obstacles do you encounter along the way?
- What do you need to do to avoid/overcome them?



Illustration by Ludwig Richter, 1842



Sibling rivalry: *“You prod and you poke and you pull on my hair”*

- Do you have a brother or sister?
- How do you get along?
- Do you prod, poke, pull hair, pinch, hit or just tease? Be honest.
- What is it like to be the younger/older? Plus and minus



Disobedience: *“That’s not what Mummy told us to do!”*

- Hansel and Gretel disobey their mother.
- What happens to them because they disobey?
- What happens when you disobey your parents?

Acknowledging differences:



The witch:

- Why do the children imagine their neighbor is a witch?
- Do you know someone who is really different from your parents/teachers?
- Have you ever thought someone was very strange and later discovered they were nice?



The difference between fantasy and reality:

Circle Time Activity: Hansel and Gretel dream about being lost in the forest and finding the gingerbread house and the witch. Their dream echoes things that have happened to them in real life. What are the connections? For example: they get lost when they run away from the next door neighbor and have to ask how to find their way home; in their dream they are lost in the forest.

REALITY

DREAM

1. Cello bow

2. Halloween candy

3. Next-door neighbour

4. Cuckoo clock



Answers: upside down—1. Witch's magic wand 2. Gingerbread house
3. Wicked witch 4. Bird in the forest.



Halloween:

Shoestring Opera's *Hansel and Gretel* takes place on Halloween, and the children are preparing to go out trick or treating:

- What is the most favourite costume you've ever worn?
- Draw a picture of yourself in costume
- Do you ever do tricks for your treats? Describe your trick. Or...
- Do a trick for your class.

Exploring the Arts



Music: Cuckoo

- Hansel and Gretel sing this song when they are lost in the forest. Learn it and sing it with your class. A duet part can be played on the recorder by the older students, or sung by students or the teacher.

"I love the part where Hansel and Gretel follow the sound of the cuckoo through the forest. I like how the sound of the cuckoo sits on top of the rest of the music."





Cuckoo: Duet for Classroom Choir and Recorder

Lyrics Adapted by Mark Brownell
Music by Englebert Humperdink
Music Arranged by Doug Price

Moderato *

Recorder

Hansel/Gretel (unison)

Piano

Cuc - koo Cuc - koo

Cuc - koo knows the way back home.

mp

*

B^b G

3

Rec.

H./G.

Pno.

Let us fol - low him and go!

Cuc - koo Cuc - koo

5

Rec.

H./G.

Pno.

Tell me cuc - koo show what you know.

Cuc - koo Cuc - koo

7

Rec.

H./G.

Pno.

Lead us friend we won't be too slow.

Cuc-koo Cuc-koo

Dance with Me

Lyrics Adapted by Mark Brownell
Music By Engelbert Humperdink

♩=100 Allegretto

Gretel

Han - sel come and dance with me, watch me now on count of three,

Piano

5

G.

right foot first, left foot then, turn a-round and back a - gain.

Pno.

- Sing this song! Dance to it!
Make up your own steps and then jazz it up!

Jamie come and dance with me

Slap your hands against your knee

Click your heels, touch your toes,

Grab my hands and round she goes





More About the Cello

Shoestring Opera's cellist turns into a magical singing, dancing, cello-playing Witch.

- How to pronounce cello? It starts with ch and rhymes with jello. CHELL-O.

The cello has a deep voice, sometimes compared to the human voice. It can also play very high, fast notes, almost as high as a violin can play.

For a youtube teacher demonstration and introduction to the cello, click on/type:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo6mVTjbZTI

Would you like to listen to some cello music?

Hush is an album by Bobby McFerrin (improvisational singer/sound-effects performer) and cellist *Yo-Yo Ma*, which showcases music from Vivaldi through Jazz in a hip and fun way. Watch a You Tube video of them performing together:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=akix5lj1k6c



Photo source: Wikipedia



Art:

- Build a miniature gingerbread house: out of cardboard, plasticene, popsicle sticks or other materials.
- Paint the backdrop of the gingerbread house as a class project. We will use it for our performance at your school! It can be painted on an old sheet (single bed size). Please let us know ahead of time (info@shoestringopera.com) if you would like us to incorporate it in our performance.
- Draw a portrait of the witch and send it to Shoestring Opera. Our contact information can be found at the end of this Study Guide.



"Actually, I feel sorry for the witch. She's just hungry. It's not her fault that all she can eat is little children."

—Spencer, age 9

Activity Pages



"Hocus Pocus"

- Cast a spell: I'm going to turn you into a... (a squirrel, a monster, a pirate, a crying baby etc).

Child A casts the spell.

Child B must obey and perform until stopped.

Child C will break the spell? But how?



"Now you Hansel move real slow"

Child A is the witch Child B is Hansel Child C is Gretel

- Child A: Make Child B stop in his tracks and then do whatever you order, (drag one foot, walk on all fours, dance on hot coals, do a somersault etc)
- Child C steals the Witch's wand and stops the spell



Singing and acting

- Who says/sings the following?
- Make up a song and sing the lines yourself
- Make up some actions to go with each song

1. Brother little brother you're driving me mad
You're the meanest brother that I've ever had
You prod and you poke and you pull on my hair
Why do you continue like you do not care?
2. Nibble nibble mousey, Who's nibbling at my housey?



3. Sister little sister what are we to do? I'm so very hungry that I'd eat my shoe
I'd chew on the laces, I'd munch on the heel
Just to fill my tummy and have a square meal.
4. She might be a witch with an awful twitch
Who rides the air with a broomstick switch!
5. Hocus pocus cello bow
Move not, speak not, now you know
Stuck like glue you cannot move
Feel my magic music groove!
6. With one little push — Splash
Then the lid — Smash!
Hans and Gretel now will be — free as can be!
Hurray!



Shoestring's Hansel and Gretel

Music by Engelbert Humperdinck

Musical Arrangements by Doug Price

Libretto by Mark Brownell

French translation Dominique Denis

Directed and dramaturged by Molly Thom

Shoestring Opera

Shoestring Opera was established in January 2004 by cellist Anne Rankin with the mandate to bring opera to children in the schools. Its first project, *The Shoestring Magic Flute*, based on Mozart's opera, was written for two singer-actors (baritone and soprano) and two instrumentalists (cello and piano). Canadian playwright Greg Robic wrote the script and arranged the music, and it was dramaturged and directed by Molly Thom. *The Shoestring Magic Flute* has delighted audiences in schools and theatres all over Ontario, has been performed at Harbourfront's Carnivalisma Festival and the Music Garden in Toronto, the Montreal Baroque Festival, three times to sold-out audiences at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and sixteen times at the Solar Stage Children's Theatre, Toronto. *Prologue to the Performing Arts* tours *The Shoestring Magic Flute* in two versions, a bilingual version and an all-English version. In 2008 Shoestring Opera developed a second opera for children, an adaptation of Puccini's comic opera Gianni Schicchi entitled *Bozo's Fortune*, with a libretto by Shirley Barrie, and in 2012 a third new opera, *The Schoolyard Carmen*, written by Mark Brownell, performed in English and also in a bi-lingual version, which played an unprecedented 61 performances in its first year of touring. In 2015-16, Shoestring will tour both *The Magic Flute* and our newest opera, *Hansel and Gretel*.

Shoestring Opera is a not for profit organization with charitable status. Shoestring's Hansel and Gretel was developed with the assistance of

www.torontoartscouncil.org



Thank you to our generous donors, your contributions have made the production of Shoestring's Hansel and Gretel possible.

Shoestring Friends:

Jane Smith
Sherri Appell
Margaret Edgar
Daphne Harris
Dominique Denis
Alan and Jane Masters
Mary Wentz
Elon Griffith
Charles Hayter
Pat Cashia
Cindy Newton
Adrian's Shoes

Shoestring Angels:

Oscar Signoretti
Don and Jane Rankin
Brigitte Shim
Harold Rosenberg
Christina Graham and Roy MacDonald

Shoestring Archangels:

The Hon. Henry N.R. Jackman
Mark Quigley

If you would like to write to Shoestring Opera we can be reached at:

info@shoestringopera.com

If you have letters or pictures you would like to mail us we would love to receive them at:



61 The Kingsway
Toronto, Ontario
M8X 2T3

