

Hansel and Gretel

A New Musical Adaptation of the Classic Fairytale



Image from <http://www.scottgustafson.com>

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Study Guide For Teachers and Students

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Hansel and Gretel Study Guide for Teachers

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Notebook files, containing activities included in this study guide, can be downloaded for use on SMARTBoards. These files contain a Venn Diagram, T-Chart, and Crossword Puzzle.

Backgrounder – Fairytales and Folktales

Fairytales and folktales exist throughout the world in many different cultures with a strong oral tradition. Because the tales were originally told out loud, they are different from stories written down by one person. Thus, there are often many versions of fairytales, depending upon the culture in which they are found. However, one constant is that the stories take place in a type of “never-never” land where anything is possible; where heroes and heroines may kill giants, become kings and queens, turn into animals, turn others into animals, etc. Fairytales were not written down until the Brothers Grimm began recording them in the 1800’s. They collected the tales from storytellers, from ordinary people, and from books. It is believed that the brothers are quite faithful in their retelling of the tales told to them.

Because fairytales were originally passed on through oral language, the characters tend to be one-dimensional types as it was difficult to illustrate complicated characters in this manner of transmission. Typically, good characters are innocent and/or clever, while bad characters are very bad or evil. What is of central importance in a fairytale is the clash of opposing forces and how they interact throughout the tale. In these stories, good almost always triumphs in the end and justice is almost always served. Bad characters usually get exactly what they deserve.

Generally, fairytales transcend ethnic and political boundaries with different versions of the same tale found from America to China. Recurring types or traditional plots are used to classify fairytales, exemplified in stories where the true prince or princess is wrongly deprived of his or her station in life, or the hero’s or heroine’s ingenuity is tested. Many of the motifs found in fairytales involve hair and how it was cut off. The character types, motifs, and plots all seem to present archetypes – the emotionally realistic description of universal human experience. Fairytales also appear to be about critical life stages and some people argue that helping children work through their conflicts is one of the fairytale’s most important functions. Those critical of fairytales suggest that they present an unrealistic, fantastical world to children who would benefit more from realistic stories of life and relationships.

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Fairytales and Folktale Resources for Teachers

There are many resources and websites out there. Here are a few of the best websites:

www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm - National Geographic presents 12 tales from the brothers Grimm in their original form. Open the treasure chest to find a map of their journey through Germany. It also has the classic version of Hansel and Gretel and a variety of links and activities.

Hansel gives the top link 5 out of 5 bread crumbs!

www.surlalunefairytales.com – Features forty-four annotated fairy tales, with their histories, cross-cultural tales, and illustrations.

3 out of 5 bread crumbs - too many advertisements

www.grimmfairytales.com/en/main - Interactive, narrated, animated version of several fairy tales (similar to the Hans Christian Anderson site), plus biographical information, games and other fun things.

4 out of 5 bread crumbs. A great site for young and old students alike.

<http://www.hanselandgretel.ca/book-fullscreen/2321-f4-hansel-and-gretel> - The direct link to the animated version of Hansel and Gretel.

4 out of 5 bread crumbs. Don't forget your popcorn, although this site is very corny on its own.

<http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/fairytales.htm> - links to classic fairytales from around the world.

More Grimm and fairy tale links than Gretel has bread crumbs.

<http://en.childrenslibrary.org> - Free on-line modern and classic stories in English and other languages.

5 out of 5 bread crumbs. Take a lesson from Gretel because you can easily get lost in this great site.

The Characters

Hansel:

Unhappy and frustrated with life at home, Hansel yearns for what he feels will be a better life on the other side of the dark forest. He convinces a reluctant Gretel to join him on his journey. Unfortunately, his scheme gets them captured by the Witch. Hansel learns a valuable lesson about home.

Gretel:

Gretel loves her father and brother, and feels torn between the two. She foolishly follows Hansel into the forest in an attempt to improve their lives. When he feels that all is lost she convinces him that a positive attitude will get them back home and change their fortunes.

Father:

In an attempt to provide better parenting for his children, Father foolishly marries a woman who is selfish and self-centered. He allows himself to be content with what he has, and is motivated by his desire to make his children happy.

Stepmother:

Not really a mother at all, perhaps a stepwife. She tries to convince Father that he would be better off without the children. While the Witch brings darkness to the surrounding area, Stepmother brings darkness into the home.

Witch:

The Witch brings darkness to the Forest. She sits in her candy house and waits for unsuspecting children to come her way. Ultimately she is outsmarted by Hansel and Gretel.

Heinrich:

Like Hansel, Heinrich is unable to contain his imagination and decides to leave home for what he perceives will be a better place. His character is lost (literally and figuratively) and although he cannot help himself, he unwittingly provides the key to Hansel and Gretel's escape from the Witch.

The Setting – Once upon a time ...

Hansel and Gretel's home, the Forest, the Witch's house.

Play Overview

Our story begins on the edge of the Black Forest, where the presence of the Witch has turned lush, green life into dark, eternal winter. There is hunger in the Forest, and Hansel and Gretel are in search of food. Although forbidden to enter the Forest, hunger makes Hansel desperate, and he dreams of a better life beyond it.

At Gretel's urging, the children return home to Father, and a new Stepmother, brought into the family to help parent the siblings. This new Stepmother is greedy and self-centered and consumes what little food there is. Resentful at having to share the household food and Father's attention, she leaves. The children are relieved to see her go, but Father misses her company.

Father tries his best to shield the children from their dire circumstances and he carefully concocts a fantasy, involving ancient Japanese secrets and Italian desserts, around the pitiful items he has left to feed his family. They are now forced to live on tree bark, dandelions, and water.

Father is concerned for his children, and brave Gretel tries to comfort her brother and is convinced things will change for the better. Hansel, on the other hand, yearns for a different life and is ready to take action. He convinces Gretel that there are many wonderful things waiting for them on the other side of the Forest. They decide to strike out on their own. Gretel however is still unsure of this path they are taking, and leaves a trail of white pebbles to mark the way back home.

Finally, too exhausted to continue, Gretel stops and challenges Hansel's leadership. She decides to go back home, but discovers the pebbles have disappeared and she is lost. Afraid to continue on her own, she builds a fire and waits for rescue.

In the meantime, Hansel trudges on until he comes upon the flickering light of a fire. Seated at the fire is a strange man who identifies himself as Heinrich. Hansel confesses to Heinrich that he is lost, only to discover that Heinrich had also left his loving home and family to take a grand journey through the Forest and beyond, and is now doomed to wander the Forest under the Witch's spell. He runs away at the sound of a rustling in the bushes, but not before he leaves Hansel with important information about tricking the Witch that will save his life.

The rustling sound turns out to be Gretel, who had abandoned her fire when she heard Heinrich approaching. Ever optimistic, she sings of having a positive attitude, and the need to change your perspective.

They fall asleep together and wake to what seems a dream...a magnificent Candy House. In excitement, they run around tasting all the house's delights, but are surprised by the appearance of a lonely old woman who invites them to lunch. Unknowingly, they have fallen into the hands of the Witch. She feeds them plate after plate of delicious foods, and the children can't seem to get enough.

The Witch invites them to spend the night with promises of leading them out of the Forest in the morning. Gretel is unsure of what to make of this invitation, as she is eager to return to her home and Father, but the Witch convinces them to stay.

As they nestle into the cotton candy bed, they hear a click. Before their eyes, the old lady changes, as does the rest of their surroundings, and too late they realize they are now prisoners.

The children are frightened, and this time it is Hansel who comforts his sister with thoughts of home. But when the Witch confuses Hansel with Gretel, they realize she has very poor eyesight, and are reminded of Heinrich's words.

The next morning, the Witch prepares her oven for a Hansel feast, and wakes up the children. She is met with a strange sight, frozen tree-like shapes in the cage, but no children. Angrily, she pulls out her keys, opens the door, and enters searching for what she can not see. The children slip out, shut and lock the door, and remove the key. The Witch is now imprisoned in her own cage. They run from the house with the Witch's screams echoing into the Forest, and are now able to find their way out.

They are reunited with their Father and discover the only thing they needed all along was each other.

As for the Witch, well, they saw no sign of her again, and the Forest gradually returned to its former lush, green self.



DRESS REHEARSAL

Class Preparation and Activities Prior to the Performance

1. Crossword Puzzle

How well do your students know their fairytales and folktales? Have students work through the crossword independently or in a group. You may want to do it as a whole class activity with younger students.

Project the puzzle and discuss the answers. See if students can identify all the stories represented.

*Note: The crossword puzzle is attached as a Notebook file for use with a SMARTBoard.

2. Read the classic version of Hansel and Gretel

It is important for students to be familiar with the classic version of Hansel and Gretel before viewing the performance.

(Post viewing activities will require that they use this knowledge to make a comparison with the performance version.)

Brainstorm what students know about this fairytale. You will notice that they may come up with different endings about what happened to the witch and the stepmother.

The Grimm brothers' version of the story is quite graphic. You may wish to choose a version that has a kinder, gentler ending. These will be readily available in your school library.

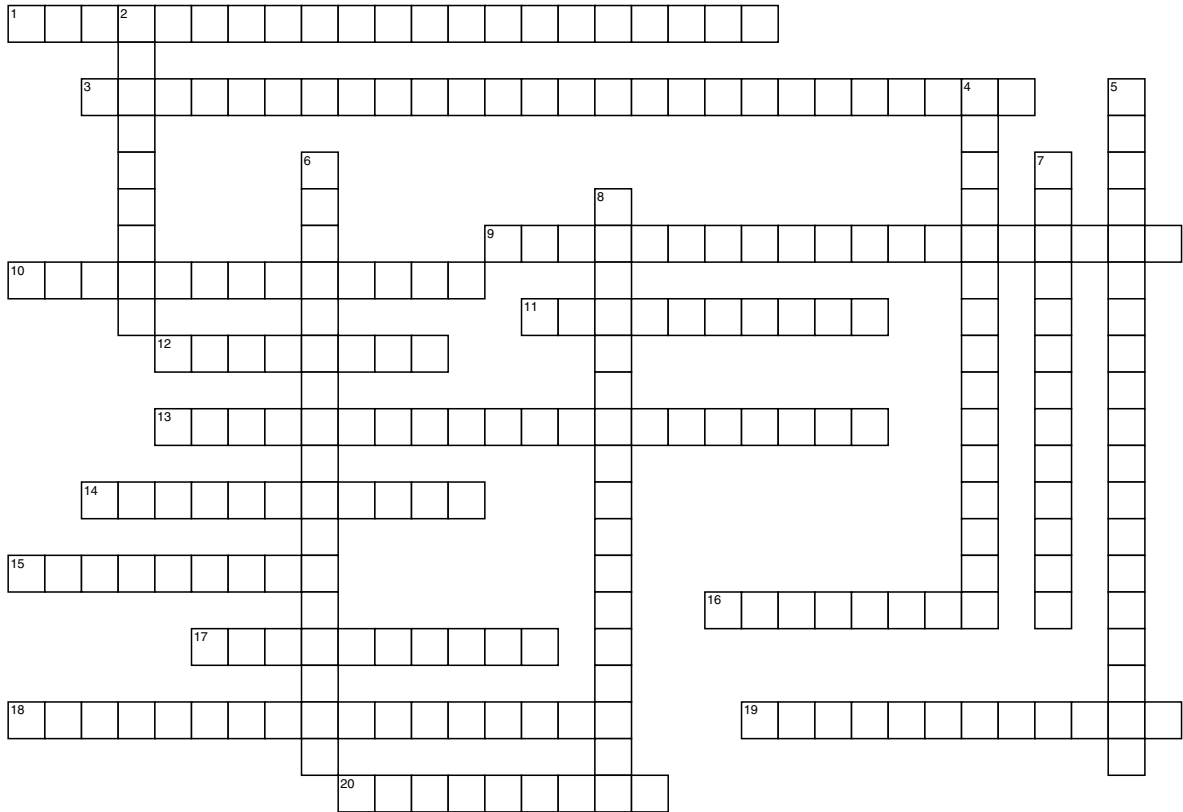
3. Students can be instructed to think about 5 specific ideas from the play.

- a. How is the classic version of Hansel and Gretel similar and different from Alberta Opera's performance?
- b. How did Hansel and Gretel's attitude make a difference to the outcome of the story?
- c. Did Hansel and Gretel follow the rules? If not, which rules did they break and what were the consequences?
- d. How did the children describe the Witch's candy house?
- e. Watch and listen carefully. Can you spot some references to modern-day things that do not belong in a traditional fairy tale? (*Teacher FYI – reference to eBay, GI Joe, Barbie, etc.*)

These ideas are further developed in the section titled Class Activities Following the Performance.

Hansel and Gretel

Can you identify the source of these quotes ?



ACROSS

- 1 "Life itself is the most wonderful fairy tale of all."
- 3 "Who has been sitting in my chair?"
- 9 "But he has nothing on at all," said a little child at last.
- 10 They collected a number of stories and wrote them down.
- 11 'Within the flower, upon the green velvet stamens, sat a very delicate and graceful little girl. She was scarcely as long as a thumb.'
- 12 'When the witch wanted to come in, she stood down below and called out'
- 13 'Under the bridge lives an ugly troll with eyes as big as saucers, and a nose as long as a poker.'

- 14 'The ogre was tricked into becoming a mouse and was eaten.'
- 15 "If you will take care of our house, cook, make the beds"
- 16 "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."
- 17 'Her godmother simply touched her with her wand, and at the same moment, her clothes were turned into cloth of gold and silver, all decked with jewels.'
- 18 "I have scarcely closed my eyes the whole night through. I do not know what was in my bed, something hard under me, and am all over black and blue."

- 19 'His own image; no longer a dark, gray bird, ugly and disagreeable to look at, but a graceful and beautiful swan.'
- 20 Happy, Grumpy, Dopey, Doc, Sneezzy, and Sleepy, and Bashful. Who's missing?

DOWN

- 2 "Mirror, mirror on the wall , who in this land is the fairest of all?"
- 4 "I'll give you three days to guess my name, and if you find it out...."
- 5 "I am going to Bremen, and shall be town-musician there..."
- 6 "I've run away from a little old woman, A little old man,

- A barn full of threshers, A field full of mowers, And I can run away from you, I can!"
- 7 'Many church steeples, piled one upon another, would not reach from the ground beneath to the surface of the water above. There dwell the Sea King and his subjects.'
- 8 "Yes, yes," said the, "my heart is good, but still I am a monster."

Hansel and Gretel

Can you identify the source of these quotes ?

Solution:

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ENCORE

Class Activities Following the Performance

Once Upon a Time

Retelling and comparing the two versions of Hansel and Gretel

Background:

This activity is suitable for all grades.

Activities:

1. Begin this activity with a whole group retelling of the performance version of Hansel and Gretel.
2. Have the class retell the story in their own words. Use a graphic organizer to map their thoughts. Be sure to add a section for the message of the story.
3. Go on to use a comparison organizer (Venn diagram) to determine the similarities and differences between the two versions. This can be done as a class or in small groups depending on the grade level.

Closure:

You may choose to extend this activity by reading some other non-traditional versions of Hansel and Gretel. Here are a few of our favourites:

DeLuise, Dom. *Hansel & Gretel*. New York: Aladdin, c1997.

Gordon, David. *Hansel and Diesel*. New York: HarperCollins, c2006.

Law, Karen. *The Truth About Hansel & Gretel*. London: Franklin Watts, 2003.

Lemke, Donald. *Hansel & Gretel: The Graphic Novel*. Mankato: Stone Arch Books, 2009.

Marshall, James. *Hansel & Gretel*. New York: Dial, 1990.

Moerbeek, Kees. *Diary of Hansel and Gretel*. New York: Little Simon, 2002.

Wick, Walter. *Can You See What I See?: Once Upon a Time*. New York: Scholastic, c2006.

Positive Attitude

Don't be Grimm. Be Happy.

Background:

The power of a positive attitude is a strong message in this version of Hansel and Gretel. In fact, a positive attitude is a small thing that can make a big difference.

Activities:

1. Don't be Grimm. Be happy. Discuss what it means to have a positive attitude.
2. Questions for discussion. Have the students think about the attitudes and actions of:
 - i. Heinrich (*feels his situation is hopeless and is therefore doomed to wander the forest – stays in the dark*)
 - ii. Witch (*creates what she always wanted [candy house] and realizes that material things do not make happiness - she's alone*)
 - iii. Father (*tries to make the best of the situation [appealing to his children's imaginations] and eventually chooses to again put his children's happiness ahead of his own, giving up romance and companionship with his new wife*)
 - iv. Stepmother (*selfish, with no regard for her husband or step-children*)
 - v. Hansel (*knows that same actions bring same results, believes if he can get to the other side of the Forest things will be better, comes to the realization, when the family is united in the end, that what they were looking for was at home all the time.... "as long as we are together"*)
 - vi. Gretel (*feels torn between her love for her father and her brother's dream of a better life, follows Hansel, but leaves a trail of pebbles to form a link with home, tries to go back, but cannot*)
 - Make two columns (Negative and Positive) on a piece of chart paper, white board, or open the attached Notebook file on your SMARTBoard.
 - Have students identify characters' actions in relation to their attitudes. How are happiness and success influenced by attitude?

Closure:

Many cultures have proverbs about what it means to have a positive attitude:

Turn your face to the sun and the shadows fall behind you. ~Maori Proverb

Those who wish to sing, always find a song. ~Swedish Proverb

Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come. ~Chinese Proverb

Rules

Background:

Hansel and Gretel are 'forbidden' from entering the forest. Hansel believes there is no such thing as a Witch and it is only an adult's way of stopping children from wandering off alone.

Activities:

1. Have the class discuss what rules Hansel and Gretel broke in the play. What were the consequences of their actions? Why do you think those rules were created in the first place?
2. Do you have rules at home that forbid you from doing something? Have you ever broken those rules and what were the consequences? How might your family rules be different than someone else's? Do you follow a rule because you don't want to get into trouble or is it because you know the rule is there to protect you? Why do rules change as you get older?
3. Brainstorm class and school rules. Choose five of those rules and decide why you think they were created? What do you think would happen if those rules were not in place?
4. We also have rules in our community. Brainstorm community rules. How do you feel when you see people not following the rules? What are the consequences of not following these rules? Should there be different consequences for people who continue to break the rules?
5. Have you ever been with a group of people who encourage you to break rules? How did you handle that situation? What happened the last time your teacher left the classroom? Did all the students continue with their work or did they start to fool around? Did you find it hard not to join in because what they were doing looked like fun?

Closure:

Make a poster for an existing rule or new rule that you feel strongly about and put it up in your classroom or school.

Role play situations where someone is trying to convince you to break a rule and how you might respond.

Candy House

Background:

Hansel and Gretel sing a song about the Witch's fabulous candy house.

**Gumdrops and gooey and
Ring pops and chewys
Lollipop windows and chocolate doors
Cookies and cream puffs
With ice cream enough to make a meal**

Is it real?

**And look here's
White cake and brown cake
And pink upside down cake
Candy as much as you please**

And the narrator adds further details:

Into a living room of more sugary delights... A lollipop lamp... Colorful hard candy Venetian blinds... And sponge toffee furniture... Hansel broke a small piece of coffee toffee table off and stuffed it in his mouth... Then they entered the dining room... It was filled with a large table made of graham crackers propped up by two large slabs of dark chocolate... They sat on two jello dining chairs and jiggled in anticipation... spiralling Jolly Rancher stair case that led them to a small room with a large cotton candy bed surrounded by many strange candy cane posts...

The description of the Witch's house in the play excites all the viewer's senses. Discuss what words can you taste, smell, see, and touch. Challenge students to use as many juicy, descriptive words in their own writing.

Activities:

1. Ask students to write a description of their own candy house. You might choose to do this as a group activity or a buddy activity with younger students.
2. Have younger students draw their house and write a sentence to go with it. Have them present their drawing and orally (using juicy words) describe the picture to their class.
3. Have older students write a descriptive poem of their candy house and add an illustration.

Modern Version of Hansel and Gretel

Background:

Students were asked to listen for references to modern day things that were put into Alberta Opera's version of Hansel and Gretel. Some of the items they could recall were references to eBay, GI Joe, Barbie, Jolly Ranchers, etc..

Activities:

1. List the items that students recall from the play.
2. Have them consider how many of our modern conveniences could have changed the way the story unfolds? For example: GPS, cell phone, police, etc.
3. Have them create a version of Hansel and Gretel that takes place in the modern forest ... the city ... and include the conveniences that we take for granted. Hansel and Gretel is a cautionary tale where the characters are warned not to do something or else Have the students change the Witch's character and situations that reflect a modern time. They may choose to do this as a story writing activity, or as a group, they could write a script for a Reader's Theatre.
4. Have students write their own cautionary tale. For instance: stay away from that warehouse or don't go into that part of town.

Closure:

You may wish to extend this activity by having students present their Reader's Theatre to an audience of students and/or parents.

Challenge them to modernize other fairy tales.

Just for Fun...

Secret Codes and Ciphers

Background:

Codes are all around us. Modern computer language is a code. Barcodes use symbols or visual patterns that only a scanner in a store or library can decipher. Father mentions finding a coded recipe that only the Japanese Emperor and his grandmother could read. Codes have been around for many centuries and date back to the Egyptians and Romans. In order to break the code the reader needs to decipher the pattern. Try the activities and challenges below.

Activities:

1. Julius Caesar used a substitution cipher. He simply replaced a letter with the third letter after it in the alphabet. For example: A = D and B = E and so on. Using Caesar's cipher can your students find the answer locked in the secret message below? This food dates back to ancient times

FDHVDU VDODG

2. Another code could be linking numbers to the corresponding letters in the alphabet. For instance: 1=A 2=B and so on. Challenge your students to decipher the code below.

3, 15, 14, 7, 18, 1, 20, 21, 12, 1, 20, 9, 15, 14, 19

Closure:

You may wish to extend this activity in math, language arts, or computer class. Students can use the websites listed below to learn more about codes and how they are created. Have students create their own messages and give them to a classmate to decipher.

Twelve codes for kids to use to write secret messages. Let Agent Muldoon teach you how to code secret messages.

www.youthonline.ca/spykids/

Easily create secret codes for kids with this build-your-own cipher wheel.

www.topspysecrets.com/secret-codes-for-kids.html

Reader's Theatre You Be the Actors

Background:

Reader's Theatre is an excellent way to improve reading fluency. It requires no props and little preparation. As there is no movement, the focus remains on the reading.

Hint: Any part can be read in unison. You can pair less fluent readers with more fluent readers for choral reading of a part.

Activities:

Use the script provided in this handout for this activity. Older students may want to use scripts generated in the writing activity.

1. Explain to students they are putting on a Reader's Theatre play, like the radio plays from years ago. As there is no action involved so they will be expected to use their voices to provide excitement to the story.
2. Place a few statements on the board and demonstrate how you could read them showing different emotions with your voice. (e.g. excited, mad, scared)
Place a few more statements on the board and have students work with a partner to practice different expressions. You may also want to direct them to try different characters.
3. Divide students into groups of 5, assign a role to each one, and distribute scripts. Have them highlight their part. Students can then discuss how their character might sound. e.g. The Witch has a high cackling voice)
4. Move from group to group as they read aloud providing feedback and additional modeling. Give students plenty of time to rehearse so they can add expression and fluency.

Closure:

Have students perform for other groups in the class, or for other classes.

Hansel and Gretel

A Reader's Theatre Script

Parts: Narrator
Father
Hansel
Gretel
Witch
Stepmother

Narrator: Once upon a time, a poor woodcutter lived on the edge of a forest. He had a son named Hansel and a daughter named Gretel. One day he married a selfish woman who not only became his wife, but a stepmother to his children. She convinced the woodcutter to take the children into the forest and leave them there to fend for themselves. The poor man loved his children, and did not want to do as his wife asked, but he felt he had no choice.

Stepmother: Husband, we can't afford to feed these greedy children of yours. Tonight you must take them into the forest and leave them to find their own food.

Narrator: The children overheard this conversation and were scared.

Gretel: What shall we do? We'll starve in the forest!

Hansel: Don't worry Gretel. I have an idea. This afternoon I'll go out to play in the garden and secretly fill my pockets with shiny pebbles. We will leave a trail to lead us out of the forest.

Narrator: So Hansel filled his pockets with pebbles. Soon Father came to get them.

Father: Come along children. I must take you into the forest.

Hansel: Gretel, I'll drop these pebbles in a line as we walk along.

Narrator: When the children weren't looking, Father slipped away, leaving the children on their own.

Hansel: Look! The moon is shining on the line of pebbles I dropped. If we follow the trail we'll get home.

Narrator: When the children reached home their wicked Stepmother was furious. She locked them upstairs and the next day when Father came to take them to the forest again, they had no time to collect more pebbles, and only had a handful of bread crumbs.

Father: Come along children. I must take you back into the forest.

Gretel: I will hide these bread crumbs in my pocket, and leave a trail out of the forest.

Narrator: Gretel left her trail of bread crumbs, but the hungry birds in the forest ate the trail and when Father left them, they could not find their way back.

Gretel: The trail of bread crumbs has disappeared, and so has Father.

Hansel and Gretel: Who will help us! We are lost!

Narrator: The children stumbled through the forest until they came upon a magnificent candy house.

Hansel: Look Gretel! It's a gingerbread house, with candy cane trim.

Gretel: I see gumdrops and peppermints! Marshmallow and cream puffs!

Narrator: Hansel and Gretel set upon the house, eating and eating, until finally...

Witch: Who is nibbling at my house?

Gretel: Oh! I'm sorry! We didn't know anyone lived here and we are lost and so hungry.

Witch: Come in! Come in! You can spend the night.

Narrator: So Hansel and Gretel entered the house of the kindly old woman, never realizing she was really a wicked witch. They went to bed with thoughts of sugar plums in their heads, but the next morning, the wicked witch grabbed Hansel and put him in a cage.

Gretel: What have you done with my brother?

Witch: I have put him in a cage, and after I fatten him up, he will be my dinner. Now, you will do all the chores. Go and make your little brother breakfast.

Narrator: The witch had one weakness. Her eyesight was very poor without her glasses. When Gretel realized this, she hid them and told Hansel her plan to fool the witch. Every day, the witch would come to see if Hansel was fat enough to eat.

Hansel: When she asks to feel my finger, I will hold out this chicken bone to feel.

Witch: You are still too thin to eat! We must feed you more!

Narrator: This went on for a few days, until finally the witch ran out of patience, and called for Gretel.

Witch: I can no longer wait! Go and light the oven, then check to see if it is hot enough.

Gretel: I am not sure I know how to do that. Would you please show me?

Narrator: When the witch came to show Gretel how to test the oven, she opened the door and looked in. Gretel gave her a mighty push and in she tumbled. Gretel quickly shut the oven door, and freed Hansel from his cage.

Hansel and Gretel: We're free! We're free! Let's go home to Father.

Narrator: Hansel and Gretel found their way out of the forest and returned to their Father's house. Their wicked Stepmother was gone, and they lived happily ever after.

The End