

PATHWAYS FOR UNDERSTANDING

Hansel and Gretel by Engelbert Humperdinck



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An Introduction to *Pathways for Understanding Study Materials*

The goal of *Pathways for Understanding* materials is to provide multiple “pathways” for learning about a specific opera as well as the operatic art form, and to allow teachers to create lessons that work best for their particular teaching style, subject area, and class of students.

Meet the Characters / The Story/ Resources

Fostering familiarity with specific operas as well as the operatic art form, these sections describe characters and story, and provide historical context. Guiding questions are included to suggest connections to other subject areas, encourage higher-order thinking, and promote a broader understanding of the opera and its potential significance to other areas of learning.

Guided Listening

The Guided Listening section highlights key musical moments from the opera and provides areas of focus for listening to each musical excerpt. Main topics and questions are introduced, giving teachers of all musical backgrounds (or none at all) the means to discuss the music of the opera with their students. A complimentary CD of the full opera, as well as the full libretto (with English translation), are provided as part of the Guided Listening resources and are sent via mail.

Guiding Questions / Discussion Points

Guiding Questions or Discussion Points appear within several sections of these materials to spark discussion in your classroom and facilitate student exploration. Note that these questions are not intended to serve as “official” learning outcomes for the opera experience; rather, we hope that they act as a point of departure for prompting meaningful analysis and conversation amongst students. We are aware that teachers incorporate the study of opera into their classrooms in many ways and to address a variety of student outcomes, and we expect that individual teachers will adapt these materials to best serve their specific curriculum and instructional goals.

CD Provided (*Libretto Included*)

- Humperdinck: Hansel & Gretel
- Jennifer Larmore, Rebecca Evans, Jane Henschel
- Philharmonia Orchestra, New London Children’s Choir
- Sir Charles Mackerras (Conductor)
- Copyright 2007 by Chandos Records Ltd

Production Information:

Music:	Engelbert Humperdinck
Text (English):	Adelheid Wette, based on the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. English Translation by David Pountney.
World Premiere:	Wiemar, Court Theater December 23, 1893

Meet the Characters

Hansel (mezzo-soprano):	A young boy who lives with his sister and parents in a cottage in the woods. He cleverly figures out how to escape from the witch.
Gretel (soprano):	Hansel's sister. She follows Hansel's advice and frees them both from the evil witch.
The Witch: (mezzo-soprano/tenor)	An evil old woman who lives deep in the forest. She captures Hansel and Gretel, puts a spell on them, and intends to bake them in her magic oven.
Mother (soprano):	Hansel and Gretel's mother, Gertrude. She sends them out of the forest to collect berries for dinner, and is frantic when she realizes that they might be lost.
Father (baritone):	Hansel and Gretel's father, Peter, is a broom-maker. He is distraught when he learns that his wife sent the children off alone into the strange forest.
Sandman (Soprano):	A mysterious old man who sprinkles Hansel and Gretel with a magic dust, making them sleepy.
Dew Fairy (Soprano):	A magical fairy, she sprinkles the children with dew to wake them after a night of refreshing sleep.

The Story of *Hansel and Gretel*: Synopsis

Act I

In Hansel and Gretel's house. Hansel complains he is hungry. Gretel shows him some milk that a neighbor has given for the family's supper. The children dance. Their mother returns and wants to know why they have gotten so little work done. She accidentally spills the milk and chases the children out into the woods to pick strawberries.

Their father, a broom-maker, returns home drunk. He brings out the food he has bought, then asks where the children have gone. The mother tells him that she has sent them into the woods. He tells her about the Witch who lives there and says that the children are in danger. They go out into the woods to look for them.

Act II

Hansel picks strawberries. The children hear a cuckoo singing and eat the strawberries. Soon they have eaten every one. In the sudden silence of the wood, Hansel admits to Gretel that he has lost the way. The children grow frightened. The Sandman comes to bring them sleep, sprinkling sand over their eyes. The children say their evening prayer. In a dream, they see 14 angels.

Act III

The Dew Fairy comes to waken the children. Gretel wakes Hansel, and they see the gingerbread house. They end up in the Witch's kitchen. The Witch decides to fatten Hansel up and casts a spell on him. The oven is hot. Gretel breaks the Witch's spell and sets Hansel free. When the Witch asks her to look in the oven, she pretends she doesn't know how to: the Witch must show her. When the Witch peers into the oven, the children shove her inside and shut the door. The oven explodes. The gingerbread children come back to life. The mother and father find the children, and all express gratitude for their salvation.

The Story of *Hansel and Gretel*: Guiding Questions

Act I – Bad Kids

In the first act of *Hansel and Gretel* the children are scolded by their mother and sent into the woods.

- Why are the children in trouble? Is spilling some milk so wrong? Why or why not?
- What are some other instances—in literature, history or other musical works—where a witch is the villain?

Act II – Sandman

In the second act the children are lost in the woods and meet some strange characters.

- What is the purpose of the Sandman? Does he help the children?
- Are the woods a magical place? Why or why not?

Act III – Witch Hunt

Hansel and Gretel free themselves, and the Gingerbread children, from the evil witch.

- How is the opera of *Hansel and Gretel* different than the fairy tale? How is it similar?
- Do you have any sympathy for the witch? Explain your reasoning.

The History of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*

Appropriately enough, the story of how the opera *Hansel and Gretel* came to be written begins with two children. Engelbert Humperdinck, a German composer who had written vocal music but never a full opera, had two teenaged nieces. Their mother, Humperdinck's youngest sister, Adelheid Wette, asked Humperdinck to compose a series of four folksongs based on the famous children's story "Hansel and Gretel" for her daughters to perform at a small family Christmas gathering. Humperdinck agreed, but went above and beyond his commission. With Wette writing the libretto, he created a short *singspiel* (a dramatic piece in which songs alternate with spoken dialogue) based on "Hansel and Gretel." His nieces performed it, and the family was so delighted with it that Humperdinck decided to expand it further into a full-scale opera.

The opera is based on the story by the Brothers Grimm. Adelheid Wette used the basic elements of two children who are thrust out of their home, get lost in the woods, and are accosted by a hungry witch, but modified it slightly to fit her needs. In Wette's hands, the story is not about being lost and then found or even necessarily about the witch's atrocities. Instead, it is about God's ever-watchful eye and power to care for people in need. Wette changes the evil stepmother from the Grimm tale into a put-upon mother who is desperate because of her family's near-starvation but is not intrinsically evil. In the Grimm tale, the stepmother dies at the same time as the witch. In Wette's libretto, the mother comes with the father to rescue the children and lives to sing the moral of the story along with everyone else on stage.

Despite these changes, Wette did not shy away from the gruesome details of the original story. The libretto is certainly dark at times, with the children's strict parents, the dangers of the spooky forest, and the cannibalistic witch all featured prominently. Also terrifying is the children's response to all of this darkness around them – they commit a violent act themselves and push the witch into her own oven. The libretto, however, is not absolutely dark. There are also scenes of children at play, siblings bickering, prayers, and guardian angels and fairies.

Before writing *Hansel and Gretel*, Humperdinck had been invited to Bayreuth to help Richard Wagner with his production of *Parsifal*. Humperdinck leapt at this opportunity to learn first hand the inner workings of Wagner's methods of opera composition and production. *Hansel and Gretel* is Wagnerian in a number of important ways. Humperdinck uses musical phrases that are repeated in similar circumstances, like Wagner's leitmotifs. For example, we hear the music that becomes associated with the witch when Father speaks about witches in the woods riding on broomsticks, again before we see the witch's house, and then again when the witch sings. Also, like Wagner, Humperdinck uses heavy orchestration, many players playing at once, which allows him to have different themes playing in the orchestra at the same time and gives him the resources to create powerful special effects with his orchestral forces, like the sounds of the forest. The fact that *Hansel and Gretel* requires a large orchestra also means that the singers have to be able to project over it. Those singers playing the title characters must therefore have large voices but still look and sound believable as children.

Folk tunes play an important role in Humperdinck's opera. They ground the sometimes fantastical plot in the world of real, flesh and blood people. The simple folk tunes within the complex musical world of Humperdinck's writing are part of what make the opera accessible to children. The folk tunes are immediately hummable and are often excerpted from the opera and taught in elementary school music classes or published in beginning music books.

The first performance of *Hansel and Gretel* took place on December 23, 1893, in Weimer's Hoftheater. It was originally scheduled to premiere nine days earlier in Munich, but the singer scheduled to play Gretel, Hanna Borchers, fell ill. Another illness, this time of the singer playing Hansel in Weimer, caused a shift in casting. The soprano slated to play Gretel switched to Hansel, while another singer took over the part of Gretel on short notice. Richard Strauss, who had declared the score a masterpiece when he first saw it, conducted. The premiere was not perfect—in addition to the casting difficulties, the orchestral parts for the overture had not yet arrived in Munich, and the performance was played without it.

Despite its inauspicious beginning, the opera was received well, and it was taken on the rounds of theaters throughout Germany. Its rapid progress was helped along by the creation of a *Hansel and Gretel* touring company in 1894. In Berlin, even the emperor enjoyed the opera. Soon theaters in other countries began to put on productions of *Hansel and Gretel*. In Germany, the opera is generally associated with Christmastime, but it is performed throughout the year worldwide. Because *Hansel and Gretel* is meant to be experienced by children, it is often performed in the vernacular. Its first English-language translation was performed in 1894 and there have been many since, including the Met's current production.

Guided Listening:

“Goosey goosey gander, the mouse in the straw”

CD 1, Track 2 | Libretto pp. 76-77

Hansel and Gretel have been left at home by their parents. Hansel is making brooms for his father while Gretel knits stockings.

GRETEL

Goosey goosey gander, the mouse in the straw put out his little head, can you guess what he saw?

The geese had no shoes in the ice and snow, cobbler can't you make some? The answer was....

HANSEL (*interrupting*)

Which is why they were barefoot.

GRETEL (*continuing*)

No!

HANSEL

Hey diddle dumpling I sit here half dead!
So who will lend me money to buy me some bread?

I'll sell my old mattress and sleep where I please,
I'd rather have a bite than be bitten by...

GRETEL (*interrupting*)

Oh, it's hunger that bites me.

HANSEL (*continuing*)

...Fleas!

(*throwing his work aside and getting up*)

Oh how I wish Mother would hurry up home.

GRETEL (*getting up*)

Oh yes, my tummy thinks it could eat a stone.

HANSEL

Just crusts of bread, that's all we've had,
Hunger keeps gnawing, driving you mad.

GRETEL

Hush, Hansel, think of our father's refrain
When mother curses or complains:

'When in need or dark despair

God will always hear our prayer.'

HANSEL

So nicely said, so pat, so neat,
but such fancy words are no good to eat.

Oh Gretel, I wonder how it would feel
If we'd just gorged a scrumptious meal?
Strawberry pancakes and beef with noodles,
when did Mom last make apple strudels?
Oh Gretel, I wish...

GRETEL (*stopping him*)

Stop. What a sulky glare!

What is it doing there, that gruesome stare?

It's eyes are askew – phew, what a pout!

Watch how I'm chasing that Gremlin out!

(*She takes a broom with her hand.*)

Discussion Points

- Describe what you hear in the opening excerpt.
 - What instruments are used?
 - How would you describe the music? Is it strong and menacing, light and playful, or something else?
 - What kind of setting do you envision? Is this scene taking place in a forest, in an office building, on the sea, or somewhere else?

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Discussion Points *(continued from previous page)*

- Listen to the music beginning at 0:25.
 - What is Gretel singing about? Is she having a normal conversation with Hansel, or is she telling a story? How can you tell? Do her words seem serious, silly, sad, or something else?
 - When Hansel interrupts Gretel at 0:50, does the music change? What is Hansel singing about? Is he telling a story, too? How would you describe Hansel's mood when he is singing?
 - Listen to the orchestra as they accompany the voices. Are the voices and the instruments playing parallel parts (do they seem to be mimicking each other)? What does the orchestra do when the voices are not singing?

- As Hansel and Gretel continue to sing about being hungry, how does the music change? How do Hansel and Gretel's voices change? Do they sing with the same kind of playfulness in their voices?

- Listen to the music at 1:29.
 - Do you notice something different here? Is there a change in the mood of the music from before? How does the music make you feel?
 - How would you describe the melodic contour of the voices? Do the pitches move in step-wise motion? Are they sporadic and unpredictable? Explain your reasoning.
 - How does the orchestral accompaniment match what Hansel and Gretel are talking about in this moment?

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Discussion Points *(continued from previous page)*

- Listen to the music at 1:58. What do you notice? Is there another change?
 - How would you describe this section? Do you recognize the type of song that this could be? For example, is it a march, a carol, a lullaby, a sonata or something else?
 - What is Gretel singing about? Is she telling a story again, or trying to comfort her brother? Explain your answer using specific lines from the libretto.
 - Is there a connection to how the music sounds and the lyrics she is singing?

- How does the song end? Is there a sense of finality? What do you imagine will happen next?

Guided Listening: "Little brother, dance with me"

CD 1, Track 4 | Libretto pp. 78-79

Hansel and Gretel try and forget their troubles by dancing and singing together.

GRETEL

Little brother dance with me,
take my hand, advance with me,
one foot in, one foot out,
bow your head and turn about.

(Hansel tries to dance, but is very awkward.)

HANSEL

Sister I'm a sorry sight;
which is left and which is right?
Show me once more how it goes,
then I might avoid your toes.

GRETEL

With your foot you tap tap tap,
with your hands you clap clap clap,
one foot in, one foot out,
bow your head and turn about.

HANSEL

With your foot you tap tap tap,
with your hands you clap clap clap,
one foot in, one foot out,
bow your head and turn about.

GRETEL

Brother you have learnt it well,
dancing breaks the gremlin's spell.
Once the boy gets down to school,
Maybe he's not such a fool.
Make your head go nick, nick, nick,
make your fingers go click click click,
one foot in, one foot out,
take a bow and turn about.

HANSEL

Make your head go nick, nick, nick,
make your fingers go click click click,
one foot in, one foot out,
take a bow and turn about.

GRETEL

Dance it nimble, dance it neat,
Make it twinkle from your feet.
When two children join together,
They are more than twice as clever.
(takes Hansel by the arm)
Come!

HANSEL

I love to dance and sing and play my games
hate to be alone.
Let's dance away our hunger pains,
The dance is all we own.

GRETEL

I love to dance and sing and play my games
hate to be alone.
Let's dance away our hunger pains,
The dance is all we own.
(pulls Hansel along, and dances round him then gives him a push)

Tra-la-la etc

Turn around again and do it faster
can't you make your legs do more than that?
Come over here, you lazy little rat!

HANSEL *(gruffly)*

Let go of me, let go of me, I'm not your little
brat. A man has more important work than
dancing with a girl.

GRETEL

But big boy I'm too strong for you.
I'll make you join the whirl.
(dances round Hansel as before and gives him a push)

Tra-la-la etc

Mind you don't fall over my dear Hansel,
Look at him he's split his brand new pants.

HANSEL *(dances round Gretel)*

Tra-la-la! etc

You naughty girl, you naughty girl, your
stocking has a hole.

GRETEL

You stubborn boy, you'll do as you are told.
A wicked child is not allowed
to share a dance with me.

HANSEL

Now don't be cross you bossy girl.
I'll catch you, you will see!
(They dance as before.)
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GRETEL

Tra-la-la etc

Turn yourself around my slow-coach Hansel,
Turn yourself around and join the dance.

GRETEL AND HANSEL

Yes spin until your head's askew,

Dance until you drop.

And if you wear your stockings through,

Let mother sew them up.

(They dance by turns as before. Then they seize each other's hands and dance round and round, quicker and quicker, until at last they lose their balance and tumble over one another onto the floor.)

Discussion Points

- What are Hansel and Gretel singing about?
 - If there were no lyrics in this excerpt, how might you be able to tell that the song is about dancing?
 - When Hansel and Gretel are giving each other dancing instructions, what do you notice about the "action words" (clap, click, nick)? Does the repetition of the words have an effect on the music?
- Listen to the music from 0:00-1:40.
 - Does there seem to be a pattern in the music? Specifically, listen for the repeated melody or tune that repeats several times with different words.
 - Do you notice any changes in the melody? How would you describe these changes?
- As the piece continues, how would you describe how Hansel and Gretel are interacting with one another? Are they loving siblings? Are they playing and poking fun at each other? What clues can you find in the text about their relationship?
- Are there elements of the music that help us understand how Hansel and Gretel are interacting? Do they always sing the same part (unison)? Are there parts where they sing in two parts (harmony)? How does this change the feeling of the music?

Guided Listening:

“At night it’s a gruesome and sordid place”

CD 1, Track 8 (1:33-3:01) | Libretto pp. 83-84

Father explains to Mother why she never should have sent the children into the “haunted” forest.

FATHER (*He lets the broom fall and wrings his hands*)

At night it’s a gruesome and sordid place,
And no child should be there alone.

MOTHER

Don’t say that!

FATHER

For many a child has been lost without a trace,
where evil itself has its home.

MOTHER (*surprised*)

What evil? Just tell me.

FATHER (*with mysterious emphasis*)

The gristle witches!

MOTHER (*starting back*)

The gristle witches!

(he picks up the broom again, draws back.)

Well, what’s that to do with a broomstick?

FATHER

The broomstick, the broomstick, you know what it’s for:

They ride on it, the Witches!

Discussion Points

- Listen for the pattern the drums play at the beginning of the excerpt.
 - Does that pattern come back at other times throughout the excerpt? If so, when?
 - Do other instruments or voices repeat this pattern? How do those instruments differ from the drums?

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Discussion Points *(continued from previous page)*

- What is the mood or feeling of this excerpt?
 - Is Father feeling upset? Scared? Confused? Something else? What about Mother?
 - How does the orchestral music mimic their emotions in this moment?

- What do you notice about the dynamics in this piece? Are they constant or sporadic? Or something else?

- This is the moment we learn of a supernatural element in the story—witches in the forest. How does the music set the “supernatural” scene? What instruments are used to create the supernatural element?

Guided Listening: "Cuckoo, cuckoo, eggs are blue"

(CD 1, Track 12 | Libretto pp. 86-87)

Hansel and Gretel have been sent to the forest to gather berries, and can't resist making a game out of the task.

CUCKOO

Cuckoo, Cuckoo

HANSEL (*pointing with his hand*)

Cuckoo, cuckoo, eggs are blue!

(*Cuckoo: behind the scenes, heard as if quite in the distance.*)

GRETEL (*roguishly*)

Cuckoo, cuckoo, berries too!

(*takes a strawberry from the basket and pokes it into Hansel's mouth: he sucks it as though he were drinking an egg.*)

HANSEL (*springing up*)

Ho-ho!

I like that game. Look at me!

(*takes some strawberries and lets them fall into Gretel's mouth*)

Watch how the baby cuckoo grows,
he steals the food from under your nose.

(*It begins to grow dark, helping himself again*)

Cuckoo, jumps the queue.

GRETEL (*does the same*)

Cuckoo, gets his due.

HANSEL

Throw your babies out. I'm first!

Let them starve or die of thirst!

Gretel (*helping herself*)

Cuckoo, too true.

Cuckoo, me too!

(*Hansel pours a handful of strawberries into his mouth.*)

If you've filled your basket full

Watch the cuckoo steal them all.

Hansel (*helping himself*)

Cuckoo, and you!

(*They each try to gain possession of the strawberries. Hansel wins and puts the basket to his mouth until it is empty.*)

GRETEL (*horrified, clasping her hands together*)

Hansel, now look what you've done,
oh heavens you have scoffed all the berries, you pig you.

HANSEL

Watch it.

GRETEL

Just wait till mother hears.

She will thrash you and then there'll be tears!

HANSEL (*quietly*)

Now, now, don't pull that one on me!

Look, Gretel you had your share I can see!

GRETEL

Come, we'd better find more, and quickly.

HANSEL

But now it's too dark, and those brambles are too prickly.

Of course you could look for all you're worth...
but now it's the darkest place on earth.

GRETEL

Oh Hansel, Hansel, we must have been mad.

How could we have both been so stupid and bad?

We wasted our time so carelessly playing.

HANSEL

Hear what the pine-trees are saying:

Listen to the whisp'ring glade

'Children, children, tell me, are you not afraid?'

(*Hansel looks around uneasily*)

(*At last he turns in despair to Gretel.*)

Discussion Points

- Where does this scene take place?
 - How does Humperdink use music to help set the scene? Based on your aural observations of the music, how would you describe this forest? Is it calm and mystical? Eerie and mysterious? Something else?

- The cuckoo bird is “heard” throughout the piece.
 - Where does the “cuckoo bird” come in? Does the cuckoo sound like a real bird?
 - What is used to emulate the cuckoo in the music? Is it an instrument, a voice, a group of voices, or something else? A combination?

- What are Hansel and Gretel’s feelings in this piece? Are they excited, scared, nervous, or something else? Explain your reasoning using what you hear in the music and what you read in the libretto.

- If you were the set designer for a production of *Hansel and Gretel*, how would you bring the forest to life on stage?

Guided Listening: “Where each child lays down its head”

CD 1, Track 15 | Libretto pp. 89

Hansel and Gretel say their evening prayer before falling to sleep in the forest.

HANSEL AND GRETEL

Where each child lays down its head,
fourteen angels guard the bed,
two will stand above me,
two will kneel to love me,
two upon my right hand,
on my left two more stand.
Two will give me warning,
two announce the morning,
two times seven
will show me God in Heaven!

(They sink down on the moss and go to sleep with arms twined round each other.)

(Complete darkness.)

(Here a bright light suddenly breaks through the mist, which forthwith rolls itself together into the form of a staircase vanishing in perspective in the middle of the stage.)

Discussion Points

- Consider the text of this piece.
 - What is happening at this moment in the story? Does this duet have a specific purpose?
 - What feeling do you get from the music? Are you excited, angry, comforted, or something else? How does what you feel listening to this piece align with how Hansel and Gretel feel in this moment?
 - Are there specific elements of the music that give the music a certain emotion?

- Listen to the music from 0:44 – 1:40.
 - Do you notice anything interesting about the melodic contour (shape of the melodic line) in this section?
 - As Hansel and Gretel echo one another the melody rises and gets higher in pitch over an extended period of time. What feeling does this create in the music?

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Discussion Points *(continued from previous page)*

- The last section of the excerpt showcases the orchestra as Hansel and Gretel fall asleep.
 - What do you notice about the change in dynamics (volume) throughout the last section?
 - Describe the texture of the music. Does it have a full and robust sound? Or does it sound light and sparse?
 - Is there a section of the orchestra (string, woodwinds, brass, percussion) that is most prominent when you listen?

- Listen to the strings as the piece comes to an end. Using a technique called tremolo (rapid bowing), the strings are able to achieve a trembling effect
 - How does this add to the feeling of the music at this point?
 - Envision the same passage being played without tremolo. Would the music be able to convey the same emotion?

- Hansel and Gretel sing this piece to help them fall asleep in the forest. Think about a time when you were in a place where you didn't feel safe. How did you comfort yourself? Why did you choose that method?

Guided Listening: "Hansel, don't be so greedy"

CD 2, Track 6 (1:02-5:11) | Libretto pp. 94-95

The witch introduces herself to Hansel and Gretel.

THE WITCH

Now, darling, that's no way to speak!
Children I want you to like me a little.
My name's Rosina Lickspittle;
when you're with me there's nothing to fear,
quite harmless, just a poor old dear.
I'm fond of children, as you will see,
that's why I love to have (*caresses Hansel*) them
for tea!

HANSEL (*turning roughly away*)

Go, ugly mug, go on your way.
(*stamping his foot*)
Leave us, d'you hear what I say?

THE WITCH

Ha ha, ha ha, ha ha ha ha ha ha!
I love to see children all cross and forceful
especially you, you daintiest morsel!
Come, little mousey come into my housey
into the cave of Aladdin;
a place a child could go mad in!
There are apple tarts and meringues like snow,
chocolate mousse, Black Forest gâteau,
there's butter, milk, and the cream that's so
good in your fav'rite, yes I know, it's rice
pudding.
There's creamy Swiss roll here
and mountains of profiteroles here,
and all as a treat just for you, my sweet,
yes, all for you to eat!

HANSEL

I won't stay here, it's all just a lie.

GRETEL

Just say 'no' to strangers!

THE WITCH

My, my, my, how sly!
My children, I'm trying so hard to be nice,
you'll find that my house is a Paradise!
(*to Hansel*)
Come, little mousey come into my housey.
(*to Gretel*)
You'll be petted and pampered,
and play all day unhampered.

GRETEL

Maybe, what will my brother have to do?

THE WITCH

With you, we two will feed him and fatten him,
those scrawny limbs we'll tenderly nourish,
his milk-fed body will flourish,
and when he's plump and half asleep
and docile, and obedient, like a sheep,
then, Hansel, let me speak in your ear,
your moment of greatest glory is here.

HANSEL

So speak out loud and not in my ear.

THE WITCH

Eh?

HANSEL

How does this so-called glory appear?

THE WITCH

Well, just remember when it is near
you shut your eyes and forget what you hear.

HANSEL

Oh, but I use both my ears and my eyes:
then I can tell that you're telling lies.
(*resolutely*) Gretel, all that she's said is a trick.
Now, run away, for God's sake be quick!

(*He has in the meantime got out of the rope, and runs with Gretel to the foreground. Here they are stopped by the Witch, who casts a spell upon them both with her magic wand. The stage becomes gradually darker.*)

Discussion Points

- Describe the sound of the witch's voice as she introduces herself to the children. Is this what you would expect a witch's singing voice to sound like? Why might the witch be singing in this way in front of Hansel and Gretel? Explain your reasoning using excerpts from the libretto.
- How would you describe the witch at this moment? Is she kind? Misunderstood? Sly? Conniving? Something else? Are there sections of the text or music that suggest one idea more than another? If so, which?
- The witch is a mezzo-soprano, or a medium-high woman's voice. At certain points the witch sings very high passages (such as "ha ha ha", "Paradise", and "Glory"). How would you describe the witch's voice in these moments? Is it more witch-like? Why?

Guided Listening:

“So hopp hopp hopp, galopp lopp lopp”

CD 2, Track 9 | Libretto pp. 97

The witch’s true character is revealed.

THE WITCH

So hopp hopp hopp, galopp lopp lopp,
you lazy oaf, be off you sloth.

(She rides excitedly round on the broomstick.)

When up I spring, the bat takes wing,
the hell-cat sings the death knell rings,

(She rides again; Gretel meanwhile is watching the window)

My tongue’s on heat to taste the sweet
and melting treat of children’s meat.

With five and six, the witch will mix,
with seven and eight you lick your plate,
and nine is one and ten is none

so much is nil by witch’s will.

She’ll ride until the night is through.

(Hopping madly along she rides to the back of the stage, and vanishes for a time behind the cottage.)

(Here the witch becomes visible again; she comes to the foreground, where she suddenly pulls up and dismounts.)

Broomstick, huh!

(She bobbles back to the stable and tickles Hansel with a birch-twigg till he awakes.)

Discussion Points

- As you listen, compare this aria to the witch’s singing in the last example.
 - How would you describe the witch as she is singing? How is her singing different in this example than in the last, when she is first introducing herself to Hansel and Gretel?
 - Is she still trying to lure Hansel and Gretel into feeling as if they are safe? How can you tell?
 - What does the witch plan to do with Hansel and Gretel?

continued on next page

Discussion Points *(continued from previous page)*

- Throughout this excerpt the music is somewhat upbeat, and almost like a happy march. Analyze the libretto of this excerpt, including the stage directions.
 - What is the witch's emotional state as she is singing? Is she upset? Happy? Insane?
 - Does the text of the libretto match the style of the music?
 - Why might the composer have chosen to set the text to this type of music?

- What does the witch want to do with Hansel and Gretel? What do you imagine will happen next in the opera?

Guided Listening: "The dead arise but cannot see"

CD 2, Track 12 (2:00-3:50) | Libretto pp. 100

After killing the witch, Hansel and Gretel bring the Gingerbread children back to life.

GINGERBREAD CHILDREN

The light, give thanks for sight!

(The children close in a circle round Hansel and Gretel)

ALL

The witch is dead the witch who fed
on noses and toes she had baked into bread.
But safe from harm join arm and arm
and dance away her evil charm.
So dance and swing the prancing ring,
till every living thing shall spring
for joy to greet each rescued girl and boy.

(Four Gingerbread children at a time surround Hansel and Gretel, and bow gracefully to them.)

HANSEL

The angels showed in a dream they would look
after us,
let their reward be a stream of children's
laughter.

HANSEL AND GRETEL

You angels who guard us with all your might by
day and night,
let us give you thanks for strength to fight for
life and light.
For life and light for strength and sight
give thanks with all your might!

ALL

Praise and thanks.
Accept our strength to fight for life and light,
for the glorious gift of sight!
Give thanks to be alive
*(They all press round Hansel and Gretel to
shake hands with them.)*
Give thanks to be alive,
Give thanks that we survive.
Alive that we may strive,
for life and light, for strength and sight,
give thanks with all your might.

Discussion Points

- If you were the stage director for this opera, how might you instruct the Gingerbread children to "come to life" on stage? For example, which parts of their bodies would you direct them to move first? How might they exaggerate their movements to appear to be "waking up" after being frozen for so long?
- Listen and consider the music and text.
 - Who is singing in this excerpt?
 - How would you describe the feeling of the music? Is it solemn? Joyful? Or something else?
 - Why are the children and Hansel and Gretel celebrating?

continued on next page

Discussion Points *(continued from previous page)*

- As Hansel and Gretel sing solo lines, the children's ensemble provides a choral background in the style of an opera chorus.
 - Are all of the voices singing the same melodies and rhythms, or are they singing independent lines that complement one another? What feeling does this give the music?

- Hansel and Gretel sing about angels guarding them, and give thanks to these angels for keeping them safe. Do their words call to mind an earlier moment in the opera? If so, which moment?

- Have you ever gotten lost or separated from your parents? How did you feel—how did you feel when they found you? How do you think your parents felt?

Hansel and Gretel Resources: About the Composer Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

Engelbert Humperdinck was born in the small town of Siegburn, Germany, near Bonn, on September 1, 1854. He began his musical studies with piano lessons at the age of seven. Despite his father's wishes for him to study architecture, Humperdinck studied music at the Cologne Conservatory. It was here that he received many awards including the Frankfurt Mozart Prize in 1876 and the Mendelssohn Prize of Berlin in 1879. He traveled to Munich in 1880 where he studied with composer Richard Wagner. By 1882, Humperdinck was working with Wagner as his musical assistant for the first performance of *Parsifal*. Wagner even allowed him to compose a short section of music to cover a scene change in that first performance.

Later in his career, Humperdinck was employed as a conservatory teacher, critic, adviser to a music publisher, and of course, composer. His compositions were nearly all vocal or theatrical, with his most famous work being *Hansel and Gretel*. This one work, which is now firmly established in the operatic repertoire, made Humperdinck's reputation. His sister, Adelheid Wette, wrote the libretto with the intention of providing her children with a musical play. Instead it became an opera which premiered in Weimar on December 23, 1893.

He continued to write operas, many of which were fairy tale operas or comic operas. Despite the popularity and success of *Hansel and Gretel*, none of Humperdinck's later works were met with such enthusiasm.

Humperdinck continued to teach in Berlin until 1920. He died at the age of 67 in Neustrelitz, a town north of Berlin, on September 27, 1921.

Hansel and Gretel Resources: Online Resources

Note: click on the blue link below the description to visit the corresponding page.

Video Clips

- **HANSEL & GRETEL at Lyric Opera of Chicago**
General Interview, Lyric Opera of Chicago (2012)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNn5yyJXHRM>
- **Hansel and Gretel at The Metropolitan Opera**
Production Preview, The Metropolitan Opera (2011)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDVEA8rFDIk>
- **NPT Arts Break: Nashville Opera: Hansel and Gretel**
Informational Video, Nashville Opera (2010)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozN3C4pLdjs>
- **Hänsel und Gretel**
DVD Trailer, *Humperdinck, E.: Hansel und Gretel*, Semperoper Dresden, Naxos EuroArts (2006)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY7YMhkvkWY>
- **Hansel and Gretel**
Production Trailer, Los Angeles Opera (2006)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzdvjPIKVUc>
- **Act III: "So hopp hopp hopp, galopp lopp lopp"**
DVD Trailer, *Met Opera on DVD*, EMI Classics
Philip Langridge (The Witch), Alice Coote (Hansel), and Christine Schäfer (Gretel), Metropolitan Opera (2007)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1elUvZauBk>
- **Hänsel und Gretel**
DVD Trailer, *Humperdinck, E.: Hansel und Gretel*, Anhalt Theater, Naxos Arthaus Musik (2007)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxkHD4-ecz8>
- **Hansel and Gretel**
Production Trailer, The Royal Opera House, 2010
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRArxCa0qg>

Articles

- **“Saturday Night Live’ Takes Its Makeup Magic to the Met, With Scary Results”** by **James Barron** for **The New York Times** (December 22, 2007)
Louis Zakarian is a makeup artist and Philip Langridge is an opera singer who have pretty much the same equipment where they have been doing their work: monster-size ovens and professional-grade KitchenAid mixers.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/22/nyregion/22witch.html>
 - **Interactive Feature: “The Making of a Witch”**
Produced by Alexis Mainland (December 22, 2007)
Voice of Philip Langridge, Photos by Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2007/12/21/nyregion/20071222_WITCH_FEATURE.html
- **“At the Met, an Opera That Serves Children”** by **Vivien Schweitzer** for **The New York Times** (December 16, 2009)
Engelbert Humperdinck’s opera “Hansel and Gretel,” the familiar story of hunger, kidnapping, cannibalism and witch burning, is perhaps a strange work to have become a Christmas staple. Richard Jones’s deliciously dark production, which returned to the Metropolitan Opera on Monday, doesn’t tone down the less savory aspects of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale that inspired it.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/17/arts/music/17hansel.html>
- **“Here, Kiddie, Kiddie: A Witch Is Cooking Up a Treat”** by **Anthony Tommasini** for **The New York Times** (December 26, 2007)
Children were everywhere at the Metropolitan Opera on Monday afternoon for a special Christmas Eve matinee, the premiere of a new production of Engelbert Humperdinck’s “Hansel and Gretel.”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/26/arts/music/26gret.html>

Additional Resources: Reflections after the Opera

After every opera performance, the director, conductor, and performers reflect and evaluate the different aspects of their production, so that they can improve it for the next night. In a similar way, these Guiding Questions encourage active reflection, both individually and collectively, on your student's opera experience.

Think about the portrayal of the characters in the production at the Met.

- How were the characters similar or different from what you expected? Try to identify specific qualities or actions that had an impact on your ideas and thinking.
- Did the performers' voices match the character they were playing? Why or why not?
- Did any characters gain prominence in live performance? If so, how was this achieved? (Consider the impact of specific staging.)
- What did the performers do to depict the nature of the relationships between characters? In other words, how did you know from the characters' actions (not just their words) how they felt about the other characters in the story?
- Stereotypically, most opera performers are considered singers first, and actors second. Was this the case? How did each performer's portrayal affect your understanding of (or connection with) their character?

Consider the production elements of the performance.

- How did the director choose to portray the story visually? Did the production have a consistent tone? How did the tone and style of each performer's actions (movement, characterization, staging) compare with the tone and style of the visual elements (set design, costume design, lighting design)?
- How did the set designer's work affect the production? Did the style of the setting help you understand the characters in a new way?
- How did different costume elements impact the portrayal of each character?
- How did the lighting designer's work affect the production?
- Did you agree with the artistic choices made by the directors and designers? If you think changes should be made, explain specifically what you'd change and why.

Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera

The origins of opera stretch back to ancient Greece, where playwrights used music and dance to augment moments of action in their stories. At this time, it was popular to write plays in Attic, a sing-song language, where half the words were sung and half were spoken. Dance was also a pivotal part of Greek drama; a chorus danced throughout scenes in an effort to highlight the play's themes.

The philosopher Aristotle, in 'The Poetics,' outlined the first guidelines for drama, known as the Six Elements of Drama. Aristotle suggested that a play's action should take place in one day, portray only one chain of events, and be set in one general location. Over the centuries, playwrights and composers took Aristotle's advice more seriously. The tradition of including music and dance as an integral part of theatre continued through Roman times and into the Middle Ages. Liturgical drama, as well as vernacular plays, often combined incidental music with acting.

Opera can also be traced to the Gregorian chants of the early Christian Church. Music was an integral part of worship, and incorporated ancient melodies from Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures. The Church's organization of music throughout the early Middle Ages gave it structure, codifying scales, modes, and notation to indicate pitch and rhythm. The chants were originally sung in single-line melodies (monophony), but over time more voices were added to compliment the main melody, resulting in the beginning of polyphony (many independent voices or parts sung simultaneously).

However, the Church objected polyphony, worried that the intricate weaving of melodies and words obscured the liturgical text. Since conveying the meaning of the text was the primary reason for singing in church, polyphony was viewed as too secular by Church leaders, and was banished from the Liturgy by Pope John XXII in 1322. Harmonic music followed, which developed as songs with one-line melodies, accompanied by instruments. Then, in 1364, during the pontificate of Pope Urban V, a composer and priest named Guillaume de Machaut composed a polyphonic setting of

the mass entitled *La Messe de Notre Dame*. This was the first time that the Church officially sanctioned polyphony in sacred music.

Another early contributor to the emergence of opera was Alfonso the Wise, ruler of Castile, Spain, in the 13th century. Also known as the Emperor of Culture, he was a great troubadour and made noted contributions to music's development. First, he dedicated his musical poems, the "Cantigas de Santa Maria," to Saint Mary, which helped end the church's objection to the musical style. His "Cantigas" are one of the largest collections of monophonic songs from the Middle Ages. Secondly, he played a crucial role in the introduction of instruments from the Moorish kingdoms in southern Spain. These instruments, from the timpani to lute, came from Persia and the Arabic culture of the Middle East. Throughout the European Renaissance (14th – 16th centuries), minstrels and troubadours continued to compose harmonic folk songs which informed and entertained. Some songs were mere gossip; others were songs of love and heroes. These contained a one-line melody accompanied by guitars, lutes, or pipes.

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) continued to reform church music by composing music in his native tongue (German) for use in services. He also simplified the style so that average people in the congregation could sing it. Luther turned to the one-line melodies and folk tunes of the troubadours and minstrels and adapted them to religious texts. His reforms had great impact upon the music of Europe: the common people began to read and sing music.

From the church at this time also emerged the motet, a vocal composition in polyphonic style, with Biblical or similar text which was intended for use in religious services. Several voices sang sacred text accompanied by instruments, and this format laid the groundwork for the madrigal – one of the last steps in preparing the way for opera. Sung in the native language of the people in their homes, taverns, and village squares, madrigals were written for a small number of voices, between two and eight, and used secular (rather than biblical or liturgical) texts.

When refugee scholars from the fall of Constantinople (1453) flooded Italy and Europe, their knowledge of the classics of Rome and Greece added to the development of European musical traditions. Into this world of renewed interest in learning and culture came a group of men from Florence who formed a club, the Camerata, for the advancement of music and Greek theater. Their goal was to recreate Greek drama as they imagined it must have been presented. The Camerata struggled to solve problems that confronted composers, and were interested in investigating the theory and philosophy of music. The Camerata also experimented with the solo song, a forerunner of the opera aria.

Not surprisingly, Greek and Roman mythology and tragedies provided the subject matter of the first librettists. The presence of immortals and heroes made singing seem natural to the characters. Composers used instrumental accompaniment to help establish harmony, which freed them to experiment with instrumental music for preludes or overtures. Development of the recitative and the instrumental bridge enabled writers to connect the song, dance, and scene of the drama into the spectacle which was to become opera. This connector-recitative later evolved into a form of religious drama known as oratorio, a large concert piece which includes an orchestra, a choir, and soloists.

Members of the Camerata – Jacopo Peri, Ottavio Rinuccini, and Jacopo Corsi – are credited with writing the first opera, *Dafne*, based on the Greek myth. Their early efforts were crucial in establishing the musical styles of the new genre in the early 17th century. A sizeable orchestra was used and singers were in costume. *Dafne* became famous across Europe.

The Camerata set the scene, and onto the budding operatic stage came Claudio Monteverdi. He is considered the last great composer of madrigals and the first great composer of Italian opera. He was revolutionary in developing the orchestra's tone-color and instrumentation. He developed two techniques to heighten dramatic tension: *pizzicato* – plucking strings instead of bowing them; and *tremolo* – rapid repetition of a single note. Modern orchestration owes him as much gratitude as does

opera. In his operas, such as *Orfeo* (1607), the music was more than a vehicle for the words; it expressed and interpreted the poetry of the libretto. His orchestral combinations for *Orfeo* were considered to be the beginning of the golden age of Baroque instrumental music.

Monteverdi's experimentation with instruments and his willingness to break the rules of the past enabled him to breathe life into opera. He was far ahead of his time, freeing instruments to communicate emotion, and his orchestration was valued not only for the sounds instruments created but also for the emotional effects they could convey. In his work, music blended with the poetry of the libretto to create an emotional spectacle. His audiences were moved to an understanding of the possibilities of music's role in drama.

Additional Resources:

A Guide to Voice Parts and Families of the Orchestra

Voice Parts

SOPRANO

Sopranos have the highest voices, and usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they often sing many arias, and fall in love and/or die more often than other female voice types.

MEZZO-SOPRANO, or MEZZO

This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos often play mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they are cast as seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called "pants roles" or "trouser roles."

CONTRALTO, or ALTO

Contralto, or alto, is the lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females, witches and old gypsies.

COUNTERTENOR

Also often known as alto, this is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Countertenors sing in a similar range as a contralto. Countertenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some contemporary composers also write parts for countertenors.

TENOR

If there are no countertenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is the tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who "get the girl" or die horribly in the attempt.

BARITONE

The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often a schemer, but in tragic opera, he is more likely to play the villain.

BASS

The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera, basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

Families of the Orchestra

STRINGS	violins, violas, cellos, double bass
WOODWIND	piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons
BRASS	trumpets, trombones, French horns, baritones, tubas
PERCUSSION	bass drums, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes

Additional Resources: Glossary

adagio	Indication that the music is to be performed at a slow, relaxed pace. A movement for a piece of music with this marking.
allegro	Indicates a fairly fast tempo.
aria	A song for solo voice in an opera, with a clear, formal structure.
arioso	An operatic passage for solo voice, melodic but with no clearly defined form.
baritone	A man's voice, with a range between that of bass and tenor.
ballad opera	A type of opera in which dialogue is interspersed with songs set to popular tunes.
bel canto	Refers to the style cultivated in the 18 th and 19 th centuries in Italian opera. This demanded precise intonation, clarity of tone and enunciation, and a virtuoso mastery of the most florid passages.
cabaletta	The final short, fast section of a type of aria in 19 th -century Italian opera.
cadenza	A passage in which the solo instrument or voice performs without the orchestra, usually of an improvisatory nature.
chorus	A body of singers who sing and act as a group, either in unison or in harmony; any musical number written for such a group.
coloratura	An elaborate and highly ornamented part for soprano voice, usually written for the upper notes of the voice. The term is also applied to those singers who specialize in the demanding technique required for such parts.
conductor	The director of a musical performance for any sizable body of performers.
contralto	Low-pitched woman's voice, lower than soprano or mezzo-soprano.
crescendo	Meaning "growing," used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.
diatonic scale	Notes proper to a key that does not involve accidentals (sharps or flats)
ensemble	From the French word for "together," this term is used when discussing the degree of effective teamwork among a body of performers; in opera, a set piece for a group of soloists.

finale	The final number of an act, when sung by an ensemble.
fortissimo (ff)	Very loud.
forte (f)	Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume.
harmony	A simultaneous sounding of notes that usually serves to support a melody.
intermezzo	A piece of music played between the acts of an opera.
intermission	A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.
legato	A direction for smooth performance without detached notes.
leitmotif	Melodic element first used by Richard Wagner in his operas to musically represent characters, events, ideas, or emotions.
libretto	The text of an opera.
maestro	Literally “master”; used as a courtesy title for the conductor, whether a man or woman.
melody	A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable.
mezzo-soprano	Female voice in the middle range, between that of soprano and contralto.
octave	The interval between the first and eighth notes of the diatonic scale
opera buffa	An Italian form that uses comedic elements. The French term “opera bouffe” describes a similar type, although it may have an explicitly satirical intent.
opera seria	Italian for “serious opera.” Used to signify Italian opera of a heroic or dramatic quality during the 18 th and early 19 th centuries.
operetta	A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue. The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music tuneful and undemanding.
overture	A piece of music preceding an opera.
pentatonic scale	Typical of Japanese, Chinese, and other Far Eastern and folk music, the pentatonic scale divides the octave into five tones and may be played on the piano by striking only the black keys.

pianissimo (pp)	Very softly.
piano (p)	Meaning "flat," or "low". Softly, or quietly.
pitch	The location of a musical sound in the tonal scale; the quality that makes "A" different from "D."
prima donna	The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.
prelude	A piece of music that precedes another.
recitative	A style of sung declamation used in opera. It may be either accompanied or unaccompanied except for punctuating chords from the harpsichord.
reprise	A direct repetition of an earlier section in a piece of music, or the repeat of a song.
score	The written or printed book containing all the parts of a piece of music.
serenade	A song by a lover, sung outside the window of his mistress.
singspiel	A German opera with spoken dialogue.
solo	A part for unaccompanied instrument or for an instrument or voice with the dominant role in a work.
soprano	The high female voice; the high, often highest, member of a family of instruments.
tempo	The pace of a piece of music; how fast or how slow it is played.
tenor	A high male voice.
theme	The main idea of a piece of music; analogous to the topic of a written paper, subject to exploration and changes.
timbre	Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for "tone-color."
tone-color	The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.
trill	Musical ornament consisting of the rapid alternation between the note and the note above it.
trio	A sustained musical passage for three voices.
verismo	A type of "realism" in Italian opera during the late 19 th and early 20 th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.

vocalise A musical composition consisting of the singing of melody with vowel sounds or nonsense syllables rather than text, as for special effect in classical compositions, in polyphonic jazz singing by special groups, or in virtuoso vocal exercises.

volume A description of how loud or soft a sound is.

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