

# *Hansel and Gretel* Study Guide

## Objectives

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The Great Arizona Puppet Theater's version of *Hansel and Gretel* can be enjoyed as an entertaining adaptation of a familiar old folk tale and as an introduction to opera. Very few children have exposure to opera and some background on what opera is and what can be expected in the production aid in the student's appreciation of the show. By following this guide, educators will gain more knowledge on opera, its history, and Humperdinck's operatic version of *Hansel Und Gretel*. Educators can use this knowledge to teach their class more about opera and how The Great Arizona Puppet Theater transformed this opera normally enjoyed by adults into a puppet show that both kids and adults will love.

## Arizona Common Core Standards

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### Speaking and Listening and Reading Standards:

K.SL.2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

1.SL.2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

2.SL.2. Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

K.RL.2. With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

K.RL.3. With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.

## GAPT's Version of *Hansel and Gretel*

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The Great Arizona Puppet Theater (GAPT) based their version of *Hansel and Gretel* on the German opera by Engelbert Humperdinck. More information about the opera can be found below. GAPT's script of this story closely follows Humperdinck's libretto (the text for an opera or musical theater), which differs from many well-known renditions of *Hansel and Gretel*. However, at GAPT the entire opera is not being presented. In the show, you will hear selections from the opera with spoken dialogue in between. In this way, GAPT's version resembles a musical play rather than an opera. Also, the score has been adapted to be played by just an accordion and a violin, rather than an entire orchestra. The puppeteers, who were not trained in the operatic style of singing, will be singing for the puppets, using microphones. The puppets used in this show are large rod puppets. The rod puppets at GAPT were hand made by the puppeteers. They are controlled using large rods underneath and a string to control the puppet's mouth.

*Hansel and Gretel* by GAPT is a great way to experience a puppet show, hear some classical opera, and enjoy the classic story of Hansel and Gretel.

## Humperdinck's version of *Hansel Und Gretel*

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German opera in the 19th century was dominated by the great composer, Richard Wagner. Wagnerian opera was passionate heavy drama with mythological themes. The opera cliché of the heavy soprano wearing Viking horns and singing wild melodies is based on Wagnerian opera. The only other German composer in that time to write a successful opera was Engelbert Humperdinck.

Humperdinck first wrote *Hansel and Gretel* as a musical play for his nieces and nephews to perform at home. He adapted, but did not exactly follow, the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. He later expanded it into a full opera. Humperdinck wove children's song and dances, folk melodies, a prayer tune and the supernatural into the opera. The light fairy-tale opera was a welcome relief to the heavy Wagnerian operas of the time.

## Opera's Beginnings

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Opera was "invented" in the late 16th century. A group of artists and scholars known as the Camerata met at an Italian nobleman's home to discuss their ideas on art and theater. At that time there was much interest in Europe about the civilization of Ancient Greece, where drama had its beginnings. Greek plays were presented to the accompaniment of flutes and lyres. Plays had leading and supporting actors and choruses. The pitch of the actor's voices raised and lowered for dramatic effect.

Serious European music in the 16th century was dominated by the madrigal form of singing. In madrigal singing a chorus of voices combined in intricate harmonies and intertwining melodies. Voices were used as instruments. The emphasis was on the music instead of the words. Often the words could not be understood.

The Camerata wished to return music to the Greek ideal, where music was the hand-maiden of drama. Their experiments with this new art form, the opera, were considered to be bold and controversial. The first public opera performance was given in 1600. By 1640 opera was the rage in Italy. Italian children dreamed of being discovered for the opera the way modern-day American children dream of being movie stars. Opera's popularity spread throughout Europe, especially to France and Germany.

# Vocabulary

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Opera	Rod puppets
The Camerata - the group of Italian noblemen who met and invented Opera	Madrigal singing - a chorus of voices expertly combined that use no instruments to back them up and focus on music and not words.
Drama	Musical Theatre
Mood	Libretto - the text for an opera or musical theatre
Composer	Orchestra
Aria - song	Dialogue
Soprano - highest of female or boys voices	Mezzo-soprano - a female voice halfway between the soprano and the contralto
Contralto - lower, darker and heavier female voice	Tenor - highest male voice
Baritone - male voice between tenor and bass	Bass - the lowest male voice

## Discussion Topics for Before the Show

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**Objectives:** By talking to your students about what opera is and opening up their eyes to different types of theatre, students will gain more enjoyment from the puppet show. They will know what to expect, and may even be able to get more educational value from seeing the show. Here are some topics to discuss with your students prior to seeing *Hansel and Gretel*:

- What is Opera? Talk to your students about what opera is and some of the history outlined above.
- What is musical theatre? Ask your students if they've ever seen a piece of musical theatre? What was it? Did they enjoy it?
- What is the difference between musical theatre and opera?
- Play a piece of music from *Hansel Und Gretel* or another opera. Have your students listen closely. Ask them if they can understand what may be happening in the music. *The Metropolitan Opera has some samples of tracks from the opera available online as well as more information about how the pieces are performed and how to identify voice types. See Resources below for a direct link.*
- Define the voice types for your students. See if they can identify those voice types in the recording you play for them.
- Composers who write musicals, operas and ballets try to establish a mood with the music. As you listen to the recording, try to decide what kind of mood the music is trying to establish. Is it happy? Spooky? Sad?

# Discussion Topics for After the Show

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**Objectives:** After seeing GAPT's version of *Hansel and Gretel* your students will have seen both a puppet show and parts of a classical opera (often for the first time!). Take some time to talk to your students about what their experience was like and to review what opera is and how the music in either operas or musicals can really alter and enhance the theatrical value of the performance.

- Had you heard any of the music before? Whether you have or haven't, did any of it seem familiar or was it like anything else you've ever heard?
- Which arias (songs) do you feel really helped set the mood? What was the mood? Talk to your students about how the mood changed throughout the show and how the music helped that.
- Listen to a recording of *Hansel and Gretel* and see if students recognize any of the songs. Challenge them to tell you what was happening in the story during the different songs.
- How did this play differ from other versions of *Hansel and Gretel* you have heard or seen?
- Consider reading your class the version of *Hansel and Gretel* by the Brothers Grimm (a link to an online version is supplied in the Resources below). Now that they have more experience with the opera and the puppet show, ask them how the three versions of the story are different? What is similar in each one? What version do they like best and why?

## Resources

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Arizona Department of Education - Core Curriculum:  
<http://www.azed.gov/standards-practices>

Brothers Grimm Version of *Hansel and Gretel*:  
<http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/HanGre.shtml#3>

The Metropolitan Opera Musical Highlights:  
<http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/about/education/educatorguides/content.aspx?customid=6866>

Great Arizona Puppet Theater:  
<http://www.azpuppets.org>

Please send any thoughts or appreciation letters to the Great Arizona Puppet Theater at:  
302 W Latham St  
Phoenix, AZ 85003  
[info@azpuppet.org](mailto:info@azpuppet.org)

*We love hearing from you and your students!*