



INTO THE WOODS

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim Book by James Lapine

Sung in English with English super titles

Family Information: Mild language; moral situations and sexual innuendo. *Into the Woods* intertwines many fairytale characters into one story about wishes and what happens when they come true in one trip into the woods—which changes their lives forever—but, for better or for worse? That is the question that is ethically explored.

Story in Two Acts

ACT ONE

Once upon a time the narrator begins . . . Cinderella wishes to go to the King's Festival, Jack wishes his cow, Milky-White, would give him some milk, the Baker and his Wife wish for a child. But, scrubbing in the kitchen, Cinderella and her foolish dreams are mocked by her Stepmother and her Stepsisters; Jack's Mother wants him to sell Milky-White; and the Baker and his Wife are distracted by the arrival of Little Red Riding Hood, in search of a sticky bun to take to her grandmother in the woods. The Witch next door offers to end the couple's barrenness if the Baker can find four crucial ingredients for a magic potion. Taking only six beans from his father's jacket, the Baker sets off into the woods; so does Jack, to sell his cow; and Cinderella, to visit her mother's grave.

As Cinderella shares her wish at her mother's grave a gown and slippers drop from the hazel tree. Red Riding Hood is surprised by a slaving Wolf, who persuades her to take a short detour, while Jack must part with his dear cow when he sells Milky-White to the Baker for five beans. The Baker feels badly about taking advantage of a simpleton, but his Wife (who has followed him into the woods) thinks the beans were a fair exchange because she suggests they are magic, and, anyway, their chances of children depend on getting the- ingredients. The Bakers wife has the red cape, but the Baker is worried about Red Riding Hood - and with good cause. At the cottage, both Grandmother and the young girl have been swallowed by the Wolf. Rescued by the Baker, Red Riding Hood savors her new self-awareness. Endeavoring to shake off a prince, Cinderella stumbles across a giant beanstalk. But it is now the end of the day—a time to reflect on the day's adventures. Jack is curious enough to shin up the beanstalk, where he discovers gold –and giants. Cinderella's Prince, thwarted in his search, commiserates with his Brother, who is similarly pining over Rapunzel, a maiden confined to a door-less tower accessible only by climbing her corn-yellow hair which the baker and his wife retrieve; so, for them the pieces are falling in place. They have three of the four ingredients—all secured by their sense of teamwork.

Unfortunately, the cow dies. The Witch is furious that her daughter Rapunzel is seeing a Prince, and chops off her hair. Cinderella mulls things over as the Prince has spread pitch on the stairs and trapped her. The Baker's Wife secures her shoe. Jack is being pursued by a giant—until, thinking quickly, he chops down the beanstalk.

The Baker produces the four ingredients; the ugly old Witch mixes her potions and restores her beauty, the Baker's Wife becomes pregnant, Jack—laden with gold—and his cow (restored to life) resume their friendship. Cinderella and Rapunzel marry their Princes. With the exception of Cinderella's stepsisters, blinded by pigeons, everyone lives happily.

ACT TWO

Later ... the narrator continues . . . despite one or two quibbles everyone is content—until, suddenly, the Baker's house is reduced to rubble. The only clue: a huge footprint. Back into the woods they go. Cinderella's and Rapunzel's Princes who, marital bliss notwithstanding, come across Sleeping Beauty and the equally slumbering Snow White, two new maidens whom they desire. But, for one of them, there'll be no need for a messy divorce. A Giant—actually, a giantess—is on the rampage, eager to avenge her husband's death, and she carelessly tramples Rapunzel to death. The Witch mourns for her daughter and turns on the Narrator because she doesn't like the way he's telling the story. Only after she's tossed him to the Giantess does it dawn on them that the story is now out of control. The Prince's Steward kills Jack's Mother. With a giantess on the loose they could die any moment, says Cinderella's Prince before seducing the Baker's Wife; moments later she is, indeed, crushed to death by falling timber. Everyone begins to place blame on each other. The Witch scatters a few beans and disappears in a puff of smoke. The Baker decides it's time to take responsibility.

Devising a plan to slay the Giantess, the Baker, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood and the others comfort each other. When peace is restored to the woods, the Baker begins to tell his son the story to share what he has learned.

Musical numbers:

1. **Prologue: Into the Woods**
 2. **Cinderella at the Grave**
 3. **Hello, Little Girl**
 4. **I Guess This Is Goodbye**
 5. **Maybe They're Magic**
 6. **I Know Things Now**
 7. **A Very Nice Prince**
 8. **First Midnight**
 9. **Giants In the Sky**
 10. **Agony**
 11. **It Takes Two**
 12. **On the Steps of the Palace**
 13. **Stay With Me**
 14. **Ever After**
 15. **Prologue: So Happy**
 16. **Agony**
 17. **Lament**
 18. **Any Moment**
 19. **Moments In the Woods**
 20. **Your Fault**
 21. **Last Midnight**
 22. **No More**
 23. **No One Is Alone**
 24. **Children Will Listen**
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Educational and Artistic Value of *Into the Woods*

By Pamela Gee

Opera by Children Education Associate

“Once upon a time . . . in a far off Kingdom lived a young maiden, a sad young lad and a childless baker.” It’s the perfect beginning to weave three famous fairytales into one interesting adventure. But what may appear on the surface as childhood entertainment is truly an allegory for adults. Folk tales, fairy tales, fables, and myths are used in virtually every culture to entertain, instruct and explain concepts too hard to comprehend or which are vital to survival and community ethics. Sondheim expressed to William A. Henry III in an interview for *Time* magazine appearing Nov. 16, 1987, that he and Lapine intended, among other themes, to focus on community responsibility. This theme encapsulates the importance of instructing the adults of the future while maintaining values in the present; such as good verses evil, avoiding temptation and danger, family relationships, morals, heeding advice of elders, and maneuvering through the difficult period of adolescence.

An adult primarily fulfills the role of teacher, but in some cases fail in their purpose as a result of ignorance, avoidance, over protecting instead of teaching, deliberate deception, or to dissociate all family obligations. This musical uses the traditional German Grimm Brothers’ tales in all their disconcerting original text to magnify and emphasize these themes. It explores very real and disturbing problems communities deal with when parents leave their family by choice through divorce, deceit, and abandonment. It shows the consequences of adults preying on the innocent, leaving desires and wants unchecked, failing to teach, and overprotecting instead of educating. It also explores misjudging people by appearance and the difference between superficial wishes and realistic needs. It examines how communities care for those who have no family because of death or abandonment. It seeks to discover how entitlement is bred when one receives something without hard work—or discontentment with what was provided and a disregard for others when the focus on aspiration is self-absorbed.

The tales selected to convey these messages are Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel, and Little Red Riding Hood brought together by associating the Rapunzel story with an account of a childless couple. The Baker and his Wife want to have children but must overcome a curse placed upon the Baker’s father who stole magic beans from the Witch’s garden. The beans were the Witch’s bond to beauty causing her to retaliate not only by taking the baby, but also by placing a curse of sterility on the family. The Witch, wanting to return to her former beauty, has need of four items which she cannot retrieve herself and so approaches the Baker with a “deal” to retrieve them for her before the last midnight on the third day. The items: “the cape as red as blood, the cow as white as milk, the hair as yellow as corn, the slipper as pure as gold”, exchanged for the promise of a child if they prove successful. The Baker and his Wife achieve this before intermission and all the characters in each story have their perceived happy ending, though their stories have been a little muddled because of the entangled tales.

The tale has not ended however, for momentary wishes, even though fulfilled are never the end; life goes on after “happily ever after”. The Witch unknowingly has traded her magic power for beauty, the Princes find the challenge of the chase the best part of love and discover new conquests, Cinderella and Rapunzel are both unhappy with married life (for both obvious and imperceptible reasons), Jack discovers instant wealth to the complete joy of his mother, and the Baker’s Wife, whose wish for a child so desperate in the first act, falls for the momentary attentions of a prince. These superficial wants and desires have lasting consequences and eradicate their original wishes. Jack’s foolish approach to the gains of quick riches brings about the largest physical consequence because Jack, having killed a giant, has the giant’s wife seeking revenge. Even so, his consequence has no greater impact on the community than do the discrete indiscretions. Everyone tries to place blame on the others not willing to recognize their own part in the downfall of the community. The giantess destroys the community and several people die upon her arrival, but just as much damage has been perpetrated on families and the community stability through the imprudence of the other characters. Every choice has a

consequence. The community tries to protect Jack because of his youth yet by choice, ignorance, and inability they fail to protect the community as a whole. The Witch, though a voice of reason throughout, eventually leaves as she has lost her magical powers to influence and a mounting frustration with the lack of accountability with those around her, but shares one last bit of advice from her experience and observations:

Careful the things you say,
Children will listen.
Careful the things you do,
Children will see.
And learn.
Children may not obey,
But children will listen.
Children will look to you
For which way to turn,
To learn what to be.
Careful before you say,
"Listen to me."
Children will listen.

Careful the wish you make,
Wishes are children.
Careful the path they take --
Wishes come true,
Not free.
Careful the spell you cast,
Not just on children.
Sometimes the spell may last
Past what you can see
And turn against you...

Careful the tale you tell,
That is the spell.
Children will listen.

Ultimately all of the characters in *Into the Woods* are neither good nor bad, but rather human. Is it possible for humans to live higher standards, overcome the ordinary, and become something better? Do they heed the Witches advice? The final question Sondheim and Lapine seem to ask: "Is the idea of a utopian society attainable?" Sondheim's answer, "I wish."