

LEVELED BOOK • U

HANSEL and GRETEL

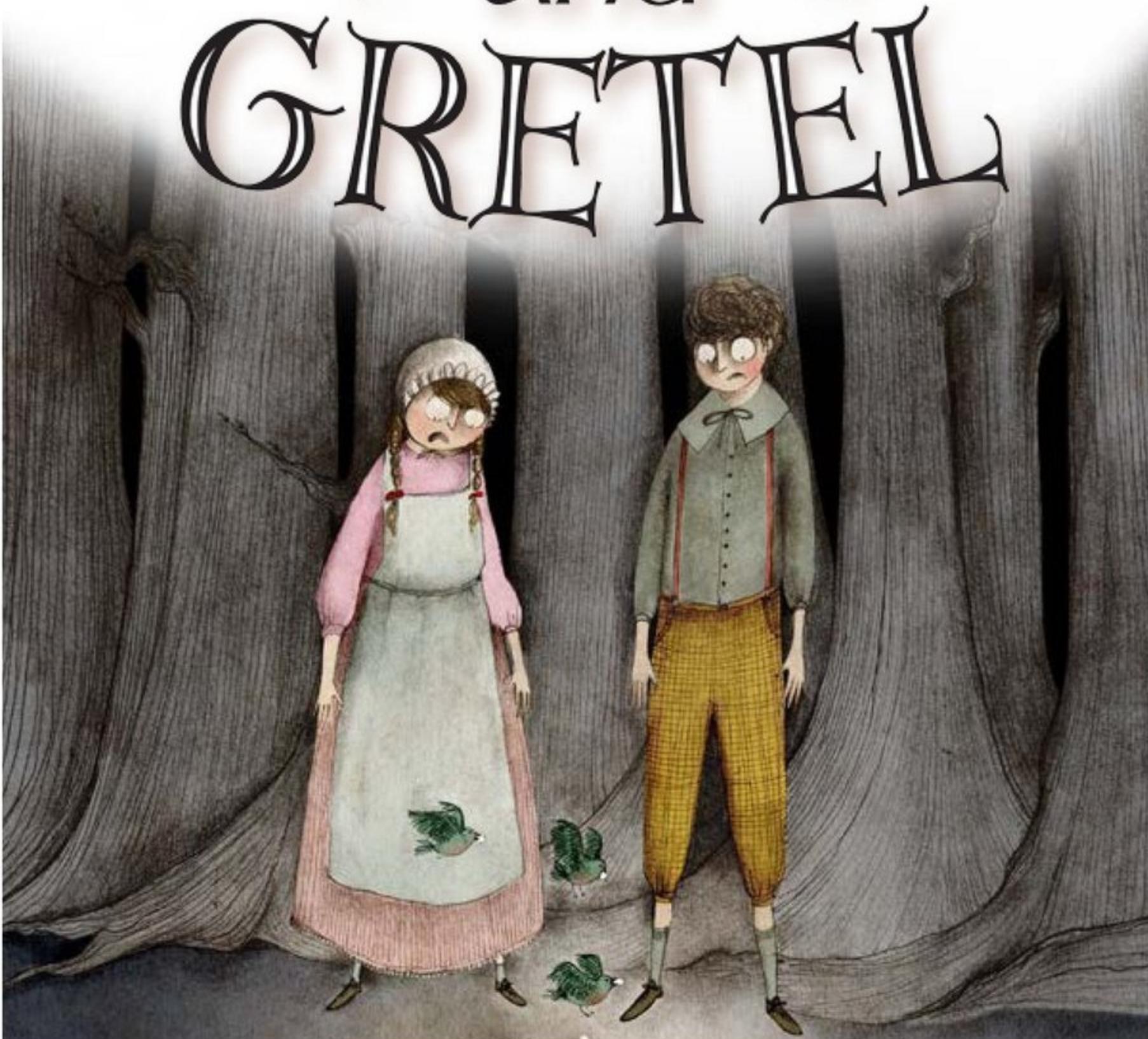


MULTI
level
O·R·U

A German Fairy Tale
Retold by Katherine Follett
Illustrated by Letizia Rubegni

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

What do you learn about Hansel's and Gretel's characters from what they say and do in the story?

Words to Know

envied
furtively
gemstones
loathsome
quaint
seized

snarled
stepmother
swooning
treasure
trudged
wicked

Hansel and Gretel
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Correlation

LEVEL U	
Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



For three summers, frost killed the apples and froze the wheat. Hansel and Gretel's family had nothing to eat but last year's moldy potatoes. Their father became weak-willed and faint, and their stepmother's once glad face grew thin and sharp. Hansel almost envied his sister, who was too young to recall happier times.

One morning, Father beckoned the children. "Come with me for a walk in the woods. Perhaps we can find some mushrooms."

Gretel happily followed.

"Where are we going?" Hansel asked. Father turned his head, glancing back over his shoulder. Hansel spied their stepmother watching from the front window, and he got a bad feeling. Father **furtively** squeezed a small crust of bread into Hansel's hand and whispered, "Here, our last bit of bread."

Hansel wanted to tear the bread in two, give one half to Gretel, and gobble down the other, but he couldn't shake the worry from his mind. Something about the way his stepmother had glared at them from the window made him uneasy. Though his mouth watered, Hansel regretfully tore the bread into crumbs and dropped them as he walked, marking their path as Father **trudged** deeper and deeper into the forest.



Then, in a dark dell, Father stopped, his hands and voice shaking. “Your stepmother and I don’t have enough to feed you. There is a village just over this hill where you may find another family.” Hansel hesitated—he felt sick to his stomach. “Do as I say,” Father pleaded, “for your sister’s sake.”

With that, he slipped into the shadows and hurried away. Gretel cried out and chased him, but she soon fell behind.



“Don’t worry,” Hansel said, holding her shoulder, “I made a path.” He pointed to the breadcrumbs, bright against the dark forest floor. Gretel sniffled and stayed close as they followed the crumbs toward home.

"You didn't make a very good path," Gretel pouted. Hansel thought he'd dropped a crumb every three steps, but he kept losing the way. Suddenly, a little sparrow swooped down, grabbed a crumb, and fluttered into the trees.



"Birds are eating your crumbs!" Gretel cried. Though they searched, Hansel and Gretel could not find the path. Shadows pressed close all around, but Hansel remained calm.

"Father said the village isn't far away," he said.

The gloom grew deeper and deeper. Just when he was sure Father had lied to them, Hansel saw light beaming through the trees. "Look—there's a clearing up ahead."



The woods parted to reveal an astounding scene. In a sunny meadow sat a **quaint** cottage made entirely of sweets! Frosting icicles dripped from the eaves, ribbon candy lined the windows, and slabs of chocolate shingled the roof.

Seized by hunger, the children stumbled forward, broke off pieces of the house, and devoured them. The sweetness on Hansel's tongue almost made him dizzy, and he didn't hear the door swing open.

"Do I hear little mouths nibbling on my house?" a small voice said. A tiny old woman with cloudy eyes and a smile as sweet as her candy house beckoned them. "Please, come in!" **Swooning** with sugar, Hansel and Gretel happily followed her inside.

The old woman chuckled as she blindly felt her way around the small house, bringing plate after plate of gingerbread, cake, and pie. When the children were finally full, she made up an enormous feather bed and then drew a **treasure** chest from her shelf.



"I don't keep many toys around, but I have these old things," she said, tossing Hansel something green and shiny. It was an emerald the size of his fist! He and his sister played marbles with the huge **gemstones** until they dozed off by the crackling fire.

Breakfast was waffles piled with strawberries, peaches, and whipped cream.

"I'm so happy to have company," the old woman sang. "I wonder, though, if you would mind doing a few chores for me. My eyesight isn't so good anymore."

"Of course!" Hansel cried.

The woman handed Gretel a broom and pointed Hansel to a broken candy-cane latch on a high window. "It's too tall for me. Maybe you can climb into that birdcage and reach it from there?"

A huge empty birdcage hung from the rafters near the window. Hansel stood on the table and hoisted himself inside. He heard a *click!* as the cage door swung shut behind him.



Gretel didn't see the cage door close, but she heard the click and saw a **wicked** smile flash across the old woman's face. Hansel jostled the door, but it was latched tight. "What happened?" Gretel asked.

"Get back to work!" the woman **snarled**, her voice suddenly low and cruel. Gretel gasped.

"Isn't it comfortable up there?" the old woman cooed at Hansel. "Here's some more cake to keep you occupied. You're a bit thin now, but you'll fatten up soon enough."

The hair stood up on the back of Gretel's neck, but she was too afraid to object. "Is there anything else I can help you with?" she asked the old woman, masking her shaking voice with false cheer.

"Oh, there's plenty," the woman hissed, bringing out an old mop, a rusty bucket, and a dirty rag that looked especially **loathsome** against the sugared walls of the candy house.



Gretel scrubbed the floors, shook out the bedding, and washed the dishes, always with one eye on the old woman. Every day, the woman shoved another mound of treats into her brother's cage, then reached up and **seized** his arm in her clawlike grasp. As time passed, Hansel's arm filled out and grew soft. The woman smiled in a way that turned Gretel cold.

Gretel was too small to reach the cage or fight the woman. She felt helpless, but one evening as she swept up after supper, she spotted a chicken bone in the dustpan, and it gave her an idea. After nightfall, Gretel tossed the bone into Hansel's cage. "Give this to her instead when she grabs your arm," she whispered.

From then on, when the woman reached up for Hansel's arm, she pinched the bone. "Why aren't you getting fat?" she demanded, growing more frustrated each day.



Finally, the old woman cursed under her breath. "I'm not waiting any longer. Girl, fill that big crock with water, and fetch enough wood for a hot fire!"

Gretel's stomach dropped. She felt sick, but she did as she was told.

When the water began to bubble, the old woman tottered to Hansel's cage. She had to stand on a chair to open the door.



This was Gretel's chance! With all her strength, Gretel swung her broom at the cage, knocking it from its hook. As the cage and Hansel came crashing down, the woman stumbled backward and fell. Hansel squirmed free and leaped to his feet. As the old woman slowly stood, Hansel and Gretel rushed at her together, pushed her into the open cage, and slammed the door shut, trapping her.



"You wicked children—let me out!"

Hansel snatched the treasure chest from the shelf, and together the children fled into the forest.

They ran until both were exhausted. They were back where they'd started, lost in the woods with darkness coming on, but Gretel felt stronger and less afraid than before. They decided to head downhill in search of home.

"What's that?" Gretel whispered. The sound of a distant voice calling their names seeped through the trees. Still afraid, the children ducked into the underbrush.

The voice came closer and began to sound more familiar. Just before the source came into view, Gretel realized who it was.



“Father!” she shouted, leaping into the man’s arms. He was thin and ragged, his eyes red from weeping.

“My precious children!” he cried, swinging Gretel into the air. “I’m so sorry for what I did—I sent your stepmother away, and I’ve been searching for you ever since!”



The family was overcome with happiness, but then Father got a sad look in his eyes. “We still have no food,” he admitted.

“Soon we will have all the food we could hope to eat,” Hansel announced, revealing the chest of gemstones. Their weeping turned to laughter that rang through the forest. Together, they headed over the hill toward home.

Glossary

envied (<i>v.</i>)	felt jealous of another person's qualities, belongings, or good fortune (p. 3)
furtively (<i>adv.</i>)	slyly or sneakily (p. 4)
gemstones (<i>n.</i>)	minerals or organic materials that can be cut and polished for use in jewelry (p. 8)
loathsome (<i>adj.</i>)	causing extreme dislike or disgust; very unpleasant (p. 10)
quaint (<i>adj.</i>)	pleasantly old-fashioned or unusual (p. 7)
seized (<i>v.</i>)	took control by force (p. 11)
snarled (<i>v.</i>)	growled aggressively or said something in an angry way (p. 10)
stepmother (<i>n.</i>)	a woman who has married a child's father after the death or divorce of that child's mother (p. 3)
swooning (<i>v.</i>)	fainting or becoming overwhelmed with excitement, joy, or other extreme emotion (p. 7)
treasure (<i>n.</i>)	something that is very special or valuable (p. 8)
trudged (<i>v.</i>)	walked slowly and heavily due to tiredness or difficult conditions (p. 4)
wicked (<i>adj.</i>)	very mean or bad (p. 10)

Hansel and Gretel

A Reading A-Z Level U Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,374

Connections

Writing

How might the story have been different if the birds had not eaten Hansel's trail of breadcrumbs? Write a paragraph describing how the story would change.

Social Studies

People believe that fairy tales written by the Grimm brothers, including *Hansel and Gretel*, are related to the Black Forest in Germany. Research the Black Forest and create a poster about it that includes pictures.

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