

Into the Woods: High School Project 2022

STUDY GUIDE



Pictured: Cast members of INTO THE WOODS (clockwise) Baker, Jack's Mom, Little Red Ridinghood, Jack, Cinderella | Grand Theatre 2022 | Photo by Dahlia Katz

Age Recommendation: 8+

Content Warning: Please be aware that haze, atmosphere, and strobe lighting are used in this production. As is the case with many fairy tales, alongside scenes of magic and wonder, audiences will also experience reference to concepts of consent, sexuality, death, and murder.

Synopsis: The story follows The Baker and his Wife who wish to have a child; Cinderella who wishes to go to the King's Festival; and Jack who wishes his cow would give some milk. When the Baker and his Wife are visited by the neighborhood Witch, who reveals to them that she placed a curse on their family, the two set off on a journey into the woods to reverse the curse. Also in the woods, we meet Little Red Ridinghood and her grandmother, the Wolf, the Witch's daughter, Rapunzel, and the Princes. By the end of Act I, everyone has gotten their wish and will seemingly live happily ever after. In Act II, when Jack's beanstalk brings them a visit from an angry Giant, we see how the consequences of their actions haunt them in disastrous ways. The community must come together to save each other and their kingdom, but sacrifices must be made.

Credits:

- Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, Book by James Lapine
- Originally directed for the stage by James Lapine with musical staging by Lar Lubovitch, settings by Tony Straiges, lighting by Richard Nelson, costumes by Ann Hould-Ward (based on original concepts by Patricia Zipprodt and Ann Hould-Ward), and makeup by Jeff Raum.

Themes:

- Wishes + Desires
- Truth + Lies
- Individual vs. Community
- Morals and meanings in Folk Literature
- Oral Tradition, Story collecting/preserving



Pictured: Cast members of INTO THE WOODS (clockwise) 1 - Lucinda, Cinderella's Stepmother & Florinda, 2 - Rapunzel's Prince & Cinderella's Prince, 3 - Witch & Rapunzel, 4 - Wolf, 5 - Little Red Ridinghood, 6 - Cinderella | Grand Theatre 2022 | Photos by Dahlia Katz



Into the Woods Fast Facts:

- The show initially premiered at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre in 1986. It premiered on Broadway on November 5, 1987 and closed September 3, 1989 after 764 performances!
- Into the Woods won many awards, including three Tony Awards in 1988 for Best Score, Best Book, and Best Actress in a Musical (Joanna Gleason). The original cast recording even won a Grammy Award!
- Into the Woods was the first show to be adapted for children. It's normal now for most musicals to be adapted into kid-friendly versions, usually called "junior versions," that can be performed in schools. But it was not as common in the early '90s when Into the Woods premiered. Sondheim and Lapine were the first artists to let their show be adapted for kids.
- A second Broadway revival began performances on June 28, 2022 at the St. James Theatre.

Further learning:

Composer Stephen Sondheim discusses the opening number of Into the Woods.



Introduction article:

Venturing into the Life of Stephen Sondheim

He was one of theatre's most influential composers and lyricists, but who was the man behind "Into the Woods"?

The late Stephen Sondheim has been widely acknowledged as the most innovative, influential, and important composer and lyricist in modern Broadway history. His work tackles unexpected themes and some of the darker elements of the human experience through music and lyrics of unprecedented complexity and sophistication. Sondheim was interested in communication with audiences, stating "I love the theater as much as music, and the whole idea of getting across to an audience and making them laugh, making them cry – just making them feel – is paramount to me."

Born in New York on March 22, 1930, Stephen Sondheim began studying piano and organ at a young age and was already practicing songwriting as a student. When he was ten years old and grappling with his parents' divorce, young Stephen watched his first Broadway musical, *Very Warm for May*. "The curtain went up and revealed a piano," Sondheim recalled. "A butler took a duster and brushed it up, tinkling the keys. I thought that was thrilling." He then formed a close relationship with lyricist and playwright, Oscar Hammerstein II, who became Sondheim's surrogate father, influencing him profoundly and developing his love of musical theater. The introduction of this art form as a way to

express himself gave Sondheim a way through the complicated emotions of a changing family life, and gave the world a talent who would go on to write the lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957) and *Gypsy* (1959) before eventually devoting himself to writing both music and lyrics for shows, such as *Company* (1970), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), and *Into the Woods* (1987).

Sondheim collaborated with James Lapine on *Into the Woods*, a musical based on several Brothers Grimm fairy tales, which debuted in San Diego at the Old Globe Theatre in 1986 and premiered on Broadway on November 5, 1987. This production was nominated for ten Tony Awards and won three (Best Score: Stephen Sondheim, Best Book: James Lapine, Best Actress in a Musical: Canada's own Joanna Gleason); won the 1988 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award for Best Musical; and the original cast recording won a Grammy Award!

The iconic musical's opening lyric - "*I wish*" - is set to the interval of a rising major second and serves as one example of the many musical motifs of character, location, or conflict that are repeated and developed throughout the show. The dialogue is heavily syncopated and, in many instances, the characters' lines are delivered with a fixed beat that follows natural speech rhythms.

The student cast and musicians, along with our creative team, enjoyed the opportunity and challenge of exploring the themes in this show – as well as learning its intricate music and lyrics. Our backstage team have poured over the set, wardrobe, and props, which help tell a story of growing up, accepting responsibility, and the consequences of getting what you wish for. The collaborative nature of theatre was something Sondheim embraced wholeheartedly and is proudly on display in this production, featuring the work of 44 high school students.

Post-show Discussion Questions:

1. Which characters did not previously exist in fairy tales and were created for the show?
2. Which characters would you classify as "good" and which would you classify as "evil"? What standards or definitions do you use to decide? Does the story make a clear distinction between the two?
3. What does the woods represent to the characters, and how does it change over time?
4. While contemplating taking Little Red Ridinghood's cape, the Baker says, "Things are only what you need them for – what's important is who needs them more." How do you feel about this statement? Do you see evidence that people today have this attitude?
5. How do the parents in the story try to protect their children?
6. What does the song "No One Is Alone" mean to you?
7. What do you think happens to the remaining characters after the story ends?

Post-show Activities:

8. Draw a map of "the woods" in the show. Show the location of important landmarks like the grave of Cinderella's mother, the castle and Rapunzel's tower.
9. Read a novel or short story that depicts a quest or journey. Write about the journey taken by the central character. How does it compare to the journey undertaken by the characters in *Into The Woods*?
10. Have someone assume the role of a radio talk show "in the woods" during the crisis with the Giant. The issue under discussion is whom to blame for bringing the Giant to the community.

Have other members of the group imagine they are residents of the woods who call in to offer their opinions of whom to blame.

11. Track each character's transformation from the beginning to end of the show. What discoveries are made by the characters who survive Act II? Which character do you think grows the most?
12. Rewrite a popular fairy tale or nursery rhyme — but give the central character an unexpected “edge” (i.e. Little Red Ridinghood's brattiness) not usually associated with her or him.
13. Draw a chart tracing the past and current relationships between the characters in Into The Woods.
14. Describe one of the parent-child relationships in Into The Woods.
15. Write an essay on your own definition of the word “family.” Ask an older person for a definition. How are the definitions different? Why?

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