

Gretel et Hansel

Text SUZANNE LEBEAU
Direction GERVAIS GAUDREULT



COMPANION DOCUMENT
for teachers, educators, and young spectators

le Carrousel
COMPAGNIE DE THÉÂTRE

Before the show **PREPARING FOR THE ENCOUNTER**

Companion Notebook	p 3
Summary of the Story	p 3
The Fairy Tale	p 4
Gretel and Hansel: A Tale Reread by Suzanne Lebeau	p 5
Siblings: the Emotional Links that Unite a Family	p 6
The Power of Evocation: The Direction of the Show	p 7

After the show **PROLONGING THE PLEASURE**

The Traces Left by the Performance	p 8-9
The Creative Team	p 10
The Company	p 11



Document credits

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Before the show **PREPARING FOR THE ENCOUNTER**

COMPANION NOTEBOOK

To prepare your students to enjoy the performance of **Gretel and Hansel**, you can sharpen their gaze as young spectators. It is possible to have them discover the process of creating the show, without diminishing the pleasure and surprise of the performance!

We therefore suggest that you make students aware of the theatre experience by preparing them to see **Gretel and Hansel** and by prolonging the pleasure of having seen it, all with the goal of enriching the experience of the show.

We invite teachers and educators to adapt the information provided and activities proposed in this companion notebook as a function of the age, knowledge, and interests of the students in their group.

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

When Hansel arrives, it upsets the balance of Gretel's life completely. Her little brother has turned everything upside down. When their parents abandon them in the forest and they end up at the witch's house, she is very tempted to push him into the oven with their jailer and get rid of him forever. . .

Passionately and starkly, the creative team for **Gretel and Hansel** asks, "By what tortuous route does one become a big sister?"

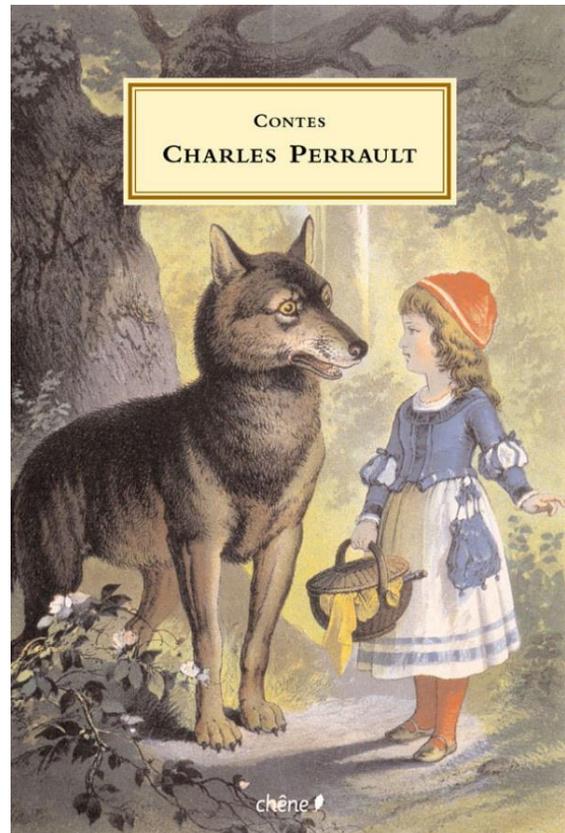
The Fairy Tale

Once upon a time . . . Tales often begin with these words. This standard formula situates the story sometime in the past, long enough ago that the reader accepts the manifestations of the marvellous that inevitably arise in the world of tales.

Fairy tales first appeared in the seventeenth century. They borrow from oral tradition, myth, love stories, and classical texts of antiquity.¹ Moreover, a number of variants of a single tale often coexist; for example, there were apparently more than thirty versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* in different regions and countries. It was Charles Perrault, however, who published the first written version of the tale, in 1695. Since then, “Little Red Riding Hood” has been reshaped, rewritten, and parodied dozens of times.

Although we owe the expression “fairy tale” to Madame D’Aulnoy, it was Perrault who had the greatest success at the time with his *Contes de ma mère l’Oye*. In fact, though most fairy tales were written by women, those penned by four men – Charles Perrault, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen – are the ones that are still being told today.

The fairy tale is adapted to the way in which children conceive of and experience the world, and that is why these tales are so interesting to them. Educationalist and psychologist Bruno Bettelheim brought to light the richness and depth of the fairy tale in his book *Uses of Enchantment*. “While it entertains the child, the fairy tale enlightens him about himself and fosters his personality development” and “makes . . . great and positive psychological contributions to the child’s inner growth.”²



¹ Michel Le Bris and Claudine Glot (eds.), *Fées, elfes, dragons et autres créatures des royaumes de féerie* (Paris: Hoëbeke, 2002).

² Bettelheim, Bruno, *Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 12.

GRETEL AND HANSEL: A Tale Reread by Suzanne Lebeau

“Hansel and Gretel,” also known in French as “Jeannot et Margot,” is a folk tale that the Brothers Grimm included in their book *Children’s and Household Tales*. The story features two children, brother and sister, who are abandoned in the forest by their parents because they can no longer feed them. Wandering in the woods, trying to find their way home, the children discover a house made of bread and sugar and covered with cakes. The inhabitant of this delectable house is in fact a witch, who quickly imprisons the brother in order to fatten him up and eat him. The sister, courageous and valiant, manages to shove the witch into the oven and save her brother. Finally free, Hansel and Gretel grab the jewels that they find in the witch’s house and find their way home, helped by the animals in the forest. Their mother has died, but they joyfully rejoin their father, and all their worries are over.

Gretel and Hansel, as the title indicates, is a rereading. Suzanne Lebeau has appropriated the patrimonial story and tells it in her own way. The transposition moves the tale into theatrical form and highlights the connection between sister and brother, along with their courage and imagination. The two children become both characters and storytellers; the play pivots on their intertwining accounts that both contradict and complement each other. The dialogue is striking: we fully feel the jealousy and love-hate relationship, both delicious and disturbing, that adults and children experience every day in their relationships with their brothers and sisters.

To write her 27th play, Lebeau explored the wide-reaching theme of siblings and everything that it implies: identity, difference, jealousy, rivalry, and more. A true thinker and great researcher, she explores the writings of philosophers and educationalists and then contextualizes these readings to feed her work as an author.

In her research before writing **Gretel and Hansel**, Lebeau explored the negative feelings of childhood. Without ever judging or taking sides, she dug into the themes that inspired her and the questions that arose in her: how can we address jealousy? Do we get jealous because we are scared of losing? Is jealousy necessary to identity? How can we bring out our individuality, our uniqueness, and deal with the need to be recognized as unique and essential? How do we address suffering?

The importance of Lebeau’s body of work and her exceptional contribution to the rise of the genre of theatre for young audiences, both in Canada and abroad, have earned her many prizes and awards. With **Gretel and Hansel**, she speaks to children about one of their most intense and most secret desires, the drive toward good or evil that can overwhelm them, because it is beyond their control . . .

It is the big sister who sets the tone for Lebeau’s play: Gretel tells the story with spirit and passion. This Gretel, in fact, is completely modern, leaving behind the traditional Manichean model for characters in fairy tales. She exemplifies Lebeau’s love of complex, nuanced figures. In a moment of tenderness and generosity – or inattention! – she leaves the narration to her little brother, who happily steps up and takes control. These back-and-forths between brother and sister give the narration a tangible energy and lively pace. In short, Lebeau presents us with a sister and brother with strong personalities, who both adore and hate each other, and who sometimes show a disarming sense of humour.

Food is a central aspect of Lebeau’s play, as it is in the Brothers Grimm’s tale. In **Gretel and Hansel**, Gretel first recounts Hansel’s coming into the world: he was born on soup day. As Gretel and Hansel grow, the little one always steals the bigger one’s milk or bread. Then comes autumn, the meagre time, with few fruits . . . The parents can no longer feed their children and must get rid of them. Lost in the woods, Gretel and Hansel discover a house – the witch’s house – which has all the candy they could ever dream of. And, in keeping with what the audience already knows, the author relates how the witch fattens up the little brother in order to eat him and how the big sister manages to free him.

Siblings The emotional links that unite a family

The word “siblings” encompasses all of the brothers and sisters in a single family. Most of the time, they are the children of a single couple, but they may have only one parent in common. In this case, they are called half-brothers or half-sisters. The birth order of brothers and sisters is seen as significant. In fact, in French there are three words to name the rank of a child in a family.

AÎNÉ (oldest)

The *aîné* is the one who was born first. The oldest often feels a sense of responsibility for the younger brothers and sisters. At one time, the oldest boy in a family was given particular significance. He was endowed with a “birthright” – that is, he had priority in the inheritance when the parents died.

CADET (younger)

This word is used in two ways.

1. The *cadet* is the child born immediately after the oldest one.
2. The *cadet* may also designate all brothers and sisters who come after the oldest. The oldest therefore have one, two, three, or more brothers and sisters who are *cadet*.

Tip!
In a family, the
benjamin may also
be the *cadet* of the
aîné!

BENJAMIN (youngest)

The *benjamin* is the youngest child in the family. This child is also sometimes called the last-born.

In **Gretel and Hansel**, it is Gretel who is the oldest. Although the tensions between sister and brother are palpable (competitiveness, jealousy, and malice), the audience will also see disarming episodes of tenderness and affinity. One of the most touching moments in the play is no doubt the one in which Gretel hesitates to save Hansel . . . Because she is strong,

*“the temptation to see the little brother roasted like a chicken on the spit
to never again
to never again hear him cry
or say me too, like an echo.”*

Might Gretel be ready to abandon Hansel, as their parents had abandoned both of them? She is momentarily gripped by a giddy destructiveness, but finally realizes that she could not live without her brother. So, she frees him, and at the same time frees herself of her violent jealousy. Paradoxically, what had set brother and sister against each other unites them in the end. In **Gretel and Hansel**, as in real life, relationships between siblings are built through trials.

THE POWER OF EVOCATION The direction of the show

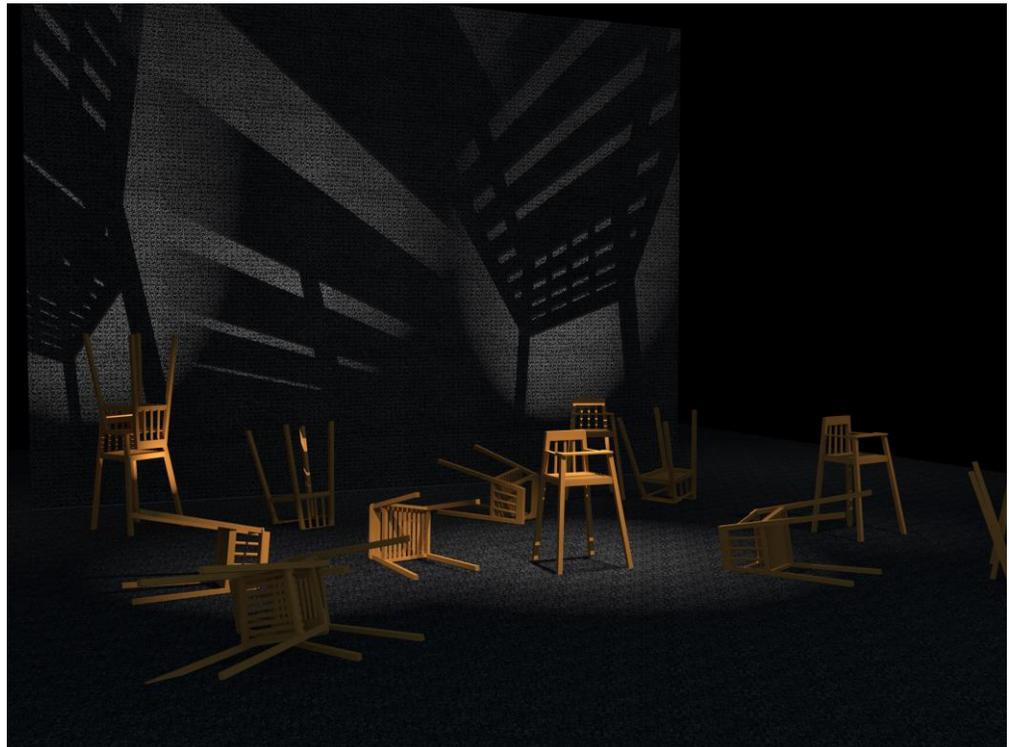
Gretel and Hansel has roots deep within the purest tradition of the tale – those tales that children adore and need. Children who are lost, placed in a hostile environment, and show their courage and imagination, children who are abandoned to the forces of evil – these archetypes make tales into treasures of vital wisdom that are as valuable today, centuries later. They allow us to interiorize the good and bad impulses that upset us so because they are beyond our control.

With this 14th production by Le Carrousel, Gervais Gaudreault took on the challenge of working with a minimalist form of theatre: “With this play, the fourteenth one I directed for Le Carrousel, I gave myself the challenge of working with a form of minimalist theatre. The space conceived with the set designer is, in fact, large and almost empty. On the stage, high chairs are arranged in a circle like the moments of childhood portrayed. Within the circle, a house is evoked for privacy and safety. Outside the circle, the forest is the unknown, adventure.”

The two protagonists, both characters and narrators, move around fifteen wooden high chairs that are transformed as the story advances. These chairs are used sometimes for what they are, but they also evoke the trees in the forest, the wood for the fire, and the cage in which Hansel is imprisoned.

From the darkness all around emerge shadows: through the lighting, the chair’s legs become branches or trees, re-creating the ambience of the forest. Sound effects support the narrative line of the text. Natural sounds combined with more abstract sounds echo the narration and punctuate the story. Since the actors are playing moments of childhood without infantilizing, the costumes are in the same vein: they suggest rather than show.

Gaudreault is a master of the art of suggestion and transposition. His stagings always leave the audience the pleasure and the freedom of appropriating the meaning of the work. The spectators are not spoon-fed; each must use his or her imagination and intelligence to access the full wealth and depth of the work.



Set design | STÉPHANE LONGPRÉ

after the show **PROLONGING THE PLEASURE**

THE TRACES LEFT BY THE PERFORMANCE

After the performance, your students should express freely what they felt, understood, liked, or didn't like. Let them spontaneously formulate their comments, questions, or impressions.

To prolong the pleasure created by the show in another way, we propose that you discover how the story of Hansel and Gretel has inspired talented illustrators around the world. Here are four suggestions of illustrated books that will certainly stimulate your students' imagination.

Each of these books offers a unique vision of the Brothers Grimm tale: they transcend the usual idea that we have of the story of the brother and sister, just as Suzanne Lebeau and Gervais Gaudreault have done with **Gretel and Hansel**. Here, there is no candy, no warty witch! The company wants to tell children that there are many ways to appropriate the stories from the traditional repertoire. Children may also compare the different versions and express their preferences.



Hänsel und Gretel

Illustrated by Sybille Schenker (Germany)

Minedition France

2011

Part of the book is printed on tracing paper, black paper with cut-outs, and transparencies, including the cover.



Hänsel et Gretel

Illustrated by Lorenzo Mattotti (Italy)
Éditions Gallimard Jeunesse
2009

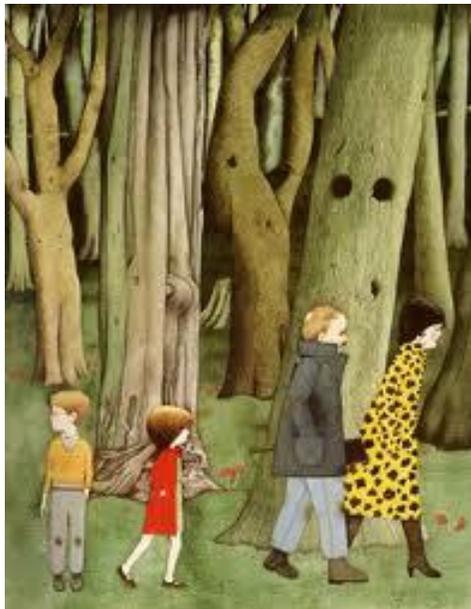
The cruel beauty of the Brothers Grimm's tale is enhanced by the black-and-white drawings, both tragic and luminous, by Lorenzo Mattotti.



Hänsel et Gretel

Illustrated by Kveta Pacovská (Czech Republic)
Minedition France
2011

Kveta Pacovská was born in Prague in 1928. Here, she shares her vision of Hänsel and Gretel. This book is a worthy addition to the series of tales that she has illustrated with her constantly surprising talent, originality, and innovation.



Hänsel et Gretel

Illustrated by Anthony Browne (England)
Éditions Kaléidoscope
2001

This version of the tale takes the two characters into a realistic, contemporary world. In 2000, Anthony Browne received the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the highest international distinction in children's literature, for his body of work.

CREATIVE TEAM

A play is the result of the encounter of artists from different disciplines around a text or work, most of the time with a director who acts as an orchestra conductor. The following artists participated in creating **Gretel and Hansel**:

Text **SUZANNE LEBEAU**

Direction **GERVAIS GAUDREULT**

Cast **ÉMILIE LÉVESQUE** and **JEAN-PHILIP DEBIEN**

Set design and props **STÉPHANE LONGPRÉ**

Lighting design **DOMINIQUE GAGNON**

Costumes and props **LINDA BRUNELLE**

Music and sound environment **DIANE LABROSSE**

Make up and hair **PIERRE LAFONTAINE**

Assistant director **MILENA BUZIAK**

Production manager **DOMINIQUE GAGNON**



The author **SUZANNE LEBEAU** and the director **GERVAIS GAUDREULT**



The actors **ÉMILIE LÉVESQUE** and **JEAN-PHILIP DEBIEN**

Gretel and Hansel is a production of Le Carrousel, compagnie de théâtre, in residency at **Théâtre de la Ville (Longueuil)** and **Maison Théâtre (Montreal)**, in co-production with **Théâtre du Vieux-Terrebonne**, **Muni-Spec Mont-Laurier** and **Le Théâtre, Scène nationale de Narbonne**. With assistance from the Aide à la création program of the Centre national du Théâtre (France).

The **COMPANY**

Convinced of the need for a true artistic encounter, Le Carrousel places at the core of its creative approach the question “What should we say to children?” and reflects deeply on artists’ self-censorship when dealing with young audiences. Supported by creative research that breaks through limits and boundaries, artistic directors Suzanne Lebeau and Gervais Gaudreault have used their passion to form a repertoire of original works that are considered, in Quebec and abroad, to be milestones in the history of theatre for young audiences.

This unique vision of childhood and art, manifested in the emotional charge and intensity of Suzanne Lebeau’s texts and the inventive sensitivity of Gervais Gaudreault’s directing, has made the company’s reputation on national and international stages. For more than 40 years, Le Carrousel has sought to tear down the walls between audiences and between practices, out of the conviction that theatre for children must also reach out to and even disturb adults.

le Carrousel

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LE CARROUSEL AND ITS TEAM

Artistic Directors **SUZANNE LEBEAU** et **GERVAIS GAUDREULT**
Associate Artist **MARIE-EVE HUOT**
Executive Director **VÉRONIQUE FONTAINE**
Administrator **NATHALIE MÉNARD**
Technical Director **DOMINIQUE GAGNON**
Manager, Outreach and Development **FANNY OBERTI**
Communications and Tour logistics **LUDGER CÔTÉ**
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