

DRAMA *Works*

Plays Through Practise

HANSEL AND GRETEL

by

CARL GROSE

EXTRACT

EXTRACT ONE: HANSEL AND GRETEL by Carl Grose

NOTES

1. For this resource I am using the edition published by Oberon Books. At the time of writing, this is the only edition. It's alarmingly full of mis-prints.

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3. In some exercises I use the word 'he', rather than 'he/she', mainly to save time. I am sorry if this upsets the many girls who study the subject. They should take comfort in the fact that the word 'actor' is now used for both sexes. You can alter any gender wording to suit your needs.

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5. Jeni Whittaker has been a teacher, an examiner and a chief examiner of drama for many years. In fact, she pilot-taught on the very first 'A' level exam in drama back in the mid-1970s and has been at the forefront of drama as an exam subject in one capacity or other ever since. Her other experience includes directing and performing professionally as well as adjudicating drama festivals and running a very large and active youth theatre. Since 1996, Jeni has been completely freelance, taking her workshops around schools and colleges all over the country. Her experience as a teacher makes her an ideal person to write a handbook especially for other teachers: she knows the problems of time and resources that teachers experience and can guarantee that all the exercises in this study-file actually work!

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PREPARATORY WORK
before beginning practical study of the text

1. THE PLAY VERSUS GRIMM'S ORIGINAL STORY

The first thing to do, before starting the following work is to read the play, either as a class or as individual homework.

Hansel and Gretel, though a well-known fairy tale from the brothers Grimm, is very far from a cutesie children's story. Though it features puppets of animals, these creatures are also a long way from being cutesie. In fact, the story has been re-invented the Kneehigh way, through Carl Grose, to have pertinent messages for the modern world. These messages are both political and about human nature.

A précis of the original Brothers Grimm story is as follows. I put it down, so that you can see what twists in the story Grose has made. Then you will be able to ask why such changes have been made.

On the edge of a dark forest there lived a woodcutter with his wife and two children, Hansel and Gretel. The woodcutter was very poor indeed and there was often not enough bread to eat. Times were particularly hard for the children, because their mother had died and their father's new wife didn't like children.

As winter came on they grew poorer and poorer till one day the woodcutter said to his wife, 'What are we to do? There is only one loaf left. I fear we shall starve.'

'We must get rid of the children,' answered his wife. 'Tomorrow we will take them into the forest and leave them there, far enough away that they will never be able to find their way home.'

'Oh no,' said the father. 'I could not leave them there to starve.'

'Well, we shall all starve if they stay with us. So it'll come to the same thing in the end.' And she set about convincing her husband that she was right.

It happened that Hansel and Gretel had heard this conversation. They had been unable to sleep for the pain in their bellies, which was from hunger.

'Oh,' Gretel sobbed. 'We shall be lost in the dark wood and the wild animals will eat us up.'

'Don't cry, little sister,' said Hansel. 'I'll take care of you.'

He slipped out of bed and put on his coat. Then he quietly unbarred the door and went out into the garden. There the moon lit up the white pebbles on the path, making them shine like new silver coins. Hansel filled his pockets with them, as full as he could, and went back to bed.

The next day the step-mother woke the children early and told them that the whole family would be going out to the wood that day when their father went to cut wood. She gave them their share of bread, which Gretel secretly put in her own pockets, since Hansel's pockets were full of stones. As they went along, Hansel dropped one of the white pebbles every so often to mark the route. The stepmother noticed that Hansel kept looking behind him and she crossly asked what he was doing, warning him he'd stumble and fall if he didn't look where he was going.

'I'm just seeing if I can catch a glimpse of the white cat sitting on the roof,' answered Hansel.

'What nonsense,' said his step-mother. 'There is no cat. It's just the sun shining on the wet roof.'

Of course, Hansel was covering up what he was really doing.

The forest got thicker and thicker as they went, and their father told them to make a pile of twigs for a fire. 'The going is too hard for you now,' he said. 'I'll light a fire and you can rest and eat your supper until I return.'

He gave them each a slice of bread and he and his wife left them, contented enough, by the fire eating their bread. They were comforted, for they thought they could hear the chop-chop of their father's axe near by, but it was really just a dead tree branch swinging in the wind. When they had eaten they curled up in the dry leaves and fell asleep.

When they awoke it was dark. The fire was out and they could hear the sound of animals rustling in the undergrowth.

Gretel was terrified and cried bitterly. But Hansel comforted her. 'Just wait till the moon is up,' he said, 'and it will light our way home.'

This proved to be the case and, taking her hand, Hansel followed the trail of pebbles back to their house. There they got scolded by the Step-mother, for being naughty children and not coming home. She threatened to whip them for staying out so long.

Father, however, was over-joyed to see them and hugged and kissed them with relief.

It wasn't long before the same thing happened again. They were down to their last loaf and likely to starve. Again the children heard the plan to leave them in the forest and again Hansel comforted his terrified sister. But when he crept out of bed to fill his pockets with pebbles, the door was locked.

As before, the next morning the stepmother gave them some bread for the day, which Hansel took for them both. Without the pebbles, Hansel was reduced to dropping crumbs of bread to mark the route instead. Again the Step-mother upbraided him for looking behind, and this time he said he was just looking for the white pigeon that lived on their roof.

'Nonsense,' said the Stepmother, 'There is no pigeon. It is just the sun shining on the wet roof.'

She did not notice the boy dropping a trail of crumbs.

They went much further and deeper into the forest this time. Then, as before, Father helped them make a fire and they were left alone. Eventually, as before, they fell asleep.

When they awoke, hearing the sounds of animals prowling around, Gretel was once more terrified, but Hansel comforted her, only this time, when he looked for the trail of crumbs, he found that the birds had eaten every one. They were well and truly lost.

They wandered on, deeper and deeper into the forest for a further two days. All they could find were a few berries to eat and they were faint with hunger, when suddenly they saw a white bird sitting on a branch. It sang so sweetly and fluttered its wings, as if beckoning them to follow. So they did, until it circled above a little cottage in the heart of the wood.

The children were delighted with the cottage, which was made of gingerbread and all sorts of other sweet things. Unable to resist they began to eat, breaking off bits of the house to do so.

Soon a voice from inside piped up: 'Nibble, nibble, nibble! Who's nibbling at my house?'

The children continued to eat, but replied that nobody was eating the house, only the wind. Suddenly the door opened and an old woman walked out, so frail she could hardly walk. She took their hands and led the children in, where there was a feast laid out for them and two little beds all ready for them to sleep in.

Their hunger assuaged, the children went to bed feeling they were in heaven.

Now the old woman was really a witch, who loved to eat children. She had little red eyes, which meant her sight was very poor, but her sense of smell was excellent. She had smelled the lost children in the forest and had built the gingerbread house especially to trap them.

When the children woke up in the morning, she grabbed Hansel and put him in a cage. Gretel she ordered to clean the house and fetch firewood. For this she was fed with the poorest scraps, while Hansel was fed with choice titbits, to fatten him up.

Every day the witch told Hansel to put his finger through the bars so that she could test how fat he was getting. And every day Hansel thrust out a chicken bone, knowing the witch was too short-sighted to tell the difference. After a few weeks the witch lost patience and ordered Gretel to collect water for the pot and to light the fire under the oven, for Hansel would be cooked that day.

Once Gretel had built up the fire for the oven, the witch ordered Gretel to climb into the oven to see if it was hot enough. She meant to cook Gretel too. But Gretel guessed what she was up to and pretended that the door to the oven was too small.

'What nonsense!' said the witch. 'Look, the door is plenty big enough for a little girl to climb in, and she stuck her own head through the door to demonstrate. Immediately, Gretel got behind the witch and pushed her in, shutting the oven door on her.

With the witch dead, Gretel released Hansel and the children danced for joy. Then they raided the house of all the witch's treasures - a mass of gold and jewels - before setting off for home. Soon they got to a lake, which was too wide to cross, but Gretel saw a white duck on the lake and sang to it. The duck then carried them, one at a time, across. From there they recognised where they were and headed straight for home, where their father was overjoyed to see them. He had been lonely as his wife had died in the meantime and he regretted bitterly what she had persuaded him to do with his children. His happiness increased even more when the children turned out their pockets full of enough treasure to keep them from ever being hungry again.

In groups, make a list of the changes you notice between the original story above and Grose's version. Why do you think these changes have been made?

When sufficient time has been made for the group to talk this through, have them report back - both the changes and the perceived reasons for these changes. Some groups may notice different things. Pool the ideas and gather them all together. Make sure everyone has a complete list noted down.

This is a list for teachers, of differences and talking points arising out of them:

Gretel is younger and also more helpless in Grimm; Grose makes the children twins which gives them instantly a more equal status. Grose's Gretel is far from helpless. In fact she is the practical one, adept at invention and engineering. Hansel is an academic, interested in finding out about things but also a thinker, who philosophises on what he learns.

How far is that different from the 'normal' stereo-typing of boys and girls? Are there any other untypical behavioural traits in Grose's version for both boys and girls?

The children in the original are younger. Grose's children are on the cusp of adulthood.

What differences arise from the fact that Grose's Mother is their real parent, not a step-mother? How does Mother being alive change the homecoming?

How is Birdy different from the white duck and the white pigeon in the original? Why do you think this is? What does the colour white usually signify in fairy-stories?

Other changes are due to the greater prominence Grose is able to give them. Starvation is given much more prominence, for instance, and the wider message of

feeding the world is brought in. This too emphasises that the children are growing up and recognising the plight of others than themselves.

Grose's theme of growing-up - the whole play is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood - is hinted at in Grimm too. In the Grimm version Gretel, once her brother is imprisoned in the cage, learns to think for herself and becomes far braver and more self-sufficient. The gender stereo-typing of the fairy-story has Hansel taking responsibility at first and protecting Gretel, as well as doing all the thinking for the pair of them. But it is interesting that, once Hansel is incapacitated, Gretel begins to show more spirit and capability. At the end of the story, it is Gretel who is the prime mover of events [singing to the duck etc.] Hansel then takes a back seat.

What other clues are there to 'rite-of-passage' in the original fairy-tale? [Expect answers along the lines of thinking for themselves - asking the duck for help, finding the treasure, and not being so trusting - Gretel realises what the Witch is about when she is told to test the heat of the oven, for instance.

How does Grose spell out to the audience that his version is about rite-of-passage? Look at the end, pages 62 and 63, for clues.

Talking animals are very common in old fairy-tales. Often they are dead mothers or loved ones, reborn as animals. The white bird and the white duck in the original story could be the children's dead mother, who protects them. It does seem strange that she leads them to the gingerbread house where they are in danger from the witch, but perhaps she knows how resourceful her children are and that they will, through being led there, at least not starve in the forest, which they were in danger of doing. Also, once the witch is dead, they have access to all her wealth, which will keep them in plenty for the rest of their lives. What do you think?

There are far more talking animals in Grose's version. They are a long way from being idealised. The chickens are eaten, and so are the rabbits. In a running joke about the rapid procreation of rabbits, identical seeming rabbits keep appearing. The bird in Grose's version is as much a victim of the witch as are the children. This may be Grose's attempt to explain why the white bird in the original story, if it is a symbol of their mother, leads her children to a fate which may cause their death. Grose's bird has been enchanted to do the witch's bidding, but the death of the witch releases it to go back to its own home. Graham the ferret becomes a symbol for sexuality [the ferret up the trousers]. At the end, it is another way of showing Hansel has reached maturity, through puberty.

As well as Hansel and Gretel being a-typical boys and girls, what other stereo-types of fairy stories are different?

The 'wicked' step-mother. In Grose's version there is no stepmother. The parents are Mother and Father. Though Mother comes up with the idea of leaving the children in the forest, they are driven by necessity and later say how much they miss their children. When the children come back, having followed the white stones, they sacrifice the last chicken to them and the second time it is the children who creep off into the forest to save their parents. Perhaps this is the first 'grown-up' decision they make in their journey to adulthood. Realising that it's a hungry old world, when their neighbours [no mention of these in the original story] give them bread, they crumble it not to lay a trail - this pair of children are far too savvy to think that such a thing would work - but to throw it up into the winds which will scatter it far and wide, because the world is full of starvation and such a deed may help a little.

2: PRACTICAL EXERCISES IN KNEEHIGH STYLE

These exercises are selected from my resource on Kneehigh Theatre. If you want further work on this innovative group, their history, influences and their work other than this particular play, you will need EXPLORATIONS IN THEATRE STYLE: KNEEHIGH, which is available as a download or as hard copy from the website: www.dramaworks.co.uk This is a very full resource.

WARMING UP AND BONDING

Kneehigh themselves work very closely together as a company. When they are working on a play, they begin each day with running along the cliff tops adjacent to the barns where they rehearse. Built into the running are certain 'instructions' which one of the members will call out as they run.

Though this exercise is better done out of doors - and you should do this if you are able - it can be adapted for your studio or hall space. Choose as big a space as possible for it - hall over studio.

Walk first, in a close formation. Only a few inches should separate each one of you. Your formation will depend on the numbers in your group, but an example would be, if you have nine in your group, then have three lines of three in a box formation.

First practise walking at the same pace as everyone else. There is no leader for the exercise. When you have achieved this, increase the pace, once again without anyone obviously instigating the change. You are aiming for a unity within the group that includes all members, without anyone standing out or bossing the others.

Play with the walking pace by increasing or decreasing the speed, keeping to the formation and the distances apart from your neighbours. If the formation breaks, or the distances alter, then go back to a slow pace and build up gradually. Out of doors, this can all happen just following the contours of the route - a path or the outer perimeter of the playing field. Indoors, you will have to build in the turning of corners without breaking formation. This is harder.

When you are able as a group to do this, then begin to run together. It's not a sprint; just a jog, so that everyone is able to do it. When you are able to keep together without breaking formation, or increasing distance between the other lines or your neighbours, appoint a leader for the day. The leader will call out instructions, as follows, but in any order:

**forwards
backwards
touch
change
close eyes**

on the command 'touch' - everyone touches another person close to them, putting a hand on a shoulder, or on the back between the shoulder blades, for example. The rhythm and the pace of the run must not alter. Until the next instruction, you keep touching, so that all the group are physically as well as mentally linked.

On the command 'change' - everyone, without breaking the rhythm of the jog, changes places with another WITHOUT BREAKING THE FORMATION - it could be just a swap with another in your line, or with someone behind or in front. If chaos

happens, keep coming back to this instruction. Once again, it's about group sensitivity.

On the command 'close eyes' the group keep doing whatever the last instruction was - forwards, backwards or whatever - with eyes closed and without breaking formation or changing pace or the spacing between each individual. This involves strong mental concentration. Don't use this command with or immediately after the 'Change' command.

LARGER THAN LIFE

Much of Kneehigh's work is for outdoor sites. This requires very clear and large characterisation and speaking, accompanied by matching body-language.

You will find that 'words behave differently out of doors,' as Kneehigh actress Sue Hill says. Even when performing indoors, the outdoor style of acting is retained. Often on a tour, the play is performed sometimes indoors and sometimes out....

EXTRACT TWO:

WORKING THROUGH THE TEXT IN A PRACTICAL WAY

Before using this resource the students are expected to have at the least read the play through, either as a group or at home in preparation for the start of the course. They will find it helpful if the preparatory work has been undertaken also. Throughout the following work it will be assumed that the narrative of the rest of the play is familiar.

Make sure that individual or group decisions made in each lesson are carefully recorded. These can then be built on or used as discussion points. No decision is set in stone and it is quite possible that changes will be made throughout, according to the needs of the play.

SETTING AND OTHER PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Though a fairy story, usually thought of as a tale for children, Kneehigh always treat such tales in an adult way. This one is no exception. I can't remember the age limit set when I watched the play in Kneehigh's Asylum tent, but usually there is one. The programme states 'for brave children over the age of ...' whatever they have decided. I have seen plays of theirs variously described as suitable for no one younger than 8, 10 or 12. What would you think for this play, which can be very dark indeed and is certainly scary?

This is a play which contains many songs. You may have musicians in the group who are able to come up with tunes, and that would be best. The tunes should be folkly and simple. If you haven't that musical ability there, that doesn't mean you can't do this play. Wherever I can, I have given suggestions as to how to perform the songs in a variety of ways.

Note that all characters are also Chorus members and musicians when they are not playing their character on stage. Think of a way of indicating - quite openly, that's part of the fun - when you are dropping character and becoming a Chorus member. Later I have suggested donning a head-dress of leaves and twigs, to indicate you are part of Nature, or the forest. Variations on this idea would work; different head-dresses may be required for different parts of the play.

When Kneehigh perform there is no concealment of character changes. It often happens openly, and might involve other members helping with a complex change. There is a way of doing this, with a twinkle at the audience, which makes it clear that the audience too are part of the fun.

In the same way, scene changes and the bringing on of certain props can be done openly by the Chorus, with that same twinkle if this is a fun part of the story - more seriously if changing mood to a bleaker one.

You can't start practical explorations of a play without having an idea of the setting. Remember, whatever decisions you make now as a group can be added to or altered, according to necessities that crop up in the script, throughout.

The set needs to be able to suggest Hansel and Gretel's home, along with the outside 'garden' or 'yard', where the chickens peck and Hansel is taught to chop firewood. The outer edges of this suggested space could be where the rabbits, who stand for a chorus in this play, live. Beyond it is the forest and the witches' house.

Not many schools would have a revolve, but that is an ideal solution. Thus the back of the family wooden cabin is also the back of the witches's house when the revolving stage is turned. It is the way Kneehigh solved the problems set by the script in its original version.

Try to think of a material that can suggest a number of themes or recurring images in the play. Some suggestions follow:

- a set made of shapes like bones, which can also look like the twigs and branches of a forest
- a childrens' playground set - push-around roundabout, seesaw, slide, climbing-frame and so on, Clever placing of these can suggest the different areas and requirements of the set
- a very simple set - where light blocks/ rostra can be altered to make different positionings. These could be put together in imaginative ways [combined with chairs and desks from your own school] to suggest different settings. Consider how desks and chairs upside-down [legs pointing upwards] can suggest a forest - especially if some of the chairs are leaned hickedy-pickedy, crossing each other, perhaps placed on top of desks. Under the desks [as children will use their imaginations in play] can become hidey-holes and dens, or Hansel's cage - and so on.
- a set which is kept very simple - just a large raised area of rostra for the house, a small one near the front for the rabbits, for instance, one or two wooden stools and a table on the house level. The rest is done by Chorus members, holding sticks and branches, to create a forest, for instance. This idea could also be done with just a couple of Chorus movers/ set changers in combination with one of the other ideas suggested.

Whichever set you decide on [and you can change your mind as you continue to work through the play], there will need to be additions. A Kneehigh habit is to hang the props that will be used in the play from bits of set. Even the puppet animals could be already on, as part of the set, where they can easily be accessed. Or they can be already with their 'handlers', who are a part of the Chorus/ Musicians. These remain on stage throughout - another Kneehigh habit, which enables the Chorus to change parts of the set, activate effects, and so on. Characters, when they are off-stage as themselves, immediately become Musicians/ Chorus members - unless they have a costume change.

Decide whether you like this idea. What are the advantages of it? What are the disadvantages? Does one outweigh the other?

Sometimes a certain surreality can be achieved by the idea of hanging props to parts of the set - and surrealism can so easily be nightmare. Thus, in Kneehigh's 2016 production of *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk*, the set consisted of the outlines of structures which could be rooms, or houses - the outside or the inside, as needed. From these were

hung shoes, coats, a telephone, a baby's cradle - all used at some point in the play. This is to give you an idea of how such an idea could apply to *Hansel and Gretel*.

Make a running list of the props needed [which include the puppets] throughout the play. Have a think about where they could be hung, and what effect might be added by doing this. For instance, hanging the two rabbit puppets up by their tails, ears hanging downwards, will suggest they have been killed and are being hung to be eaten. The same might work for the chickens, or the chickens could be perched, as if roosting on bits of the set. The bird, perched on high until used, suggests that it is watching over the action which is important, whether you feel it represents a figure protecting the children - or leading them to the witch.

More obvious props like the apple make sense hung, but consider Hansel's encyclopaedia, and all the various items used to make Gretel's working contraptions. They need to be easily accessed by the actors and simple to slot together. They need actually to work!

The amount of things that need to be hung, such as Hansel's cage - unless you use the chairs and desk option, where it could be placed on top of the desks [but then you will have to solve the witch not finding him at the climax in a very different way from the wild swinging to and fro suggested] tells you that the setting needs to have height. Scaffolding, concealed by materials in some way, would be the obvious choice and be strong enough to hang an actor in a cage from.

If all of this building and fuss feels problematical to you, consider this simpler option. This is the one where I suggested that Chorus members make the forest, for example. They can also become things when they are needed. Mother needs a chopping-board - a member of the Chorus brings it in, lies on his back and holds the board flat for her.

Using people - especially if you have a big group - would make all of the contraptions much easier. Their arms, legs, hands, fingers can be levers and pulleys as needed. Their bodies can lock together to create a machine-like effect [it would help if those used as part of a machine dressed in simple black T-shirts and track suit bottoms, or leggings. This would help to de-humanise them. Nevertheless, in Kneehigh fashion, they could show pleasure when their machine works.] They can bring in the necessities - the props that are being used to make the machine and, make it much easier for Gretel to slot everything together. And when the machine is finished with, they deconstruct themselves and move off. Less clutter too!

Your finished setting idea will need lighting to change between warm family happiness to the bleak world of starvation [where the set begins to look more boney] and to the nightmare world of the witch. The lights need not be complex, but they must be thought about. I will build in some ideas you can experiment with as we work through the script.

Before we leave the set, whatever you have decided on, build it as well as you can - or **mark out where exits and entrances might be, and different performance areas whenever you work on this script.** Where is the house interior? Where is the garden or yard where woodchopping, the apple tree and so on is meant to be? Where are the rabbits? They act as commentators or a chorus. Perhaps they are as near to the audience as possible and the audience, at the beginning anyway, is the forest with the rabbits living on the edge of it, as they live their whole lives on the edge of danger. Remember, you can make changes as and when you encounter problems with your initial set-up. The setting ought to grow organically, according to the needs of the script.

A note about the puppets. There are good glove puppets, about life-size, of rabbits available from many stores and on line. These work well [though bud-bud-budding the nose isn't very clear. It can be made clearer by the handlers also whiffling.] They can be turned inside out for skinning purposes. There are examples available which have four legs - you would need these. Chickens and birds of various kinds can be found this way too. Some of the birds are quite grotesque. Best would be a large puppet that fits up to the actor's elbow, as with Rod Hull's Emu. I even found a ferret! The latter animal has such a small role, that it could just as easily be a longish roll of faux fur made into a sausage shape. No real detail is required. It does however need to be attached to a long string so that it can be pulled on stage by Father. The end of the string could be attached to a part of the set.

We need to move into the script now, but keep returning to the decisions you have made for a set. Alter it as needed, according to the new decisions you make for performance.

THE PRE-SHOW AND CHORUS: Page 9

Don't forget the idea of the pre-show, which always begins every Kneehigh show. It is a softening up of the audience, where important connections are made between actors and those who have come to watch.

Revisit some of the work on this you did in the preparation section to remind yourselves of how it works.

Grose starts the play with a Supernature Chorus singing a song. One of Kneehigh's signature features is the 'Pre-show.' Usually, the whole cast takes part in this, wearing their costume items underneath their chorus pre-show items.

What do you think Grose means by the word Supernature? What does it suggest to you? **Try brainstorming this as a group.** Here are some ideas:

It could be elemental nature or the supernatural - a magical landscape suitable for a fairy-tale. Super-nature means literally 'above nature' or 'more than nature'. It could be nature enhanced, 'super' in the modern sense of the word.

Now think of what over-garments or additions to their character's costume the cast could wear for the pre-show where they play the Chorus. Here are some starting ideas which might appeal to you. The cast might wear:

head-dresses: antlers, twigs, leaves, animal masks

over-garments to cover their character costume: a kind of poncho made of material leaves, mosses, garlands

These would be easy to remove as and when the chorus become characters.

Think of other additions you might make, always bearing in mind that quick changes are essential.

Before the actors [all of them in their supernature disguises] come onto the stage and make a grouping to start singing the song, they will be in the auditorium talking to members of the audience. If you think your chosen supernature headdresses are too frightening for this, then have those head-dresses on stage and allow the actors to come on with just their poncho-style coverings to their real costumes.

They do not need to talk about aspects of the play - the initial jokey connection is enough - but it can help if some of what you engage with the audience fits into the themes of the play. Here are some ideas that are still light but lead in to the plot nicely:

rabbits -do you have one? to parents with children ... wild ones getting into your garden and eating your vegetables, etc.

woods - walking in them, appreciation of nature etc.

happy families - you look like one, all smiley etc. Children getting on, etc. From these ideas, you can see the sort of thing. Keep all conversations light, friendly and avoid any conflict or upsetting anyone. If someone ducks their head because they don't want to engage with you - move on to someone else. Not everyone likes to engage with an actor!

Try some of these ideas out on your group, to give yourselves confidence.

After the pre-show, the cast move onto the stage, don their head-dresses, if you took that option, and stand still until the lights come up. The script indicates that the lights come up first in silhouette.

There is always a lot of music and song in a Kneehigh production. The two opening verses need to establish a mood. It appears to be happy and, of course pastoral. Everything is 'natural'. The words dwell on happiness, light and spring. Whether you use music or not, this is the easy-going country attitude that ought to be established.

Ideally, of course, you ought to invent your own tune. If this is impossible, you could use a pipe and guitar, for example, to establish a pastoral mood and speak gently as a chorus against this background. At least try for a repeated sung musical phrase for 'Take each day as it comes.' It is leisurely - the kind of mood of a hot summer day, with tired happy country folk coming home, laden with harvest, on top of the hay wagon. I'm not asking for those details - but this is the kind of mood.

Have every member of the group find a simple tune for 'Take each day as it comes.' Everyone else in the group sings along with each suggestion, judging which works best, which sets the right mood. Just sitting here I've found one or two possibilities to hum in $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ time - the natural rhythm for pastoral songs.

If you keep the sequence of notes very simple, you can play with it as a group and find your own harmonies eventually. It doesn't take long to find something that is really effective.

So with the repeated line as a chorus, sung softly and rhythmically, you are creating an atmosphere for the audience. If you really cannot sing, try making a sound track of bird song, the humming of insects. Or you can experiment with simple tin whistles to make bird sounds, while some of the group make other sounds and hum soft chords and long held notes, as a background to the spoken verses.

Two of the super-nature chorus could have rabbit hand puppets already over their forearms. The rabbits nibble grass on the ground. Look at your set ideas and check for audience visibility. Is the stage raised enough for rabbit visibility? Might there be a necessity for a permanent feature right at the front, but towards the side, which is a grassy bank? This would half conceal the puppeteers and raise the rabbits to more prominence.

Puppetry is quite a skill. **Practice with them first, in pairs, and invite the rest of the group to comment.** The puppeteer needs to be moving as little as possible, to allow focus on the animal. Like all other aspects of theatre the puppeteer's focus on what he is doing attracts the focus of the audience likewise. However, moods ought to be conveyed subtly by both puppeteer, whose face will reflect them in miniature, and puppet. And nose 'bud-bud-bud' whiffing may be helped by the puppeteer doing this too. The key is that the puppeteer's concentration and quiet mood-changes lead the audience.

Take care of the tone established by the rabbits. They are used as narrators and, here, as a gentle lead-in to the tale. They can afford to be a little bit cutesie, but not too much. Gentle humour in 'I'm four ... months'. This should mimic the kind of playground boasting

tone children use when they say 'I'm bigger, older, stronger than you' or 'My dad's bigger than yours.' Then the 'months' will get more of a laugh.

Try out the rabbit conversation now. If you haven't got puppets to practice with, you can use your right hands as the creatures. This will help you focus in the right way, as you watch your own hand when you speak the lines. No need to try to make it look like a rabbit! That will be impossible. Just use the hand held up, palm facing the front.

We are still being kidded that this is a children's show. The rabbits are as young and inexperienced as the children. They too are about to go through a rite of passage and grow up. Some of them won't make it through. Life is a risky business. Because of that you will see that the chorus of 'Take each day as it comes' has more wisdom than it would seem at first.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FAMILY - HAPPY TIMES Pages 10-17

The first strangeness occurs with the circling bird which, in this version as opposed to the fairy-tale, is red - though it drops a white feather.

Each time the bird or a bird features, it is different sizes. This is according to distance. The same bird far off appears small. Is it always the same bird? This is something you will have to decide as a group. If it is, it is Birdy, who works for the Witch, but who is enslaved by her so cannot do other than work for her.

If you are able, two versions of Birdy should be shown. The small one, far away, which is used at times in the play, could be hung on a zipwire, high up. The larger one could be worked by a puppeteer, from a long pole. Or you could have two sizes of bird, rather than the zipwire, a smaller one on a long cane, and a larger one on a shorter one. This would allow for more flexibility of movement in the bird. The smaller one needs to have wings out, as if in flight.

The dropped white feather is a clear symbol. In any fairy-story it would be a message of hope or, as I've explained above, a message that someone [usually a dead mother] is looking after the children. Since the mother here is not dead, what could be the meaning of the feather? Is it some sort of a trick? Or a warning?

The twins do not read anything in to the feather. Gretel just uses it to irritate her brother by tickling him when he's trying to read. One of the rabbits, however, though nothing seems to have changed in the day, is suddenly frightened. The combination of his fear and the strangeness of the dropped white feather from a red bird should alert the audience to something going on.

As chorus commentators the rabbits remind us to take each day as it comes, because you never know what's going to happen and sure enough, there is the sound of a trap shutting with a snap and both rabbits disappear. Some days are good and leisurely; there is no point of brooding on the future; but when something happens, it can happen with the speed of a sprung trap.

This sound - which needs to be carefully worked on - is built in throughout the play. It needs to be noticed by the audience, who will gradually realise that it is a sign of danger. The trap snapping shut.

These rabbits have heightened intuition of danger, unlike the children. 'Bud-bud-bud...' is the nervous twitching of their noses. The nose on a puppet rabbit is not going to show this well enough, but if the human handlers also whiffle their noses the point is made!

Then there is the similarity between the red bird and the red apple, both of which are described as 'suspended high above.' Has the bird become the apple? Or planted the apple there as a temptation, like it dropped the feather. If they are baits for a trap, then both baits are taken. Gretel picks up the feather and tickles Hansel with it. Gretel also, like Eve in the Garden of Eden, wants that apple and works hard to get it. She is the instigator, as is Eve. Hansel is not too fussed about the apple until Gretel has managed to knock it down. Then he wants to share it. Just as the apple signifies the Fall in the Bible story, because it brings about the anger of God and his punishment of banishment from the Garden and ultimately, death, so this apple is another warning of change. Hansel and Gretel are exiled from their happy home, their Eden, and their journey into adulthood is begun. They are moving from a state of Innocence to Experience, just as Adam and Eve did.

Gather up all the warnings there are in these first two pages and discuss how they can be emphasised for an audience. This must not be done in too heavy-handed a way. You could use such things as:

a rumble of thunder [done softly on a drum, so that it is there but in the background]
the crack of the closing trap [by snapping two percussion sticks together. These are specially made percussion instruments, which I'm sure can be borrowed from the music department.]

a warning hum, or musical chord, or other sound made by voices, from the Chorus

Try all of these out and make your decision. If you try the chord, make it a discord. The best way of doing this is to have everyone in the group hum the first note they come up with. Then they must not adjust to make it harmonise. Instead, they hold to their note. The results of this clashing discord can be remembered and reproduced.

Whichever you decide, it is the snap of the trap that must be used when indicated. But a drum roll, thunder-sheet, or hummed chord will be useful as a background sound on many other occasions.

There is always music in a Kneehigh production, and the musicians, or Chorus, are present on stage and visible at all times. ...