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Making Curriculum Connections!



**An Educator's Guide to**

**A  
TALE DARK  
& GRIMM**

**ADAM GIDWITZ**

**INSPIRE • ENGAGE • EDUCATE**

The activities in this guide align with Common Core State Standards  
and fit into the curriculum for grades 4–5

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## Dear Educator:

*A Tale Dark & Grimm* is a darkly humorous and suspenseful tale of Hansel and Gretel's quest to save the Kingdom of Grimm. It will appeal to all of your readers, especially those in search of **fast-paced action and laugh-out-loud humor**. Your students will enjoy the sarcastic yet wise comments of the Narrator (perhaps the author himself?), while growing up along the two protagonists as their adventures teach them **what it is to be good, faithful, and brother and sister**. The intended audience for this book, and the accompanying guide, is **fourth grade and fifth grade readers**.

As classroom teachers, we have chosen to use this book for both independent and guided reading activities, assigning a number of chapters at a time to be discussed after a week's time. (Chapters range from approximately 20–30 pages and can be broken into very readable sections.) You will find **easy-to-use** activities for your students in the Student Activity Guide for each chapter. Your students are asked to define **key vocabulary words** using their dictionary skills and context clues. Additionally, the Activity Guide offer **comprehension questions** that align with Common Core State Standards and will help your students to demonstrate their mastery of the text.

Though we relied largely on our students' independent reading skills, teachers can teach the text in the way that works best for them. Before assigning the book, we recommend reading the Introduction with your students in order to acquaint them with the author's tone, as well as the convention of speaking to the reader, both of which may be unfamiliar to them. As the story progresses, individuals or small groups may read silently or aloud together for five minutes or more to preview the action in each chapter. This offers an opportunity to introduce any new vocabulary, review the reading assignment you are giving, and have students pre-read the comprehension questions together so that all know what information they are reading to understand. We assigned the book at a **pace of 2–3 chapters at a time** (per week usually). This helps students to become engaged with the novel, makes the follow-up work manageable, and allows for completion of a book within a **5–7 week time** frame.

This book helps expose students to different author's tools such as **simile, metaphor, tone, and imagery**. It could easily lead to other assignments in art, technology/computer, or language arts like visually re-creating the Kingdom of Grimm, writing alternate endings to various chapters, or sketching a graphic novel chapter of a favorite section. Enjoy introducing your students to an exciting twist on the fairy-tale genre, one that is sure to capture their imaginations and encourage a lifelong love of reading!

— Penguin School and Library



## About the Author:

Adam Gidwitz's first novel, *A Tale Dark & Grimm*, was named a 2010 Best Children's Book by *Publishers Weekly* and *School Library Journal*, an ALA Notable Book, and an Editor's Choice by *The New York Times*. Adam is an elementary School teacher and storyteller who lives in Brooklyn, NY.

This guide was created by Elizabeth McGregor and Phoebe Search, fourth grade teachers at the Collegiate School in New York City. Beth received her MA in Education from Stanford University and has been working in the classroom for over seven years. Phoebe received her MA in Education from the Bank Street College of Education and has been working in the classroom for twelve years.



# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Introduction

1. Read the Introduction through with students. Direct their attention to the structure, language, and tone of the author. As you encounter the vocabulary words below, ask students to attempt to define them using the given context.

"...the land of Grimm can be a **harrowing** place."

"...it is in the darkest zones one finds the brightest beauty and the most **luminous** wisdom."

"It is the story of two children **striving**, and failing, and then not failing."
2. Use the discussion questions below each quote to guide your conversation:

"For, in life, it is in the darkest zones one finds the brightest beauty and the most luminous wisdom."

What do you think the author means by that?

Can you make a text-text or text-world connection?

"You see, there is another story in Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. A story that winds all throughout that moldy, mysterious tome—like a trail of bread crumbs winding through a forest."

How is the author crafting his language here? What tools is he using?

\*\*Be sure to reference the following terms: adjectives, alliterations, and similes.
3. Direct students to look at the cover. Make a classroom observations and predictions chart.

Ask students: What do you see? What predictions can you make about what you think will happen in this story?
4. Read the final line aloud to students: "It is the story of two children striving, and failing, and then not failing. It is the story of two children finding out the meaning of things."

Ask for student reactions. Does this remind you of the moral of any other stories you have read? How is this general plotline similar/different from other fairy tales?

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3

## Faithful Johannes

### Vocabulary List

- "Johannes **tottered** in on **bowed legs**." p. 6
- "...when the **revelry** finally **abated**, Johannes sat him down for a talk." p. 7
- "Any of those would have been perfectly **sufficient**, as far as I can tell." p. 10
- "So, wrinkling his old, **malformed** face into a wince." p. 10
- "Johannes **hovered** over his bed." p. 11
- "But the **allure** of the gold was too strong." p. 13
- "As soon as they had **descended** below the deck." p. 14
- "To kill the king's new stallion! **Treason!** Treason!." p. 19
- "He told of the ravens' **prophecy** of the bridal gown." p. 22
- "He stood, **beckoned** Hansel and Gretel to his side." p. 25



# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Faithful Johannes cont.

1. Using their reading journals, ask students to record and define at **least five** of the above words. They should use the context for at **least two** of the words they choose.
2. In preparation for the class discussion, have students complete the following: After reading "Faithful Johannes," working in pairs, generate a list of physical descriptions and character traits, both inferred and from the text. Individually, ask students to draw a picture of Faithful Johannes using these words. Tell them they will return to the drawing as they encounter Faithful Johannes at various times in the book.
3. During the class discussion, address the following questions (students can answer these in self-directed reading groups, as a class, or in pairs): On page 9, the young king demands to see the room despite FJ's declaration, "Your father asked me not to show you that room." Do you have a text-to-self connection to a time when you had been warned not to do something by a parent/adult, but went ahead and did it anyway?

What do you think the king was thinking when he forgave Johannes for the first two acts of treason?

What is Faithful Johannes's plan for stealing the princess?

What is the final act of treason? What is the new king's response?

Would you have been as faithful as Johannes was? Why or why not?

What does the word understand mean? What does Faithful Johannes mean by under-stand?

4. As a read-aloud, share a picture book fairy tale that ends with "happily ever after" (like on p. 15). Then, as a class, rewrite its ending to mimic the author's style by creating a series of additional endings with the incomplete breaks of "The End" followed by Just Kidding/Sort of/Not Really.

**\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed:** 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4

## Hansel and Gretel

### Vocabulary List

"made their way across the level **turf** beyond the palace moat." p. 39

"they were **resolved** to punish theirs by going out." p. 39

"Why else would she allow them to **wallow** around all day?" p. 44

"Something dim flickered in his food-**addled** brain." p. 47

"nearly getting eaten by a **cannibalistic** baker woman is bad." p. 50

1. In small groups, ask students to discuss the following quotations and questions:

"Parents are supposed to help their children to grow wise and healthy and strong. The baker woman was doing the opposite." p. 44

Do you agree with the author? What is a parent's job? Were Hansel and Gretel's parents (the king and queen) good parents?

The baker woman pleads for forgiveness saying, "I'm sorry for what I've done. I don't want to die! Just let me out! Let me out!" p. 47

Does she deserve forgiveness? Infer what you think Hansel considered as he heard her say this? Hansel walked away from the baker woman in the oven. What do you think of his actions? Can you make a text-text connection with another character who walked away from someone who needed him/her? How is this similar/different?



# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Hansel and Gretel cont.

2. Ask students to draw a labeled diagram of Hansel in the oven complete with all the food he soaked away. It should be colorful and detailed to reflect the language in the description.
3. As a class, come together to do a close reading of the following quote: "But it is a crime, a *crime*, that that is the only part of the Hansel and Gretel's story that anybody knows," p. 50. Then, look at the cover illustration. Ask students to describe what they see. What predictions can you make about what you think will happen in this story? Add to the class observations and predictions chart. What parts would you expect to find in the story of Hansel and Gretel? Which parts are new?

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4

## The Seven Swallows

### Vocabulary List

"so together they **hoisted** the great wooden tub onto their shoulders." p. 54

"in their **haste** not to displease their father, had lost their grip on the tub." p. 55

"a few other children, wide-eyed and **earnest**." p. 57

"Hansel was **devastated**." p. 57

"Months?" he **bleated**. p. 60

"he **reluctantly** agreed to go." p. 61

"Gretel carried her **smoldering** guilt with her always." p. 61

"Its **crystalline** crags rose straight up from the ice and snow." p. 61

"Her guilt burned her like the **scouring** wind." p. 62

"...and brought it down on her middle finger, **severing** it from her hand." p. 63

1. Before discussing, ask students to use the roots and suffixes of five words of their choice to figure out what the word might mean. Then, have them write down the definitions on a separate piece of paper.
2. Then, ask students the following questions: Father tells mother not to tell Hansel and Gretel, their new children, what had happened to their sons: "For, he said, what good could come of their knowing? Reluctantly, and with tears in her eyes, his wife agreed."  
How is this similar/different to how Hansel and Gretel's original parents acted? Why would they make a decision like that? Would you have done the same? Why or why not?  
Why is Gretel growing more uncomfortable living with their new parents?  
On page 64, what do you think of how the author explains why Gretel's finger was able to unlock the door? What does sacrifice have to do with her decision?
3. This is a great chapter for a SIMILE HUNT! Expand by having students write their own similes to describe other landforms they might have encountered on parts of their journey. Create a map of Hansel and Gretel's journey thus far, from the Kingdom of Grimm to the baker woman's house to the house of the seven sons to the Crystal Mountain. Fill in the journeys between each story's stop with whatever you imagine they would have encountered along the way.
4. Give students tools to do some bird research independently, including various books and websites. Swallows, kestrels, and merlins are all mentioned in this chapter. How are those birds similar? How are they different? What are some of the key features of each bird? Have students record their information in their reading journals.

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4





# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Brother and Sister

### Vocabulary List

'Little rodents dashed in and out of the **underbrush**." p. 71

"The **vibrant** power of the place began to take hold of the children." p. 71

"Hansel rushed ahead of his sister, **bounding** through the ferns" p.1-72

"Gretel laughed and sang and collected **bluebottles** and daisies and other wildflowers." p. 72

"Gretel walked up to it, **mesmerized**." p. 72

"Hansel suddenly remembered once more, and **remorse** swept over him." p. 76

"he had been overcome the last two days with that **uncontrollable** animal **lust**." p. 77

"as happy as a **sated** wolf." p. 77

"he carried in his hands the broken, **eviscerated** carcass of the white dove." p. 77

"An arrow flew through the air—a straight, simple **harbinger** of death." p. 80

1. In this chapter, do some word work with your students. Label three large sheets of chart paper or poster board DIDN'T KNOW, MIGHT KNOW, and DEFINITELY KNOW. Then, post around the classroom. Ask students to record, on post-it notes, words that they did not recognize, thought they might know, and were certain of. Then direct them to put their words on the appropriate sheet. Discuss any observations they make.
2. Then, ask students the following questions:  
On page 73, the author writes, "Please, take no more than you need. Life here exists in a delicate balance. Do not upset it." Why is balance important? How does balance, effect your environment? How does balance affect your life? What sorts of things are out of balance in our modern world?  
When Hansel kills the rabbit, what was he thinking? What made him do it?  
  
On page 75, the author writes, "Suddenly Hansel felt sorry for having killed the small beast, though he had enjoyed hunting it so." Can you be both sorry for and happy for having done something? Make a text-to-self connection.  
  
On page 76, Gretel treats Hansel "as if he were much younger than she."  
What about Hansel's changes make him seem younger? In what ways is Gretel being more of an adult than Hansel?  
What colors does the author mention in this chapter? Have they changed? Why do you think the author has chosen to paint these scenes with these colors?  
  
What do you think is the significance that Hansel killed a dove rather than some other bird?  
  
What evidence does Gretel use to conclude that her brother has been killed?  
  
The author explains on page 81, that "they (sad parts) happen in nearly all stories, of any kind." What other stories have you read/seen in movies that have a sad part? Do comedies as well as tragedies have a sad part? Do the stories of our lives also follow this same pattern?
3. With your students, discuss what elements the Wood of Life contains. Why are these elements important? Ask them to then visualize and draw what the Wood of Life looks like. Have students share their ideas with two other classmates to compare and contrast their thinking.
4. As an extension, students may create 4-panels for a graphic novel version of the book, showing Hansel's transformation from boy to beast through Gretel's eyes (1-boy, 2-boy with rabbit, 3-boy with deer, 4-beast with dove). Have them label his changing physical characteristics and the traits that change with them (example: longer teeth, more vicious).

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4





# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## A Smile as Red as Blood

### Vocabulary List

- "So **forbidding** that almost no one went in." p. 85
- "So she sat near him always and **marveled** at his easy jokes." p. 88
- "They fought more that night, but Gretel was **implacable**." p. 95
- "In the center of it stood a tall, **dilapidated** house." p. 97
- "Before the windows, from the **eaves**, hung cages." p. 97
- "and landed **squarely** in her lap, ring and all." p. 103
- "...any wedding between your parents was **destined** to be cursed."  
p. 107
- "All the men cheered **heartily**." p. 109
- " 'Can I say something?' she asked **timidly**." p. 109 – 110
- "The villagers started with **dismay**..." p. 110

1. To begin your class discussion, have students examine the author's use of personification on page 86 to describe the trees that had "just slipped into their golden robes of autumn." Ask students how else personification has been used in this book and generate examples as a class.

2. Then, ask students these questions during your discussion:  
Do a close reading of the following quote on page 93:  
",You're not afraid of that silly old forest, are you?," "No, she lied."

Why would Gretel lie about her fear? What other emotions is she feeling? Can you make a text-self connection of a time when you lied about your fear? Did that decision have a good outcome or not?

Make a text-text connection to another story with a handsome, dangerous monster.

Looking back over the different parents Gretel has had in the book, how does the widow compare?

Reread the bottom paragraph on p. 96, focusing on its descriptive language. How do the woods appear to you? Return to this passage after p. 103.

How does the author use humor in this chapter? What factors might have affected this choice?

Take a look at the questions already written in the book on p 99. What are your ideas? Share your responses with the person sitting next to you.

Doves have come up in two chapters. Why? What is their significance?

3. Discuss how the author uses language to shape the way we see settings and characters. Generate examples as a class and record them on a large piece of chart paper. Then, as a writing exercise, give students the following directions:  
Following his description of Schwarzwald as an example, use multiple senses to describe a place: sight— "golden robes"; sound— "laughter was in the air,"; smell— "wood burning in fireplaces" & "apple cider frothing with cinnamon."

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4



# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## The Three Golden Hairs

### Vocabulary List

"Every year the duke brought back a great **bounty** from his hunt" p. 117

"One lord **ventured** to laugh, but the duke turned an eye of such **withering** scorn on him that the laughter immediately ceased" p. 118

"a **grizzled** old man who bared his teeth and steadily, carefully finished the skinning." p. 119

"He sliced into the skin—but instead of **severing** the neck, he gently peeled away the top layer of hide and fur." p. 120

"Wait, don't tell me, dear readers. This sounds **implausible** to you. Of course it does. Having never experienced such a thing yourself, it naturally sounds **ludicrous**." p. 121

"He sat down beside Hansel **gingerly** and frowned." p. 128

"...was swallowed like a coin slipping into the great dark **maw** of a well." p. 137

" 'Tired from all your wicked trickery?' his grandmother said **indulgently**." p. 140

"grumbling about telling one sinner from another and wasting a perfectly good day of **damnation**." p. 142

1. Give students a list of five of the above words, your choice. Then, direct them to use a dictionary to list the following: word, part of speech, definition, use of word in a sentence.
2. Then, divide students into small reading groups (3–4 students each) and give them the following discussion questions to answer. One student is responsible for taking brief notes on the group's responses.

What is the significance of cutting away Hansel's beastly form?

What clues are we given as to who the Lord is gambling with before it is revealed?

Why do you think Faithful Johannes chooses not to reveal himself to Hansel right away after he learns of the Devil's deal?

What does Hansel learn about punishment and forgiveness?

Why is under-standing better than forgiveness? What is another word for under-standing? Can you think of a time in your life when you under-stood someone else?

3. Bring the class together to share ideas from their discussions. Then, give students a Venn diagram with the following directions:

Connect the idea of different inner and outer selves as expressed by Hansel's boy/beast form to other similar characters (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Frankenstein, etc.). Use a Venn Diagram to keep track of your ideas.

**\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed:** 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5

### Praise for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

"A wonderful sense of humor and narrative voice... completely fresh and unique."

—Rick Riordan, author of the bestselling Percy Jackson and the Olympians series

"Gidwitz has a profound understanding of the Grimms' tales, and he cleverly weaves different tales with an imaginative thread so that they form a grand narrative that has a critical utopian vision – a realm ruled by wise and responsible children."

—Jack Zipes, Professor Emeritus at the University of Minnesota





# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Hansel and Gretel and the Broken Kingdom

### Vocabulary List

"So Hansel, having **bested** the Devil, and saved the two villages" p. 166

"Shops were burned, **eviscerated**, empty." p. 170

"The whole family was dirty, **emaciated**, with ragged clothes and frightened eyes." p. 170

"After a few more **perfunctory** objections, their father finally had to admit that, indeed, it sounded like a pretty good plan." p. 179

1. Ask students to choose two of the following questions to respond to in their reading journals:  
Examine the description of dragon p.160–161. How does the author create strong emotions in the reader, without ever naming the threat to the villagers?

When else has Gretel experienced a pivotal moment in a tavern? What are the similarities? Differences?

On p. 174–175, why do Hansel and Gretel shrug when their parents ask of their travels? Why is forgiveness difficult from child to parent? What would you do in their position?

On p. 177–179, how are the roles reversed in this conversation? How is this part of "coming home"?

2. Make your own broken Kingdom of Grimm!

Brainstorm what aspects of the kingdom are broken (literally, metaphorically). Create a list of these in your reading journal. Then, create a map in the shape of a castle, with different puzzle pieces illustrating what's broken. Use construction paper, coloring materials, and anything else available to create a collage. Once the castle is created, tear it into pieces of various sizes, and then, ask a friend to put the castle back together again.

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4

### Praise for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

"An audacious debut that's wicked smart and wicked funny."

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

"Gidwitz is terrifying and funny at the same time. His storytelling is so assured that it's hard to believe this is his debut novel. And his treatment of the Grimms' tales is a whole new thing."

—*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

"Unlike any children's book I've ever read... *A Tale Dark and Grimm* holds up to multiple rereadings, like the classic I think it will turn out to be."

—*The New York Times*

"A marvelous reworking of old stories that manages to be fresh, frightening, funny and humane."

—*The Wall Street Journal*



# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Hansel and Gretel and the Dragon

### Vocabulary List

"Not only was it unheard of for royalty to pay them a visit, unless in some grand **procession** that was just passing through" pp. 185–86

"**Stifled** gasps arose from those who had never seen it." p. 195

"Now the plan was working, Gretel realized, **incredulous**." p. 200

"The dragon spit out the **staves** of the broken barrel" p. 201

"'Habeas corpus!' cried the first, somewhat **tangentially**." p. 209

1. The idea of the dragon is an important one in fairy tales in general, and particularly in *A Tale Dark & Grimm*. Discuss with your students the metaphorical significance of the dragon. What else does a dragon represent? Then, ask them to respond to these questions in their reading journals:  
What clue are we given on page 193 that the dragon might have another identity?  
Is the dragon defeated? How do you know?  
Can we ever tackle our "dragons" alone? Who ended up being Hansel and Gretel's army?  
What is your "dragon?" How would you defeat it? Create a battle plan using pictures and/or words to describe your strategy.
2. Create a family tree of Hansel and Gretel's support network ("army") throughout the story, including Faithful Johannes, the ravens, the old woman, etc. How are the branches of the tree able to prevent Hansel and Gretel from falling down, as the ravens did for Gretel in this chapter? Discuss which additions may be surprising. Why or why not? Then, ask students to brainstorm members of their own "army." What lessons have they learned from these individuals that have helped them along on their journey?

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5.1, 5.3, and 5.4

### Awards and Honors for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

2011-2012 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award (Young Readers)

2011-2012 Kansas State Reading Circle (Middle School/Jr. High Division)

2011-2012 Kentucky Bluegrass Award (Grades 6-8)

2011-2012 North Carolina Young Adult Book Award (Young Adult)

2011-2012 North Carolina Children's Book Award (Junior Books)

2012-2013 Connecticut Nutmeg Book Award (Intermediate Grades)

2012-2013 New York Charlotte Award (Middle Grade)

2012-2013 Kentucky Bluegrass Award (Grades 6-8)

2012-2013 Connecticut Nutmeg Book Award (Intermediate Grades)

2012-2013 Indiana Young Hoosier's Book Award (Middle Grade)

2012-2013 Texas Lonestar Reading List (Middle School)

2012-2013 Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Book Award (Grades 6-9)



# Classroom Lesson Plans for *A Tale Dark & Grimm*

## Hansel and Gretel and Their Parents

### Vocabulary List

"Why did this **patricidal** beheading have to happen?" p. 237

"And let me be the first to congratulate the children on the successful **vanquishing** of the dragon." p. 243

1. For the final discussion, ask students their general reactions to the book. Then, direct them to answer the following questions in small reading groups:  
What do Hansel and Gretel each believe about the dragon's knowledge of their plan? Who do you agree with, and why?  
How does Gretel figure out the real identity of the dragon?  
How must Hansel and Gretel kill the dragon? What is the significance of this?  
What brings the King back to life? Where else has this happened in the story?  
On p. 240, how do we know that the King and Queen are finally the parents Hansel and Gretel expected them to be?  
How are the subjects like children? How are the children like adults? What is the author saying about age and maturity?

2. As a final project, ask students to choose one of the following activities:

Write an opening chapter to "TDG 2." Think about author's tone, style, and plot elements.

What are Hansel and Gretel doing now?

You are Faithful Johannes, observing from the afterlife, watching all that has become of Hansel and Gretel after your passing. Write them a letter describing how you have felt watching Hansel and Gretel on their adventures.

\*\*Common Core Standards Addressed: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4



# A Q&A with *The Tale Dark & Grimm* author Adam Gidwitz



**Q: Of all possible genres, what drew you so strongly to fairy tales?**

**A:** I never used to be interested in fairy tales, because I was pretty sure they were all sweet, and cute, and boring. But one day, a few years ago, I started looking around on my shelf for a story to read to second graders, and I picked up a musty old book—one that I had owned for years but never opened—called *Grimm's Tales for Young and Old*. I started to read a story entitled Faithful Johannes. It turns out that in the story, two kids get their heads cut off by their parents. I thought, *Huh. Can I read this to second graders? Will I get fired?* And then I thought, *Let's find out*. So I read it to them, making jokes as I went and trying to make things not too terrifying. And afterward, half of them were completely traumatized, and the other half asked me to make the story into a book. So I did.

**Q: Why do you think it is important that young readers explore fairy tales?**

**A:** I say in the biography on the jacket flap that "While all of the dark and grim things in this book really did happen to Hansel and Gretel, they also happened to Adam. Of course, if you've ever had a childhood, they've probably happened to you, too." What do I mean? Did I really get my head cut off by my parents? Let me answer that question with another question: How did Hansel and Gretel feel after they learned their father had cut off their heads? Upset? Frightened? Betrayed? Unloved? Have you ever felt that way about your parents? I have. Here's another question: Why did Hansel turn into a wild beast? Perhaps it was because he could not control himself. Maybe he did not respect the boundaries of the world he lived in. Have you ever lost control like that? I have—in fact, most of middle school was like that for me. Everything in this book happened to me. Not physically, of course. But emotionally. The stories that fairy tales tell are the stories of our lives. That's why they're worth exploring.

**Q: What books greatly influenced you when you were young? Why?**

**A:** My favorite author was Roald Dahl, and my favorite book was *Matilda*. I guess I love stories about terrible parents and the brave children who defeat them.



Don't miss  
the companion to  
*A Tale Dark  
& Grimm*,  
*In a Glass  
Grimmly*



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