



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2025 Study Guide



Into the Woods

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by James Lapine

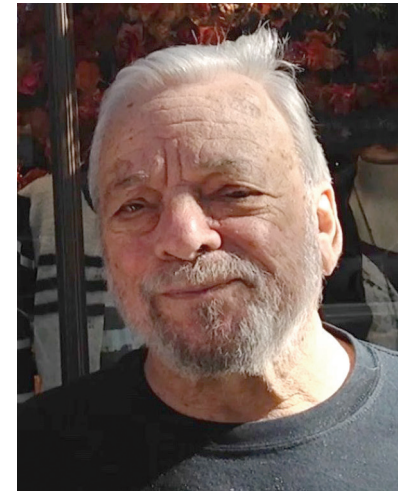
Into the Woods Trivia

1. During Sondheim's life, his many musicals were produced around the world, and many creatives wanted to change bits and pieces (gender, subplots, doubling of characters). When this happened, different companies would need to request these changes from Sondheim's estate. To these queries Sondheim himself would respond with a thoughtful letter written on his typewriter. One such letter was sent our own rehearsal pianist of *Into the Woods*. Unfortunately Sondheim did not approve the request!
2. Sondheim often worked with James Lapine, most notably on the musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, prior to their work together on *Into the Woods*. After *Sunday in the Park with George*, Sondheim wanted to create another musical with Lapine that suggested a "quest musical along the lines of *The Wizard of Oz*." *The Wizard of Oz* was the original inspiration for the creation of *Into the Woods*!
3. Nowadays almost every musical has a Junior Version, a version of the show that is more accessible and appropriate for high school students. In the 90s this was not common at all. Sondheim and Lapine were the first musical creators to give permission to have *Into the Woods* adapted for students. Music Theater International turned this two-plus hour musical into a 50-minute show for kids.



James Lapine

- James Lapine wrote the "book" for *Into the Woods*, which means he wrote the script. Most musicals to have multiple writers, some focused on the music and others on script.
- He played Jack in an elementary school production of *Jack and the Beanstalk*.
- Sondheim and Lapine often collaborated.
- Lapine and Sondheim also wrote *Sunday in the Park with George*.



Stephen Sondheim

- Stephen Sondheim - March 22, 1930 – November 26, 2021.
- Sondheim is credited with changing the American musical. His plays had dark, sophisticated plots with intricate and ironic music and lyrics.
- He won eight Tonys, eight Grammys, an Academy Award and a Pulitzer Prize.
- *Into the Woods* was written in 1986 and first performed at the Old Globe theater in San Diego. It went to Broadway in 1987. The play won three Tony Awards.

The witch is brought four items – "the cow as white as milk, the cape as red as blood, the hair as yellow as corn, and the slipper as pure as gold".

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine and their theatrical collaborations. How is Stephen Sondheim considered to have changed American musical theatre? These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sondheim
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Lapine
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/07/19/specials/sondheim-words.html>
<https://www.sondheimsociety.com>
2. What are the elements of a musical? How do musicals differ from nonmusical plays? What does music add to the telling of a non-musical? These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_theatre
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/essays/elements-of-the-musical/>
<https://library.fiveable.me/american-literature-since-1860/unit-8/american-musicalstudy-guide-/6QQizxKbCu4JbgMP>
<https://www.kxtickets.com/news-blog/the-four-essential-elements-of-musical-theatre>
3. Familiarize yourself with the history of the following fairy tales: *Cinderella* (Ashputtel), *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Little Red Riding Hood* (Little Red-Cap), and *Rapunzel*. These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2591/2591-h/2591-h.htm>
<http://shortstoriesshort.com/story/jack-and-the-beanstalk/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Red_Riding_Hood
<https://www.ravenwoodcastle.com/2020/11/10/legends-lore-rapunzel/#:~:text=Nowadays%20Rapunzel%20is%20most%20frequently,known%20as%20Grimms'%20Fairy%20Tales.>
<https://fostercuriosity.com/series/the-dark-side-of-disney/the-dark-side-of-rapunzel>
4. Research Carl Jung's work on fairy tales. What insights did Jung and his followers glean from their study of fairy tales? How was this work an inspiration for the writing of *Into the Woods*? Why do fairytales continue to be popular today? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.butler-bowdon.com/carl-jung-archetypes-collective-unconscious>
<https://sites.psu.edu/intothewoods2023/psychoanalysis/>
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/out-of-the-psyche-and-int_b_6324398
5. What does the forest symbolize in literature? This and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enchanted_forest
<https://eselman.medium.com/into-the-woods-the-psychological-significance-of-forests-in-fairy-tales-2dbd-9fa01c04>
<https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/into-the-woods-with-shakespeare>

6. In this play, a witch is an important part of the entirety of the plot. How do witches help and hinder stories in theatre, not only fairy tale based plays like *Into the Woods*, but also a few of Shakespeare's creations?
<https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/the-greatest-theatre-witches-of-all-time>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Plays_about_witches_and_witchcraft
<https://3264850.wixsite.com/luciemspecialistp/witches-in-different-contexts>

Additional resources and interviews:

<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/16/146938826/stephen-sondheim-examining-his-lyrics-and-life>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTw9JZkulzU>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUN_MTChn5M

What is the function of the Narrator? How does he contribute to and clarify the action of the play? Who or what might he represent? What happens when the characters of the story are left without him?



2025 Costume design for Jack by Linda Roethke.

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on the elements of musicals. How does the music of *Into the Woods* help to evoke emotion? What are the tones established by the musical score? How does the tone of the music shift from the beginning to the end of the play? How do songs help establish the characters and their conflicts? It is proverbially said that, "when emotions become too strong for speech, in a musical, you sing." How is this true for the characters in *Into the Woods*? When a song is reprised, how does it show the growth of the characters?
2. Refer to your research on fairytales. How did James Lapine expand the stories of *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Cinderella* and *Rapunzel* for *Into the Woods*? What new characters did he add? On their journey through the woods, what are the instances in which characters from one fairy tale wind up helping someone from another? In what ways do characters from one story negatively affect a character from another tale? How does the interweaving of all these stories give us an entirely new and original fairy tale?
3. Refer to your research on Carl Jung's work on fairytales. In Act One, the Baker, the Baker's Wife, Cinderella, Jack, and Little Red enter the dark woods. For what are they searching? What are their fears? In what ways do they confront their fears? In what ways do they overcome their fears?
4. Stephen Sondheim once said that Lapine "held the other fairy tales together with the story of the baker and his wife." How does the story of the Baker and the Baker's Wife propel all the other stories? What is the Baker's relationship to Rapunzel and the Witch? The Mysterious Man?
5. What words does the Wolf use to describe Little Red? What is the wolf tempting Little Red to do? What does Little Red learn from their encounter?
6. In order to get what she wants, the Witch sets in motion a plan that requires the Baker and the Baker's Wife to collect necessary items to break the curse on their house and by default they help make Cinderella, Rapunzel, and Jack's wishes come true. What is the Witch's wish? What does she sacrifice to get what she wants? In what ways is she successful? In what ways does this do more harm than good?
7. What are the Baker, the Baker's Wife, Jack, Little Red and Cinderella willing to do and/or sacrifice to get their wish? Does their heartfelt desire justify the means by which they achieve their wish? What are the consequences of their actions? How do they lose sight of what they have?
8. In what ways do the Witch, the Mysterious Man, Cinderella's Stepmother and Jack's Mother err by trying to keep their children safe? In what ways do Jack, Little Red, Rapunzel and the Baker refuse to learn?

*Refer to the following lyrics:
No matter what you know, children
refuse to learn...
Children can only grow from something you love
to something you lose...*

What do each of the parents—the Witch, Jack's Mother, Cinderella's Stepmother, the Mysterious Man—wish to pass down to their children? What is the value of telling children stories of the past?

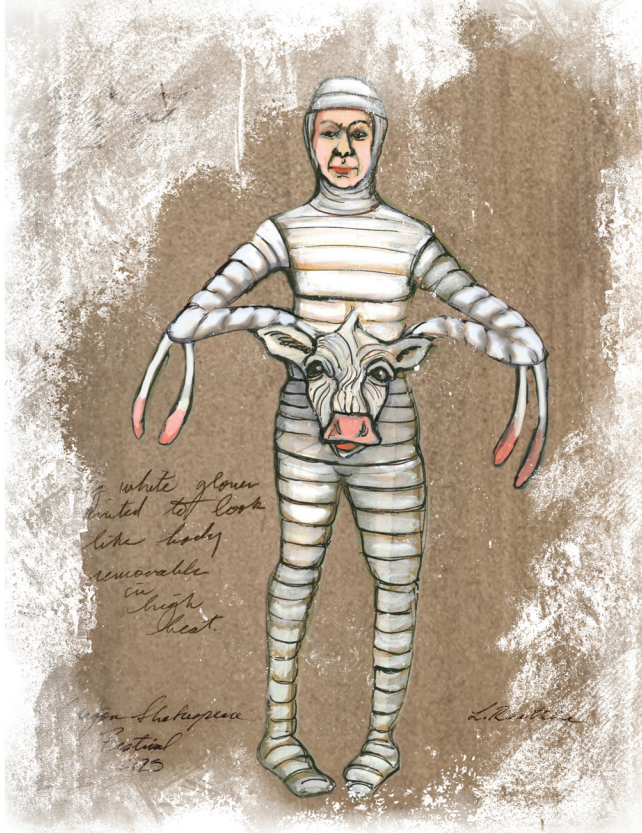
9. In what ways are the parents successful in leaving a legacy for their children? What problems, dysfunctions, traits or curses have each of the children inherited? In what ways are they able to amend their faults in order to break inherited curses?

"Stay a child while you can be a child." – The Witch



After seeing/reading the play, cont'd

10. Jack's Mother warns Jack to "stop while you're ahead." In what ways does Jack learn this lesson? In what ways does he not? What are the consequences of Jack getting his wish? In what ways do Little Red, Cinderella, the Baker and his Wife, the Witch, Cinderella's Stepmother and the Princes need to heed this lesson?
11. At the end of Act One the characters re-emerge from the woods. How has the journey through the woods transformed Little Red? The Baker? The Baker's Wife? Jack? Cinderella?
12. In Act Two, when the characters are back in the woods, Little Red says "But Mother warned me never to stray from the path." The Baker replies "The path has strayed from you." What does the path symbolize? What realizations do the characters make when they no longer have a path to follow? In what ways does the changing path affect them negatively? Positively? Which characters ultimately emerge as leaders? In what ways do they work together for the common good?
13. The Baker and the Baker's Wife plan to tell the royal family of the destruction caused by the Giant's Wife. In response the Witch says "I wouldn't count on that family to snuff out a rat!" In what ways is the Witch's judgment of the family justified? What is the royal family's responsibility to the kingdom? What kind of leadership do they assert? When do they take action and why?
14. James Lapine says that the second half of this play is about a community coming together to solve a problem. The Baker and Cinderella sing "No One Is Alone" to Jack and Little Red at the end of the play. What are they trying to communicate through the song? What lessons have the Baker and Cinderella learned that they want to pass to Jack and Little Red? In what ways do these characters become a community by the end of the play?
15. What are the traditional roles of men in fairy tales? Women? What do princes and princesses typically represent? Referring to the lyrics "The harder to get, the better to have," what motivates the Princes in this play? What do they define as charming? What do they expect from their princesses? What happens when all of their ideals are shattered? What does this say about the nature of dreams, ideals and pedestals?
16. Cinderella refers to her father's house as a "nightmare," the Prince's palace as a "dream," then she realizes that she wants something "in-between." What does she mean by this? In what ways is she successful in her quest? How do Jack, Little Red, the Baker and his Wife find their own "in-betweens"? What happens to the characters who cannot find the same kind of moderation?
17. Toward the end of the play, what happens to characters who are considered bad or evil such as Cinderella's Stepmother, Florinda, Lucinda, the Witch, the Wolf and the Giant's Wife? In what ways do these characters learn lessons? How have they transformed?



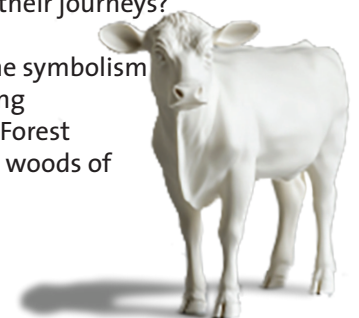
2025 Costume design for Milky White by Linda Roethke.

Consider these lyrics:

*Witches can be right, giants can be good.
You decide what's right, you decide what's good.*

How do the characters' perceptions of what is good and right change over the course of the play? Which characters grow past their original notions of "happily ever after"? Which characters do not?

18. "I wish" is the first lyric and the last lyric in the play. How do Cinderella, the Baker, the Baker's Wife, Jack, Little Red, and the Witch's wishes change by the end? How do their journeys back into the woods help to redefine their wishes? What is the moral responsibility of fulfilling a wish? When does the end justify the means? What does the final "I wish" say about their journeys?
19. Refer to your research on the symbolism of the forest. If you are seeing *As You Like It*, how does the Forest of Arden play resemble the woods of *Into the Woods*?



Flash *From the* Past

90
90 years
of OSF

For our 90th Anniversary Season we thought it would be fun to share pictures of our past productions of *Into the Woods*.



From the 2014 production of *Into the Woods*:
From left to right:
Miriam Laube as the Witch.
Catherine Colson as Cinderella's Stepmother
John Tufts as Rapunzel's Prince and Christiana Clark as Snow White.

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