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Hansel and Gretel

Hansel and Gretel, retold by Sue Graves, was originally written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812. The brothers are also known for creating *Cinderella*, *The Frog Prince*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. The story consists of five major characters. Hansel and Gretel are young siblings who live with their submissive father and cruel stepmother. The last character, the main antagonist, is the witch who lives deep in the forest. The story takes place in a wooded area sometime in the distant past. The atmosphere is tense and diabolical. Last but not least, the story is told in third person from the children's point of view.

Absolute poverty or destitution is the first theme. By definition, absolute poverty is an environment where basic human needs like clean water, edible food, and safety are almost nonexistent. Because this is a children's book, details about their poverty is scarce but eventually the family has no food. The evidence of this is found on page 10, "Hansel and Gretel were hungry. 'We have no food,' said their father." Without the strain of poverty, the father would have never abandoned his children in the woods. Additionally if the children had not been starving, they might have realized the danger lurking from a house made of cake and candy.

Survival is the second theme apparent in this story. Survival means the ability to endure subhuman conditions and still remain alive. Hansel and Gretel are given a death sentence when their parents decide to abandon them in the forest. The underlying motive for their actions, especially by the stepmother, is survival. The family has no food, and she realizes it is easier to fend for two people rather than four. This is pointed out on page 10, "Their stepmother said, 'Take the children deep into the woods and leave them there.'" Even though their father doesn't want to do this, his priority is surviving his abusive marriage. Evidence of this is on page 12,

"Hansel and Gretel's father was afraid of the stepmother. He did not want to leave the children in the woods. But he said to Hansel and Gretel, 'Come with me.'" Their need to survive is stronger than the need to protect their children. Most parents would sacrifice themselves to save their offspring, but these two. Without this theme, the story could not take place.

Hansel and Gretel was disturbing story. As a parent, the treatment these children were subjected to is absolutely despicable. In this day and age, Social Service would have stepped in and removed them from this toxic environment. Another issue that bothered me was the cannibalism. The purpose behind this story was to scare children about "stranger danger," and what is scarier than the thought of being eaten. Unfortunately we live in a society where this has actually happened. I find this story interesting but a little too graphic for small children. I would recommend it for older students.

