Engelbert Humperdinck

Hansel & Gretel

Education Resource
This resource contains two parts

**Part one** includes background information for teachers to assist them in preparing their students to attend the opera.

**Part two** is a series of activities that can both assist students to prepare for the opera and/or to be worked on afterwards.

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Preparing Your Students

To prepare students for their visit to Victorian Opera’s production of Hänsel and Gretel, we suggest that you:

- Familiarise your students with the story
- Introduce students to the characters, and their voice types
- Complete activities in this resource, both listening and practical tasks

PART ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

“This opera is magic, the work of a master composer. A story of good and evil, darkness and light that will capture the imaginations of the young and young at heart.”

– Richard Mills

Filled with magic and beautiful music, this specially-abridged version of Engelbert Humperdinck’s masterpiece Hänsel and Gretel is the perfect introduction for young audiences to an enchanting world of opera. Hänsel and Gretel, two mischievous children are sent into the forest and discover a gingerbread house and its unpleasant owner, a wicked witch who eats children.
1. Synopsis of the opera

Hänsel and Gretel are playing in their house in the woods alone, waiting for their mother and father to come home. They should be making brooms, but are playing games instead. Hänsel moans about being so hungry, and Gretel tries to distract him by teaching him a fun dance. She also shows him a surprise hidden away for later – a jug of milk a neighbour gave their mother that she is going to turn into custard. Their mother comes home and tells them off for being naughty and playing rather than making broomsticks. In her anger she accidently knocks over the jug of milk, and then sends the children out in to the woods with a basket to gather strawberries. The poor mother gets quite upset, as she doesn’t have any food for her family. Father comes home, very happy that he’s sold lots of broomsticks and managed to buy the family a basket full of good food. He soon cheers up the Mother. However, when she tells him that she sent the children out in to the woods after they were naughty, he becomes worried and tells Mother about the ‘Evil One’ who lives in the gloomy wood, full of magic spells.

This ‘Evil One’ is a Witch, who lives in a crispy, crunchy house of sugar and spice. She entices children into her house, puts them in her oven and turns them into Gingerbread Children.

Out in the woods, Hänsel and Gretel are gathering lots of strawberries in their baskets. They come across a cuckoo and hear the leaves in the trees whispering to them and they become quite scared. Suddenly a mysterious man appears - the Sandman, who reassures the children, and sprinkles magic sand in their eyes to help them sleep. Hänsel becomes sleepy, and Gretel encourages him to sing their evening prayer before falling asleep. As they sleep, fourteen angels appear in their dreams and watch over them, keeping them safe.

Morning comes, and the Dew Fairy shakes dewdrops over the sleeping children to wake them up. They slowly wake, and the Dew Fairy disappears. As the morning mist clear,s, they see a house not far away made out of gingerbread figures. Realising that the house is edible, Hänsel slowly approaches, breaks off a piece of the house and eats it. The Witch suddenly startles him, and he drops the piece of edible house in fright. The Witch entices the children into the house. The Witch tries to cast a spell on the children with her magic wand, but Hänsel and Gretel are too clever to be tricked by the magic, and tease the Witch. The Witch tries to make Gretel get into the oven, but she says that she can’t manage it, and the Witch bends over double showing her how to get inside. Together the children give her a big push, and she falls into the oven, with the door closing behind her.

Hänsel and Gretel celebrate the Witch’s demise. They soon realise that they are surrounded by children. Gretel goes around to all of the children and slowly they open their eyes, smiling. The children thank Hänsel and Gretel for saving them from the Witch, and hand in hand they sing. Everyone dances together joyously.
2. Background to the story and the Brothers Grimm

The story of Hänsel and Gretel was published in 1812 by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

The Brothers Grimm were German collectors and writers of folk tales. They published, researched and studied folklore during the first half of the 19th century, and are regarded as two of the best known storytellers. They wrote, modified and published over 200 stories.

Many of the stories they published were told to them by their contemporaries, and had been passed down from older generations.

Each country in Europe, as well as smaller regions within those countries, had their own fairy tales. Sometimes these stories had similarities to those in nearby areas, with variations depending on local customs and folklore.
3. Hänsel and Gretel - the characters and voices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Voice Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hänsel</td>
<td>This character is a boy, but will be performed by a girl. This is called a 'pants role'. The voice type is mezzo soprano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gretel</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch</td>
<td>This character is a woman but is performed by a man. The voice type is tenor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Mezzo soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dew Fairy</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandman</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels and Children</td>
<td>Mixed chorus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Engelbert Humperdinck and the writing of Hänsel and Gretel

Engelbert Humperdinck was a German musician, teacher and composer who lived between 1854 and 1921. His parents wanted him to study architecture, but after winning some scholarships he pursued a career in music.

Today he is best known for Hänsel and Gretel. He and his sister, Adelheid Wette, initially collaborated to write a Märchenspiel – a fairy tale play - for her children. She contributed the final libretto and he wrote a singspiel of 16 songs. It eventually became an opera in two acts and was first performed in Weimar, Germany in 1893. It has since been translated into over 20 languages, and was first performed in Australia in 1982.
5. Hänsel and Gretel - a chat with Richard Mills, conductor and Artistic Director of Victorian Opera

What is it about this opera that makes it so popular with audiences and opera companies?

It has very strongly drawn characters and the depiction of good and evil is clearly delineated in it. It also celebrates innocence in a very special way in the dream pantomime with the 14 angels blessing the kids. The notion of the child in English Victorian fiction is very different to the 20th century notion of children. Today we have a clearer view of the nature of childhood, a perhaps less idealised or sentimental view of it. What’s nice about Hänsel and Gretel is that this kind of idealised view of childhood is leavened with a bit of German common sense. But I think that is one of the things that appeals about it. It has a kind of authenticity when it looks at the plight of these two young people.

So do you think it’s the original story of Hänsel and Gretel that appeals in the context of Humperdinck’s opera or is it the combination of what he produces?

I think it is what he produced. The idea of fairy stories in cultures is to set forth unpalatable truths, about seasonal change, about death, about complexities of relationships and about the presence of evil in the world. That’s what this story does. Of course it’s miraculously composed, it is magically written.

What particular musical features/ techniques does Humperdinck use?

He uses a Wagnerian kind of language, the technique of voice leading (the linear progression of melodic lines - voices - and their interaction with one another to create harmonies), but simplifies it, harmonically it’s not that complicated. What is complicated is the counterpoint (the relationship between voices that are harmonically interdependent - polyphony - yet independent in rhythm and contour), it is very, very intense part writing, complex. But within very simple harmonic structures. The effect is very beautiful and lays very well on the orchestral sound but still allows voices to be heard.

Which parts of this opera stand out for you as the conductor?

The thing I like about it is the sense of complex counterpoint, the weaving of different strands of melody to create interesting many layered textures. It’s a very treacherous piece to play if you are a repetiteur. It looks very simple on the page but in fact it’s very tricky.
The Victorian Opera version uses a chamber music arrangement for the instrumentation. Why did you and Julian Langdon choose this instrumentation?

Firstly, there's a very practical need to make it able to be toured, transportable. Realising this with a full orchestra would cost a small fortune and we need to operate within the budget we have. The clarinets and horns we’ve put in create a very warm sound, the two clarinets and two horns make the voice leading potentially very rich and interesting.

The notion of forest or ‘Wald’ to use the German word is a very important notion in 19th century German literature and theatre. If you walk out of a densely settled town like Freiburg and you go into the Schwarzwald (Black Forest) you can see exactly what I mean, this juxtaposition of town and wilderness is a feature of Germany even today. The notion of the forest, a dark place, a place removed from the day to day commonalities of existence, a place of magic, a place where humanity can embrace nature, is central to German Romantic thought. It's in Goethe; it's a central thing of German literature this notion of ‘Wald’. You find it in Weber in his opera Der Freischütz, in Wagner, in The Ring Cycle, especially in Siegfried. It persists right through the century. Humperdinck is part of the tradition of rendering nature. And of course the sound of the horn is inseparable from that, which is why we used two horns in this arrangement.
6. The fairy tale as a metaphor

Fairy tales are often stories that contain or are metaphors - they represent something else. They usually include symbolism or represent interpretations of life. Fairy tales are often cautionary tales for children, which sometimes have morals or ‘life lessons’. As Richard Mills said, “they set forth unpalatable truths.” Fairy tales often mirror the challenges of life, yet also highlight a hope for improvement.

The common formula for a fairy tale is that a hero/heroine is subjected to a series of trials, which they navigate with the assistance of a helper. There is also typically an antagonist - someone who makes life difficult, but who will eventually be defeated. In the end, the hero/heroine has a happier life.

There are variables in the stories; talking animals, trickery, and magic have all featured in fairy tales. There are elements of everyday struggles as well; power and class battles between rich and poor, beauty and ugliness, youth and maturity, men and women. They also frequently show a nasty side of humanity, such as someone wanting to obtain power at the expense of someone else.

_Hänsel and Gretel_ contains many fairy tale features and moralities that could be discussed;

- A very poor family struggling to feed themselves
- A father who gives into his wife against his better judgement
- An evil witch luring children into a bad place, with the use of treats
- An evil witch who wants to eat children
- Children using their intelligence to rescue themselves from a bad situation
- Evil (in this case) is punished
7. Background to opera and opera singing

What is opera?

Opera is a complex European art form that has been around since about 1600. It was very popular in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Today there are many styles of opera performance, but simply, an opera is a play that is sung.

Music Theatre is a dramatic performance that includes music. It usually includes dialogue, music, dance and theatrical elements like set, costume, props, makeup, lights and sound. Music theatre traditions exist around the world in different forms.

The countries in which European opera was first developed are Italy, France, Germany and England. Therefore the main four languages of European Opera are Italian, French, German and English. Other countries have become significant in the opera world since, including Russia.

Opera often uses recitative, a vocal (singing) style designed to imitate natural speech and used when spoken dialogue might be present in other forms of music theatre.

What are the common voices and voice types in opera?

There are seven voice types in opera/music theatre. These are defined by the range of notes they can sing and a vocal quality. There are three female operatic voice types, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo soprano roles.

There are four male voice types, although the countertenor voice is usually only used in Baroque operas.

- Soprano, the highest sounding female voice
- Mezzo-Soprano, the lower sounding female voice
- Contralto, the lowest sounding female voice
- Countertenor, the highest sounding male voice
- Tenor, a high sounding male voice
- Baritone, the middle sounding male voice
- Bass, the lowest sounding male voice
There are further categories of voice defining the kind of voice quality, and the type of music they can sing. The composer will consider voice types to highlight the different characters – for example, to differentiate between a King and a Servant; a Princess and a Witch.

A few of these are:

- **Coloratura** – a very high range with the ability to sing complicated parts with agility
- **Dramatic** – a heavy sounding, powerful voice
- **Lyric** – an average sized voice with the ability to sing long, beautiful phrases
- **Heldentenor** – The ‘heroic tenor’, a very big role that requires a powerful sound

Here are some examples of what these voices sound like.

**Classical Female Voices** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U
**Classical Male Voices** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23W
PART TWO: ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

The following activities are pitched at various ages and skill levels. They can be complete activities in themselves or included as part of a unit that the school/teacher devises to support the excursion to Hänsel and Gretel. The activities suggested in this resource have been designed in accordance with the Victorian Curriculum for the following learning areas and capabilities.

“The Arts enable students to develop their creative and expressive capacities by learning about the different practices, disciplines and traditions that have shaped the expression of culture locally, nationally and globally. Students are both artist and audience in the Arts. They make and respond and learn to appreciate the specific ways this occurs in different disciplines.”

They correspond to the new Victorian Curriculum as per the table below.

<table>
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<th>LEARNING AREAS</th>
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Figure 2: Dew Fairy © Ross Hall
Activity 1 – Listen to the opera

You can listen to recordings of the opera on Spotify. Or you can watch it online via the following YouTube links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyV80L9d0bk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqWDm8NWD1Q

Discuss the voices and the singing with your students. How does it make them feel, do they like the music, and why?

Activity 2 – Read the story

Read the full story of Hänsel & Gretel with the class using any version of the picture story book; or there are a number of printable versions of translations of the original story online.


Do they see this story being relevant in the 21st century? Do they see connections to examples of poverty that exist around the globe? How do they think each of the characters should have behaved?
Activity 3 – Interactive online activity


You will need flash player for this activity, this resource is in English.

For use on class laptops, teacher laptop projected onto board or Smart board/ Interactive Whiteboard.

Hänsel and Gretel: Learning about Opera! is an online educational experience.

Players can control interactive elements in every scene and watch the play unfold. Whilst listening to Humperdinck's original music and following the story, students can interact with elements of the production by taking on the roles including:

Costume Designer  Choreographer
Set Designer  Props Manager
Lighting Technician  Technical Director
Stage Director  Conductor

The interactive program runs for 15 – 20 mins. There is a link for parents and teachers also.

Activity 4 – Create your own version of a play of Hänsel and Gretel

For younger students . . .

Create puppets of each character and ‘act out’ as the story is read. For example, you could use the story and images from the following website


For older students . . .

Divide the class into groups of six. Have each group:

Allocate roles – Narrator, Hänsel, Gretel, Father, Stepmother and Witch

Decide how they will act out the story

Discuss the use of props and costumes to suggest characters and space

Perform for the class

Activity 5 – Build a gingerbread house

Search online for “Gingerbread House Template” and create:
A real, edible gingerbread house with icing and lollies attached; or
A cardboard gingerbread house (to any scale) for the classroom

Example template: https://www.template.net/design-templates/print/gingerbread-house-template/

Activity 6 - Learn the music

Focus on learning two songs from Hänsel and Gretel prior to the performance:

“Brother Come and Dance with Me” – Appendix 1
“Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep” – Appendix 2

You can listen to either of these on Spotify or YouTube by searching the title of the song and ‘Hansel and Gretel’.

Suggested Ideas:

Listen to the song whilst patsching (patting knees to the beat of the music)
Clap the rhythm of the melody
Learn to sing the melody in English
Learn to sing the melody in German
Have children work in small groups to create a dance or set of movements
Create an accompaniment on untuned percussion instruments
Create a bass-line accompaniment on xylophones, metallophones and glockenspiels by following the chords symbols above the melody

Invite students who play instruments to join the class ensemble, e.g.

- Chords played by piano, keyboard, guitar, ukulele
- Melody line played by piano, keyboard, recorder, flute, violin
- N.B. The melody will need to be transposed for transposing instruments, or into bass clef if required

Perform at assembly
Encourage school ensembles to learn and perform the songs
Activity 7 – The instruments of the orchestra in Hänsel and Gretel

In the Victorian Opera orchestral arrangement by Julian Langdon the instruments you will hear are:

Strings - 3 Violins, 1 Viola, 1 Cello, 1 Double Bass
Woodwind - Flute, Oboe, 2 Clarinets, Bassoon
Brass - 2 French Horns
Piano

The following image shows the instruments in a standard orchestra.

- Strings – violin I and II, viola, cello, double bass
- Woodwind - flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon
- Brass - horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba
- Percussion – large drum, middle drum without snare, small drum, tambourine, triangle and glockenspiel
- Piano
- Harp
Watch the overture to the opera – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdAO9CKRyP0
This version is being played by the Australian Doctors Orchestra.

1. What instruments can you see and hear?
2. Circle the instruments in the image above that are being used in Hänsel and Gretel.
3. Which sections of the orchestra do the instruments you hear come from: Strings, Woodwind, Brass or Percussion?
4. Where have you heard these sounds/instruments before?
Activity 8 – Elements of Music

The grid below can be used as a starting point for responding to the Elements of Music when listening to any piece of music. Choose the method that works best for you and your students. Start by using the prompt questions to discuss the music with older students. Encourage younger students to respond to the music by moving around the room.

You can use the YouTube video in Activity 5 to facilitate the questions and responses in the grid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Physical Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tempo</td>
<td>What speed is the music going? Which instruments are moving fast, which slowly?</td>
<td>Move around the room to the speed/tempo of the music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td>How loud or quiet is the music? When does it change volume?</td>
<td>When the music is quiet, hold both hands close together, as it gets louder move them further apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch</td>
<td>How high or low is the music? Which instruments/voices are playing high, which are low?</td>
<td>When the music is low in pitch, move down low, close to the floor. When the music is high in pitch, move arms high in the air.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>Can you hear a steady beat? Which instrument/s are playing the beat? Describe the way the melody and other parts are moving – are they skipping, hopping or long, smooth sounds?</td>
<td>Stomp your feet to the beat. Dance the way the melody/tune makes you want to dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>How many different parts can you hear playing?</td>
<td>Use strips of coloured paper or string to show how many parts you can hear playing at any time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 9 – Hänsel and Gretel - Word Search

Find the following words from the opera. Then look up what the words mean in English.

BESEN, KORB, WALD, VIERZEHN, FEE, VATER, HEXE, TANNENBAUM, DUNKEL, RECHT, MUTTER, LINKS, KINDER, ENGEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Besen</td>
<td>Dunkel</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engel</td>
<td>Fee</td>
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<td>Hexe</td>
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<td>Korb</td>
<td>Links</td>
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<td>Mutter</td>
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<td>Tanzen</td>
<td>Vater</td>
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<td>Vierzehn</td>
<td>Wald</td>
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<td>Tannenbaum</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity 10 – Translate the words in the following drawings and colour them in.

Translate from the images in the picture below.

der Teller  
die Kerze  
der Besen  
der Topf  
der Krug
Use the images in the picture to translate the words below.

die Tannenbäume  der Wald  die Kinder  der Korb

Translate the following German sentences.

Hänsel und Gretel wandern durch den Wald. Im Wald ist es dunkel. Was ist im Korb?

________________________________________________________________________________
Dance Duet: Hänsel und Gretel

Vivace \( \frac{j=100}{} \)

Humperdinck

Hänsel and Gretel
Education Resource

Appendix 1 - Dance Duet - Come Dance with Me

Brüderchen komm Tanz mit mir,
Brother come and dance with me,

Both my hands I offer thee,
Right foot first, left foot then,

Rund herum, es ist nicht schwer!
Round about and back again

Tanzen soll ich armer Wicht,
I would dance but don't know how,
Schwe-stern, und kann es nicht!  
when to turn or when to bow.

Da-rum zeig mir, wie es Brauch,  
Show me what I ought to do,

daß ich tan zen  
so that I may

lere auch!  
dance like you!

Mit den Füß-chen  
With your foot you

tapp, tapp, tapp  
tap, tap, tap,

mit den Händ-chen  
with your hands you

klapp, klapp, klapp  
clap, clap, clap,

ein-mal hin,  
right foot first,
ein-mal her,  
left foot then,

rund her-um, es is nicht schwer!  
round a-bout and back a- gain!

Mit den Füß-chen  
With your foot you

tapp, tapp, tapp  
tap, tap, tap,
mit den Händchen, klapp, klapp, klapp
einmal hin,

einmal her, 'rum, es ist nicht schwer!
gain.

Gretel
That was very good indeed,
and I'm sure that you'll succeed.

Seht mir doch den Hänsel an,

Try again and I can see,

Hansel soon will dance like me!

Mit den Köpfchen, nick, nick, nick,

With your head you nick, nick, nick,
Hänsel and Gretel
Education Resource

Victorian Opera 2017 - Education Resource - Hansel and Gretel

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Appendix 2 – Evening Prayer

Hänsel und Gretel: Evening Prayer

Humperdinck

Hänsel and Gretel
Education Resource

Victorian Opera

Hänsel und Gretel
Education Resource

Victorian Opera 2017 - Education Resource - Hansel and Gretel
2 immer leise/always quiet

mit steigerung/increasing

G     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

zwei - e, die mich decken,
two who warmly cover,

G     Am     Em

[d2g2] [d2g2]

zwei - e, die mich waken,
two who o'er me hover,

G     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

Lin - ken, zwei - e, die mich decken,
left hand, two who warmly cover,

Bm     E     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

zwei - e, die mich waken,
two to whom 'tis given to guide my steps to heaven,

Em     Am     Em

[d2g2] [d2g2]

zwei - e, die mich waken,
two who o'er me hover,

G     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

poco rit.

Bm     E     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

zwei - e, die mich waken,
two to whom 'tis given to guide my steps to heaven,

Am     Bm     E

[d2g2] [d2g2]

poco rit.

G     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

poco rit.

G     D

[d2g2] [d2g2]

sen.

sen.

sen.

sen.
Solutions

Activity 9

L A O M U H R F T T A R E E
Z I T A B E S E N A T N K S
R E N G A H G E H W A L D T
Y I Z K R E C H T A N V V S
R E Z I S X A K T L N U I E
W D U N K E L S O A E W E A
T A N D S T E D X R N T R B
V A T E R G A E X B Z Z A
U L F R A D N U B E A T E Z
R E M U T T E R I E U R H N
B A A N N Z E H N A M E N M

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Besen</td>
<td>broom</td>
<td>Dunkel</td>
<td>dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engel</td>
<td>angel</td>
<td>Fee</td>
<td>fairy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hexe</td>
<td>witch</td>
<td>Kinder</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korb</td>
<td>basket</td>
<td>Links</td>
<td>left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutter</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>Recht</td>
<td>right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzen</td>
<td>dancing</td>
<td>Vater</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vierzehn</td>
<td>fourteen</td>
<td>Wald</td>
<td>forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannenbaum</td>
<td>pine tree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity 10

der Teller – the plate, die Kerze – the candle, der Besen – the broom, der Topf – the pot, der Krug – the jug
die Tannenbäume – the pine trees, der Wald – the forest, die Kinder – the children, die Korb – the basket

Hänsel and Gretel walk through the forest. It is dark in the forest. What is in the basket?
This resource is collated by Deborah Vanderwerp, Education Officer for Victorian Opera and written by Deborah Vanderwerp and Sue Arney.

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