

Background Information

Plot Synopsis of *Hansel and Gretel*

Hansel and Gretel are the children of a poor woodcutter. Fearing starvation, the woodcutter's wife (variously called the children's mother or stepmother) convinces him to abandon the children in the forest. After overhearing their mother's plan, Hansel and Gretel gather white pebbles to make a trail to follow home. After their return, their mother again convinces the woodcutter to abandon them. This time, however, they can only leave a trail of breadcrumbs. Unfortunately, animals in the woods eat the children's trail of breadcrumbs and Hansel and Gretel become lost.

Lost in the forest, they find a house made of bread (later versions call it gingerbread) with sugar windows, which they begin to eat. The inhabitant of the house, who is an old woman, invites them in and prepares a feast for them. The woman, however, is a witch who has built the house to entice children to her so that she may fatten and eat them. She cages Hansel and makes Gretel her servant. While she prepares to cook Hansel, she tells Gretel to climb into an oven to be sure it is ready to bake. Gretel guesses that the witch intends to bake her and tricks the witch into climbing into the oven, closing it behind her.

After taking jewels from the witch's house, Hansel and Gretel set off for home to be reunited with their father, whose wife has since died. "Then all anxiety was at an end, and they lived together in perfect happiness."

Adapted from "Hansel and Gretel." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansel_and_gretel (4 March 2007).