



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2025 Study Guide



Into the Woods

by Stephen Sondheim

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 to Sondheim's estate. To these queries Sondheim himself would respond, with a thoughtful letter written on his typewriter. One such letter was sent to 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 Lapin 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.

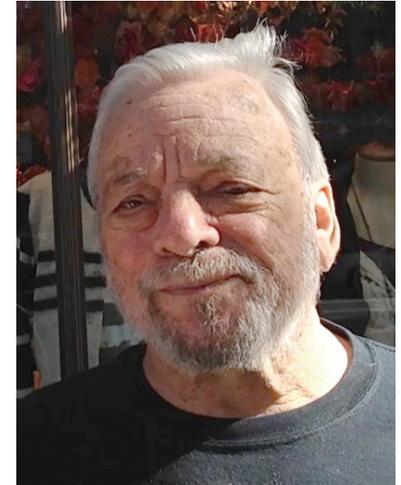


James LaPine

- James LaPine wrote the book for *Into the Woods*. To write the "book", means to write the script.
- Playwright, librettist and stage director.
- 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*.



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".



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.

Before seeing/reading the play

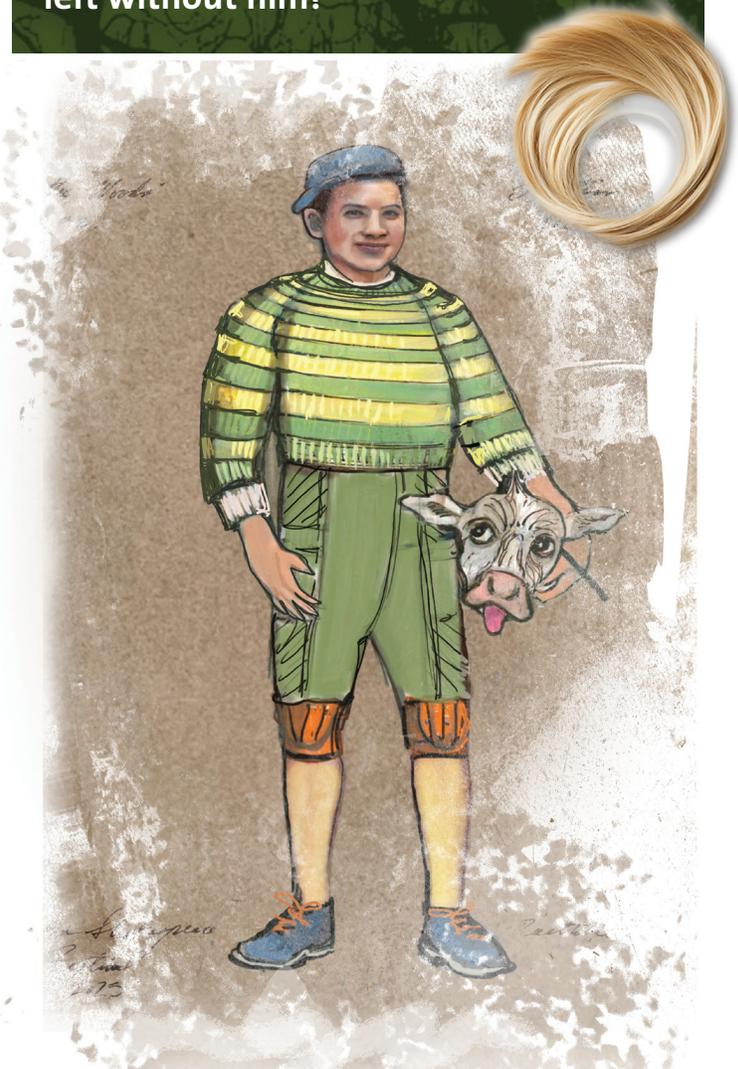
1. Research Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine and their theatrical collaborations. How is Stephen Sondheim considered to have changed American musical theatre? These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sondheim
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Lapine
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/07/19/specials/sondheim-words.html>
<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://espelman.medium.com/into-the-woods-the-psychological-significance-of-forests-in-fairy-tales-2dbd9fa01c04>
<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=MTwgJZkulzU>
- 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 fairytale 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 fairytale?
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**



Flash *From the* Past

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.
Cathrine Colson as Cinderella's Step Mother
John Tufts as Rapunzel's Prince and Christiana Clark as Snow White.

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