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A Tale Dark And Grimm



Synopsis

Adam Gidwitz makes a sparkling debut with a work that children are sure to request again and again. Not content within the confines of their own tale, Hansel and Gretel skip out on their story and jump into eight other classic Grimm fairy tales. But all is not sugarplums and candy houses. Danger lies ahead, and Hansel and Gretel have much to learn about avoiding witches' ovens and making sure "The End" isn't their end.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Instead of going with the trend of softening Grimms' tales, Gidwitz throws caution to the wind and bloodies them right back up. By the second page, I was cracking up. By the third, I knew this would be the book I read to my 8, 11, and 13 year old nieces and nephews this Thanksgiving. Gidwitz's style of addressing the readers and warning them about the terror that's coming lightens the story, moves it along and really connects the reader to the speaker. It's amazing. It also serves its stated purpose of warning the smaller children about impending violence. It's tongue in cheek, but it's also an actual tool to let parents know what's coming up. I'm a children's librarian, and I'm so excited to get my copies (yes, I ordered multiple, that excited) in. I finally have something cool to recommend to my middle grade readers who want something quick and a little scarier than normal fantasy. Gidwitz uses Hansel and Gretel as the protagonists of the collected tales, drawing them all together into one cohesive history of these strong, unlucky twins. For the most part, you can assume just about everybody dies at some point, but where it really counts they come back to life. Riot. Absolute riot.

Wow, did I enjoy reading this. Gidwitz is, first of all, a fantastic storyteller. The tale is pretty complex, and also fairly horrifying, but it moves at a rapid pace and is constantly enlivened by clever jokes, allusions, and tongue-in-cheek "warnings" about what's to come. These last will appeal to bloody-minded readers of all ages, by which I of course mean everyone. And yet all the while, Gidwitz seems to be communicating this profound wisdom about childhood, and parents, and families, and anything you can think of that's related. I know extremely little about children's literature and especially little about the Grimm's tales, so I can't say much from that perspective. But as an adult, the poignant meditations on growing up, and on what parents can and can't be, struck me among many, many other things. In fact, this happened so many times that I wondered whether this book is secretly written primarily for adults. I will not be surprised if I return to this when I have my own children, as a guide to their world and my role in it. Highly recommended.

I always check out the 1-star reviews, to see why the person didn't like the book. Sometimes it is as unrelated as shipping problems, or Kindle issues. In this case, the reviewer didn't like the intrusive narrator. I'm not a big fan of author "asides" but in this case, I think it works. Gidwitz re-tells original Grimm fables (in all their bloody glory) with frequent asides admonishing timid readers to close the book, or banish younger listeners from the room. The gruesome level is fine for most 4th or 5th graders (IMHO) and the "beware--this gets awful" tone serves to keep these younger readers feeling brave and excited -- that they are still reading the "big kid" book. As the asides are mostly short and set in a different type, I suppose a reader could skip them, but I found them humorous and enjoyable.

My son, who is 8, was introduced to this book and came home scared and afraid. After reading half of it myself, I can see why. The narrator in this story repeatedly warns of impending violence and describes the violence in such a way that it is gory and creepy. I can not imagine any child not being affected by the level of violence in this book. Take, for example, this excerpt from the book, "He invites girls to this house, and he reaches down their throats and rips their souls from their bodies, and he traps the souls in cages in the form of doves, to let them rot under his eaves. Then he hacks the girls' bodies to pieces to make our supper." "He threw the girl on the oaken table, and from a nearby cupboard produced a filthy iron cage. Then he reached his hand into the girl's mouth until his arm was buried deep in her throat. Slowly, painfully, and with great struggle from the girl, he pulled forth a beautiful white dove. The dove fought the young man as he shoved it in the filthy cage and

slammed the door shut." "The girl's body was still. Now you might want to close your eyes. He lifted an ax that hung on the wall, and Gretel, peering through a gap between a filthy pot and a filthier pan, watched her handsome, wonderful, funny friend hack the girl's body into bits and toss each piece into the boiling cauldron. His blunt butcher's knife rose and fell, rose and fell. He licked the blood from his hands and sent piece after piece sailing into the pot." Excerpt From: Gidwitz, Adam. "A Tale Dark and Grimm." PENGUIN group, 2010-10-25. Simply not a book for young children. In fact, it was too much for my taste and I couldn't finish it.

I love fairy tales, folk tales, and good old fashioned story telling. When I picked up this book, I immediately felt like I was sitting on someone's porch listening to them spin a yarn. I was instantly a kid again, relishing every gruesome bit and chuckling at the story teller's clever asides. This is a book that celebrates the joy of classic storytelling and is a great reminder that fairy tales were wonderful long before politically correct parents and Walt Disney took the "awesome" parts out. This could have been titled "The further adventures of Hansel and Gretel" as it's these two that the author has plucked out of Grimms' collection. The brother and sister team go on adventures that involve taking a trip to Hell, encounters with warlocks, enchanted forests, and deadly dragons. They are beheaded, drowned in pits of liquid fire, and Hansel turns into a beast boy before getting shot by a Duke. Yes, it's graphic and the author's description of Hell and of the sinners writhing in their pools of fire gave me the willies. What tempers these aspects of the story is the fable like feel and the author's frequent and timely warnings that things are going to get worse, and it's perhaps time for the little children to leave the room. What child will read those warnings and not feel the delicious thrill of anticipation that marks a truly good tale? Hansel and Gretel show courage, cleverness and above all devotion to each other in their search for grown ups that are good. They show young readers that no matter if your demons live in enchanted forests or if they sit two rows over at school (in the bully section), kids are far from helpless. I loved this book and recommend it not only for kids fifth grade and up, but for adults as well. Crack it open and re-discover the joy to be had in a dark tale. Recommended.

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