**Sample of a Comparative Essay**

**How to Get Out of the Forest: German and Canadian Versions of Hansel and Gretel**

**(800 WORDS)**

*Hansel and Gretel*, transcribed from the original German oral tradition by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, receives a new treatment in the hands of the Canadian illustrator and storyteller, Ian Wallace. The stories reflect different aspects of their cultures. While the Grimm Brothers wrote the original tale set in the darkest reaches of Germany’s Black Forest, Wallace adapts his story to reveal the harsh realities of life in the Canadian Atlantic provinces. While Wallace's story may be a shortened version of the original, it does not lose any of that suspenseful atmosphere that makes it appeal to adults. Through a comparison of Grimm Brothers' and Wallace's *Hansel and Gretel* examination of the setting, language and intended audience, one can see that these two versions, while different also share some similarities.

The setting of both versions of *Hansel and Gretel* takes place in a forest where the children are left by their parents to fend for themselves. In Wallace's version, the children live in a fisherman's town somewhere in Atlantic Canada. The children live in a "house by the sea on the edge of a large forest" (Wallace 3). On the other hand, in Grimm's story, the narrative is set in "a woodcutter's home on the edge of a great forest" (Grimm 101). The forest appears in both versions, but in Grimm's original telling it seems even creepier, full of references to the dark, sinister Black Forest, while in Wallace the same dark forest fills the story, but as a familiar Canadian setting. The setting is one that a reader has encountered perhaps as a child or as an avid outdoor enthusiast. In Wallace, there are images of pine and maple trees, corn fields, moose, picket fences and fishing boats. Grimm's Black forest on the other hand, emphasizes the images of open fires, simple housing and lack of food, in other words, the painful reality of poverty.

Considering that Grimm's text was written in the early 1800's, the language used still sounds very old-fashioned especially when compared to that of Wallace's modern writing. The original details in Wallace stay true to the original except when Wallace modernizes his to suggest a Canadian theme. Phrases like "'Stupid goose,' said the woman, 'the opening is big enough, do you see?'" (Grimm 105) or "'Spare me your lamentations,' said the old woman..." (Grimm 101) would hardly ever be said or let alone written down to suggest dialogue today. Wallace, therefore, takes an original line, and changes it to say: "'You fool,' cried the woman. 'Watch me!'" (Wallace 14). In Grimm's tale, "Gretel says, 'Dear God, pray help us! If we had been devoured by wild beasts in the wood at least we should have died together'" (Grimm 101). Wallace makes no reference to any form of prayer, suggesting how prayer would not enter the thoughts or words of modern youths when trying to find a solution to their problems. Wallace not only modernizes the language, but he cleverly shows modern humanity's lack of faith in God and prayer. The Grimm's tale, on the other hand, never loses sight of its moral function, of imparting a moral lesson to all involved.

Consequently, the audience intended for Wallace's version would imply an attraction for children first, but also create an appeal for adults as well, while Grimm's tale, as always, began as an appeal to adults only. Wallace changed the story subtly to suit a new generation of Canadians who perhaps already had heard the original. He explores the cultural circumstances of life in an Atlantic seacoast fishing community. He does this through his illustrations of the clap-board homes, panelled recreation room, the light fixtures associated with docks and the rugged eastern landscape. Grimm's story, set for simple German people, reveals a similar dark forest, full of ominous shadows where light never penetrates. Their story developed out of a concern to show an average German peasant family struggling with poverty, and what happens when children place too much faith in their parents to ensure their survival. By the end, the darkest setting in their story is no longer the Black Forest but the inner regions of the human heart.

In conclusion, a comparison of the Grimm Brothers' and Ian Wallace's *Hansel and Gretel* use of setting, language and intended audience proves that these narratives are two different versions but both share similarities. The setting of both stories takes place in forests but locales that reflect their different regional qualities. The Grimm's language reflects an old-fashioned era when children said their prayers which certainly contrasts with Wallace's version. Likewise, the audience intended in both accounts reflects different eras, concerns, nationalities and cultures. Nonetheless, the key to understanding both versions begins with the realization that one is a modernized version of the other, that each one is geared towards a different audience.

Teachers: SO WHAT? added:

Whatever version you choose to read, *Hansel and Gretel* is a timeless story that many children will enjoy reading or have someone read it to them.