



# **THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER**

## **A Study Guide for Teachers and Students**

*Artwork for Study Guide by Emily Grosland*

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### **SYNOPSIS**

Kind shoemaker Hans and his beloved wife Claudia are worried that their holiday will be the bleakest ever. Business is poor and there is little money for food or to buy the leather needed to make shoes to sell. To make matters worse, Wolfgang, the landlord of their tiny shop, is demanding their rent payment. When Wolfgang learns that the rent cannot be paid, he insists that Hans help him capture an elf, a magical creature that Wolfgang believes to be capable of turning straw into gold. Hans reluctantly agrees to help Wolfgang, hoping that the landlord will give them more time to pay their rent.

Meanwhile, a smart elf, Ivy, attempts to teach his new fun-loving elf partner, Holly, how to distinguish a good human from a bad human. Holly learns quickly that Wolfgang, with his awful elf-finding machine, is a bad human, while Hans, who frees Holly from Wolfgang's net, is a good human. The elves vow to help the good Hans in return for his kindness.

For a week, the two elves sneak into Hans and Claudia's shop at night and make beautiful shoes for the shoemaker to sell. As their fortunes change, Hans and Claudia are able to afford food and coal and to pay off the villainous Wolfgang with a bag of gold. By helping out the goodhearted Hans and Claudia, Holly's elf training is complete, and the two elves happily return to their home in the Black Forest.

## **LITERATURE/LANGUAGE ARTS**

1. Read “The Elves and the Shoemaker” by the Brothers Grimm with the class. Talk about what students expect from a theatrical performance of the story. What characters from the story do they think they will see onstage? What are some of the things the characters might do? What might they look like?
2. Have students imagine themselves as one of the elves. Have them write step-by-step instructions to another elf, telling the elf how to make shoes. They may be as creative as they wish--encourage them to think of unusual (but appropriate) ways to make shoes.
3. A journal or diary is a daily record of personal activities, reflections, feelings, events, and observations. If Hans, Wolfgang, Holly, Ivy or another character from the story kept a journal, what do you think he or she might write? Have students choose a character from the play and write a journal entry from the character’s perspective.
4. In an acrostic poem, the first letters of each line form a name, motto, or message when read in sequence. Have students write acrostic poems about the play using the letters WOLFGANG, HOLLYANDIVY, HANSANDCLAUDIA, or any other combinations you can think of that are related to the play.

## **DRAMATIC ARTS**

1. *The Elves and the Shoemaker* has a prologue. What is a prologue and what is its purpose? What happens during a prologue?
2. During this particular prologue, the actors are getting ready for their play. What different tasks are they doing to prepare for the show? Define the following theatrical terms: prop, costume, set, character, stage.
3. Wolfgang wants everyone to know that he is actually a very nice person, although the character he plays is evil. Discuss this with your class. Would it be hard for them to play a character that is so different from themselves? How would they play a mean character if they were nice? A bold character if they are shy? A goofy character if they are very serious?

## **HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY**

1. Have your students research the lives of the Brothers Grimm. The website [www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm) is a very good resource about their lives and their work. Have the class share their findings.
2. The Brothers Grimm were from Germany. Locate Germany on a map with the class and discuss it. What is its capital? Where did the Grimm brothers live? Find their hometown on the map.
3. Where is the Black Forest? Locate it on a map and discuss its climate, vegetation, and relationship to where you are right now.

4. The elves in the play work for Santa Claus. Have students research different Santa Claus traditions around the world. What other names are there for Santa? How is his style of dress depicted in other cultures? Do children in other countries leave out stockings for Santa to fill? What other ways does he leave gifts?

5. Who was the first person to reach the North Pole? The South Pole? When did the explorers arrive at these destinations? What might their journeys have been like? What difficulties did they face?

### **SCIENCE**

1. The elves change Wolfgang's elf finder into a penguin finder. Where would Wolfgang find penguins? What is the climate like there? What do penguins eat? Do they live by themselves or in groups? How do they stay warm?

2. Wolfgang thinks that the elves can turn straw into gold. Is this possible? Define the word "alchemy" for your students. What other items have people tried to turn into gold in the past? What other famous stories involve characters trying to turn things into gold?

3. Hans and Claudia use coal for the stove to heat their home. What other methods of heating homes have people used over the years? How is the way we heat our homes today different from Hans and Claudia's time?

### **ADDITIONAL--WRITE TO CTC!**

After watching the play, write about it. Tell what you liked or disliked about the story, the characters, costumes, set, or anything else you observed. Support your thoughts with examples and reasons. (*Teacher's comments are appreciated!*)

Mail to:

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### **READING SUGGESTIONS**

• ***The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm All-New Third Edition***, translated by Jack Zipes, illustrated by John B. Gruella. Bantam, 2003. Also available as a downloadable e-book from Amazon.com

• ***The Elves and the Shoemaker*** retold from the Brothers Grimm, illustrated by Jim LaMarche. Chronicle Books, 2003.

• ***The Elves and the Shoemaker*** by the Brothers Grimm, adapted and illustrated by Paul Galdone. Clarion Books, Reprint Edition, 1986.