

# The Gingerbread Cottage

*The Gingerbread Cottage* was produced by Czech Television. What started as a boring afternoon with daddy, who is busy with his own interests, turns into the very opposite. Hansel and Gretel are led into a tremendous adventure that changes into a battle for life. The children wander off and suddenly find themselves in a magic forest where they actually discover a gingerbread cottage. Gretel, as an experienced reader of fairy-tales, knows that they would do best to keep well away from it, but her young brother cannot resist having a nibble. As can be expected, the evil witch entices him inside and Gretel has no alternative but to help him. Everything seems perfect like in a fairy-tale, but then something terrible occurs. When Hansel and Gretel try to push the shovel on which the witch is sitting into the oven, the shovel breaks under her weight and that saves the witch's life.

*The Gingerbread Cottage* was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Fiction category.

## International experts' opinions



Figure 1: Jenicek finding a bridge and disappearing while he crosses it.



Figure 2: His sister Marenka follows and they are brought into a new world.

There were mixed responses about the program from the international experts. Very few liked it. For example, "One does break the stereotypes. I found it fascinating the way in which the real children fit in with all the historical witch stuff" (female expert, Columbia). Some experts found the program empowering for the children. "The one thing that I loved, which I think is why fairy-tales exist, is to empower kids about things that are really scary in their lives. But they are fictional things that are playing into their deepest fears. I think that it accomplished that. I think that it showed these kids sort of out-winning this witch who had magical powers. I think kids would like that" (female expert, USA). They also felt that the children would appreciate the program. "I actually think kids will really like this. For all its faults, I think kids will really like it" (male expert, USA).

There were discussions about the age of the target audience suggesting it might be better suited for a younger age group. "Just a general comment. I think *Gingerbread Cottage*, isn't it for a lower age?" (female expert, Philippines). Similarly, "*The Gingerbread Cottage*: It is an interesting updated take on an old story. Some elements of it I wasn't totally sold on, but I just think it is updated. It was fine. I don't know if my daughter would watch that though. I think it is a little bit younger than *Gingerbread Cottage*" (female expert, Jamaica).



Figure 3: Finding a gingerbread house.

However, some did not like the character of the witch. “I didn’t like the witch in there; I think she spoiled a lot. She was not credible; she is not right as a character. She wasn’t even scary. They didn’t want her to be really scary; she was not credible. She didn’t work” (male expert, Germany).



Figure 4: Jenicek eating a piece of chocolate and being found by the witch.

Others were not impressed by the story itself. “I think *The Gingerbread Cottage* was a little bit too much – too many small things happening all the time that weren’t so very important. I felt that perhaps the story was a little weak, and then they have to fill in more and more things” (male expert, Norway). Some also found the program confusing. “I didn’t understand it – it was basically *Hansel and Gretel*, and then it stops for some reason and then becomes something else – and kind of arbitrary. I sort of got bored, and I couldn’t follow the story” (male expert, USA).



Figure 5: The witch using magic chocolate that turns Jenicek into a fat boy.

A few of the experts also found the quality of the production values to be unsatisfactory. “It felt like they were shooting in a very small place, trying to make it look like it was different, and that you really hadn’t gone very far” (female expert, UK). Some gave few suggestions also. “There was that frame with the father. For me, I would have rather had it just happen in an imaginative way. I don’t know why we have to excuse ourselves for having an imagination, but it feels to me like it is a construct of trying to make the parents feel safe; this isn’t really happening. But for me, it would have worked better if we were just with these kids, and they walked out after the thing and we just watched that story” (male expert, Canada).



Figure 6: Marenka and Janicek trying to push the witch into the stove, but they fail.



Figure 7: The cat turning huge and helping them defeat the witch.



Figure 8: Marenka is turned into a shovel by the witch and a trunk helps her to turn back.



Figure 9: The siblings finally coming back to the real world safe and sound.

Screenshots from *The Gingerbread Cottage*

*Prof. Dr. Dafna Lemish, Namrata Bansal, and Hao Cao  
(Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA)*