Into The Woods

Background: From the earliest times, stories called folk tales or fairy tales have been told to children. These stories become part of a child's earliest knowledge, and sometimes influence his/her future attitudes about life. Often the knowledge is gained subconsciously. The stories themselves have developed and spread throughout the world, passing along common motifs and themes, adapted to differing cultures.

Directions: In order to look at these tales in a new way, you will be viewing a musical by Stephen Sondheim called Into the Woods which combines many fairy tales into one presentation. To help you gather details as you view the musical, you will be assigned to concentrate on finding evidence for one of the themes/ideas below. Look for situations and characters who exhibit/explain/enact the theme/idea. Pay special attention to the lyrics of the songs. Write down any phrases, examples, etc. you notice that illustrate your theme/idea. Take notes, record details.

1. Time (notice the urgency, or the lengthiness, any special time of day mentioned, how time affects the plot, characters who can't wait, characters who have been waiting for a long time, etc.)

2. Parental Advice (notice who gives it, who takes it, who listens, who doesn't, is the advice good? bad? important? does the child learn from it? ignore it? surrogate parents? real parents? ineffectual parents?)

3. Desires (what do characters wish for, want? what is the difference between longing for something and then finally getting it?)

4. Into The Woods (it is much more than a location, take note of how it represents different things to different people, write down the reasons that each character has for wanting to go into the woods, listen especially to the song "Into the Woods" and write down phrases, pay attention to the types of things that happen in the woods)

5. Luck/Fate/Fortune (who is lucky? who is fated to do something? be someone? is fate influenced by an outside force? later in the second act, also listen for the idea of blame)

6. Change (note how characters change...not just their appearance, but their goals, attitudes, etc., look for reasons that they change (or don't change)...do they desire change or is change thrust upon them?)

7. Protection vs. Risk (or, in other words, wanting to stay safe vs. having to take a chance; or avoiding choice vs. making a decision; take note of who favors protection, who wants to take risks, and do their attitudes change as they experience the results?)

8. Blind/Ability to See (look for the figurative examples of blindness as well as the literal ones)

9. Sayings to Live By (write down any "thoughts for the day" type sayings that a character shares, also keep track of the morals of the various stories)

"THOSE WHO LOVE FAIRY TALES DO NOT LIKE IT WHEN PEOPLE SPEAK OF THE INNATE TENDENCIES IN MANKIND TOWARD AGGRESSION, DESTRUCTION, AND, IN ADDITION, CRUELTY."

-Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
Freud, the Austrian physician, was the founder and author of almost all of the basic concepts of psychoanalysis.