

**Analysis of Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* (1987/1991)**

The following practice was carried out in the subject "Literatura Norteamericana II", in the degree in English Studies at the University of Málaga. The subject was taught and assessed entirely in English. The practice answers what was perceived to be as a gap in the syllabus, in which Broadway musicals were not addressed among the literary creations in the USA during the twentieth century. However, since this is not part of the official syllabus, the task was voluntary and was not part of the subject's final assessment. Despite this, students found it interesting and grounding for future units, and it awakened them to the possibility of regarding literature as a much ample range of artistic manifestations. The work of Stephen Sondheim was selected for the task because of its lyricism and its intertextuality, which reinforce previous notions addressed through the module.

**Instructions:** In this unit 8 we explore the importance of American composer Stephen Sondheim in US drama. One of his most relevant musicals is *Into the Woods* (which you might know due to its Disney version, which I advise you not to watch before doing this task). In order to demonstrate how the themes we have studied in this module pervade all American culture I propose the following task as a part of your research project:

-Watch the official recording of Sondheim's *Into the Woods* and answer the following questions: [Into the Woods \(original Broadway cast recorded in 1991\)](#)

- a. How can you connect the whole musical with the idea of **The American Dream**? What conclusions can you draw about it after watching the musical and carefully reading the lyrics? Pay special attention to the songs "On the Steps of the Palace", "No one is Alone" and the way in which the lyrics change at the end of "Ever After" and "Finale".

- b. Some people have connected the musical with the AIDS crisis (which we will study during unit 9 on this module) where can you see the **connection**?
- c. In your opinion, what does the character of **the Witch symbolize**?  
And the Giants?
- d. In which way does Sondheim warn us about the power of **fairytails**? How is it similar to other criticism we have read about during the module?
- e. Connect the musical with **some of the works** we have studied during the module.
- f. Describe your **personal opinion** of the musical, which character have impacted you the most? Can you connect it with contemporary events?

-Take into account that this is not necessarily an academic essay. I am interested in hearing your own critical assessment here, so while you can read and **quote some ideas** that are not your own (**using the MLA format**), I would prefer that you think about these questions yourself and try to answer them after thinking critically on the musical and its topics.

-The answers will be original texts of between **250/500 words each**.

-The task must be done individually.

-Remember that if the lecturer finds instances of plagiarism (i.e: not justifying a reference, failing to specify that a sentence is a reference or a quote, etc.), or an irresponsible use of AI, this might imply failing the task.

-**Grammar and punctuation** will be taken into consideration.

-Take into account that the musical can be a little ambiguous, so there is **not a single, unique right answer** to each of these questions! Also, I would advise you to **read the lyrics** of the songs while you listen to them, so that you don't miss any of their implications.

-I hope you do **enjoy** the musical and that it helps you to think critically about some of the issues we are going to study!

## **Format**

You have free creative rein to make a cover, but the rest of the project must be formatted thus:

-Arial 12, justified text, 1.5 separation.