



# STUDY BUDDY™



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This performance study guide published by ArtsPower National Touring Theatre is designed to help teachers and students enjoy **Hans Brinker's Christmas**.

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ArtsPower National Touring Theatre and Gary and Mark Blackman present **Hans Brinker's Christmas**; Based on the book *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates* by Mary Mapes Dodge; **Adapted and Directed** by Greg Gunning; **Music and Orchestrations** by Richard DeRosa; **Lyrics** by Greg Gunning; **Incidental Music** by Ron Drotos; **Costumes** by Fred P. Sorrentino; **Set** by Red Dot Studios; **Photos** by Carol Rosegg

STUDY BUDDY™ Hans Brinker's Christmas

Rosalind Flynn, *Writer*

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ARTSPOWER'S  
**Hans Brinker's**  
CHRISTMAS



## USING THIS PERFORMANCE STUDY GUIDE

**T**his **Hans Brinker's Christmas** performance study guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after attending the ArtsPower production. The guide includes information and activities meant to increase students' understanding of this and other theatrical performances. You may photocopy any or all of the following pages to distribute to students.

### Hans Brinker's Christmas: Who, What, Where, and When?

page 3

This page familiarizes students with background information on Holland and some terms used in the play.

### What Happens in Hans Brinker's Christmas?

page 4

This synopsis of the play familiarizes students with the play's main characters and events.

### Hans Brinker's Christmas: Staging the Story

page 5

This page contains information about theatre conventions used in **Hans Brinker's Christmas** and encourages students to engage in creative problem-solving related to staging a play.

### From Novel to Play

page 6

The information on this page explains the play's relationship to the original novel *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates*.

### Lines of Dialogue

page 7

This activity page provides dialogue from the play's script and involves students in experimenting with different ways to speak or "deliver" characters' lines.

### The Part That YOU Play

page 8

This page reminds students of their roles as audience members, stressing the importance of listening carefully and responding appropriately. Post-performance discussion questions and resources are also included on page 8.



**T**he setting for **Hans Brinker's Christmas** is the small village of **Broek** (BREWK) in **Holland** during the 1840's. Broek is near Amsterdam, Holland's capital and largest city.

Holland, officially known as **the Netherlands**, is a country in western Europe. The word "nether" means low or below. Much of the Netherlands, or "low lands," is below sea level. **Sea walls** or **dikes** (dams built to hold back water) and **canals** (waterways constructed by people) protect the country from flooding.

People who live in the Netherlands are called **Dutch**. All the characters in **Hans Brinker's Christmas** are Dutch. They live along canals that freeze in winter. The Dutch skate on frozen canals for enjoyment, competition, and transportation.

In the 1840's, the Dutch made ice skates by attaching blades to their shoes. Metal blades or skates were more expensive than wooden blades. One of the main characters in the play, **Hans Brinker**, does not have enough **guilders** (Dutch money) to buy metal skates. He carves his own skates out of wood.

Christmas is one of many festivals that the Dutch celebrate. **Hans Brinker's Christmas** occurs during a Christmas festival that features an ice skating race. The prize? A pair of silver skates!

WHO?  
WHAT?  
WHEN?  
WHERE?



**G**retel and Hans Brinker live with their parents in Holland in the 1840's. Whenever their mother goes to work in Amsterdam, the children care for their father, Raff (RAFE) Brinker. Raff was injured at work on a sea wall during a storm. Since the accident paralyzed him, Raff cannot communicate with anyone.

Hans reads medical books and wishes to become a doctor. He believes that the finest surgeon in Holland—Dr. Boekman (BOKE-man)—can cure his father. Hans and Gretel, however, are too poor to pay for the operation.

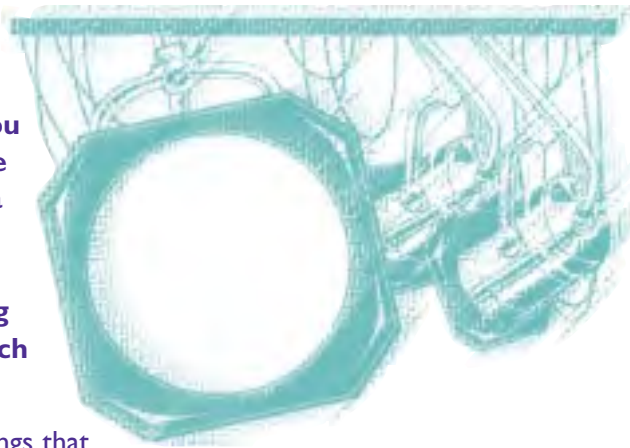
Dr. Boekman and his nephew Peter return to the Brinker's village of Broek (BREWK) for the Christmas Festival. Peter and Hans grew up together. Now, Peter is a medical student, but he does not really want to be a doctor. He wants to win the festival's skating race. Hans wants to win the race, too. If he does, he can sell the first prize, silver skates, and use the money to pay for his father's operation.

Can Hans win the race in a pair of wooden skates he carved himself? Can Peter afford to lose the race and disappoint his uncle? Will Hans and Gretel successfully raise the money to pay Dr. Boekman? You will find out when you attend the play!



## THEATRE CONVENTIONS

When you attend a play, you agree to pretend. You agree to “suspend disbelief”—to pretend that the stage action and characters are real. To present a story on stage, actors and other theatre people often rely on theatre customs. These customs, or conventions, are accepted ways of acting or doing something. In **Hans Brinker’s Christmas**, watch for the following theatre conventions:

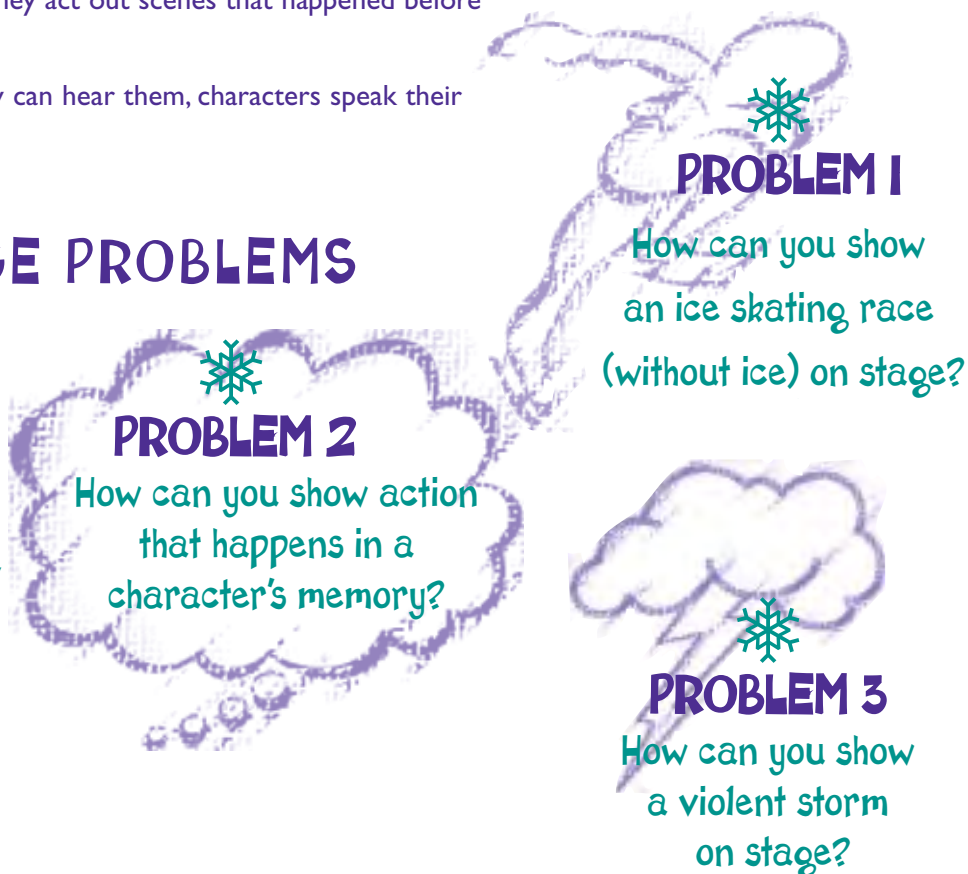


- \* The play is a musical. In musicals, characters sing songs that tell stories, reveal inner thoughts, and move the action forward.
- \* Characters freeze in positions on stage. Even though you can still see them, “frozen” characters are not part of the action on stage.
- \* Split stage effect: Two sides of the stage are used for scenes that occur simultaneously in different locations.
- \* Some actors play more than one character or role. In theatre, this is called “doubling.”
- \* Characters have “flashbacks.” They act out scenes that happened before the present action.
- \* Even though other actors really can hear them, characters speak their inner thoughts aloud.

## SOLVING STAGE PROBLEMS

To present a story on stage, actors and other theatre people often have problems to solve. Here are some problems that had to be solved for **Hans Brinker’s Christmas**. How might you solve them? You may use lights, sound effects, music, actors, costumes, and props (objects) in your solutions. (Hint: You may want to use some of the theatre conventions listed above.)

When you attend the play, watch for ArtsPower’s solutions to these stage problems.



### PROBLEM 1

How can you show an ice skating race (without ice) on stage?

### PROBLEM 2

How can you show action that happens in a character’s memory?

### PROBLEM 3

How can you show a violent storm on stage?

## HANS BRINKER'S CHRISTMAS: Based on a Novel

**In 1865** an American author named **Mary Mapes Dodge** published a 300-page novel entitled *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates*. In 1995, playwright **Greg Gunning** based his 45 minute-long script, **Hans Brinker's Christmas**, on her story. "Based on" means that the playwright used the original story as a starting point. **Mr. Gunning** kept some of the novel's characters and problems, but he also made many changes. Here are some:



### MARY MAPES DODGE

Author of *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates*

Mary Mapes Dodge wrote Hans and Gretel Brinker's story in her New Jersey farmhouse. She learned about Holland by reading books and speaking with Dutch neighbors who immigrated to the U.S. in the early 1800's. Her novel tells the Brinker family's story and describes the sights, sounds, and people of the Netherlands. *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates* was one of the first books written to entertain rather than instruct children in the 19th century. It has been published in over 100 editions and translated into many languages.

### Differences Between *Hans Brinker's Christmas* and *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates*

#### In the play...

The play has five main characters. They are played by four actors who also play minor characters.

Hans's and Gretel's mother does not appear in the play.

Gretel does not enter the skating race.

Dr. Boekman (BOKE-man) is Peter's uncle.

#### In the novel...

The novel has more than 10 main characters and many minor ones.

She is a main character in the novel.

Gretel wins the girls' race.

They are not related.

Why do you think the playwright may have made these changes?

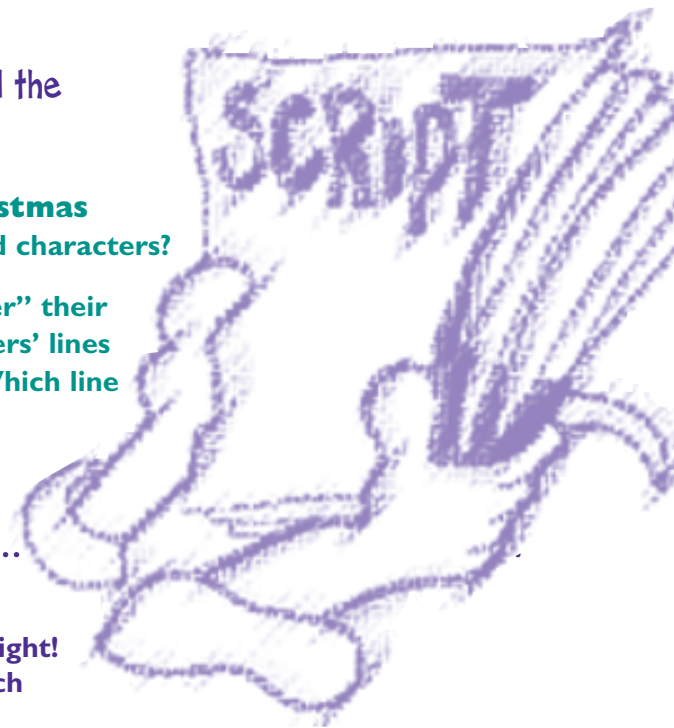
If you have read *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates*, watch for other changes in the story and characters when you attend the performance.

Playwrights are people who write plays. They write lines of dialogue for actors to speak.

The dialogue gives information about the story and the characters.

- \* Read the lines of dialogue from **Hans Brinker’s Christmas** printed here. What do they tell you about the story and characters?
- \* Actors experiment with different ways to say or “deliver” their lines. Work with a partner. Try delivering these characters’ lines in different ways (boldly, fearfully, proudly, sadly, etc.). Which line deliveries do you like best? Why?

When you attend **Hans Brinker’s Christmas**, listen for these lines and for how the actors deliver them.



## GROUP ONE

**Hans:** No, Papa. Don’t go out to the sea-wall tonight!  
**Raff:** The water’s rising. Seawall won’t hold much longer. We’ll have to reinforce it.

## GROUP TWO

**Peter:** So, still keeping the old nose to the grindstone, eh, Brinker old boy?  
**Hans:** Yeah, well, some of us work for a living.

## GROUP THREE

**Gretel:** Forget about that Doctor Boekman. He has to be the most disagreeable man in the whole world.  
**Hans:** And the finest doctor in Holland.

## GROUP FOUR

**Hans:** You could make Papa walk again!  
**Dr. Boekman:** It doesn’t work that way! You “canal people”– you always want something for nothing! Well, I also came from this town. I was poor. Nobody ever gave me anything.



## GROUP FIVE

**Peter:** This afternoon, I’ll win the silver skates.  
**Dr. Boekman:** No! Just like everything else you attempt – you will fail!

## GROUP SIX

**Gretel:** Win. Win a race. Be a doctor. Where does it all get you?  
**Peter:** Out front! The best! Ahead of everybody!

Character reminders: Hans and Gretel are brother and sister. Raff is their father. Peter and Hans are 18 year-old boys. Dr. Boekman (BOKE-man) is a surgeon and Peter’s uncle.

**T**o prepare for presenting **Hans Brinker's Christmas**, four actors memorized their lines and practiced the show's songs. They worked with a director who helped them move about the stage and play their parts well. The costume and set designers planned with the director and created the play's clothes and scenery. The stage manager is ready to make sure everyone on stage and backstage does the right thing at the right time. All the ArtsPower theatre artists need now is **YOU!**

You have a part to play in **Hans Brinker's Christmas**. You are the audience. Your part requires you to listen carefully and watch closely. It's okay to laugh or applaud if you enjoy the play, but remember that you and the actors are in the same room. Talking or whispering to friends during the performance will distract the actors. Help them play their parts well by playing your part well.

## Reacting to the Performance

After the performance, share your experience of **Hans Brinker's Christmas** with your class, family and friends:

- \* Who was the most memorable character and why?
- \* What did you learn about Holland in the 1840's?
- \* Why do Peter and Dr. Boekman speak to and treat the Brinkers poorly throughout most of the play?
- \* What were the lessons or "themes" of the play?
- \* What was your favorite part of the play and why?



## RESOURCES

**To learn more about Holland, look for...**

Osborne, Christine. [The Netherlands](#). NY: Bookwright Press, 1990.

Van Stegeren, Theo. [The Land and People of The Netherlands](#). NY: Harper Collins, 1991.

**To read the original novel, look for...**

Dodge, Mary Mapes. [Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates](#). NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1945.

**To read a story from the original novel, look for this picture book...**

Hort, Lenny. [The Boy Who Held Back The Sea](#). NY: Dial Books, 1987.

**To access ArtsPower's Internet site, type...**  
[www.artspower.org](http://www.artspower.org)