

GERMAN LITERATURE

CLASSICAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

| TITLE | REVIEW |
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| <p>Struwwelpeter (Shock-headed Peter) (1845) <i>by Heinrich Hoffman</i></p> | <p>In his review of the book by Heinrich Hoffman, Cyriaque Lamar wrote: “If you possess any sort of fluency in the German language, there’s a good chance you’ve encountered this bedtime classic. In this collection of morality tales, children are—with gleeful abandon—victimized, humiliated, and mutilated by men with giant scissors. Pleasant dreams, everyone!” [1]</p> <p>The book comprises ten illustrated and rhymed stories, mostly about children, with each offering a clear moral message that demonstrates the disastrous consequences of misbehavior. Hoffmann wrote <i>Struwwelpeter</i> in reaction to the lack of good children’s books. Intending to buy a picture book as a Christmas present for his three-year-old son, Hoffmann instead wrote and illustrated his own book.</p> <p>The book opens with the first story describing a boy, <i>Struwwelpeter</i>, who does not groom himself properly and is consequently unpopular. <i>Die Geschichte vom bösen Friederich (The Story of Bad Frederick)</i>, tells a story of a violent boy who terrorizes animals and people. Eventually, he is bitten by a dog, which goes on to eat the boy’s sausage while he is bedridden, and in <i>Die gar traurige Geschichte mit dem Feuerzeug (The Dreadful Story of the Matches)</i>, a girl plays with matches and burns to death. And so it continues...</p> <p><i>Struwwelpeter</i> has been translated into several languages. In 1891, Mark Twain wrote his own translation of the book, but because of copyright issues, Twain’s <i>Slovenly Peter</i> was not published until 25 years after his death in 1935. Hoffman’s nightmare tales were also adapted for Walter Hayn’s 1911 American children’s book, <i>Slovenly Betsy</i>. [2]</p> <p>Sources: [1] “The best scenes from the most demented German children’s book ever published” by Cyriaque Lamar. In Gizmodo, published on 5/28/12. [2] <i>Struwwelpeter</i>. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved April 23, 2017.</p> |

**Old Shatterhand and
Winnetou (1893)**

by Karl May

Up to the end of the 20th century, the German author, Karl May (1842–1912), influenced generations of German teenagers with his adventure and travel stories. His books were a must-read for girls and boys, and all of his books were marked with humanistic, naturalistic, and Christian values. A total of about 200 million copies of his books have been published, with half sold in his native German language. In the 1960s, UNESCO stated that May was the most translated German writer up to that time.

Karl May was a teacher who earned a small salary and resorted to stealing to make ends meet, which resulted in him being incarcerated for seven years. While in prison, May worked in the prison library and that is when he began his career as an author. He began writing travel and adventure series for youth, and in addition to the western series, other series were set in the Orient or the Middle East, all featuring their main character, Kara Ben Nemsi. May relied solely on research about the lands he wrote about, as he himself never traveled.

The most popular series were Westerns about Old Shatterhand and his Apache Indian friend, Winnetou. As a result of reading these books, generations of German youth learned about America's Old West and loved American Native Indians.

Many well-known German-speaking people used May's heroes as role models in their childhood. Even Albert Einstein enjoyed May's books and said, "My whole adolescence stood under his sign. Indeed, even today, he has been dear to me in many a desperate hour...."

**Das Doppelte
Lottchen (The
Double Lottie or /
Lottie and Lisa)
(1949)**

by Erich Kästner

This unexpected story begins with a girl from Vienna who spends a summer away from home at summer camp, where she meets a girl from Munich who looks exactly like her. The two nine-year-old girls discover they are identical twins who were separated at birth when their parents divorced. One girl (Lisa from Vienna) ends up living with her father, and the other girl (Lottie from Munich) grows up with the mother. They become friends, conceal their secret from the others, and on returning home, replace each other in their respective homes in order to learn about the parent they never knew. The mother accidentally finds a photo of the two girls together, which eventually leads to their parents reuniting.

This story was successfully turned into a Hollywood movie and filmed under the name *The Parent Trap* in the U.S., first in 1961, and again in 1998, and featured in many adaptations in various languages.

Die Konferenz der Tiere (The Meeting of the Animals) (1949)
by Erich Kästner

Die Konferenz der Tiere was written just after World War II. It is a moral tale in which animals organize a conference because world leaders have failed to find solutions, and human adults are destroying the world. Kästner depicts animals and children as being more responsible for the future of the planet than adults. The animals decide to take matters into their own hands and tackle big subjects like poverty, war, famine and environmental decline in the book.

Kästner believed that books should be written for both children and adults, so he writes a humorous, satirical novel.

In 1957, Kästner received Germany's highest book award, the George Buechner Prize.

Der Räuber Hotzenplotz (The Adventures of Robber Hotzenplotz) (1962)
by Otfried Pruessler (1923–2013)

"This is a merry tale of two scoundrels, two friends, a toad-fairy, and an unforgettable escapade.

The robber, Hotzenplotz, works hard at his job, waking up early to hide in the woods and attack new victims. One morning, Kasperl's grandmother is sitting in the sun outside her house, grinding coffee on her new musical coffee mill—a birthday gift from Kasperl and his best friend Seppel—when suddenly Hotzenplotz, attracted by the music, leaps out to steal the mill. Sergeant Dimplemoser hears Grandmother's cries and comes to her aide, but Hotzenplotz has evaded the useless police for years. So Kasperl and Seppel vow to catch the robber themselves. But catching robbers is not as easy as that ... Kasperl and Seppel soon discover that even the best-laid plans can be foiled, especially when Hotzenplotz enlists the help of his wicked magician friend, Petrosilius Zackleman, a gluttonous villain with a weakness for fried potatoes."

Source: The Robber Hotzenplotz. (n.d.). Reviewed by Amazon. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

Krabat (Krabat and the Sorcerer's Mill) (1971)
by Otfried Pruessler

"New Year's has passed. Twelfth Night is almost here. Krabat, a fourteen-year-old beggar boy dressed up as one of the Three Kings, is traveling from village to village singing carols. One night he has a strange dream in which he is summoned by a faraway voice to go to a mysterious mill—and when he wakes he is irresistibly drawn there. At the mill, he finds eleven other boys, all of them, like him, the apprentices of its Master, a powerful sorcerer, as Krabat soon discovers. During the week the boys work ceaselessly grinding grain, but on Friday nights the Master initiates them into the mysteries of the ancient Art of Arts. One day, however, the sound of church bells and of a passing girl singing an Easter hymn penetrates the boys' prison: At last a plan is set in

motion that will win them their freedom and put an end to the Master's dark designs.

Krabat and the Sorcerer's Mill was one of Cornelia Funke's [another famous German author of children's fiction] most beloved books as a child, and it is easy to see why. It is a wondrous story of magic, black and white; of courage and cunning; and of high adventure."

Source: *Krabat and the Sorcerer's Mill*. (n.d.). Reviewed by Amazon. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

**Oh, wie Schön ist Panama! (Oh, How Beautiful is Panama!)
by Janosch (born as Horst Eckert)**

Oh, wie Schön ist Panama! was a popular German children's book published in the 1980s and 1990s. The story about a little bear and a little tiger, both happily living in their cottage and enjoying the simple pleasures of fishing and collecting mushrooms, resonated with many Germans.

The story starts when bear and tiger are out by the river and find a crate with the word "Panama" written on it. The crate smelled of bananas, which starts them thinking about faraway places. Although they had been quite content, they set off the next morning with a fishing rod, a red cooking pot, and tiger's precious striped tiger duck toy, and head out to find "the place of their dreams." They meet many creatures along the way and rely on each other. Eventually, they meet an eagle who knows the way to Panama, the "best place on earth." He flies high into the sky, so they climb to the top of the tallest tree. From there they could see the most beautiful meadow with a cottage out in the distance. We, the readers, know this is actually their home. But since bear and tiger have never seen it from this perspective, they do not recognize that "Panama" was where they came from.

This book is about self-reliance and friendship, simple joys, as well as a sense of *Fernweh*—a German word meaning homesickness or wanderlust for a place you have never been. But most of all, the book is about discovering and finding peace from where you come from.

The author, Horst Eckert, was born in Hindenburg (now Zabrze, Poland). After World War II, he and his family moved to West Germany, where he eventually started illustrating and writing children's books. He is better known by his pen name, Janosch.

Janosch's works have been translated into 30 languages, and *Oh, wie Schön ist Panama!* was made into an opera, titled "Oh, the Beautiful Panama!" The premier in Deutsche Oper Berlin (German Opera Berlin) in 2013 was completely sold out. He has received numerous awards, and his illustration of this particular book,

featuring tiger duck, can be found in various children's products and became a mascot for a TV show, *Tigerenten Club*.

Gibt es hitzefrei in Afrika?: So leben die Kinder dieser Welt (Is It Heatless in Africa?: This is How the Children of this World Live), published in 2006, is among Janosch's latest publications. It is a joint project with Sabine Christiansen and UNICEF.