

Why reading Grimm needn't be grim reading. Story-telling at key stage 1 and key stage 2

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BACKGROUND

Trinity School is a specialist language college in Carlisle and under the auspices of its primary MFL project sends secondary-trained MFL teachers into, at present, six of its feeder schools to teach French, German and Spanish. One of these, Rockcliffe CE Primary School, expressed an interest in German lessons for the whole school and since October 2001 I have been spending two hours a week in the school teaching German to all pupils from Reception through to Y6. The school has 93 pupils grouped into four classes. Since the number of infants is small, I teach all Reception and KS1 pupils together, and the KS2 pupils in their normal class groupings (Y3 and Y4, Y5 and Y6). Part of my brief is to develop a scheme of work and, with very few KS2 and even fewer KS1 pupils learning German nationally and so the methodology largely untried and untested, there has been plenty of scope for innovation. The particular area of interest that I have found inspiring, both from the teacher's and the pupil's perspective, has been the use of stories and these will form an important feature of the finished scheme of work.

WHICH STORIES?

In the first four terms of German, KS1 and KS2 were presented with different stories. With KS1 I kept to short, simple stories with which the children were already familiar such as *Goldilocks*¹, *The Giant Pancake*² and *Can't you sleep little bear?*³ They had covered these in English with their class teachers and I had translated them into simple German. In KS2 I had taken my inspiration from the Grimm brothers and used *Rotkäppchen* and *Die drei kleinen Schweinchen*. My latest project has been to introduce *Schneewittchen*⁴ to both key stages. With these three *Märchen* the sources I use vary. The series entitled *Lesen leicht gemacht*⁵ from the European Language Institute in Italy includes all three titles amongst its readers and these can serve as a model. They give the teacher excellent ideas for teaching additional

vocabulary but are really intended for individual pupil use. I found an excellent version of *Die drei kleinen Schweinchen*⁶ on the internet and bought a very simple but beautifully illustrated set of Grimm Märchen⁷ in Germany which provided the basis for *Schneewittchen*. In reality, the end product often results from a combination of sources and there are occasional textual substitutions, but I feel it is important to keep the German as authentic as possible.

An important feature of a successful story is repetition of a theme with slight variations each time. A very basic example of this is a story like *The Giant Pancake* where the pancake is chased by a number of characters, building up by one more each time so that a list is formed that is constantly revised. In *Die drei kleinen Schweinchen* the little pigs may use different materials to build their houses, but the process leading to the entrance of the wolf is the same at each stage and so the language used in the telling of the story becomes familiar to the pupils. Rhyming chants are also important, such as the wolf's huffing and puffing, as these are easy to remember and fun to join in with.

WHY STORIES?

Children are used to reading stories and having stories read to them so it seems like the obvious way to teach the foreign language. They are enjoyable, appeal to the emotions and allow the pupils to engage their active imaginations. It is also an excellent way for both KS1 and KS2 pupils to become familiar with stories from other cultures which is one of the fundamental tenets of the National Literacy Strategy at both key stages. What better way to become familiar with such stories than in their original language and settings? In terms of teaching useful language, even in a fairy-tale world the characters share elements of everyday life with the readers, although we may have to step outside the story to experience this. There are numerous opportunities to digress from the story, for example in

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Rotkäppchen pupils might be encouraged to consider what other clothes the little girl wears in addition to her red cape, which items of food and drink her mother gave her to take to the grandmother, but which other items are kept in their larder, and when she confronts the wolf in grandmother's clothing, this is a perfect opportunity to learn about parts of the body.

Yet there may also be a very strong argument for learning the not so obviously useful language. With all the stress on transactional language at KS3, KS4 and beyond in recent language teaching practice, there has been little room for the abstract. Since there are, as yet, no formal targets set in primary MFL, this may be one of the few curriculum areas left where pupils can delight in the nonsensical. Take as an example the wolf's chant from *Die drei kleinen Schweinchen*:

*Ich werde strampeln und trampeln
Ich werde husten und prusten
Und dir dein Haus zusammenpusten!*

With the possible exception of *husten* it is unlikely whether most of those verbs will serve any useful future purpose, but pupils can use the chant to get their tongues around German pronunciation. If divided into three groups, each given a separate line and told to imagine they are the wolf, they can compete to see which group can say their line loudest and in the most aggressive wolf-like fashion. It almost brings down the ceiling, but allows the children to get rid of any inhibitions about speaking the language out loud and, while the verbs themselves may not be the most useful, the structure is and the rhythm of the future tense may just strike a chord when the tense is formally learned at a later stage. Similarly in our German version of *The Giant Pancake* it is amusing to listen to the children acting the part of the pancake calling out: *Ich will nicht gegessen werden!*, aware that the sentence as it stands is unlikely to be repeated in a non-fictional context, but also knowing how easy it will be for learners to adapt this otherwise very complicated structure of a passive with a modal verb and apply it to numerous real-life situations. Another point about the structure of stories is that they naturally contain a variety of grammatical elements. Where primary MFL teaching is often criticised for too much 'noun-crunching', in a story the teacher can concentrate on a series of verbs or adjectives and adverbs, all introduced within proper phrases. More often than not the story will be told in a past tense and I see no reason why this should not be a tense that young pupils meet in the early stages of language learning.

METHODOLOGY

First of all it is important to check that the pupils are familiar with the story in English. The ultimate aim is to read the story to them in German in its entirety without pausing for explanations as if to a class of native-speakers. Hence, the process is the reverse of the class-teacher's normal English

story-telling activity where the story comes first and acts as the catalyst for later activities. Visual props are a crucial aid to pupils' understanding. These take on a variety of forms, from flashcards and OHT images to puppets, masks, magnetic characters for the magnetic whiteboard and real items. For the story of *The Giant Pancake* these included an actual pancake and frying pan, for *Rotkäppchen* numerous food items, cutlery and clothes. Sometimes, in order to check understanding, pupils are shown a variety of images and encouraged to pick the right one by giving *richtig/falsch* responses verbally and with thumbs up and down or by coming to the front and choosing the right card or other visual prop. For example, *'Die drei Bären wohnen in einem Zelt/in einem Schloss/in einem Haus.'*

This method can prove particularly effective because the pupils rapidly become impatient with the teacher for suggesting the wrong options and their dismissive attitude towards me as they call out their unfailingly correct responses proves that it is time to move the story on. A visual cue can be used to elicit a verbal response within the story, e.g. a stop sign is held up when the children need to call '*Halt!*' to the giant pancake as it escapes. Alternatively, words within the story elicit a physical or visual response from the pupils. They might mime an action for a verb, e.g.

'Schneewittchen hatte Angst und wollte weinen, aber stattdessen suchte sie einen Platz, wo sie schlafen konnte.'

This sentence provokes four reactions from the listeners as each underlined cue-word is heard: a sharp intake of breath and look of fear followed by pretend sobbing, then hand on forehead in searching motion and finally eyes closed resting face on hands as if falling asleep. The response is often verbal, and the simplest form of this is a form of oral cloze exercise, simply leaving a gap that the pupils fill once they are familiar with the language. However, a verbal response may not actually be part of the text but the text can act as a cue, e.g. at the beginning of *Schneewittchen* when the children hear the following words about the queen: '*... stach sie sich in den Finger*' they call out in unison, and incidentally very convincingly, '*Aua! Das tut weh!*'.

When pupils acted out parts in *Die drei kleinen Schweinchen* there was some unexpected improvisation by the boy playing the wolf who, after eating up a little pig, spontaneously patted his stomach and ad-libbed '*Mmm, lecker!*'.

Where there is dialogue, pupils can be divided into groups to say the words of the different characters, for example the mother and her daughter in *Rotkäppchen* or the girl speaking to the wolf. The fact that they are then playing a part and can modulate their voices accordingly is another successful factor in reducing inhibitions. Wherever possible, individual pupils can also put on masks or hold a puppet to act out short pieces of the story.

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There are numerous follow-up activities that can be done depending on the pupils’ abilities and the desire to introduce them to the written word. After clothes and colours had been introduced to the Y5 and Y6 pupils during *Rotkäppchen*, they were given a written description of what she was wearing and asked to colour in a picture of her according to the text. The follow-on activity for those able to write in German was to colour in a similar picture of a little girl known as *Grünkäppchen* wearing the same clothes in different colours of their choosing (apart from the cloak), and then copy out the text, changing the colours so that it matched what they had drawn. Other activities might involve matching items of vocabulary to pictures or drawing a scene from the story with German labels, e.g. designing a room in the seven dwarfs’ house.

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

Our aim is to have schemes of work for primary MFL classes that are flexible enough to allow important cross-curricular links to be exploited, according to the topic that each class is following over any given half-term. In our most recent story, *Schneewittchen*, links have been made with the Y3 and Y4 topic of homes and furniture (we looked at the German words for items inside the seven dwarfs’ house) and with the KS1 topic of buildings and the environment (again, the seven dwarfs’ house, the castle where the queen lives and features of the forest). But the most obvious link is with literacy. It is not just a question of the National Literacy Strategy’s general aim of raising cultural awareness that appears as a *Leitmotiv* at foundation level and in both key stages in the form that children should be familiar with traditional stories and stories from other cultures, but it is also possible and, I believe, extremely desirable to reinforce specific elements of the Literacy Strategy through the context of the story. For example, the grammatical awareness strand of the Literacy Strategy in Y3, Term 2 decrees that pupils should be taught:

- 1 the function of adjectives within sentences through:
 - identifying adjectives in shared reading
 - discussing and defining what they have in common
 - collecting and classifying adjectives, e.g. for colours, sizes and moods
- 2 to use the term adjective appropriately.

Similarly, in Y4, Term 2, pupils are expected:

- 1 to revise and extend work on adjectives from Y3 Term 2 and link to work on expressive and figurative language in stories and poetry:
 - examining comparative and superlative adjectives.⁸

All of these objectives were covered during German lessons with *Schneewittchen* as the focus, and thus consolidated work done in English by

the class teacher during the Literacy Hour. We collected adjectives as we went through the story and classified them according to:

colour – *Rot (so rot wie Blut), Weiß (so weiß wie Schnee), Schwarz (so schwarz wie Ebenholz)*

personal characteristics and emotions – *schön, wunderschön, eitel, böse, traurig, jung, alt,*

size – *klein, groß, dick, dünn*

the weather in the forest – *bewölkt, windig, schlecht.*

Pupils were asked to think up mimes or actions to show the meaning of the adjectives, or to point to an item in the appropriate colour whenever a colour adjective was mentioned in the story. It is helpful that the Rockcliffe school uniform is red, white and black! At all times after the lexis was first introduced, pupils were encouraged to use the term ‘adjective’ appropriately. Comparatives and superlatives occur naturally in this story, firstly when the stepmother asks the mirror:

‘Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand, wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?’

Then the mirror changes its response from:

‘Du bist die Schönste im ganzen Land’
to

‘Schneewittchen ist die Schönste im ganzen Land: Schneewittchen ist schöner als du!’

Thus incorporating both a comparative and a superlative in a single utterance. Since these sections are ideal for chousing and the pupils had no trouble learning the words to call out and took great delight in participating, the comparative and superlative form quickly became very familiar, so setting up opportunities for further work on the subject. While all pupils in KS1 and KS2 were confronted with the identical story text, differentiation was made between classes according to the follow-up activities i.e. all pupils met the same adjectives, but the extent to which the adjectives were worked on varied from class to class. Since the Grimm version of *Schneewittchen* does not name the seven dwarfs, it seemed like a good idea to allow the children to name them themselves. At KS1 some adjectives were chosen as names, but also other familiar language such as numbers or days of the week. At KS2 the pupils were encouraged to choose adjectives from a list that best described the dwarfs in their opinion, and then to pick one of these to draw. Under the drawing, according to ability, pupils wrote a sentence conforming to a given model, such as:

‘Ich heiße Traurig. Ich bin der traurigste der Zwerge.’⁹

Incidentally, KS1 and Reception pupils had no problems remembering the adjective *eitel* to describe the stepmother and demonstrating its meaning by miming someone checking their appearance constantly in a mirror, but when I asked for the English meaning of the adjective, blank

looks told me that they had not yet encountered the word “vain”. While there may be some advantages in target language teaching, it is important to remember that pupils of this age are still developing a basic vocabulary in their native language and that teachers have a responsibility to promote this in all areas of the curriculum, even in MFL.

SUMMARY

Story-telling can be an extremely effective resource in primary MFL, but it is not the only one and variety is important. Stories can be used as a framework within which a range of vocabulary and structures can be introduced. Fairy tales were meant to be read out loud and the rhythm within the text aids the listener to remember the wording of these stories. Most adults will recall some elements of fairy tales learned as a child in their native language when given a cue. This is particularly the case where rhymes are an important feature of the story such as the ‘*Spieglein, Spieglein...*’ couplet in *Schneewittchen* which will hopefully be recalled at a later date, perhaps when dealing formally with prepositions taking the dative (*an der Wand, im ganzen Land*) or when revising comparatives of adjectives. The past tense is usually used and is found in a natural rather than contrived context. Every child in the school can recognise, and most can now produce the phrase ‘*Es war einmal...*’. Where voice modulation is used by the pupils in role-plays to represent different characters their confidence in speaking out loud increases and the fact that they are calling out in chorus allows the less confident to take part as they feel ready. My personal view is that, wherever possible, stories that have been written in German should be used in preference to those that teachers translate themselves because of the superior quality of the rhythm and cadences in the original versions. In my experience, the pupils’ response to stories has been overwhelmingly positive but there is one area where I would advise caution. Remember that the aim of many stories for very young children is to settle them at bed-time. I have experienced

children in the Reception class falling asleep towards the end of the lesson. The first time this happened was at the end of my version of *Can't you sleep little bear?* where little bear does finally succumb to sleep. Although this was something I had not expected, I rationalised that it must be a proven successful outcome since the story had obviously been understood, if not every word then at least its mood. The child had reacted emotionally to the story in the same way as a German child would have and an instinctive reaction, although not necessarily this one, is surely what teachers in any area of MFL learning are aiming for.

NOTES

- ¹ Based on my own version of story
- ² See Appendix 1 for transcript
- ³ Waddell, M. and Firth, B. (1988) *Can't You Sleep Little Bear?* London: Walker Books
- ⁴ See Appendix 2 for transcript
- ⁵ *Schneewittchen, Rotkäppchen, Die drei kleinen Schweinchen* are from the series *Lesen leicht gemacht* (2000) Recanati: European Language Institute
- ⁶ www.maerchen.keepfree.de/maerch/di/diegeschichtevondendreischweinchen.html
- ⁷ Ovale (1994) *Die schönsten Grimms Märchen*, China: Tormont International Ltd.
- ⁸ DfEE (1998) *The National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching*, London: DfEE
- ⁹ See Appendix 3 for example of worksheet
- ¹⁰ Loosely adapted from *The Big Pancake*, The Storyworlds Series, Heinemann
- ¹¹ Loosely adapted from Ovale (1994) *Die schönsten Grimms Märchen*, China: Tormont International Ltd
- ¹² Fuhrig, H. J. and Jöcker, D. (2000) *Start German with a Song*, Münster: Menschenkinder Verlag
- ¹³ www.office.microsoft.com/clipart

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Appendix 1: Der große Pfannkuchen¹⁰

Please note: Underlined sentences indicate chorusing in unison.

Es waren einmal sieben kleine Kinder. Sie hatten immer Hunger. Eines Tages machte ihre Mutter einen großen Pfannkuchen. Als der Pfannkuchen fertig war, sagten die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder: „Wir wollen dich essen.“ „Oh weh!“, dachte sich der Pfannkuchen. „Ich will nicht von sieben kleinen Kindern gegessen werden. Ich laufe fort“.

Also sprang der Pfannkuchen aus der Pfanne heraus und rollte zur Tür. „Halt!“ sagten die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder: „Wir wollen dich essen.“ Der große Pfannkuchen rollte die Straße entlang. Die Mutter und die sieben kleinen Kinder liefen ihm nach. „Halt!“ sagte die Mutter, und die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder sagten: „Wir wollen dich essen.“

Kurz darauf begegnete der Pfannkuchen einem Pferd. „Halt!“ sagte das Pferd. „Ich will dich fressen.“ „Oh weh!“ sagte der Pfannkuchen. „Ich will nicht von einem Pferd gefressen werden,“ und er rollte weiter. „Halt!“ sagte das Pferd. „Halt!“ sagte die Mutter, und die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder sagten: „Wir wollen dich essen.“

Kurz darauf begegnete der Pfannkuchen einem Hund. „Halt!“ sagte der Hund. „Ich will dich fressen.“ „Oh weh!“ sagte der Pfannkuchen. „Ich will nicht von einem Hund gefressen werden,“ und er rollte weiter. „Halt!“ sagte der Hund. „Halt!“ sagte das Pferd. „Halt!“ sagte die Mutter, und die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder sagten: „Wir wollen dich essen.“

Kurz darauf begegnete der Pfannkuchen einer Katze. „Halt!“ sagte die Katze. „Ich will dich fressen.“ „Oh weh!“ sagte der Pfannkuchen. „Ich will nicht von einer Katze gefressen werden,“ und er rollte weiter. „Halt!“ sagte die Katze. „Halt!“ sagte der Hund. „Halt!“ sagte das Pferd. „Halt!“ sagte die Mutter, und die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder sagten: „Wir wollen dich essen.“

Aber dann begegnete der Pfannkuchen einem Fuchs. „Halt!“ sagte der Fuchs. „Oh weh!“ sagte der Pfannkuchen. „Oh weh!“ sagten die Katze und der Hund und das Pferd und die Mutter und die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder. Der Fuchs warf den Pfannkuchen hoch in die Luft. Er fraß den Pfannkuchen auf und sagte: „Mmm, lecker! Das schmeckt gut!“

Und die Katze, der Hund, das Pferd, die Mutter und die sieben hungrigen kleinen Kinder blieben hungrig und gingen nach Hause.

Appendix 2: Schneewittchen und die Sieben Zwerge¹¹

Please note: Underlined sentences indicate chorusing in unison. Items shown in brackets are digressions inserted into the text.

Es war einmal eine wunderschöne Königin. Als sie eines Tages am Fenster saß und nähte, stach sie sich in den Finger und sagte: „Aua! Das tut weh!“ Das rote Blut tropfte in den weißen Schnee. Es war so schön, das rote Blut im weißen Schnee, dass die Königin sagte: „Ich möchte ein Baby mit einer Haut so weiß wie Schnee, Lippen so rot wie Blut und Haaren so schwarz wie Ebenholz.“

Bald darauf hatte die Königin ein Baby. Mit Haut so weiß wie Schnee, Lippen so rot wie Blut und Haaren so schwarz wie Ebenholz. Sie nannte das Kind Schneewittchen. Aber die Königin starb, als Schneewittchen noch ein Baby war. Schneewittchen wurde älter und sie wurde immer schöner. Und als der König wieder heiratete, bekam er eine neue Frau, die Stiefmutter. Sie war sehr eitel. Die Stiefmutter liebte Schneewittchen nicht.

Denn die Stiefmutter verbrachte viel Zeit vor ihrem Spiegel und fragte ihn jeden Morgen: „Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand, wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?“ Und der Spiegel antwortete: „Du bist die Schönste im ganzen Land!“ Damit war die Stiefmutter sehr glücklich. Aber eines Tages befragte die Stiefmutter den Spiegel: „Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand, wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?“ und der Spiegel antwortete nicht: „Du bist die Schönste im ganzen Land“ sondern: „Schneewittchen ist die Schönste im ganzen Land! Schneewittchen ist schöner als du!“ Die Stiefmutter war sehr böse und sie plante, Schneewittchen zu beseitigen. Die Stiefmutter rief den Jäger und sagte: „Bring Schneewittchen tief in den Wald.“

(1. *Was ist im Wald? Bäume, Gras, Blumen, ein Kaninchen, ein Frosch, ein Vogel.*)

(2. *Wie ist das Wetter im Wald? Es ist schlecht, es regnet, es ist kalt, es ist windig, es ist neblig, die Sonne scheint nicht, es ist nicht schön, es ist nicht warm.*)

Der Jäger brachte Schneewittchen tiefer und tiefer in den Wald und ließ sie dort allein. Schneewittchen hatte Angst und wollte weinen, aber stattdessen suchte sie einen Platz, wo sie schlafen konnte. Sie lief immer weiter durch den Wald, bis sie zu einem kleinen Haus kam.

(3. *Wie sieht das Haus der sieben Zwerge aus? Hier ist das Fenster, die Tür, das Dach, der Boden, die Wand.*)

Sie klopfte dreimal, aber niemand antwortete. So ging sie hinein.

(4. *Was ist im Haus der sieben Zwerge? Ein Tisch, sieben Stühle, sieben Betten, sieben Teller, sieben Tassen, sieben Gläser, sieben Messer, sieben Gabeln, sieben Löffel.*)

Schneewittchen war hungrig und durstig, so aß sie etwas von einem Teller, trank aus einem Glas und schlief in einem der Betten ein. Um Mitternacht kamen die sieben Zwerge nach Hause zurück und fanden Schneewittchen. Sie sah so wunderschön aus, dass sie beschlossen, sie schlafen zu lassen.

(5. *Wie heißen die sieben Zwerge? Rot, Blau, Grün, ...*)

Am nächsten Morgen wachte Schneewittchen auf und wollte sich waschen.

(6. *Song: Wischi wischi, waschi, wischi¹² - meine Hände, meine Arme, ...*)

Als die Zwerge zur Arbeit gingen, warnten sie Schneewittchen: „Lass' niemanden ins Haus! Die Stiefmutter ist sehr böse!“ Die Stiefmutter befragte den Spiegel: „Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand, wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?“ Und der Spiegel antwortete: „Schneewittchen ist die Schönste im ganzen Land.“ Die Stiefmutter fragte: „Wo ist Schneewittchen?“ Und der Spiegel antwortete: „Sie lebt im Haus der sieben Zwerge.“

Die Stiefmutter verkleidete sich als ein Kräuterweiblein und ging zum Haus im Wald. Sie rief: „Äpfel zu verkaufen, Äpfel zu verkaufen.“

(7. *Was hat sie noch im Korb? Eine Birne, eine Banane, Trauben, Orangen, Schokolade, Brot,...*)

Schneewittchen kaufte einen Apfel, aber der Apfel war vergiftet. Kaum hatte Schneewittchen in den Apfel gebissen, fiel sie zu Boden. Als die Zwerge nach Hause kamen, fanden sie Schneewittchen auf dem Boden. Schneewittchen schien tot zu sein. Die Zwerge weinten und brachten sie in den Wald. Eines Tages kam ein schöner Prinz auf seinem Pferd und sah Schneewittchen im Gras liegen. Er küsste sie und Schneewittchen wachte auf.

Appendix 3 Arbeitsblatt



Hier ist einer der sieben Zwerge¹³. Sein Name ist **Traurig**.
Dieser Zwerg ist der **traurigste** der sieben Zwerge⁴

Zeichne einen anderen Zwerg und beschreib ihn! Die Wörter unten helfen dir.

<u>English</u>	<u>adjective</u>	<u>superlative</u>
big	groß	der größte
small	klein	der kleinste
old	alt	der älteste
young	jung	der jüngste
fat	dick	der dickste
thin	dünn	der dünnste
beautiful	schön	der schönste
ugly	hässlich	der hässlichste
funny	lustig	der lustigste
sad	traurig	der traurigste
happy	glücklich	der glücklichste
stupid	dumm	der dümme
clever	klug	der klügste
hard working	fleißig	der fleißigste
sleepy	schläfrig	der schläfrigste
lazy	faul	der faulste
dirty	schmutzig	der schmutzigste
clean	sauber	der sauberste