

Teacher's notes

Heidi

by Johanna Spyri



SUMMARY

Eight-year-old Heidi lives in a village in Switzerland. When both her parents die, she is left in the care of her aunt Dete. Then Dete moves to Frankfurt to work and Heidi must live with her bad-tempered Grandfather high up in a mountain chalet. But Heidi is a sweet-tempered child and her Grandfather soon comes to love her. Heidi loves living in the mountains, going up the hill every day with Peter and his goats. Then one day Aunt Dete comes to take Heidi away to Frankfurt to live with a rich family and be a friend for twelve-year-old, Clara, who is an invalid. Heidi does not want to leave Grandfather and the mountains. In Frankfurt, she makes friends with Clara and learns to read, but she does not like living in the city and thinks all the time of returning home. When Clara's father finds that Heidi is very unhappy, he sends her back to Switzerland. The next summer Clara comes to visit. The mountain air and the antics of Heidi's friend, Peter, have a miraculous result: Clara learns to walk, to the delight of her father and grandmother.

ABOUT JOHANNA SPYRI

Johanna Spyri was born on July 12, 1827, in Hirzel, a village near Zurich, Switzerland. She was the fourth of six children. Her father, Johan Heusser, was a doctor and her mother, Meta, looked after sick people. The Heusser family home overlooked Lake Zurich and beyond it could be seen the high Alpine mountains. Johanna spent the first 25 years of her life in this beautiful place. At the age of 18, she helped to teach her younger sisters and in the summer they went to the Chur region of Switzerland, which became the setting for the *Heidi* stories.

In 1852 Johanna married Bernhard Spyri, a lawyer, and they moved to Zurich, where Johanna came into contact with artistic and literary people. Although she was outwardly happy in Zurich, it appears that she also suffered from depression for a while. When Johanna was 43 years old, she began to write stories based on the people and places of her childhood, and in 1871 her first book appeared anonymously. From this time until 1884 she wrote about twenty stories for women and children. The first *Heidi* story appeared in 1880 and was an immediate success, but Johanna still kept her name a secret. However, from 1881, with the publication of a second instalment of *Heidi*, she began to use her own name.

In 1884 her son Bernard, born in 1855, died after a long illness. Her husband also died later that year. After this, she lived alone, but continued to write. She died in Zurich on July 7, 1901.

Johanna Spyri wrote in German but *Heidi* has been translated into many languages. A cartoon film was made in Hollywood in 1982. In addition to *Heidi*, her books include *The Little Alpine Musician*, *Uncle Titus*, *Gritli*, and *Veronica*.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Although it was written well over one hundred years ago, *Heidi* remains in the top 100 list of favourite books for children aged between 10 and 14 in the UK and it is especially popular with girls. How is it that the story retains its appeal? First, in writing *Heidi*, it is clear that Johanna Spyri drew upon the memories of her own happy childhood in the mountains of Switzerland. The setting for *Heidi* is an important part of its charm. Readers are transported to an idyllically beautiful place, with its colourful flowers, animals, sights and sounds and its good-hearted, simple country people. Heidi's life in the mountains is untroubled by pressures of school work. Instead she can play with the goats and with her friend, Peter, the goatherd. Her delight in her surroundings is one of the lasting impressions of the book. Heidi herself is a enchanting character. It is clear that the other characters in the story find her sweet and funny and, with the exception of Miss Rohmer, love her dearly. Heidi loves to help other people and, although she is small, she is able to change people's lives. Heidi sees that blind Grandmother lives in a house which is in desperate need of repair. Grandfather, who has become known in the village of Dorfli as a bad-tempered and bitter recluse, cannot refuse Heidi when she asks him to mend the house. Clara, the sick child who leads a lonely and unhappy life, is happier when Heidi stays with her. When she visits Heidi on the Alm, Clara becomes stronger and even finds that she can walk.

There is an important contrast in the book between the city and the country. In the countryside, with its beautiful landscapes, mountain air, green grass, animals and flowers, Heidi is happy and healthy. However, in the city, she is miserable because she cannot see the mountains. She becomes mentally disturbed and starts to walk in her sleep. Clara, too, lives in the city and is sick, and it is the healing power of the country which is responsible for Clara's recovery. Even though people may be richer in the city, it seems that city life makes people ill. In contrast, the country provides a better, though poorer, way of life.

Johanna Spyri offers another way of dealing with the pain and suffering of life: a belief in God. Clara's Grandmama tells Heidi that she can talk to God about her problems, and although Heidi is not immediately impressed by God's help,

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she nonetheless persuades Grandfather on her return that he ought to go to church. It is possible to wonder how much this, and Johanna Spyri's portrayal of town versus country, was due to her own son's illness and her own depression.

In some ways, the world of Heidi might seem to be rather unreal. It is completely free from the violence and darker aspects of life which are shown on today's television and in films. It does not, on the face of it, deal with the problems which concern modern children. However, in *Heidi* children are offered an inspirational role model. Although she is an orphan, she is a happy child with a great deal of inner strength. Moreover, although she sometimes has no control over what happens to her, the message is that what happens is for the best and that good can come from most situations. These themes are most probably part of the reason why the story is as popular today as it has always been.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Students work in groups of four. Make copies of the pictures on pages 6 and 8. Cut each picture in half vertically (top to bottom). Make sure you have one set of four picture halves for each group. Give each student one picture half. Tell them not to show their picture half to anybody. Each student has to tell the other students in the group what is in their picture half. Without seeing the pictures, the group has to try to decide which picture halves go together.

When the students have put their picture halves together, they can try to find some of the new words given on page 40 in the pictures.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–5

Ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Ask them to make notes about Heidi. They can write about these things:

- Heidi's family and friends
- Her age and what she looks like
- The things she likes
- Her character (ask students to look up 'character' in their dictionaries)

Then one person from each group talks about Heidi to the whole class. Have a class discussion about Heidi's character. What words can we use to say what she is like?

(for example: happy, kind, helpful, a country girl etc)

Chapters 6–10

Students work in pairs. Ask students to make as many sentences about the city and the country as they can, like this:

- In the country/city you can/can't ...
- In the country/city there is/are(n't) ...

Then have a class discussion: do students like the city or the country better?

Chapters 11–15

Put students in pairs or threes. Ask them to act one of these scenes. They can write down all the words they are going to say. If they want to, they can use words used by the people in the book.

- Mr Seeman and the doctor find Heidi in her white night dress outside the front door in Frankfurt.
- Clara and Heidi say goodbye before Heidi goes home.
- Heidi meets Grandmother again when she comes home.
- Heidi sees Grandfather again.
- Clara starts to walk with Heidi and Peter's help.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Write the names of the chapters on the board in jumbled order. Ask students to copy the names and put the right chapter number next to each chapter name. Tell them not to look in the book! The first person with the right answer is the winner!

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know these new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' activities at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1–5

- alone** (adj) not with any other people
beard (n) hair that grows around a man's chin
bowl (n) a wide round container that is open at the top, used to hold liquids, etc
cheese (n) a solid food made from milk
corner (n) the place where two lines or edges meet
goat (n) an animal like a sheep that can climb steep hills and rocks
grass (n) a very common plant with thin green leaves that grows in fields
hay (n) long grass that has been cut and dried
hole (n) an empty space in something solid
roof (n) the outside surface on top of a building
sledge (n) a vehicle for travelling over snow with two long narrow pieces of wood or metal fixed under it
soon (adv) a short time from now
surprise (n) an unexpected or unusual event
wheelchair (n) a chair with wheels used by people who cannot walk
wooden (adj) made of wood

Chapters 6–10

- God** (n) a male being who is believed to control the world or part of it
housekeeper (n) someone who is employed to do the cooking, cleaning, etc in a house or hotel
kitten (n) a young cat
manservant (n) a male servant



Student's activities

Photocopiable

Students can do these activities alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only exercises are marked.

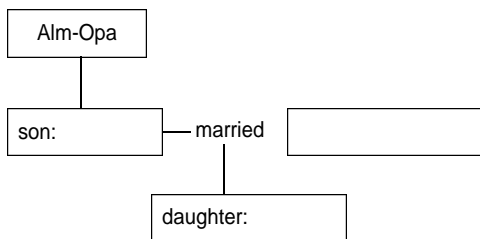
Activities before reading the book

- Look up 'map' in your dictionary. Find a map of Switzerland. Find the mountains. What are the mountains called? Find Zurich. Where is Frankfurt? Is it on your map?
- Look at the picture on the front cover of the book. Where are the houses?
- With a friend, talk about these questions:
 - What work do the people in the houses do?
 - Would you like to live in one of the houses in the picture? Why or why not?
- Now read the Introduction on page v. Put these names in the right places:
Goat-Peter, Aunt Dete, Grandfather, Heidi, Clara.
 - ... has no mother or father
 - ... lives high in the mountains.
 - ... is Heidi's friend
 - ... takes Heidi to Frankfurt
 - ... lives in Frankfurt

Activities while reading the book

Chapter 1

- Put these names in the family tree



- What is the name of Adelheid's sister?
- Which thing happened first, second, third, fourth ... ? Number the sentences 1–8.
 - Heidi saw Alm-Opa and his house.
 - Heidi's parents died.
 - Dete and Heidi saw Goat-Peter's house.
 - Heidi went to live with her aunt, Dete.
 - Dete left Heidi with Alm-Opa.
 - Dete got a job in Frankfurt.
 - The old man was angry.
 - Dete took Heidi to Dorfli.

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Chapters 2 & 3

Who says these sentences to who, and when or why? What are they talking about? Don't look at the book!

- 'I want to see inside the house.'
- 'I don't have to tell you everything.'
- 'Oh they're very pretty.'
- 'Do you want to go with them, up the mountain?'
- 'No! I hate it!'
- 'It's not really a fire.'

Chapters 4 & 5

Put these half sentences together.

- When it snows.
- Brigitta and Grandmother are surprised because
- Grandmother is afraid because
- Heidi cries because
- The Dorfli teacher says that
- Grandfather is angry with Dete because
- Dete is angry with Grandfather because
- Heidi goes with Dete to Frankfurt but
- Grandmother is sad when
 - ... Heidi and Dete go away to Frankfurt.
 - ... she thinks their house will fall down.
 - ... she does not want to.
 - ... she wants to take Heidi to Frankfurt.
 - ... Heidi has to come to school.
 - ... Heidi and Grandfather have to stay inside their house.
 - ... Grandmother cannot see the mountains.
 - ... Alm-Opa is kind to Heidi.
 - ... he does not send Heidi to school.

Chapters 6 & 7

Are these right or wrong?

- Miss Rohmer is Clara's mother.
- Clara is a well, happy child.
- Heidi and Clara are the same age.
- Miss Rohmer thinks that Heidi will be a good friend for Clara.
- Clara thinks that Heidi is funny.
- Clara's family is rich.
- Heidi likes being in a city.
- Heidi is happy at the top of the church.

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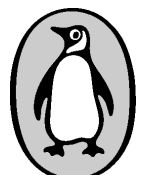
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- (i) Heidi takes the kittens to Clara.
- (j) Heidi can't go out of the house alone.
- (k) Miss Rohmer likes cats.
- (l) Clara is happy when she sees the kittens.

Chapters 8 & 9

Answer the questions.

- (a) What does Heidi do in the mornings, the afternoons and the evenings?
- (b) Only one thing makes Heidi happy. What is it?
- (c) What happens when Miss Rohmer opens Heidi's cupboard?
- (d) Does Miss Rohmer like Heidi? Why?
- (e) Does Clara like Heidi? Why?
- (f) Why does Heidi cry when Grandmama shows her a book?
- (g) How does Grandmama help Heidi with her reading?
- (h) In what other way does Grandmama help Heidi?

Chapters 10 & 11

Finish these sentences

- (a) Heidi stops talking to God because ...
- (b) Clara and Heidi are sad when ...
- (c) Miss Rohmer is angry with Heidi when ...
- (d) Heidi can't sleep because ...
- (e) Everyone in the house is afraid because ...
- (f) When Mr Seeman and the doctor find Heidi, she is ...
- (g) Mr Seeman does not want to send Heidi home now because ...
- (h) The doctor says she must go home tomorrow because ...

Chapters 12 & 13

Put each of these names and words in the right places:
Peter, Dorfli, Grandfather, Grandmother, Sebastian,
Mr Seeman, Clara, Heidi, God, church, school, song.

Mr Seeman tells (a) to take Heidi home.
(b) gives her some white bread for grandmother.
When Sebastian leaves Heidi, he gives her a little bag
from (c) Everyone is very surprised and happy
when they see (d) again. And Heidi is very
happy that she is back with (e) and the goats in
the mountains.

In Mr Seeman's bag there is a lot of (f)..... Heidi
wants to buy bread for (g) with the money. Heidi
reads a (h) for Grandmother and she tells

Grandfather about (i) After this, Grandfather
goes to (j) He also wants Heidi to go to
(k) So they move to (l) for the winter.
Heidi teaches (m) to read so he can read a song
to Grandmother too.

Chapters 14 & 15

Say why:

- (a) Peter does not like Clara.
- (b) Clara gets stronger.
- (c) Peter is surprised when Grandfather, Heidi and Clara come up the mountain.
- (d) Clara starts walking.
- (e) Peter runs away from Mr Seeman.
- (f) Mr Seeman thanks Peter.
- (g) Heidi says it's a wonderful day.

Activities after reading the book

- 1 Look at all the pictures in the book and the sentences under each picture. Find another sentence from the book for each picture. Write your sentences down and give them to a friend. Ask your friend to find pictures from the book for your sentences.
- 2 Talk about these questions with a friend:
 - (a) Which person in the book do you like best?
 - (b) Which person do you like least?
- 3 There are two more books about Heidi called 'Heidi Grows Up' and 'Heidi's Children'. What do you think happens to Heidi in these books? Talk about your ideas with a friend or write your answer.

