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## **The Wildest Lessons Ever! A Book Project in Fifth Grade to Foster Reading Motivation in ELT**

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### **Abstract**

In English Language Teaching (ELT) at German secondary schools, work with longer stories and books, including graded readers, usually does not start before seventh or eighth grade, after several years of learning English. In this article, I want to present how fruitful the use of a book – with a plot matching the pupils' interests and a language level fitting their language competencies – can be in the first years of learning English. The evaluation of questionnaires distributed before and after the project demonstrates that with the help of creative and interdisciplinary tasks connected to reading a book, teachers have the opportunity to keep up the pupils' eagerness to learn and to use English, to strengthen their reading motivation, their general language skills, and their creative and social skills. This is due to several reasons, among them the fact that literature integrates content and language, and that intensive and creative work with the reading material leads to a sense of achievement on the part of the pupils.

**Keywords:** reading motivation; lower secondary level; project; creative tasks; interdisciplinary approach

### **Biodata:**

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## Introduction

In the Bavarian school system, pupils first get into contact with English language teaching (ELT) in primary school. With the help of songs, short (nursery) rhymes, short stories and playful activities, they primarily acquire vocabulary and phrases for situations having to do with greeting friends and talking about one's family, and they should receive a first idea of the grapheme-phoneme relationships in the English language. In addition, some might read a picturebook in primary school. Pupils are encouraged to discover language rules inductively, for example for the plural '-s', but it is not intended that time is invested into the explanation of grammatical structures, let alone the explicit description of grammar. Of course, the concrete realization of English lessons in a certain class at primary school is very much dependent on the teacher responsible, but the Bavarian curriculum stipulates as the aim of English lessons at primary school that the foundations for a successful career of learning English should be laid in the form of building and keeping up motivation and language awareness (ISB, 2019, LehrplanPLUS, the curriculum for English at primary schools in Bavaria).

For some of the pupils, this approach to language learning is too slow. Many are highly motivated learners who are more than happy that they can start building well-formed grammatical sentences at secondary school. 'We were finally able to form full sentences and did not just translate single words or match pictures and words as in primary school', one pupil, in an irritated and slightly disparaging tone said in class in an informal evaluation of her English lessons in 5<sup>th</sup> grade (secondary school) as compared to fourth grade (primary school). This received the approval of the overwhelming majority of her classmates (all student quotes are translated from German by the author). Remarks like this and the excitement that can be felt at the beginning of the school year in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at secondary school show a high willingness to learn English. It is the responsibility of every teacher to keep up and enhance this motivation, all the more since it is well-known that motivation usually weakens as children become older. Motivation is a complex interplay of internal factors – individual psychological and emotional dispositions – as well as external factors such as the stimulating nature of a task or topic, according to Haß, Kieweg, Kutzy, Müller-Hartmann and Weisshaar (2017, p. 229). The motivation to achieve a certain learning target and to broaden one's knowledge continually decreases in the course of time spent at school, according to

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Wisniewski, and achievement or performance motivation, that is the wish to meet certain demands or requirements, continually decreases with the beginning of the secondary level and only increases again after tenth grade (2016, pp. 46-9). In order to strengthen motivation, the focus should be put on the construction of tasks (Hedge, 2000, p. 24), since this is something over which the teacher has some control, arguably more than over internal factors that influence motivation.

In this article, I want to propose a short book project as an example of practice and one way of strengthening motivation, particularly reading motivation, at the beginning of the secondary level (in Germany the 5<sup>th</sup> grade). '[T]he studies of literary texts both as literature and language-acquisition input below the upper secondary level are to date very few,' as Bland (2013, p. 1) writes. It is only for 10<sup>th</sup> grade that the Bavarian curriculum for *Gymnasien* stipulates the reading of a complete novel and not only extracts (ISB, 2019, LehrplanPLUS). With the new coursebook *Green Line Bayern 1* (Carleton-Gertsch et al., 2017) for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the Bavarian *Gymnasium* comes a brief graded reader (*Lektüre* or learner literature), called *The Wildest Party Ever!* by Hamida Aziz, which is suggested as an alternative to dealing with several chapters in the regular coursebook. The reader has 40 pages and can be used towards the end of the school year. It contains the same new vocabulary and grammar as the respective texts in *Green Line Bayern 1*. However, vocabulary and grammar are presented in a much larger context and in a story rather than in short and separate coursebook chapters. In literature, content and language are inseparable, and the aim of teaching English to language learners is to integrate content and language. Therefore, literature lends itself to being used in ELT.

[L]iterature is a high point of language usage; arguably it marks the greatest skills a language user can demonstrate. Anyone who wants to acquire a profound knowledge that goes beyond the utilitarian will read literary texts in that language. (Bassnett & Grundy 1993, quoted in Bland, 2013, p. 2)

Of course, it can be argued whether this also holds for fabricated texts. The graded reader *The Wildest Party Ever!* is a fabricated text just like the texts in the coursebook. However, the mere fact that it is a separate publication, a book into which pupils can write and where they can underline or highlight parts, means that they can create an affective bond to it.

Moreover, the exciting plot provides an authentic reading experience – the first and foremost aim of the students is to understand and consume a story, not to acquire vocabulary and grammar. This is also how the publishers advertise the book. Towards the end of the first year of English at secondary school, the aim is to provide proof of what the pupils have learnt in the past year and to set a stepping stone to a higher competence and motivation level in English. That the book contains obligatory vocabulary and grammar might be regarded as an advantage by those pupils who are not keen on reading. They can see meaningfulness in this as a first step, and, in a second step, they can be led to appreciate reading for its own sake.

In the following I will present the aims and the course of the project that I conducted in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade with 25 pupils (boys and girls). The school is a selective secondary school with most of the children coming from families with an academic background. In order to be able to evaluate the project, I distributed questionnaires to the pupils before and after the project, the results of which will be detailed. Based on the questionnaires, I would like to shed light on the changes the project brought about. I will begin with some general notes on teaching literature in German ELT as well as on the focus of the project and a short summary of the plot of *The Wildest Party Ever!*

### **Literature in German ELT and Focus of the Project**

The teaching of literature in German ELT has seen many changes in the past 20 years, such as an opening of the canon towards new literatures, the introduction of learner-focused reception theory and reader-response criticism, the support of a process-oriented approach with pre-, while- and post-reading activities, and also its use for intercultural learning. The learners' individual occupation with, reflection of and response to the text have thus become much more important (Lütge, 2013b, p. 191). The book project I want to present in the following is an approach to foster learning motivation and reading competence in English, based on these developments. Reading competence can be defined as consisting of motivational, cognitive, affective, intercultural, communicative and reflexive competences (Burwitz-Melzer, 2007, pp. 137-8), and my focus is on fostering motivational competences, given the fact that motivation for learning English typically decreases in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade (Haß et al., 2017, p. 228). Moreover, there is a link between reading attainment and reading

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engagement, as many empirical studies have confirmed. Early success in reading leads to additional reading experiences and further progress, which means an upward spiral of success (Ellis & Coddington, 2013, p. 230). A downward learning spiral must actively be counteracted by enabling success in the first reading experiences, which is all the more probable when sufficient scaffolding is provided at the very beginning.

Intrinsic motivation (where individuals are driven by their interest and enjoyment to master a particular task or skill) and social motivation (where individuals are driven by the desire to take part in a community of learners) have the strongest associations with reading achievement because they influence the decisions students make about how often they read, the kind of books they read, and their willingness to persist in the activity should it become challenging [...]. (Ellis & Coddington, 2013, p. 230)

With creative tasks, I want to encourage each pupil's individual response to the text. Creative tasks make it more probable that students act and learn out of interest and with emotional involvement, which strengthens motivation and also leads to a more intense occupation with the learning object (Wisniewski, 2016, p. 167). Creative tasks can more easily lead to a sense of achievement and success than closed exercises, which again leads to an increase in motivation. Individual responses are possible, everyone's output is seen and appreciated, and the pupils feel that they can fulfil the requirements imposed on them. Then, a product usually arises from the task, which is a visible sign of the work done and promotes goal-orientedness (Glas & Schlagbauer, 2013, pp. 103-4). I want to stress again that tasks need to be fitted to the students' individual abilities and should neither be too easy nor too difficult to fulfil for motivation to be optimally developed (Haß et al., 2017, p. 229). Seeing to it that requirements can be met is crucial for motivation. Creative tasks make differentiation for weaker and more advanced pupils possible. They consider different learner types and allow different ways of proceeding.

Group work also plays an important role in the project. It encourages text comprehension, as the students negotiate meaning, as well as social skills. Literary competence can be regarded as an even more general term than reading competence. Reichl (2006, p. 179) suggests that it can be broken up into a general foreign language competence, a general reading competence in the foreign language, and a repertoire of skills and reading

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strategies relating to literary reading, for example genre or cultural awareness and tolerance of ambiguity, the latter a key competence in the domain of literary literacy (Lütge, 2013b, p. 193). Since abilities such as changing perspectives or actively engaging in reader response need to be built up gradually, not too many demands should be placed on the first exposure to a book in ELT.

Lütge (2013b, p. 198) pleads for the integration of the use of literature in the classroom from the very beginning in order to avoid a ‘literature shock’ at later stages. This approach – an early occupation with literature – also avoids the emergence of ‘the alleged dividing-line between – testable – skills acquired in the early grades and complex literary and cultural competences – seemingly beyond any systematic didactic access’ (Lütge 2013b, p. 199). Teachers should avoid putting literature on a pedestal, as this could lead to a marginalization of literature rather than underscoring its significance. Rather, literature should be perceived as a medium connected to and not distinct from everyday life, as it provides readers with models for understanding the world (Bredella, 2008, p. 21) and with cultural knowledge for dealing with all sorts of tasks transpiring in life, and enables readers to participate in cultural discourse, as Hallet (2007, p. 58) points out.

### **The Graded Reader: *The Wildest Party Ever!***

*The Wildest Party Ever!* tells the story of Luke, one of the characters in the coursebook *Green Line Bayern 1*, who is sad because not many of his friends seem to have time to come to his birthday party. But then his friends and parents surprise him with a trip to a park where wolves are kept in an enclosure. The park keeper informs the children about the wolves and how to behave in the park. After a barbecue, the parents and friends stay overnight in a cottage in the park. When Luke is in bed, he realizes that he has forgotten to take his dog Sherlock outside, so the friends decide to go out for a walk with him. But Sherlock runs into the forest. The friends manage to catch him. Suddenly, though, they stare into the eyes of a loose wolf. The friends are excited but remember how they should react and call the park keeper. The wolf is stunned and safely taken back to the enclosure, and the children’s adventure makes it to the front page of the local newspaper.

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### Pre-Reading Questionnaire

I distributed questionnaires in my class before and after the project (see Appendix for the questionnaires). The answers that the pupils put down in the first questionnaire partly influenced my methodology of running the project, for instance when I asked about preferred ways of transferring the story. Apparently, my class consisted of very avid readers. All of them except one ticked the box saying that they regularly read a (German) book, for example at weekends or in the evening. Their justifications included that they liked reading and that it was fun, that books were exciting, that reading was a pastime and a habit for them, or that they could relax with the help of a book and escape into a different world. All 25 pupils said that they liked reading in German, 20 said they liked reading in English. One added that he liked reading in English when he knew the words, implying that too many unknown words can lower the motivation.

Of the 25 pupils, 16 said that they read the English texts from the coursebook aloud at home and they also confirmed that they liked doing this. Many pupils added as a comment that they read both aloud and silently, that it depended on the text whether they read aloud or silently, or that reading quietly worked better when they wanted to focus on understanding the text in terms of content. Three pupils ticked 'yes' when I asked whether they thought that they had problems with pronunciation. These three pupils objectively have problems in pronunciation and dispose of a better self-evaluation than three classmates who confidently ticked the 'no' box despite certain problems.

The pupils were asked to rate – on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) – whether they were looking forward to working with the book. The great majority (22) circled 4 or 5. This demonstrates that the reading motivation was high at the outset, but that perhaps some doubts remained. The pupils added comments showing that the doubts were due to their fearing that they might not understand. The pupils expected the project to be fun and exciting. Several wrote that it was something different and a welcome change and that they were proud of reading a book in English. One wrote that he liked the fact that the focus would be less on grammar and another looked forward to learning many new words. It should be noted in this context that all unknown words that appear in the book are listed and translated in a section at the end of the book, but not all of them are compulsory learning

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matter for the children. This particular pupil liked the fact that he could broaden his vocabulary with additional and optional words.

The children were asked whether they would prefer reading a part of the book together in class first then as homework, or to read it at home alone first and then re-read and discuss in class. Just over a half indicated they would prefer to read in class first (14 of 25). Since there was no clear preference among the group, I decided to use both methodologies to do justice to all pupils. Some pupils added additional comments, such as that they liked a first encounter with the text in class better because they then knew how to pronounce the words and could read the text aloud correctly at home.

From their comments and knowing who suggested which ways of proceeding, I can come to some conclusions. Fast and skilled readers prefer reading the text alone at home. After all, books read for the pleasure of reading are usually not read aloud in a group. Skilled readers do not want to analyse a text in great detail – for them the joy of reading a longer text could get lost by picking it to pieces. Then there are learners who regard reading a book as another way of learning English and less as a reading or literature activity. They put the focus on correct pronunciation and understanding the text as well as possible, which includes learning as much vocabulary as possible. They prefer a first encounter with the text in class, where the teacher explains important new words already before reading the text, corrects pronunciation during the reading process and can clarify additional words or open issues after reading the text. Very meticulous pupils are among these learners, too. As such, I used both approaches during the project.

Pupils were asked whether they thought that they would have problems reading a whole book in English and to note their fears if they had any. There were 16 confident responses with expectations of no major problems. Of those who did express some doubts, most added that they saw possible problems in understanding the story. To young language learners, words are most important – they are the bricks of the English language. Grammar, the mortar which glues everything together, is less in the focus of the pupils. It is an issue that takes centre stage later when grammatical structures become more difficult and acquiring vocabulary has become more of a routine. New grammatical structures are introduced in the book, the modal auxiliaries *can*, *can't*, *must*, *mustn't*, *need*, *needn't*, and there is a first encounter with the simple past. With the pupil in mind who looked forward to



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reading a book because this would mean not bothering with grammar, I deliberately introduced the modal auxiliaries and the simple past before beginning the book so that the focus was on reading and creative tasks during the project.

Pupils were asked to note advantages and disadvantages regarding working with a book. Learning new vocabulary was noted as an advantage by 12 learners. Some added that it was an advantage that they could learn the words in a bigger context and that they could better link the words with the text and recognize connections and recurring structures. Here again, we see the emphasis young learners put on the acquisition of vocabulary. It also seems to be significant for them that the story opens up a larger context. In the short coursebook stories, words are also contextualized, but for the pupils, an even wider context that stays the same for a couple of weeks seems to be a relevant factor. Five pupils hoped that they could better understand texts and read more fluently after the project. Five expected a plus in their motivation to learn English, another five saw an advantage for learning English in general, four for pronunciation and three for their knowledge of sentence structure. Only a few pupils wrote down disadvantages or fears, for example that grammar would receive less focus.

All but two pupils said they would not wish to go on with the coursebook instead of working with the reader. In terms of tasks that go beyond reading the text, 20 were in favour of transferring a part of the story into a play and performing it. I had already noticed during the school year that there were avid actors in this class. The idea of transferring the content into music using percussion instruments was favoured by 16. Nine learners liked the idea of using dance and mime for presenting the content, and six opted for a reading competition. Given these answers, I decided to give the pupils the opportunity to perform part of the story and to accompany the performance by music, thus using a creative and interdisciplinary approach to transfer the narrative. Since I also taught the class in music, there were hardly any issues to be solved beforehand regarding organization or staff.

### **Process and Products of the Project**

In what follows, I want to present what the circa 20 lessons in class looked like. The introduction centred on birthday parties, as suggested by the resource material. I distributed the book before a two-week holiday, and we started reading the first chapter together. Over the holidays, the pupils had the chance to look into the book but were not obliged to read

any new parts. I believe that a methodology that supports the pupils in their first reading experience does justice to the majority of them. After the holidays, I distributed the pre-reading questionnaire and continued the work with the book. Mostly the story was read aloud, sometimes I asked the children to read quietly. Occasionally, I asked the pupils to read a new part containing new words at home for the first time. Then the work with the text in class had the aim to ensure that everyone had understood the words and the story well. It is essential to guarantee the comprehension of the text itself before activities that go beyond the literal understanding begin (Volkman, 2010, p. 232) so that weaker pupils are supported. This means that reception must precede production. As Batstone (1996, p. 273) formulates it, 'the cognitive load involved in noticing suggests that learners may need time to make sense of new language before they can make sense with it'. This is why the reading of most chapters was accompanied by additional comprehension exercises. At the back of the book, there are short exercises for every chapter that mainly test reading comprehension. Since solutions are provided in the book, they also give slower pupils the opportunity to work through the exercises again at home to foster understanding. I chose some tasks from the material proposed by the publisher, for instance writing birthday invitation cards, sentence matching exercises, crosswords testing vocabulary, cloze tests on modal auxiliaries and the simple past. The children were given regular homework.

The highlights of working with the book were certainly the creative and productive tasks towards the end of the project. One task was to turn a part of the story into a play, and to use instruments to enhance the performance. This task necessitates interpretation, 'the central construct of literacy that connects communicative competence and literary studies,' as Bland (2013, p. 4) puts it. The second task was to write a limerick, a poem with a neatly defined form, on the content of the book and to recite it. For the third task, the pupils should assume that the story was turned into a film and should design a film poster. For the three creative tasks, the pupils had five lessons at their disposal. Since emotional involvement and personal response need to be given more attention in developing literary literacy, as Bredella (2008, p. 22) has emphasized, learners should be able to get personally involved with characters, to change perspective, and to reflect and analyse emotions. All three creative tasks presented here allow the students to feel empowered through (creative) reader response (Lütge, 2013a, p. 221). The variety of input, intensity, pace, interaction and activity in these

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tasks facilitates the building of motivation (Hedge, 2000, p. 24). Moreover, the tasks necessitate that the pupils recycle vocabulary and structures encountered during the reading process, and so they consolidate their knowledge.

Doing creative tasks and responding to other pupils' creative products without assessing them on the basis of traditional marks can also promote tolerance of ambiguity. Students can very well value qualitative differences in results. In feedback rounds, elaborate products can be appreciated just as less elaborate but still appropriate results. These differences can sow the seeds of learning motivation (Hallet, 2013, p. 7). Moreover, emotional responses affect the learning process. And in creative tasks, the teacher has the particular chance to balance personality differences, for example between introverted and extrovert learners (Hedge, 2000, p. 20).

### **Creative Task 1: The Acting Task**

The first creative task, the acting task, fosters narrative competence, the ability to read and respond to narratives as well as to produce them actively. Reading a text several times also means 'a different creative response with each rereading' (Bland 2013, p. 1). Clearly, a different response is generated by every creative engagement with the text: an occupation with certain lines that need to be reformulated, with pronunciation, with the emotions and so forth. The affective dimension is fostered because the children deal with the text in a playful and emotional way via several modes of expression, using speech, gestures, movement and music. Both reading and music help to train the brain to the rhythmical patterns and to the qualities of sound (Bermejo & Guillén, 2013, p. 199), which is why connecting the two can multiply competences in both domains.

Four groups of six or seven pupils were formed for the acting task. The pupils chose to dramatize the encounter with the wolf at night in the forest, and first had to turn the narrative into a play using direct speech and stage directions. They had to decide how many parts should be cast and whether, for instance, one person had to play two roles, and whether there should be a narrator or not. Some groups were more efficient, others were less focused or struggled with social frictions first and needed more help and instructions. All four groups then performed their plays and received feedback. I had introduced feedback rounds in this class, so the children were skilled in giving and receiving feedback. The winning group had

the chance to improve on their performance. In a teacher-centred phase, the pupils could offer suggestions how the performance could be improved and when and how certain instruments could be used to underline the content of the play, for example certain rattles to imitate the sound of wind or a soprano glockenspiel to accompany the protagonists when they scurry down quietly from the bedrooms. The winning group distinguished itself by having efficiently distributed tasks at the beginning, by having rehearsed in a focused way and by having integrated ideas for the use of the music instruments, which were distributed to the audience during the final performance (see Figure 1), so that the actors could better concentrate on their roles. The scene with the wolf is certainly one of the most exciting ones in the book and lends itself perfectly to be turned into a play accompanied by music.



Figure 1: Performance of the winning group

### **Creative Task 2: Writing a Limerick**

With the help of the second creative task – writing a limerick – I wanted to acquaint the pupils with poetry writing at a stage where they are still relatively unbiased towards this genre and have not yet developed a dislike for reading and writing poetry as is often the case in higher classes. Because of the well-defined form and rhyme scheme that a limerick must have, every pupil should ideally have a sense of achievement – certainly after a little help by the teacher. The children received worksheets with a detailed explanation as to how to write a limerick. However, the task turned out to be a challenge for a number of pupils. While some musically and rhythmically talented children understood the rhythm pattern from the

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beginning, others had problems segmenting words into syllables and recognizing the stress of words. For instance, some stressed grammatical syllables like 'ing'. Some had problems finding words on a certain topic, which points to the limited vocabulary these pupils have at their active disposal. The task, although it was successful in this case, shows that it is crucial to provide scaffolding, such as a detailed worksheet, in order to account for the individual needs and competencies. Otherwise, some pupils might lose interest in the task and in literature in general. Here are two examples from pupils that were particularly successful in the poem task:

The kids ran in the forest at night  
Dave tripped over and they turned right  
The wolf came from left  
But it was not deft  
It walked right into the light.

A wolf in the forest at night.  
The moon is so cold and so bright.  
The wolf is hungry.  
But how can that be?  
The friends must switch on their light.

### **Creative Task 3: Designing a Film Poster**

The third creative task, designing a film poster, should do justice to the joy that many young learners find in drawing and in using visual elements. The poster should contain one or two catchy sentences to get people interested. It was up to the pupils to decide what the catchiest element of the book was, and what should be visualized or find expression in a slogan. The pupils presented their film posters to each other in small groups and opted for their favourite poster within that group. Six posters entered the class contest. The three winning posters were put up in class (see Figure 2), so that the artists received recognition for their work. According to Bland there is no intellectual progression from pictures to words, and the two should be intertwined in order to include creativity and emotions in the learning process

(2013, p. 5). With this task, the pupils also demonstrated that they could respond to the text, an important component of reading competence

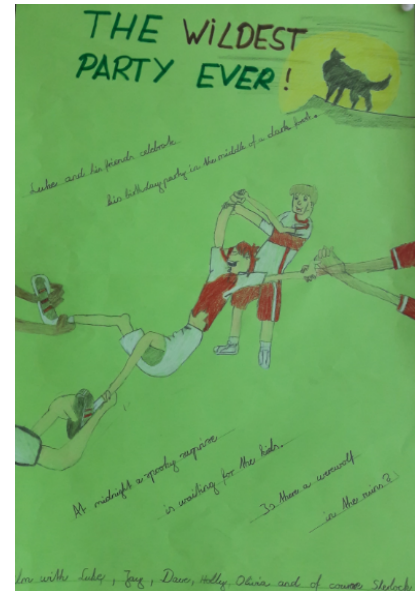


Figure 2: Film posters

### The Post-Reading Questionnaire

In order to evaluate the project and to deduce conclusions for teaching methodology as regards reading in early foreign language learning, I distributed a second questionnaire to the pupils at the end of the project. The results will be detailed in the following, starting with dealing with new vocabulary and whether the text is read aloud or silently.

It is a desideratum in ELT that pupils encounter words in context in class, can infer their meaning from the context or via explanations by the teacher, practice their correct pronunciation and use them in similar and then in new contexts. In my view, this order of encounter of use in the classroom should find its logical continuation in homework, where pupils should first re-read the text in the textbook and reactivate the pronunciation and meaning of the words, and then copy the vocabulary and memorize it. In my 5<sup>th</sup> grade, a number of pupils will first copy the vocabulary and only in a second step (if at all) read the text, and I argue it is only by trying to establish the other order via routines from the beginning of ELT that this can become a learning habit. When reading a longer story, where the reading experience should be more in the foreground than acquiring a certain number of words, it is all the more desirable that the pupils really start by reading the text and develop tolerance for unknown words, or tolerance of ambiguity, also given the fact that not all new words are obligatory vocabulary. Apparently, this seems to be the case for the majority of my 25 pupils, for 17 ticked the box in the questionnaire saying that they first read the text and only in a second step looked up the words at the back of the book. This is a surprisingly large number and suggests that the pupils really consumed the matter first and foremost as reading material and not as a vehicle to learn English words.

Just over half, 14 of 25, said that they read the text (almost) always aloud at home. Of the 10 who did not, many wrote that they liked reading silently more and that they could read faster that way. Of course, reading aloud is not the natural way of reading, and it is conspicuous that particularly the good readers in class do not like reading texts aloud at home. They immediately want to put the focus on the content of the story. This highlights the importance of choosing texts that are not just vehicles of words and grammar but, even if they are fabricated, can be consumed for their own sake. Volkmann (2010, p. ix) stresses that foreign language classes must never be void of meaning, content and culture, and no less so when we stress communicative competence.

Free or extensive reading (see Krashen, 2013) would mean that students read quietly and individually for the pleasure of reading, that they can choose the reading material, can stop reading uninteresting material and that there are no additional exercises on the reading to be done. This is clearly not the case in the book project presented here. Doing follow-up tasks on worksheets can in fact disturb the reading flow. Krashen reminds us in this context

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that 'more time devoted to reading instruction could mean less time devoted to actual reading' (2013, p. 22) and that too much formal instruction can be counterproductive to reading ability. In the concept presented here, however, reading instruction can mean, for instance, re-reading parts of the text in order to find out certain details that are asked for in questions on the text. It could mean looking for hints in the text that tell the reader about the feelings of the characters, and so forth. It also needs to be taken into consideration that many pupils struggle with pronunciation when they begin learning English. Therefore, providing a pronunciation model in class is certainly helpful.

Of the 25 pupils, an overwhelming majority of 21 said that the illustrations in the book had helped them to understand the plot. The results point to 'the significance of visual literacy in L2 education' (Bland 2013, p. 1), and visual literacy can pave the way to free and extensive reading. Even if the pictures are not an integral part of the text such as in graphic novels or picturebooks, they foster comprehension, heighten motivation and can counterbalance tendencies to give up when encountering difficult passages. Research shows that 'images help not only in contextualizing the topic of the text, but also allow students some autonomy in their predicting and interpreting meaning' (Bland, 2013, p. 5).

Some pupils noted drawbacks of the work with the book. Each comment, even if it might appear minor at first sight, hints at a point that could be improved. In general, the majority (15 of 25), liked the worksheets that went with the book. However, the main reason why some rated worksheets negatively was that they were perceived as being too difficult; for some, they disrupted the reading flow. Nine pupils preferred the worksheet associated with the creative task of turning part of chapter six into a play best, particularly because they could put themselves in the shoes of a character and better imagine the story. Seven pupils liked the worksheet which contained a reading text about adopting a wolf, and questions on the text, and one student wrote that she liked the fact that everything revolved around the same topic, the wolf. This demonstrates how motivating it can be to design sequences of lessons centering on one and the same topic rather than hopping from one topic to the next, dealing with each of them only superficially. We can infer that content is key from the very beginning of teaching foreign languages. Here again, dealing with literature, where language and content are inseparable, has the advantage of providing the acquisition of world knowledge and deeper understanding (Lütge, 2013, p. 219).



Of the two pupils that had rated their motivation with no more than 3 (out of 5) before reading the book, one wrote that the project had been fun, that the story was very exciting and that her motivation to read in English had increased. The other pupil had had doubts about too many unknown words but was also more positive about reading English books after the project. Teachers here have the chance to lay the groundwork for pupils to go through positive early experiences. Hedge (2000, p. 21) puts forward that positive early experiences can counteract the development of anxiety – which inhibits the learning process – because children gain self-confidence at a very early stage of their engagement with the foreign language.

Half of the pupils felt that they had improved their pronunciation, because of the large amount of reading during the experience. Some recognized an improvement because they felt it was now easier to pronounce words, because they could read more fluently or because they felt I corrected them less often. As to vocabulary, nine thought this the greatest gain, and several pupils wrote that they had benefited from learning the words in a bigger context. Seven saw the greatest progress in grammar, two in their reading comprehension, and one in his general language competence and feel for the language. One of the three pupils noting pronunciation problems in the pre-reading questionnaire indicated that now, after the book project, she liked reading aloud – a great success from a teacher's perspective.

An overwhelming majority of 21 pupils wrote that their motivation to read an English book had increased because of the project, and 18 pupils wrote that their motivation to learn English in general had risen. Not a single pupil judged the project negatively in sum or opposed it in hindsight, so all retain positive memories of the project. A great part of the increased motivation to learn English came from the fact that the work with the book was perceived as something that was not standard, even though the work was integrated into the regular English classes. The fact that a new piece of material, the small book, had to be brought to classes and that the coursebook could be left at home for several weeks marked the project units as cool and as something special. One pupil noted that not every fifth-grader reads a book in English, which points to the potential of a book project in the early stages of language learning.

'It is put forward (in many studies) that having read and understood a whole book in English considerably fosters the students' confidence and contributes to the development of

a reading habit' (Kolb, 2013, p. 35). I can totally confirm this for my project, as 17 of the 25 pupils said that they were proud that they had read a book in English in this early stage of learning the language. This demonstrates that learners of English should not only be exposed to functional communicative learning because they would 'miss out on the affirmative and self-esteem-promoting educational potential of children's literature, which is a vital apprenticeship to life and to becoming a reader' (Bland, 2013, p. 3).

### **Conclusion**

In an informal evaluation in class, I asked the pupils to tell me what they had, in sum, particularly liked about the project and what they had not liked so much. Students highly value the opportunity to give personal statements and should be given the time to do so because it not only fosters their ability to respond to the text itself and to evaluate their learning process but also their ability to express their response in appropriate words. The students particularly underlined the special feel of the project. The project also conveyed a sense of improvement more than traditional lessons do. This is due to the visible products, such as posters, plays and videos, which have arisen out of it. These products are the result of lessons including open teaching methods, which have followed more traditional phases of teaching. Thaler (2010, pp. 17-20) advocates 'balanced teaching' – a combination of close instruction and open work – suggesting there is no one best method for optimal learning but it is rather the balanced and flexible use and combination of methods that provide for an optimal learning environment.

As the questionnaires have shown, the pupils themselves saw their greatest profit in the domains of pronunciation and vocabulary and in a heightened motivation to invest even more time in learning English and in reading English books in the future. The project also saw an improvement in several other domains, such as reading comprehension, intercultural competence, creative, emotional and social skills. The improvement in the latter domains is more difficult to measure and is not in the focus of the young learners but is at least as important as the improvement in their language skills. It remains an unresolved issue how, in the context of standardization and competence orientation of ELT, they can be assessed and tested. One particularly difficult domain is emotional education (Lütge, 2013b, p. 195). I suggest that emotional education, at least in the early stages of language learning, should

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be kept out of assessment and marking. It can be measured indirectly in the form of high motivation, the strength of which can be elicited in questionnaires or observed in classroom interaction, but not assessed in the form of credit points.

The most important ingredient for any literature EFL classroom may be enthusiasm on the part of the reader, the most significant requirement on the part of the teacher may be to foster and keep this enthusiasm alive and let it grow and flourish. (Lütge, 2013a, p. 219)

In conclusion, the project successfully demonstrated the benefits of integrating a book into the learning process from the beginning of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. In this way, learner motivation can be increased. Moreover, affective, communicative, social and reflexive skills can be fostered as well as the more obvious language and reading skills. A literature shock can be prevented and creative and aesthetic skills be nurtured. Besides, content and language are always connected, and a meaningful context for English language learning is set. Process and product are given equal importance. In this case, the integration of the book project was facilitated by the fact that the book was carefully designed so as to replace certain chapters in the coursebook. I would like to suggest that teachers should be given more support like this by publishers, because using carefully chosen pieces of literature in the classroom, even if they are fabricated, can have a beneficial long-term effect on early foreign language learners. An essential point seems to be associating reading and literature with positive emotions and experiences from the very beginning. For some pupils in my class, the book project lessons were even the wildest lessons ever. As a teacher, what more can you ask?

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## Appendix

### 1. Pre-Reading Questionnaire

	ja ☺	nein ☹	weiß nicht ☹
Liest du regelmäßig ein (deutsches) Buch, z.B. am Wochenende, im Urlaub, nachmittags, abends ...? Wenn ja, warum:  Wenn nein, warum nicht:			
Liest du gerne auf Deutsch?			
Liest du gerne auf Englisch?			
Liest du englische Texte (z.B. unsere Texte im Green-Line-Buch) laut zuhause? Machst du das gerne?			

Denkst du, du hast Probleme bei der Aussprache?			
Freust du dich auf die Arbeit mit der Lektüre? Bist du motiviert, die Lektüre zu lesen? Auf einer Stufe von 1 (gar nicht) bis 5 (freue mich total): _____ Wenn ja / freue mich sehr, warum:  Wenn nein / freue mich nicht sehr, warum nicht:			
Willst du die Texte der Lektüre am liebsten zuerst gemeinsam in der Klasse lesen und dann zuhause?			
Willst du die Texte der Lektüre am liebsten zuerst alleine zuhause lesen und dann in der Klasse besprechen und nochmal lesen? Hast du andere Vorschläge? Schreibe sie auf:			
Denkst du, du wirst Probleme haben, die Lektüre zu lesen? Hast du bestimmte Bedenken (z.B. verstehe Geschichte nicht, ist zu viel Text, dauert lange, lese nicht gern, verstehe Vokabeln nicht usw.)? Schreibe sie auf:			
Welche Vorteile, denkst du, hat das Lektürelesen für dich ganz persönlich? Zähle sie auf:			
Welche Nachteile, denkst du, hat das Lektürelesen für dich ganz persönlich? Zähle sie eventuell auf:  Schreibe Befürchtungen auf, falls du welche hast:			
Würdest du, statt die Lektüre zu lesen, lieber ganz normal mit unserem Green-Line-Buch weiterarbeiten? Wenn ja, warum:  Wenn nein, warum nicht:			
Würdest du nach dem Lesen der Lektüre gerne eine Szene darstellen oder einen Teil der Geschichte nachspielen?			
Würdest du nach dem Lesen der Lektüre gerne den Inhalt in Musik umsetzen, also z.B. im Englisch- oder Musikunterricht mit der Lektüre weiterarbeiten?			
Würdest du nach dem Lesen der Lektüre gerne den Inhalt in Bewegung / Tanz zu Musik umsetzen (ohne zu sprechen)?			
Würdest du nach dem Lesen der Lektüre gerne einen Lesewettbewerb machen? Hast du andere Vorschläge für das Arbeiten mit der Lektüre, nachdem wir sie komplett gelesen haben? Schreibe sie auf:			

## 2. Post-Reading Questionnaire

	ja	nein	weiß nicht
	☺	☹	☺
Die Bilder im Buch haben mir beim Verständnis des Textes geholfen.			
Ich habe die Bilder im Buch nicht gebraucht, um den Text zu verstehen. Mir waren die Bilder egal.			
Ich habe die Vokabeln vorher angeschaut und dann den Text gelesen.			
Ich habe den Text gelesen und bei Bedarf hinten die Vokabeln nachgeschlagen.			
Ich habe die Geschichte oder die einzelnen Abschnitte zuhause mehrmals und oft gelesen.			
Ich habe (fast) immer laut gelesen. Wenn ja, warum:  Wenn nein, warum nicht:			
Schreibe weitere Kommentare zum Lektürelesen oder wie du es gemacht hast, hier auf:			
Die ausgeteilten Arbeitsblätter haben mir gut gefallen. Beispiele für Arbeitsblätter, die mir gut gefallen haben und Begründung, warum:  Beispiele für Arbeitsblätter, die mir nicht gefallen haben und Begründung, warum nicht:			
Hat dich das Lesen der Lektüre angespornt, z.B. in den Sommerferien mehr zu lesen? Wenn ja, warum:  Wenn nein, warum nicht:			
Denkst du, deine Aussprache hat sich verbessert, weil du durch das Lektürelesen nun viel gelesen hast? Wenn ja, woran merkst du das:  Wenn nein, warum nicht:			
In welchem Bereich hast du dich durch das Lektürelesen verbessert? Schreibe auf (z.B. Vokabeln leichter gelernt, Grammatik besser verstanden, Aussprache, lese jetzt gerne laut und vorher nicht usw.):			

<p>Ist deine Motivation, z.B. auch nächstes Schuljahr oder sogar alleine ein englisches Buch zu lesen, nach der Lektüre größer?</p> <p>Wenn ja, warum:</p> <p>Wenn nein, warum nicht:</p> <p>Schreibe weitere Anmerkungen zum Lesen der Lektüre hier auf:</p>			
<p>Ist deine Motivation, insgesamt Englisch zu lernen, nach der Lektüre größer?</p> <p>Wenn ja, warum:</p> <p>Wenn nein, warum nicht:</p>			
<p>Was hat dir insgesamt gut gefallen? Zähle auf:</p> <p>Was hat dir insgesamt nicht so sehr gefallen? Zähle auf:</p>			
<p>Bist du stolz, dass du schon in der 5. Klasse eine Lektüre auf Englisch gelesen hast?</p>			