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## Judith Kerr

14 June 1923 – 22 May 2019

In this issue, we celebrate the work of Judith Kerr, a British author/illustrator who died earlier this year at the age of 95. Many of her iconic books have been children's favourites around the world for generations and in 2016, she was awarded the Booktrust Lifetime Achievement Award and named Illustrator of the Year at the British Book Awards in 2019. We have therefore chosen to feature four Recommended Reads as a tribute, including her very first picturebook, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968), as well as one of the titles from her very popular 17-book *Mog* series.

Kerr also wrote semi-autobiographical children's novels based on her experiences as a child refugee, fleeing Germany during the 1930s with her father who was a theatre critic. Her *Out of the Hitler Time* trilogy includes one of the titles featured here, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971), recommended for what Hope (2017) calls its potential as 'a catalyst in the classroom' in enabling children to empathize with refugee experiences at a deep level.

To discover more about Kerr's fascinating life and work and its importance within the context of children's literature history, we recommend the biography *Judith Kerr's Creatures: A Celebration of her Life and Work* (2013), originally published to commemorate her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. You will find further ideas for using some of Kerr's picturebooks with young learners in the November 2019 film clips on the 'Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching' (PEPELT) website.

### References

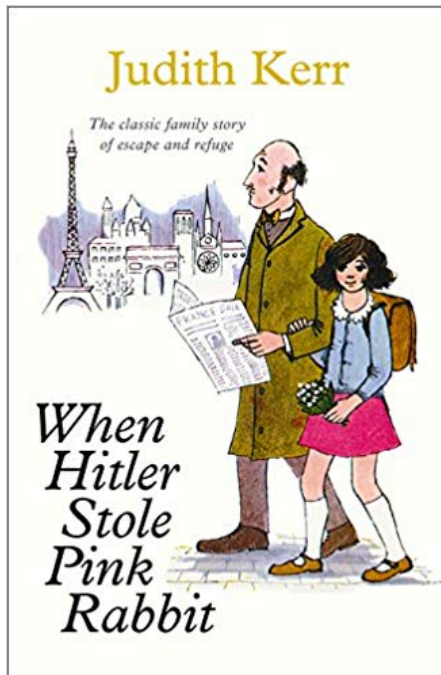
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***Kerr, Judith (1971). When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit.***

**London: Harper Collins Children's Books**

**Recommended by Sarah Howell**



Every now and then we encounter a book that stays with us forever. Judith Kerr's award-winning novel, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* is one of those books. I first read it as a child at school and have since read it many, many times with young readers in the English language classroom. Although perhaps better known among the ELT community for picturebooks, Kerr also achieved global recognition for her trilogy of novels for older children, including this unforgettable autobiographical account of her early childhood in Germany. This was at the time when Hitler first came to power and the years that followed as her family travelled across Europe to finally settle in England.

The realities of war are often terrifying for children; however, this is a beautiful and compassionate story about a family seeking refuge and trying to rebuild their lives. The story is told from 9-year-old Anna's perspective of her life in Germany, the danger of 'that man' in the red posters on the walls, then leaving on a train to seek safety in Switzerland, taking only what you can carry – good old Pink Rabbit or a lovely *new* toy? – and the need to move again to France and ultimately, to England.

Whilst set in a particular historical period, the story continues to have significant resonance for many children seeking refuge as a result of armed conflict around the world today. It can be used in the English language classroom context as an excellent vehicle for developing empathy while learning about the challenges of understanding different cultures, learning new languages and the numerous difficulties experienced when making new friends on arrival in a country. Anna becomes a stranger in strange lands and must adapt, as so many children who are refugees must, and despite her circumstances, she is

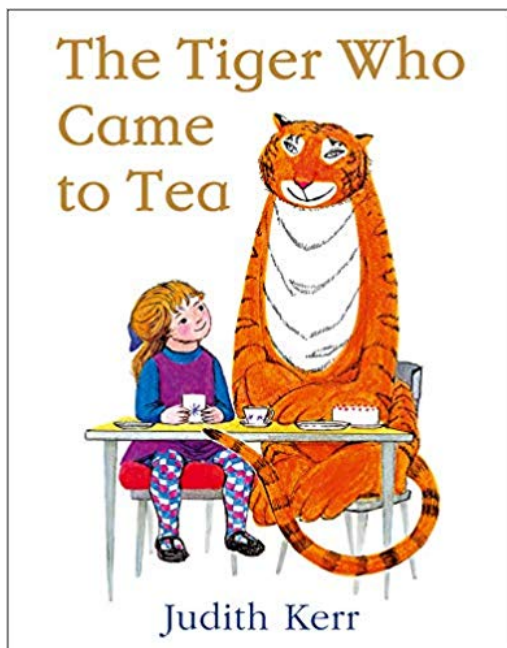
happy, resilient and heart-warmingly amusing. By sharing with children in the English language classroom the fact that the book is based on a true story, teachers can add depth to classroom discussions, encourage empathy and provide a source of inspiration. To quote Michael Morpurgo on the back cover, this is ‘the most life-enhancing book you could ever wish to read’.

**Sarah Howell** is an ELT author, teacher, teacher trainer and researcher. Her publications include the Oxford University Press primary English language courses *Treetops* (2006), *New Treetops* (2012) and *Rainbow Bridge* (2017). She is a member of TESOL Italy’s Executive Committee and of the Board of Directors for two NGOs involving young people. In 2010, she was awarded the *Premio Cartagine* for the *Protection of Children and Youth* category.

***Kerr, Judith (1968). The Tiger Who Came to Tea.***

**London: HarperCollins Children’s Books**

**Recommended by Helen Chapman**



‘Once there was a little girl called Sophie, and she was having tea with her mummy in the kitchen. Suddenly there was a ring at the door...’, so begins this internationally acclaimed picturebook. There is a tiger who politely asks to have tea with Sophie and her mother. He says he is very hungry – and he is. He does not just have one sandwich, but *all* the sandwiches on the plate. He does not have just one bun, but *all* of them. He drinks *all* the milk in the milk jug and *all* the tea in the teapot. Eventually, he eats all the food he can find and promptly leaves!

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Sophie's father comes home, hears about the shenanigans of their stripy guest and the family go out for supper. The next day, Sophie and her mother buy a large tin of Tiger Food, in case their feline visitor comes again.

Children will love this surreal tale of a wild animal turning up at home and this story of a naughty guest has considerable scope for the English language classroom. Kerr's illustrations reflect the style of typical British family homes in the 1960s contrasted with the image of the Tiger who stands out in this context. The visual stimulation sparked by the illustrations provides multiple learning opportunities and the frequent repetition enables children to actively participate during the retellings. This can be then extended to role playing using realia such as a tea set or food-related props.

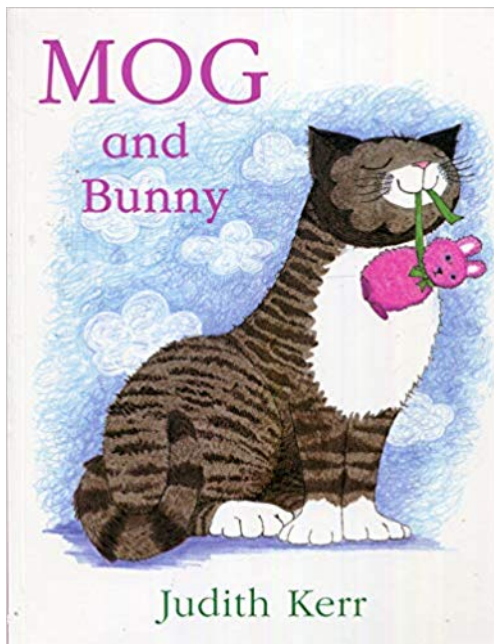
The naughtiness of the Tiger also lends itself to a discussion with older primary children about appropriate behaviour and encourages them to empathize with others' feelings. During book talk, the teacher can ask questions such as: *Is Tiger polite? How could Tiger be a better guest? Would you invite him for tea at your house? How do you think Sophie's mum feels?* Personalized response activities naturally follow after reading this story. Children could draw the Tiger visiting their own home and tell classmates about how their family would react. They could create a tea party table for the Tiger using plasticine with culinary delights for his huge appetite. They could also invent an alternative ending by creatively exploring what happens when the Tiger makes another visit, perhaps bringing along another animal friend.

**Helen Chapman** is a teacher, teacher trainer, young learner materials writer and blogger. She is currently based in Morocco and has taught in Spain, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Her interests include teaching young learners, exploring teacher beliefs and integrating learner reflection. She is also Joint Events Coordinator for the IATEFL Young Learners and Teenagers Special Interest Group.

***Kerr, Judith (1988). Mog and Bunny.***

**London: HarperCollins Children's Books**

**Recommended by Luciana Fernández**



Debbie and Nicky have a pet cat called Mog and they give her a toy bunny. Mog loves Bunny. She carries Bunny around and plays with her all day. Even when Mog has supper and drinks her milk, Bunny is there. At night when Mog sleeps in her basket, Bunny is there. And if Mog is busy, she always finds somewhere cozy for Bunny. But the children's parents are not very fond of Bunny. They shout, 'Yuk! What a horrible dirty thing!' and threaten to throw Bunny away. One day the family has supper in the garden. After supper, it starts to rain and they all run inside. Debbie and

Nicky ask, 'Where's Mog?' and mum says she is probably dry under a bush. The children are so worried about Mog that they decide to look for her. They finally find her but she refuses to go inside. 'What's the matter Mog?' they ask. And then they notice that Bunny is trapped under a grill. They take both Mog and Bunny inside and put Bunny on the radiator to dry. The following day, they tell mum about Mog staying in the rain with Bunny. 'You won't really throw Bunny in the dustbin, will you?' says Debbie. 'No, never. It would make Mog too sad' replies mum.

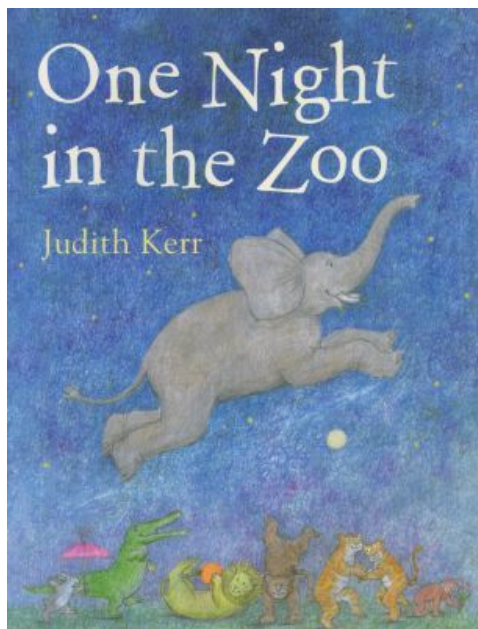
The illustrations of the characters' expressions clearly communicate the children's love for Mog, Mog's love for Bunny and how disgusted the parents are by the dirty toy. The simple language of the story also enables young readers to explore several themes of significance to children: looking after pets, friendship, loyalty and parental perspectives.

*Mog and Bunny* is an ideal picturebook for reading aloud in the classroom and can be used to engage children in a book walk, including making predictions before they listen to the story for the first time. It can be dramatized by children and they can retell it using pictures and props. This simple yet rich story also encourages critical thinking via *what*

*if...?* questions posed by the teacher during book talk. Finally, like any good picturebook depicting personal feelings, children will readily be able to make meaningful connections to their own lives outside the English language classroom.

**Luciana Fernández** has 25 years' experience in the education field as a teacher educator, teacher and head teacher. She is currently a literacy, ELT and teaching practice advisor and trains teachers and teacher educators throughout Latin America. She is also an academic consultant for National Geographic Learning and Trinity College London.

***Kerr, Judith (2010). One Night in the Zoo.***  
**London: HarperCollins Children's Books.**  
**Recommended by Laura McWilliams**



There can be no primary-aged child who has not, when being sent to bed, felt that they are missing out on the real fun elsewhere. Judith Kerr references this common fantasy in her wonderful rhyming picturebook by inviting children to observe 'One magical, moonlit night in the zoo'.

Young readers embark on a tour of the zoo starting with an elephant, who 'jumped in the air and flew', moving on to a crocodile and a kangaroo, three lions, four bears and so on, all with rather unusual, sometimes mischievous, night-time routines (don't try the 'squid and squidgeberry stew' whatever you do!). At each stage, the refrain 'But nobody knew' is repeated, conveying the sense of opening a window into the magic. Kerr secretly invites the young reader into this private animal world, foregrounded at the end by the closing words, '...except you!'.

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The final double-page spread presents a chronological summary showing each animal, which enables children to recap. The rhyming structure also scaffolds their recall during book talk. The rich, authentic language at first seems at odds with the simplistic counting progression, but this provides differentiated ways to access the story for different language learners. Children with less English can focus on numbers and animal names, while those with more extensive repertoires will grasp Kerr's more elaborate language, with the support of the illustrations.

*One Night in the Zoo* is a perfect springboard for creativity – children can add more animals to the zoo and will enjoy imagining the zany activities they do. There are several possible cross-curricular links for teachers, such as having children research the animals' natural habitats and their 'real' everyday behaviours as well as designing environmentally-friendly zoos. Ethical issues concerning the role of zoos in protecting endangered species could also be explored with older primary children. I highly recommend this gorgeously quirky picturebook. Teachers will relish discovering what mischief the animals get up to just as much as the young readers in their classrooms.

**Laura McWilliams** is a teacher and teacher trainer and currently works as Senior Teacher for British Council France, having previously held the same role in Egypt. Prior to becoming an English teacher, she worked in theatre and brings her love of drama and storytelling into the English language classroom.