Storytelling in Western Europe and Scandinavia
By Kristine Casper

Introduction

Many geographers argue that Europe is not one of the major continents of the planet but part of a larger continent of Eurasia. Europe actually is a large peninsula off the western portion of Asia. Separated from the rest of Asia by the Ural Mountains in Russia to the East, and bordered on the West by the North Sea and Atlantic Oceans, Europe developed a rich cultural legacy of its own granting this land mass the designation of one of the seven continents of the world. For the purposes of this article, we are focusing on the countries of Western Europe. They are Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Andorra, Switzerland, and Austria.

There are many similarities between these countries. Christianity in its various forms is the predominant religion in Western Europe setting them apart from some of the countries of Eastern Europe, explored in another chapter. Domestic life is very similar from country to country where the family is exclusively nuclear in type. Politically, the region is democratic and many of the independent countries are unifying themselves economically with the European Union allowing their people greater freedoms in work and tourism. Geographically, all but Andorra, Switzerland and Austria share a long coastline and enjoy the fishing and climate that bordering a large ocean brings to them. Moreover, recreationally, all of the countries count Football (American Soccer) as one of the most played and watched sports.

However, even with these similarities, the countries of Western Europe have maintained independent cultures that are as varied as the people who populate the area. This independence and tie to their cultural identity is found in the folklore celebrated by the people. As Pellowski recounts in The World of Storytelling, “there is a time in the evolution of every nation when it will seek to assert its specific identity by means of folklore.” (p.15) Many still wear the time-honored folk dresses for special celebrations and dances; they keep other traditions alive in their handicrafts and they tell stories of long ago. These stories in general were tales told by peasant farmers as a way to pass time socially and later to educate children. Pellowski credits the written collection of oral tales that the Brothers Grimm of Germany published in the early 1800s with being “the single most important group of folktales that affected storytelling for children. Their widespread appeal and their contemporaneous legitimacy helped educated European parents to believe it was important to continue telling such stories to children ...” (p.16) Besides the Brothers Grimm, this region calls some of the greatest storytellers and collectors of tales its own. Peter Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe from Norway, Hans Christian Anderson from Denmark, and Charles Perrault from France are some of the most well known scribes of legend and fairy tale that are found in Western European literature. European folk literature is unique in that it includes tales that combine the
natural with the supernatural. In these stories, or fairy tales, humans have to face evil, giant trolls or other mythical beings and other magical elements are included that help or hinder the unfortunate in prevailing against darker forces.

The tales of the various countries in Western Europe have their own literary fingerprint that makes these stories unique to their history. Finnish tales tend toward the mysterious and melancholy and they have a tradition of folk poetry that is found in its national epic, *Kalevala* published by Elias Lönnrot in the 19th century. Dutch stories, like *Katje, the Windmill Cat*, take place around water making them reflective of Holland’s low-lying proximity to the sea. In Belgium, many of their festivals such as the Cat Festival of Ypres are based on local myths that have been told from generation to generation with pride. One such legend is recounted in the picture book *Mannekin Pis* by Vladimir Radunsky and is included in the following annotated bibliography.

In the Scandinavian countries, the long, cold winters give storytelling incredible importance. These countries have a history of domination over each other creating political differences, but the people united in the struggle to survive in a harsh climate where the sun does not rise between November and February. It is perhaps because of this need to share stories of survival that the Danes have a long history of creating runic inscriptions. These soon spread to Norway and Sweden where their storytelling traditions date back to the days of Nordic gods and Viking sagas. The folktales of the Scandinavian countries include the mythology of the ancient religion of the region where the Norse myths recount tales of Odin, Thor and the importance of Valhalla. The rugged terrain and harsh climate of Northern Europe inspire a strong tradition of storytelling and includes the folklore of trolls, grotesque creatures who live in the mountains and other uninhabitable areas of Scandinavia. Farmers would listen to stories of ugly, clumsy trolls that turned to stone if caught by the light of the sun helping to explain some of the vast land and rock formations they encountered. Other stories told of men lost in the wilderness and imprisoned in the mountains. Still explored in books for children today are some of these storyline traditions. *Sea of Trolls* by Nancy Farmer, annotated below, is a recent novel for children that incorporate the ancient myth of the area with a Viking saga and *Samuel Blink and the Forbidden Forest* by Matt Haig introduces the hideous creatures that legend tells live in the Norwegian forest. The oldest surviving Scandinavian literature come from Iceland whose most famous literary heritage is the creation of the Viking sagas, told orally originally and then written down in the 13th century. Being an isolated island, these sagas were the way to describe the daily lives of the early settlers and inform others of the important political events of the time. Today, Iceland has a literacy rate of 99.9 percent and they are avid readers boasting that they have more bookstores per citizen than any other country in the world.

From long dark nights in the north to the rich sunshine of the south, the climate and geography of the area have defined the way people live and the stories they tell. The annotated bibliography below attempts to introduce a few
of the stories recently published for children that will give readers a glimpse into the traditions, stories, and histories of the countries of Western Europe.

RESOURCES


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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Sweden**

Gan, Delice.  *SWEDEN*.  *Cultures of the World* Series.  New York: Marshall Cavandish, 2003 (Second Ed.)  144p. illus.  $30.00.  ISBN 0-7614-1502-5.  Non-fiction.  Gr. 4-7 Consistent with others in this series, we see Sweden in all of its aspects; especially well done are the chapters that delve into the character of the Swedish people and their attitude toward life.  Foods, festivals, social interaction, trends and life style are well explained, as is the present increase in diversity of population and the changes it causes.  The ever-present sidebars are full of interesting facts such as the development of the country’s glass-blowing industry and the design of the unique style of their folk dress.  Maps, glossary, bibliographies, a time line and a comprehensive index add to its usefulness as an essential tool for reports.  **SWEDEN**

**Norway**

traditional Norwegian folktale. In the introduction, noted folklorist Naomi Lewis briefly explains how the craggy Norwegian landscape fed the imaginations of village listeners in believing that trolls exist and magic thrives. Dasent captures their love of storytelling in his translation, the first into English in 1859, which is the version used here, with minor changes made for readability. **NORWAY**

D'Aulaire, Ingri. *D'AULAIRES' BOOK OF TROLLS.* Illus. by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire. Garden City: Doubleday, 1972, 2006. 62p. illus. $19.95. ISBN: 1-59017-217-5. Folklore. Gr. K - 4 Norway has many kinds of trolls: mountain trolls, forest trolls, trolls with several heads to name a few. Female troll hags are known to carry their head under their arm, hulder people are related to trolls but not as ugly and the littlest ones are gnomes with amber eyes and cat's whiskers. With verve and wit, the authors/illustrators introduce young readers to this weird world of trolls through droll anecdotes and bold lithographs; some black and white, some richly colored. A treasured classic back in print. **NORWAY**

Farmer, Nancy. *THE SEA OF TROLLS.* Maps by Rick Britton. New York: Atheneum Books, 2004. 459p. $17.95. ISBN 0-689-86744-1. Fiction Gr. 5-8 The happy days of Jack's new apprenticeship to Bard/Druid Dragon Tongue abruptly end as Viking berserkers raid his Anglo-Saxon village and carry him off as a slave. His newly acquired talents, however, help him to survive the long journey to Norway, his subsequent dangerous quest to the land of the trolls and its many menacing creatures. There is no attempt made to sugarcoat the brutality of the plundering raiders; however, revealed as well is their kinder, more pleasant side. The inter-weaving of Nordic, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic lore and the broad array of the many colorful characters, make this a good choice for reading aloud. Information notes such as the description of the Viking raid on the monastery on Londisfarne, and a good bibliography is appended. **NORWAY**

Haig, Matt. *SAMUEL BLINK AND THE FORBIDDEN FOREST.* New York: Putnam, 2007. 316 pp. ill. $17.00. ISBN: 978-0-399-24739-2. Fiction. Gr. 5-8 Samuel Blink and his mute sister Martha are sent to live with their Norwegian Aunt Eda after their parents are tragically killed in a car accident. Aunt Eda has many rules for the children to follow including “Never – under any circumstances – go into the forest.” Uncle Henrik has already ventured into the forest never to return. Now Martha has disappeared as well. Samuel, with Aunt Eda’s Norwegian Elkhound Ibsen for company, follows Martha into the forest determined to save her from the many mysterious and dangerous creatures that live there. Haig has been staying with relatives in Norway since he was a small child and his fondness of the country and the folklore are evident as he weaves local legends into this fantasy adventure story that will keep readers eagerly awaiting Samuel and Martha’s safe return. **NORWAY**
Gr. 4-7  Some of the more interesting aspects included in this comprehensive coverage of the country, are the unique language situation, the information detailing the Sami (Lapp) people of the Arctic region and the fact that pagan influences are still prevalent today in the real belief that trolls exist. One fascinating sidebar tells how the offshore oillrigs are named after various Norse deities; another explains the custom of visiting one’s neighbors at 2 AM in summertime when the sun is still shining. The inclusion of helpful maps, good index, glossary, bibliographies and time line make this an excellent tool for research, while the approachable style and well-placed photos make this an interesting and rewarding read.  NORWAY

Gr. 4-7. Cruelly treated by his uncles, newly orphaned Peer befriends Hilde, whose warm and loving family live on a nearby farm high above the fiord. When trolls take the family’s two younger children away, Peer makes his way into the trolls' underground lair to rescue them, (and, as luck would have it picks up some of the treasure hidden there). Because of his kindness to them, other folklore creatures such as the water witch, Granny Green-teeth and his personal "nis" come to his aid. Set somewhere north of Bergen, on Norway’s rugged coast where faerie still survive, this makes for lively reading.  NORWAY

4-7 gr.  Three years later, Peer is caught up in the affairs of a local fisherman and his selkie wife. Trolls are seeking to steel the couple’s infant. Peer ultimately saves all of his friends, frees himself from the evil uncles and discovers his purpose in life. The author, who grew up in Yorkshire, UK, has created sympathetic characters and danger-fraught adventures with child appeal.  NORWAY (combine with Troll Fell)

Gr 1-5.  With woodcut illustrations on each page, this contains many of the tales collected by the well-known folklorists, Peter Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe as well as some that are lesser known. The introduction directed to adults; tells just what trolls are and why children should be made aware of them. There is further introductory matter at the beginning of each tale, and extensive source material and bibliography in the appendix. Both the author and the illustrator make a case for accepting the inherent violence in troll lore; knowing that American parents may hesitate in using with children.  NORWAY
Gr. K-2 Birkebeiners, were poor, brave warriors who were loyal to the King in this recounting of a true event in Norwegian history in 1206. The Baglers, rich nobles who opposed the deceased King were looking for his infant son, Prince Haakon so they could take over the throne. A group of Birkebeiners skied across country, through mountains and severe snowstorms to bring year old Prince Haakon to safety in Nidaros. The story of Prince Haakon’s rescue, who later did become King of Norway bringing peace and unity to his country, is still remembered today in both Norway and in America where cross-country ski races called the Birkebeiners are held. In Norway, participants ski part of the harrowing journey with an eight-pound sack on their back the way the Birkebeiners carried Prince Haakon out of danger. Most of the text of the story is framed in classic Scandinavian designs by Caldecott medalist, Mary Azarian’s (Snowflake Bentley) woodcut illustrations adding historical and cultural context to this amazing story.

Gr. 3-5 Based on a true story that happened during the Nazi occupation of Norway in 1940, Peter and his friends are given the chance to save thirteen tons of Norwegian gold bullion from the Germans. Thirty-eight students of the Riswyk School use their sleds to bring the gold from its hiding place nearly thirty-five miles to the fjord where Uncle Victor’s boat is ready to take it to safety in the United States. Making multiple trips heavy with bullion, the children evade soldiers, warn adults of spies in the area, and Peter is captured by German soldiers when he distracts them from finding the last of the gold Lovisa had hidden under a snowman. First published in 1942 this new edition maintains the illustrations from the original and gives readers a glimpse into what it was like for a peaceful nation to be occupied by the enemy in the middle of war.

**DENMARK**

Gr. 3-8 This fine new edition is a happy addition to the many that have come to us over so many years. H.C. Andersen is Denmark’s greatest treasure and icon, the focus of the appreciative introduction by Lewis, and revealed afresh in the thirteen gems selected for this work. Their individual introductions by Lewis too, point out their universal charm and creative genius. Joel Stewarts’
digitally created full page and scattered small illustrations bring a modern sophistication to these beloved classics. **DENMARK**


...........**DENMARK; In the Children's Own Words.** Our Lives, Our World series. Compiled and edited by Susie Brooks. Trans. by Kristian Buus. North Mankato, Minn.: Smart Apple Media, 2006. 32p. Illus. ISBN 1-59389-228-4. Non-fiction. Preschool - Gr. 2 Originally, an educational film made in Denmark and featuring four young people and their family unit, we see a day in each of their lives as they describe it. Two younger (preschoolers) and two older (school age); each from a different region; their homes and schools are revealed in a straightforward, refreshing style as captions for the selected frames of the film. These are child’s eye views of the highpoints and holidays that run through the year, and being so, should have broad child appeal. A glossary and index is included. **DENMARK**

Docalavich, Heather. **DENMARK, The European Union: Political, Social and Economic Cooperation series.** Philadelphia: Mason Crest, 2006. 88p. illus. ISBN 1-4222-0043-4. Non-fiction. Gr. 3-5 As indicated by its lengthy series subtitle, much of the content of this basic research tool deals with Denmark’s political and economic status. History and life style information however, has not been neglected. The style and tone is straightforward; placing glossary items in bold print. Adequate colored photographs are appropriate to the text and back matter includes report suggestions, a chronology, the aforementioned glossary, and sources of additional print and non-print information. Unfortunately, the index is sketchy. **DENMARK**

Hesse, Karen. **THE YOUNG HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.** Illus. by Erik Blegvad. New York: Scholastic Press, 2005. 48p. $16.99 ISBN 0-439-67990-7. Biography. Gr. K-3 In a series of short chapters named with the titles of his own stories, the early life of this great Dane is recreated for young readers. From his birth, through the death of his beloved father, until the day he leaves the tiny village of Odense for greater things, we see young Hans developing as a storyteller. With the use of appropriate language for the targeted independent readers, and the richly colored pen and ink watercolors by the renowned Danish illustrator on each page, H.C. Andersen comes alive. An afterword
summing up the storyteller's life and a useful bibliography are included.

**DENMARK**


4-7 gr. Originally published in 1995, this series continues to offer a full and comprehensive overview of the countries it covers. Readers are informed in detail of all aspects of life: the history, geography, government and economy, with its strongest emphasis on the life of its people at work and at play. Their food, celebrations, family life, and general attitude toward life are given full treatment. Copious sidebars, numerous colored photos, a timeline, maps, bibliography and a detailed index enhance the work. A clear, informative style contributes to the book's success. **DENMARK**

Other countries well represented by the Cultures of the World Series are Finland, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Switzerland.


Gr. 5-8 Based on her father’s stories of the German occupation of Denmark during World War II, Toksvig tells one families struggle to do the right thing at a time of war. Bamse, the ten-year-old son of a famous Danish actress is asleep on stage on King Henry’s throne after a stage party when they get word that the Germans now occupy Denmark. His father wants his family to cooperate with the Germans. Orlando, Bamse’s older brother wants the Danish resistance to fight the Germans outright the way the resistance in Norway was doing at the time. Caught between following his father’s instructions to stay out of it and wanting to take an active role in the resistance like his older brother, is Bamse. Gradually, as the Germans strip more and more freedoms from the Danish, the Skovlund family comes together, takes a stand to shelter Jews and helps to get them to safety. Chapter headlines, titled as the acts and scenes of a play, chronicle the occupation from 1940 to 1943 and the well-drawn characters show depth and the confusion they felt as they struggle to lead normal lives during this dangerous time. An author’s note explaining her family’s role in the occupation and more historical information follow this fast paced and dramatic story of war and survival. **DENMARK**


k-3 gr. The beloved storyteller’s life is briefly retold in simple language, starting "Once upon a time a baby was born..." and ending..."his fairy tales went on to be printed in dozens of languages...They will live happily ever after." Quoted throughout are interesting passages from these tales that appear in the borders of each page, greatly enriching the reading experience. Each page is illustrated in pale pastels that capture the old-fashioned tone of the text. **DENMARK**
**Finland - Lapland**


K – 3. This book spends a day with seven-year-old Iina-Maria and her family who live in a village in Lapland, the northern most region in Scandinavia. We join Iina-Maria as she attends school and plays a game of catch the reindeer with friends. After school, she visits her grandmother for sewing lessons using reindeer leather carrying on the Sami tradition. Later, Iina-Maria’s family journeys to their weekend home in the Arctic wilderness where they take a seaplane because there are no roads. Following a dinner of boiled reindeer meat, potatoes and rye bread, Iina-Maria goes fishing with her father, after which she cleans the whitefish they catch for tomorrow’s lunch. A Finnish design that is suggestive of Sami traditional dress border the crisp, color photos that accompany each event in Iina-Maria’s day giving the reader a personal view of everyday life in the Arctic Circle. An author’s note explaining the geographic region and brief history of Lapland, short bibliography and index is included as is a brief list of Sami and Finnish words and phrases, that would be more useful if a pronunciation guide was included, add context.

**FINLAND**


Gr. 5-8 Eleni, a Finnish girl in the late 1780’s works for Lady Sigrid, a wealthy Swedish woman during the time of Sweden’s rule over Finland. After her mother dies, her fugitive father whisks her away aboard his ship leaving Finland behind. A violent shipwreck ensues and Eleni finds herself among strangers on an island off the coast of Scotland. This historical novel includes elements of fantasy as the author intersperses Finnish folklore throughout. Eleni, born at twilight has the power to speak with the mystical sprites and fairies of Finnish lore helping her to keep connected to her lost family and homeland. An author’s note giving historical context and a pronunciation guide to Swedish, Finnish, and Scottish words is included. This is a tale of adventure that will delight historical fiction readers and fantasy fans alike.

**FINLAND**

**Iceland**


Gr. K - 2 Working with her father and others, Drifa gathers 208 eider duck eggs from their nests, and helps them to hatch and grow. As she monitors their development over one summer, she is careful not to treat them as pets; the goal of this project, sponsored by the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment, is to return the ducklings to the wild. The author-photographer
records their success as all but seven birds are returned to the colony on Hvallatur Island. Useful information on the eider duck given on the last page should help teachers and other adults use this book with younger readers.

ICELAND

Gr. K - 2 Fishing is an important part of Icelandic economy, but also a popular leisure activity as is shown here. On a visit to both grandfathers who live in the fishing village of Stykkisholmur, young Friork first tries his luck casting for cod with the first. Later, the second grandfather takes him lump fishing which is done by pulling marked nets and taking only the females for their roe. Due to the clarity of the photos and text, the reader feels he is right there with Friork, enjoying the adventure. Details on both types of fish are included on the final page fact sheet. ICELAND

Gr. K-3 When a small Icelandic village has trouble getting eggs; the ladies go to the city to buy some chickens. These chickens follow the ladies everywhere – to pick blueberries, attend birthday parties, they even join the ladies in singing to the sheep. Soon, they act too much like ladies and not enough like chickens and they forget to lay eggs. These resourceful village women come up with an imaginative way to get the chickens to lay eggs again in this humorous and well-paced story. Illustrator Gunnella subtly introduces the culture and traditions of her homeland in her folk art inspired oil paintings that complement this charming story. ICELAND

p-2 gr. It is the first year for Anna’s colt, Prince to summer with the herd and Anna is concerned. She has raised him from a foal and now fears for his safety in the mountains. He does come close to death, but at the end of the summer is one with the herd. Lush watercolor illustrations in earth tones capture Iceland’s rugged landscape even though author and artist are German and the book was first published in Switzerland. ICELAND

Preschool – Gr. 2 In this second story, Prince is one year older and ready to be broken to a halter. While working with him, the noise of a tractor frightens him away. Now Anna must work to reestablish his trust. ICELAND
Ruepp, Krista. ANNA’S PRINCE. (Third in series). New York: North-South Books, 2006. Unpaged. Illus. $15.95. ISBN 0-7358-2081-3. Picture book. Preschool – Gr. 2 It is the following spring, and four-year-old Prince is ready to be broken to ride. With help from her father, Anna learns to saddle and bridle her pony. After a few hesitations, they are off. Beautiful watercolor illustrations give the flavor of Iceland adding an exotic touch to an appealing series for horse-loving young girls. ICELAND

Wilcox, Jonathan. ICELAND. Cultures of the World Series. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2007(2nd ed.). 144p. illus. $30.00. ISBN 13:978-0-7614-2074-3. Non-fiction. 4-7 gr. This valuable series with its in-depth coverage of each country is also known for it is sidebars of interesting facts. Unique to Iceland, for example, its small size and population count, encourages everyone to know everyone. This suggests that everyone could be potentially famous, and helping one another is easier. Another sidebar tells of the fifth gait Icelandic ponies possess. The expected treatment covers all aspects of life in this fascinating country, including their saga literature and pure Viking language. Back matter includes a comprehensive index, several maps, a time line, glossary and bibliography of print and non-print information. ICELAND

Germany

Cech, John. THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER. Retold from the Brother’s Grimm by John Cech. Illustrated by Kirill Chelushkin. New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 2007. 22 pp. $14.95. ISBN: 1-4024-3067-5 Folktale Gr. K – 3 A poor shoemaker and his wife receive help from two eerie looking elves in this retelling of the Grimm’s popular tale. After the elves help improve the shoemaker’s business, he and his wife wait up one night to catch a glimpse of their benefactors. They choose to repay the elves kindness by making them clothes and shoes of their own. The pen and ink illustrations are dark and creepy, in direct contrast with the lighthearted and traditional text that remains true to the Grimm’s story, however they do manage to maintain an old-fashioned flair. Cech includes a well-detailed note about the history of the story, background information about the Grimm Brothers themselves and the importance of fairy tales in children’s lives that make this edition an interesting introduction to this popular tale. GERMANY

until Kriss Kringle comes by and lets them into the warm house. After the spiders spin webs on the tree, Kringle himself spins some holiday magic as he turns the webs into silver and gold decorations. Originally published in 1982, this revised and newly illustrated edition has an old-fashioned quality that suits this legend well. An author’s note explaining the legend is included.

**GERMANY**


Gr. K – 3 Doris Orgel retells six animal tales from her favorite copy of the Brothers Grimm collection that she adored as a child. In an author’s note, Orgel explains that she translated these tales from the original German text taking care to stay true to the spirit the Grimm Brothers intended but freshened the text up to appeal to today’s young readers. Orgel concludes each tale with an aside of additional information about the retelling of that particular story such as in The Hare and the Hedgehog. In this retelling, the female hedgehog outwits the cocky hare whereas in the original stories, Orgel explains, the male hedgehog is the mastermind behind tricking the hare. In another closing comment to The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids, Orgel explains that in the Brother’s Grimm time, this tale was told as a warning to young children not to allow strangers to enter their home. Realistic color paintings of the animals accompany each story and background information about how the Grimm Brothers collected their tales is included. **GERMANY**

**Austria**


Gr. K-3 Composer Mozart’s score is blank. Unable to create a new piano concerto in time for Saturday evening’s main event, Mozart’s starling, Miss Bimms starts to sing. Excited by this inspiration, Mozart inadvertently lets the bird out of its cage and it flies out into Vienna. The musician runs after her into the Kohlmarkt, one of the cities busiest streets. Mozart hears the sounds of the city from the bass laugh of the baker to the rattle of the carriage wheels. As he travels through the city, Mozart cannot find his beloved bird, but his once blank score is filling up with musical notes and he and his orchestra are ready for the big night. Miss Bimms hears the Burgtheater fill up with the melody inspired by her hungry chirps and finally finds her way home to join in the song. The gouache, acrylic, and colored pencils are soft and lend an old-fashioned appeal as the musical staff fills up with Mozart’s song. An author’s note explains the inspiration for this story and that Mozart really did have a pet starling. A charming introduction to one of the worlds’ most renowned composers. **AUSTRIA**
Gr. 5-9 Originally published in 1978 and reissued with a new afterword by the author in 2005, this compelling drama about two best friends living in Austria in 1938 is based on Orgel’s childhood. Liesel, the daughter of a Nazi SS officer and Inge, who is Jewish have shared everything since they started going to school together. Now with Hitler’s influence stronger than ever in Vienna, their continued friendship can put both of their families in danger. Through Inge’s diary entries and Liesel’s letters to Inge, the reader is allowed an inside look at what it was like to be thirteen in Nazi occupied Vienna. An ALA Notable Book and recipient of the Sydney Taylor Award and the Golden Kite Award.

**AUSTRIA**

Gr. K – 3 Katje, a tricolor cat who lives with Nico, a miller in a small Dutch town, works as hard at chasing mice in the windmill as the miller does grinding the flour. When Nico marries, his new wife is not fond of the white flour paw prints Katje tracks in to their plain house and shoos the cat away from the baby’s cradle. Feeling unwanted, Katje moves herself into the windmill full time sneaking into the house at night to rock baby Anneke to sleep. When a vicious storm causes the dyke to break, Katje rushes home to protect Anneke. As the cradle floats away, Katje jumps aboard and rocking it against the current of the flood to keep it from capsizing, she saves little Anneke. Pale blue Dutch delft tiles add authentic details and border the warm, watercolor pencil illustrations and text. An author’s note tells of the Elizabeth’s Day Flood that occurred in 1421 that is the basis of this tale. *NETHERLANDS*

Belgium

K-3 Inspired by the bronze statue in Brussels of the same name, this story embellishes one of the legends of the statue that an infant boy peed on troops below his tree-hanging basket. Beginning a long time ago, Rudunsky, tells the story of an young boy who lived in a beautiful city with his mother and father until the war came. Then the city became ugly, the boy lost his parents and became scared. However, before he could go looking for his mother and father, he really had to pee, which he does onto the warring soldiers from atop a building. The combatants are so shocked by the behavior that they begin laughing together ending the war. The childlike illustrations darken as the war progresses and the soldiers look like scary green men. The bright flowers, happy faces, and white backgrounds return as the young boy is reunited with his family and peace reigns. The epilogue explains that Manneken Pis (peeing
Belgium

France

Gr. 3-6 A young American girl in 1893, Charlotte and her family have the opportunity to live in Paris for six months to visit a Mary Cassatt art exhibition. Charlotte meets many people and experiences French cuisine as she tours the various famous sites in France. Charlotte chronicles her adventures in her scrapbook where she keeps photographs of famous French paintings and postcards of the historic buildings she visits introducing the reader to the city and the artists of the time. Biographical information of fourteen artists mentioned in the lively text is appended at the end as well as an authors note explaining that the journal is based on historical fact.

Switzerland

Grades 1-4
Two brothers, Morris and Boris look like twins right down to the hump on their back but that is where the similarity ends in this Swiss folktale. While Morris is helpful and kind to the animals and his land, Boris beats his cows and never gives the animals enough to eat. When fall comes, Morris takes a trip up the mountain to fix the roof of their hut before winter sets in. Appreciating all that the forest and land have to offer along the way, Morris is kind to the ants and gently untangles the thorny bushes along the path. He is rewarded for his kindness with a positive transformation from the forest witch. Jealous of his brother’s good fortune, Boris makes the same trip through a snowstorm but he continues his selfish ways and he too is rewarded for his unkind behavior toward the forest creatures, as he is left looking more wretched than before. The pen and ink drawings alternate between black and white and full color spreads with a lot of attention to the detail of the forest and creatures. A brief note explains that the author found this 150-year-old originally oral tale in a book of local folklore in the Canton Ticino region of southern Switzerland.

Andorra
PAPERCUTTINGS

Papercutting is the traditional art of creating beautiful designs in paper and is found in many cultures of the world. In Switzerland and Germany this art form has a unique style and is called Scherenschnitte, or “scissors cut”. Nature scenes and hearts were often depicted in these cuts. Denmark’s, Hans Christian Andersen used to tell stories to children while cutting paper designs that related to his story. Photographs of his elaborate paper cuts and more information about his artistic form of storytelling are discussed in *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen* listed in the annotated bibliography of this chapter. A brief history of Scherenschnitte can be found at the Crafts Across America site at [www.crafts-america.com/profile/papercut.html](http://www.crafts-america.com/profile/papercut.html)

Introduce this art form to children by creating paper cut snowflakes or heart shaped designs during winter story times.

**Snowflakes -**

**Materials –**

- Square piece of white paper
- Scissors

**Directions –**

Use a square piece of paper. Tissue paper works well for younger children who may not have the hand strength to cut the many folds of paper. The heavier the paper you use, the more difficult it will be to cut, but your snowflake will be stronger and more durable.

Fold square in half making a triangle
Fold triangle in half again

Fold A half way to B
And fold B half way over to A so that the triangle has 2 pointy legs.

Cut off the pointy legs so you have a tall thin triangle.

Cut this triangle to make the snowflake designs.

Cut out various shapes along both sides of the triangle to create snowflake design. Make sure to leave some paper between A and B to hold snowflake together.

A is the center of the paper – if you cut point A off you will have a whole in the middle of the snowflake. If you cut point B the tips of your snowflake will have more points.

Experiment with different cuts to create various snowflake designs.
Hearts –

http://www.elca.org/countrypackets/germany/crafts.html

Materials -
- Square piece of red paper. Origami paper may be easier to cut than construction paper.
- White paper for background
- Scissors
- Pencil to draw pattern to cut out

Directions –

Fold square piece of red paper in half

Draw half a heart using up as much paper as desirable

Starting with the fold, draw a simple design inside the half of heart to cut out. Another half heart or tulip flower works well. Draw from the fold toward the center of the half heart.

Cut out the half heart along line

Cut out design

Open up and mount on white paper

Experiment with various shapes

Makes a great Valentine!
WOVEN PAPER BASKETS


Traditionally used in Scandinavian countries including Norway, Sweden, and Denmark as Christmas tree decorations filled with treats. Families waited until after Christmas when they took the tree down to eat the treats. These baskets make great decorations or gift bags for Valentine’s Day events. They could also be used to celebrate May Day by putting flowers in the basket and then hang on a friend’s door.

This project will be easier for children 10 and up. Younger children will need their parents help.

Materials –

Two pieces of paper, each a different color
Pencil
Scissors

Directions –

First, cut two paper rectangles from colored construction paper and round off the ends. The exact dimensions of the rectangles are not important as long as the two pieces are the same size. You may want to start with larger pieces while learning.

Fold the strips in half and cut 2-3 slits through the folds. Do not cut all the way to the edge.

Weaving
You will be weaving "through and around", as opposed to the "over and under" in traditional weaving.

Begin by weaving strip 1 through strip A, around strip B (strip B goes through
strip 1), through slit C and around strip D (strip D goes through strip 1) Push this row to the back, where the slits end.

Continue the weaving with strip A. A is already around slit 1, put through strip 2, around strip 3 through strip 4. Until this row is finished.

Strip 2 is already around strip A, put through strip B, around strip C and through Strip D.

Strip B is already through strip 1 and around strip 2, put through strip 3, around strip 4.

Strip 3 is already through Strip A, around strip B, put through strip C and around strip D.

Strip C is already around strip 1 and through strip 2, around strip 3, put through strip 4.

Strip 4 is already around strip A, through strip B, around strip C, put through strip D.

Continue until all the rows are finished if you used larger paper.
If done correctly, pattern will be the same on the back as it is on the front and the basket will open so small treats may be placed inside.

To make an optional handle on your basket cut a strip of matching paper and staple (glue) the ends to the front and back of your basket.

**TABLE TOP MAY POLE**

Maypole Dances are traditional folk dances that celebrate the summer solstice and are popular in the Scandinavian countries. Dancers, many wearing the traditional folk costumes of their country, circle dance around a pole that has been decorated with brightly colored ribbons and flowers. Sometimes, a garland of flowers is placed at the top of the pole and slides down as the ribbons unravel during the dance. These traditional celebrations are also found in Germany, Austria and France making it a cultural event that covers most of Western Europe. Celebrate the warm weather by making a table top May Pole.

Materials –
- Paper towel role or for larger May Poles, wrapping paper role
- Small piece of cardboard for stand
- Paint
- Ribbon or crepe paper streamers
- Tape or glue

Paint the paper towel roll a bright color of your choice and set it aside to dry.

Tape or glue one end of the paper towel role to a piece of cardboard so it stands up straight.

Wrap ribbon around role spiraling from top to bottom. Fasten inside the top of the role with tape.

Cut lengths of ribbon or crepe paper streamer that will hang loose on the outside of the pole. Fasten with tape inside the top of the role. These are the ribbons dancers hold on to as they dance around the pole in their traditional folk dresses.

http://www.scandinavica.com/culture/tradition/midsummer.htm

http://khound.com/topics/may_day.htm - May Day crafts