Johanna Spyri

About the author
Johanna Spyri was born in 1827 in Hirzel, a village in Switzerland. She was the fourth of six children. Her father was a doctor and her mother looked after sick people. The family home overlooked Lake Zurich and beyond it were the high Alpine mountains. Johanna spent the first 25 years of her life in this beautiful place. Then, she moved to Zurich, where she often missed the countryside and her home, a feeling that is reflected in her writing.

At 43, she began to write stories based on the people and places of her childhood and in 1871 her first book *A Leaf on Vrony’s Grave* appeared anonymously. She wrote many stories for adults and children, but those about Heidi are undoubtedly the most popular. The first *Heidi* story appeared in 1880 under a pen name and was an immediate success. From 1881, with the publication of a second part of *Heidi*, the author began to use her own name. She died in Zurich in 1901.

Summary
Heidi lives in a village in Switzerland. When she is only a year old, her parents die and she is left with her aunt Dete. When Dete moves to Frankfurt, Heidi must live with her bad-tempered grandfather in the mountains. Heidi is a sweet-tempered child and Grandfather soon comes to love her. She makes friends with a boy called Peter and she loves going up the mountain with him and his goats.

One day, Dete takes Heidi away to Frankfurt to live with a rich family and their invalid daughter, Clara. Heidi makes friends with her and learns to read, but she is homesick. When Clara’s father finds out, he sends her back home. Soon Clara goes to visit. Mountain life is good for Clara and eventually she learns to walk.

Chapters 1–3: An old man lives in a little wooden house on the Alm, the highest mountain near the village of Dorfli in Switzerland. He goes away and returns with his only son, Tobias, who dies in a building accident leaving his wife and a one-year-old girl, Heidi. Heidi’s mother dies soon afterwards, so her sister, Dete, takes the child. When Heidi is six, Dete gets a job in Frankfurt so she takes Heidi to live with her grandfather, who does not want her but has no choice. Heidi and her grandfather eat melted cheese and drink some milk. Heidi likes it there, even the sound of the wind sounds nice. In the evening, she meets Grandfather’s goats, Brownie and Snowy, brought down the mountain by eleven-year-old Goat-Peter. The next day, Heidi goes up the mountain with Peter and the goats. She runs around and has a great time. When the sun sets, she marvels at the red sky, which she believes to be a fire.

Chapters 4–6: Grandfather takes Heidi to visit Peter’s grandmother. She is blind and regrets the fact that Peter can’t read to her from her old song book. She is also afraid because the house is old and it might fall down. Heidi goes to visit her every fine day, and her grandfather goes sometimes to repair the house. Two years pass and Dete returns to take Heidi to the house of a rich family in Frankfurt, whose twelve-year-old invalid daughter, Clara, needs company. Dete blames Grandfather for not sending Heidi to school and ignores his claim that she is happy with him. When they arrive in Frankfurt, Miss Rohmer, the housekeeper, finds Heidi unsuitable as she has an improper name, cannot read and is too young. Clara, however, likes Heidi and laughs at her remarks.

Chapters 7–9: The next day Heidi and Clara have lessons in the morning. Later, Heidi goes for a walk looking for grass and mountains but finds none, even when looking from the top of the church. She gets some kittens for Clara, but Miss Rohmer does not want them in the house. Clara’s father, Mr Seemann, returns and finds a happy Clara but an angry Miss Rohmer. After listening to both, he decides Heidi will stay. When his mother arrives, she promises Heidi a book with beautiful pictures if she learns to read. She sees Heidi is unhappy but the girl will not say why because everyone is nice to her there. She tells her to talk to God about her problems and the child prays to go back home. Heidi finally learns to read.

Chapters 10–12: Clara’s grandmother leaves and God does not answer Heidi’s prayers. Heidi reads stories to Clara but is troubled by a sad tale and worries about the people at home. She begins to feel tired and weak from
Heidi

not eating. One day, a servant sees something white and tells Miss Rohmer there is a ghost in the house. She writes a letter to Clara's father, who comes quickly. He watches one night and finds out it is Heidi walking in her sleep in her white nightdress. He sees the child is unhappy and decides to send her home. A manservant takes Heidi home because Dete can't leave the city. On her way up the mountain, Heidi visits Peter's grandmother. Then she gives Grandfather a letter and some money from Mr Seemann.

Chapters 13–15: Heidi wants to help Peter's grandmother, so she reads to her and offers to buy white bread and a bed for her. She talks to Grandfather about God. He is reluctant to pray but the next Sunday they go to church. She also teaches Peter to read. Then, Clara visits Heidi and loves the place. Peter is jealous and pushes Clara's empty wheelchair down the mountain. Grandfather carries Clara up to see the goats and flowers and leaves to look for the chair. Clara starts walking. Clara's father and grandmother visit and they are very happy to see Clara walk. Peter mistakes Mr Seeman for a policeman and confesses about the wheelchair. Mr Seeman isn't angry, however, and wants to help those who helped his daughter. Grandfather asks Mr Seemann to look after Heidi when he dies, and he promises to do so.

Background and themes

A happy childhood: In Heidi, the author drew upon the memories of her own happy childhood in the Swiss Alps, a beautiful place with colourful flowers, animals and fantastic scenery. Heidi's life in the mountains is untroubled by the pressures of school work and modern city life, so she can play with the goats and her friend, Peter. Heidi is an enchanting character. Everybody in the story finds her sweet and funny and, with the exception of Miss Rohmer, they all love her dearly. In some ways, the world of Heidi might seem to be rather unreal. It lacks the darker aspects of life shown on today's television and in films. It does not deal with the problems which concern modern children. However, Heidi offers us an inspirational role model. Although she is an orphan, she is a happy child with a great deal of inner strength. The message is that what happens is for the best and that good can come from most situations.

Helping others: Heidi loves helping other people and, although she is small, she is able to change people's lives. She helps her grandfather to be a nicer person. She worries about Peter's grandmother and puts her needs before her own and she makes the lonely Clara much happier, eventually helping her to walk again.

Country versus city: The book emphasises an important contrast between the city and the country. In the countryside, with its fresh mountain air and green grass, Heidi is happy and healthy. But in the city, she is miserable and she becomes ill. Clara is sick in the city but recovers in the country. People may be richer in the city, but the country can provide a better way of life.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1. Discuss: Ask students to look at the front cover and talk about what life is like in a place like this. Is it normally hot or cold? Is life easy or difficult? What work do you think people do? What food do people eat? What games do children play? What animals live there? Is the place you live very different from this place? How is your life different?

Chapters 1–3

While reading (At the end of Chapter 1)

2. Role play: Ask the students to role play a conversation between Heidi and her grandfather. Brainstorm some possible questions with the whole class first (See key for suggestions). Student A: You are Grandfather. Ask Heidi questions about her life and answer her questions. Student B: You are Heidi. Answer Grandfather's questions and ask him about his life.

After reading

3. Write: Ask students to imagine they are Heidi and to write a short piece about her first day on the mountain with Peter and the goats. Tell them they can use information from the book but they can also invent some parts.

4. Pair work: Ask students to talk about Heidi: Who are her family and friends? How old is she and what does she look like? What does she do? Is she a good girl? Where does she live? Would you like to live like this? Why or why not? Get feedback from the whole class.

Chapters 4–6

Before reading

5. Pair work: Write WINTER on the board and ask students to make a list in pairs of all the things they associate with winter. Tell them they can use information from the book but they can also invent some parts.

While reading (p. 9, after 'Heidi wanted to know about school and she asked him a lot of questions.')

6. Role play: Put students in pairs to think of possible questions Heidi might ask Peter. Get feedback from the whole class and then change pairs and ask them to role play the conversation.
Heidi

7 Guess: (p. 11, after ‘You don’t like me. I know that.’) Ask students to speculate about why Alm-Opa says this.

After reading
8 Discuss: Ask students to debate for or against the motion: Dete did the right thing. Heidi will have a better life in Frankfurt. Divide the class into two groups, for and against, and allow time for them to think of arguments before having a whole class debate.

Chapters 7–9
Before reading
9 Guess: Ask students to predict what Heidi’s life in the city will be like.

While reading (p. 21, at the end of Chapter 8)
10 Role play: Mr Seeman returns and asks Clara to tell him about Heidi. Ask students to role play the conversation in pairs.

After reading
11 Pair work and discuss: Ask students to make as many sentences about the city and the country as they can. Give them the following cues: In the country/city you can/can’t ……. In the country/city there is/are(n’t) ……. Get feedback and then have a class discussion about whether students like the city or the country better.

Chapters 10–12
Before reading
12 Discuss and write: Ask students to talk about ghosts (refer them to the word list at the back of the book if they don’t understand ghost). Do you believe in ghosts? What do they normally do? Are you afraid of them? Can you think of a film or a story about ghosts? Was it good? Did it make you feel afraid? What other things are you afraid of? Get feedback from the class and then have students write a short ghost story. This can be invented or based on a story or film they know.

While reading (p. 26, after ‘Miss Rohmer wrote a letter to Mr Seemann.’)
13 Write: Ask students to write the letter.

After reading
14 Pair work: Put students in pairs. Ask them to act one of the following scenes. They can use their own words or those used by the people in the book:
   a Mr Seemann finds Heidi in her white nightdress outside the front door in Frankfurt.
   b Clara and Heidi say goodbye before Heidi goes home.
   c Heidi meets Grandmother again when she comes home.

Chapters 13–15
Before reading
15 Guess: Ask students to predict the last part of the story in pairs. Give them these questions as a guide: What will Heidi do with the money? What will Heidi do to make Grandmother happy? Where will Grandfather and Heidi go on Sunday? What will Heidi teach Peter? Will Clara visit Heidi? Will she like it there? Will Peter like Clara? What wonderful thing will happen at the end?

While reading (p. 34, after ‘He pushed the wheelchair down the mountain!’)
16 Discuss: Ask students to discuss what punishment Peter deserves.

After reading
17 Research: Tell students that there are two more books about Heidi called Heidi Grows Up and Heidi’s Children. Divide the class into two groups, A and B, and tell group A to find out information on the Internet about the first book and group B about the second. Then put the students in pairs (one from group A and one from group B) and ask them to exchange information about the books and decide which one they would like to read most.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.