

## HANDOUT 2.3 B - KARL'S FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Karl has been in *Kindergarten*<sup>1</sup> for three years but soon he is going to start at the *Grundschule*<sup>2</sup>.

When the mail arrives there is a letter from the school. Mother reads part of the letter to Karl. "All children who turn six at the end of June must register for school." "Me, too?" Karl asks. "Yes, even you since you turned six on your birthday, May 17th." The times for registration are listed as well as the details that explain what Mother needs to bring. Karl's first day of school will be in mid-August.

Karl feels a bit nervous about going to school. "Why can't I stay home?" "You want to learn to read, don't you?" says Mother. "Then, you can read stories to Monika. As a big brother, it is also your job to help her learn."

On a February morning Mother and Karl get ready to walk to school for the official registration.<sup>3</sup> Karl plans to wear his favorite T-shirt, but he must put on his winter jacket, hat and gloves for the morning walk because the temperature is 5° C! Once Karl and Mother arrive at school, the school secretary gives Mother the official registration form to fill in. Standing behind them is a boy with glasses. Karl wonders if he will be in his class. Karl really wants to be in class with his best friend Andreas, because the same students will stay together in the same classroom through fourth grade<sup>4</sup>. Then they will be divided into different schools depending on their school reports, either to a *Hauptschule*<sup>5</sup>, *Realschule*<sup>6</sup>, or to the *Gymnasium*<sup>7</sup>.

Just as he is about to ask the secretary if it is possible for he and Andreas to be in the same classroom, a loud bell rings. Karl jumps at the unexpected noise. The secretary tells Mother and Karl, "That's the recess bell. Every day when it rings, all of the children are allowed to go outside to the playground."

As Mother and Karl are leaving the school Karl notices that many of the classroom doors are open. Karl tries to look inside. All of the classrooms have a blackboard in the front and one at the side. Most of the time there are shelves with books and games in the back. In some classrooms there are flowers on the windowsill and in one there is even an aquarium. Suddenly Karl stops, points at the maps on the wall, and asks Mother, "Where is Germany, Mama?" Mother replies, "Oh, Karl, this is why school is so wonderful. You are going to learn all about Germany and the world. That is a map of Europe, and you can see the member nations of the European Union colored in blue." "But, Mama, where is Germany?" Mother smiles and says, "Karl, since you are so interested, we will look at our atlas at home tonight."

Suddenly the bell rings again, and all of the children come running inside the school from the playground. Karl steps towards Mother so he doesn't get run over. As soon as all of the children are inside their classrooms, Mother and Karl continue down the hall and find the exit. Along the wall of the school they notice some recycling bins. This reminds Karl that in order to earn his allowance he must complete the task of sorting the family's recyclable materials each day. At home in the back of their apartment building they have more recycling bins than here in school, and he is still learning all of the different types of recycling containers. But, he already knows how important it is to take part in keeping the earth clean. The yellow bin is for plastic and metal, the orange bin is for items that may be broken but can be taken apart for its parts or used by others, blue is for paper and cardboard, black is for the items that are not yet recyclable, brown is for organic matter, green is for colored glass, and white is for clear glass. Karl knows that being in charge of the family recycling is important.

The next day Karl and Mother return to the school for a physical examination. After a doctor checks Karl to de-

1 In Germany *kindergarten* is equal to a preschool in the US, therefore, a child may attend kindergarten for more than one year typically between the ages of 3-6.

2 Elementary school 1-4th grade or 1-6th grade depending upon the state.

3 In most *Länder* (states), registration for the next school year must take place by the end of February.

4 If the elementary school is a 1-6th grade school, students are together (1-3) and then in separate classes (4-6), unlike in the United States where in most elementary schools, the students are mixed each year.

5 A school that is slower paced with a more general programming for students ending at age 15/16 which prepares students for apprenticeship programs (e.g. baker, plumber, carpenter).

6 A school that provides extended general programming for students ending at age 16 and also prepares students for apprenticeship programs (e.g. baker, plumber, carpenter). Note: Under recent decisions of the individual *Länder*, current trend is the combination of the *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* into a *Sekundarschule*.

7 A school where students prepare for the *Arbitur*, for entrance into the university.

termine if he can see and hear well, Karl is weighed and measured. The doctor tells him, “Karl, you are growing right on schedule! You weigh 21kg and are 116cm tall. I think you will be taller than your father!” The doctor asks Karl to hop on one foot, walk on his toes and on the heels of his feet. Then the doctor asks Karl to draw a picture and answer some questions. Finally, it’s official; Karl can attend school!

Karl wants to know everything about school. Again and again Mother has to tell him about everything that happened on her own first day of school. Karl also asks Father, Grandpa Dieter and his two grandmothers, Gabi and Ilse to tell him what happened on their first day of school. Grandmother Gabi still has a picture of Father when he first entered school, which Karl thinks was a very long time ago.

Four months later another letter from school is delivered. This one is from Karl’s new teacher, Frau<sup>8</sup> König. It says that Karl will be in Class 1B. Immediately he calls Andreas. Andreas will also be in 1B. Karl is so happy that they will be going into the same class! Andreas says to Karl, “I hope Frau König is nice.” “So do I,” says Karl. “After all, she will be our teacher for the next four years.”

“Karl,” said Mother. “Let’s read the letter and see what things you will need for school. It says that you should have a paint box, crayons, notebooks, a coloring book, and modeling clay.” Mother takes Karl shopping and together they buy all of the required supplies. At home Karl writes his name on all of his supplies because he is so proud to be able to write his own name. As he is carefully writing his name on the last notebook, Karl suddenly remembers that he needs a book bag. Just then there is a knock at the door. It’s Grandma Gabi. “Guten Tag! Look at what I have for you Karl,” says Grandma Gabi. Karl sees the most wonderful book bag and gives Grandma Gabi a big hug. It looks like a backpack with stripes on the front and sides that glow in the dark. “So the car drivers can see you in the winter,” says Grandma Gabi. “Remember Karl, even though Germany is not as cold as Canada, it’s latitude is nearly the same which means that in the winter the sun doesn’t always rise before you are in school. The stripes will let the drivers see you as you walk to school. ”

The book bag comes filled with surprises: a gym bag, a pencil case with many pencils and a small coin purse that is filled with €3.50<sup>9</sup>. Grandmother Gabi explains that Grandfather Dieter placed the two euro and 50 cent coins in the purse so that Karl can add it to his savings in order to buy the latest Playmobil<sup>10</sup>. How nice of Grandfather! After labeling all of these supplies too, Karl puts them back in the book bag. He waits impatiently for the first day of school.

Finally, it is August. The first day of school has arrived. Family members are invited to go to school with the students on this special day. Grandma Gabi and Grandpa Dieter are happy to participate in Karl’s first day of school. Grandma Ilse unfortunately can’t attend because she is sick. After breakfast Mother hands Karl his school cone, a *Schultüte*<sup>11</sup>. What a wonderful tradition thought Karl! As he holds the colorful cone he begins to imagine the possible candies and surprises it holds. He immediately wishes to look inside, but according to tradition he must wait. Father takes a picture of Karl with his *Schultüte* and his new school bag. Finally, all of them leave home and walk to the school.

When they arrive at the school, they are told to go to the auditorium where they find it beautifully decorated. Chairs and benches are placed at the front of the stage. Many parents and children are already there. The principal Herr<sup>12</sup> Müller gives a short speech. The students in fourth grade present a funny theatre play about Casper<sup>13</sup> who can’t read. Karl sees Andreas’ sister on stage with one of the hand puppets. She and the other students started school last Monday and have been preparing this performance for the first graders. After the play they all sing a song. When it’s finished the teachers come to the front and call out the names of the children who are going into their class. All of the students follow their teachers to their assigned classroom.

In Karl’s classroom “Welcome to Class 1B” is written on the blackboard. Karl sits next to Andreas at one table. There are two students at each table, which are arranged to form a circle. As he looks around the classroom he

8 Mrs., Miss, Ms. or woman in German

9 € is the symbol for the euro, the money system used in Germany

10 A German toy manufacturer

11 A colorful cone shaped object typically filled with some school supplies as well chocolates and other sweets to help make the beginning of a child’s school life even sweeter, traditionally given on the first day of entering school at age 6.

12 Mr. in German

13 Casper “Kasperle” is a humorous character in traditional German hand puppetry

notices a comfortable looking couch near the wall. At the front of the room is the teacher's desk. Karl's teacher looks friendly. They will all learn to work together as a community during their four years together as a class.

Frau König asks the family members to wait outside on the playground while she tells a story to the children. The story is about a young rabbit that doesn't dare leave his burrow, but later he gains the courage to go out and explore the world. Frau König and Karl's classmates discuss the meaning of the story. Each child then takes a card from the shelf and writes his name on it after coloring in the rabbit on the front side.

Next the teacher discusses the daily plan. School starts at 8 a.m. every day. Karl knows that Mother will wake him up in time for him to eat his roll with jam and drink a glass of milk before it's time to walk to school. Even though he's been riding a bike since he was four, he realizes Mother and Father will insist that he waits until he passes the bicycle test before he will be allowed to ride to school by himself. That won't happen until the fourth grade. Suddenly Karl hears Frau König call on Andreas to answer a question. Karl needs to listen. Frau König explains, "Each day we will have four periods of lessons that include reading and writing German, practicing math, either music, physical education, and art, and then *Sachkunde*<sup>14</sup>. We will study our German by reading wonderful stories. Some will be fairy tales that the Grimm brothers from Hanau<sup>15</sup> wrote. Raise your hand if your family has read some to you? Wonderful! Karl, what are your favorites?" Karl puts his hand down and shares, "I really like *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. My family and I took a trip along the *Märchenstraße*<sup>16</sup>. We stopped in Hameln<sup>17</sup> and saw the statue of the Pied Piper and the children." Then the teacher continues, "During the *Sachkunde* time we will rotate among many different topics. And remember that in our *Land*<sup>18</sup> your study of English will not start until third grade. We also will have homework." This doesn't surprise Karl. His mother and father talk a lot about how important education is and how it is their job to make sure that he does his best in school and in society. They take their responsibility very seriously.

"Well, children, let's do something fun. I would like you to place your *Schultüte* on your desk and draw a copy of it on a piece of paper. We will put your drawings in the hall so that the older children can see all of the different designs. It will make them remember their *Schultüte* and bring back wonderful memories of when they started school." Karl opens his school bag with all of his supplies and draws a magnificent copy of his *Schultüte*. As he draws, his curiosity returns. What surprises did Mama and Papa put in his cone?!

Suddenly, Karl hears Frau König's voice, "Children, I hope you have had a wonderful time today. I am sure we will continue to enjoy our time learning together. Do you remember when school starts?" "Yes", the class says in unison. "Well, children when does school end?" "We end school at 13h30 every day," smiles Andreas. That makes Karl think of his mother's wonderful *Mittagessen*<sup>19</sup> that he will go home to after school each day. After his homework is finished he will go to his soccer club around 15h30 where he will see Andreas again. Since Andreas' mother works and isn't home, he will go to the *Hort*<sup>20</sup> to eat lunch and then head to practice at 15h30 as well. Andreas' sister goes to violin lessons instead. Children have physical education and music classes in school, but sports and music lessons take place outside the school in local clubs or institutions. When Karl is at his sports club he meets children from other parts of the area, which he enjoys.

"Children, it's time to meet your families on the playground." On the way Karl sees Ayla. Ayla joined Karl in Kindergarten after she and her family moved to Germany from Turkey. Karl finds it amazing that he already knows someone besides Andreas in his new school.

On the playground a photographer takes a picture of the whole class with everyone holding their *Schultüte*. Everyone joins in, and school is over. It was really fun. Karl is already looking forward to Monday when school really starts, and he'll learn how to read, write and count much higher numbers than: *eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn*<sup>21</sup>.

14 Includes social studies such as geography, history, citizenship, and natural sciences such as biology and everyday life

15 A city in southwest Germany

16 The German Fairy Tale Road

17 A city in western Germany

18 One of 16 states in Germany

19 Lunch in German. Afterschool a warm lunch is served which is usually the biggest meal of the day.

20 An afterschool program

21 1-10 in German

Back home Karl is finally allowed to unpack his *Schultüte*. What's inside? Gummi Bears<sup>22</sup>, Werthers candies<sup>23</sup>, a Heft, two *Bleistifte*, a *Radiergummi*, a *Buch*, a small *Teddybär*, a *Schleich*<sup>24</sup> Smurf and so many other things that he can enjoy for the entire school year. It's a shame that you only get a *Schultüte* on your first day of school!

Source:

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22 A jellied flavored candy created in German in 1922

23 A hard candy created in Germany in 1909

24 A German toy manufacturer