

5 German Short Stories For Beginners

André Klein · Wednesday, October 16th, 2013



There are many ways to learn or teach German, but my favorite approach is using storytelling. I can think of a number of reasons why [learning German with stories](#) is so effective, but the best one is this: because it's fun! Learning a language can easily become a chore, so anything that takes your mind off the struggle while keeping you engaged is heaven-sent.

As opposed to the daily grind of conscious effort, by suspending our awareness of the fact that we're learning a foreign language (which—let's face it—is rather scary!), we can bypass mental blocks and make the process of acquiring new words so much more efficient and enjoyable. Have you ever had the experience of being so engrossed in a [novel](#) or a story that you completely forgot everything around you? That's *exactly* what I'm talking about.

There's only one catch: you have to find a story which is both simple enough to be *understandable*, i.e. appropriate for your current level, and *interesting* enough to keep you going. There should be *enough* new words, but not too many. Finding a story that meets both criteria is often easier said than done, especially at the beginner's level.

How To Find German Short Stories Which Are Simple But Not Boring

Many people's first idea is to take a look at [children's books](#), another starting point may be stories written in a special [simplified German](#) style, but chances are adult students will find these texts boring.

This is why in this article I've collected a few short stories which are not just manageable for beginners and intermediate learners but also simply great literature. Most of these short stories were written in the post-war era, because after the horrors of WWII many authors felt that their language, just like their homeland, was in desperate need of new beginnings and had to be freed from the remnants of pathos and ideology. As a consequence, these authors developed a new language which was characterized by simplicity and brevity. Put simply, they expressed themselves using simple words. This is what makes these short stories an excellent way to practice German.



Please note that these short stories, despite being rather accessible for literary texts, were not written for learners, and if you're looking for German texts with a more guided approach, i.e. including translations of words, exercises, etc. check out our [library](#) or skip to the end of this article.

(All direct links found by simple Google searches and posted for educational purposes only)

Die Küchenuhr, by Wolfgang Borchert



via uni-hamburg.de

This German story is about a young man who has lost his home and family during a bombing. Through a remaining kitchen clock he remembers the care of his mother and understands his lost family life as a blissful state.

“Die Küchenuhr” is probably the most famous short story by Wolfgang Borchert and is often studied in schools in Germany to introduce students to the concept

of *Trümmerliteratur*. It's a remarkable example of how much can be expressed by using very few words.



Read a [PDF](#) edition of this story, complete with exercises, hosted by Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University.



Read an [English translation](#) of this story.

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Additional material: [Quizlet](#) to help you understand new words and practice vocabulary in this story.

Der zufriedene Fischer – Eine Anekdote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral, by Heinrich Böll



CC BY-SA 3.0

In this story by literary Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll, a fisherman and a tourist exchange their views about life and “work ethic”. Written in the middle of the German *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic boom) in 1963, this short story was questioning the new-found prosperity but its content is timeless and more valid now than ever. There may be a couple of difficult words in here, so using a dictionary is recommended.



Read the [story in German](#).



Read an [English translation](#) of this story in PDF.

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Slow reading by *Get Germanized*, an [audio reading](#) (starts at 0:30) via [Wattenichsachs](#), or:

Der große Wildenberg, by Siegfried Lenz



CC BY-SA 3.0

Written in 1958 this short story is about a man who goes to a job interview and gets entangled in the cogwheels of bureaucracy.



Read [the story](#).



English translation of this short story not available.

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[Exercises](#) around this story. (advanced)

Skorpion, by Christa Reinig



via [dingfest](#)

More a parable than a short story, this story deals with a man who feels excluded from society due to his appearance and tries to convince people to accept him

while walking through a city.



Read [the story](#).



English translation of this story not available.

?

an [audio reading](#) of this story on Youtube

Auf der Flucht, by Wolfdietrich Schnurre

Written between 1945 and 1948, this short story by Wolfdietrich Schnurre is about a family fleeing through a barren landscape. Pained by hunger the family is looking for food, and when the father eventually finds a loaf of bread he is forced to evaluate his real motives.



Read the [German story](#).



English translation of this short story not available.

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a short [dramatic enactment](#) of this story on Youtube (focusing mostly on dialogue).

Even More German Short Stories for Beginners



Should the texts above still be too difficult, you can also take a look at my book **Café in Berlin** ([Kindle](#) / [iBooks](#) / [ePUB](#)) which is a collection of *very short German short stories for beginners* written in simplified German and supported by an extended dictionary and comprehension questions. This book is designed as a stepping stone to learning German with authentic literature.

UPDATE: There's a whole series now called **Dino lernt Deutsch** ([Kindle](#) / [iBooks](#) / [ePub](#))

Which short stories do you think are good for beginners? Write a comment!

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