



by  
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## The Great Word Robbery

### *Die Händlerin der Worte*

#### review

A warm, funny book about the power of language for good or evil.

While exploring a market in their hometown, siblings Leonie (ten) and Jonas (eight) come across a stall that sells, of all things, words. The owner of the stall – the Seller of Words – is a cheerful creator of varied and beautiful physical items that people buy to extend their vocabulary. But while the children admire the multitude of words, a thief appears and steals a box containing expressions of tolerance, politeness and kindness. Their absence can have only one outcome: the breakdown of social interactions.

Leonie and Jonas set out to find the thief, and soon discover that it is none other than Eriso Zwister. He also sells words, but they express darker emotions such as impatience and rudeness. By stealing a box of good words, he hopes to create a demand for bad ones. Leonie and Jonas prove the theft with the help of the orphan child Pico, and together they devise a plan to get rid of Zwister by using his own limited worldview against him. He hates foreign words so much that he refuses to sleep on a mattress, citing the Arabic etymology of the word as a reason. The children proceed to distribute foreign words for free to Zwister's customers, and as a result the ill-mannered antagonist flees in disgust at this explosion of multilingual expression, never to return.

*The Great Word Robbery* is a very accessible story for more confident readers, and a great book to read aloud to older children. Its joyful and message-driven narrative is communicated clearly and with

humour. Based on a French book, it was first turned into a German-language play and now a novel – evidence that, even though it is about language, it translates well and is relevant across borders. It is clearly structured and written, and its use of a varied vocabulary will develop rather than merely confirm a child's language.

Touching on the international roots of our languages and the enrichment that shared language brings is, of course, very topical in today's world. But while this book's moral compass is firmly in place, it is also an easy, fun read about children solving a mystery that will be enjoyed by younger and older readers alike.

## rights information

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