

Prince Noah

and the School Pirates



Silke Schnee

Illustrated by Heike Sistig

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Illustrated by Heike Sistig
Translated and adapted from the German by Erna Albertz

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One day, Prince Noah wandered into the castle kitchen.

“Oh good,” said the cook, “You can help me crack the eggs for a big chocolate cake!”

Prince Noah cracked one egg after another. Seven eggs landed in the bowl. Three slithered across the counter. Hmm, seven in the bowl – that number was clearly more than the three on the counter.

Noah’s big brothers, Prince Luke and Prince Jonas, and his parents, the king and queen, heard Noah working out the numbers.

“Someone who can do so much belongs in school!” said the king. They all nodded proudly.

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In those long-ago days, children did not go to school in buildings but on majestic sailing ships. There was a ship for girls and one for boys, a ship for children with eye patches, a ship for children who had only one leg, and a ship for children who didn’t learn so fast. No one knew why there were so many different ships, but it had always been that way.





The first day of school finally arrived. The sun had polished each and every one of its rays for this special day, and shone down on the colorfully decorated sailing ships from a cloudless blue sky. The ships rocked gently in the harbor. Then the royal trumpeters played a fanfare. Prince Noah started to dance for joy.

The children formed long lines and began to board their ships. The girls climbed aboard their pink ship while the boys clambered onto their orange one. The children who couldn't see well boarded a ship with high railings, and those who had trouble walking boarded one without stairs. Prince Noah got onto a multicolored ship which looked a little different from the others.

When all the children were safely aboard, a second fanfare sounded and they began their journey out onto the wild, wide sea. The parents waved and waved. Some of them had tears in their eyes. The queen sobbed and sniffed. The children waved back, and a few of them wiped their noses on their nice, clean school clothes because they felt quite small and alone.





After a good night's sleep, the children began their lessons. "This is an A," said Miss Readmore, the teacher.

"A, A, A," answered Prince Noah loudly and clearly, while the whole class giggled and applauded. "An A, an A, an A!" sang Prince Noah, jumping on his desk. His friend John joined him in a wild dance. The class began to clap more loudly, and some children tapped their rulers against their desks and stamped a rhythm with their feet.

"A, A, A," they all screamed while Prince Noah performed the most amazing dance moves.

"Enough!" shouted Miss Readmore. "Sit down! Now you know the letter A, but who knows what five plus five is?"

"Two," answered Prince Noah.

"Wrong," said Miss Readmore.

"Not wrong," replied Prince Noah, holding up the five fingers on his right hand and then the five on his left. "Five and five makes two – hands!"

"Well," said Miss Readmore, "I'll have to think about that."

The first day of school was over. Prince Noah was mighty proud of himself.





Meanwhile, on their ship, the girls spent their days painting, embroidering, weaving, and knitting.

“But I also want to learn math!” exclaimed Maya. “It’s so boring just doing handwork!”

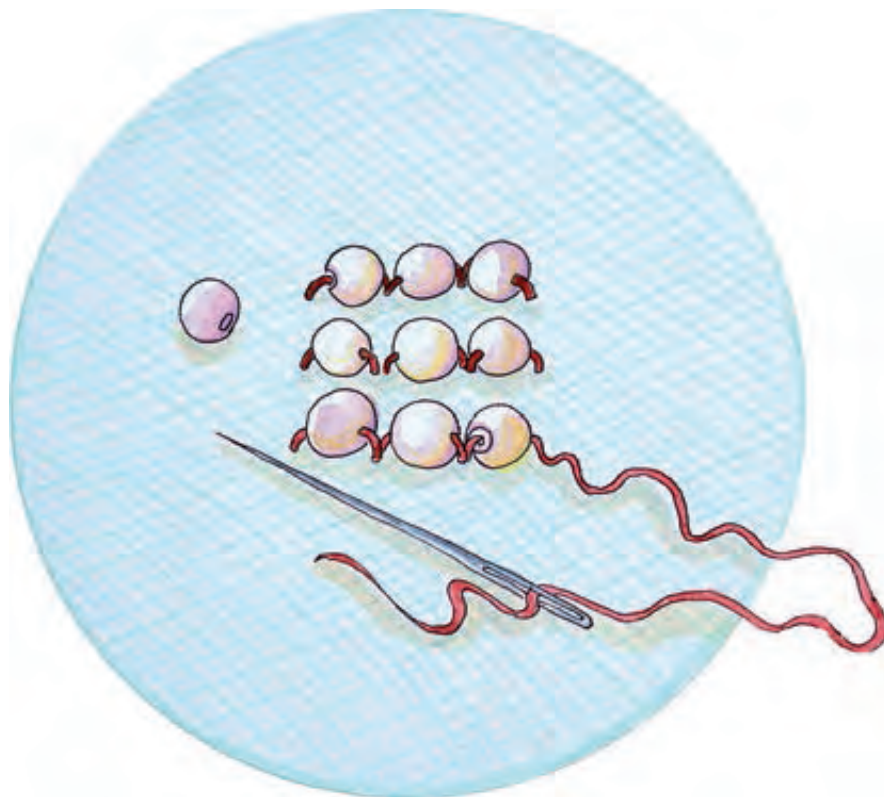
Mrs. Chat, her teacher, hardly listened. Math had never been taught to girls. Back in those days, teachers thought it was much too complicated for them.

Maya found a nice piece of cloth and some shiny beads. First she sewed three beads in a row. Then she sewed another row below it. Then she sewed three more beads in a third row.

“Three plus three, plus three makes nine,” she counted under her breath. She kept sewing rows of three until she had ten rows.

“Ten times three is thirty,” she murmured, and was very pleased because she had figured out the answer without counting the beads.

“Why do people think math is so hard?” she wondered.





On the big ship for boys there was a constant ruckus. It sometimes smelled like sweat and dirty feet. The boys loved diving from the railing, swimming, climbing the ropes, fencing, and of course playing soccer.

Prince Jonas had just shot another of his famous penalty kicks.

“Hooray!” cheered his friend Leo. “And now a center kick to me!” The ball crashed into a cabinet, barely missed a lamp overhead, and smashed straight through a glass porthole into the ocean.

“Awesome shot!” yelled Leo, “And now we need a new ball!”

“How will I ever turn these young rascals into respectable gentlemen?” sighed their teacher, Mr. Proper. He had long since given up trying to teach the boys anything except climbing, diving, and playing soccer.







On the ship for the boys and girls with one leg it was much quieter. In the mornings, they learned to read and write, but their afternoons were often quite boring.

It was so boring that one day a boy called Max started carving deep notches in his wooden leg. Every day he carved a new notch. After four weeks he had made twenty-eight notches, one next to the other, just like the sharp teeth of a shark.

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The ship for children with eye patches was even quieter. Those who could see with one eye and those who could not see at all worked mostly with their hands, forming letters out of sand and seawater and leaving them to dry on the deck. Day by day, they slowly formed all the letters of the alphabet.

Because they could not trust their eyes, they were training their ears. They learned that the noises they heard could tell them whether the water was choppy or calm, whether it was day or night, and whether a room had a high or a low ceiling. Their ears became as sensitive as those of bats, and they were amazed at how many sounds they could recognize.



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