

Children's and Young Adult Library Services in Germany during Coronavirus Pandemic

by Benjamin Scheffler, Director of the Children's and Young Adult Library at the Central and Regional Library Berlin, Germany

In Germany, all libraries, including those for children and young adults have been closed since March 13, 2020. Many library employees are working from home, while others come to work on a tightly restricted basis. In some districts, employees have been deployed to other areas of public administration, for example, some serve on information hotlines run by the health authorities.

Depending on each library's capacity, libraries are providing a range of digital services to their youngest patrons, providing opportunities to participate in online events, and supporting students' home learning. For example: the Potsdam State Library has organized a writing competition for children; in Munich you can follow employees on Instagram to see what their home offices look like; and Hamburg's libraries are providing services similar to the Association of Berlin Libraries (VÖBB). Nearly everywhere lending periods (Ausleihfristen) have been prolonged automatically, and digital library services have been expanded.

Starting in May 2020, libraries will start to gradually reopen. As they do so, there will be a reduction in some of these new digital services. But going forward, some of these new digital services will remain to complement and enrich the range of services offered by children's and young adult libraries in Germany. Examples of what VÖBB is providing, described below, are representative of what many German libraries are providing. At this point the main focus lies on digital services: learning tools and resources, film streaming, music streaming – everything is possible with the library card. For those lacking a library card [Berlin's VÖBB](#) offers a library card to access the digital services. One registers online – the card is valid for three months and free of charge.

Online Storytelling

Children can listen to stories or have books read to them across all possible channels, sometimes with, sometimes without video. On Mondays through Saturdays at 5:00 p.m., the children's library of the Central and State Library of Berlin presents a reading or narration event via Facebook Live. Twice a week, professional storytellers, who usually tell fairytales from around the world in the Mongolian yurt in the library's garden, now perform virtually from their own living rooms. On other days, the library staff take turns reading stories, poems, or fairy tales. Even if you are not on Facebook, you can [watch the stories](#) here (you don't need a Facebook account!).

Online Learning Support

Even while schools and libraries are closed, preparations for Germany's nationwide "Abitur" exams continue in May. Usually, young people study in the Central and State Library of Berlin, where free homework help takes place daily, and sessions with detailed advice and training for high school graduates are held twice a week. These consultations now take place online. Students book an appointment via email and then receive detailed, individual advice on their exam topics via Skype or Jitsi or telephone. This service has become very popular.

Online Learning Opportunities

The Berlin libraries are united in a network www.voebb.de and offer a wide range of [digital tools for school age children](#), including: a vocabulary trainer program; student tutoring in German, English,

French, mathematics and Latin; learning aids for the most important school subjects; and full access to a large database with up-to-date information on countries, biographies etc. Media services and special databases on newspapers and magazines make it possible to research even very topical subjects on which there is little literature. Access to all of these services is provided free-of-charge with a valid library card.

Apart from that, Germany's [Stiftung Lesen](https://www.stiftunglesen.de/), a foundation that works on reading promotion throughout Germany, replenished their website with all kinds of tips and useful resources for parents with small children. Not only do they recommend storytime apps and promote reading aloud stories, they also have a reading challenge, DIY instructions for fun things to make from stuff everyone has at home and materials and guidance for teachers. Everything is free of charge.

<https://www.stiftunglesen.de/aktionen/vorlesen-corona/>