

---

# We Were a Handful: A Children's Book Not Just for Kids.

---

## We Were a Handful: A Children's Book Not Just for Kids.

Foreign students, teachers and visitors of Charles University often come to the university bookshop in Celetná Street looking for English translations of Czech books which they can bring back home as a souvenir from Prague. You would not be wrong if your choice of such a token would be *We Were a Handful*, one of the most popular Czech books for children, written by Karel Poláček. The story takes the reader back to the beautifully simple yet complex world of adventures,



gang fights and children's recklessness of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Written as a diary, the book is narrated by the character Petr Bajza, the grocer's son, and tells the story of the boy and his four friends who form a gang together in a small Czech town. *We Were a Handful* invites the reader to witness the gang's amazing adventures and everyday experiences, from organising fights with boys from their neighbourhood to trying to understand adults and the adult world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Poláček's child narrator and diary format gives the book authenticity as well as humour.

The plot provides us with extremely entertaining tales, with the added charm and pleasure of reading the stories through the eyes of a child's perspective. It starts in the most ordinary way when the narrator, our main character, talks about his everyday struggles, introducing the reader to his family and friends. Whilst the book is not separated into chapters and does not follow a certain chronological order – which may seem a little chaotic – it does however provide an authenticity to the way in which children themselves tell stories.

Jewish author Karel Poláček (1892-1945) wrote *We Were a Handful* during World War II, just before his deportation to Auschwitz in 1944. During the most difficult and terrifying time of his life, the author reminisced once more of his happiest memories: his childhood. Despite the horrific circumstances, Poláček was able to maintain the lightness and purity of a child's experience, and make the reader feel as if the book was really written by a carefree child growing up in a peaceful and safe world. The success of the book was followed by a very popular TV adaptation in 1990s.

As we discover the world seen through Petr's eyes we start to really understand the beauty of carefree joy and finding happiness even in the most tragic of times. Whilst written with children in mind, the book's stories teach lessons about

friendship that both adults and children can benefit from. The childish language that the main characters use is brilliant, with the wit and charm providing the main source of humour.

*We Were a Handful* was finally, after many years, translated into English and is now available for purchase in the Charles University bookshop in Celetná Street in Prague, having been produced by the Karolinum Press, Charles University's very own publishing house.

**Weronika Pukrop** is a student of Journalism and Media at De Montfort University, Leicester. She was born in Poland so she is an international student in the UK, which she finds challenging as well as exciting. Weronika has always been around people with different nationalities and she truly enjoys getting to know other cultures, which was one of the reasons why she decided to study abroad. She believes that it's very important to travel, study and work abroad to gain valuable experiences. Her main interests are travelling, fashion, food and music.

**Nicola Wheeler** is a Erasmus student from the University of Kent in the United Kingdom, studying English and American Literature, and is in the Faculty of Arts at Charles University. She is passionate about literature and history, and has a keen interest in current affairs. Nicola believes that writing for the international iForum is a fantastic opportunity to broaden her editing and creative skill whilst studying on her year abroad.