Wabo moves in

24 letters for the Wichtel door · 1 to 24 December



How it works

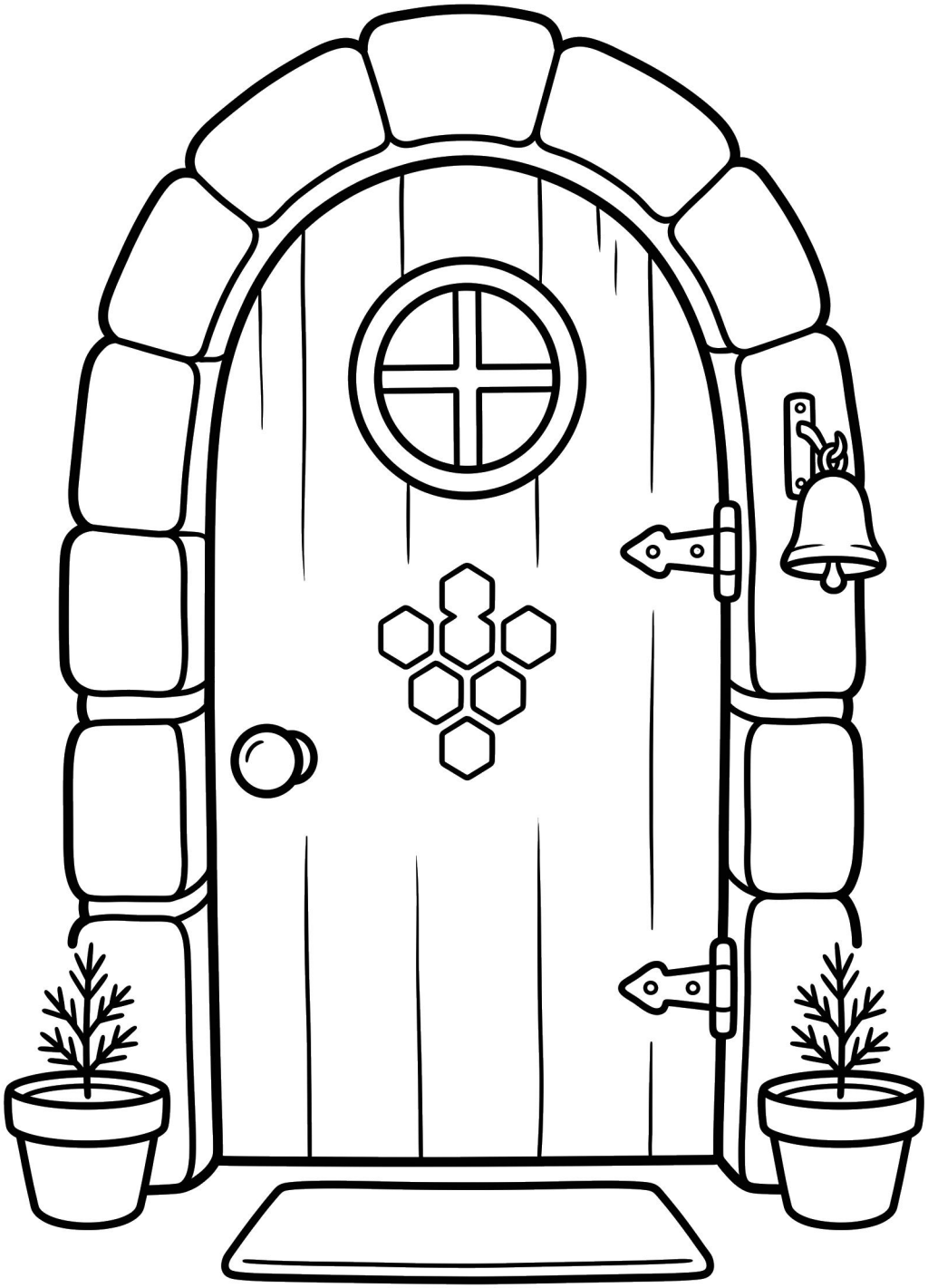
1. Download the PDF and print it out.
2. Colour in the Wichtel door, cut it out with a grown-up and stand it somewhere you choose: a wall, a cupboard or a skirting board.
3. A grown-up cuts out the 24 letters, ideally ahead of time.
4. From 1 December, a grown-up puts the day's letter by the door each evening.
5. In the morning, read it together and do the task.

For parents

Children use scissors and cut twigs only together with a grown-up. Only adults light candles, and they are never left burning unattended. Small things such as confetti or feathers do not belong in the hands of toddlers. Honey is not for babies under one year old. You may print and copy the PDF at home, in nursery and at school.

The Wichtel door

Colour it in, cut it out with a grown-up, stick it on a piece of card (from a cereal box, for example) and stand it against the wall.





1 December

Wabo moves in

Dear children,

I'm here. My suitcase is unpacked, my honey spoon is leaning against the wall, and the door is shut. That means I live with you now. Lipsi has already found the best spot, right up on top of the door frame. Every evening until Christmas I'll leave you a letter. By the way, there's an old fairy tale about us Wichtel (gnomes). Below it says what it's about.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi hums a hello.)

Did you know? In the Brothers Grimm tale "The Elves" (KHM 39), little men help a shoemaker "one evening not long before Christmas".

Today: Find the spot for the Wichtel door. Not too high, so you can see the letters easily.



2 December

It's so quiet

Hello out there,

I slept well last night. The Wichtel house is quiet in winter. It's quiet at the bee yard too, but I know something is going on there. The bees haven't gone away. They are all sitting together in the hive. In winter, bees are left in peace as much as possible. I stick to that. I just look out of the window and think of them.

Your Wabo

Did you know? A bee colony can spend the winter with about 20,000 bees.

Today: Draw a welcome sign for Wabo and leave it by the door.



3 December

The winter cluster

Dear children,

Today Lipsi showed me how bees sit in winter. All packed tight, like a bunch of grapes. Right in the middle sits the queen. Out at the edge it is colder. The bees keep swapping places: whoever is on the outside moves in. Lipsi squeezed herself in between my hat and my beard straight away. That counts as a winter cluster.

Your Wabo

Did you know? In winter, bees sit in a winter cluster. The queen sits in the middle at 25 to 30 °C, it is colder at the edge, and the bees swap places from the outside in.

Today: Play winter cluster. Everyone squeezes in close, and whoever is on the outside moves to the middle after a while.



4 December

St Barbara's Day

Hello out there,

Today is 4 December, St Barbara's Day. I stayed in the warm and looked out of the window. There's a story in the Wichtel house today, read it if you like. We have a jug of twigs by the window now. Will they bloom by Christmas? I ask every morning, but the twigs don't answer.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi hums, she's in a hurry.)

Did you know? On 4 December, people cut twigs, traditionally from cherry trees, and put them in water. If they bloom at Christmas, it is said to bring good luck. They take about three weeks to flower and need a bright place that isn't too warm.

Today: If you have a garden or a bush, cut a twig with a grown-up and put it in water, somewhere bright and not too warm. If you don't, draw a Barbara twig with buds and hang it by the door. On the 24th, draw blossoms on it.



5 December
Five eyes

Dear children,

Today Lipsi lets me look her in the face, and I look back. She has big eyes on both sides. And up on her forehead sit three tiny ones. Five eyes, and she still doesn't notice when I take the last spoonful. Well, maybe she does.

Your Wabo

Did you know? A bee has two big compound eyes and three small simple eyes on its forehead.

Today: Draw a bee with all five eyes.



6 December
St Nicholas

Hello out there,

Today is St Nicholas Day. Last night there was a lot going on in the Wichtel house. You can read the story today, I won't say more. By the way, Lipsi is proud of her name. It reminds us of Leipzig, where we live. In Latin, the city used to be called Lipsia. I didn't give her the name, she chose it herself. At least that's what she claims, with a lot of humming.

Your Wabo

Did you know? Lipsi's name is a reminder of Lipsia, the Latin name for Leipzig.

Today: Put a clean boot outside the Wichtel door tonight. Maybe the next letter will be in it in the morning.



7 December
Ambrose

Dear children,

Today is a special day for everyone who keeps bees. A new story comes out today. I won't say more. Meister Zeidler put an old bee skep on the table today, without anyone asking. He didn't say anything, but he looked at it for a long time.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi nods solemnly.)

Did you know? 7 December is the Catholic feast day of Saint Ambrose, patron saint of beekeepers, candle makers and gingerbread bakers. He is shown with a bee skep.

Today: Draw a bee skep.



8 December
Wax

Hello out there,

One summer Lipsi put a tiny white flake on my nose. Wax! Young bees make it themselves. They build their combs from it. You can make candles from wax too, and that's just what I'm thinking of today, when it gets dark so early. Lipsi nodded.

Your Wabo

Did you know? Bees make wax themselves: young worker bees, about two to three weeks old, sweat it out of glands on their belly as small white flakes.

Today: Roll a candle from a sheet of paper: roll it up tight, close it with sticky tape, and add a flame of yellow paper on top. If you have a sheet of wax at home, you'll find the real instructions at /en/children/rolling-candles/.



9 December
Six corners

Dear children,

Today Meister Zeidler showed me an old, empty piece of comb from his cupboard. The cells are lots of little rooms, and they all look the same. I couldn't build them more neatly with a ruler. And the bees don't even have one. Lipsi sat down in a cell straight away and looks out as if it were her own flat.

Your Wabo

Did you know? The cells of the comb have six sides.

Today: Draw hexagons that touch each other, like a honeycomb. You'll find the template in the PDF.



10 December
Girls and boys

Hello out there,

Today it's about the boys in the bee colony. They're called drones. They have no sting. They don't gather food either, the worker bees do that. In winter there are no drones in the hive at all, only the queen and the workers. Lipsi just hummed. She's a worker, and she's proud of it.

Your Wabo

Did you know? Drones are the male bees and have no sting. In winter there are no drones in the colony.

Today: Draw a drone and a worker side by side. What do they look like to you?



11 December
How long does a bee live?

Dear children,

In summer bees don't live long, but in winter they live much longer. And the queen? She lasts the longest. I asked Lipsi how old she is. She turned round and crawled into my beard, offended. Not a good question, apparently. I said sorry and cleared the windowsill for her.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi hums, but more quietly.)

Did you know? A summer bee lives about five weeks, so around 35 days, a winter bee more than 200 days, the queen up to five years.

Today: Look at the calendar and count 35 days from today together. Where do you land?



12 December
The dance

Hello out there,

Meister Zeidler told me what Lipsi does in summer. When she finds flowers, she flies home and dances on the comb. That's how the others learn which way to fly and how far. I've never understood a dance like that. Lipsi does. Now in winter she doesn't dance, she waits for spring, just like me.

Your Wabo

Did you know? With a dance on the comb, forager bees show in which direction and how far food is, in a round dance and a waggle dance. Karl von Frisch worked this out.

Today: One person hides a cuddly toy or a biscuit in the home and shows the others, using only dance and gestures, which way to go and how far.



13 December
Third Sunday of Advent

Dear children,

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. There's a new story for it. It already smells of Advent here, I won't say more. I just sat quietly by the door today and sniffed. If you close your eyes, you smell more, says Nestor. I tried it. He's right.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi cleans her antennae and says nothing.)

Did you know? In Pulsnitz in Saxony, bakers have been allowed to bake Pfefferkuchen (spiced gingerbread) since 1558. The basic dough of flour and honey or syrup matures for weeks.

Today: With your eyes closed, smell spices from your kitchen, such as cinnamon or cloves. Just sniff, don't breathe it in, and leave out sharp spices like pepper or chilli. Who can guess which spice it is?



14 December
Red isn't red

Hello out there,

I made a mistake. I wanted to show Lipsi a red poppy in a picture book, and I thought she'd be pleased. She only moved her antennae and looked puzzled. She can't see red at all. But she sees a light we can't see: ultraviolet. Now I'm jealous.

Your Wabo

Did you know? Bees see ultraviolet, which we can't see, but not red: a red poppy isn't red to a bee.

Today: Find five red things at home. How would Lipsi see them?



15 December
Sealing up

Dear children,

There's a draught. I noticed today when my hat wobbled. Bees know that problem. They close every tiny crack in the hive with a sort of putty. I wondered whether to do that to my door too, but Lipsi shook her head. She'd rather sit in my hat. There's no draught in there.

Your Wabo

Did you know? With propolis, a sticky resin from tree buds, bees seal the tiniest cracks in the hive and make the entrance narrower.

Today: Hold a narrow strip of paper up to the window and see where it wobbles. That's where the draught is.



16 December
Imme

Hello out there,

Today you'll learn an old word. Imme. It's what people used to call a bee. I think it sounds like a hum, and Lipsi thinks so too. She hummed it three times until she'd had enough. I made up two new words myself today, but I won't tell you. You'll surely come up with better ones.

Your Wabo

Did you know? "Imme" is an old German word for bee. The German word for beekeeper, "Imker", comes from it.

Today: Invent words that contain "Imme". The funniest one wins.



17 December
The forest beekeepers

Dear children,

Meister Zeidler told me something today, and that's rare. Long ago, people kept bees in the forest, right inside a hollow tree. They got the honey by cutting the combs out of the tree. I don't imagine that was cosy. But Meister Zeidler smiled while he told me, a tiny smile.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi hums to herself.)

Did you know? Zeidlers used to keep bees in hollow trees in the forest. The German word "Zeideln" comes from "schneiden", meaning to cut, and refers to cutting the combs out.

Today: Look out of the window or in a picture book: can you find a tree with a hole? Or draw a tree where bees live.



18 December
The Christmas market

Hello out there,

Leipzig has a Christmas market, and I swear Lipsi can smell it from here. She sits at the window and sniffs. She's probably dreaming of roasted almonds. I told her about the market, the lights and the stalls. That will have to do for a bee in winter.

Your Wabo

Did you know? According to Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing, the Leipzig Christmas market goes back to 1458 and is counted among the oldest in Germany.

Today: Tell each other what you like best at a Christmas market. If you've never been, make up your favourite stall.



19 December
Light as a feather

Dear children,

The next story from the Wichtel house comes with the first snow. Maybe today is the day, maybe it already came. Check our page. By the way, Lipsi is so light that I hardly feel her when she sits on my hat. Sometimes I think she isn't there at all. Then she hums, and all is well.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi nods contentedly.)

Did you know? A bee weighs about 0.1 gram. A colony of 50,000 bees weighs about 5 kilos in early summer.

Today: Find something really light, such as a feather or a piece of confetti. Can you hardly feel it on the palm of your hand?



20 December
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Hello out there,

Fourth Sunday of Advent. Today there's reading aloud in the Wichtel house, you'll find the story on our page. It's especially quiet at our door today. Lipsi has perched on the spine of a book and is waiting. Maybe you'll read to each other today too.

Your Wabo

Did you know? From 1886, the "Leipziger Bienenzeitung", a magazine for beekeepers, came out every month in Leipzig.

Today: Have someone read to you today, a book or the story of the day.



21 December
Shivering until it's warm

Dear children,

I was cold today, and Lipsi noticed. She snuggled into my beard and trembled ever so gently. That's what bees do in the hive, all together, to stay warm. Lipsi can't manage it alone, but it was cosy anyway. Thank you, Lipsi. Tonight we'll both sit at the window and see if it snows.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi hums contentedly.)

Did you know? Bees heat their winter cluster with their flight muscles. They shiver, and that way the colony doesn't freeze.

Today: Shiver like a bee until you warm up. But only until you start laughing.



22 December
Little folk

Hello out there,

Did you know we're not the only little ones? Nestor told me there are others in Lusatia, with completely different names. I was curious straight away. Maybe we'll visit them one day. I think they'd be surprised if a Wichtel with a bee and a honey spoon rang their doorbell.

Your Wabo

Did you know? In Sorbian legends from Lusatia, there are tiny beings called Lutken. "Querxe" is the name for dwarfs in Lusatian legends, also around Zittau.

Today: Draw a Wichtel the way you imagine one. What does his hat look like?



23 December
The last evening before the feast

Dear children,

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, and I'm a little excited. Meister Zeidler told me what he's planning for tomorrow, but I'm not allowed to say. He whispered it in my ear, and Lipsi was listening. I'll keep it secret. Tomorrow I'll write to you for the last time.

Your Wabo
(Lipsi hums softly and yawns.)

Did you know? In Styria, people remembered the bees on Christmas Eve too: they were told that it was Holy Night. In Berchtesgaden, the custom of waking the bees was called "Impwecken".

Today: Whisper "Good night" to the Wichtel door. It's sure to be listening.



24 December
Merry Christmas

Dear children,

Today is Christmas Eve, and there's a story for Christmas Eve. This is my last letter. I'm packing my suitcase. Maybe we'll see each other again. Thank you for taking me in. Lipsi and I felt very much at home with you. Merry Christmas!

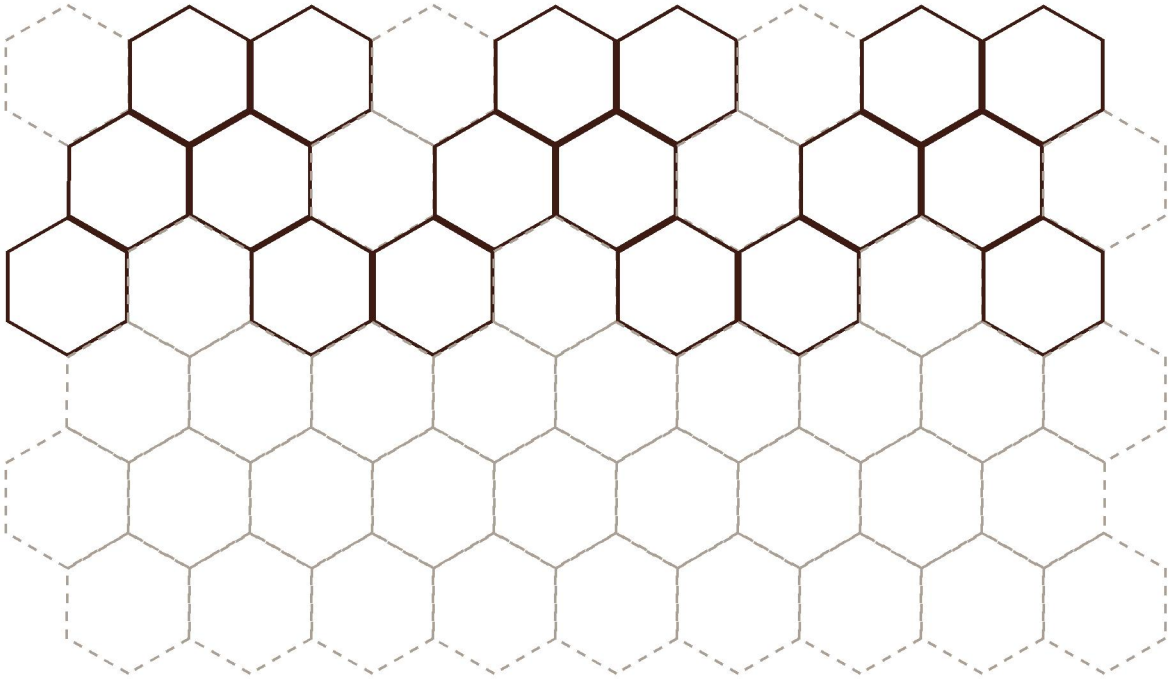
Your Wabo
(Lipsi nods and waves with both antennae.)

Did you know? Because of pollination, the honey bee counts as Germany's third most important farm animal, after cattle and pigs.

Today: Write or draw a letter back to Wabo and leave it by the door.

Honeycomb template for 9 December

Keep drawing the comb: every cell has six corners.



Sources for “Did you know?”

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· NABU: Das fleißige Lieschen
· AGES: Bienenstock-Livestream
· Uni Göttingen, Forstbotanischer Garten: Kirsche – Brauchtum
· LWG Bayern: Biologie der Bienen
· Universität Leipzig: 600 Jahre Alma mater Lipsiensis
· LWG Bayern: Bienen und Kirche
· LAVES: Bienenwabenbau und Bienenwachs (2017)
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All links: honigwichtel.de/en/children/gnome-door/