

Erasmus+ project „The Children of Sheherazade“ Germany – Year 2 (2022–23) – Storyteller’s Report

School: GGS Düppelstraße, Aachen, Germany

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I was greeted happily when I entered the classroom and I felt the same. I greeted everyone personally and the hugs and squeezing lasted for several minutes.

Then I noticed that 2 children were missing: Badr from Syria and Moanrian from South Sudan. I asked about them and the children said that Badr had moved away and that Moanrian was repeating the 2nd grade: „He had never been to school before and otherwise everything would be too difficult for him!“ I was told.

„And now: you tell the story and we draw!“ came the next question. I said yes, but a little differently, because now it was not their countries of origin that determined the stories, but they themselves. They could choose topics that I would then tell stories about. After we had decided what the topics were, the first ideas came.

Everything was written on the board and then it was a matter of choosing, because we couldn’t cover all the topics. To avoid any arguments or „I’ll go with what the person who is announced chooses!“ I asked everyone to put their head on the desk and raise their hand if a topic came up that they liked!“ They could choose as many topics as they wanted.



Then there were two run-offs until the 3 or 4 topics were decided. Halloween stories, Christmas stories, giants and witches of the world.



There was then a discussion on the topic of Halloween about which stories would fit: ghosts, spectres, zombies, werewolves. But then ... he said he would like to know how Halloween came about. Where does it really come from, what does this day or night mean. It must be said here that this boy is 2 years older than the others and only joined the class shortly before the summer holidays. Kathleen von Scheven had agreed to take him in because otherwise he would have been sent to a special school because of emotional difficulties. He came from the other school. This suggestion was enthusiastically received by everyone. Even when I explained that we would then have to go to Ireland for the beginnings of Halloween, the Celtic festival of Samhain. But their ghosts, specters and zombie stories would not be included. We ended this first session with the story of Jimmy Dudu. A Jamaican story about a soul bird that is only seen from October 31st to November 1st and that must not be killed.

This really challenged the class, because for the next six weeks I told Celtic stories that dealt with the discovery of Ireland by the Tuatha da Dananns (Bronze Age) as well as the creation of other worlds. And everyone joined in. Lots of questions were asked. We looked at quantum physics, which talks about parallel universes, just like in the stories. We were able to answer some things together, but some things remain mysterious. „Maybe we'll know something when we're as old as you, Mrs. Sommer!“ said Beni. Benjamin is a Roma who, in his first year, refused to paint or do anything else after the story for most of his time. He said „No!“ to everything. And now! Like a different person. He listens with an intensity that motivates me to tell the story differently. He immediately picks up a sheet of paper and starts painting. His pictures are colorful and detailed.

Just in time for the start of Advent, we were able to tackle our second topic: Christmas stories, which turned out to be a challenge for me. Christmas stories! Here too, the question was: what is the meaning of Christmas? We thought about it together and decided. Christmas is about giving something and experiencing miracles. First, I told the story of the holly branch, where a stingy old man learns to be generous.

One student's painted answer was his house, his Benz and his bag full of gold!
The picture by Asli, who had only painted a wedding couple in a meadow in the first year, showed the beggar and the dark house before the stingy old man's transformation. Ecrin divided her picture into two halves: before and after the realization. The range of what is meant by giving is wide.

As everyone wanted to continue working on the topic after the Christmas holidays, I suggested telling the story of Hans Christian Andersen's Snow Queen. This dragged on for the next 6 weeks, but everyone joined in enthusiastically. And so, in the end, a book within a book, "Christmas Stories," was created.

The last topic was split into two. Here I took up an idea from my Danish colleague Maria, who wanted to deal with two topics more or less at the same time and always told them in turn. I asked my children if that was OK with them and they said yes. And they always knew exactly whether it was the giants' or the witches' turn!

The children still love the storytelling sessions. They are enthusiastic about it and now have a lot to tell. After running, which some still need to do, others decide to stay where they are, they get a piece of paper and start talking about what they think is important to draw. Sometimes there is just one object or one figure that reflects the essence of the stories for them. We discuss how much truth the fairy tales or stories have. Whether it is all just fantasy. Quantum physics, brain research or even knowledge of nature can make a contribution here and it is now a given that we sometimes go online to track something down or someone. The I-pads that were purchased due to Corona are coming into their own.

At the end of the school year they were curious about what we would be doing next year. „You will invent and develop your own stories!“ was received with curiosity but also with some scepticism. „Let yourself be surprised! It will be fun!“ I said. „That's always the case with you and storytelling!“ was the comment that I happily took off into the summer holidays with.