

School Drama Project of Class 3Pa

Murder At Pitlochry House

Friday and Saturday evening (16th / 17th September 2016): Every seat is taken in the great hall of Pratteln Secondary School and an expectant audience is waiting to see the results of the two-week school drama project of class 3Pa.

As the curtain opens and the whodunit about the mysterious murders at Pitlochry House is about to start the audience sees a Victorian living room in black and white. The beautiful and impressive stage setting, designed by art teacher Beat Ackermann and executed by class 3Pa, is cleverly done. Every piece of furniture is reduced to its black outlines on a white background, a surprisingly efficient way of drawing the attention of the audience to the performance of the actresses and actors. They, the students of class 3Pa, are almost at the end of an exciting two week project which started on Alp Wang in the heart of Switzerland on 5th September and will end with an overwhelming applause after their two brilliant 50 minute performances.

This is my 10th drama project at our school in 37 years. After just one year of learning English at school I usually take my classes to a secluded place somewhere in Switzerland (with only cows as witnesses to our work!) where we can concentrate completely on preparing an English school play. Not even a mobile phone can distract us (as it is forbidden to take one along).

This year my class works on “Murder At Pitlochry House” by Peter De Geesewell. This includes getting to grips with the text and understanding every single word of it, doing lots of role plays and games which help to build up the students’ trust in themselves, each other and their director and his team. By the end of the day, we end up on the improvised ‘stage’ in front of the house to try and act out what we have been working on all day.

We try to immerse the students in the English language by using English only for a large part of the daily programme and we encourage the students to use English in their free time as well. Our cook also helps to focus everyone by serving British food like porridge or bacon and scrambled eggs for breakfast, fish and chips, Irish stew or shepherd’s pie for lunch and dinner. In the evenings we watch an English film with English subtitles or have a make-up competition.

The results are amazing. By the end of the week the students do not only know their text by heart but have also become quite fluent and self-confident in the camp language.

There follows a second week at home, on the school stage, where we complete the stage setting and then rehearse relentlessly for five days.

And now it is time to perform – and shine – in front of our audience. The curtain opens and every single student of the class appears on stage, either on Friday or Saturday and some on both days. The parents hardly recognise their children because they are dressed up in wonderful costumes, speak fluent English and act as if they had never done anything else.

As class-teacher and director I am very proud of my class. It was a great fortnight and I’d like to thank every one of my students for their dedication and stamina. They have made this play their own play.

Another big thank you goes to my team: Beat Ackermann (stage design and construction), Brigitte Rickenbacher (cook and camp mother), Anja Gloor, Margrit Mangold and Tania Muntwiler (co-directors). Everyone has supplied ideas, has bubbled over with enthusiasm and has helped to give my students the experience of a lifetime.

Peter R. Füg