

Quaisra Shahraz' visit and lecture

On Thursday 21st of September the Geschwister-Scholl-Gymnasium was visited by a famous novelist and screenwriter from the United Kingdom. Her name is Qaisra Shahraz and she visited to give a lecture on multiculturalism based loosely around her short story 'A pair of Jeans'. Attendance was obligatory for everyone in Q1, so we all met at the beginning of the 3rd lesson in the study hall which was going to be the auditorium for the next one and a half hours.

The room was packed with chairs and in the front there was a speaker's desk as well as two sofas which we 'stole' from the library. While most of the students took their seats, six of us had volunteered to sit at the front, on the mentioned sofas, to be able to talk to the author herself directly and possibly be part of the lecture (but also to hopefully gain a bonus to our grade). Me and four other students from Mrs Bitan's English advanced class, who also organized Shahraz' visit, and another girl from Mrs Ullner's advanced class took our respective places.

After a few minutes our headmaster, Mr Niessen took the microphone and informed us that Mrs Shahraz was going to arrive a little bit later than planned, because her train had a delay. So much for Germans being always on time, but I assume exceptions prove the rule.

When she eventually arrived at our school though, she did not complain about the delay, but instead praised Germany for many reasons. Apparently she had gained mainly good experiences on her journeys to this country.

Right after that we dove into the topic she was actually here for; her short story. She gave an introduction and then asked if she could have two of us to quickly summarize the plot for the others. I showed up and was asked to step in front of my classmates, what I did – nervously.

After me Franco outlined the rest of the story and when we were both sitting down again Shahraz started talking about a variety of interesting topics, like the process she went through while writing and especially publishing the story, how people from different cultures interpreted the story in diverse ways and that she wrote a different ending, so it does not give away a false message.

She also gave a bit of insight about how the way you dress is a huge part of your identity, but also greatly influenced by where you grew up. She talked about the differences of forced and arranged marriages and how these terms sometimes are mixed up, creating misconceptions about these two concepts.

We, the listeners, learned a lot about the problems immigrants and their children have to face when they come to a new country, for example about how a first generation immigrant may still have a strong connection to his/her home country, but how over generations this will get lost. She explained, at the example of her own sons, that you identify more with the land that you spend your whole youth and life in, rather than the one that your parents emigrated from.

The following minutes she talked passionately about how all she wanted, especially from us young people, was that we connect – not necessarily via the internet, but face-to-face. We should get to know people from different cultural, ethnical or religious backgrounds and learn to understand each other, as that is the only way to effectively extinct the poisonous prejudices that immigrants and their children have to face in our world. And since we, as a school, stand together against racism and hatred Shahraz' speech was rather fitting, but also in a weirdly sad way, since we just have to look at world politics to see that those prejudices and even the hatred is still alive and well in the minds of many.

After she encouraged us to go out in the world, meet new people and learn from them, it was time for a few questions. She had already answered a lot of the ones we had prepared in her speech, so we just asked the few we still had and strangely enough, time had seemed to fly by. The 4th lesson was over and after a few pictures were taken, we were released into the rest of our day, the words that stood upon the scroll that Shahraz brought ("Spread Hummus not Hate") echoing in our minds as we went back to our daily business.

Lisa Savelsberg, Q1