

 **IS**

International School

The magazine for international educators



Preparing students for tomorrow's world

*The 'stage' is delivered to
Franconian International School*



Theatre in a container

Sarah Tudge celebrates a sell-out performance with a difference

A few months ago the city of Erlangen built a container village close to our school. This temporary accommodation is providing housing for asylum seekers waiting to be processed through the German system, and the school has been working with the local community to try to assist in any way we could. As I walked past the container village every day, I kept wondering about the stories of the people who would live there: Where would they come from? What had they been through to get to Germany? How would they feel when they arrived? And then I stumbled upon Claire Bayley's gripping play 'The Container'. The play tells the story of five refugees, traveling across Europe in a container, trying to find refuge to make a better life for themselves. This was a story begging to be told to our school community, so that perhaps we would stop and think about the people who were soon to fill the containers down the road.

I took the play to my International Bacculaureate Theatre class and they were on board. We obtained the rights from Nick Hern books and I made email contact with Claire Bayley, who was utterly supportive of our project. We signed up for the play to be part of the International Week Against Racism that takes place in Erlangen. We were ready to go ... but where would we perform? Our school theatre is plush and lovely, but doesn't give the feel of being in a container. We looked at designs of how to change our gym, or even build a structure on our stage. We started rehearsing in our school truck, for the students to get a feel for the claustrophobia the characters would feel. Then our Deputy Director managed to persuade a local building company, Mauss, to loan the school a container for two days. The play would take place in the container, there would be audiences of 40, and we would stage multiple performances.



Scenes and rehearsal from the performance of 'The Container'

Meanwhile the rehearsal room was rather fraught. My talented IB Theatre class were struggling. This was a tough play, they were telling stories that were foreign to them, and they were trying to do justice to accents they found very difficult. This is where working in an international school is amazing; we were able to ask parents and staff to come and help us. From our community we had Turkish, Ukrainian and Syrian accent coaches available. The students worked tirelessly, the coaches were kind.

Then came the day when the container arrived. At 6.30am it was placed in the front of our school entrance. Every member of our community had to walk past the venue for this play. We had twenty four hours to rehearse and for the students to get used to the space. It was an intense time and the students were pushed to their limits. We had to check that there was enough air for 40 audience members, and that there was enough light as all light was provided by torches. The school and the community were buzzing. Why was this container in front of the school? Who were those exhausted students and crew appearing in and out of the door? What was happening?

All shows were sold out; there was a fantastic mix of high school students, staff, members of our community, university students and officials. All proceeds went to Amnesty International. The actors delivered an unbelievably brave performance; they told the story with maturity and honesty. The audience was visibly moved and grateful to get out of the container into the fresh night air – but as they walked to their cars they saw the container village and perhaps thought differently about the people who would live there.

***Sarah Tudge is Head of Drama at Franconian International School, Germany
E-mail: info@the-fis.de***

