

Native American Workshop - a tangible Indian experience!

On May 29th, 2015, a number of students from various Albert-Schweitzer's 8th grade classes, together with their English teachers, were able to enjoy a special opportunity:

a visit by the renowned Indian musicians Mitch Walking Elk and Wade Fernandez, who paid an extra visit to our school while in Germany on a concert tour, also doing a gig at the Offenbach Youth Club Sandgasse.

Wade from the Menominee tribe and Mitch, a Cherokee, set off by telling something about themselves: where they come from, about widespread stereotypes, about the significance of their tribal culture and life on the reservations in modern America.

The students had learned through their English textbooks that at the beginning of white European settlement large numbers of tribes had been decimated through imported diseases, and found this confirmed by Wade and Mitch.

Then the two visitors answered the manifold questions of the interested pupils: What is the story behind the animal names given to Indian tribe members? What religion do Indian people belong to? How are the Indian tongues kept alive? How are the ways of life different between the Woodland Indians and those from the Great Plains? Do Native Americans still hunt using traditional weapons? What forms of adequate reparation or satisfaction have been or are given by the US government to amend the wrongs done to the Indian nation, among others the theft of land, displacement and genocide.

So many of the topics spoken about could have been extended and offered sufficient starting points for further discussion in the English language classrooms, among them the work of the US Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Claims Commission, as well as the practice of boarding schools aiming at imposing Anglo-Saxon culture on Indian children.

In the last part of their visit the two visitors presented the pupils with a taste of their music. They had brought an acoustic guitar, a drum and of course their fascinating voices.

Their music style ranged from ceremonial songs to Blues, Folk, Rock and even Flamenco. The whole spectrum of their musical performances can be found on YouTube and a few sample CDs and Mitch's autobiography were on display.

At the end, Mitch and Wade posed for the some selfies with the group and shook hands with the participating students. They were presented with a bag filled with Offenbach knick-knacks, and warmly thanked for the invitation.

The workshop was not only enriching in terms of geographic and cultural input, but also provided ample opportunity to students to put the knowledge of English they had been acquiring at school into practice.

[Car – 7/2016]