

As the new year begins, I cannot believe how fast the time is going. I have already been on my Year Abroad as an English language assistant for five months! Since my last YA blog things have been moving fast. I have continued with my weekly German lessons and also travelled home for Christmas to spend time with my friends and family over the school's Christmas holidays, which started on the 23rd of December and lasted until the 8th of January.

Working in the school has been amazing and everyone is so helpful and kind. Although nerves were high when I first started giving classes in the school I feel I have adjusted well and I am more relaxed, which has made the whole experience even more enjoyable. I have started doing a class after school for one hour so that students who feel they may want to speak more English than is possible in the classroom have the opportunity to discuss and learn more. During this additional class we spoke about a range of different things and the students led the conversation, which was great. They give feedback and have been discussing what they would like to cover in the next class. At first I found it challenging to organise a class and find interesting material to use in class but having the students tell me where they feel they may need a little more work with regard to grammar for example is great. As the weeks go on I am really starting to get the feel for teaching and to be honest I enjoy it a lot! The students are very interested in life in Ireland and learn a lot about our culture, attractions, and traditions, which I enjoy being involved in. When I first came to the school I put up a notice for additional English lessons outside the classroom and a local lady got back to me and enquired about me joining her and her friends every week to help them with literature. I had never done anything like this before, so I was very nervous going into it, but I really enjoyed it.

We met for the first time in January, and they were very interested in life in Ireland. We started with the novel *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan which the ladies chose to discuss. The experience has been enjoyable, and it is nice to see people so interested in Ireland and its past, although the book deals with such a sad topic (the book narrates the life of a man born to an unwed teen set in a small village in Ireland in 1985).

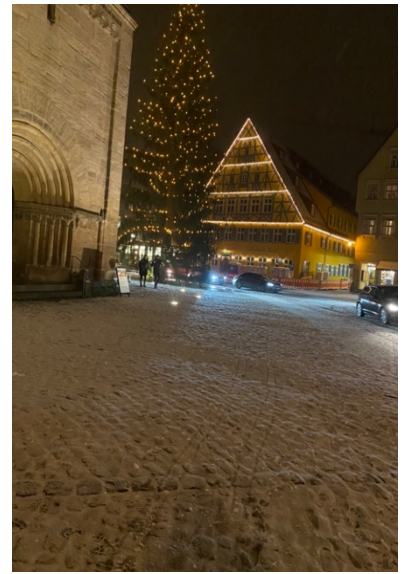
In February I plan to travel home to Ireland for one week during the school holidays. This is the school's carnival ("Fasching") holidays which starts on the 26th of February and ends on the 6th of March. In order to travel home I will stay in Nuremberg with my friend and travel with Lufthansa. During my time here I am lucky enough to have friends visit from Ireland and stay at my accommodation. I plan to try find a place I can volunteer at during the week to improve my German language skills and to move a little bit more out of my comfort zone with regard to speaking German. At the moment all the Christmas lights are still up in the streets of Dinkelsbühl and won't be taken down until mid-February, or so I have been told. It's nice to see all the lights still up. It has also started to snow again.

As I mentioned, when I first came to the school I advertised that I would be open to doing grinds after school and some students have also come forward who are interested. This is a new thing for me, so I am a little bit nervous, but it is good to try new things. Overall, this Year Abroad is really pushing me out of my comfort zone and has encouraged me to learn and I have learned so much. I have also gained so much insight into teaching and becoming more independent. I have learned things like how to prepare material and lesson plans and how to handle large classes of students. I have also become more independent as I have to do more things for myself while I am living alone here in Germany. I'm excited to continue learning and meeting new people while I am here in Germany although time is going so fast!

Laura



Dinkelsbühl Christmas lights during December



Christmas tree outside cathedral of St George in Dinkelsbühl