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I caught the bug at 17

Nevfel Cumart speaks to pupils about himself and about writing

js Kreuztal. He never actually intended to become a poet. The son of Turkish immigrants, Nevfel Cumart was born in Germany in 1964 and grew up in the northern town of Stade. After completing his abitur, the general qualification for university entrance, he did an apprenticeship as a carpenter. He then upped sticks and moved to Bamberg to complete his degree. He took credits in Turcology and Arabic, Iranian and Islamic studies with a view to becoming a professor. In 1993, however, he changed tack, turning his back on the world of academia and making his long-standing pastime into his profession – he became a writer.

At yesterday morning's two readings at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt secondary school in Kreuztal, Nevfel Cumart had won over the 13-year-old students within minutes. The author, who had already put in a guest appearance at the city library on Monday evening, probably was not seen by the school's German teachers as a "dead cert" for delivering entertaining reading lessons – after all, his speciality, poetry, was uncharted waters for the autumn readings season which has become something of a tradition at the school. And yet, Cumart was quick to tune into the pupil's wavelength and was promptly inundated with questions.

It was clear from the start: This was not going to be a dry and dreary poetry reading, but an engaging dialogue conducted on a level playing field. Even before Cumart

had read out his first poem "Two Worlds" in German and Turkish, the inquisitive pupils bombarded him with questions. How had he become a writer? Where does he get his ideas? How much do writers earn?

Cumart, 45, quenched the pupil's thirst for knowledge with unusually candid answers, shedding light on the creative process he embarked upon in his teenage years. "I caught the bug at 17," pointing out once more that he had never set out to become an author.

The ideas for his poems – which fill a total of 15 books to date – are everywhere. "The ideas find me – I just have to grasp them." Cumart draws on his own experiences at home, his travels or his feelings and moods, from joy and pleasure to anger and frustration. Similarly, the collision of two cultures in his own German/Turkish biography frequently forms the starting point for his poetry.

The man behind the lyrical compositions was also of huge interest to the students. Nevfel Cumart concedes just how hard and exhausting surviving as a writer can be – always on the go, travelling from reading to reading, up and down the country – Kreuztal, Rostock and then on to the next venue. This way of life is a strain not only for himself but also for his wife and his eight-year-old daughter. "I've been away from home since 22nd September," the poet admits. "There's often little time left for family and friends."

