

2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT



*Kathy Oster welcoming students
to Story Avenue*



young alberta
book society

**CELEBRATING 41 YEARS OF
BRINGING ALBERTA'S CHILDREN
AND LITERARY ARTISTS TOGETHER**



*Gail de Vos at Notre
Dame Elementary,
Wordpower 2023*



Young Alberta Book Society
11759 Groat Road
Edmonton AB T5M 3K6

780.422.8232
info@yabs.ab.ca

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

I love reading. I was very fortunate to grow up in a household where books were present and reading was valued. These days, I read quite a bit for my job, but I take time to read for my own pleasure every day. Stories are a vital part of my life. And when I look back at my school years, I can remember every author or illustrator who ever visited my class. Seeing that real, living people were behind the books I read made a visceral impact on me. I gained a real sense of the work that goes into storytelling and publishing, but also realized that these creators weren't people in distant places. These were people who could and did come from places that I knew. My understanding of what is possible grew, and I realized that I could even tell my own stories one day.

YABS exists to foster literacy in young Albertans. This can be done in many ways, but we focus on connecting young people and real, live Albertan authors, illustrators, and storytellers because those connections can have big impact. A literary artist visit has the power to both inspire a youth's interest in literacy and to open their perception of one day telling their own stories or creating their own art. This year YABS began exploring relationships with organizations that provide programming for youth outside of school settings. In January 2024, I attended one of the events under this new FLY! program. The experience reinforced for me how meeting with literary creators energizes the audience's imagination while also being a lot of fun. I'm excited to see how YABS grows in these complementary directions.



Natasha Deen at Story Avenue

I want to give a huge thank you to our donors (logos pictured on the last page), whether large or small. Every one of you makes a difference in our ability to reach young Albertans. I also want to thank our Executive Director Stephanie Gregorwich and our Deputy Director Jennifer Plamondon, without whom none of this would be possible. And thank you to my fellow Board members, to our hosts, our partner organizations, our literary artists, and our volunteers for supporting YABS and literacy in this province.



CATHERINE LITTLE, JUNE 2024

NEW PROGRAM: ONWORDS & UPWORDS

ONWORDS & UPWORDS

A SERIES OF RURAL ALBERTA TOURS

Onwords & Upwords was a 6-leg tour to rural communities sponsored by Canada Council for the Arts. Onwords tour legs began with YABS choosing an anchor school in an area we believed to be in need of artist visits, then working with that school on which artist they would like to host. From that school as the starting point, we built out a full week of sessions in the area.

This was our first project with Canada Council for the Arts in over a decade. We're thrilled to have them as a funding partner once again!



Lorna Schultz Nicholson at an Onwords school



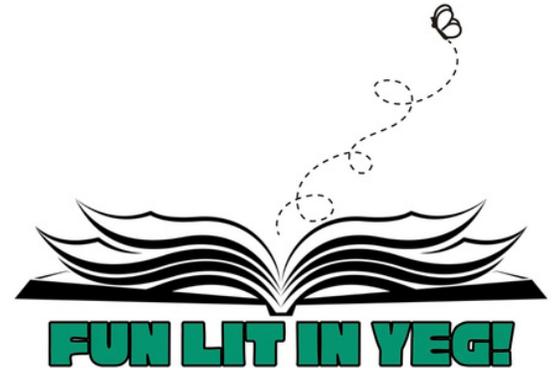
Sigmund Brouwer at Veteran School

- **Gerry Rasmussen** went to 4 schools in Hinton and Edson
- **Rita Feutl** went to 6 schools in the Grande Prairie area
- **Lorna Schultz Nicholson** went to 4 schools in west-central Alberta
- **Joan Marie Galat** went to 6 schools in southwestern Alberta
- **Sigmund Brouwer** went to 10 schools in southeastern Alberta
- **Sue Farrell Holler** went to 5 schools in southern Alberta and two around Grande Prairie

NEW PROGRAM: FLY!

The Edmonton Arts Council invited applicants to develop new programming that expands on existing services. From this, Fun Lit in YEG! (FLY!) was born, a series of artist visits for children and youth presented via community organizations in the City of Edmonton such as community leagues, Boys & Girls Clubs, and youth service agencies. This is an entirely new audience for YABS!

During this fiscal year, we sent artists to Alberta Ave Community Centre, multiple Boys & Girls Clubs, Bent Arrow's Kikosewin program, and Delton School's after school program.



The event with Kikosewin was a particularly special one. We partnered with Pe Metawe Games to host the youth at their facility for a full day that included character development with Marty Chan and character illustration with Gerry Rasmussen. After pizza and snacks, the youth used the characters they created with Gerry and Marty in a collaborative storytelling game run by Pe Metawe's story guide Chris Anderson.



Gerry Rasmussen's workshop with kids from Kikosewin



Participating FLY! artists (so far): Kathy Jessup, Gerry Rasmussen, Tololwa Mollé, Fred Curatolo, Rob Feagan, Alison Hughes, and Marty Chan



MARTYN GODFREY AWARD



The Martyn Godfrey Young Writers Award had a record breaking year in 2023! We received more than 250 short stories from grade 4-9 students all over the province. Our volunteer jury of educators, librarians, and authors read them all and selected the three best stories in each grade.



The elementary winners attended a workshop by Marty Chan while the junior high winners had a session by Natasha Deen. Every winner also received a certificate and a parcel of books by YABS authors.

Our 18 winners each received a certificate, a parcel of books by YABS authors, and an invitation to our exclusive Winners' Circle online writing workshops for themselves plus a friend or sibling.

“Wonderful writing that made my job very difficult. I congratulate all of the students who entered their work in the contest. So much fun to read. I look forward to one day seeing some of these young author's books in bookstores for all to enjoy.”

DAVID POULSEN
2023 JUDGE



We began honouring the late Martyn Godfrey with this contest in 2001, inspired by Martyn's joy in the letters he received from children.

2023 GODFREY WINNERS

Elementary Winners

Grade 4

- Matthew Leong of Calgary for *The Boy and the Sword*
- Emilia Kovaliv of Edmonton for *Saving Planet X*
- Amelia Hurley of Fort Saskatchewan for *It's My Turn*

Grade 5

- Hailey Lanovaz of Calgary for *Little Green Riding Hood*
- Violet Vizena Selfors of Red Deer for *The Dragon*
- Ewa Olaniyan of Calgary for *Dealing With Different*

Grade 6

- Violet Sylvestre of Camrose for *A Witch's Storm*
- Amara Archer of Calgary for *The Tale of the Coffee Shop*
- Freja Bekkering Van Damme of Calgary for *The Music Box*



Junior High Winners

Grade 7

- Ella Abebe of Calgary for *Beyond the Gates*
- Chloe Chan of Edmonton for *The Ghostly Soldier*
- Areeba Haque of Edmonton for *The Cloth of New Beginnings*

Grade 8

- Ava Serena Jivraj of Edmonton for *Hide and Seek*
- Sofia Nenshi Nathoo of Calgary for *Lucky*
- Kaylene Lugay of Edmonton for *Dancing Among the Stars*

Grade 9

- Piece Ror of Fort Saskatchewan for *Broken*
- Sarathi Gunarathna of Edmonton for *Without Marianna*
- Genavieve Myson of Calgary for *Credo*



To check out the winners' stories head to:

<https://www.yabs.ab.ca/martyn-godfrey-young-writers-award/>





CENOVUS WORDPOWER



For the final time with Cenovus Energy as a sponsor, the Wordpower tour brought 8 authors, illustrators and storytellers together in-person with students in 10 Cenovus communities around Alberta. After three successful online tours, the artists were delighted to hit the road and return to in-person sessions and were warmly welcomed by the 26 participating schools.

The tours took place on April 24-28 and May 8-12, with some sessions being rescheduled to June 5-9 due to forest fire activity. Approximately 17,000 students from kindergarten to grade 12 enjoyed presentations and workshops. Gifts of books by the artists were presented to the school libraries.

We extend our thanks to Cenovus Energy for a wonderful decade-long partnership.



Sue Farrell Holler at Dr Brosseau School

The 2023 Tour artists were Constance Brissenden, Sigmund Brouwer, Gail de Vos, Robert Feagan, Joan Marie Galat, Sue Farrell Holler, Kathy Jessup, and Gerry Rasmussen.



WORDPOWER

CENOVUS WORDPOWER



*Dr. Brosseau School student
with one of the books gifted to
the school library*

“ We have learned so much new information. Mr. Feagan was fantastic! All the teachers were constantly stopping him to ask questions or to compliment him. Students were quite hyped up about the visits and a lot of questions were asked. Overall the visit was a HUGE success, students could not stop talking about what they had learned and one pleaded to keep Mr. Feagan forever!

”

**ERICA DEKKER, NORTH
STAR ELEMENTARY**

“ This program is amazing, the students learn so many valuable things from the authors and storytellers that come to present. They not only learned about the people themselves and how they began, but about what makes great stories, how to be a great writer, and not to give up. The kids laughed so much, that is what I will always remember.

”

**TINA REEKIE, COLD LAKE
ELEMENTARY**

The 2023 Tour Communities: Ardmore, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Bonnyville, Bruderheim, Caslan, Cold Lake, Elizabeth Metis Settlement, Lac La Biche, Lamont, Le Goff / Cold Lake First Nation.



WORDPOWER

TALEBLAZERS

YEAR ROUND & BURSARIES



Taleblazers, our annual literary festival, sends authors, illustrators, and storytellers into schools and libraries all over the province. Due to Covid-19 disruptions, the program has taken different forms since 2020. In 2023-24, we saw a return to primarily in-person visits, but continued with subsidizing travel the entire school year, not just during our traditional festival period of October/November. The structure of the Festival will continue to adapt to the needs of our hosting partners in future years.

We were fortunate to have an abundance of travel money, but faced challenges with school calendars against artist availability. Schools remained enthusiastic about the idea of artist visits, but struggled to find room in the budget for extras. Schools continued to experience high rates of medical leave leaving them understaffed, often on very short notice.



Sigmund Brouwer with Alberta kids

Despite these challenges, we saw an increase across the board in bookings throughout this fiscal. Under the combined banners of Taleblazers, Year-Round Bookings, Allard Win-a-Literary Artist, and Seeds of Stories bursaries, we successfully facilitated 76 in-person and 14 online bookings by 19 different artists. Our artists conducted 232 individual sessions at 81 different schools and libraries in 38 different communities across Alberta to an estimated audience of 21,000 children and youth.

The Taleblazers festival creates opportunities for literary artists to engage students of all grade levels around the province, which leads to enhanced levels of literacy, and most importantly, excitement about reading and the arts.



TALEBLAZERS

YEAR ROUND & BURSARIES



A notable story from our 2023-24 bookings came to us from Arrowwood Community School. After a writing residency with author Sigmund Brouwer, the students wrote a collection of their own stories which they went on to independently publish with Sigmund's guidance. It's always so exciting to hear about the youth we work with taking the next steps in their writing journeys!



We marked 23 years of offering help to hosts in paying artist fees through the Allard Win-A-Literary Artist program, prioritizing schools in particular need of extra support. As the needs of schools increased, we began the Seeds of Stories bursary program in 2020 with a starter grant from the Edmonton Arts Council. Since then, we've grown Seeds of Stories with the help of a wide variety of sponsors. The number of bursaries we're able to offer is in constant flux as we seek funding year-round to continue helping as many schools as possible.

Thank you!

Our deepest thanks go out to the many sponsors of our bursary spots: The Allard Foundation; The Edmonton Community Foundation; Calgary Arts Development; Shaw Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink, and Red Deer & District Community Foundation.

TALEBLAZERS

YEAR ROUND & BURSARIES

“ We had the mom of an autistic young man come in to tell us he was so worried about coming to the session, but was over the moon excited to meet Gerry and work with him. His mom said that he had a real breakthrough that day. He has never before been able to handle any criticism of his work without having a meltdown. He took Gerry's constructive criticism and worked with it! His mother was in tears. He has been telling everyone what he got to do and when he was at his grandmother's house he sat with her and cut all of Gerry's comic strips out of her old pile of papers and kept telling everyone that he got to draw with Gerry! Two weeks later, this session was still the first thing he wanted to talk about.”

HOST OF GERRY RASMUSSEN

“ Our school has a very small population and, therefore, a small budget. This program provided us with the opportunity to benefit from an extra activity we wouldn't normally get. With two special programs serving students with learning difficulties and focused on reading and writing, this opportunity was an excellent complement to the programming.”

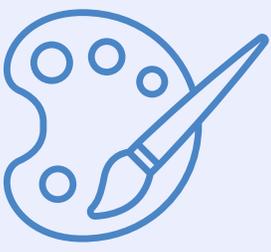
BURSARY RECIPIENT



Lorna Schultz Nicholson at Holy Family School in Brooks

“ After the presentation, one of our Language Arts teachers noted how impressed she was with Sigmund's candid discussion about his time as a student and his shortcomings as a writer. His emphasis on finding stories in everyday life, putting them to paper and accepting help from others to perfect them, she felt, was relatable and inspiring for our students, especially the boys. Mission accomplished!”

HOST OF SIGMUND BROUWER



STORY AVENUE



On February 23-24, 2023, students, instructors, volunteers and teachers gathered at the Centre for Education in Edmonton for two inspiring mornings of writing and illustrating workshops with nine YABS authors and illustrators.

More than four hundred grade 5 & 6 students joined us from from Delton, Norwood, John A. MacDougall, Mee-Yah-Noh and wihkwêntôwin (formerly Oliver) schools. They attended two sessions with different artists, were fed a mid-morning snack, and returned to school with pages of writing and a book by one of their instructors.

The students went back to their schools showing off their finished stories from the workshops and starting new ones. They enthusiastically read the gift books they were given, traded with their friends, and emptied the library shelves of everything written by the instructing authors.

Story Avenue is always a highlight of the year and we feel very privileged to run this program.



Story Avenue 2024 instructors (left to right): David Poulsen, Lorna Schultz Nicholson, Sue Farrell Holler, Shea Proulx, Rita Feutl, Natasha Deen, Bill Bunn, Debby Waldman, Gerry Rasmussen

STORY AVENUE FEEDBACK



Shea Proulx with students learning to create comic-zines

“One student was particularly inspired by Bill Bunn’s session at Story Avenue. He said, ‘I want to continue working on stories just like the ones we did today.’ This student has since been actively writing during our literacy blocks and has shown a remarkable improvement in his writing skills.” -- Teacher

“The conference had a significant impact on our students' literacy skills and attitudes towards reading, writing, and illustrating. They came back inspired and more enthusiastic about expressing themselves through writing and drawing. Many students mentioned feeling more confident in their abilities after attending Story Avenue.” -- Teacher

“I’ve learned so much! It’s bidirectional: the kids are learning and so am I! It’s amazing.” -- Story Ave Volunteer

“Following Story Avenue, we noticed a remarkable increase in students' engagement with reading, writing, and drawing. They were eager to share their stories and creations with others, both in and out of the classroom. For example, one student, who was previously hesitant to participate in writing activities, started writing short stories at home and has even started to volunteer to read them aloud in class.” -- Teacher



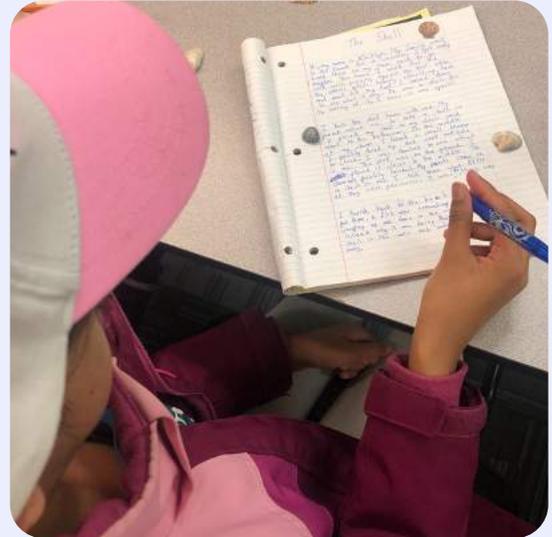
Some of our incredible volunteers

Our deepest gratitude goes out to our Story Avenue sponsors: The Werklund Foundation, Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37, Rotary Edmonton Northeast, and Federated Cooperatives Ltd.

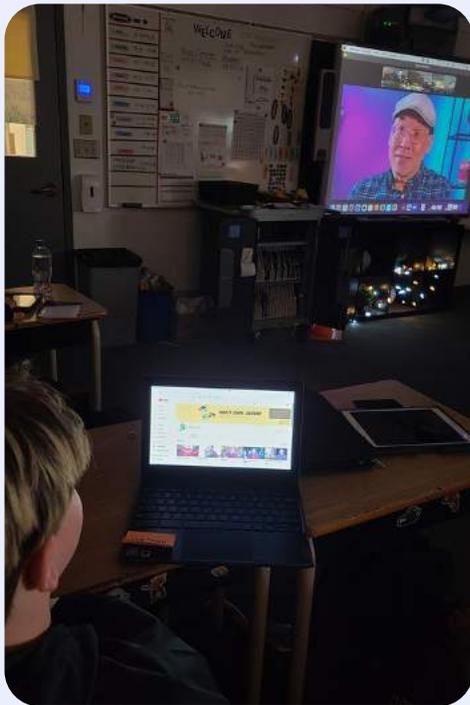


MORE FEEDBACK & PHOTOS!

"The most valuable aspect of the program was giving our students an experience that we normally could not afford to give them. I especially enjoyed watching our neurodivergent students shine (FASD/ADHD/Autistic). They seemed to rise to the occasion the most & it really tapped into their creativity & allowed them to share aspects of themselves they wouldn't normally reveal." -- Host of Rita Feutl



Story Avenue student writing in Debby Waldman's class



Student in Marty Chan's virtual session

Part of why I am a teacher & teaching where I am teaching is because of an author coming to visit our school when I was young. That has stuck with me for a lifetime. It showed me that there was a whole different world out there and new experiences to be had." -- Wordpower Host

"Author visits are always a great reminder of how important reading and writing is and it's also a good reminder of the entire process that goes into writing a book. Specifically for Marty, this was awesome because he is a local author that grew up close by and could share his experiences of growing up in Alberta, which would be similar to experiences the students had. For students to see that these experiences were the inspiration for many of his books was quite inspiring. While observing my own class, and a few others, I could see that students were engaged and listening to everything he had to say the entire time. I also heard from multiple teachers that their students were highly interested in signing out Marty's books from our school library after the presentation."

– Host of Marty Chan



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Vice-Chair



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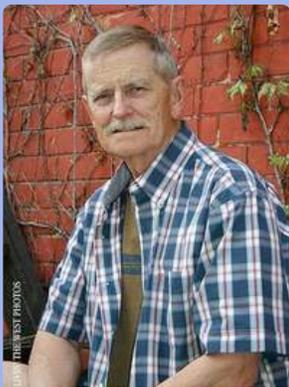
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