

2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



*New comic artists after
FLY! session*



young alberta
book society

**CELEBRATING 42 YEARS OF
BRINGING ALBERTA'S CHILDREN
AND LITERARY ARTISTS TOGETHER**



Alison Hughes at Story Avenue



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

These are particularly challenging times on multiple levels. In the past year, we saw long strikes by Canada Post employees and by educational assistants. We held a heated federal election in Canada and continue to experience the fallout of the presidential election in the U.S. In Alberta, we have the lowest per capita student funding in the country which is leading to ever decreasing numbers of school library staff and ever increasing class sizes. Many in our communities are struggling and we are seeing a corresponding shift in several funders to focus on poverty-relieving initiatives.

It's difficult to remain hopeful, but it's important to continue to show up, to try new things, and to do what we can with what we have. At YABS, one of the new things we tried in response to new challenges was to move our long-running annual Story Avenue program into schools rather than have it at Edmonton's Centre for Education. We've also been exploring more programming to meet youth in non-school settings and continue to seek new ways to engage with schools and libraries to meet our mission.

Let me share some personal highlights of volunteering with YABS this past fiscal year:

- Jurying for the Martyn Godfrey Award and hosting the online author sessions for the winners. So many good questions from these young writers! So much enthusiasm!
- Being a casino volunteer at Grand Villa Casino in Edmonton during Game 3 of the 2024 Stanley Cup playoffs. This casino is attached to the Rogers Place arena. Even though the Oilers lost that night, the fans were in good spirits!
- Meeting more of our artists in person for two YABS confabs. It's great to spend time with our literary artists and to see other board members face-to-face!
- Seeing our Tale Quest program in-person. The youth are so clever and creative as they collaboratively play a roleplaying game and then work with a literary artist to develop their ideas.



Children in FLY! session

I want to finish by acknowledging all of the people and organizations that keep YABS running. Thank you to all of our individual donors, for your faith in what we do. Thank you to all of our funders for their support this year (see last page for logos). I also want to thank our Executive Director Stephanie Gregorwich and our Deputy Director Jennifer Plamondon, who make all of this happen. And thank you to my fellow Board members, to our event hosts, our partner organizations, our literary artists, and our volunteers for supporting YABS and literacy in this province.



CATHERINE LITTLE, JUNE 2025

NEW PROGRAM: TALE QUEST

In 2020, we received one-time funding from the provincial government to run a virtual event for Alberta Culture Days. In partnership with Pe Metawe Games, an Indigenous-owned table top game shop in Edmonton, we came up with Tale Quest: an afternoon of collaborative storytelling games and writing workshops for youth.



In early 2025, we were fortunate to receive funding from the Edmonton Arts Council to revisit Tale Quest and run 12 sessions throughout the year in-person at Pe Metawe's storefront on Alberta Avenue. A professional game facilitator runs an age-appropriate role playing game for groups of up to 6 youth, followed by a writing workshop with a YABS artist.



Pe Metawe
GAMES



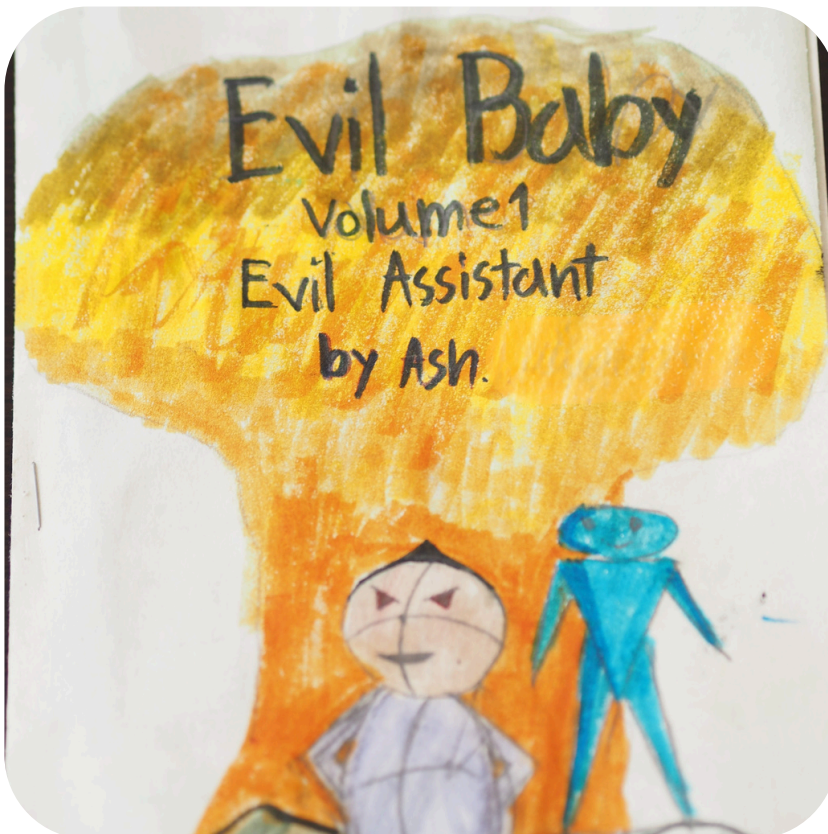
*Bill Bunn & Pe Metawe's Chris Anderson
preparing for Tale Quest session*

Three sessions for kids aged 9-14 were held in this fiscal with workshops by YABS artists Bill Bunn, Marty Chan, and Kathy Jessup. Thanks to Pe Metawe Games and game facilitators Chris Anderson and Jordan Carter!

FLY: FUN LIT IN YEG!

Fun Lit in YEG! (FLY!) was a series of artist visits for children and youth presented in partnership with community organizations in the City of Edmonton.

We sent artists to the Alberta Avenue and McCauley Community Leagues, multiple Boys & Girls Clubs, Scouts troops, Camp Dragonfly, The Centre for Family Literacy, The Mujeres Omega Foundation, and out-of-school programs at different Edmonton schools.



Evil Baby by Ash, comic created in Gerry Rasmussen's FLY! session at Alberta Ave Community League

FLY! was a great experience in reaching new audiences. Previously, our work has been largely limited to schools and public libraries during the school year. This allowed us to branch out to the general public on evenings, weekends, and during the summer!



Participating FLY! artists: Kathy Jessup, Gerry Rasmussen, Tololwa Mollé, Fred Curatolo, Rob Feagan, Alison Hughes, Marty Chan, Carolyn Fisher, Karen Spafford-Fitz, Natasha Deen, Bethany Ellis, Joan Marie Galat, Gail de Vos, Rita Feutl, Debby Waldman, and Anna Priemaza

MARTYN GODFREY AWARD

The Martyn Godfrey Young Writers Award had another record breaking year in 2024! We received nearly 300 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 Natasha Deen while the junior high winners had a session by Anna Priemaza. Our thanks go out to staff at the winners' schools who presented the certificates to the winners at school events!



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.

“This competition was a ton of fun! Thank you for the privilege of jurying this year. It was a fantastic experience, getting a glimpse into the minds of young writers!”

SEAN MONAGHAN
2024 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.

2024 GODFREY WINNERS

Elementary Winners

Grade 4

- Jonah McWilliam of Calgary for *Shadow*
- Melody Wang of Calgary for *The Element War*
- Tiwalola Adeyemi of Calgary for *The Knight of the Night*

Grade 5

- Kennedy Ryder of Calgary for *Dealing with a Feeling*
- Saba Shaikh of Edmonton for *Friendship Always Wins*
- Sophie Li of Edmonton for *The Golems of the World*

Grade 6

- Avery Frayn of Calgary for *Reality*
- Reyansh Chandra of Calgary for *The Hidden Truth of a City's Leader*
- Zahia Islam of Edmonton for *Scars*



Junior High Winners

Grade 7

- Alexis Clapperton of Lethbridge for *At the Point of a Sword*
- Josie Neher of Calgary for *The Escape*
- Lily Andrews of Calgary for *3014*

Grade 8

- Annabelle Iverson of Ardmore for *Deceitful Symphony*
- Areeba Haque of Edmonton for *Ocean's Echoes*
- Jedd-Nuel Juarez of Calgary for *The Rabbit Who Wanted Danger*

Grade 9

- Asia Collick of Calgary for *Stars*
- Liam Moroz of Fort Saskatchewan for *Not Okay*
- Vidisha Sharma of Edmonton for *Golden Moments*



To check out the winners' stories head to:

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



TALEBLAZERS

YEAR ROUND & BURSARIES



Taleblazers, our annual literary festival, sends authors, illustrators, and storytellers into schools and libraries all over the province. In 2024-25, 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 from our casino fundraiser, but continued to face challenges. Schools remained enthusiastic about the idea of artist visits, but struggled to find room in the budget and in their prep time for extras. Schools continued to experience high rates of early retirement, downsizing, support staff strike action, and medical leave leaving them understaffed, often on very short notice.



Sigmund Brouwer with Alberta kids

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



Despite these challenges, we did our best to match up our host schools with artists who fit their needs. Under the combined banners of Taleblazers, Year-Round Bookings, Allard Win-a-Literary Artist, and Seeds of Stories bursaries, we successfully facilitated 53 bookings by 12 different artists. Our artists conducted 171 individual sessions at schools and libraries in 39 different communities across Alberta to an estimated audience of 12,000 children and youth.



We marked 25 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. We have been fortunate to offer additional bursaries through the Seeds of Stories program which is funded through private donations and small foundation grants.

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 all of the foundations and private donors that keep our bursary programs running!

TALEBLAZERS

YEAR ROUND & BURSARIES

When students have the chance to interact directly with professional authors, the experience is authentic, immediate, and deeply inspiring. They see writing not just as something confined to the walls of a classroom, but as a vibrant, real-world skill. For many of our students, meeting someone who makes a living telling stories opens up new possibilities for how they see themselves, their creativity, and their futures. These visits light a spark that can change how students approach not only literacy but their own sense of voice and agency.

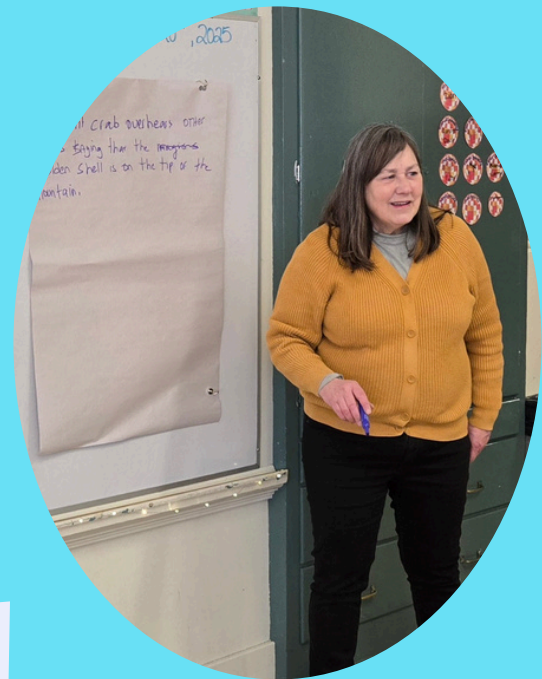
ELDER DR FRANCIS WHISKEYJACK SCHOOL

Programs like those offered by YABS are especially critical in high-needs schools like ours, where budget constraints often limit access to extracurricular and enrichment opportunities. By making these workshops free and accessible, YABS ensures that students from all backgrounds can benefit from the same high-quality programming, thereby promoting equity across our education system.

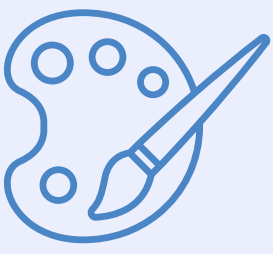
SPRUCE AVENUE SCHOOL

"We were thrilled to have been granted an author visit from the Young Alberta Book Society. We hosted Kathy Jessup, storyteller and writer, in the new year. She was so flexible, understanding of our student needs and so easy to coordinate with. Our students were so engaged and exceeded expectations, both of their interest and participation in the presentation."

CHILDREN'S VILLAGE SCHOOL



*Debby Waldman
presenting to a grade
5/6 class*



STORY AVENUE



Each February, the Young Alberta Book Society works with five Edmonton schools and nine literary artists to run Story Avenue, a series of writing workshops for hundreds of inner city Grade 5 and 6 students. We faced three new challenges in 2025:

- Student numbers had exploded as compared to the previous year. In the past, the program has accommodated around 400 students each year. In 2025, we were looking at over 550.
- Our fundraising had not been as successful as hoped. Several long-time funders did not renew and applications to new funders did not bear fruit.
- The Education Assistants and Administrative Assistants at Edmonton schools went on strike from early January to mid-March.

With an overloaded conference centre, an underfunded budget, and inadequate available school staff to maintain student-staff ratios for a field trip, it was clear the model had to pivot.



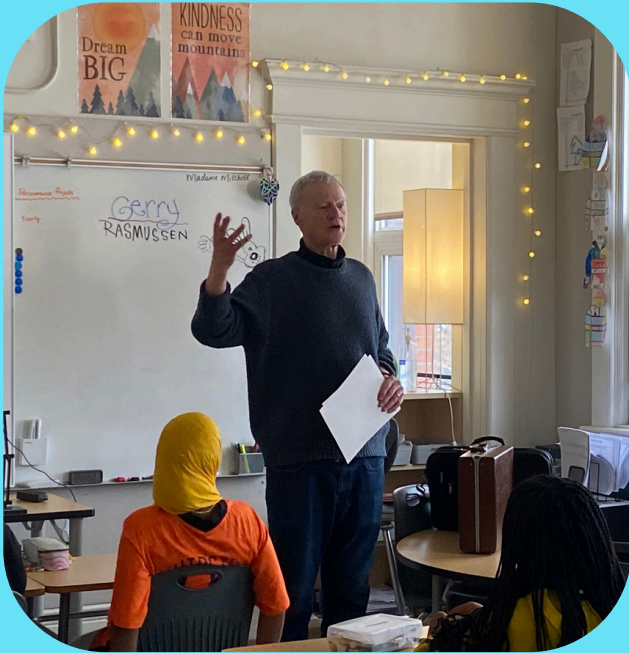
Students in Marty Chan's Story Avenue session

Thanks to the Werklund Foundation and our casino fundraising, we still had sufficient funds to carry on with a modified event. So, on February 20 and 21, eight of the artists instead visited the schools – Delton, Norwood, John A. MacDougall, Mee-Yah-Noh and Wîhkwêntôwin – giving workshops to over 550 students directly in their classrooms, sometimes with two classes combined. Marty Chan delivered his sessions online so several classes could login to each of his workshops, allowing for more students to participate than would have been possible at the Centre for Education.



Story Avenue 2025 instructors: Bill Bunn, Sigmund Brouwer, Marty Chan, Joan Galat, Alison Hughes, David Poulsen, Shea Proulx, Gerry Rasmussen, and Debby Waldman

STORY AVENUE FEEDBACK



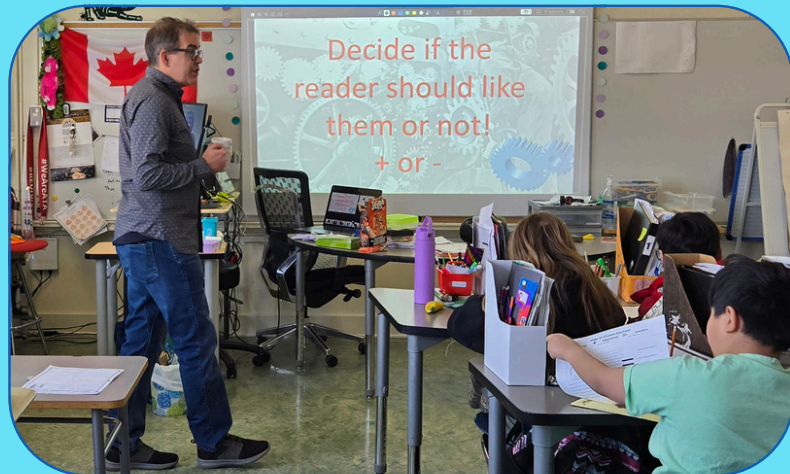
Gerry Rasmussen at Story Avenue

"It was truly an incredible experience! As a new teacher with no prior exposure to an event like this, I am grateful for the opportunity to witness the enthusiasm of the students when an author entered the room. Their genuine curiosity was clearly reflected in both their writing and the thoughtful questions they posed to the presenters. It was inspiring to see even the more hesitant writers find a spark and immerse themselves in their work, with some struggling to stop once they began. This experience provided a refreshing perspective on the writing process, offering students inspiration from an outside source rather than just my own guidance, which significantly heightened their engagement. I would be thrilled to participate in a similar experience again in the future."

– Teacher, Delton School

"Story Avenue is an event I look forward to each year; the engagement in my students is always wonderful to see. Sometimes, it takes hearing from and being inspired by a new person's story to ignite an interest and newfound excitement about writing. Writing is a subject that can not only be challenging, especially for students within our demographic, but bring about frustration and anxiety for many. The opportunity to connect with authors and illustrators in a small workshop-style setting has been beneficial for my students in more ways than one."

-Gr. 6 teacher



Bill Bunn at Story Avenue

Our deepest gratitude goes out to the Werklund Foundation for sponsoring Story Avenue 2025!





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Win Greenwood
Vice-Chair



Kathy Oster
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Director



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Kathy Jessup
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THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS & SPONSORS



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We gratefully acknowledge the support of
the Leanne Children's Foundation