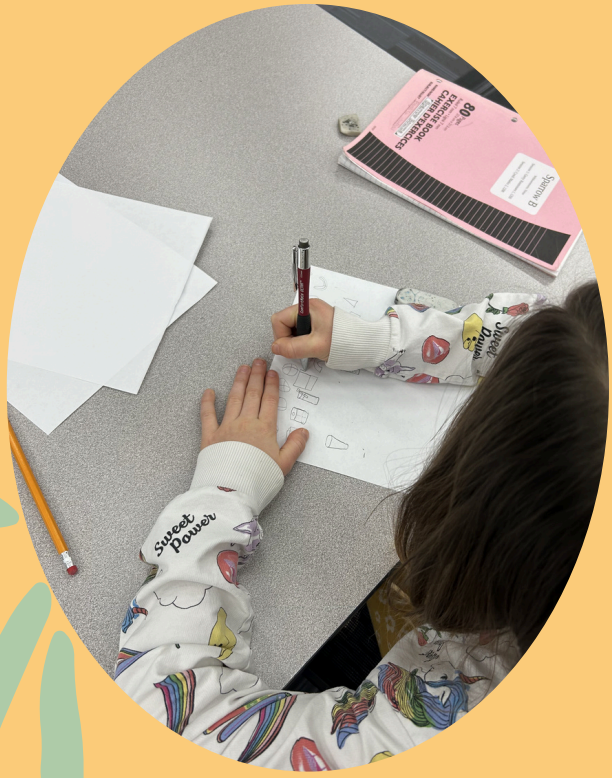
2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT

Joan Marie Galat and Stephanie Gregorwich at the Stronger Together Library Conference

young alberta book society

CELEBRATING 43 YEARS OF BRINGING ALBERTA'S CHILDREN AND LITERARY ARTISTS TOGETHER



Student at Story Avenue

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Our mission at YABS is to foster literacy skills and a love of stories in young Albertans. One of the particular ways we work towards this is by bringing together Albertan authors, illustrators, and storytellers with young Albertans. We believe the impact of meeting a professional literary artist, learning about what they do, and then having a chance to ask questions, is invaluable for youth. But our work is built on functioning schools and supported teachers, librarians, and education assistants. It's built on stories coming from a multitude of voices. And it's built on young people having access to a broad array of books and stories.

While YABS worked hard to deliver its programs in the past year and saw unprecedented attendance for Story Avenue, we also faced the challenge of another labour dispute in Alberta's schools. Provincial teachers went on strike in the fall of 2025. Public and separate schools were unable to host our literary artist members during what would otherwise be our busiest months for Taleblazers, though some visits to libraries and charter/private schools still took place. We also rearranged our plans and held some Tale Quest programming on weekdays during the school closures. The strike ended with the province passing back to work legislation which changed the tone of our interactions with teachers for the rest of the school year. We continue to seek ways to build relationships with schools and other youth-serving organizations within the currently challenging environment.

Rob Feagan with Chestermere librarians

Funding and supporting literacy is more important than ever. All of our donors, whether large or small, get my deepest thanks. I want to thank our funders for their financial support this year. I also express my gratitude to our Executive Director Stephanie Gregorwich and our Deputy Director Jennifer Plamondon, who give so much to YABS. Thank you to our hosts, our partner organizations, and our literary artists. Thank you also to my fellow Board members and our volunteers for supporting YABS and literacy in this province.

CATHERINE LITTLE, JUNE 2026

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. The sessions consisted of a professional game facilitator running an age-appropriate role playing game for groups of up to 6 youth paired with a writing or illustrating workshop with a YABS artist.

Tale Quest Adventurer by Fred Curatolo, October 2026

Nine sessions for kids aged 9-16 were held in this fiscal year with workshops by YABS artists Bill Bunn, Kathy Jessup, Kate A. Boorman, Fred Curatolo, Natasha Deen, Gerry Rasmussen, and Anna Priemaza. While most sessions were held on weekend afternoons, we switched some to weekdays during the October teachers' strike as an activity for teens to take part in.

Thanks to Pe Metawe Games and game facilitators Kaia Heroux, Mike Perschon, and Jordan Carter!

MARTYN GODFREY AWARD

The Martyn Godfrey Young Writers Award, the final one under this program name, had a great year! 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.

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.

The elementary winners attended a workshop by Marty Chan while the junior high winners had a session by Kate A. Boorman. Our thanks go out to staff at the winners' schools who presented the certificates to the winners at school events!

> We look forward to this competition each year and have so much fun creating stories for it. Thanks for offering this opportunity!

GRADE 4 TEACHER, CALGARY

2025 was the final year of the writing contest under this name. A new name is being selected in 2026 and will be in place for the 2027 award!

2025 GODFREY WINNERS

Elementary Winners

Grade 4

- Alexa Ho of Calgary for *The Dragon Slayer's Mission*
- Mehr Kelley of Calgary for *Operation: Find Popcorn*
- Jade Keel of Vegreville for *Window of Worlds*

Grade 5

- Emma Vorster of Priddis for *Missing*
- Illana Gallichan of Calgary for *Cliffhanger: A Tale of Courage & Isolation*
- Lucas Fadamiro of Calgary for *Eli and the Shadow*

Grade 6

- Ella Bergin of Three Hills for *Warrior*
- Nya Mancell of Calgary for *Eve, not Everleigh*
- Maria Menendez of Calgary for *The New Me*

Junior High Winners

Grade 7

- Anna Borysova of Calgary for *Witch Glitch and Princess Punch*
- Reyansh Chandra of Calgary for *The Enchanted Masterpiece*
- Zahia Islam of Edmonton for *Bloom*

Grade 8

- Sophie Ta of Calgary for *A Whale-Soaked Sky*
- Emily Geng of Athabasca for *The Night Watcher*
- Elena Lo of Calgary for *The Final Level*

Grade 9

- Nicholas E. of Calgary for *Embers of Deceit*
- Abrar Almishri of Calgary for *The Law of Success*
- Zoë D. of Edmonton Region for *My Missing Half*

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. Thanks to repeated increased casino funding, we have been able to continue 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.

The 2025-26 school year proved to be one of the most challenging in our four-decade history. We began the school year with optimism and plans with our hosts to reconnect after the provincial teachers' strike was resolved. The government's use of the notwithstanding clause to legislate teachers back to work profoundly changed their interactions with us. Gone was the enthusiasm even from longstanding hosts who pre-strike had said they intended to reschedule. The consistent message was "We are not open to discussing extras until next school year."

Sigmund Brouwer with students in Red Deer

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

Taleblazers

TALEBLAZERS
YEAR ROUND & BURSARIES

We were fortunate to still complete a few fall bookings with public libraries and charter/private schools. The new year saw some schools warming up to artist visits, particularly when they had outside funding or pre-existing relationships with artists who reached out directly.

Under the combined banners of Taleblazers, Year-Round Bookings, Allard Win-a-Literary Artist, and Seeds of Stories bursaries, we successfully facilitated 24 bookings by 8 different artists. Our artists conducted 64 individual sessions at 20 schools and libraries in 14 different communities across Alberta to an estimated audience of 5,200 children and youth.

We marked 26 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!

ARTIST RECRUITMENT

A slowly emerging challenge for YABS is the size and diversity of our artist roster. Over the last 6 years in particular, we've seen a marked decline in artists available for school bookings due to inter-province relocation, retirement, scaling back due to age and health concerns, and transitioning into regular teaching or other jobs.

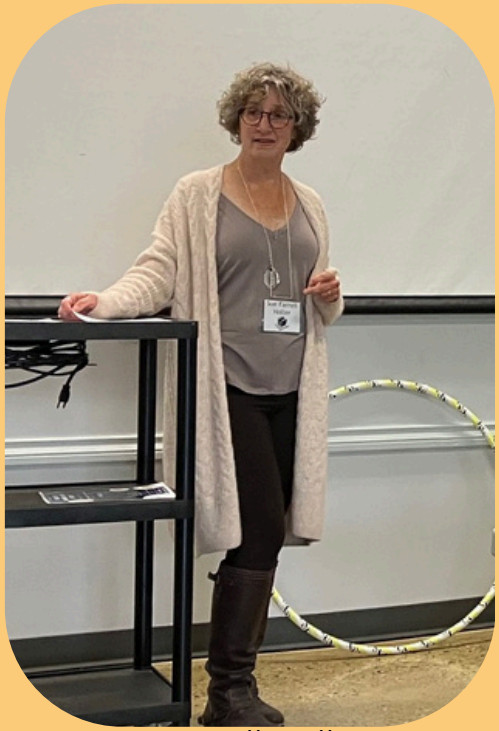
The addition of new artists to the roster has not kept pace with this decline, nor has the representation of artists from diverse backgrounds increased. This has made it increasingly difficult to fulfill requests from hosting schools.

We placed a recruitment ad in the Summer 2025 issue of the Writers' Guild of Alberta's WestWord Magazine and asked our friends at WGA for introductions to some of their members who looked to be a good fit with our work. We received several responses to the ad and in fall 2025 we added a new middle grade author and new illustrator to the roster!

AUTUMN SHINDIG! A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY FOR ARTISTS

For the first time since spring 2019, we had a day of in-person professional development for artists. The Kerry Wood Nature Centre in Red Deer welcomed us on a sunny September Saturday. Sue Farrell Holler gave a presentation on how rejection can be a hidden treasure, Suzy Vadori gave a talk on avenues for finding paid work as a literary artist, and Jenna Greig from Pe Metawe Consulting presented a primer on tools for working with diverse audiences.

A soup and sandwich buffet lunch was provided by local Red Deer business Remi's Catering, and we wrapped up the day with an open mic for the artists to swap some stories.



Sue Farrell Holler on the hidden treasures of rejection.

STORY AVENUE

On February 18-20, 2026, thanks to our wonderful program supporters, we were able to help over six hundred Edmonton grade 5 & 6 students from Mee-Yah-Noh, Norwood, Delton, Wîhkwêntôwin, and John A. MacDougall discover the joy in writing and reading through three mornings of writing and illustrating workshops with nine Albertan authors and illustrators.

Over the last few years, the population at our five participating schools has ballooned significantly, and John A. MacDougall School identified a large proportion of their students as having special needs, so for the first time, Story Avenue expanded to three days in a hybrid model: two mornings with four schools at the Centre for Education, and one morning with John A. MacDougall School having sessions in their own classrooms.

Students in Gerry Rasmussen's Story Avenue session

Regardless of the location of their sessions, each student participated in two sessions with different artists, was given a mid-morning snack, and finished the morning with a folder of their writing and drawing, a book by one of their instructors, and a new energy for reading and writing.

Story Avenue 2026 instructors: David Poulsen, Kathy Jessup, Dee Hahn, Shea Proulx, Natasha Deen, Marty Chan, Debby Waldman, Gerry Rasmussen, and Cyndi Marko.

STORY AVENUE FEEDBACK

Natasha Deen's Story Avenue session

"Story Avenue was so meaningful. Having the opportunity to learn from real authors made the writing process feel authentic and exciting in a way that really resonated with them. Throughout the workshops, I saw students take risks and try new things. It was especially powerful to watch some of my quieter students come out of their shells and share their ideas with more confidence.

What stood out most was how the experience continued beyond the workshop itself! Students were coming back to school eager to keep writing, adding to their stories, and sharing their ideas with others. It felt like the workshops sparked something in them, not just in terms of skill development, but in their willingness to see themselves as writers."
– McKenna McKeaveney, Teacher

"For some students, this experience may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and it was reflected in their excitement and professionalism during the workshops. Thank you to all the authors who took the time to share their wisdom with our young writers, and to the Centre for Education for being such wonderful hosts! A heartfelt thank-you also goes out to all of our sponsors. Your sponsorship helped create some amazing learning and strong memories for our students."
– Kevan Cooke, Teacher

Kathy Oster welcoming students to Story Avenue

Our deepest gratitude goes out Edmonton Public Schools, the Werklund Foundation, the Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37, and Servus Credit Union for sponsoring Story Avenue 2026!

Thank you

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