

# 2020- 2021

## Annual Report



young alberta  
book society



*Illustrator Gerry Rasmussen presents an online Story Avenue session to a Gr.4/5 class at John A. MacDougall School in February, 2021.*

### Message from the Chair

I suggested we illustrate this year's annual report with an image of a rollercoaster made up of many little cars, and in each car is a facemask-wearing emoji, representing each of us as our online selves, masked, and socially distanced, and on this wild ride together.

I am extremely proud of our Young Alberta Book Society. With this particular "Message from the Chair," I want to highlight the difficult context within which school bookings took place this past year and touch briefly on the work of the Board. But I also want to recognize the emotional impact of this pandemic. It is absolutely heartbreaking to witness and endure the periods of isolation at

home, the self-isolation from family within the home, the fear of illness, the fear for each other, and the fears of financial precarity, not to mention the actual illness that this pandemic has brought on.

So, let me thank our Executive Director Stephanie Gregorwich and Deputy Director Jennifer Plamondon, who were tasked with the stressful job of reimagining and recreating virtual versions of YABS programs in very uncertain times. And while I rarely state it so bluntly, without their efforts none of the related employment that our members received this year would have been possible. While our funders provide the dollars, it is Steph and Jenn who assemble the program proposals, bend over backwards to find creative ways to use the money, and do the laborious work of scheduling and

rescheduling. They do this work because they believe in fostering literacy, and we spend a lot of time talking about the social impact on young Albertans, but I don't want any of us to forget the financial impact of the continued existence of YABS. Thank you, Steph and Jenn.

And they did it all from home. The physical YABS office has been closed since March 13, 2020.

To recap, at the end of the 2020 school year, schools were closed and no one had a clear idea of what a return to school would look like in the Fall. With no clear idea when in-school visits would be possible, literary artist bookings dried up.

Our first Board meeting following the AGM took place September 8. We decided that YABS would not offer in-person visits for the fall, and

likely for the rest of the 2020/2021 school year, but planned on revisiting this policy after Christmas.

In September, we saw extremely overwhelmed teachers doing their best to adapt as they found out on a day-to-day basis whether their students would physically be allowed to occupy the same space or not. School budgets were decimated with needing to purchase pandemic-related supplies and full class sets of resources that would have once been shared between students. The neediest schools also tended to be the ones whose students lacked the necessary computer equipment and home internet access required for participating in online learning, limiting the opportunities for having virtual visits to those times when students were physically in class. To exacerbate the problem, parent groups that would usually raise money through casinos were unable to do so. In this environment, booking an artist visit was often buried under more pressing priorities.

In the background, a Board committee spent the early Fall reviewing and revising the YABS Membership Eligibility Policy, creating greater balance between the requirements of different applicant categories, correcting a few discrepancies, and adding a requirement for applicants to provide a sample presentation recording, keeping in line with trends in the industry and with the increasing availability of recording technology. (The Board voted to accept the updated policy in December.) YABS was also able to launch the overhauled website <https://www.yabs.ab.ca/>.

In October, with the continued support of Cenovus, Word Power 2020 came off hiatus and some bookings were made, but due to difficulties with scheduling, the tour stretched on into March 2021. Our members stepped up, learning to use various streaming software, adapting to deliver their usual sessions in a completely new dynamic. With Cenovus' consent, travel costs associated with Word Power were reallocated to fund more school visits, when bookings were possible.

From September through March, there were about a dozen Taleblazers virtual artist bookings, with all receiving some level of financial support. This support included the Martyn Godfrey Young Writers Award, the Allard Foundation Award, and the Seeds of Stories bursary program funded by the Edmonton Arts Council. The Seeds of Stories program received an additional boost when, in December, the Board elected to attribute budget to grow the program province-wide. Even with funding, teachers often had to rebook multiple times before circumstances finally aligned for a visit to take place. This situation continued into the new year. Once more, Cenovus generously agreed to sponsor Word Power 2021. All sessions are again virtual, and the first was held in April 2021. It is hoped that all sessions will be booked by the end of the school year in June.

Currently, the Board shares in the hopeful anxiety that we will see an end to this pandemic sooner rather than later.

And I also want to acknowledge Cenovus Energy, Wawanesa Insurance, the Rozsa Foundation, the Allard Foundation, the Werklund Foundation, the Edmonton Community Foundation, Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton Arts Council, Alberta Education, and Alberta Culture Days for their financial support. Thank you.

-Submitted by Catherine Little, Chair, Young Alberta Book Society Board of Directors



Art by gstudioimagin & commercialart from Vecteezy.com



Each spring, the Young Alberta Book Society honours late author Martyn Godfrey with the **Martyn Godfrey Young Writers Award**: a writing contest for Albertan students in Grades 4-9. For the 2019-20 edition of the contest, entrants were initially asked to submit a short story by March 31, 2019. After COVID-19 reached our province,



that deadline was pushed back to June 30, 2020. Over 175 entries were received from Albertan students from dozens of schools all over the province. The jury read the stories over the summer and the winners were announced in the fall. Each winner received a certificate as well as a set of books by Albertan authors. The Best Overall Elementary Story and Best Overall Junior High Story winners also each received an online author visit to their classes in the fall. Matilda Barron's class was visited by Marty Chan and Madison W.'s by Natasha Deen. In addition to the eight winners, five entrants received certificates recognizing them as Honourable Mentions.

#### 2020 Martyn Godfrey Young Writers Award Winners

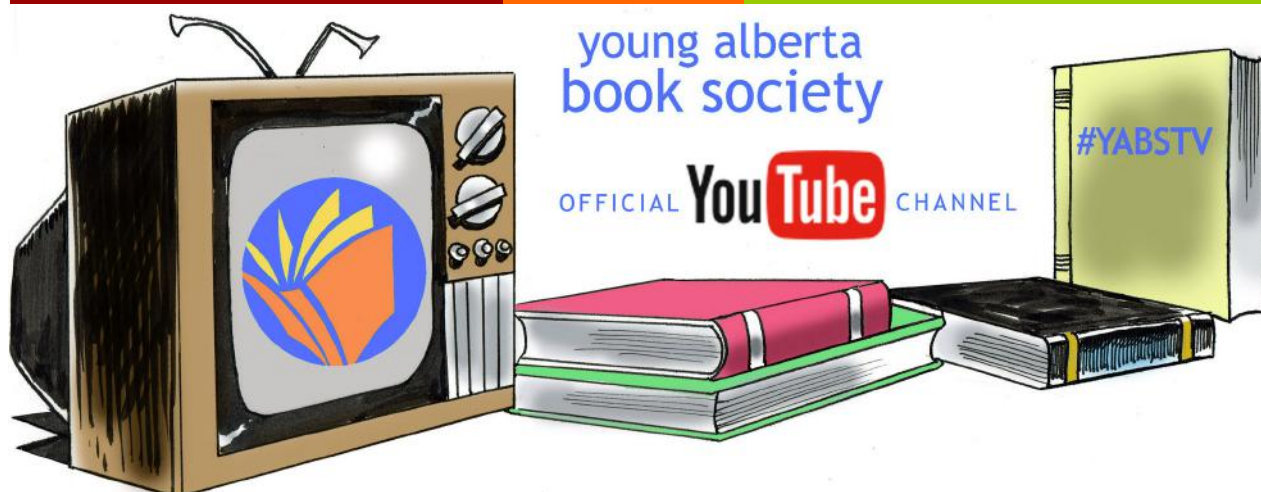
- Best Grade 4 Story: Kimaya Satavalekar of Fairview School in Calgary for ["The Hunters"](#)
- Best Grade 5 Story: Kaylene Lugay of St. Kateri Catholic School in Edmonton for ["Dare to Make a Difference"](#)
- Best Grade 6 Story: Zachary Buchan of Tempo School in Edmonton for ["A Fight for Survival"](#)
- Best Overall Elementary Story: Matilda Barron of Victoria School of the Performing Arts in Edmonton for ["Back In Time"](#)
- Best Grade 7 Story: Linnea Price of Waldorf Independent School in Edmonton for ["Cecily"](#)
- Best Grade 8 Story: Lilyann Saunders of River Valley School in Sundre for ["A Golden Snowflake"](#)
- Best Grade 9 Story: Tumi Fabiyi of Fairview Junior High in Calgary for ["Hello, My Name Is \\_\\_\\_\\_\\_"](#)
- Best Overall Junior High Story: Madison W. of CBE Homeschooling Program in Calgary for ["The Dog That I Hated to Love"](#)

#### 2020 Honourable Mentions

- **Anna P.** of Edmonton for *"Once Upon a Piece of Magic"* (grade 4)
- **Hannah S.** of Edmonton for *"Invisible"* (grade 6)
- **Heidi B.** of Edmonton for *"Soaring Like a Bird"* (grade 7)
- **Fatima S.** of Calgary for *"Her Cursed Motives"* (grade 8)
- **Hailey B.** of Fort MacLeod for *"Legend of a Warrior"* (grade 9)

As COVID-19 was still disrupting school operations in spring 2021, the March 31 deadline was again pushed back to the end of June and the stories will be juried in the summer. More than 40 entries have been received so far.





*Illustrator Fred Curatolo created this header art for the channel, meeting one of the requirements for YABS TV to have a custom URL once the channel reached 100 subscribers.*

As COVID-19 spread into Alberta, all schools were emptied and in-person classes cancelled indefinitely on March 15, 2020. On March 17, the provincial government declared a state of public health emergency. It rapidly became clear that in-school programming was not going to happen for at least the rest of the school year. In response, the Young Alberta Book Society created **YABS TV** ([www.youtube.com/youngalbertabooksociety](http://www.youtube.com/youngalbertabooksociety)), a YouTube channel featuring videos by YABS members. Artists were given very small honouraria to create videos for the channel. It was nothing YABS or our artists had tried before. The Young Alberta Book Society's (YABS') programming has always focussed on in-person experiences and creating connections between literary artists and students in face-to-face settings. Suddenly, that was no longer possible. Authors, illustrators and storytellers jumped in with both feet and started experimenting. The province was encouraging all non-essential work be done at home, so all of the videos were recorded with whatever phones and computers the artists already had. Most had never previously tried to create a video of this sort and faced a steep learning curve but persevered in hopes of creating resources for teachers and students to use in their homes. By the end of May, over 100 videos had been posted with writing tips, illustration tutorials, book talks and story times. Currently, the channel has over 150 videos, nearly 200 subscribers, and nearly 10 000 views.

In June, the Rozsa Foundation supported a new initiative for YABS TV: **Wordsmith With Us**. Literary artists were contracted to create educational and entertaining YouTube videos that teachers could use in their online teaching for the rest of the school year and kids could watch at home over the summer. Each artist created a video lesson with an activity targeted at either Elementary or Junior High students and then posted a short follow-up video two weeks later. A total of 44 videos were posted from June 1 to August 27, 2021.

In the process of making videos, the artists were offered webinar sessions on videoconference programs, filming and editing tips, and given tip sheets and links to other resources, in order to help build up their skills with technology and digital communication from their homes, skills that were to come in handy when artist visits went online in September.

*"Thank you so much for this YABS channel. We are featuring local authors in our weekly reading online for students so this is perfect. Also, we are engaged in story writing right now, so ...perfect! Thank you for sharing.*

*-Pam Clark, Connaught School, Calgary*

*"I loved the rollaway pancake video. I even showed it to my 92 year old mom. She was listening so well and expressed how she spoke so clearly. She has 2 hearing aids so was so happy to enjoy this. Thank you!"*

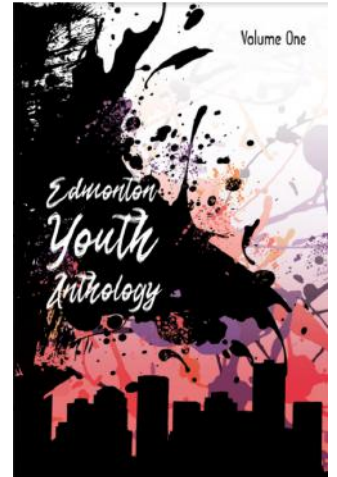
*- Diane Gillespie*



## Ink Movement Partnership

**Ink Movement Edmonton**, a student group at the University of Alberta, approached YABS to be its partner charity for a Young Edmonton Grant from the Edmonton Community Foundation. These grants are awarded for projects initiated, led, and organized

by young Edmonton and area residents. Ink Movement used their grant to publish an anthology of writing and art by Edmonton youth and to offer writing workshops by Albertan authors Bill Bunn and Katherine Koller to their contributors. YABS assisted with administering the grant and organizing the workshops.



## New Website Design

Thanks to support from the Werklund Foundation and Digital Tea, YABS was able to redesign its website. The old website's updating software had ceased functioning right before COVID-19 hit, leaving us unable to make changes to the website in-house. The support from the Werklund Foundation and Digital Tea meant we had a new design and modernized site architecture allowing more control over each page on the site and significantly easier updates.



## Alberta Culture Days



For the first time, YABS received a small Alberta Culture Days grant from the Government of Alberta to host an event last fall. On September 27, YABS partnered with Pe Metawe, a local company which offers educational programming, to pilot a new initiative: Tale Quest. Tale Quest is a two-part collaborative storytelling experience aimed at teens. Part one is a writing workshop where the author will guide the participants through imagining and crafting well-rounded characters to star in their story. In part two, small groups of

participants work together under the guidance of a Pe Metawe facilitator to jointly develop a story with their characters through the mechanism of a role-playing game. For Alberta Culture Days, twelve Albertan teens from around Alberta joined author Marty Chan and the Pe Metawe team via Zoom for an afternoon of joint storytelling. The principal at Kikino School, who arranged school computer access for several of her students, said "The students really loved the experience and they will be doing follow up with their teacher and classmates to share their learning experiences and connections."



The **Cenovus Wordpower** tour was all set to go for the last week of April 2020 when schools were closed mid-March. While it was initially hoped that the pandemic concerns would be resolved quickly, it soon became clear that a spring tour would not be feasible. Thanks to the flexibility of our generous sponsors, Cenovus Energy, the tour was postponed to the fall, and all sessions taken online.

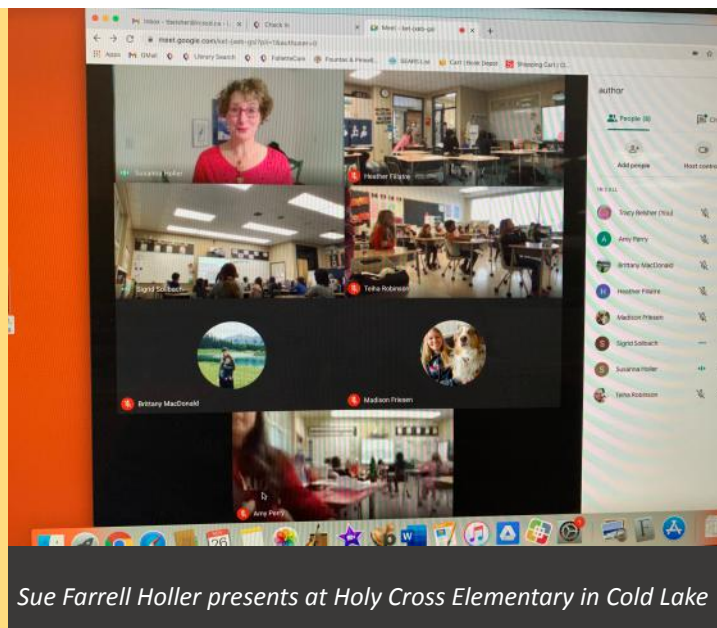
In the end, Wordpower 2020 brought together fifteen professional Albertan authors, illustrators and storytellers with students in 63 schools. The artists presented over 350 hours of sessions ranging in length from 20 to 60 minutes over the course of the program. Sessions began mid-October and were largely complete by mid-December, though school closures necessitated moving some sessions to the new term and cancelling others. The artists used Zoom and Google Meet to visit schools across north-central Alberta from Grande Cache to Cold Lake and Fort MacKay. A Wordpower Family Night was held via Facebook Live on December 17. Eight of the touring artists participated in sharing winter-themed stories for over 200 online viewers. The livestream was recorded and posted on the YABS TV youtube channel to be viewed over the rest of the holiday break.

The Tour artists were Bethany Ellis, Carissa Halton, David Poulsen, Gail de Vos, Gerry Rasmussen, Jacqueline Guest, Joan Galat, Karen Gummo, Karen Spafford-Fitz, Kathy Jessup, Lorna Schultz Nicholson, Marty Chan, Natasha Deen, Rob Feagan, and Sue Farrell Holler.

*"The visits this year were virtual, so very different, but no less valuable. Kids in school are starving for something out of the normal since there are not a lot of "extras" this year with all of the precautions we need to take to have in school learning. For Lorna's grade 6 visit, we had one class self isolating at home but because of the virtual presentation, they were still able to participate from home...it was awesome!"*

*"I (on behalf of our entire school), appreciate so much the work you have all put in to make sure that our spring visits happened somehow!! It has been a light in a dark time. The kids loved the presentations, but also loved seeing the presenters in their own spaces and still be able to interact with them:) When presenters are here in person, it is awesome, but somehow, this year, seeing people in their own spaces, makes all people more relatable and "normal". Students see the people they think of as celebrities, important or untouchable, are usually regular people like themselves. Seeing their personal items around them or seeing them in a more casual relaxed way really makes the students comfortable, too. That is so important and inspiring!!*

*"Again, thank you for all that you do!" -Jill Tercier, Dr. Brosseau School*



Sue Farrell Holler presents at Holy Cross Elementary in Cold Lake



As with everything this year, the Taleblazers program had to be revamped to cope with the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. Through this flagship program, literary artists visit schools and libraries throughout Alberta. Artists conduct presentations and workshops to encourage reading, writing, listening and oral presentation skills. The festival creates opportunities for literary artists to engage students of all grade levels, which leads to enhanced levels of literacy, and most importantly, excitement about reading and the arts. This year, no in-person sessions were held, but video-conference sessions were facilitated and bursary programs to assist with the artist fees were offered.



*Bethany Ellis shares stories with two classes in Grande Cache.*

The 2020 Taleblazers Literary Festival was open for the whole 2020-21 school year and combined with our Year Round Bookings Program. Between September and March, it facilitated 44 videoconference sessions presented by 10 participating artists in 13 schools and libraries through 15 bookings. While some teachers and librarians were able to book and host their sessions in the first term of the school year, most encountered repeated scheduling challenges as they and their colleagues grappled with the new realities of schooling, the quarantines, and the school closures. Several bookings intended for earlier in the year are not expected to be completed until June 2021. The hosts were extremely positive about the sessions that did occur, reporting that their students were enthusiastic about the lessons shared by the presenters, and eagerly writing and drawing after the virtual visits.

*"At our small rural school, we are always on the lookout for ways to create real-life connections to the outside world. We want our students to believe they that they can be and do anything they set their minds to. In order to do this, they must see themselves in others. Our students love to read and learn from others, and having the opportunity to listen to and learn from a literary artist helps our staff and students fuel our passion for books, foster imagination, and create compassion and empathy for others." - Rochelle McDonald, St Mary's Catholic School, Grande Prairie*

*"Gerry Rasmussen's cartooning session was so amazing that we're having trouble getting the kids to stop drawing and focus on other work. We're going to book more sessions for the other grades!" - Angie Stewart, Christ the King School, Edmonton*

*"Our strong First Nation, Metis, and newcomer communities deserve to see how art and literature expresses our culture. It is important to exemplify literacy to every student in our classes. We love when an artist shares their perspective, talent, and inspiration to our remote community. We need more encouragement of those things to up here to light the sparks in the eyes of these northern youth." - Lori Trofanenko, Aspen Grove School, Grande Prairie*



*Carissa Halton on a videoconference visit to Ecole Notre Dame High School.*

*"Having the opportunity to work one-on-one with a local author has helped my students craft detailed, riveting stories, and improved both their verbal and written expression in all areas. The expertise of a professional author is invaluable." - Jameson Epp, Southpointe School, Fort Saskatchewan*

*"Everything about the current pandemic all adds up to a stressful year. We are trying very hard as a staff to make school as engaging as possible while still following AHS protocols. Bringing in a Young Alberta Book Society artist for virtual presentations is a welcome treat to keep spirits up as we wait for life to return to the new normal." - Joan Blench, TA Norris, Peace River*



# Seeds of Stories



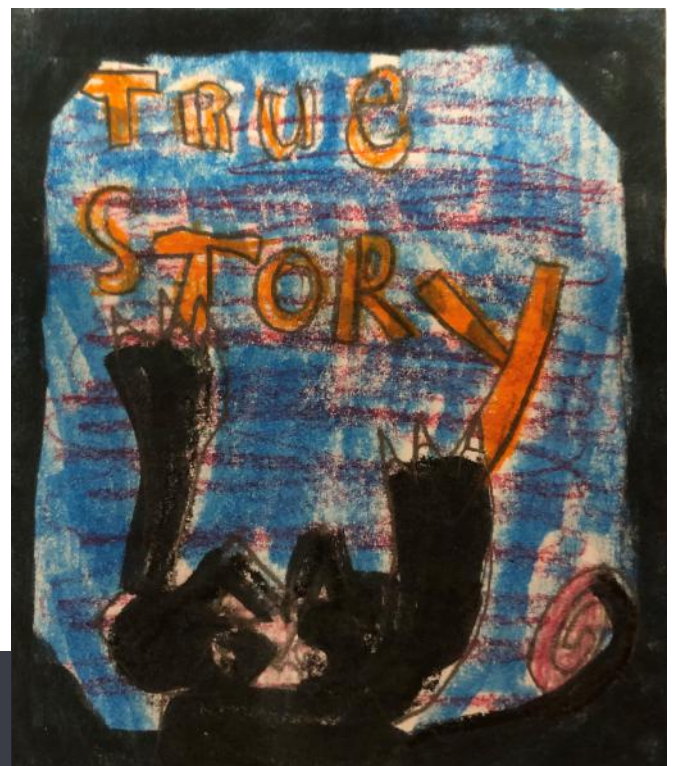
In early 2020, the Edmonton Arts Council supported a new bursary program at YABS via their Connections and Exchanges Initiatives Grant. Seeds of Stories (SOS) was funded to provide thirty \$500 Artist Fee Bursaries (plus GST and memberships) to schools in Edmonton so they could host an author, illustrator or

storyteller via Taleblazers or the Year Round Bookings Program. Due to COVID-19, the program start was delayed until the 2020-21 school year, and though dozens of schools were approved for bursaries, quarantines and school closures meant only two Edmonton visits actually happened before the fiscal year end of March 31. More were completed in the following months, though a few may yet have to be scheduled into autumn of 2021.

With travel suspended for the year, the Board also reallocated funds from the Taleblazers travel budget to provide fifteen SOS bursaries for schools outside of Edmonton. Again, while also allocated, only two of these visits could be held before the end of March. Eleven others have been completed as of this report and two more remain to be scheduled.

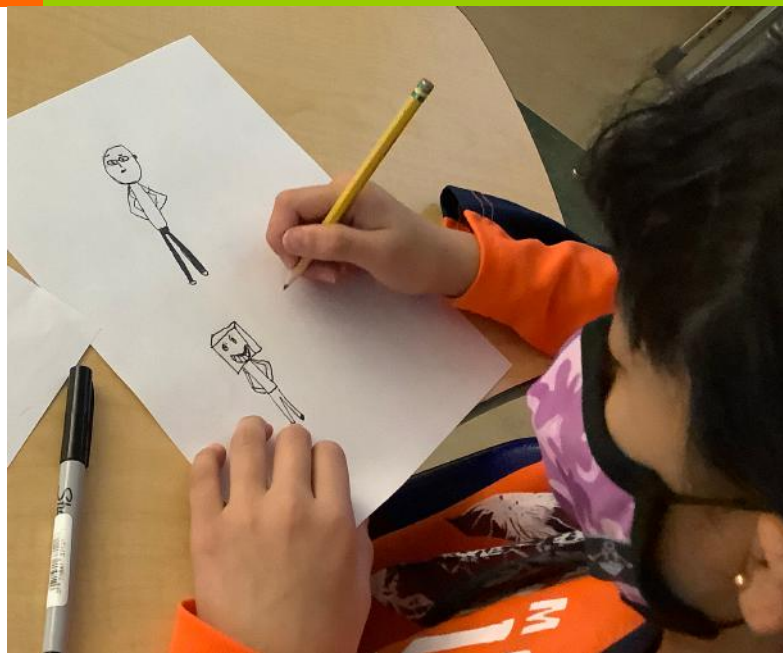
Bursary recipients commented how impossible it would otherwise have been to host an author this year. School budget cuts combined with the need for extra sanitation supplies and full class sets of formerly shared materials left little room for artist fees. With the cancellation of all field trips and many extra-curricular events, access to guest artists was a valued experience.

Avondale School principal Kristina Black said: "This was a wonderful opportunity in a difficult year. Students have not had much opportunity to engage with presenters from outside of the school. These visits make students excited about writing. Many students are reluctant writers and the visit increased the overall engagement of our students in the writing process. We are very thankful for this wonderful opportunity."



*Above and right: student-created artwork inspired by an virtual visit with author Marty Chan.*





The **Dr. Charles Allard Win-a-Literary Artist program** is an annual competition for schools and public libraries throughout Alberta to win \$300 towards a half-day presentation by a YABS literary artist during Taleblazers. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Allard Foundation in honour of the late Dr. Charles Allard, this program is able to bring artists to hundreds of students each year who would not otherwise have this inspiring experience. The Allard Foundation sponsors ten visits each year. Four of the online visits were completed before this report's fiscal year-end of March 31, 2021. The others will be completed as soon as circumstances allow.

### In 2020, the winning venues were:

- Rideau Park School
- Vincent Massey School
- Oliver School
- Calmar Public Library
- Erskine School
- Grande Cache Public Library
- Christ the King School
- Battle River School Division's Reading University
- Delton School
- Jennie Elliot School

*"I learned writing is good for you and ideas are everywhere."* - Gr. 4 Student

*"I am always so impressed with [visiting] authors and how they inspire our young students to put pencil to paper and write. They really do come back with hints on how to become a stronger writer and they are so excited to meet authors whose books they have in their classrooms and the school library. You just never know when a young person will be inspired to go on and choose writing as a career. It would be so lovely to know it happened [here]."* -Sheelagh Brown, Oliver School

*Author Hazel Hutchins shares her writing notebook with an eager class*





Thanks to the Werklund Foundation and the Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37, on February 16-19, 2021, we were able to help approximately four hundred Edmonton Grade Four, Five and Six students discover the joy in writing and reading. Typically, the students gather at the Centre for Education in Edmonton for two mornings of writing and illustrating workshops with nine Albertan authors and illustrators. As Edmonton - and the world - was still in the grips of COVID-19, this year was a little different. For 2021, Story Avenue went online.

Five inner-city Edmonton Schools participated: Delton, Norwood, John A. MacDougall, Mee-Yah-Noh and Oliver. They were joined by literary artists Carolyn Fisher, Debby Waldman, Gerry Rasmussen, Joan Galat, Lorna Schultz Nicholson, Marty Chan, Natasha Deen, Sigmund Brouwer, and Sue Farrell Holler.

The Grade Five and Six teachers in each school chose two of the nine artists' sessions and arranged times for each artist to connect with the class via teleconference on the classroom smartboard. Because class sizes in schools are larger than some of the conference centre rooms permit, we were also able to

include all of the Grade Four classes at the five participating schools for one workshop each. This is a first for Story Avenue, and the Grade Four classes were ecstatic to be included in something that has hitherto been reserved for older students.

The authors and illustrators conducted their workshops, the students asked questions via the mic or the text chat function, and the teachers facilitated the students sharing their work with the artist and each other. The fifteenth year of Story Avenue didn't match the preceding fourteen in format, but it still resulted in motivated kids who were excited to read and write.

*"We loved Story Avenue even with the different format. We had more time with the authors and my class was excited! Thank you again for all the work that goes into this. It is such a valuable experience for our kids."* - Susan Strebchuk, Norwood School

*"My name is Carol Herder and I teach Grade 4 at Delton School. I've always been jealous of the Grade 5 and 6 classes who get to attend Story Avenue each year. I was very excited to learn that our Grade 4 classes would have the opportunity to participate this year virtually, and appreciate the opportunity. It was a great experience for my class. Thank you!"* -Carol Herder, Delton School

*"The kids really enjoyed it. Some told me about how they were going to continue writing their stories when they have free time. It was nice to jump into fiction today because we have been focusing on opinion writing since the start of the month."* -Phoebe Delange, Oliver School

*"Thank you for Story Avenue and showing us how to make surprising stories. You showed us lots about planning your story, like including things that are unexpected. One day, maybe one of us will be a book writer."* -Landen, Grade 5, John A. MacDougall

Delton Grade Five teacher Amy Summers related a conversation her students had regarding the skiing and field trips and other events that had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. After his classmates had lamented the loss of several fun activities, Peter piped up to tell his friends *"it's okay! At least we got Story Avenue!"*



*Katie Chapman's Delton Gr. 5/6 class learns from author/illustrator Carolyn Fisher.*





Catherine Little



Carolyn Fisher

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Shaula Corr



Linda MacDougall

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Shaula Corr

Carolyn Fisher

Win Greenwood

Linda MacDougall



Win Greenwood



Kathy Jessup



Kathy Oster

# Thank you!

The Young Alberta Book Society appreciates all our volunteers, from our Board of Directors to our fundraising casino workers, Story Avenue helpers, event hosts, program juries and the people who help out with a myriad of small jobs.



Lorna Schultz  
Nicholson

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