



MIND THE STORY

A special message from author Marty Chan. | Page 16

ATA NEWS

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Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling



Have a restful summer. See page 4.



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Curriculum battle

Minister and ATA exchange barbs over draft program of studies. See stories on page 5.

Virtual PD

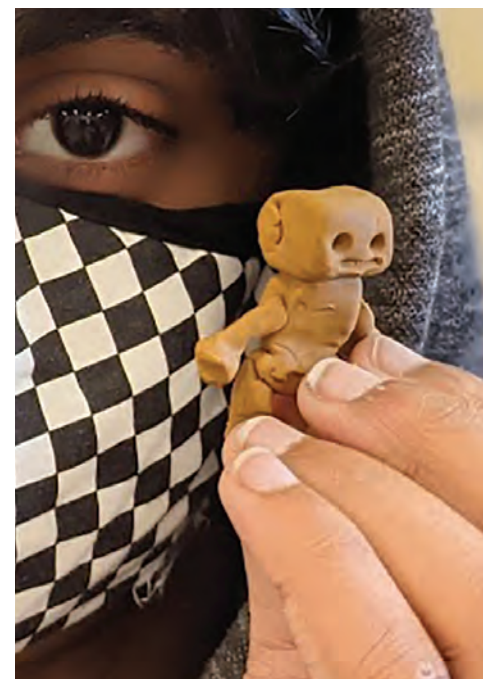
Teacher conventions to remain virtual in 2022. See story on page 7.

Distance learning tribute

Website and farewell created to honour ADLC. See story on page 11.



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The best summer ever



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Although maybe the best summer ever was the time I went out to Pigeon Lake and hung out at a cabin. I read more books that summer than I ever have: mysteries, thrillers, some humour books and some nonfiction. I think I actually got in 20 rounds of golf that summer — and that was on top of the time just lying on the beach and playing in the waves. A nice quiet summer close to home — that was the best summer ever.

Hmm... or was it the summer that I actually stayed right at home. We had built our garden boxes that spring, so we spent much time tending to the garden. We grew peas, carrots, beets, spinach, onions, lettuce — you name it! Then we just sat and talked on the patio into the evenings with a nice glass of wine.

But there was also the summer where we decided to explore our own city in a way we had never done before. We hit all of the places the tourists would go. We went to the museum, the art gallery, the science centre and we even did the mall. I think we took more walks in the river valley than I have in the rest of my life combined.

Then there was the summer that I caught up with an old friend, the summer I fell in love again, the summer I volunteered, the summer I watched a million movies and the summer I decided to focus on reconnecting with my family. Boy, this reminiscing is making me feel old!

Okay, confession time. I may not have done everything listed above. And if I am honest, my best summer ever was likely the time I went solo backpacking in Europe. The summer of 2021 won't likely be the best summer ever — I don't think anyone is going to Europe. COVID is still here and we are all really tired.

According to our research on teaching amid the pandemic, 93 per cent of teachers at the end of April were feeling exhausted by the end of the day. There were also overwhelming feelings of isolation. This school year has been a year like no other.

But this column is not about that, nor is it about the best summer ever.

This column is about looking forward and wishing you hope. While COVID will remain, there is optimism. Most of you are now vaccinated with your first

shot and many of you will have a second dose before the end of the school year.

Things are opening up, and while we still need to take precautions, there are many things that we will be able to do that we haven't done in a very long time.

And most of all, this school year is ending. Hope exists because there is light at the end of this tunnel and we can see it, and the circle of light is growing larger with every day.

It won't be the best summer ever, but it will be an important summer. It will be the summer when we get to exhale and relax.

Take a few weeks to sit on your butt. Sleep in. Enjoy morning coffees in the sun. Do whatever you need to do to shut down.

Then get on with enjoying your summer in whatever way works best for you. There are lots of options out there to make it a very good summer, and I hope maybe I have inspired you a little.

Please take care. We love you; we see you.

Have a good summer. ■

I welcome your comments. Contact me at jonathan.teghtmeyer@ata.ab.ca.



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

teachers' legitimate concerns and falsely claimed the Association is a partisan supporter of, and provided financial support to, the New Democratic Party. The entire government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has appeared to be ad hoc, uncaring and unresponsive to the challenges faced by teachers throughout the pandemic. This is what underlies that ARA motion of non-confidence, a motion that is really a *cri de coeur* from thousands of teachers across the province.

What was not mentioned in much of the press coverage of the non-confidence vote was that in the same

meeting, the Assembly previously had passed a number of resolutions that set out a co-operative path forward. These were developed by Provincial Executive Council and communicated to the minister weeks before ARA, but elicited no response. In fact, the Association has always attempted to focus on problem

solving, and the untold dozens of you who follow this column closely will note that I have taken care to outline some of those solutions in this space. So what does happen now? Good question. I've been in the profession for more than 35 years now and have seen ministers who have not exactly been friends of the profession or the Association come around to understand and respect our role and insights. I would include among their number Lyle Oberg, Ron Liepert and Jeff Johnson, each of whom had something of a Damascus Road experience in their dealings with the Association.

supporters. In 2010, he was bestowed with the Public Education Award at the 93rd Annual Representative Assembly.

Of course, things are somewhat different today. The UCP government is ideologically driven to an extent that's unprecedented in recent history. The premier, under attack within his fractious party, sees beating up on the "teachers' union" and its "bosses" as a way of uniting his political base. The minister of education is relying on advice provided by political appointees who have no knowledge of Alberta's unique education culture or environment. And, over the course of decades, the department of education has seen the departure and systematic removal of officials who had first-hand experience as teachers or administrators within Alberta's public school system. All this will make it more difficult to chart a co-operative and positive path forward.

Yet solutions that serve the interests of government, the Association, teachers and, indeed, all Albertans are possible and I would be delighted if, some years from now, I could attend an ARA where a redeemed Honourable Adriana LaGrange was awarded a Public Education Award for her leadership. ■

Questions for consideration in this column are welcome. Please address them to Dennis Theobald at dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca.

Future uncertain following non-confidence vote

“ The entire government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has appeared to be ad hoc, uncaring and unresponsive to the challenges faced by teachers throughout the pandemic. ”

meeting, the Assembly previously had passed a number of resolutions that set out a co-operative path forward. These were developed by Provincial Executive Council and communicated to the minister weeks before ARA, but elicited no response. In fact, the Association has always attempted to focus on problem

And before them, David King as minister of education in the government of Peter Lougheed originally proposed dismantling the Association, but after some experience in the ministry and, later, with the Public School Boards Association of Alberta, came to be one of our best friends and most ardent

It's not bullying; it's courage

VIEWPOINTS

Lindsay
Special to the ATA News

This year, I helped a young man trust again. Last year he threw a chair at his teacher. Yesterday, I caught him sharing food and when I spoke to him about trust and being sneaky, he broke down in tears and admitted to hiding snacks among his school supplies. He tearfully showed me. His guilt was real. He cared. Cared that I trusted him. Cared that I was disappointed. And he wanted to come clean. He wanted to own it. And he trusted me to listen to him.

This year, I helped get an important assessment for a girl with severe anxiety. She's quiet and well behaved so flew under the radar, but I was concerned. She couldn't work with numbers. She wouldn't raise her hand or offer opinions. She told me the words move when she reads and that math makes her physically sick. This past month, she's raised her hand four times and worked during math class over half the time. This last week she received an important educational psych test for anxiety. Her life will be different now.

This year, I talked to my students about talking with people about their feelings and asking for help. I talked about our family support worker's role and how sometimes you just need someone who isn't totally connected to your life. A young girl came to me and said she wanted to meet with our family support worker. She went in and asked for help with her anger. She opened up about bullies at her last school, moving to Canada to live with a mom she didn't really know and her mom's boyfriend, who makes her feel like she doesn't belong. She smiles more now. She stands up for herself. She misses me when I'm not at school.

This year, I changed my math unit plans four times because of self-isolation. I created five different ways to teach one thing because some of my kids can't multiply. So they can't multiply decimals, fractions or divide. I worried about sending them to Grade 7 without these skills and constantly reworked my teaching to try to prepare them. I did all of this while also trying to instill in them a desire to learn and a feeling of success.

This year, I took deep breaths with an 11 year old who whines, throws little tantrums and blames me for most everything when he's upset. I walked him home in the rain when he couldn't handle school anymore. I reached out to his mom and his dad. I filled out three different forms and questionnaires



ISTOCK

for his pediatrician. I met with my school resource team and partner teacher 20-plus times to adapt our teaching and involvement with this child. Challenging him, expecting realistic outcomes while keeping in mind his mental health.

This year, I met with my principal over and over again to discuss how we could move forward with the fun, normal things kids love at school while adhering to COVID protocols. Patrols. Play day. Phys-ed. Library. Community walks. Recess. I stood up when I felt we weren't being safe, and I had an uncomfortable conversation about how I felt like I wasn't safe at work and needed some things to change.

This year, I read the draft curriculum for Grade 6 and K-6 physical education. I joined a Facebook group and submitted feedback to the Alberta government—one subject and grade at a time. I designed and had signs made. I distributed these signs and spoke to many people about how I felt. I fielded questions. I joined a two-hour Zoom listening to our consultants discuss the draft curriculum. I printed off and collected 42 signatures for a petition to go to the legislature.

This year, I joined a committee to rewrite the document that supports English language learners (ELLs), required by the Alberta government. I wrote five days' worth of guest teacher plans so I could go do work somewhere else.

I sat with teachers and discussed how to make this document valuable to teachers and beneficial to our ELLs. I met with all of the teachers at my school to help them pilot these new documents. I created a checklist to make the steps clear, and I collected feedback from each grade.

This year, I worked hard. I took care of my students. I helped them learn and thrive. I navigated an ever-changing situation, while reassuring the little people around me that we were OK. I got up every day and went to do a job that my government doesn't respect. I don't have time to bully you.

I teach my students this:

- It's not disrespectful to say no if you are being asked to do something you are uncomfortable with.
- It's not mean to tell someone you don't want to be around them if they aren't nice to you.
- Sometimes, to do what's best for you, you have to be impolite. You have to disagree.

Disagreeing with you, our minister of education, is not bullying. You don't like it. There are a lot of us. That's hard to swallow for you.

It's not bullying. It's courage. There's a difference.

The author has chosen to withhold her last name out of respect for her students' privacy. ■

YOUR VIEWS

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

In response to the news of the location of the remains of 215 children at Kamloops Indian Residential School.

Ed Meers

This breaks my heart. The cultural genocide committed against our First Nations peoples is a black mark in the history of Canada and evidence of the atrocities committed in the name of colonialism.

Stacey Mee

With respect, many of us Indigenous peoples ask that it stops being referred to as a cultural genocide and refer to it for what it is, a genocide.

Sarah Danielle

(Lowering the flag) is a great first step, but is it possible to go further? All non-Indigenous teachers need to understand that to any Indigenous family they may still represent the abuser. Schools should always be safe spaces for all students and families.

Natasha Sullivan

Hopefully some families receive closure.

Nancy Boyd

I started thinking about all the families that never knew what happened to their children... didn't get to say goodbye ... this is why we as ATA members must continue to reject the draft curriculum.

Grace De Guzman

I can't believe I was never taught this in school. It was never part of our curriculum. Imagine if it was taught sooner than later and all the reconciling and understanding that could have already been started.

ON TWITTER

Ms. Lutzmann @MsLutzmann

I want @jkenney, @AdrianaLaGrange and @CMOH_Alberta to explain why teachers like me have to go into workplaces on Tier 2 #COVID19AB outbreak status without their second doses, while thousands of vaccination appointments go unused at AHS facilities every single day.

Michelle @springyhair

Providing feedback (which @AdrianaLaGrange says she wants) and asking for an accurate, well-sequenced, developmentally appropriate, not racist and teachable curriculum is not bullying. Using that term belittles the experiences of those who do experience bullying.

Nicole Laderoute @nicoleladeroute

Today I learned that advocating for a quality, age-appropriate, inclusive curriculum is now known as "trying to cancel out a person."

Barbara Laroche @BarbLaroche

UCP says they will not be "bullied" about the new curriculum. They want feedback from "Albertans." The following are apparently NOT Albertans because they point out that it is a disaster:

- parents
- teachers
- curriculum experts
- Indigenous and francophone groups
- school boards

FOR THE RECORD

“

Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.

”

– John Lubbock

Teachable moment from Kamloops

Following the discovery of children's remains at a former residential school in Kamloops, how did you turn this tragic news into a teachable moment in your classroom?

Stefania Maria Lund

Though I'm currently a substitute, I have always taught about residential schools to our little learners (three and four year olds). I have been continuing my own learning, reading pretty much anything I can and finding ways for me to help with reconciliACTION. I have been sharing my resources and our district's resources with anyone who has been asking for them.

During my substitute teaching last week, I was able to open up that discussion with an online kindergarten classroom because it's so important. Even as a substitute teacher I have the opportunity to have these important conversations. I want the children to know that it isn't just their teacher who needs to have these sometimes hard conversations, but all of us need to be able to use moments such as this and turn it around into a teachable moment.

Gary Smith

I have been reviewing my sources of information and learning to share with staff and students – some tough reading but so enlightening.



SUPPLIED

Quinn Healy

We have framed our humanities year with an Indigenous lens and so this tragic news gave my Grade 4s and I more to talk about, more to grieve. We acknowledged these children, talked about our big feelings and then we celebrated Indigenous joy through picture books, the lessons taught and then a continued discussion, well past the week of "wearing orange."

Shala Vollman-Taki

I teach kindergarten and we read Phyliss's Orange Shirt again, we talked about residential schools again and how these schools were really different a long time ago. The people did not treat the kids with love and kindness like our school does. I told them that many children died and lots didn't come home. I told them that 215 of those lost children were found buried. This made us sad. We stopped and had a prayer circle, everyone took turns praying to God and asking Him to keep those children safe. We went and collected 10 rocks each and painted them orange.



SUPPLIED

Sabrina Miller

I made a Google slide talking about strictly numbers (150,000: the number of children who attended a residential school; 4: the average age at which children were removed from their families, etc.) until I got to 3, the youngest age believed to be in the mass grave. I had a lot of kids say "I have a little brother/sister/cousin that age." My kids really need the wow factor, and I think some of the numbers really surprised them (139: the number of residential schools in Canada; 165: the number of years residential schools were open; 1996: the year the last residential school was closed).

Annie Greeno

We spent all week learning from and listening to survivor stories through picture books and short films. Students



SUPPLIED

Jessica Sellin's Grade 10 English class drew 215 hearts on the front sidewalk of Ecole Camrose Composite High School to represent the 215 children who lost their lives at the Kamloops Indian Residential School.

took opportunities every day to express their feelings through little art and writing activities. Here is some of it displayed on our bulletin board with 215 hearts.



SUPPLIED

Tracy Welke

We've been learning about the Seven Sacred Teachings all year. Our leadership students created a small memorial in front of our school.

Following the news, our class read *Stolen Words* and had a talking circle to share the students' thoughts and feelings about what was happening. Today, our school will pay tribute to the 215 lives with a special ceremony. We will all wear orange. My students are in Grade 6 and we often talk about our history and unfair treatment. Students are aware of the 94 calls to action.

Sam LC

We've been learning about the Seven Sacred Teachings and connecting Grandmother Turtle to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We read "When I was 8" and "Shin-chi's Canoe" and then created our virtual heart garden.



SUPPLIED



Have a restful summer free of mute buttons

The other day I was asked about my perspective on this last school year. At its core this is a really simple question but it warrants a really complex answer, especially when I feel like I am still standing neck deep in the current year.

This last year has been relentless and difficult for teachers, administrators, students and their families. It's stressful and frustrating to think of what this last year has done to our classrooms and way of life. We have mourned the loss of traditions we hold dear. We stayed home, we waved to loved ones through

screens and did what was asked of us in the hopes that our efforts will make for a better future.

Personally, and professionally, I have seen changes to my own life that I will more than likely carry forward into the future, and not all of them are necessarily negative. The resolve and appreciation I hold for public education, my colleagues and my students are even stronger now than they were before the pandemic.

I believe that a "return to normal" will never happen. We can't go back – only forward. The pandemic amplified many

inequities in our society – poverty, funding issues, access to supports, racism, hate. Conversely, the pandemic also highlighted a desire from many to do better, to create a more inclusive, respectful and diverse future.

Just look at the response to the draft K-6 curriculum. Teachers, parents, school boards, Indigenous and francophone groups have all said that this draft is a step backwards, and we don't want this for our children and their future. In order for us to move forward, it will take vision and political will on the part of our elected officials.

I believe the ATA has a chance to reimagine a better, stronger, more inclusive future for our students and public education in Alberta. We have the expertise, the will and the desire. I believe that teachers and the ATA can and should lead this opportunity. We can reimagine what would truly make a great school for all.

As the year winds down, and we reflect on what has passed, and where we are going, I wish for you a restful and mute button-free summer. You deserve it and you have earned it. Be well and stay safe.

Busy summer ahead

ATA News Staff

As teachers prepare for a well-earned summer break, a number of issues remain on the ATA's radar. Here is a quick status update on the issues that the ATA will be working on in the coming weeks and months.

Collective bargaining

- The TES program area just completed a series of focus group-style sessions with sample groups of teachers to discuss bargaining issues in detail.
- List bargaining has gone to arbitration, which began on June 10. The Association hopes to receive the decision of the arbitrator sometime over the summer.
- Work continues on developing the ATA's opening proposal for central table bargaining. Final feedback will be gathered from teachers in the fall before it is ratified by PEC.

Pension lawsuit

- The ATA has filed a lawsuit over the government's ministerial order that imposed an investment management agreement on the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF) and the Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo).
- In late June the government and other respondents (AIMCo and ATRF) will submit written responses to the ATA's written briefs.
- Hearings will be held in late July.

Curriculum

- Fifty-six school boards have stated that they won't pilot the new draft curriculum and no school board seems willing to pilot the social studies curriculum, in particular.
- The ATA expects to hear more on this front as the minister will likely be forced to come up with a revised strategy to get the drafts piloted.
- The Association held curriculum circles on May 31 and will use the feedback of teachers to compile a more thorough and detailed response to the draft curriculum.

COVID and schools

- When the new school year starts, Alberta is likely to be in phase three of its reopening plan, which effectively removes nearly all COVID-related restrictions.
- This means that schools will reopen in the fall with no students under 12 having been vaccinated. The government has not yet released guidelines as to what COVID measures will continue in the fall.
- The Association is working on a document outlining recommendations on how best to support safe schools in the fall.

School staffing

- Like last year, school boards will start the new year again with constrained funding amid enrolment growth.
- Federal funding related to learning during a pandemic is gone, and that has resulted in the loss of some teaching positions.
- TES staff are providing advice and assistance to teachers impacted.

Public relations campaign

- The Association is working on a new media campaign that is expected to launch in the fall. ■

New curriculum to proceed this fall, states minister's letter

Education minister refuses to change course in response to ATA letter

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

Alberta Education is committed to proceeding with its draft K-6 curriculum this fall, states a letter signed by Education Minister Adriana LaGrange.



Adriana LaGrange,
education minister

Dated June 9 and addressed to ATA president Jason Schilling, the letter is a response to an April 26 letter that Schilling sent to the minister expressing the Association's lack of confidence in the curriculum and the processes used to create it.

In her response, LaGrange states that she is moving forward with consultations with the intention of piloting the draft in the fall. She said that she will not reinstate a previous partnership with the ATA.

"I continue to believe the process of curriculum development needs voices from all partners in education, most importantly parents, but also teachers who are not members of the ATA and other interested Albertans," the letter states.

The letter further outlines LaGrange's belief that the draft curriculum is based on the latest research, and includes a quote from the book *Visible Learning Feedback* by John Hattie and Shirley Clarke.

"... knowledge acquisition is vital for the development of skills, also providing engaging and stimulating contexts, but the breakdown of knowledge is better placed in curriculum planning than in success criteria."

"In other words, children need to know in order to do," the letter continues. "I believe that a knowledge-rich curriculum is the right and principled approach for Alberta's students, and that is where this curriculum excels."

The draft curriculum brings a renewed focus to literacy, numeracy, citizenship and practical skills, she said.

"It also promotes social equality by ensuring that all students, regardless of background and family circumstances have a strong base of essential knowledge on which to build a lifetime of future learning."

The letter goes on to state that LaGrange has heard from many teachers who are excited about the new curriculum.

"I am confident that once teachers begin engaging with the new curriculum, they will find exciting ways to convey this rich content to their students and to inspire in them a love of learning about our province and our world."

The ATA's receipt of the LaGrange's letter came the same day that she lashed out at the ATA in a piece by *Calgary Sun* columnist Rick Bell.

"I will not back down to union bosses, to anyone who wants to intimidate me. I will not be bullied," LaGrange is quoted as saying.

"From what I've seen and what I've experienced over the last two years it's always I give and they take. It is very typical union politics. They have their own agenda."

The ATA followed up with a news release stating that the minister is disregarding public opinion polls showing that 61 per cent of Albertans believe the UCP government is mishandling public education and that nearly 40 per cent have identified curriculum as a top issue. The ATA says the minister is also ignoring its request to halt the curriculum pilot and engage in meaningful discussion that includes classroom teachers.

"Instead of listening to the wishes of Albertans, this minister has aimed the government's ire on their usual target, 'the union boss's agenda,'" said ATA president Jason Schilling. "She has publicly accused us of bullying and intimidation. I find it distressing that she views the voices of concerned Albertans as bullying." ■

Curriculum circle highlights lack of teacher input

Kate Toogood
ATA News Staff

New feedback from teachers on the draft K-6 curriculum has provided further evidence that it is not ready for Alberta's elementary schools. The



Mark Swanson, ATA
PD co-ordinator

feedback, provided by grade level and subject matter experts, demonstrates that the draft curriculum was not written by Alberta's K-6 classroom teachers, said Mark Swanson, chair of the feedback session and the ATA's co-ordinator of Professional Development.

"We knew the draft curriculum featured incorrect terminology, inconsistent learning expectations and in some cases, completely inappropriate content," Swanson said. "But now we know just how flawed it is."

The feedback was gathered May 31 during a virtual curriculum circle organized by the Alberta Teachers' Association. The event enabled dozens of elementary teachers, including those with Indigenous and francophone perspectives, to provide expert response to the curriculum draft released by Alberta Education on March 29. The Association hosted the event as another phase of its ongoing, in-depth assessment and evaluation of the draft curriculum.

"It was critical for us to hear directly from classroom teachers since they have key expertise with curriculum matters and understand deeply how children learn," Swanson said. "We wanted to

give them the opportunity to really dig into the draft curriculum documents and provide robust feedback, and they did not disappoint."

The circle featured opening remarks from ATA president Jason Schilling as well as a presentation from University of Lethbridge education professor Richelle Marynowski, who focused on the current research and best practices in the development and delivery of elementary education. The remainder of the day included three 90-minute sessions during which participants were broken into groups based on their expertise and asked open-ended questions about curriculum content and delivery.

An example of criticism that came forward related to the physical education curriculum, which asks elementary students to count calories and compare their bodies to those of their classmates.

"How is this appropriate for young learners? Not only does this counter everything we know about how to teach about health and nutrition, it's potentially harmful to young people," Swanson said.

Feedback gathered at the circle will be combined with commentary from the Association's specialist councils and findings from a survey of more than 5,400 teachers and presented in a report to Provincial Executive Council. "By providing clear and actionable advice, we're demonstrating where the draft curriculum will fail students and why it must be rewritten," Swanson said. "The minister has asked for feedback, and we hope she will listen to what these classroom experts have to say."

The Association is urging the provincial government to place a moratorium on the piloting and implementation of the draft curriculum so that a full review and rewrite that includes classroom teachers can occur. ■

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Shift to virtual a success for teacher exchange program

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

Despite travel restrictions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, dozens of Alberta teachers were able to bring an international flavour to their practice through virtual exchanges with colleagues from around the world.

Normally, the ATA's short-term exchange program sees Alberta teachers spend two weeks visiting a counterpart in another country, then hosting that colleague for another two weeks at home. However, during the pandemic the model shifted to a six-week virtual exchange in which matched teachers held regular discussions by video conference.

"Teachers are still passionate people who love their craft, and even though they're exhausted, they're still keen to do these projects," said Carolyn Freed, the ATA's exchange liaison.

This past year, the program matched 33 Alberta teachers with teachers in Australia, Iceland, Spain and Germany.

"It's been really quite heartening to see how many teachers have taken this on despite how difficult these times have been," Freed said.

For St. Paul teacher Terra-Lee Gratton, who was matched with a teaching partner in Australia, the experience was similar to having an old-school pen pal.

"For anyone not ready or planning to travel internationally, having the opportunity to connect virtually is honestly the next best thing!" she said. "Participating in an e-exchange during a pandemic brought renewed energy and a welcome source of joy with my Australian counterpart, who was also living and teaching through the same pandemic."



St. Paul teacher Terra-Lee Gratton says she appreciated being able to participate in an exchange with an Australian colleague from the comfort of her own home and school this past year.

Ian Wilson, co-ordinator of safety and wellness for Wolf Creek School District, was paired with an Australian principal and was able to gather some valuable ideas to share in his district.

"We've shared our journeys as educators and the circumstances that have brought us to this point in our careers. It's been interesting to recognize the many commonalities from halfway around the world," he said.

The virtual exchanges have gone so well that they may continue to be an option even after travel restrictions are lifted and the exchange programs are able to operate normally, Freed said.

"I'd like to see it as another option," she said. "It could be a stepping stone to doing it in person."

Gratton and Wilson both said they appreciated the virtual exchanges but that there's also something special about meeting colleagues in person and walking the halls with them.

"I have been fortunate to have experienced a virtual and an in-person exchange, and have appreciated both opportunities," Wilson said. "Given the choice, I would choose an in-person exchange. There is nothing better than being immersed in another setting and experiencing all it has to offer." ■

Teacher conventions to remain virtual in 2022

ATA News Staff

PD will continue for another year, at least when it comes to teachers' conventions.

At its June meeting held June 10 and 11, Provincial Executive Council voted to support a recommendation that teachers' conventions be held virtually again next school year.

While the province is moving to fewer restrictions when it comes to COVID-19, there is still a great deal of uncertainty about what the future of the pandemic might look like. With many convention boards needing to secure venues and finalise other contracts for an in-person event, Council felt that it needed to make a final decision on this matter before the end of the school year.

"Council appreciates the very hard work of all of our teacher convention association volunteers," said ATA president Jason Schilling.

"They worked very hard to put on outstanding conventions last year in an online format. Teachers provided very positive feedback on those conventions, and while we all want to see each other in person, this was the right decision to make at this time."

This decision of council affects only the 2022 conventions and is not necessarily reflective of other Association events next year or of future conventions beyond 2022. ■

Teachers show resilience while riding out pandemic in foreign country

ATA News Staff

When a pandemic hits, you catch the first flight home and hunker down.

That's the general rule that emerged last year at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but 38 teachers from Alberta and Australia decided on a different approach. In the early stages of a year-long exchange when the pandemic struck, all the teachers decided to remain in their adopted countries and see their exchanges through to the end.

"It was an exercise in patience and also flexibility," said Carolyn Freed, the ATA's exchange liaison. "I was just amazed at how resilient our teachers are and were throughout the pandemic, for them to continue teaching, for them to flex to that country's expectations."

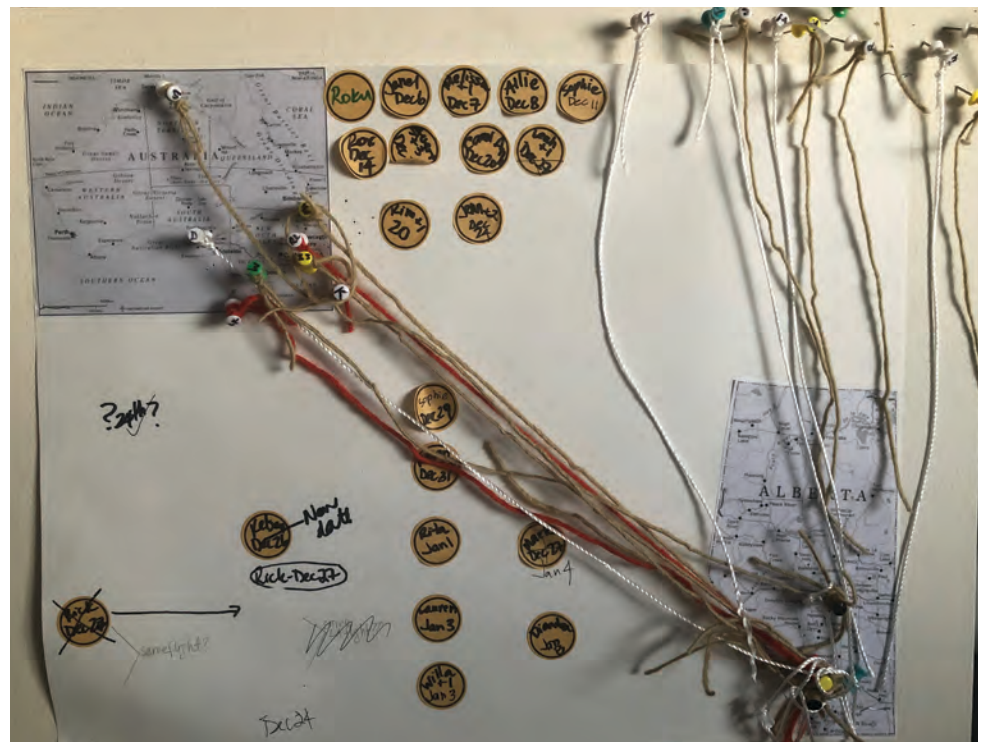
A collaboration between Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Education Exchange Program includes both short-term and long-term exchanges. The long-term or year-long exchanges are reciprocal, where exchange partners trade jobs and

homes for an entire year. Australia is the most common partner for long-term exchanges but they're also available to the United Kingdom and Germany.

When the Alberta teachers were scheduled to come home, Freed created a string-art map to track each family's location in Australia and their home in Alberta. Starting in December 2020, each time a family returned home, their string came down. After many pandemic-related cancellations, the last family arrived in mid-January and all the strings were finally hanging.

"It was a huge learning experience for everyone," Freed said. "We had such a resilient crew that just created a real cohort and a sense of family while they were over there. I think they really just demonstrated the professionalism of Alberta teachers abroad and really represented us so well."

Freed is not sure when the in-person exchanges will resume. That will depend on the pandemic, she says. Once the pandemic eases, the exchange programs will approach their partners in other countries to determine whether they want to resume. ■



This map was used to track the Alberta teachers who were on exchange in Australia during the pandemic.

EXCHANGE PROGRAM DETAILS

Teachers who are interested in participating in an exchange should have at least five years of teaching experience and the written support of their principal and school jurisdiction.

Additional information on the programs is available on the Association's website at www.teachers.ab.ca > Public Education > Teacher and School Leader Exchanges.

2021 gotcha! PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS REVEALED



By leaps and ... masks!

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta teachers were active with their cameras throughout the 2020–21 school year, flooding *ATA News* inboxes with dozens of photos for the 2021 Gotcha! Photo Contest. Here are the judges' top-three picks along with some honourable mentions.

Prizes are awarded as follows • 1st: \$200 • 2nd: \$100 • 3rd: \$50

1



FIRST PLACE Frozen leap

Grade 10 student Nyapan Tung is captured in mid-air during a photography class focused on fast shutter speed and “freezing” action.

Photographer: Mark Knoch, McNally High School, Edmonton

Date of photo: March 23, 2021

Judges' comments: This photograph combines great execution of skills and careful planning in composition and lighting: a spot that showcases the view of the city and a time of day when the sun lights both the buildings and the subject. Overall, the effort pays off in a wonderful photograph that captures the athleticism of the student and a beautiful view of the city.

BE READY!



Teachers, keep your cameras handy to capture special education-related moments during the 2021–22 school year.

While you might want to keep your most spectacular shots for submission to the 2022 Gotcha! contest, please also consider sharing “routine” photos throughout the school year — the *ATA News* is always looking to show what’s happening in education around the province.

Send photos to managing editor Cory Hare: cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

SECOND PLACE A moment in the sun

Student Sophie Brisson goes for a backwards tumble while enjoying some time outdoors.

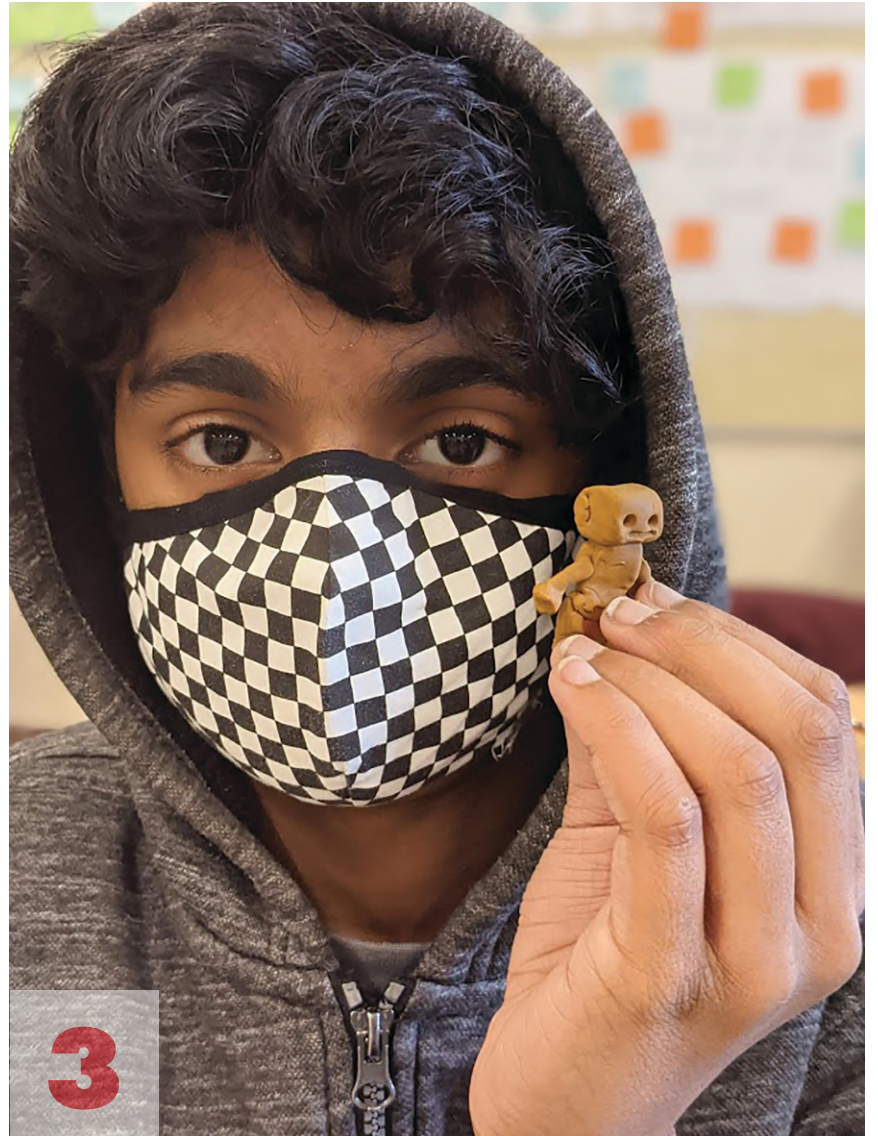
Photographer: Danielle Jean, Muriel Martin Elementary School, St. Albert

Date of photo: Feb. 23, 2021

Judges' comments: Wearing a mask during COVID-19 doesn't stop this student from conveying a feeling of carefree delight. While the student's body casts a shadow that adds an interesting shape to the picture, the photo exudes joy and spontaneity.



2



3

THIRD PLACE Clay figure

Grade 7 student Calvin Paulways shows off a clay robot named Roz that he made as part of a study of the novel *Wild Robot*.

Photographer: Kathy Doherty, Father Scollen School, Calgary

Date of photo: April 27, 2021

Judges' comments: The student's steady gaze raises the question about his assessment of his own creation. Perhaps his thoughts are reflected in the small figure in his hand: wide-eyed but somewhat subdued. The hoodie and the mask add an element of mystery and the use of tight cropping enhances the emotional impact.



HONORABLE MENTIONS

→ COVID greetings

Tanaka Nemutambwe (left) and Corey Ly exchange a COVID greeting.

Photographer: Mark Knoch, McNally High School, Edmonton

Date of photo: Feb 22, 2021

Judges' comments: Two students greet each other with a friendly elbow bump. The photographer catches the optimism in the students' eyes above their masks. The warm glow on their faces reflected from the bright orange shirts complements the feeling of hope and optimism.



HM



HM

← Sit and sketch

Maleah sits at the base of her chosen tree at Calgary's Pearce Estate Park and sketches the changing seasons.

Photographer: Dena Leigh, Colonel Walker School, Calgary

Date of photo: April 7, 2021

Judges' comments: The tall trees and their shadows bring a poetic quality to the photograph, and the contrast in scale between the trees and the student adds interest to the composition.

→ Clean-up time

Kindergarten students pick up trash in the school yard in preparation for Earth Day.

Photographer: Michelle Dickie, Varsity Acres School, Calgary

Date of photo: April 21, 2021

Judges' comments: The chain link fence effectively frames two students who are diligently performing their civic duty. The photographer makes good use of depth of field to focus on the subject.



HM

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The Alberta Distance Learning Centre in Barrhead will close June 25.

SUPPLIED

ADLC remembered via online tributes

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

Anyone who's had a connection with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) is invited to visit a new website that's been set up to honour the facility that is weeks away from closing.

The website adlcmemories.ca includes history and personal tributes to the facility that started as the Alberta Correspondence School in 1923. Based in Barrhead and operated by the Pembina Hills School Division, the centre will officially close on June 25.

"We needed to do something to mark the event," said Gary Frederickson, an ADLC teacher who is involved in creating and maintaining the website.

Frederickson is seeking more photos and personal thoughts that he can post to the site. He can be reached by email at gwfederickson@gmail.com.

The learning centre employs about 80 teachers, about half of whom are based in Barrhead while the

others are located elsewhere in the province and even beyond. About half of the staff have landed other assignments within the division, while the other half is looking for work, Frederickson said.

The closure is the result of provincial funding being phased out. While the closure has been a politically charged issue, the website is focused on people's stories, not politics, Frederickson said.

A virtual farewell is also scheduled for June 23.

"It just didn't seem right to have it just sort of disappear," he said. ■

Closing presentation

A virtual closing presentation will take place on June 23 from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

The Zoom link is available on the website www.adlcmemories.ca/home.

A message from ATA President Jason Schilling

To all the cooperating teachers of public, separate and francophone schools who welcomed a student teacher into their classrooms this year, a big thank you!

In this time of uncertainty and ever-changing educational landscape, you took the time to open your classroom doors and mentor the future of this profession. Thank you for sharing your enthusiasm and joy for teaching. Thank you for your commitment to guide, motivate and inspire. Thank you for your patience, your encouragement and your time. It is impossible to share all the ways in which you have guided and shaped the next generation of teachers, so please accept my greatest appreciation for the endless ways in which you made a difference, not only to your student teacher, but to the profession and to the students in our province. You have set the bar high and your student teachers will rise to the occasion as they prepare to enter their own classrooms in the coming months and year. Simply, thank you for all that you do.

Aux enseignants-accompagnateurs — Un grand merci!

Vous avez pris le temps de partager avec les stagiaires vos connaissances et votre expérience afin de faciliter leur insertion professionnelle. Et pour cela, je tiens à vous témoigner ma plus grande reconnaissance pour tout ce que vous avez fait au cours de cette année scolaire à nulle autre pareille et si compliquée.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

Teacher fined for inappropriate project approval



PITFALLS & PRECAUTIONS

Dan Grassick
ATA Secretary to Professional Conduct Committees

Pitfalls and Precautions is a series that aims to educate teachers on professional conduct issues by highlighting situations addressed by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee.

Recently, the Professional Conduct Committee heard a case in which a teacher's failure to act created an unsafe classroom situation.

The incident leading to the charges of unprofessional conduct occurred in a health class attended by students in grades 7, 8 and 9. During a unit on interpersonal relations, the teacher assigned students a group project to demonstrate how people can react passively, assertively or aggressively in different situations. Students were to develop either a slideshow, video, poster, cartoon or skit to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter.

Two Grade 9 boys chose to work together. After the first day of their project planning, they presented the following plan for a poster and skit to their teacher:

A girl is at her locker. A guy walks up to her and starts flirting. He "gives her a good old slap on the ass." Aggressive reaction: she hits them back. Assertive reaction: she tells them to stop it and knock it off. Passive reaction: she ignores it and giggles.

The teacher didn't tell the students that the project wasn't appropriate and that they would need to change their plans. When later questioned about this by an Association investigator, the teacher explained that the project plan didn't alarm them because "students like to choose themes that shock the teacher."

On the second day of the project, the teacher assigned a Grade 8 girl, who had been absent on the first day, to the group with the two Grade 9 boys. The female student expressed her discomfort with the skit to the boys in her group, and they agreed to change their plan. They ultimately presented a revised presentation that didn't involve touching or slapping.

The girl's parents informed the school principal about the original plan that the teacher had approved and the fact that the change came about because their daughter was courageous enough to refuse to go along with the original plan.

The Professional Conduct Committee found the teacher to be guilty of unprofessional conduct, ruling that the teacher allowed the group's inappropriate planning to proceed with little to no intervention, and, in doing so, they were responsible for the situation in which the younger female student needed to advocate for herself.

The committee determined that the teacher failed to meet section four of the Code of Professional Conduct, which requires that teachers treat their students with dignity and respect and are considerate of their circumstances. The public and the profession expect teachers to provide safe and caring learning environments for their students at all times. This teacher failed to do so.

In addition to the above, the teacher was also found guilty of violating sections 13 and 14 of the code because they sent emails that were critical of their principal to the division's superintendent without first discussing their concerns directly with the principal.

The committee assigned the following penalties to the teacher: a letter of severe reprimand and a fine of \$500 to be paid within six months. Failure to pay the fine in full within the specified time will result in the teacher being declared ineligible for membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Ironically, in a lesson in which the teacher was trying to teach students to communicate assertively, it was the Grade 8 girl who clearly communicated her concerns to her student peers that led to their skit being changed to remove the overt sexual harassment and assault while the teacher stood passively by. ■



An Alberta teen is infected with a mysterious parasite

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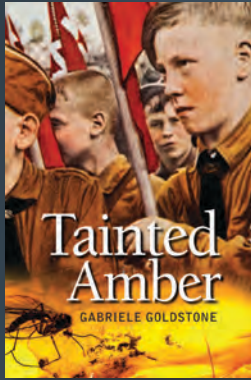
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– Canadian Review of Materials

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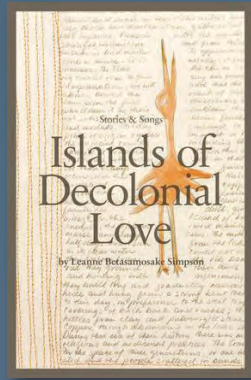
An ode to the responsibility of the teacher, and the search for meaning

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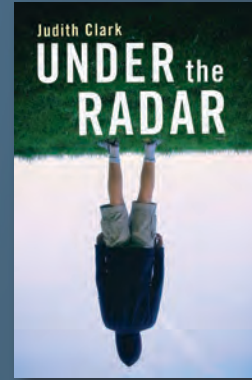
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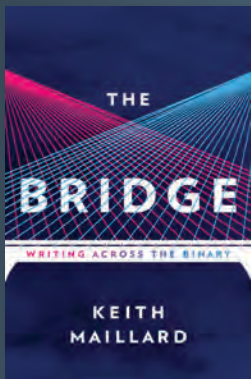
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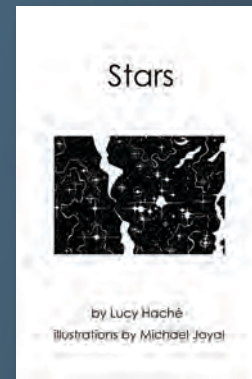
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 BY QUI NGUYEN



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MIND THE STORY



Marty Chan
Special to the ATA News

This school year, the most overused phrase is a toss-up between “we need to pivot” and “please mute your mics.” I’m no stranger to the pivot, having done it for most of my writing career.

The first time I had to pivot was when I wrote interactive murder mystery plays. Performed in restaurants and hotels, the plays invited audiences to become detectives and solve a crime. A company commissioned me to pen a weekend-long mystery at an Edmonton hotel. I thought I could outwit the players with my brilliant plot twists. I was wrong.

The armchair detectives figured out most of my mystery by the end of the first night; then they pursued a plot twist I hadn’t even conceived. They had figured out that their room keys could open more than one door, and they used them to break into our actors’ rooms. I had to lure the players into the hallways and conference rooms where the mystery was supposed to unfold. I asked an actor, Michelle, to die sooner than planned.

Michelle agreed and we staged her body in a stairwell. Unfortunately, in my rush to set up the plot twist, I forgot to inform the staff. Later that night, two

housekeepers stumbled across Michelle’s body and ran screaming down the hallway. They also became the main suspects for the rest of the weekend.

I often recounted this origin of my humble beginnings as a writer, but I also used it to illustrate how we must adapt to life’s challenges. This past year, the world has faced an unprecedented challenge: deciding what to do with all that toilet paper we hoarded in 2020.

We are seeing the ripple effects of the pandemic in schools. Anxiety issues are rising and reading levels are falling. How does a teacher pivot to address the new realities?

The solution may be elementary, my dear Watson. A Princeton researcher used the BBC series, *Sherlock*, to study the impact of storytelling on our brains. She examined the brainwave activity of test subjects watching an episode, then asked the subjects to recount the story. As the subjects recapped key scenes from *Sherlock*, their brain activity lit up in regions that involved memory, moral reasoning and self-reflection. The people were trying to piece together their understanding of the plot elements to put them into context.

Today, an entire world has experienced something we need to put into context before we can return to a time when the most pressing concern is “how can I watch the *Friends* reunion show without paying for HBO Max.” Our road to recovery lies in our ability to share our stories, whether they be about waiting for a COVID test result or discovering that wearing masks all day can give us acne. Stories can bring us together.

In my school visits, I talked about how my childhood experiences as the only Chinese kid at a small-town school shaped my *Marty Chan Mystery* series. I’d often tell kids how I taped my eyes up because a girl pulled her eyes down and made fun of my “Chinese” eyes. When my blunt mom caught me, she told me to stop wasting all the Scotch tape in the house. I told the stories with self-deprecating humour to reveal how I felt as an outsider.

A few years ago, I shared my stories at a rural school. The librarian contacted me after and said I had had quite the impact on one student, a Korean boy whose family had just moved to town. He didn’t realize that other people felt like he did: out of place. I resisted the urge to ask her if the boy’s mother was missing any Scotch tape.

More importantly, the other students likened this kid to the funny protagonist from my books and befriended him. The librarian said the boy had blossomed from feeling alone to becoming one of the gang. Through my stories, the other kids at the school could see past the colour of the boy’s skin and treat him as an equal.

As I reflect on this year’s events, I think about the stories we need to share to put this pandemic into context. I think about how the students in our lives need to share their experiences and see that they aren’t alone.

Let’s tell our stories and just this once let’s unmute all the mics. ■

Marty Chan is an Edmonton-based playwright and children’s author.

