



APRIL INSPIRING STORIES TO SHARE – Educator Lisl Gunderman, Wildwood School, Wildwood

Grande Yellowhead Public School Division (GYPSD), her students, and the community of Wildwood have long recognized Lisl Gunderman as an excellent educator, but she is now officially a national one. The Right Honourable Julie Payette, Canada's 29th Governor General, recently presented Ms. Gunderman with one of six Governor General's History Awards for Excellence in Teaching, in a ceremony at Rideau Hall on January 28, 2019. Only 150 award recipients across Canada have received this prestigious award in the last 23 years.

Ms. Gunderman's innovative history project, created with Mother Earth's Children's Charter School (MECCS) teacher, Maxine Hildebrandt, aims to not only teach students about differing cultures, but also to inspire them to build deeper understandings of Canadian history and how communities can strengthen these rich connections. Ms. Gunderman and Ms. Hildebrandt connected at an outdoor education training camp in the summer of 2016, where they quickly discovered a mutual love and passion for history. The two kept in touch and developed a unique project in 2017 between Ms. Gunderman's Grade 4-5 class at GYPSD's Wildwood School, and Ms. Hildebrandt's Grade 3-4 class at MECCS in Warburg, Alberta. The project outlined an exchange of cultural diversity and family history between the two schools. Wildwood students exchanged their local community's farming, mining, and agricultural history with MECCS's students who in turn shared their Indigenous traditions and family teachings.

A \$2,500 cultural exchange grant from the Canadian Multicultural Foundation and the Alberta Teachers' Association helped expand their initiative to include four on-site field trips, and numerous literacy projects to explore topics on Indigenous story-telling, local traditions and land-based learning for their combined group of 40 students. All participants thoroughly enjoyed the program, but the 'wow' impact for Ms. Gunderman was the creation of the formula itself. "Maxine and I connected almost instantly at the summer workshop," stated Gunderman. "The more we engaged, the more we wanted to bring our students together to learn about each other's cultures and build relationships through our mutual love of cultural teachings. We quickly realized how both the sharing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions and history could build powerful connections between our schools through the lens of storytelling and hands-on teachings."

Storytelling is an important tool used to preserve cultural traditions, local customs, and maintain historical records for the benefit of current and future generations. And what better Canadian storyteller to enrich their program than award-winning Métis author, David Bouchard, who became an important collaborator on part of their project. Gunderman continued. "Our students were invited to participate at MECCS for David's presentation on Indigenous stories and teachings. He spoke to the students about the value of stories and the importance of building relationships with each other. The day was very impactful for all of us." Bouchard



continued to be involved in their project, and helped all students understand that each of them had interesting and valuable family stories to share with each other.

Ms. Gunderman was speechless when informed that their project had won national recognition. The nomination involved an extensive application process that caused both teachers to deeply reflect on their work, guiding principles, pedagogy and assessment. It also inspired them to continue building connections between the two schools and future students.

She firmly believes the relationship piece between the many different participants solidified the success of the project. "What started off as a chance meeting between Maxine and myself has deepened into a friendship that I truly honour, and she has inspired me to seek other learning partnerships and cultural opportunities. Wildwood School continues to offer Cree classes, and many of my students have delved deeper into learning about local community and family history."

Along with the teachers' family members, Bouchard was also invited by Gunderman and Hildebrandt to join them in when they received their award at Rideau Hall in Ottawa.

Back in her classroom at Wildwood, Ms. Gunderman is looking forward to this year's collaboration and new group of students, thanks to the continued support of her principal, James Randall, and Grande Yellowhead. "My first teaching position was at Wildwood School in 1992," she noted. "You quickly learn that each class is unique and comes with its own story to share."

Along with the national award, Ms. Gunderman and Ms. Hildebrandt will share a \$2,500 cash prize, and an additional \$500 will be given to each of their respective schools. Grande Yellowhead Public School Division is very proud of Ms. Gunderman and looks forward to her **inspiring** future generations of storytellers.

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For more information, please visit www.facebook.com/gypsd to view pictures from the project and awards celebration in Ottawa. To learn more about GYPSD and its award-winning public schools and staff, we invite you to visit www.gypsd.ca.