

Book Buzz

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An Interview with the Hon. Carolyn Bennett

When I first learned that this issue's theme would be Indigenous @ your library, my hope was to do an interview with the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. She is so passionate about exposing students and Canadians of all ages to Indigenous authors and stories.

Recently, I had the opportunity to be part of one of her school visits with the children at my son's school. She did a reading of the picture book, *The Raven and the Loon*, and participated in a discussion in the learning commons. I saw first-hand the interest and inquiries young students have for this important subject. They had many questions – so many that the teacher-librarian had to step in to conclude the session.

This inspired some of my very own. Here are the Hon. Carolyn Bennett's answers.

TingL: Did you like to read as a child? Who were some of your favourite authors?

CB: I read everything, and actually really annoyed my sister because I would be so busy reading.

What I remember most is reading all of the Nancy Drew books and all of the Cherry Ames books, and then deciding that being a doctor, was the best combination of being a caregiver and a detective!

Who are some Indigenous authors to watch for?

Sadly, we have lost Richard Wagamese, but all of his books are truly worth reading. I often read his last book of poetry, *Embers*, when on flights.

I also love the work of Thomas King and Lee Maracle, Cherie Dimaline and Drew Hayden Taylor.

Which books by Indigenous authors for children and young adults would you recommend to learn about the history, culture and experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples?

Melanie Florence, Monique Gray Smith, and Deborah Kigjugalik Webster.

What is your advice to educators and teacher-librarians in curating a collection that includes Indigenous voices and contributions to Canadian literature?

I think great bookstores like Mabel's Fables in my riding are tremendous coaches. GoodMinds.com has a truly comprehensive collection of books by Indigenous authors, and having the authors come and read is the best!

What was your inspiration to launch Indigenous Book Club Month and the #Indigenousreads Holiday Campaign, and how can the community participate?

After my friend Brenda Zimmerman died, her colleague at York University came to see me with an idea that Brenda had for reconciliation.

She suggested that if every book club in Canada chose a book by an Indigenous author for June we could begin the work of understanding and start to fill in the gaps of all the things about First Nations, Inuit and Métis that we never learned at school. Then we decided to also use the month of December to suggest children's books by Indigenous authors as gifts for the holiday season. And we live streamed a reading at Mabel's Fables to kick off the month.

Finally, what are you reading now?

I am rereading Lee Maracles' *Memory Serves* and *My Conversation with Canadians*, as well as *Making Room for Indigenous Feminism* edited by Joyce Green. ■