



Heather Webb Makin

# A Day in the Life of an Ally Librarian

**E**astview Public School in Scarborough is one of three elementary schools in the Toronto District School Board that teaches Anishnaabemowin as an alternative language to French for our Grades 4 to 8 students. Eastview also provides daily land acknowledgment and cultural ceremonies, as well as Indigenous cultures and traditions classes, taught by Indigenous educators to all grade levels once a week.

As a teacher-librarian at an inner city school that centres Indigenous perspectives for student achievement and well-being, my schedule is extremely varied depending on the time of day, as well as the time of year. An entire day could consist of reading Forest of Reading titles, helping to co-teach media lessons on internet safety or teaching my other teachable subjects, drama and dance. My day also could be made up of teaching teachers and students about residential schools, treaties, the importance of water to Indigenous people, the need for water walks, the significance of traditional powwow regalia and dances and providing resource assistance for the 2018 Ontario social studies curriculum.

This puts me in a unique position. I am a white woman teaching students about First Nations, Inuit and Métis issues and cultures. I am no expert, nor do I claim to be. But I am an ally, one with Indigenous friends and mentors who help me every step of the way.

A few years ago—soon after I joined the staff at Eastview—I thought it best to upgrade my knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Canada to recognize our shared history. Understanding that we are all treaty people, I signed on to take the intermediate AQ Native Studies course. I was fortunate to have a fellow staff member, Christina Saunders, help guide my way. She identifies as Indigenous and now works for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Urban Indigenous Education Centre as an instructional leader who helps mentor me. She helps, she guides, she listens to my questions, my concerns, my unknowing. She has been a huge inspiration in my continuous journey in my learning to unlearn and relearn Indigenous education.

Here is what an average day in late September might look like at Eastview Public School.

**8:15 a.m. – 8:50 a.m.:** Read, file and respond to email. Drink coffee. Review episodes of *Wapos Bay* to correspond with the TDSB and Indigenous character trait of the month for October. *Wapos Bay* is an award-winning animated series following the adventures of three Cree children living in remote northern Saskatchewan. In each episode, the children are guided by their elders to learn how to balance traditional ways of life with the new ones. Make lists of books and videos that correspond with Indigenous character traits and have available for teacher read alouds in class.