

sure how it would look but I knew I had to commit to prioritizing authentic Indigenous voices wholeheartedly.

We began with investing in expanding our First Nation, Métis and Inuit collection. Although already housing an admirable list of titles, half of this year's library budget was dedicated to purchasing a wide assortment of both fiction and non-fiction Indigenous authored and illustrated texts. In my experience, students would typically learn about Indigenous people and their communities through social studies or by hearing about residential schools on Orange Shirt Day. In some cases, this may have been the only Indigenous perspectives students were exposed to all year. There are so many stories to be told from diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. All students need breadth and depth of exposure to Indigenous perspectives. I also wanted my Indigenous students to see themselves in our collection, to know their community was honoured in our learning commons. As our collection has expanded, seeing students excitedly grab books from displays and watching their eyes light up when they tell me, "I go to powwow!" or "I jingle dance just like her!" has confirmed my belief in the importance of continuing to make purchasing literature about Indigenous people, by Indigenous people, a priority. Authentic representation matters.

Beyond texts available to students, the presence of Indigenous voices was another facet of "nothing about us without us" that I needed to uphold. I cannot have elders and knowledge keepers visit our classroom every day, however, digital resources and the Internet virtually bring faces and experiences into our learning commons. Recently, when sharing the Silver Birch Express nominee *A Bear's Life*, my students learned that the Great Bear Rainforest is Kitasoo/Xai'xais territory and that the First Nations people of that land have cared for it for generations. Even though the book speaks about the Indigenous perspective, taking time to find and then show them a video of a hereditary chief talking about the rainforest in his words and telling them of the spirit bear in his own language,



is what made their experience more authentic and thus impactful. We don't have to speak on behalf of anyone or any culture, nor should we. When we take the time to find Indigenous voices, they can speak about themselves, in their own words and language. They do the teaching and our students learn to listen and appreciate Indigenous culture and perspectives.

Since the beginning of the year, our Intermediate students' time in the Learning Commons has been framed by the overarching goal of broadening our collective Indigenous perspective. In our Google classroom, every other week I post a significant moment in Indigenous history, taken from *Historica's Indigenous Perspectives Education Guide*, and highlight it with additional videos, articles and interviews with Indigenous people. Students are given time to consider the question and create comments in our Google classroom with their thoughts, based on the information I have gathered and curated for them. As they continue growing in their research skills throughout the year, students will have more freedom to direct their research. As a class, we will continue to frame our inquiry around Indigenous perspectives and the importance of going directly to Indigenous voices as our source of information and compass for our learning. This already has taken flight. As one of the Grade 8 classes has many talented visual artists, when introducing texts and resources about Inuit culture, I screened the National Film Board's short documentary, *I Can Make Art Like Andrew Qappik*. We looked at maps, shared short



readings and had great discussion after watching the documentary. Hearing Andrew Qappik speak and seeing him carve and print-make first hand, ignited a special interest for them in the artistic side of Inuit culture. Seeing this spark, I then prepared materials for our own printmaking art, using push pins, pencils and Styrofoam to emulate the method of soapstone carving demonstrated by Qappik. With this particular class, we will continue researching and growing in our appreciation of Indigenous Art and that will perhaps influence their self-directed research. The learning commons is now decorated with their printmaking art alongside books about Inuit culture and articles about Andrew Qappik.

Students seem to believe I have a vested interest in Indigenous learning because I am Indigenous. Often students eagerly remind me that, "I'm Native too, Ms. B!" What they don't see is that although half my genetic makeup is Indigenous, stories about First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities are not my own to tell. Through a broader Indigenous lens, of course there is a common history of colonization, but I have to work just as hard as any teacher would to read articles, preview texts, discover reliable sources, find virtual voices of elders and knowledge keepers and build relationships with Indigenous community members with support from our school board's Indigenous Education Team. This takes time. It is not always easy, however, I repeat the words which resonated so deeply with me, "nothing about us without us," and am encouraged to continue making choices, guided by that truth. ■