

World on a Maple Leaf Launch

November 17, 2011, 1030

Centre for Education

Good morning everyone,

I was privileged to be asked to serve on the review panel for this project and to be asked to speak on the occasion of the launch of *World on a Maple Leaf*. My contributions are small in comparison to the many other contributors, so let me first join with others in recognizing the efforts of the people who made this book possible.

I will begin by thanking united Cultures of Canada Association, the City of Edmonton Community Services, and the Human Rights Education and Multicultural Fund—for your foresight in funding the project and especially for making 1000 copies available free throughout the province.

To the authors, thank you for taking up our offer by responding to the call for submissions. You generously chose to share not just your talent, but a little bit of yourselves with us. Catherine Ripley and I delighted in reading all of the stories—not just the ones selected for publication. I particularly enjoyed reading each author's notes about how the story came to be a part of your personal history.

Asma Sayed, your introduction to the collection highlights the importance of multiculturalism to our national identity. As you noted, it was as difficult to choose stories for the collection, as it was to leave a story out. Throughout that process of selection you challenged us to assess each story for content, style, appropriateness to our purpose and audience, and most importantly, authenticity. For me, every discussion brought some new insight into the world of literature and of folk tales specifically. Thank you for sharing your considerable expertise with us!

Trustee Catherine Ripley is a talented children's author in her own right, and she challenged us to examine every detail of the stories for consistency of tone and voice, plot line, and, most importantly, for quality of expression. Catherine is unable to be here today but she has sent with me the following message:

“I ask you to share my deep regrets at not being able to attend, and my respect and appreciation for Nayanika's dream of collecting a diversity of folktales together in one collection and her perseverance

in bringing that dream into reality. She first shared her dream with me in 2004 and by inviting various partners to invest in her dream, we now have this wonderful resource to use in our classrooms, libraries, community halls and our living rooms. The book provides insight into a variety of cultures through the powerful medium of ‘story’ and, thus, will help us all embrace our own wonderfully diverse and culturally rich Edmonton community in a deeper way”.

I must add my voice to the chorus of praise for Nayanika’s work on this project. Nayanika, your powerful vision for this book and quiet determination to bring it to fruition are a testament to your tenacity and grace. Throughout our deliberations you sat quietly, intently, taking in our often disjointed to-ing and fro-ing over each story, gently intervening in our conversation, to guide us along the path to a decision. And I have to mention your chai tea and samosas: as I read the stories again this weekend I nostalgic for chai! To be sure--there are special benefits to being on a committee with Nayanika!

To Dana Antaya-Moore—and the production team at Edmonton Public Schools—you’ve worked your magic (and considerable expertise) to bring this project to the book we are launching here today. From pages of type to a beautiful book—it’s truly a work of art—a beautiful collection—a treasure to be sure.

I must take a moment to acknowledge my long-time friend, Flavio Rojas, whose illustrations have brought the stories to life. Each drawing gives life to the characters, a backdrop for the scene, an interpretation of the story, and in many cases an extra dollop of Flavio’s special breed of humour! Thank you Flavio, this is a very special moment for me!

Nayanika asked me to talk about how the book could be used, so over the past few days I’ve been sharing it with friends and colleagues and listening to their responses. One friend—a junior high school teacher—said she would use it in her grade 9 social studies classes to introduce the Immigration unit of her course. She noted that the title alone “will be a great jumping off point for classroom discussion”. Another friend who teaches ESL to adults held it in his hands, and examined the cover from every angle. “I can’t look at this book and not be moved by it”, he said. How would he use it? He would have students act out the stories. “Taking on the role of a character”, he said, “is a good way to develop empathy for others,” [I think we are going to see a sample of how that can be done later in our program.] I showed it to a friend who looks after her pre-school granddaughter. She said she would read from this book every day. “After all,” she said, “we all tell similar stories, to teach the same lessons, but these stories add a richness that my telling of the story would lack”. One of my friends

asked where she could buy it, because she loves folk tales, and she wants one of her own to read at leisure. Finally, late last night, my neighbour and I discussed the book at length, browsing and talking about the stories together. We talked about what makes a folk tale a folk tale [Asma—thank you again for your introductory comments], we compared these stories to stories we were told as children, and we contemplated the prevailing themes that characterize the genre. This is how she would use the book in grade 2 classes—reading aloud to children, inviting comparison, introducing students to the diversity of the country. My conclusion is that the list is endless, and I estimate that there will be demand for the book throughout our schools, parent centres, professional offices, libraries—everywhere people gather to read, to learn, and to discover. As Catherine Ripley wrote to me in a note, “I believe the sharing of these stories will open up new conversations about cultural traditions and beliefs while also allowing us to reflect on our similarities and open up our hearts to welcome and respect each other in new ways”.

I thank everyone for their contributions to the book, and for joining us today in the celebration of *World on a Maple Leaf: A Treasury of Canadian Multicultural Folktales*. We hope you enjoy it!

Thank you.