

Indigenous literature to be part of Grade 11 curriculum next year

Grade 11 students at York Region's public schools will have the opportunity to discover First Nations, Inuit and Metis voices next year as Indigenous literature finds a permanent and required place on the curriculum.

Starting in the 2023-2024 school year, all students in the YRDSB will be required to take Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Voices as their Grade 11 English credit.

Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Voices is not a new course for the YRDSB, but the 23-24 school year will be the first time the course will be required for all.

The course is designed to expand students' understandings of Indigenous peoples, culture and contemporary realities, says the Board. Learning about history, perspectives and cultures of Indigenous peoples will help students better understand Canada's past, present and potential for the future.

Heather Sears, Coordinating Superintendent of Education, says this change is both important and exciting.

Students will continue to gain the important skills taught through Grade 11 English while learning more about Indigenous perspectives, about Canada, the importance of Truth and Reconciliation, and the relevance of treaty relationships.

Adds Andrew McConnell, Coordinator of First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education: The course is a natural extension of the Grade 10 history course. By using contemporary works, students will have a chance to see the diversity of experience and ideas that modern Indigenous people bring to communities today.

Coinciding with the announcement, Grade 11 students from Newmarket's Sir William Mulock Secondary School said the course gives them a better view of Canada and everyone's place within it.

There are a lot of Indigenous heroes who have tried to give the actual facts about their culture instead of having people get false information about their culture, said Gbemiro, speaking alongside fellow student Evan.

The first step to change is awareness, said Evan. Ideas spring from knowing and those ideas could potentially be something that could help people.

For Deanna, the course helped raise awareness of issues that are very contemporary for the country.

I think this course was really beneficial because it opened my eyes to the issues that are happening in Canada with Indigenous people, she said. I knew about Residential Schools but, for example, the boil water advisory, I had never heard about that before and that is such a real, current issue in Canada I think we need to talk about more and I am glad we did talk about it in this class.

Adopting the program board-wide in 2023-2024 rather than 2022-2023 is, says McConnell, in order to give teachers time to familiarize themselves with the work.

We really want to allow the opportunity for teachers to feel fully prepared as they take on this course, he says. It is not a brand-new course, it has existed in the curriculum since 2000, but for us as a Board to be doing this across all of our high schools we know that we need to allow for time for teachers to get comfortable with the content, with the authors, and to really get a solid understanding of how it fits into the Grade 11 English curriculum.

[The course] is an opportunity for this generation to really step into knowing who Indigenous people are right now. It's an opportunity for Indigenous folks in this generation to feel pride in knowing they are being represented for who they actually are as

opposed to who they have historically been portrayed as.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter