

National Day for Truth & Reconciliation to be marked with community gathering, film screenings and more

September 30 is National Day for Truth & Reconciliation and there are several opportunities for Aurorans to observe this poignant day of reflection.

A ceremony and community gathering will take place this coming Tuesday at Mirkopoulos Plateia, Aurora Town Square's outdoor gathering space, led by Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley, Elder Pat Floody, Ancestral Knowledge Keeper Raiden Levesque, and spoken word poet Sarah Lewis.

"This evening gathering focuses on remembering the children who did not come home, those who lived as survivors and their families," says the Town of Aurora on the observance, touching upon those impacted by the residential school system. "It is important to recognize and commemorate the difficult history of residential schools, their ongoing legacy, and the trauma experienced by so many. This evening will provide the opportunity to learn, to have a safe space for meaningful reflection, and a sacred fire starting at 5.30 p.m."

Ahead of National Day for Truth & Reconciliation, the Aurora Public Library (APL) will host the first of two film screenings on Sunday, September 28 "Ninan Auassat: We, the Children."

APL describes the film, which was shot from a "child's eye view," as "powerful," representing the hopes, dreams and hardships of children from three different Indigenous Nations: Atikamekw, Eeyou Cree and Innu.

"This documentary reveals the dreams of a new generation poised to take flight."

The screening will take place in the Library's living room space from 2 - 4 p.m., and will be followed by a virtual screening on National Day for Truth & Reconciliation itself of *The Stand*, which will be available for streaming throughout the day.

"Drawn from more than a hundred hours of archival footage and audio, Christopher Auchter's riveting new feature recreates the moment when the Haida Nation took a stand for the future."

"We very strongly feel that we have an important part to play in education for National Day for Truth & Reconciliation," says APL's Polly Ross-Tyrrell. "It's a very conscious decision on our part that we're open on that day so people can come and learn and explore. We try to create meaningful spaces where people can reflect and learn, and where they can engage with Indigenous history and learning. We want to celebrate it all together and explore the meaning together."

"It is intimidating and it is sometimes hard for us to know how to begin the journey of learning, of reconciliation, and we're just here to try and make it a little easier."

The programs offered by APL are part of their broader Indigenous Teachings program, which showcases many Indigenous-related programming opportunities and a curated list of Indigenous, Inuit and Metis authors whose works can be found on APL shelves.

As part of the initiative, a Reading Challenge featuring these works is an ongoing engagement opportunity for APL year-round, not just in the lead-up to September 30.

"We tried to go through multiple perspectives because you've got Métis perspectives which are going to differ from First Nations perspectives, which are going to differ from Inuit perspectives, like they all have such unique histories and face completely different challenges throughout Canada's history," says APL's Shelby Brown on bringing the reading list together. "You want a broad spectrum because Canada's a big country. We've got a lot of different cultures and just within the Indigenous communities as well, there's so much that people can learn from and so many different perspectives."

The perspectives offered through film as well are coming to APL courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.

“We wanted a film that we could show in person on a weekend, and then we wanted a film that could be available all day on the actual day itself,” says Ross-Tyrrell. “We chose *Ninan Auassat* and *We the Children*, [as our] in-person film. It made me cry in the best possible way. It's a child's point perspective of the dreams and aspirations of three children of very different Indigenous backgrounds, what they think about the world, and how they're going to change the world. It's a really, really moving film. *The Stand* is about a moment that many of us will remember when the Haida Nation decided to stand for the future and not give up to stand for the children who are in the other film. We very much hope people will join both experiences, because it's two very, very different perspectives. But they're both wonderful films and I highly recommend them.”

Both films taken together represent the past and the future, she adds, a deliberate choice as many people see the issues related to National Day for Truth & Reconciliation as rooted in the past, but they also very much inform the future.

“There's a lot of people who maybe tend to think of Indigenous people as being in the past, and they're not. They're right here, right now, and that's what the film about the children really says,” says Ross-Tyrrell. “I want people to connect with the people in these films and see that we are all human beings with dreams, with thoughts of the future. We may be very, very different, and some of the differences are not at all the responsibility of the people who are most affected by them, but we're all people hopefully working together for there to be a future for the children. I want the world to be a good place for all of them and I think both films show really clearly that Indigenous people are in many ways way ahead of us in thinking about the future generations.”

Elsewhere, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation will be marked by the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region & South Simcoe with a screening of the film *Walking Through the Fire*, by the Sultans of String.

This collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artist and musicians will unspool at Newmarket's NewRoads Performing Arts Centre on September 30 at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6.30. The free screening will be followed by a 30-minute Q&A with filmmaker Chris McKhool, and Indigenous artists Shannon Thunderbird and Marc Meriläinen.

For more information on the Town of Aurora's community gathering, visit www.aurora.ca/recreation-arts-and-culture/specialevents/truth-and-reconciliation. For a complete list of programs as part of the Aurora Public Library's Indigenous Teachings program, visit indigenousteachings.ca.

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter