

Year of programming takes shape around Chasing Painted Horses

With its own unique brand of 'magic realism,' the novel Chasing Painted Horses has provided no shortage of inspiration for the Aurora Public Library and community groups as One Book One Aurora 2021 gets underway.

As The Auroran reported last week, Drew Hayden Taylor's novel about confronting old, yet vivid memories is at the centre of the Library's (APL's) annual campaign to get all of Aurora reading from the same page.

'This book has been so magical that so many people are coming on board,' says Reccia Mandelcorn, APL's Manager of Community Collaboration, who says she often has the same criteria in picking a book for the campaign: will it sustain interest for months?

'This year, when I had my 'beta readers' read the books on my shortlist, I got everyone's opinion on it. One of the things I was hearing from all my wonderful community members is to stay away from anything that was too dark, even if it was a really good book, because although we need important themes to build upon, they all warned about not having anything that was too dark or graphic during this very difficult time that we're all experiencing.'

That was just one determining factor and it certainly fit the bill. Ms. Mandelcorn says she loves the theme of 'magic realism' and has loved fantasy and fairy tales since childhood. Chasing Painted Horses, she says, has its pages infused with this magic, along with themes of art, homelessness and Indigenous life, all woven together by an Indigenous voice in Drew Hayden Taylor.

Among the activities beginning to fall into place surrounding Chasing Painted Horses is a writing workshop led by Marnie Maguire, a writing contest for adults and teens encouraging people to tap into their imaginations and a photography contest sponsored by The Auroran for teens and adults alike depicting art found in unexpected places.

'I am hoping that the photography contest will inspire,' says Ms. Mandelcorn. 'We want to expand art participation. This year, the Town of Aurora is partnering with us on a community art project installing chalkboards on the fencing around Library Square. People will be invited for an all-ages community event to come and draw and that will pick up on the theme of the book's 'Everything Wall' [which has a central role in the novel]. We're inviting people to take pictures of what they draw and there will be prizes every week for the best drawing, as is what happens in the novel.'

Additional programming touches upon the themes of homelessness with virtual events slated to be hosted in conjunction with the Social Planning Council of York Region and the Affordable Housing Coalition of York Region.

'We will be continuing programming on the need for affordable housing in our area as brought up by the theme of Harry, a homeless person in the book,' says Ms. Mandelcorn. 'I am very excited about retaining that partnership with them; we did some programming with them this year and it was wonderful. I am very excited they are on board again.'

An art exhibition, A Carousel of Horses, exploring the horse as symbols of power, and a virtual author visit with Drew Haden Taylor on Saturday, October 23, at 2 p.m., round out the lineup.

All this affords plenty of time for Aurora residents to read the book.

In years past, previous One Book One Aurora selections have been placed free of charge in small lending libraries dotted around the community intended to allow readers to pick up, read, return or pass on their volume.

The fine details of the roll-out are still forthcoming but Ms. Mandelcorn says she's eager to hear readers' reactions, as well as the community conversation that will come.

'The book is accessible and can be read at different levels,' she says. 'I am hoping teens might pick up the book as well. I'm hoping

to expand to a wider group so we're not just having the 'book club set' but teens and young adults start enjoying this initiative and be exposed to some Indigenous writing. Drew's writing is humorous, magical and not necessarily what you think of. Maybe in the past, Indigenous writing or writing from Indigenous authors has been pigeonholed. That is something people are going to pick up from this book because Drew is Indigenous, but his writing stands on its own.

For so short a book, it is so rich. You can find so much in it. It's just so open for the reader to discover for themselves what they are seeing and maybe what they see in themselves and society, too.

For more on One Book One Aurora and associated programs and events, visit onebookoneaurora.com.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter