

Youth exhibit poignant takes on what it means to Remember at Skylight Gallery



They might not know what it's like to live through a World War, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're strangers to conflict and now local youth are showcasing their different perspectives on what it means to Remember in an exhibition hosted at Aurora Town Hall's Skylight Gallery.

On through to the end of the month, the exhibition is a showcase of youth art and prose collected by the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in last year's Remembrance Day Poster Contest.

From traditional depictions of cenotaphs the world-over and doves of peace, to very personal portraits of specific soldiers past and present, youth let their imaginations run wild and the imagination naturally guided them to a place of reflection.

The main theme is Remembrance and, of course, they're encouraged to examine it in either a historical perspective by either writing poetry, essays, or creating art in terms of historical events in the past or simply in terms of what does it mean to remember, explains Claude Arcand, who heads up educational programs on behalf of the Aurora Legion. When we remember during Remembrance Day, there are those who died, those who were left behind, and a lot of the poetry evoked a feeling of loss and things of that nature. But often they were tempered by the hope that this would end, and it did; basically, we were given the sacrifice and we're able to move on in a situation of peace and love.

Major (Rtrd) Stephen Boyne, who chaired the local Legion's 2024 Poppy Campaign said he found the works remarkably insightful, particularly as you're talking about kids who are in Grade 3 or 4.

They have demonstrated a heartfelt grasp and understanding of the sacrifices that go along with war and the importance of peace, says Boyne. The art component of it takes some of the sterility of the history. You're not reading the facts in the textbook; it reflects more the emotions, the feelings that go along with things in history.

Pointing to one highly-visual poem that incorporates the entirety of John McCrae's In Flanders Fields written in curves and loops to spell out the word Remembrance, he adds, If you look at some of the poetry, it's not necessarily written from the perspective of the traditional Western World War 1 and World War 2 experience with war; there are students from countries who have much more recent experience with war than we do, and I think some of that is reflected in some of the work that has been put forward.

This is important not just for the students, but for other people who read it. Remembrance Day tends to be seen in a World War 1,

World War Western context and it helps to broaden the reality of war to other countries with much more experience with warfare that maybe don't necessarily get taken into consideration when people think about Remembrance Day.?

While the current exhibition showcases the work of 2023 entrants, Arcand and his team are hard at work this week evaluating 2024 entries and seeing which ones might go to the next level, which culminates in a Legion contest at the National Level.

They hope that the spoils from this year's contest will feature again in the Skylight Gallery in 2025.

?We're all part and parcel of creating that theme of Remembering. A young person nowadays will not necessarily relate to something that happened 100 years ago, 80 years ago, 75 years ago, but when exposed to it in various courses in school, it provides an opportunity to realize that people in the past were heroes, people in the past sacrificed so they may have the kind of life they have today,? says Arcand. ?It doesn't have to be their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents; it might have been in my generation, but a lot of kids don't have military ancestry. This helps open their eyes that there has been that effort on the part of society to try and create peace for all in the world ? a peace where we are free to be able to do what we wish and celebrate the way we want, and have the rights that some of us take for granted that we shouldn't really take that for granted.?

By Brock Weir