

June 2024

Book Clubs for Inmates NEWSLETTER

Sarah Polley at the Grand Valley Institution for Women



Sarah Polley, the acclaimed Canadian filmmaker, actress, and activist, visited the Grand Valley Institution for Women, a federal prison in Ontario, on May 14, 2024. Her visit, which aimed to engage with the inmates through storytelling and artistic expression, highlighted her commitment to social justice and rehabilitation and made it a truly unique and unforgettable experience for all attendees. Sarah's warm and approachable nature immediately set a comfortable atmosphere, with her first response to the question, 'How did it feel to kiss Mark Ruffalo?' breaking the ice and fostering a sense of camaraderie.

Sarah's visit, which revolved around her book, *Run Towards the Danger*, was a testament to the exceptional dedication of our volunteers and the staff at Grand Valley Institution. Their unwavering commitment to creating an environment conducive to the flourishing of ideas and the



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forging of connections was the driving force behind the success of this event. This evening was a shining example of their leadership and inspiration, and their efforts are deeply appreciated every month.

Both volunteers and attendees hailed the occasion as the pinnacle of the year and potentially the most memorable in the history of author visits. Members from both the GVI Main and Minimum units spoke highly of the experience, cherishing the opportunity to interact with Sarah directly. Despite the unique setup of both book clubs coming together, the members felt comfortable and valued Sarah's thoughtful and engaged responses. The conversation was extraordinary—real, vulnerable, intimate, and personal. Combining the minimum and central units for this book club, the author's visit was an excellent decision, enhancing the sense of community. Members felt free to ask questions without pressure, and Sarah handled every inquiry with thoughtfulness and engagement. Her presence captivated everyone, with many nodding in recognition and connection.

The Author Visit Program underscores the importance of providing support and resources to correctional facility inmates, helping them rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. Authors such as Sarah Polley's involvement highlight the potential of arts-based programs in emphasizing the importance of fostering community and personal growth among the incarcerated population.

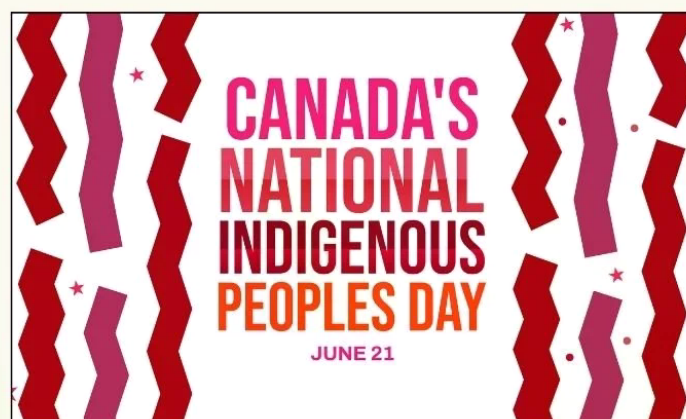
Upcoming Days to Celebrate

National Indigenous Peoples Day: Friday, June 21, 2024

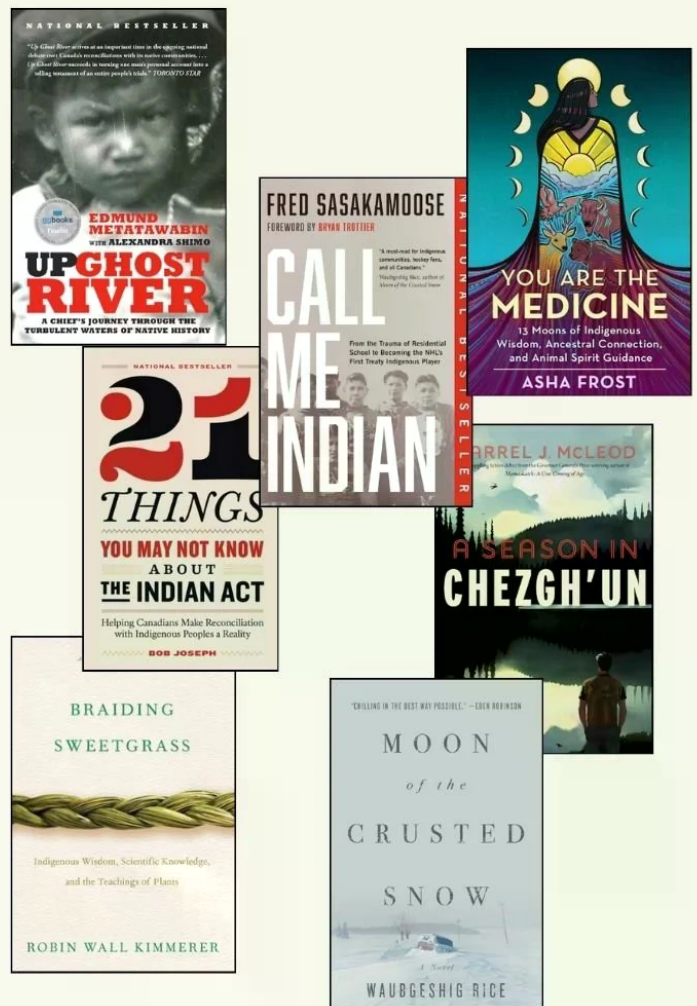
On June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day, we celebrate the history, heritage, resilience, and diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across Canada. This date, which coincides with the summer solstice, has been significant for many Indigenous communities for generations due to its representation as the longest day of the year.

Governor General Roméo LeBlanc declared this holiday, formerly called National Aboriginal Day, official in 1996. In 2017, it was renamed National Indigenous Peoples Day. Across the country, numerous activities are held to showcase the rich cultural expressions and stories of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Suggested Reading from Canadian Indigenous Authors:



- *A Season in Chezgh'un* by Darrel J. McLeod
- *Bad Cree* by Jessica Johns
- *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good
- *Indians on Vacation* by Thomas King
- *Medicine Walk* by Richard Wagamese
- *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice
- *Nobody Cries at Bingo* by Dawn Dumont
- *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline
- *The Outside Circle* by Patti Laboucane Benson
- *The Theory of Crows: A Novel* by David A. Robertson
- *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* by Bob Joseph
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Ken Cuthbertson
- *Call Me Indian: From the Trauma of Residential School to Becoming* by Fred Saskamoose
- *From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle
- *Heart Berries: A Memoir* by Terese Marie Malhot
- *Up Ghost River* by Edmund Metatawabin
- *You Are the Medicine* by Asha Frost



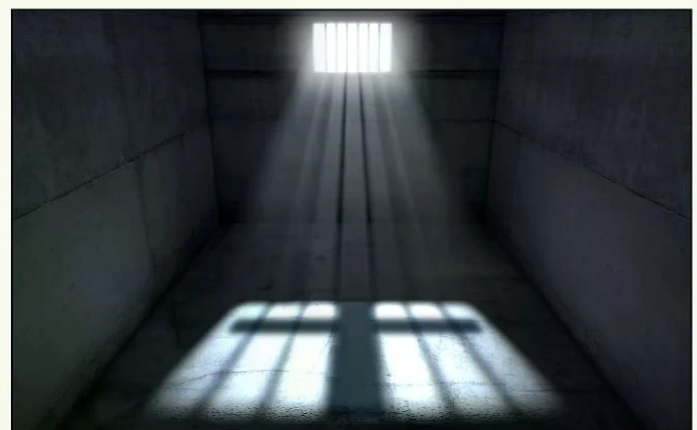
Nelson Mandela Day: Thursday, July 18, 2024

Mandela Day is celebrated globally on July 18 to honour Nelson Mandela's life and legacy. This day encourages individuals, communities, and organizations to reflect on Mandela's values and principles and positively impact their communities. It is a call to action to uphold his vision of equality, freedom, and justice.



Prisoners Justice Day: Thursday, August 1, 2024

International Prisoner Justice Day is observed annually on August 10, commemorating the anniversary of Eddie Nalon's death in 1974. Nalon passed away in a Millhaven Maximum Security Prison solitary confinement section after guards disabled the emergency call button in his cell. The day began with the prisoner fasting and refusing to work on his memory. It now serves as a day for prisoners and their allies to demand reforms to a criminal justice system that is often



dehumanizing and brutal.

What's New with Book Clubs for Inmates and Children of Inmates Reading Program

We've added a few new ChIRP programs to our roster and we hope to be operational by the Fall of 2024. They are **Atlantic Institution, Medium Security, Atlantic Institution, SIU unit, Archambault Institution, Dorchester Institution, Drumheller Institution, and Stony Mountain**. Not bad for five months into 2024.

As for Book Clubs for Inmates, we are still continuing with our efforts to provide brand new books to both federal and provincial institutions. Additionally, we secured funding for our Author Visits Program for the next five years. We are grateful to the **Northpine Foundation** for their kind grant, which enabled us to continue running this program. As mentioned early in this newsletter, Grand Valley Institution was visited by Sarah Polley. Just two months ago R.H. Thomson paid a visit to Beaver Creek Institution and coming this August, author Lawrence Hill, of *The Book of Negroes* will visit Nova Institution for Women and author, Michelle Good of *Five Little Indians* will be paying a visit to Saskatchewan Institution.

We are busy with fundraising events across Canada and we've secured a spot this year at **The Word on the Street** in Toronto from **September 28th to 29th**. Make sure you stop by and take a look at our booth. Details to follow.

We'll be back at the end of September with highlights from Lawrence Hill and Michelle Good's visit and The Word on the Street. Until then, have a wonderful summer.



Help us continue the amazing work we are doing in federal penitentiaries across Canada by donating. Your support enables us to bring positive change and provide essential resources to those in need.

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