

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 26, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Margaret T. Stevenson Talented Young Writer Award Recipient: Skye Hyndman

ORIGINATOR: John Beaton, Principal Victoria School

RESOURCE

STAFF: Carol Anne Inglis, Kathy McCabe

INFORMATION

Skye Hyndman from Victoria School is the 2009 recipient of the Margaret T. Stevenson Talented Young Writer Award. Margaret Stevenson is best known for her encouragement of young writers and promotion of quality children's literature during the years she served as supervisor language arts for Edmonton Public Schools. The purpose of this award is to promote annual recognition of a talented young writer completing grade 8 in Edmonton Public Schools. The portfolios of all the applicants are impressive demonstrations of the board priority "to ensure every student is successful in their program of studies, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy."

Samples of writing submitted by Skye demonstrated evidence of her personal growth as a writer, her positive attitude towards the literary arts, a strong personal style, and satisfied the following selection criteria:

- show a range of writing for different purposes, situations and audiences
- show persistence with complex writing tasks
- display a strong personal style and sense of voice
- demonstrate excellence in content, organization, word choice, syntax, and control of writing conventions
- show evidence of reading a wide variety of literature
- show evidence of valuing the work of other authors

Excerpts from the writing of Skye Hyndman are provided in Appendix I.

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APPENDIX I - Excerpts From the Writing of Skye Hyndman

EXCERPTS FROM THE WRITING OF SKYE HYNDMAN,
VICTORIA SCHOOL

From Skye's Introduction to her portfolio

I have tried to include within my portfolio the most stirring and amusing feelings and incidents that have ever crossed my mind and body. Call me vain, but inside every character I create is a fraction of my former or current self. I write like others paint or dance or sing: with passion and soul and a story to tell. In every piece, I embed a subtle message, a fantastic philosophical (or perhaps just downright silly) thought. I consider writing to be an art form of the finest type: it is impossible to perfect.

**From Description for "Quiet"
(A poem written by Skye in grade seven)**

I wrote this poem last year. Our assignment was to write about the sensory experience found in the hallways of Victoria School. I focused mainly on sound, and how loud the school really is if you take the time to listen. I tried to zoom in on the, seemingly, most insignificant noises, the ones no one paid attention to. I imaged these poor little vibrations to have rather low self-esteem; I compared them to extremely shy students. Yet, they have become so tightly woven into the school's normality, that I am sure everyone would miss them if they were gone.

"Quiet"

The world is not a silent place.
From the gentle intake of breath,
to the off-key singing of a Gr. 9 girl,
Victoria School is that part of the world
where in some cases its noise is only outdone by
the screaming of a cat taking swimming lessons
or a horrible musician sawing away at an out of tune violin.
Yet hallways are quiet to the human ear;
Jangling keys, ripping paper, whirring heaters escape notice.
Only words reach empty ears, oblivious
to rattling pins, shy, shuffling students.
Nothing, nobody.
Utterly important,
like music.

From Description for "A Groundling's Experience"

(A story written by Skye in October, 2008)

In this piece, I tried to communicate the feelings of a young child, belonging to the lower class, attending one of Shakespeare's tragedies in Shakespearean times. I wanted the reader to experience the world through her eyes, ears, nose and skin.

Excerpt from "A Groundling's Experience"

I stumbled out the door, handicapped by my bulky attire. Mother strode down the street in her dignified manner, pulling me along like a dog on a leash. Just as the sun peeped above the horizon, we entered an arena in which a crowd of people had gathered. I wrinkled my nose at the pungent odour of human sweat and decaying food. Flies buzzed with unsuppressed joy, swarming around heaps of indistinguishable garbage.

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The room suddenly quieted. A man dressed in an assortment of colourful robes had walked onto the platform. He spoke in mournful tones, putting a hand to his chest. Immediately tears welled up in my mother's eyes. His performance was wasted on me. I had no idea what the words meant. Hours stretched by, mother sobbing, me standing on wobbling legs, counting the seconds.

From Description for "Skye of the Island"
(A personal narrative written by Skye in February, 2009)

The title of this piece was inspired by Lucy Maud Montgomery's "*Anne of the Island*", although the two pieces have near to nothing in common. It refers to the Christmas holiday I spent on Vancouver Island, and conquered my fear of ice.

Excerpt from "Skye of the Island"

Victoria is a beautiful place, but this Christmas it was enchanting. Uncharacteristically, temperatures had dropped below freezing and every house, tree, and farm was frosted with a generous layer of icing-like snow. A picture straight out of a Martha Stewart magazine. Not a footprint blemished the great expanse of white, for the locals are a little wary of snow. And why shouldn't they be? It's cold, wet, hard to walk through, and if you spontaneously passed out you'd freeze to death and no one would find your body 'til the great thaw. But my grandparents lived in Edmonton for years and no meager 2 feet of snow was going to stop them from walking a few kilometers to exercise their dog.

And so I found myself half-awake, mouth open in a silent laugh/scream sliding down an icy slope at speeds rarely encountered outside the most advanced forms of space travel. The terror I felt was strangely refreshing, like jumping into a lake in the middle of January wearing only your underwear. It seized me in its iron grip and pushed thoughts of fatal injury to the back of my mind. It was the border between exhilaration and bliss, fear and love.

From Skye's Reflections on her portfolio

On many an occasion, I have looked back on some of the writing I did years ago and find myself recoiling in disgust. No doubt one day I will reread this very article and shake my head in wonder. What on earth was I thinking? What teacher in her right mind would give this an A? Did I honestly think this writing style was cute? I sound like a rather priggish child trying to be an adult (and failing miserably, at that).

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Yet, some of my pieces are ageless. Whenever I revisit these I shake my head, this time in sadness. I think, *'My writing has taken a downturn lately. Look how much better I was in sixth grade.'*

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In my portfolio, I have tried to include at least some of my work with this time-proof characteristic. I imagine people digging up those pages thousands of years later from some old ruin, decoding it, reading it, and saying, "Hey, this is some quality stuff!" I can only hope that you will think the same.