

# THE PERSPECTIVE

January/February 2022

# TWS

Toronto Waldorf School

## STORYTELLERS IN THE CLASSROOM: CAN WE BE DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE AND JUST?

by Sheila Anderson-Masse (she/her/elle)

- p 1** STORYTELLERS IN THE CLASSROOM: CAN WE BE DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE AND JUST?
- p 3** INDIGENOUS STORIES
- p 4** BLACK HISTORY MONTH
- p 4** BANNOCK BY THE FIRE
- p4** LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AT TWS
- p 6** ALUM PERSPECTIVE
- p 7** 2SLGBTQ+ HISTORY & PRIDE MOVEMENT:
- p 8** NEW BOOKS AT TWS LIBRARY
- p 8** HISTORY OF AFRICA



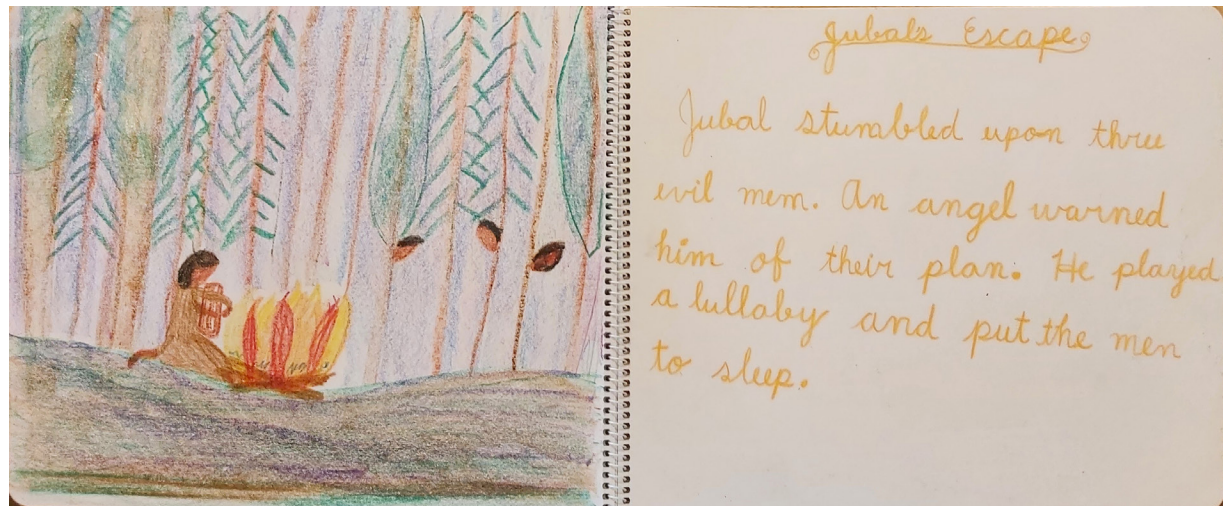
Harlem Renaissance  
grade 8 blackboard  
drawing

Whose stories are told in our school? And who gets to tell them? Whose stories are not told? Many of us who are white settler teachers are engaged in an awkward dance, lurching between appreciation and appropriation, seeking to decolonize a well-entrenched Eurocentric curriculum, yet aware of the implications of speaking for others, the danger of highlighting the stories of others while erasing their voices. Our classroom practices have always placed the teacher squarely on a pedestal in the center; how do we adjust these practices so that the teacher is not the only storyteller? How do we pay more attention to silence and celebrate the things that we may not recognize as important?

As we attempt to place Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice work at the centre of our curriculum and our classrooms, how do we determine the difference between tokenism and an authentic and deepening connection with multiple cultures and in particular with BIPOC students and families? What resources are available to us and who do we turn to for feedback and support in our choices? How do we foster healthy, reciprocal, mutually enriching relationships with elders and storytellers from various communities?

In her article “Moving from Diversity to Justice”, culturally responsive educator Christina Hale-Elliott challenges our preoccupation with diversity. Diversity “looks outward”, sweeping superficially across a broad landscape; only justice can turn the light inward.





1



2



3

1, 2. Grade 4 Indigenous History student work

3. Grade 6 Japanese Studies student work

4. Grade 7 African Studies blackboard drawing of Wangari Maathai

5. Grade 8 Chinese Studies student drawing of Li Shizhen

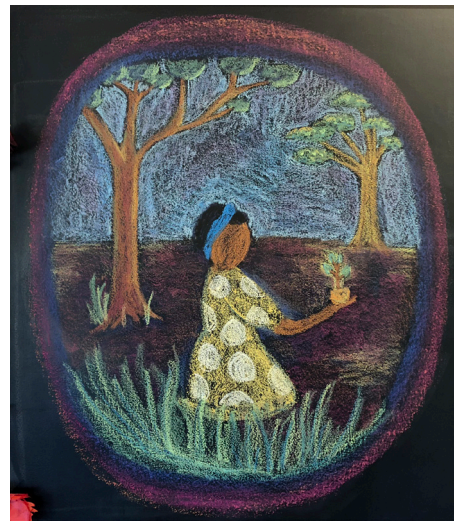
Schools also need to be able to answer the questions of why you want “diversity” and to what end. If the answer to the question of “why you want diversity” does not include an honest acknowledgement of who and what your school has historically been, including why there has not been greater diversity up to this point, then you are still missing the mark. If your answer to the question of “to what end” does not include a vision focused on the inherent brilliance of BIPOC students being cultivated and celebrated, then you are missing the mark. (Hale-Elliott)

At the moment there seem to be more questions than answers. Our Inclusion Committee is struggling to define its mandate and its scope and to settle on how its members work together. Nevertheless, we continue to question and make changes. From an overhaul of the traditional Waldorf classroom decorations to the diversified holdings of the school library, changes are visible, often thanks to generous donations. Many voices have contributed to these changes.

Here are some of our recent attempts to grapple with DEI work in the Lower School. Inspired by the schools in British Columbia, the Lower School Faculty is looking at how to incorporate the First Peoples Principles of Learning. In Grade 1, fairytales come from around the world; in Grade 2, the children hear about people from all cultures and spiritual backgrounds doing noble deeds; in Grade 3, children hear a variety of creation stories, not just one; in Grade 4 the individuals in the classroom explore who they are and where they come from; in Grade 5, geography focuses on First Nations people, the original caretakers of the land; in Grade 6, the history and geography curriculum expands across the world and the study of economic geography can provide an important window into the world. In Grade 7, the focus has shifted from the colonizers to the indigenous communities they displaced. In Grade 8, revolutions are not just part of history; they are also alive, current, and providing seeds of courage to the young people preparing to step into High School.

The TWS High School English department has spent many hours examining our English curriculum through various lenses. We are seeking windows and mirrors for our students, mirrors where they see themselves reflected, and windows through which they can look into the world, including unfamiliar parts of the world and unfamiliar points of view (Style 1)

This is ongoing work. One of the key issues for curriculum is acknowledging that no text is sacred. But what is sacred is what we are trying to help foster in young people: empathy, compassion, integrity, resilience. Is the solution to throw out all our texts and start fresh? Probably not. But difficult questions must be raised and answered, however long that may take. This kind of shift requires from the teachers both courage and a willingness to be vulnerable. We will make mistakes, ask the wrong questions, try out answers that lack authenticity or feasibility. We will re-evaluate as we go. The important



4



5

thing is that students see us engaged in the world, initiating change, encouraging them to initiate change and to question what we do.

An Indigenous focus has already been part of our curriculum for some time, with an Indigenous Studies Main Lesson created and led by Rachel Aide for almost two decades. Each High School grade studies an indigenous novel. Two years ago, Erika Starzynski brought a new Ministry of Education course to TWS: Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice. Here are some of the texts that now share space with some of the familiar old classics:

Grade 9: The Hate U Give - alongside Oedipus Rex and As You Like It

Grade 10: The graphic novel Persepolis, the Thanksgiving Address and Kanien'kéha - alongside Beowulf and Chaucer and the history of the English language

Grade 11: The Colour Purple alongside Hamlet

Grade 12: Moonlight alongside The Handmaid's Tale, The Life of Pi and an overview of epistemology.

In the senior French class: the graphic novel l'Arabe du Futur by Riad Sattouf alongside Le Petit Prince.

In a recent Power of the Word Main Lesson, several Grade 10 students challenged Chaucer's voice; even when he is defying the norms of his medieval world and celebrating the independence of women like The Wife of Bath, he is still a male voice writing what he thinks women would say. The outrage of these students must be acknowledged and it will bring about a transformation - at the very least the important addition of a voice to parallel Chaucer's.

As I begin Parzival with Grade 11, I feel both inspired and weighed down by Waldorf teacher Daniel Baker's passionate and thoughtful 2020 article ultimately rejecting the medieval text that he has admired and taught for years. His solution for American Waldorf students is The Autobiography of Malcolm X. What should or could our Canadian solution be? I am aware of the “research-and-planning mode” that can trap us as we desperately seek the “perfect” substitute. To “set perfection as a prerequisite for dismantling oppressive systems—that, in itself, is oppression.” (Baker). Or do we put the text's imperfections at the centre of the classroom, meditate as we walk the eleven-circuit labyrinth (such an imperfect number!), and at “the end of all our exploring...arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time”? (Eliot)

As Thomas King asserts, stories are all we are (King). It matters what stories we tell and who tells them. We are guided by this awareness even as we weave awkwardly between appreciation and appropriation, striving to become more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just. We will certainly step on the feet of others, and probably our own as well, but from time to time, perhaps we will find rhythm and harmony.

## INDIGENOUS STORIES

Looking for some inspiring stories to share with your children?

Here's a link to audio stories, where you can learn more about Indigenous peoples, history and culture:

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1302889494709/1534952403997e>



## WORKS CITED

Baker, Daniel. *Reconsidering Parzival*. Letter to Waldorf educators, staff members, and administrators, June 20, 2020.

Eliot, T.S. “Little Gidding”, *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1941. Print.

Hale-Elliott, Christina. “Moving From Diversity to Justice”. March 23, 2021. National Association of Independent Schools.

King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Massey Lectures. Canada: CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corp.], 2003. Radio.

Style, Emily. *Social Science Record*, Fall, 1996. First published in *Listening for All Voices*, Oak Knoll School monograph, Summit, NJ, 1988.

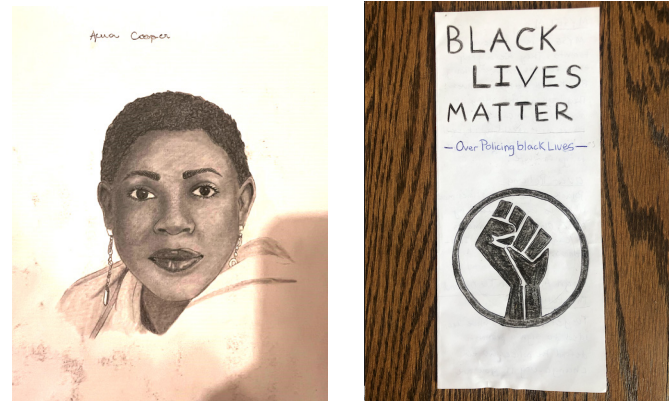
## BLACK HISTORY MONTH

by Erika Starzynski (she/her/hers)

Black History Month is an annual celebration of African Canadians and a time for recognizing their central role in Canadian history. Rooted in the work by historian Carter G. Woodson and minister Jesse E. Moorland who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), an organization dedicated to researching and promoting achievements by Black Americans and other peoples of African descent. Black History month was first proposed by Black educators and the Black United Students at Kent State University in 1969 and celebrated in 1970 for the first time in the US.

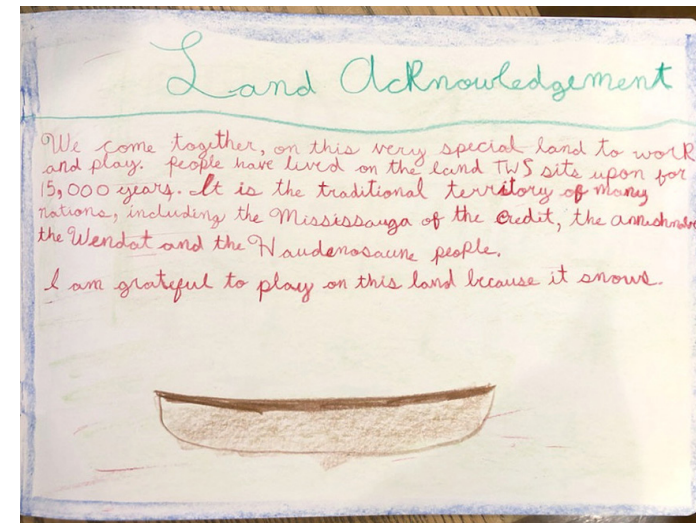
Jean Augustine and Ontario House of Common's representative put forward a motion for the official recognition of February as Black History Month and the honoring of Black Canadians in 1995. In 2008, Senator Donald Oliver moved to have Black History Month officially recognized by the Senate, which was unanimously approval.

Black history IS Canadian history. At TWS we continue to work towards a curriculum that includes the often marginalized, forgotten, and ignored history of Canada and it's inhabitants and contributors.



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AT TWS

by Rachel Aide (she/her/hers)



A land acknowledgment is a formal statement that publicly recognizes Indigenous Peoples as the first caretakers of the land now known as "Canada," and highlights the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

Land acknowledgements also serve as a conscious reminder that indigenous people inhabited the land for centuries before the earliest European settlers arrived. The recognition of this history brings awareness to the rightful claims indigenous people have to this land and its resources.

The Toronto Waldorf School began to give land acknowledgements in 2015, the year the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report brought to light the Canadian government's role in the establishment of the Residential Schooling System. Since then, various community members including faculty, parents, and students have researched, written, and delivered their own individualized land acknowledgements at the opening of classes, meetings, or events.

Beyond the school community, there's been interest in introducing land acknowledgements at the start of public meetings. David West, a former TWS parent, proposed beginning each Richmond Hill City Council Meeting with one. While the motion was struck down when he served as a city councillor, it's possible that the idea will be revisited now that he's mayor.

Acknowledging the land gives us the wonderful opportunity to reflect on our own relationship to the land, to learn its territorial and treaty history, and to foster relationships with its original stewards: The Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

Featured are two recently delivered land acknowledgements. The first was prepared by four Grade 12 students (Deja Defilippis, Grace Oliver, Jacob Switzer, and Sachin Talreja) for the High School Welcome Trip to Elora Gorge. The second was prepared by Ms. Aide for the first online High School assembly of the year.

### Land Acknowledgement for Elora 2021

*DEJA:* The Land and Water of Elora is situated on the traditional territory of the Petun, the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabewaki, and the Odawa.

*SACHIN:* Elora Gorge is covered by The Simcoe Patent/Treaty Number 4 and the Haldimand Proclamation that granted a large tract of land to the Six Nations of Grand River for their alliance with the British during the American Revolution.

*GRACE:* We recognize that this area is home to many past, present, and future First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Our acknowledgement of the land is our declaration of our collective responsibility to this place and its peoples' histories, rights, and presence.

*JACOB:* Our school supports the "CALLS TO ACTION" from the Truth and Reconciliation Committee on Indian Residential Schools. We vow to never forget, to hold governments and colonial forces to account, AND to seek redress and healing for injustice.

### Land Acknowledgement for Tkaronto

*I'm speaking to you from my home in Toronto which sits on the traditional territory of the Anishnabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas.*

*Just south of me lies one of the oldest roads in North America, which has been travelled by people for thousands of years. The settlers named it Davenport Rd.*

*Toronto is part of the Toronto Purchase. In 1805, the government of Canada purchased a stretch of land from the Mississaugas that ran from Lake Ontario to Steeles Rd. on the edge of Vaughan. The Crown paid the Mississaugas 10 shillings for the land (which is about \$60.00 Canadian Dollars).*

*In 1998, the Mississaugas challenged the legality and fairness of the Toronto Purchase. In 2010, when our Grade 9s were 3 or 4 years old, the Crown finally paid the Mississaugas \$145 million in compensation.*

*I'm grateful to live and work on this land, and respectfully care for it alongside my indigenous and non-indigenous neighbours. And it is especially fun to run into people on Davenport Rd. (Alex Barsoum, the downtown school bus people, and Mr. Singh: I'm looking at you!)*

## BANNOCK BY THE FIRE



Before the Winter Break, Grades 1, 2 and 3 all got to experience making bannock or "fry bread" over an open fire. The students were all so grateful for this tasty indigenous lesson!



## ALUM PERSPECTIVE BY SUSAN MAHIPAUL

### Which “Class Of” were you a member of?

*I was part of the graduation class of 1995 and then did one year of OAC afterwards.*

### Can you please share a special memory of your time here?

*I have many special memories really and I find it hard to just pick one. Maybe I can say that the most significant memory for me, or impact on me as a person was the fact that I was able to graduate with my class in 1995. Because of my disability, I spent half of Gr. 8 and all of Gr. 9 in hospital and rehabilitation centres and for a while it was recommended that I transfer to a public school that would be more accessible for me. I think that my class was very accepting of my mother, who came in every day to help me get to class. Students helped carry my wheelchair up and down the stairs and overall created a place for me where I felt that I belonged. That had a huge impact on my self-concept as a person. I also remember that for gym class my goal was to learn how to juggle and many of us would have juggling contests off to the side of the gym with each other. We live in a world where people expect others to do things a “certain way” and to use time in a certain way. When you have a disability, you are constantly having to alter your day, your environment, or recognize that your pacing needs to change. A special memory for me will always be that I was allowed to problem solve how I could get my academic work done and keep up in my way. That gave me the confidence to tell others later on in my life about what I needed and how I was going to do things.*

### What do you do for a living now? How did you get there?

*This feels like a question that might have a long and complex answer and journey for me. In 2004 I graduated as an occupational therapist (OT) from the University of Toronto. I worked as a paediatric OT for about 5 years in the Toronto area and then decided to pursue a PhD at McMaster University in the School of Rehabilitation Sciences. I gravitated towards a PhD because I was curious about how my colleagues understood disability and why how I lived my everyday (disabled) life didn't seem to match how disability was taught and written about within the field of OT. During my doctoral work I became aware of how medicine and the rehabilitation sciences are not tolerant of disability and have stereotypical attitudes and biases toward how disability should be understood and more importantly treated. I began to realize how prevalent the overcoming narrative is within life and how much that led to my internalizing the belief that overcoming my disability was going to mean that society would accept me. As part of an overcoming narrative, people and society around me assumes that I live a tragic life and that I am unhappy with my disability, that I want to get rid of it, fix it, or have it cured and that I wish to overcome it to be as “normal” as possible.*



*For many disabled people this means many painful and often unnecessary treatments in name of “normality”.*

*I became an expert in critical disability studies, a field that questions how systems and power are enacted in the lives of disabled people. The field attempts to dismantle ableism and sanism (both of which are insidious in our society and create discrimination and oppress people who have physical impairments/chronic illness and/or mental traits that are judged and viewed as lesser than, dangerous, and to be eradicated). As a disabled young woman, and then a disabled OT, I found that there are very few people like me within the health professions and also within academia. I am uniquely situated to bring critical perspectives on disability into the health fields. I am a lecturer within the undergraduate disability studies program and King's University College @ UWO in London, ON. I teach across many Masters level OT programs in Canada on critical disability studies, Mad studies, and disability justice, disability rights, and disablement. I teach about challenging the prevailing medicalization of healthcare education and practice. I also lecture on anti-oppressive narratives and practices and I have become a specialist in academic ableism. As part of my work I have been asked to join national occupational therapy working groups as a consultant on how to bring equity and justice related to disability and ableism into the OT profession (particularly in relation to colonialism). Clinically, I have a private consultation practice where I have created a disability positive and anti-ableist practice with primarily women with disability and/or disabling chronic conditions on how to navigate the healthcare system and other systems of oppression (such as work, school, parenting, etc.). One of my specialties within this practice is how disabled students can be accommodated within healthcare professional education/programs.*

### What aspect of your Waldorf education has been most influential in your life and work?

*I believe that studying within the Waldorf school encouraged me to become a critical thinker, but most importantly for me to develop the ability to reflect on life and the stories of people around me. I am a storyteller at heart and coupled with reflection and a deep sense, trust, and belief in my Self I have been able to become an advocate, clinician, consultant and researcher within disability studies scholarship. There have been many years during my childhood and adulthood where I felt that I had no voice, where I was othered within systems, and where I had to observe the environment around me to appreciate how others viewed the world and how I might fit into that worldview. The Toronto Waldorf School in many ways gave me space to discover who I was. And I feel like the education overall was well-rounded. I don't know whether I would have been held back in a public school because of all of my hospitalizations. Although I'm a very academic person, I think that the Waldorf School created the foundation for me to explore how I moved through the world and a voice (to have a say) in how I could do this when often the message I hear is “you can't do that” or “I have never seen someone in a wheelchair do this job” or “you can do this without help, can't you?” etc.*

### What advice would you give to a student graduating from TWS this year?

*The world can seem like a scary place. We live in a time where we are speaking out against systems, but we also live in a time where there are people who wish to keep old systems the same. For me, it has always been about finding the right people to network with. Don't be afraid to reach out and learn from people who are working in the fringes and who may not be doing mainstream work. As a disabled occupational therapist I will always be in the fringes, on the outside - I am never an insider because there are people around me (unfortunately) who will remind me that someone like me doesn't belong in the health professions. When I bump up against those individuals, I look for others who are working in the fringes to bring about change. Equity and justice is not about one*

*group of people wanting to have their voices heard, it's about all of us who come from marginalized groups learning from each other how we experience oppression and power. This may mean that you will choose to become an ally to collectives you do not know much about (for example, for me I have learned a lot about racism and White supremacy) in order for those same individuals to collectively join you in your equity and justice pursuits (for example to learn about how ableism impacts systemic oppression). Change takes time, it takes reflection, and most importantly it requires listening. It doesn't help to force change quickly. My goal is to focus on long term outcomes and to build relationships and networks. That has led to powerful shifts for me and have offered me ways to feel like I belong. Lastly, do not be afraid to say “no”. Often we feel a lot of pressure to agree to take on things for fear of missing out or that these opportunities will not become available again. The best advice my PhD supervisor gave me was that when you say “no” to opportunities, other opportunities will be around the corner. This has been very true in my experience. Also, don't assume that people will value you all the time. Sometimes we have to do things for free, or we have to volunteer our time in order for someone to get to know us. And when they then recognize the value we have, then this can lead to great working relationships and/or paid work opportunities. Be advocates! Speak up when you see injustice. As someone who experiences injustice frequently, I appreciate when other people add their voices and stories to mine.*

*There are two pieces I wrote recently that people can connect to if they'd like.*

- <https://medium.com/national-center-for-institutional-diversity/what-does-it-mean-to-be-productive-a-conversation-between-disability-allies-e1bf32976ca2>
- <https://theconversation.com/covid-19-amplifies-the-complexity-of-disability-and-race-157933>

Susan Mahipaul, PhD, MScOT, OT Reg. (Ont.) (she/her/hers)

Disability @ Health Navigator  
Consultant, Educator, Researcher  
Critical Disability Studies Scholar



## 2SLGBTQ+ HISTORY & PRIDE MOVEMENT:

At TWS, we want to acknowledge as a school our support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. We recognize the brave people that fought for their rights to celebrate themselves and who they love openly and unapologetically. We are committed to continuing to support the 2SLGBTQ+ community by educating ourselves on their history and advocating for inclusivity and diversity.

We encourage everyone to take the time to learn about 2SLGBTQ+ history and the Pride movement

<https://www.pridetoronto.com/pride-toronto/>

## NEW BOOKS AT TWS LIBRARY!



Have you heard?

Our library shelves are jam-packed with new books for our students to enjoy this year. A special shout-out to the Inclusion Committee for the many recommendations and to the Parent Council and Parent donors for their financial support of the purchases.

One of the many exciting opportunities that have resulted from this new acquisition is that many voracious readers have been providing book reviews to their fellow students.

## HISTORY OF AFRICA

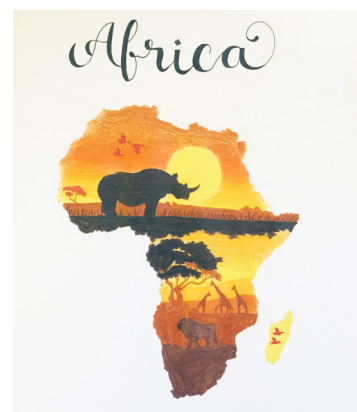
We would like to highlight a fantastic resource by the BBC called "History of Africa with Zeinab Badawi" - it is a series of 20 programmes is based on a unique project, overseen by UNESCO known as the GHA: the General History of Africa - Africa's history, culture and heritage written and told by Africans themselves.

Zeinab Badawi travels across more than thirty countries in west, east, central and southern Africa and explores the continent's history from the beginning of time to the modern era with the goal to 'set history straight'. She captures key moments in Africa's history in her conversations with Africans from all walks of life including leading historians from across Africa and she brings alive some of the lesser known heroes and heroines of the continent's past.

This is a search for truth and identity - uncovering hidden chapters and perspectives of Africa's history and revising distorted interpretations.

"The fact that humans around the world are part of the original African diaspora and all that's gone into their thinking about Africa cannot now be argued - scientifically, culturally, it's still argued I think the prejudice against Africa probably will take longer to break down. But break it down we must. And we will only break it down not with fairy tales, but with facts."

<https://youtu.be/ETnIsBnNRro>



**TWS** Toronto Waldorf School

9100 Bathurst St, Thornhill, ON L4J 8C7  
(905) 881-1611 [www.torontowaldorfschool.com](http://www.torontowaldorfschool.com)

Follow us:

