

History Becomes Our Story

A new book brings out a writing competition for youth

by Elodie Caron

You know, everyone likes a good story. Or so says Thomas King in the first line of his short tale, *Coyote and Enemy Aliens*, a contribution to *Our Story*, a new collection of work by Aboriginal authors from across the country. The book is the result of a partnership between the Dominion Institute and Enbridge Inc., part of an ongoing effort to preserve the history of Canada. It's the third collection, but the first comprised entirely of Aboriginal talents.

The short stories all focus on a period of time in the past, told with an Aboriginal perspective. Authors explore defining moments of both personal and national significance, ranging in time from hundreds of years ago to the turn of the last century.

In *Skraeling*, Rachel A. Qitsualik tells of a meeting between Inuit, Tunit and Viking long ago in the far north, and it's a fascinating story, rich with detail. With *A Blurry Image on the Six O'Clock News*, Drew Hayden Taylor gives voice to a non-Aboriginal woman drawn to the coverage of the conflict at Kanesatake by the image of her ex-husband, an Ojibway, behind the barricades.

There are stories of beginnings and stories of endings. Brian Maracle recounts the creation of the Iroquois, while Lee Maracle describes her despair at the loss of Snauq, the traditional 'supermarket' of the Tsleil Watuth, to modern development in Vancouver.

Fellow contributors Tomson Highway, Tantoo Cardinal, Basil Johnston and Jovette Marchesault add greater depth to the collection.

Each author was given a limit of 5,000 words, and the diversity of the resulting work is impressive. What so many people can do with the same amount of space is a testament to the power of words and the need for such expression.

Which is why it's so encouraging to see Aboriginal youth given the opportunity to participate in their own way.

The Canadian Aboriginal Youth Writing Challenge, launched in conjunction with *Our Story*, is an extension of the book. The short story competition is open to Aboriginal youth between

the
ages of 15 and 18 and the judging panel is comprised of several of the same authors who contributed to the book.

The deadline for submissions is May 6, 2005, so if you're interested, you've got some time to work on your entry. They are accepting works of 800 to 1400 words, and will be awarding ten authors. The first-prize winner will get \$500, a trip to Ottawa to read from their work at an event to celebrate the competition, and the chance to be profiled for an Access Television production. Nine finalists will get \$200 and a letter of recognition. All stories will be published online by the Dominion Institute.

For more information on the competition and the rules and regulations, you can check out the website of the Dominion Institute: www.dominion.ca or call their toll-free number: 866--701-1867.