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Researcher receives grant to support her research in Institute for Child and Youth Studies

Dr. Erin Spring, a post-doctoral fellow with the University of Lethbridge's Institute for Child and Youth Studies (I-CYS), will build on her doctoral research as she embarks on a local project with First Nations young adults.

Her previous work honed in on Canadian youths' responses to place and identity in young adult fiction. The results showed they were very aware of the role of place within their lives.

"I think this is because they're at a time in their lives when they're thinking about where they want to live, who they want to be, and what is and isn't important to them," she says. "Characters in young adult texts are often confronting similar issues, and thinking through these questions as readers of fiction can help young adults make sense of their world."

Now, she hopes to learn how local Aboriginal youth react to sense of place and identity in Canadian fiction for youth and young adults.

"In order to know more about Aboriginal youth and youth in general, we need to hear their voices and we need to know what they think about the world and what they think about the books written for them," she says. "This research will help to fill an important gap in the literature about young adult's responses to fiction and could help parents, librarians and teachers find new ways to connect with the young adults in their lives."

Spring has chosen two fiction works penned by First Nations authors. In Richard Van Camp's book, *The Lesser Blessed*, Larry Sole is a Grade 11 student, a member of the Dogrib Indian band, and a youth with a troubled past. A coming-of-age tale, *The Lesser Blessed* describes how Larry finds his place in the world. In addition, Spring has chosen *Arvus in Excelsus*, written by local author Gordon Fox. Arvus is a First Nations cowboy whose life has been negatively affected by residential school. He returns home to Kainai after being gone for several years and works hard to overcome his past.

“I will be working with Blackfoot youth by reading these First Nations texts and getting them to respond in a reading group discussion,” says Spring. “I’m interested in hearing what they think about these First Nations texts and how they use their knowledge of the world and their culture to shape their reading experience.”

Spring plans to establish a reading group for high school students at a southern Alberta library.

“My overall goal is to better understand children, youth and young adults and how they interpret texts and interpret and talk about their own identities in relation to what they’re reading,” she says.

Spring’s research recently got a boost from IBBY Canada, the Canadian section of the International Board on Books for Young People, when she was awarded the Frances E. Russell Grant worth \$1,000. The grant is designed to encourage and support research in young people’s literature leading to a publishable work on Canadian children’s literature. Spring plans to use the funds to purchase texts for the reading groups; the texts will remain with the participating organizations after the study has wrapped up.

“I was honoured to receive the grant,” she says. “The people who have won this in the past have great positions at other Canadian universities and they’re doing important research, so I feel like I am following in some big footsteps. It’s wonderful to have your work recognized and have other people tell you that what you’re doing is important. Thanks to I-CYS as well for giving me this opportunity to do the post-doc and to spend the time to put the project together.”

Originally from Huntsville, Ontario, Spring remembers being a youngster and wanting to read books about girls living in similar situations.

“I wanted to find myself in the pages and that desire led me down this path to understand myself better through fiction and now to see if it applies more broadly to other youth,” she says.

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