

**SASKATCHEWAN YOUNG
READERS' CHOICE AWARDS**



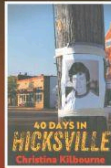
**THE WILLOW AWARDS
ANNUAL REPORT
2024-2025**



WILLOW AWARDS

2024
SASKATCHEWAN
YOUNG READERS'
CHOICE

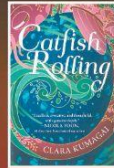
Snow Willow Finalists



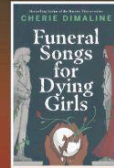
40 Days in Hicksville
by Christina Kilbourne



Autumn Bird & the Runaway
by Melanie Florence and Richard Scrimger



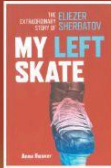
Catfish Rolling
by Citra Kumagi



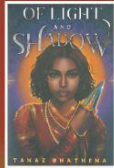
Funeral Songs for Dying Girls
by Cherie Dimaline



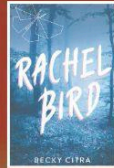
A Green Velvet Secret
by Vicki Grant



My Left Skate: The Extraordinary Story of Eliezer Sherbatov
by Anna Rosner



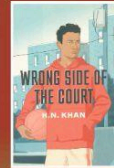
Of Light and Shadow
by Tanaz Bhathena



Rachel Bird
by Becky Citra



Something More
by Jackie Khalilieh

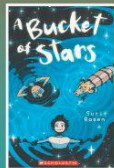


Wrong Side of the Court
by H.N. Khan

Diamond Willow Finalists



The Big Sting
by Rachelle Delaney



A Bucket of Stars
by Surti Rossen



The Cricket War
by The Piam & Sandra McTavish



Dear Elsa
by Marco Fraticelli



Game Face
by Shari Green



The Last Green Dragon
by Rud Verhagen



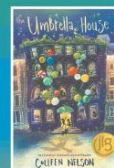
Maggie Lou, Firefox
by Arnolda Dufour Bowes



Rescue
by Marie Etchell



The Superteacher Project
by Gordon Korman

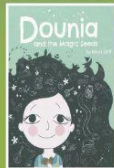


The Umbrella House
by Colleen Nelson

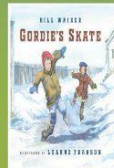
Shining Willow Finalists



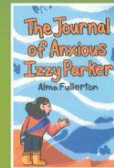
Auntie's Rez Surprise
by Heather O'Watch, illustrated by Ellie Arscott



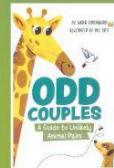
Dounia and the Magic Seeds
by Marya Zarif



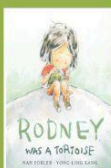
Gordie's Skate
by Bill Waizer, illustrated by Leanne Franson



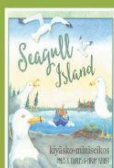
The Journal of Anxious Izzy Parker
by Alma Fullerton, illustrated by Beena Mistry



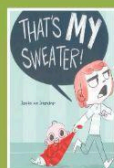
Odd Couples: A Guide to Unlikely Animal Pairs
by Maria Birmingham, illustrated by Raz Latif



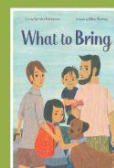
Rodney Was a Tortoise
by Nan Forler, illustrated by Yong Ling Kang



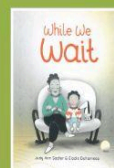
Seagull Island: kiyāsko-miniscikos
by Myles H. Charles and Miriam Korner, illustrated by Miriam Korner



That's My Sweater!
by Jessika von Innerebner



What to Bring
by Lorna Schultz Nicholson, illustrated by Ellen Rooney



While We Wait
by Judy Ann Sadler, illustrated by Elodie Dumaineau

SILVER PATRONS



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Board Members 2023-2024

President and Diamond Committee Chair:

Erin Walton, Regina

Past President:

Vacant

Vice-President – Publisher Liaison:

Annah Gullacher, Humboldt

Vice-President & Co-Director: Communications & Social Media:

Rhonda Wills, Regina

Co-Director: Communications & Social Media:

Renee Trenaman, Saskatoon

Treasurer & Snow Committee Chair:

Darrelle Downs, Saskatoon

Secretary:

Nicole Downs, Saskatoon

Director: Sponsorships & Grants:

Joanne Patron, Regina

Director: Shining Committee Chair & Co-Director: Publication & Distribution of Promotional Materials:

Wenona Gedir Lundsten, Saskatoon

Co-Director: Publication & Distribution of Promotional Materials:

Charmaine Stouse, Regina

Director: SLA Rep:

Riane LaPaire, Saskatoon

Director:

Roseanne Dery, La Ronge

Mission Statement

The mission of SYRCA - Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice - The Willow Awards, Inc. is to promote reading and celebrate Canadian literature. Each year, Saskatchewan children and youth vote for Willow Award recipients from finalists nominated in three award categories.

Objectives

To achieve its Mission, the Corporation will:

- develop an annual list of Canadian and Saskatchewan books nominated to receive a Willow Award;
- maintain a website to inform the public of the list of nominated books, and to conduct the voting electronically;
- present Willow Award(s) to the author(s) of the winning book(s);
- promote reading of Saskatchewan and/or Canadian books by conducting the award, and by developing incentives for young readers to participate;
- develop and ensure implementation of SYRCA - Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice - The Willow Awards, Inc. policies;
- encourage community involvement in all levels of SYRCA - Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice- The Willow Awards, Inc. activity;
- Cooperate with other organizations and groups to maximize use of limited resources;
- ensure that SYRCA - Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice - The Willow Awards, Inc. is managed in a financially responsible, prudent, and ethical manner.

SYRCA - The Willow Awards Strategic Plan

Effective strategic planning requires us to focus on a few key priorities, while at the same time continuing to attend to all the important areas that relate to our mandate as outlined in our mission statement. A priority is often carried out over more than one year.

<p>Organizational Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Task & Responsibilities ● Board Meetings <p>Fiscal Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Budget ● Fund Development <p>Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Website ● Posters, Bookmarks ● Internal Communications ● External Communication ● Conferences 	<p>Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Membership ● Board Memberships, Human Resources, Volunteers <p>Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Book Selection ● Gala- winning authors' attendance, reading at host schools ● Launch ● Educational Activities
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President's Report

The Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards (SYRCA), The Willow Awards Inc., met four times during the 2024-2025 year.

We bid farewell to board members Pam Foy and Leanne Holstein, who stepped down at the close of the 2023-2024 year. We were pleased to welcome Charmaine Stouse as director of publication and distribution of promotional materials, and Rianne LaPaire as the Saskatchewan Library Association representative. Lisa Kowalshyn joined the board as the Literacy Educators' and Resource Network representative but stepped down in December, leaving that position vacant indefinitely. The board operated this year with eleven members.

Although participation in urban centers has declined, we've seen a notable increase in engagement from rural areas—reflecting the success of our targeted outreach efforts over the past year. To support new participants, we've added a "Getting Started" page to our website, addressing frequently asked questions and guiding users through our program and platform. Our promotional activities included presentations to education students at both the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. We also connected with educators in the Prairie Spirit School Division through a presentation at their start-of-year convention. In Regina, our Mystery Book Bag Fundraiser—held as part of a larger community event—helped forge new relationships and strengthen existing ones. The second year of the #winwiththewillows author contest was well-received and successful. Additionally, our efforts to encourage regional libraries to keep Willow finalist lists current and ensure book availability have been fruitful. These initiatives continue to expand our reach and deepen community connections.

Our fundraising efforts—particularly through sponsorships and the Mystery Book Bag Fundraiser—have exceeded our financial goals this year. The Board extends heartfelt gratitude to our longstanding sponsors and friends for their continued support, and warmly welcomes new sponsorship partners. Thank you for joining us in our mission to share the joy of reading with children and youth across Saskatchewan — your support makes a lasting difference.

As we continue to move forward, we are actively seeking new board members and supporters who share our passion for literacy and a commitment to empowering youth across our province.

Thank you, too, to our dedicated board of volunteers. It is a pleasure to work alongside you, and I deeply appreciate your commitment. Together, we celebrate Canadian authors and publishers, and the joy that comes from a truly great book.

This SYRCA Annual Report reflects the ongoing work and successes of the 2024-2025 operating year. Minutes from the 2023-2024 Annual General Meeting will be available at the September 13, 2025 Annual General Meeting, to be held via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,
Erin Walton
President

Sponsorships & Grants Report

Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards, The Willow Awards Inc. (SYRCA) is a non-profit, volunteer-run, charitable organization that relies solely on donations to cover expenses. Currently, The Willow Awards recognizes five financial supporter levels:

- Gold Patron: \$5,000 or more
- Silver Patron: \$3,000 - \$4,999
- Bronze Patron: \$1,000 - \$2,999
- Sponsors: \$500 - \$999
- Friends: \$100 - \$499.

Thanks to the kindness of our devoted donors, SYRCA, The Willow Awards, Inc. was able to meet and exceed our sponsorship goals. We received a total of **\$13,900.00** through generous sponsorships, including in-kind support. No grant applications were submitted. We again want to extend a special thank you to our longest-standing donors.

SaskEnergy has been supporting the Willow Awards as a Silver Patron since 2003. In recognition of their generosity, the Gala has been called "The Willow Awards SaskEnergy Gala " since 2004, and a representative has been asked to speak at each event.

We are grateful for the continued support of the United Library Services (ULS), who have been donating books and providing financial support to the Willow Awards since 2004. ULS has provided a full set of Willow Award books to the Gala hosting school or library each year.

All sponsors are appreciated for their commitment to the Willow Awards.

DONATIONS IN-KIND

This year, the notable in-kind (non-cash) support of The Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards - The Willow Awards Inc. includes:

Company/Organization	Contribution	Estimated Value
Canalta - Esterhazy	Up to 7 nights stay to be configured as needed to support the Gala ✓	\$1100.00
United Library Services(ULS)	Full set of books for Gala host ✓	\$ 500.00
SaskEnergy	Lanyards for Gala ✓	\$ 500.00
Stockholm Co-op	Beverages fro Gala ✓	\$ 400.00
Total In-Kind Support		\$2500.00

PATRONS, SPONSORS AND FRIENDS

We wish to acknowledge the generous support from our patrons, sponsors and friends. Supporters have enabled SYRCA - The Willow Awards to continue providing children an opportunity to read quality Canadian literature, feel empowered by voting for their favourite book, and celebrate their choices at the annual Gala. We appreciate all sponsorships as we strive to support literacy for children and youth throughout Saskatchewan.

This year, recognition (in-kind and monetary) is as follows:

SYRCA Gold Patrons (generously contributed \$5000 or more)

~

SYRCA Silver Patrons (generously contributed \$3000 - \$4999)

SaskEnergy
Sasktel Pioneers

SYRCA Bronze Patrons (generously contributed \$1000 - \$2999)

ULS
Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies
Canalta - Esterhazy

SYRCA Sponsors (generously contributed \$500 - \$999)

McNally Robinson Booksellers
Literacy Educators and Resources Network (LEARN)

SYRCA Friends (generously contributed \$100 - \$499)

Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan - Regina Chapter
Saskatchewan Library Association
Stockholm Agencies
Stockholm Foods
Stockholm Co-op
Sharon Konanz

CONCLUSION

I'm pleased to report our sponsorship goals were met and exceeded.

2024-2025 SUMMARY	
Monetary Contributions	\$11,400.00
In-Kind Donations	\$ 2500.00
ANNUAL TOTAL	\$13,900.00

On behalf of The Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards, The Willow Awards Inc. - Board of Directors, I extend our immense gratitude to all valued sponsors.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanne Patron
Director of Sponsorship & Grants

Treasurer's Report



**SYRCA - SASKATCHEWAN YOUNG READERS' CHOICE -
THE WILLOW AWARDS INC.
FINANCIAL STATEMENT
Year Ending June 30th 2025**

Balance at June 30th, 2024	\$39,438.59
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INCOME

Sponsorship	\$11,400.00
Fundraising	\$3,463.25
Stickers	\$598.00
Total Income	\$15,461.25

DISBURSEMENTS

Fundraising	\$35.00
Posters/Bkmrks	\$6,386.58
Stickers	\$95.12
Awards	\$671.32
Launch	\$15.60
Gala	\$3,373.58
Office	\$313.60
Authors	\$750.00
Miscellaneous	\$1,816.64
Website	\$1,476.18
Total Disbursements	\$14,933.62

Balance at June 30, 2025	\$39,966.22
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Term Deposit

Balance at January 31, 2025	\$17,866.98
Interest from March 31, 2025	\$780.79

Total balance at June 30, 2025	\$18,647.77
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TOTAL ASSETS	\$58,613.99
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Communications Report

Communicating information about the Willow Awards across the province continues to be a team effort by the Willow Board.

As the Publisher Liaison, Annah Gullacher corresponds with publishers across Canada. She contacts publishers with a call for submissions in the fall and communicates with them regarding finalist choices and winners as this information becomes available. From the publishers, she also gathers biographic information about the authors and permissions to use this, their pictures and the book covers on our website. This year, there was extra contact with both publishers and authors as we, once again, were able to finance four virtual author visits in the 2025 #winwithWILLOWS contest. We got such positive feedback from last year's author contest that we wanted to try to offer it again. You can find more information about the #winwithWILLOWS in the Author Contest report.

Communicating with past and potential sponsors has been the ongoing job of the Fundraising Director, Joanne Patron, and is outlined in the Fundraising report.

Coordinating the distribution of posters and bookmarks to schools and libraries across the province has been a collaborative effort led by several Board members. Our Director of Promotional Materials, Charmaine Stouse, took the lead, with support from Treasurer Darrelle Downes, Director Roseanne Dery, and President Erin Walton. We were also pleased to have the support of students from George Lee and Hawryluk schools, whose help with stuffing envelopes brought meaningful youth involvement to a youth-centered award program. The posters and bookmarks are an important visual communication piece and one that we hope all children in the province see at some point during the year.

The Willow Awards website continues to be the primary communication tool for everyone who needs information about the Willows. Renee Trenamen has taken over as the primary manager of the site, assisted by Rhonda Wills. On the website, visitors can find information about books, authors, illustrators and publishers. A contact form that allows participants to easily communicate with the board is managed by the President and fields many inquiries about the Willows, both specific and general. To that end, we have created a new page called [Getting Started](#) on the site that answers many of the frequently asked questions that we receive each year. We hope that this will assist anyone who is new to using the Willows in their literacy program.

To help promote each of the Willow books, PDFs of the book covers are available to print for easy displays. There are ideas for ways to celebrate the Willow Awards, and activity ideas for each book. The website also includes an online form for submitting votes and printable ballots for use by voters.

Our website is hosted by Blacksun Design Inc. and we are appreciative of their continued support. We continue to receive positive comments from individuals using the site and hope that visitors find it a useful tool. People can visit our website at willowawards.ca.

We were very pleased to be able to hold an in-person Gala this year at Macdonald Elementary School in Stockholm with the guidance of this year's Gala Liaison, Wenona Gedir Lundsten, assisted

by Renee Trenamen. The tech team from the Good Spirit School Division recorded and live-streamed the Gala event on our website so that all Saskatchewan children could watch as the winners were announced in real time. We have had 147 views of the gala video from Stockholm's site and we have had 30 so far on our video channel. This includes multiple classrooms viewing it together and individuals. The Gala videos for this year and past years can be accessed through our website or YouTube channel. More information about the Gala can be found in the Gala Report.

Another tool used to communicate Willow Awards news includes emails via Mailchimp, which individuals can subscribe to during the voting process or from our website and the "Subscribe to Willow Updates" link.. We currently have 278 recipients of these email connections.

Social Media director Renee Trenaman has been very active on our Instagram, Facebook, X and Bluesky accounts as she works to increase our social media presence. Her social media report follows below.

Respectfully submitted,

Rhonda Wills & Renee Trenaman
Co-Directors Communications & Social Media

Communications Report - Social Media Component

Our social media presence this year has been similar to previous years, with numbers beginning to regulate with regular posting. This is a good sign of consistency, and we're getting increased engagement throughout the year from our many authors, educators, and bookish friends throughout the internet space! This year, along with our existing Facebook, Instagram, and X platforms, we also expanded to post on Bluesky, aiding in our engagement with some authors. This has been a great start, and we've gained some good feedback from this, so I'm excited to see where this new journey takes us. We repeated our #WinWithWillows author visit contest this year, and had a great turnout for that, as well. One of the highlights of my year was seeing how much these awards mean to our local authors, getting to speak to some who read Willow Awards books when they were children and that influenced them to become authors is so heartwarming, and gives me such a deep appreciation for what we do.

I also worked on building and expanding a location on our website for educators and literacy coordinators to connect with our authors for visits, working with authors to gather information in a place that could be easily found, based on feedback from our previous author visit draw last year. This has been a huge success!

Respectfully submitted by Renee Trenaman

Director Communications & Social Media

Sticker Report

Invoice Number	Invoice Date	Amount	Payment Received	Payment	Outstanding
2025-01	Aug 29	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-02	Sept 4	\$24.00	Yes	\$24.00	
2025-03	Sept 9	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-04	Sept 10	\$84.00	Yes	\$84.00	
2025-05	Oct 06	\$24.00	Yes	\$24.00	
2025-06	Oct 15	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-07	Oct 31	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-08	Nov 5	\$30.00	Yes	\$30.00	
2025-09	Nov 8	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-10	Nov 13	\$24.00	Yes	\$24.00	
2025-11	Nov. 18	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-12	Nov. 20	\$24.00	Yes	\$24.00	
2025-13	Nov. 20	\$36.00	Yes	\$36.00	
2025-14	Feb 05	\$72.00	Yes	\$72.00	
2025-15	Feb 06	\$126.00	Yes	\$126.00	
2025-16	Mar. 02	\$5.00	Yes	\$5.00	
2025-17	Mar. 11	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
2025-18	May 13	\$36.00	Yes	\$36.00	
2025-19	May 13	\$12.00	Yes	\$12.00	
		\$581.00		\$581.00	\$0.00
Better sales for 2024/2025. Sticker sales were \$142.00 more than 2023/2024					

Launching of the Willow Finalists

Each year, every school and library in the province is encouraged to launch the new Willow Award finalists. They introduce these great books to their reading communities in many creative ways! We want to share the wonderful work teachers, teacher-librarians, librarians and the staff of schools have done to promote this quality literature. During October and November, participants can enter a competition to win a complete or partial set of the 30 finalist books. To enter, they can submit a photo(s) and/or a description of their local launch, such as bulletin boards, guest readers, book talks or a special project.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to all who contacted us with their plans for introducing this year's Willow finalist titles to their readers! As always, we are inspired by the creativity and dedication that everyone shows in promoting literacy in our province! We wish that we had books for everyone who entered! The following ideas were among the entries to our launch contest:

- special displays and book shelves showcasing the Willow finalists
- finalist author visits
- book giveaway draws
- reading the Willow finalists “just for fun” but later in the year using them for many literacy strategies with EAL students
- book battles among several classrooms
- an “I Spy” theme where students were given a small amount of time to spot as many clues about the finalists in a “gallery walk” and then choose the titles they would most like to read
- reading clubs at various grade levels including a Winter Reading Club at recess
- Willow Wednesdays with zoom readings by guest readers
- review writing
- an art contest
- using several finalist titles for Battle of the Books programs

The winner of a complete set of Willow finalist titles this year is:

- Brunswick School, Melfort

Runners Up Winners of a set of Shining, Diamond or Snow Willow Books are:

- South Corman Park School, Casa Rio
- Archerwill School, Archerwill
- Milliken Public School, Regina
- Fort Qu'Appelle Elementary School, Fort Qu'Appelle
- Riverside Public School, Prince Albert
- École St. Pius X, Regina

Respectfully submitted by
Rhonda Wills
Vice-President - Communications & Social Media





Willow Finalist Voting Report

The main purpose of the Willow Awards is to promote reading and great Canadian Literature among Saskatchewan children and youth. We gauge our success through the voting that occurs in the spring each year. Voters embrace the role of literary critic. They are excited to know that what they think matters and they eagerly await the announcement of the winners at the spring Gala.

This year, voting closed on March 31st. This allowed time to contact winning authors and make arrangements for them to travel and participate in the in-person Gala celebration on May 30th, 2025.

Voting numbers are still not what they once were before COVID. We know that budgetary constraints at the division and school levels are a factor. We also feel the loss of key personnel ie. teacher-librarians, library technicians and others who have co-ordinated the purchase of the Willow books for the library and promoted their reading. They were instrumental in drawing attention to the Willow finalists with both teaching staff and students. Interestingly, we have noticed that there seems to have been a shift in participation with an increase of votes coming in from rural centres and a decline in voting from the major cities.

Speaking with and hearing from those who have been able to participate this year, we know the tremendous value of the Willow Awards program! We continue to seek new ways to promote The Willows with educators and public libraries.

Although we continue to be concerned about our lower voting numbers this year, it is truly exciting to see the votes coming in from all across the province. We are inspired by the participation of teachers, teacher-librarians, librarians, library technicians and parents in encouraging children to read these great books! Their positive comments let us know that The Willows make a difference in the reading lives of children!

Votes by Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
SHINING	11,213	3652	5728	6700	6856	6794	5831
DIAMOND	1061	448	440	626	539	498	485
SNOW	320	247	144	208	89	98	101
TOTAL VOTES	12,594	4347	6312	7534	7484	7390	6417

Respectfully submitted by
Rhonda Wills & Renee Trenaman
Co-Directors Communications & Social Media

Voting Draw Results

This year, voting draws were held to encourage and to thank those participants who submitted votes for the Willow Awards finalists. An early bird draw and two more draws were made for a selection of books, following the closing of the voting.

Congratulations to the following schools who were the lucky winners:

St. Michaels School, Yorkton (early bird)

Saltcoats School, Saltcoats

Christ the King School, Shaunavon

Respectfully submitted by

Rhonda Wills & Renee Trenaman

Co-Directors Communications & Social Media



#winwithWillows Author Contest



Our #winwiththeWillows contest was another success this year, inviting authors to participate in our draw once again so we could provide visits to as many readers as possible. This year we were able to have four authors again, drawing randomly from those interested. We then asked for entries into a draw for their school or library to have a visit on behalf of their readers. Our winners this year were...

- Davidson School, Davidson – with Maria Birmingham, Shining finalist for *Odd Couples*
- Redvers School, Redvers – with Suri Rosen, Diamond finalist for *A Bucket of Stars*
- George Lee Elementary School, Regina – with Anna Rosner & Eliezer Sherbatov, Snow finalist for *My Left Skate*
- All Saints Catholic School/Ecole Centennial School, Swift Current – with Myles H. Charles & Miriam Körner, Shining finalist for *Seagull Island/kiyasko-miniscikos*

Thank you to all of the authors who offered to do these virtual sessions! We hope that we can do this again next year!

Respectfully submitted by Renee Trenaman

Director Communications & Social Media

2025 Mystery Book Bag Fundraiser

The Biannual Willows Mystery Book Bag Fundraiser was held on Saturday, May 3rd, 2025. For a minimum donation of \$20 donors could pick up a mystery bag of ten recently published books in one of the Shining, Diamond or Snow categories.

The Regina fundraising group purchased a table for \$35 to be a part of the Timeless Treasure Sale, which was raising funds for Save the Children and held at Victoria Square Mall from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. It was wonderful to be a part of a bigger sale, to connect with supporters and introduce new people to The Willow Awards. The Regina group sold 68 of 103 bags they had to sell at the event and with a number of additional sales made after the event a total of 92 bags were sold in Regina. The rest of the mystery bags were returned to Saskatoon.

The Saskatoon fundraiser was held in the backyard of our Treasurers home. It was a beautiful sunny day to be held outdoors. Many bags were sold that day with only about 15 bags remaining.

Pahkisimon Nuye?áh Library System in La Ronge committed to purchasing the remaining Diamond mystery bags.

At our board meeting on June 12, a request brought forward by Annah Merasty, on behalf of the Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies, was made for a donation of books to be provided to the children of northern Saskatchewan wildfire evacuees to help keep them occupied. The board voted to donate our remaining Shining mystery book bags to aid in these difficult circumstances.

Our total amount raised from the fundraiser was \$3362.00

Respectfully Submitted by,
Erin Walton and Darrelle Downs

2025 Mystery Book Bag Fundraiser Photos



2024 Willow Awards Winners



SHINING WILLOW

That's My Sweater!

by Jessika von Innerebner

DIAMOND WILLOW

The Superteacher Project

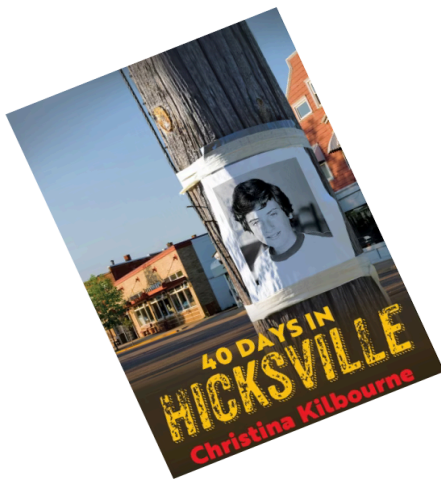
By Gordon Korman



SNOW WILLOW

40 Days in Hicksville

by Christina Kilbourne



Program: Shining Willow Selection Committee Report

The Shining Willow Award Reading Committee for 2024-2025 was made up of nine readers from a variety of backgrounds, including current, past and retired teachers and administrators, a past teacher librarian, school division instructional, reading, and strategic coaches and facilitators, and a public library programmer.

This year, we received and considered 212 titles. We began this year's reading with a brief in-person meeting so we could all meet one another, share information and go over expectations. At this meeting, readers picked up their first books for reading and we agreed to continue exchanging books on flexible dates, when individual readers were ready to do so, through Round Prairie Branch Library in Saskatoon. We documented our reading and reviews in a shared Google spreadsheet and communicated with one another via email throughout the reading period. Our committee did not meet in-person again until our finalist selection meeting at the beginning of February. So that we did not have to incur a cost for rental of a meeting space, one of our readers provided a space they had access to at no cost in a Saskatoon public school. As in the past, all of our readers appreciated this in-person setting so they could look at and reread the books being considered and for how it allowed open discussion and negotiation. Further, at this meeting, readers expressed how they would like to try to meet in-person more often in future years, if feasible.

One of the challenges we faced in our reading term this year is that we did not receive many book submissions from publishers until mid-October. This was concerning because of the limited time we have to read and consider a large number of titles. As a committee, we are hopeful that we will receive book submissions earlier in years to come.

In my third year in this role, I continue to enjoy the challenge of chairing the Shining Willow Award Reading Committee. As always, I am so grateful for the effort and support of all of the readers I am privileged to learn from and work with. This year's readers included the following: Wilfred Burton, Annah Gullacher Merasty, Hali Hamel, Joelene Linner, Twyla McNeil, Brenna Millard, Cameo Rempel, Kelly Stoddart, and myself, Wenona Gedir Lundsten.

As a committee, we are proud to present the finalists for the 2025 Shining Willow Award.
Submitted by Wenona Gedir Lundsten

Shining Willow Finalists For 2025



Program: Diamond Willow Selection Committee Report

This year the 2025 Diamond reading committee had 136 titles submitted for consideration. Twelve titles were rollovers, eight titles were passed down to the Shining committee and six titles were passed up to the Snow committee. Once the finalists were chosen, fourteen titles were rolled over for consideration for the 2026 awards.

Erin Ursu, Heather Walton, Pam Wenger, Charmaine Stouse, Susan Holmes, Rhonda Wills, Kelli Collver, Carole Carman, and Erin Walton, returned again this year to read for the committee and we welcomed Brenda Geres as a new reader. It was a pleasure to work with this thoughtful and committed group to craft our finalist list where we hope young Saskatchewan readers will find a new favourite book.

The Diamond Willow Committee is pleased to present the finalists for the 2025 Diamond Willow Award.

Respectfully submitted by,
Erin Walton
Diamond Willow Chair

Diamond Willow Finalists For 2025



Program: Snow Willow Selection Committee Report

This year the Snow Committee received 71 books. Of those received, 5 were from the Diamond committee and we rolled over 2 books for the 2024 considerations.

A huge thank you to our 6 committee readers. Once again joining us was Amanda Irvine, Katherine Fiander, Katrina Matt, Nicole Downs, Renee Trenaman and Darrelle Downs. Thank you for joining and putting in so much of your time and effort to our Snow Willows. It was such a pleasure to have all of you read for us.

The Snow Willow Committee is pleased to present the finalists for the 2025 Snow Willow Award.

Respectfully submitted by,
Darrelle Downs
Snow Willow Chair

Snow Willow Finalists for 2025



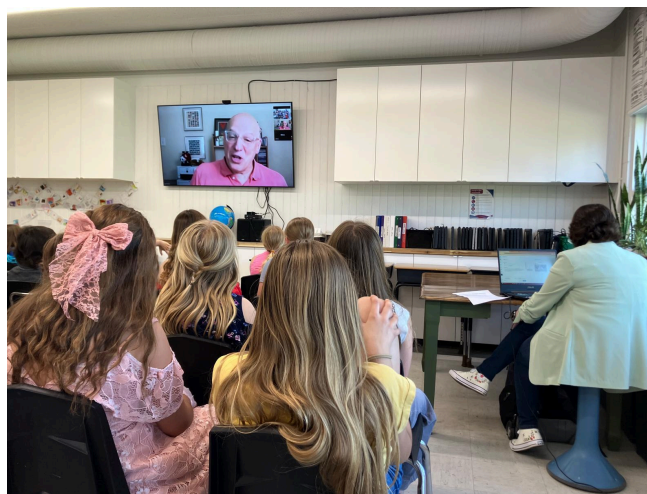
THE ANNUAL SASKENERGY WILLOW AWARDS GALA 2023-2024

The 2025 SaskEnergy Willow Awards Gala was held on Friday, May 30th, hosted by Macdonald School in Stockholm, Saskatchewan. School library technician, Courtney Radbourne-Ehman, along with the support of school principal, Melissa Johanson, organized this year's gala.

From the moment we walked into Macdonald School the morning of the gala, we felt warmly welcomed. We were greeted by an enthusiastic committee of older students that gave us a tour of the school and settled us into the staff room that was specially prepared for our arrival.



We began the day with a Grade 4-6 virtual visit with author Gordon Korman. While the students had prepared some questions for Mr. Korman ahead of time, Mr. Korman extended the visit to allow further questions from the students. It was great to see the students so engaged with interacting with Mr. Korman.



The Grade 7-9 students met with our in-person author, Christina Kilbourne, later in the morning. Ms. Kilbourne was overwhelmed almost to the point of tears by the beautifully decorated and thoughtfully prepared space her author visit took place in. The students listened attentively to her presentation and asked insightful questions afterwards, as part of a large group and also one-on-one.



Our morning at the school was followed by a pre-gala luncheon provided for special guests at the community hall. This was a great way for guests to meet and get to know one another prior to the gala program itself. Further, the space the luncheon was held in, the entrance to the hall, was amazingly decorated with artwork created by students that was inspired by this year's finalist books.



The gala program took place in the community hall as well. Guests were welcomed not only by the student artwork in the entrance but also by a creative display of all of next year's finalist

books gifted to the school by the board. Guests were also wowed by the 3D printed SaskEnergy Willow Awards letters displayed across the stage.



The program was student led, created and performed. The audience especially appreciated the entertaining videos made by students to meaningfully present each of the finalist books in the Shining, Diamond and Snow categories prior to the announcement of the category winners. Shining and Diamond winning authors, Jessika von Innerebner for *That's My Sweater!* and Gordon Korman for *The Superteacher Project*, accepted their awards in pre-recorded videos. The highlight, however, was Snow winning author, Christina Kilbourne, accepting her award for *40 Days in Hicksville* in person.



The following special guests also extended their greetings: Quinton Robertson, Director of Good Spirit School Division, Warren Kaeding, MLA Melville-Saltcoats, and Allix Schweitzer, SaskEnergy, our longstanding gala title sponsor. For the benefit of our readers across the province, the program was recorded and live-streamed on YouTube, with thanks to Good Spirit

School Division Digital Learning Consultant, Shawn Kostiuk, supported by board member, Renee Trenaman.

On behalf of our board, I would like to congratulate Macdonald School and the entire community of Stockholm for hosting a wonderful gala. Your community's support was evident and commendable in all aspects of the gala. You are so fortunate to have this support and should feel very proud of your collective efforts. Stockholm is a special place.

Submitted by Wenona Gedir Lundsten, 2025 Gala Liaison

Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA) Report

The Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA) ran and supported many successful initiatives again this year. Some highlights include:

- One Book One Province continued to bring readers together across Saskatchewan in the spring.
- The Saskatchewan Libraries Conference (May 2025) was a success, supported by volunteers, presenters, and sponsors.
- Engaging summer programs were delivered through strong partnerships with:
 - Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association
 - Saskatchewan Parks & Recreation Association
 - Saskatchewan Roughrider Foundation
- Release of the Advocacy Toolkit for Saskatchewan Libraries, including the "Vote Libraries" social media campaign during the provincial election.
- Continued collaboration with The Partnership and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB).

More detailed information about programming, committees, and operations can be found in [SLA's Annual report](#).

Respectfully submitted by,
Riane LaPaire
SLA Representative

Recognizing Board Members

The Willow Awards Board is honoured to present the **Long-Term Distinguished Service Award** to **Annah Merasty (née Gullacher)** in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the organization.

Annah has served on the board for seven years, beginning as fundraising director, where she played a vital role in securing resources and fostering strong community partnerships. Most

recently, she has served in another key role as publisher liaison, inviting Canadian publishers to submit titles for award consideration. Throughout her tenure, Annah has also been a dedicated member of the Shining Willow Reading Committee.,

In addition, Annah has introduced many Education students, at the University of Saskatchewan, to the Willow Awards and has been an passionate advocate for the program within the Horizon School Division.

Her passion for literacy and children's literature has truly shone through every aspect of her work.

We are deeply grateful for Annah's commitment, leadership, and enthusiasm over the years. Congratulations, Annah!



The Willow Awards Board is honoured to present the **SYRCA Recognition Award** to Joanne Patron in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the organization.

Joanne has served on the board for four years. During her tenure as the director of sponsorship and grants, she exceeded our fundraising goals and demonstrated exceptional tenacity in pursuing new sponsors.

Joanne also initiated and helped coordinate two successful promotional videos created in collaboration with Strategy Lab and Saskatchewan staff and students. These videos will continue to be valuable promotional and advocacy tools for years to come.

We are sincerely appreciative of Joanne's strong commitment and passion for promoting Canadian children's literature and the success of our organization. Congratulations, Joanne!

SYRCA WILLOW AWARDS PATRONS, SPONSORS, & FRIENDS

Gold Patrons (\$5000 +) -none

Silver Patrons (\$3000 - \$4999)

1) SaskEnergy



2) SaskTel Pioneers



Bronze Patrons (\$1000 - \$2999)

1) United Library Services



2) Canalta Hotel Esterhazy



3) Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies



Sponsors (\$500 - \$999)

- 1) McNally Robinson Booksellers



- 2) Saskatchewan Literacy Educators and Resources Network



Friends (\$100 - \$499)

- 1) Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan - Regina Chapter
- 2) Saskatchewan Library Association
- 3) Sharon Konanz
- 4) Stockholm Agencies
- 5) Stockholm Co-op
- 6) Stockholm Foods