



# DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

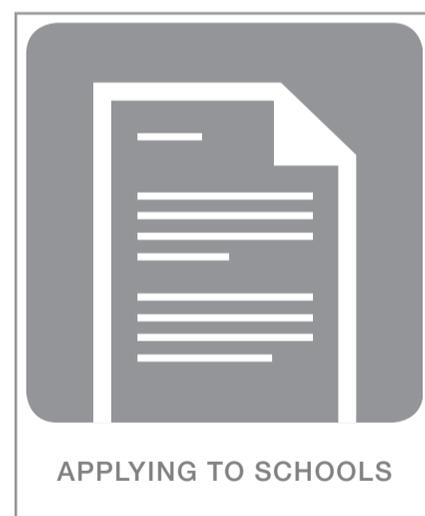
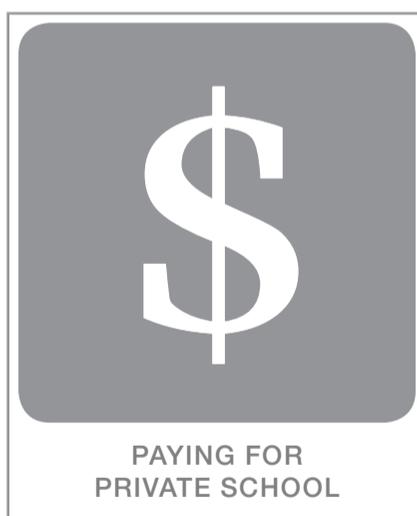
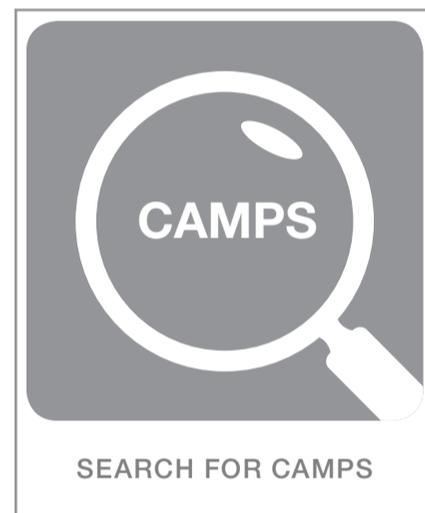
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ABC Montessori – Photograph by Tobi Asmoucha

# INTRODUCTION



Canadian Independent College - Photograph by Andrew Tolson

**Black History Month** is an important time for Canadians as we reflect on the struggles and sacrifices of Civil Rights advocates and supporters, who made the rights and freedoms we enjoy today possible.

Black History Month is also a time to celebrate what we have overcome in terms of diversity and democracy in Canada. These two topics are important, because they are critical to a tolerant and peaceful society, something we want for all of our kids.

This eBook takes a look at how private schools are integrating diversity and democracy into their curriculum, as well as the benefits of this approach, which include greater learning opportunities, reduced instances of bullying, safer schools and more tolerant, inclusive classrooms.

There is no question that the overall benefit of a diverse, democratic classroom is a safe learning environment, where students are free to be themselves, explore new ideas and thoughts and let their curiosity and imagination soar.

# CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

# 2



Meadow Green Academy – Photograph by Andrew Stawicki

## KIDS ON FREEDOM AND SLAVERY

by Melissa Mirabelli, Richland Academy

If Zachary had been alive during the time of slavery, he would secretly take the slaves to Canada by boat or by foot.

“Before I started saving slaves, I might have been one myself, so I would know how hard it is,” says the Grade 5 student.

Reflecting on an excerpt from the *Underground to Canada*, a novel by Barbara Smucker, his fellow classmates from [Richland Academy](#) also pondered this question during studies in class: How would they have helped Africans who were exploited as slaves in the U.S. from the 15th to 19th centuries?

“ . . . by telling them all the safe places that they could stop and have a break and some rest,” says Thomas.

“I would have helped them by using the system of the Underground Railroad,” says Michael.

The [Ontario Black History Society](#) declared February as Black History Month across Canada in 1995. The focus of this month involves spreading an awareness and appreciation for black Canadian history. Each year, throughout the month, [Richland Academy](#) students broaden their understanding of black Canadian history by participating in insightful class discussions and activities. Study subjects included an introduction to Black History Month, and facts about slaves and famous black Canadians.



Students perform for Black History Month at Richland Academy

Over the morning announcements and at weekly morning gatherings, Grade 2 students shared facts about famous black Canadians and the contributions they made to Canada’s history.

Grade 2 student Aliyah shared the story of famous inventor Elijah McCoy. “His inventions were so reliable that other people tried to copy [them] and sell them as imitations, but they were not as good as the original design,” she says. “It was because of this copying that people started to ask if they were buying ‘the real McCoy.’”

Norbert educated fellow students about Harry Jerome. “[He] set world records and won many medals for running in the Canadian Olympics,” Norbert says. “He won gold in the Commonwealth and Pan Am Games. He was awarded the Order of Canada in 1971. Every year, a series of Harry Jerome Awards are given to black Canadians involved in business, athletics or politics.”

What's more, Grade 2 and 3 students visited the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts to see a musical and dance performance of Freedom Train, the story of Harriet Tubman and the "Underground Railroad," the network of activists who helped American slaves from the south escape to freedom in the northern U.S., Canada and Mexico. Tubman, who was only three years old when she started working as a slave, helped 300 slaves escape, including her family. Following this inspiring show, the students engaged in class discussions about human rights, the concept of slavery, the idea of the Underground Railroad with possible parallels to modern day society, and the achievements of important black people in history.

## students engaged in class discussions about human rights, the concept of slavery...

After exploring their interest in the history of black music, the Grade 2 class presented their findings at Richland's annual Black History Month assembly. The students opened the assembly with a group performance of *We Shall Overcome*, chosen to express the struggles that black people faced and overcame. They then followed the journey of music through the ages, including spirituals, gospel, blues, jazz and rock 'n' roll.

A video montage of the evolution of African-American music, compiled by YouTube member, lydiiajay, revealed some of the most amazing written **music** from the 1800's till present day.

Special guest, Ka'ren Feder, from the [Nelson Mandela's Children Fund](#), spoke about the power of music in raising awareness about the injustices that occurred in South Africa: "Musicians made their voices heard through music . . . (it) was a way to protest and to inform." In this way, black musicians were able to let the world know what was happening in South Africa and show them that things needed to change.

Following the assembly, each grade discussed the importance of learning about black history and the profound power of music.

Grade 2 **students** shared what they learned during Black History Month:

“The slaves sang their songs to express their feelings,” says Andrew.

“Mostly everything was separated, like the washrooms for white and black people,” says Gianluca.

“There are many famous black Canadian singers,” says Gabrielle.

“It took many days to travel the Underground Railroad,” says Isa.

Grade 3 students reflected on why it is important for schools to learn about black history:

“So we know what they experienced and...we should be grateful for what we now have,” says Alexander.

“It will help us to learn to treat each other fairly,” says Marco.

“It doesn’t really matter about your skin colour,” says Elizabeth. “It matters what kind of person you are.”

Commemorating the achievements of important people and events in **black history** gives students the opportunity to experience an important part of their Canadian heritage. Engaging them in deep and thoughtful dialogue heightens their appreciation for black Canadian history and fosters respectful, global-minded citizens.

“It doesn’t really matter about your skin colour...it matters what kind of person you are.”



Canadian Independent College - Photograph by Andrew Tolson



College Prep International - Photograph by Christinne Muschi

## TEACHING THE HISTORY BEHIND BLACK HISTORY MONTH

by Agnes Stawicki

Written with excerpts from *The News-Journal Corporation* article by Linda Trimble. <http://www.news-journalonline.com>

Who comes to mind when you think of black history? Slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., or baseball great Jackie Robinson? It's likely that 80 per cent of students would only default to these two names.

This ignorance is what motivated Mary Fears, a school librarian, to team up with director Tyrone Young to produce [Filling the Gap](#), a movie that literally fills the gaps of African-American history.

“Almost everything in this movie is left out of school textbooks,” said Fears, a storyteller and Civil War re-enactor who focuses primarily on the contributions of black Americans.

Fears said the film is designed mostly for use in schools and colleges to “give students a different perception of black people during the antebellum period who did more than pick cotton.”

Such figures featured in the movie include Benjamin Banneker, a self-

taught astronomer, mathematician and clockmaker who was part of the team hired in 1791 to design the layout of Washington, D.C., and Benjamin Bradley, who designed a steam engine for a warship. Unable to get a patent for his invention because he was a slave, Bradley sold the design for \$1,000 and purchased his freedom.

Incorporated into the curriculum by a number of school districts, the film is changing the way schools teach black history – incorporating it in all subjects throughout the year, not just in February’s **Black History Month**.

“I never heard of all the people who were there,” said Logan Kuszik, a 10-year-old Florida school student. The film highlights African Americans who were inventors, craftsmen, authors and supporters of the Union army. “I think it really does fill a gap. If everybody were to watch it, they would learn about black Americans.”

But is it worthwhile for Canadian schools to incorporate it into their curriculum? David Calder, a father of two from Ontario, thinks so. “Get it out to the schools! A piece of history that must be told,” Calder says.

Schools or families can purchase the film for personal or curriculum use online at <http://www.essenceofhistory.com/>. With your purchase, Young, the director, may also make an appearance at a select number of Canadian schools.

# DIVERSITY AT PRIVATE SCHOOLS

# 3



ABC Montessori – Photograph by Tobi Asmoucha

Diversity - it's a theme you hear time and again from students, parents and staff. First and foremost, in a multicultural Canada, the independent schools have more than kept up with our changing population profile.

From Kindergarten to Grade 12, the [scholarship](#) and prize lists, the sports teams, the choirs, the concerts, the young volunteers engaged in community projects, are just as likely to feature the children of first-generation immigrants as they are the names of Canada's founding groups.

Adel, 16, was off to Kenya this summer on the [St. Andrew's College](#) outreach program building a school. He returns to school in September as head prefect, as his brother was before him. "Everything I am now, I learned at this school," says Adel, whose parents are from Uganda by way of Saudi Arabia (where Adel was born). "My parents love the school. They come to all the events. I

have made some very, very strong friendships that I am sure will last—even overseas friendships.”

That’s another aspect of diversity: Canada’s independent schools are a magnet for parents all over the world. Amazingly, [Albert College](#), founded in 1857 in Belleville, Ontario, has students from 24 countries among its 110 boarders. Larger boarding schools throw an even wider net.

Mostly, says Heather Kidd, in charge of admissions at Albert College, overseas students hear about the school through word of mouth. For Kidd and for assistant head Kristopher Churchill, this means regular trips to Asia, Europe and the Caribbean to interview students and parents. This past summer, Kidd was off to Switzerland—a new destination on the [Albert College](#) list and an interesting reversal of the usual trend for Canadian kids to attend schools in Switzerland—while this fall, Churchill is in Russia.

Albert College could have filled the 10 positions in its newly announced Foundation Language Year program instantly last year, but that would have meant accepting five Korean students. It decided to limit the number—for the sake of diversity.

Diversity expresses itself in many other forms—in the range of philosophies that drive schools, from Catholic-based [De La Salle College](#) to the military model of the [Robert Land Academy](#), from the Advanced Placement options of [The Abelard School](#), to the outdoor-themed [Canadian Ecology Centre](#).

And more than anything, diversity expresses itself in the programs offered—students’ gardens at the [Toronto Waldorf School](#), hands-on experience of ancient objects at the museum-based [Dragon Academy](#) or Grade 8 students creating a Lego robot at [Elmwood School](#).

The message everywhere, day in day out, at these schools is that the world is a wide and varied place only waiting to be explored.

**The message everywhere, day in day out...is that the world is a wide and varied place only waiting to be explored.**

# THE GLOBAL VILLAGE



Neuchâtel Junior College

Digging trenches in northern Thailand and driving nails in the Dominican Republic provide developing nations with clean drinking water and orphanages - and can change the way young people view the world.

Thanks to [Round Square](#), an organization that promotes education beyond the classroom, students are developing an understanding of other cultures through service projects, annual conferences, exchanges and outdoor expeditions.

Derived from the philosophies of German educator Dr. Kurt Hahn, Round Square began in 1967 and embraces six concepts: internationalism, democracy, environment, adventure, leadership and service (IDEALS).

The program has more than 49 member schools, nine of them Canadian. Each year more than 700 students meet in a designated country to discuss new projects and recall weeks spent living or working in impoverished conditions in faraway places.

Round Square executive director Terry Guest says the students' stories make it clear who benefits most.

“This is not luxury,” Guest says. “They are going to live in a village and they are going to work like dogs. It’s going to be dirty and tough work. They are going to go thinking they are doing something for somebody else, but I guarantee they come back thinking, “Hey, those people really did something for me.”

Jean Bigelow, director of student life at [Glenlyon Norfolk School](#) in British Columbia, can vouch for that. Since the school became a Round Square member in 1998, she says, participating students return with a better understanding of the world.

[Glenlyon Norfolk](#) has taken part in several ventures, including a water project in Thailand and building orphanages in the Dominican Republic. Students have also gone on three-month exchanges to India and South Africa.

Becoming a Round Square member can take up to two years. Schools must prove they fit in with the six IDEALS, and are committed to working in their own backyards, such as in local soup kitchens.

Judy Warrington, formerly a coordinator of international and Round Square programs at [Bayview Glen](#) in Toronto, says helping others is an essential component of what Dr. Kurt Hahn tried to do. “He wanted students to get out of the classroom and get out into the community.”



# CANADA'S CULTURAL MOSAIC

# 5



Branksome Hall – Photograph by Tobi Asmoucha

*by Sonja Schweiger*

Greek town on the Danforth, Chinatown on Spadina, Little Italy on College Street West, and a multitude of cultural alcoves throughout Toronto in the form of restaurants, clothing stores and ethnic circles. Toronto isn't just a busy concrete jungle but a community of communities, rich with flavours and colours from across the globe.

Luckily, the GTA is just the beginning. Canada's largest city is a great representation of what is happening all over the country! Canadians are embracing their roots and bringing back a little bit of culture to spice up their lives. Canada, a country renowned for peace and tolerance, is not only open on an international level. It starts at home – in our cities, on our weekends and with our families.

# CANADA'S BEAUTIFUL ETHNIC ORIGINS

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In the 2001 census, the government listed more than 200 ethnic origins. The beauty of recognizing these origins makes Canada a cultural mosaic. Unlike our neighbours, we do not seek to carve our identity out of a few national symbols (snow, moose and maple trees are not the only things that make us Canadian), but the diversity of the cultures that call Canada home. For many, this is a source of national pride. And why not? Cultural mosaics foster acceptance and respect within communities, teaching future generations about diversity and tolerance.

Canadians are free to take pride in their heritage, making Canada an attractive and welcoming place for tourists and immigrants. This type of atmosphere also encourages creative and cultural expression – allowing Canadians to enjoy a huge variety in art, **theatre**, music, foods, celebrations and festivals. The average city-dweller in this country has access to foods, clothing and entertainment from most every culture of the world! The opportunity to mix and match styles and dishes from different kitchens and fashions is one of a kind.

# TAPPING INTO OUR NATIONAL TREASURE

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More and more Canadians every day are taking an interest in culture – be it their own or something entirely foreign. But for some the question remains “how do I tap into this national treasure?” The answer begins with you. Exploring or coming back to your roots and the traditions that come with them is a great way to start. Ask relatives or seek out people in your ethnic community to help immerse you in your own culture. Keeping the family traditions and festivals alive may not just be a personal goal, but a way to get the family together.



Bishop's College School - Photograph by Christinne Muschi

## THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE TONGUES

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Embracing your native language by either learning it or teaching it to your children is also important. Not only does this preserve languages and help strengthen ties between family members abroad, it can also be beneficial in both job and travel opportunities. If you've already welcomed your own culture into your life, or are more interested in discovering different ethnicities, don't be afraid to reach out to friends and neighbours, or the cultural centres in your neighbourhood. Most will welcome the interest and invite you to their events to help you learn more. The Hansa Haus in Toronto, the Russian Centre of Vancouver, the Hindu Society of Alberta, and the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia are just four of many neighbourhood heritage centres that host public events such as dances and holiday celebrations open to anyone who is interested.

# TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FESTIVALS AND CULTURAL EVENTS

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Be sure to take advantage of the many [festivals and cultural events](#) available to you. If you live in a large city, something is always going on! Whether you're planning a family excursion or a grabbing a bite to eat with friends, global diversity is ever present. Carassauga in Mississauga; a festival of all cultures, Caribana and the Canadian Aboriginal Festival in Toronto; both popular events filled with music and dancing, the famous Folk Music Festival in Alberta, the celebration of multiculturalism that is the Alcan Dragon Boat Festival in Vancouver and the Carnival de Quebec in Quebec City are some of the most visited events across Canada, and all of them are built around [multiculturalism](#). All year round, if you're looking for an entertaining outing, traditional fun is just around the corner. Continuing to visit and support these festivals and traditions is vital to keeping them, and our identity, alive and thriving for our children to enjoy.

Being a cultural Mosaic is a defining factor in Canada. If we forget to enjoy this unique national characteristic and stop seeing the beauty in it, then we will have lost one of our greatest natural resources. Keeping traditions and language alive within the family or seeking out culture wherever you can are some of the best ways to do your part in creating the [mosaic of acceptance](#) and community in Canada.

# BULLYING AND DIVERSITY

# 6



*by Tucker Barton*

On June 5, 2012 the Ontario government passed into law [\*\*Bill 13, the “Accepting Schools Act,”\*\*](#) despite the political, media and community furor about whether it went too far, or not far enough.

Tucker Barton of [\*\*Trinity College School\*\*](#) contemplates whether Bill 13 will make a difference in fostering inclusivity and diversity in schools and looks at what it will take to effectively prevent and end bullying in schools.

# WHAT EVERYONE WANTS: SAFE SCHOOLS

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Find me a parent out there who doesn't want their child's school to be a safe place where learning can take place free of oppression. School boards, administrators, teachers and parents have been working, occasionally to the point of exhaustion, to do everything in their power to ensure that the school experience is a positive one for each and every student.

## THE REAL ISSUE WITH BILL 13

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In 2012 the Ontario Catholic school board decided that students would not be allowed to form [Gay-Straight Alliances](#) (GSAs). The rhetoric at the time spoke to the worry that they would be “activist” organizations, or that they didn’t “allow Nazi groups either.” In doing research recently for an article on providing [services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer \(LGBTQ\) youth](#) in independent schools, one of the things I discovered was that it’s actually a directive of the Ministry of Education in Ontario that you have to provide representations of, and services for all youth, including LGBTQ youth in Ontario schools. So then, I found myself asking, how is it then that Catholic schools say that they won’t? I asked a lot of people in my life including clergy and Catholics, and the only answer I was given was that no one had yet challenged it in the courts.

## A DIFFICULT DECISION

So it happens that my child, who is of a two-mom family, is at a Catholic school, a decision that has been very difficult for my family. We love the school, the staff and the community, but we were told when we asked about enrolment that there would be no positive representation of his family make-up in the classroom environment—the principal’s hands were tied. Therefore we decided that he would stay there for his primary years, but as he grew more aware, we would have to move him.

About a month ago though, he came home with a notice saying that Friday would be “Pink Shirt” day. I laughed out loud. I told people and they laughed too. Of course the school was taking a stand against **bullying**. Good on them! But clearly, they had missed the lesson on where the pink shirt concept came from. A child at a school in Nova Scotia was bullied for wearing a pink shirt because of societal assumptions about boys who wear pink shirts. Surely if there had been a GSA doing active work at that school, the odds that “pink shirt-related bullying” would have been going on would have been significantly less.

That’s why we need this bill. Yes, the policies of the Ministry of Education are clear but have been ignored for far too long. Looks to me like this is the government taking action on something before an individual has to go to the expense of putting forth this court challenge—in my mind, that’s good governance.

In all of this rhetoric, what’s being lost is that GSAs are not primarily about **combating bullying** but ideally getting the students involved, on a school-by-school basis to design their independent mandate. Often what those students require is simply a safe space where they can discuss issues that are affecting their lives. A first step often for these students is naming the club for what it is, a step toward knowing that all of the members of their school community are okay saying “Gay” out loud, in a positive way. That’s how we get rid of bullying.

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## RELATED RESOURCES:

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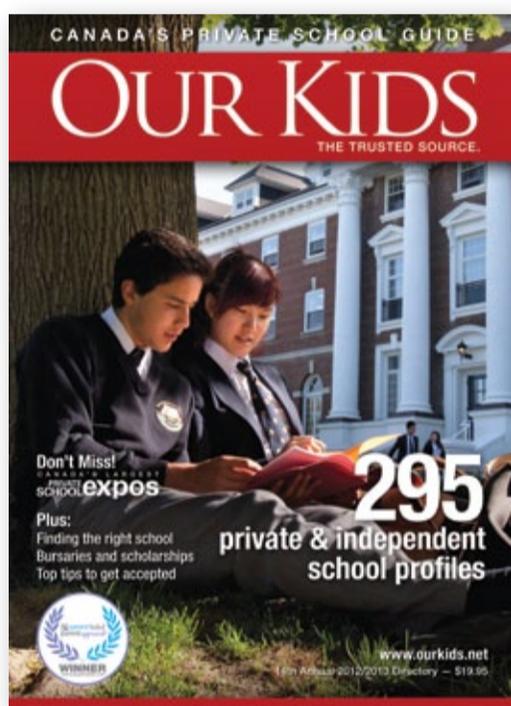
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