



The Centre for Family Literacy

# Centre Page

## Aboriginal Rhymes that Bind

*Ho ho watanay  
Ho ho watanay...  
Ki yo ke na*

*Sleep, sleep little one  
Sleep, sleep little one...  
Now go to sleep*

Many people remember lullabies sung to them by grandparents and parents that were passed down through the generations. These familiar words and tunes are one of the first connections that children have to their family histories and cultures.



Literacy and language learning are situated in a broader cultural context. The Centre for Family Literacy began an Aboriginal Rhymes that Bind program in 2009 through the understanding that supporting early literacy is connected to honouring the home languages and cultures of participants. Creating a program that focused on Aboriginal learning enabled both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants to sing, talk, rhyme and play in ways that incorporated indigenous knowledge.

Aboriginal Rhymes that Bind programs include rhymes and songs in the home languages of participants as well as traditional stories. Sometimes programs will also incorporate musical instruments and dancing. They are delivered in partnership with an Aboriginal organization that provides a facilitator for the program and that collaborates with the Centre to ensure that the program is culturally appropriate for participants. Partners have included Aboriginal

*The Centre for Family Literacy is dedicated to helping families grow and prosper.*

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## What Counts as Literacy?

### Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge in Aboriginal Family Literacy Programs

In any system of learning, cultures and societies tend to privilege certain types of literacy. For example, in the Western tradition of literacy, books are often accorded status and authority over storytelling or oral histories.

Dr. Jan Hare, Associate Professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia, delivered a keynote address at the Centre for Family Literacy's Food for Thought Conference in Edmonton in May. Professor Hare spoke about the ways in which family literacy models can support the learning of Aboriginal families and how family literacy programs can recognize and affirm an indigenous world view.

According to Statistics Canada census data, the Aboriginal population in Canada is young (with a median age of 24 years old versus an overall Canadian median age of 34 years), and it is also one of the fastest growing segments of the population. This means that there are an increasing number Aboriginal parents and children who are participating in family literacy programs.

Professor Hare spoke about family literacy as a model that has the potential to fit with some aspects of an Aboriginal world view, namely that family literacy engages parents, is focused on lifelong learning and incorporates the

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## Aboriginal Rhymes That Bind

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Learning Services, Edmonton Catholic Schools and Bent Arrow Aboriginal Parent Link.

One participant commented that the program gave her a chance to have fun and learn with her two-year-old son. She said that he “especially likes the tickle songs” and that he will often ask to sing the songs at home with her. She also said that the program gives her a chance to learn about her own culture and to practice some of the limited vocabulary that she has in Cree, the language of her grandparents.

Research has shown that the social and emotional factors within families affect the ways that learning happens in the home. Aboriginal Rhymes that Bind, like other family literacy programs, supports and celebrates the literacy activities that parents are already engaging in and gives families new ideas for enjoying stories, songs, rhymes and books together. “As we repeat the songs and rhymes, in whatever language, it is natural for the families to join in. Soon everyone is feeling more comfortable,” says Valinda Oswald, Rhymes that Bind Coordinator at the Centre,

“it is wonderful to experience; you can feel that the families appreciate knowing they can support their children and are making connections in the community.”

## What Counts as Literacy

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understanding that supporting children equals supporting families.

Professor Hare also connected the reclamation of indigenous knowledge with family literacy programs that build on the strengths and literacy behaviours that are already present in families. For example,



*Dr. Jan Hare, Associate Professor, Dept. of Language and Literacy Education, University of BC*

children may come to family literacy programs with more exposure to oral stories than to books; however, children are still developing speaking and comprehension skills, and rich language and vocabulary through listening to oral stories.

The mainstream culture gives us an expectation of stories and what is important to know but this does not mean that other ways of knowing and understanding are less valuable. Family literacy programs can empower Aboriginal families by recognizing and validating the literacy strengths that they already possess.

“I approach my work with the understanding that we, Aboriginal people, often think differently than non-Aboriginal people.”

said Professor Hare, “When family literacy practitioners build a program, they must consider how ‘what counts as literacy’ must be culturally relevant and respectful of all participants.”

## Pediatric Health Care Providers Promote School Readiness

The nonprofit organization Reach Out and Read® has been promoting early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms across the United States since 1989. The program builds on the unique relationship between parents and medical providers to develop critical early literacy skills, beginning at the 6-month checkup.

Doctors, nurses and other medical professionals incorporate the Reach Out and Read model into regular checkups. They advise parents about the importance of reading aloud to their young children everyday.

They provide parents with information on how to read to children at each developmental stage. Every child is given an age and culturally appropriate book to take home and keep. In addition, the waiting room is a literacy rich environment with displays, information and books. In some waiting rooms volunteer readers entertain the children, demonstrating to parents techniques for reading aloud.

Every child in the program enters kindergarten with a home library of at least 10 books, as well as parents who understand the great importance of reading aloud to their children's future success in school.

Reach Out and Read began as one program at the Boston City Hospital distributing 1,000 books and has grown to over 4,600 programs distributing 6.4 million books to 3.9 million children.

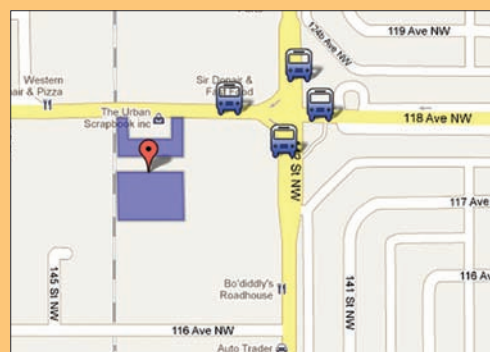
Impressive as these numbers are, research on the effect of the program is just as impressive. Peer-reviewed research findings indicate that parents served by the program are four times more likely to read aloud to their children. Other key findings show that children in the program show significant developmental gains and score higher in vocabulary tests and school readiness assessments.

## We're Moving!

As of July 1, 2011, our new address will be:

11642 142 Street NW  
Edmonton AB T5M 1V4

Located in Nexus Business Park, our main entrance is on the north side. We have free parking and bus routes 3, 121, 122, and 126 will take you there. For a link to the Google map, go to our website at [www.famlit.ca](http://www.famlit.ca)



Online donations to the Centre can be made through [CanadaHelps.org](http://CanadaHelps.org)



The Centre for Family Literacy gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the following:



## Links Fore Literacy Golf Tournament



**J**oin us for our First Annual Links Fore Literacy Golf Tournament in support of the Centre's family literacy programs. You can look forward to a great round of Best Ball golf, longest drive, longest putt and closest to the pin competitions.

**When:** Wednesday, August 31

**Where:** Colonial Golf Club (Golf Digest 4 star rating)  
10 Country Club Drive  
Beaumont, Alberta

6:30 a.m. – registration and breakfast

8:00 a.m. – shotgun start

1:00 p.m. – gourmet lunch

**Registration:** \$250/person or \$1,000/team of 4 players

Early Bird Registration: \$225/person or \$900/team of 4 players

Early Bird Deadline: Thursday, June 30

Register online at <http://linksforeliteracygolf.eventbrite.com>

Your registration fee includes 18 holes of golf, power cart, tee gift, practice facility, driving range access, door prizes, breakfast, lunch and awards.

Hope to see you on the links!

## AGM Guest Speaker Gives the Low Down on Literacy

**T**he Centre's Tenth Anniversary celebrations continued at the Annual General Meeting June 2 with Scott Murray as the special guest speaker.

Mr. Murray has worked for 32 years at Statistics Canada mainly in the areas of educational assessment, literacy and social surveys. He is known internationally as an expert in youth and adult literacy and was the driving force behind the development of the International Adult Literacy and Life-skills Survey.

Mr. Murray's skill as a speaker made his presentation "The Low Down on Literacy" informative, interesting and very accessible for all who attended the meeting.

The AGM also saw the retirement of two Board Members Esmond Sanders, and Judy Tetreau, and the election of three new members: Jonathan Chia, Alexandra Hildebrandt, and Andrea Jarman.

*If you would prefer to receive our newsletter via email rather than by mail, please send us an email at [info@famlit.ca](mailto:info@famlit.ca) and reference Centre Page in the subject line.*

### Literacy Develops in Families First

The Centre for Family Literacy is dedicated to helping Alberta grow and prosper. Our innovative programs, training and research help Alberta families achieve what they imagine—improved education, jobs and health.

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