



What's So Shakespeare about Reconciliation?

By Alyson Cook

Why it is important for art organizations like Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan (SOTS) to be involved with communities like Reconciliation Saskatoon.

This is an acknowledgement that we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. I pay my respects to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this land and their rich and beautiful culture. I hope to learn from the Original Peoples of this land, and together I hope to reaffirm and continue to build our relationships with one another.

Why SOTS Became Involved

- Since 2015, SOTS has always had at least one Indigenous artist each season.
- But, the organization wanted to build on Indigenous involvement and do something that was artistically Indigenous driven.
- As an organization whose objectives are to educate others, SOTS felt they had an obligation to use their platform to help collaborate with Indigenous artists.
- Their goal was to make their organization and their site inclusive and accessible for Indigenous Communities.
- They became involved with Indigenous artists, and attended Reconciliation Saskatoon meetings to learn ways to accomplish this goal.

What SOTS is Doing Now

- In 2017, SOTS partnered with Joseph Naytowhow, who then quickly became their main consultant
- In 2019, SOTS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Saskatoon Tribal Council and Gabriel Dumont Institute that would ensure their commitment to the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in all areas of SOTS.
- Three of the main ways SOTS made their site more welcoming to Indigenous Peoples was in their organization of a pimohtewak, their increased representation of Indigenous artists in their upcoming productions of The Tempest and Macbeth, and their consultations with Naytowhow during the building process of their new site to ensure a welcoming location.

Check out more information on these three initiatives below!

What SOTS Will Do

- SOTS understands that reconciliation is an ongoing process that requires their participation for many years to come. They hope to continue to create and build relationships, as well as learn about the ways in which they can grow their own involvement.
- SOTS has worked with their presenting partner, Nutrien, in current and future plans, and they have in turn encouraged SOTS to involve even more partners moving forward.
- Immediate plans for the future include:
 1. An Indigenous artistic installation in the central courtyard.
 2. Creating and installing interpretative panels onsite that celebrate Indigenous history, which will be financially supported by Nutrien
 3. Exploring ways that the site of SOTS could be used for Indigenous gatherings, including spots along the riverbank area of SOTS's site to host cultural ceremonies.



Organizing Their Pimohtewak

In January 2019, with support from a Winter City YXE grant, SOTS was able to help create an artistic project called **pimohtewak** with Naytowhow as well as in collaboration with a number of different Indigenous artists.. Pimohtewak was a winter play that involved the stories of Naytowhow being played to individual audience members on an iPhone app as they explored four locations on the SOTS site in the four directions of the Neyhiyaw (Cree) people. The entire project was created and led by the artists, and the only role SOTS played was as facilitator and space-provider. The pimohtewak was an opportunity for SOTS to open their site for the Indigenous community to use for their own endeavours.



Representation in The Tempest and Macbeth

For the summer season of 2020, SOTS is presenting both The Tempest and Macbeth. For these two plays, they have four Indigenous artists in their cast and are also creating music. As well, The Tempest is SOTS's first play to be directed by a First Nations director, Yvette Nolan. Indigenous stage manager Aaron Shingoose is also returning for a fifth season. By including Indigenous artists in the actual productions, SOTS hopes that it will not only be of interest to Saskatoon's large Indigenous community, but also that it will modernize the Shakespearean plays for audience members and allow discussions for contemporary issues faced by Indigenous peoples, as well as begin dialogue in the community on how to answer the calls to action that are outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.



Consultations to Ensure a Welcoming Site

SOTS is currently building a new site that includes new grounds, a new amphitheatre, and new opportunities. One of the major additions made to include the Indigenous community was the building of a "Quiet Contemplation Area", a place where anyone can visit to smudge and pray. Naytowhow has taken the lead on designing this project. As well, Naytowhow has been consulted for the overall construction of the site. Some of the suggestions he made were to have a series of Feasts open to the public, and a ceremony paying respect to the land, animals, and all that came before; hanging flags in the four sacred directions (appropriate colours in each direction) during construction build, and he is organizing a sweat for members of SOTS to attend

Conclusion

William Shakespeare is the most famous British playwright, who's works were being created and performed at the height of colonialism. It may be difficult at first to then see what's so Shakespeare about Reconciliation. But as part of the community of Saskatoon, SOTS understands that the works of Shakespeare must evolve to include all members of that community, including the large population of Indigenous peoples. SOTS has seen through the work they have already done a strengthened relationship between themselves and the Indigenous community, and hope that they will continue to have Indigenous artists involved in the creative process of all their future projects, and hopefully even more Indigenous faces on stage and in the audience.

Sources:

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- Reconciliation Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan. <http://www.shakespeare.sk.ca/pages/reconciliation.html>. Accessed 8 Mar. 2020.
- Shakespeare Illustration by Luci Gutiérrez