

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

June 8, 2023

Illuminated Puppets Bring Local History to Life

Abbotsford, BC – Students, families, and the general public will be treated to a uniquely local event for National Indigenous Peoples Day this year. A spectacular performance featuring three larger-than-life illuminated puppets tells the story of Semá:th Xó:t̓sa (Sumas Lake) before it was first drained 100 years ago. Stretching for 85 hectares between present-day Abbotsford and Chilliwack, the lake was a vital resource for the Stó:lō people.

The performance is based on the book *Semá:th Xó:t̓sa: Sts'ólmeqwelh Sxó:t̓sa/ Sumas Lake: Great-Gramma's Lake*, published by The Reach Gallery Museum in 2020. The book, which was co-authored by museum staff and Stó:lō collaborators, follows a young boy and his grandmother as she shares memories of the abundant wildlife that once inhabited the lake. The three impressive puppets in the performance represent species that would have once been found in and around Semá:th Xó:t̓sa.

This educational, family-friendly performance is the result of a collaboration between The Reach Gallery Museum, Indigenous Education, and Abbotsford School of Integrated Arts (ASIA) – Sumas Mountain. Students from the school have worked under the mentorship of professional puppeteer Tamara Unroe to design the performance and bring the puppets to life.

Allison Gardner, Vice Principal of Indigenous Education with School District 34, believes that the performance is an educational opportunity for audiences of all ages. “I am so inspired to be able to witness this collaborative piece come together,” says Gardner. “The performance is an important learning opportunity for the students to experience and it supports the curriculum, community partners, and the true history of the land that we live on right now. I am thankful that it is open to the public as we can all learn together about the beauty and richness of Semá:th Xó:t̓sa.”

The performance takes place on Monday, June 19th at 7pm at the Abbotsford Arts Center (2329 Crescent Way) and all are welcome. Tickets are free, but registration is required. To register, visit thereach.ca/events-and-programs or call 604-864-8087.

For a full schedule of Summer 2023 events at The Reach, visit www.thereach.ca.

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Thumbnail images. High-res versions available for download at <https://tinyurl.com/4zrzr45z>



Children with one of the illuminated puppets during a performance in 2021. Photo by Rachel Topham.



Heron and sturgeon puppets tell the story of Sumas Lake prior to its drainage 100 years ago. Photo by Rachel Topham.