

Dr. Superle's new course! Children's Literature: Diversity and Accessibility

January 2024, UFV English 388E + Abbotsford City Studio

WHAT

I am developing a new course which will run during the Winter 2024 semester at UFV: English 388E, Children's Literature: Diversity and Accessibility. This section will be offered as an experiential learning opportunity through the City Studio program, in conjunction with

- Tourism Abbotsford
- the City of Abbotsford Parks, Recreation, and Culture department,

and in collaboration with Abbotsford School District partners

- Barrowtown Elementary school
- Chief Dan George Middle school
- W. J. Mouat Extended Day Art program

Stay tuned for details on the school Joy Museum projects that will develop in parallel and collaboration with these schools and UFV English 388 E students.

HOW

The course capstone project will be conceptualizing, designing, producing, and delivering a sensory/tactile museum exhibit for display in the Abbotsford Recreation Centre. The exhibit will showcase interpretations of classic and bestselling children's books in interactive ways that are accessible to a wide variety of children (and adults!), including (but not limited to) those who are

- blind/low vision
- deaf/hard of hearing
- neurodiverse
- struggling with mental health
- living with visible and/or invisible health condition(s)

WHY

Virtually all children love stories, but many children are compromised in their capacity to enjoy stories to the fullest due to various disabilities. Similarly, many children enjoy visiting museums, but some children, such as those who are blind, are not provided with appropriate experiences that allow them to enjoy the exhibits. Both reading and visiting museums are primarily visual activities—but they don't have to be!

By adapting elements of beloved children's stories to be more accessible, especially through sensory and tactile approaches, more children can enjoy them. This approach will also appeal to children who are not (currently) experiencing challenges that make reading written words from a printed source difficult, unpleasant, or impossible.

There is no tactile or sensory museum in Canada (although there are several around the world, in other countries). The best Canadian museums can currently offer children who are blind or have other disabilities that prevent them from enjoying visual displays are two tactile/sensory exhibits (one at the National Human Rights Museum, and one at the National Agriculture and Food Museum). By providing this innovative approach for children (and adults) in our community, the City of Abbotsford will demonstrate its progressive commitment to accessibility.

This project is timely for its alignment with accessible education and tourism initiatives currently being developed and delivered by the City of Abbotsford, Tourism Abbotsford, the Abbotsford School District, and UFV.

English 388E will provide UFV students with a hands-on experience that will vividly highlight the need for and methods to provide accessibility for all children. Students will develop knowledge, understanding, and techniques to make important content more accessible for more children—and more enjoyable for everyone.

Since most UFV students who take children's literature courses hope/plan to become teachers, this experience will provide valuable theoretical and applied knowledge they can transfer to their future work with children in their own classrooms throughout their professional careers. Further, this project is of immense value to UFV students for its capacity to enrich and bring to life UFV's institutional goals around equity and diversity.