

A Week With Flying Eagle





THE CITY OF Edmonton

The Flying Eagle program, a summer recreation program offered through the City of Edmonton's Green Shack program and focusing on Aboriginal content, celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2014. The program began in the city's east and moved citywide a few years ago. Little Eagle tells her story of experiencing the program for the first time.

*Children are a gift from the Creator,
and this book is a gift to our community.*



All summer, I have been going to the Green Shack program at the playground near my house.

This morning, my Green Shack leader introduces us to two new leaders from the Flying Eagle program. They are wearing blue shirts, just like my Green Shack leader. They will be leading activities with us for the whole week!



The new leaders tell us that the Flying Eagle program teaches kids about Aboriginal culture.

They say that “Aboriginal” means the people who first lived on this land, and they include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

My next-door neighbor says that she is Métis, and two brothers tell us that they are Inuit.



Our leaders teach us about the medicine wheel. They say that each nation has its own colours, but that the Cree people of Treaty 6—where Edmonton is—use blue, white, red, and yellow, and these colours represent the different people of the earth.

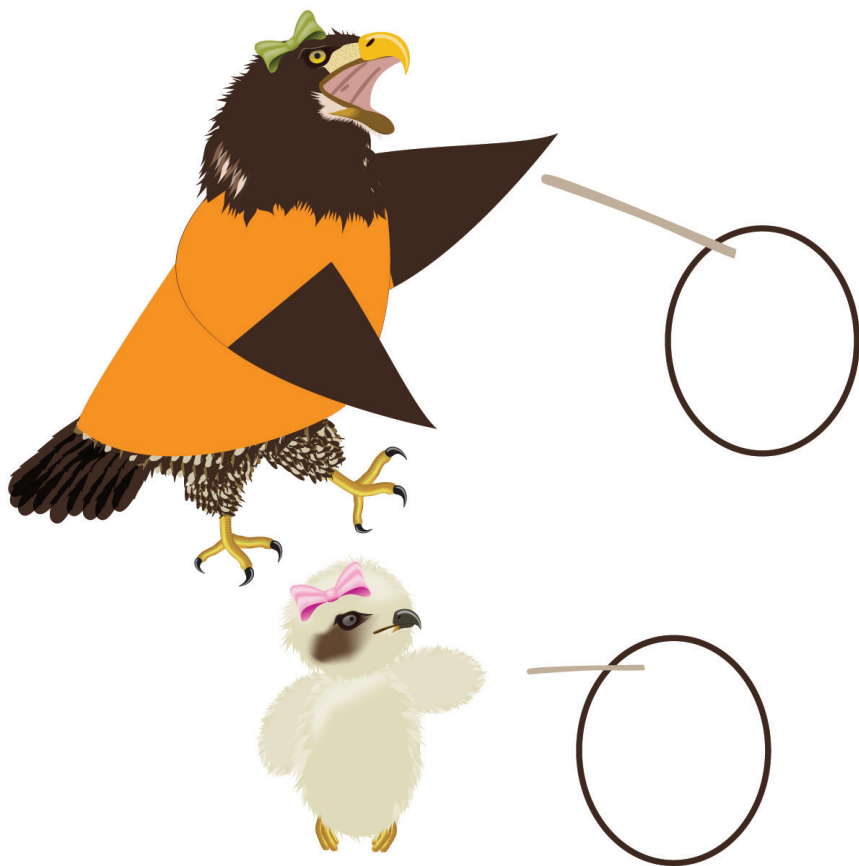
They ask us about our heritage, and one kid says he is Somalian, and one says she is part Ukrainian and part Irish. A few say they are Chinese. I don't know what I am! We all have lots of fun playing together all day.



At suppertime, I tell my family about my day at Flying Eagle. I ask my dad what we are.

He says, "Do you mean, what is our heritage?" I nod.

He points to a beaded flower on our wall, and says, "I am Cree, and your mom is Dene. We are First Nations. Our people are known for our beautiful beadwork. We are proud to be Aboriginal!"



On Tuesday morning, I bring my little sister with me to the playground.

The leaders take us on a bison hunt, but we don't hunt a real bison. We just pretend to. We practice our aim by throwing sticks through a rolling hoop.



After the bison hunt, we make some mini drums.

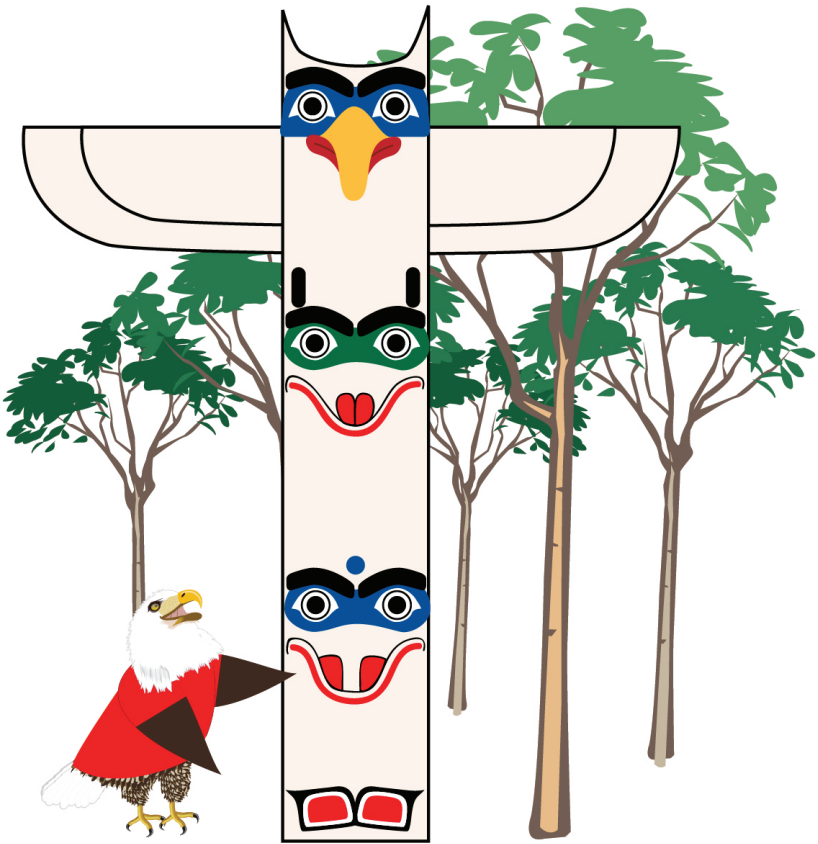
Our leaders tell us that the drum is the heartbeat of the people.

When I am finished making my drum, I help my sister with hers.



Later on, we make some totem poles. We pick animals that make us think of our family members, and we draw pictures of them on a paper towel roll.

I draw a puppy for my little sister, because she is so cuddly, and a spider for myself, because I am good at making things. I draw a bear to be my mom, because she takes good care of us, and a fish for my dad, because he loves fishing. My sister mostly draws scribbles, but she tells me she is drawing a fish and a cat.



My sister and I are excited to show our totem poles to our family when we get home. My dad is proud of us and puts them on the counter.

He shows us a picture of him and a *real* totem pole from when he traveled to B.C. He tells us that Cree and Dene people do not build totem poles, but Aboriginal people near the ocean in B.C. do.

He says that animals, like the ones in the totem poles, teach us many important things.



On Wednesday morning, we make dreamcatchers. Our leader tells us that the Anishinaabe were the first Aboriginal people to make dreamcatchers. They catch bad dreams in the web, and the good dreams float down the feathers to us.

While we work on our crafts, our leaders tell us about the seven sacred teachings of the Anishinaabe: humility, honesty, respect, courage, wisdom, truth, and love. I decide to give my dreamcatcher to my grandma so I can show her how much I love her.



After lunch, one of the leaders says we are going to “smudge.” Smudging is one of the ways that Aboriginal people connect with the Creator.

Our leader sets out a little metal pan and puts a braid of long grass that she calls “sweetgrass” inside. She lights the sweetgrass and it starts to smoke. The smoke smells sweet. I ask the Creator for good thoughts, good words, and good feelings as I wave the smoke over myself. Our leader says that each person can ask for the same things in their own way.



After smudging, we get to have a fire!

Our leaders show us how to make bannock. We roll the dough into a ball and put it on the end of a stick, and roast it over the fire like a marshmallow.

It's delicious! It tastes like soft, warm bread. I put honey all over mine, which gets a bit messy, so I have to lick it all up.



When we come home, my dad takes a deep breath in as he hugs me and asks if I was smudging today.

How did he know!?

He tells me he can smell the sweetgrass on my clothes.

I fall asleep to the smell of sweetgrass smoke that is still on me.



On Thursday, we play some neat games from the Arctic.

Our leaders tell us that the Inuit people made up these games a long time ago, and they still play them.

Everyone's favourite game is "butt bump," where we try to bump each other off balance using our butts. We all laugh a lot together!



After the hand games, we make Métis sash crafts by braiding colourful pieces of yarn together. Each of the colours means something important to the Métis people, like green, which stands for growth and success. Weaving all the colours together shows how the Aboriginal and European cultures of the Métis people are woven together.

Afterwards, the leaders let us try on real Métis sashes. The boys wear their sashes around their waists, and the girls wear them over one shoulder.



In the afternoon, we play lacrosse. It is kind of like hockey, except that we have to throw a little ball using a stick, and we run around instead of skate.

I am a very fast runner! ...but using the stick is tricky. I score a goal on one of the leaders, though! She tells us that Aboriginal people invented lacrosse. Cool!

My friend can't run as fast as me, but he's good at catching the ball.



My dad picks me up early from Flying Eagle to go to Aboriginal Family Night. I tell my friends there about all the games we play and the crafts we make at Flying Eagle.

One of my friends says that Flying Eagle will be at the playground near his house next week, and his mom says I can go with him if I want. I can't wait!



On Friday morning, I head to the playground for the last day of Flying Eagle at my playground.

We are playing a hide-and-seek game called Eagle Eyes—my favourite game!—on the playground when it starts to rain. Our leaders tell us that the rain is a blessing, and we should be happy about it. I'm happy—I love to play in the puddles!



Just before we go home, we have a talking circle,
where everybody gets to say what they thought about
the week.

Sometimes I talk slowly, but I like that nobody rushes
me when I am holding the feather in the talking circle.

I give my leaders a hug at the end.



When I go home, my grandpa and grandma are there.
They are visiting us for the weekend.

I tell them all about my week at Flying Eagle.
My grandma gives me a hug when I give her my
dreamcatcher and says, “I’m glad you have a chance
to learn about Aboriginal culture while you’re having
fun in a safe space. That’s something all kids deserve.”
She’s right—I’m going to tell all my friends about
Flying Eagle!

Flying Eagle is a program run through the City of Edmonton's Green Shack summer recreation program. We are grateful for the work and dedication Gord Stewart, Lise Robinson, Darrell Nordell, and Jay Row provided in conceptualizing and creating this program.

The following organizations have partnered with us in the delivery of the program over the past 10 years:

- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Boyle Street Community Services
- Ben Calf Robe Society
- Oteenow Employment and Training Society
- Rupertsland Institute

We would like to extend a special thank-you to:

- Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, who has provided leadership and cultural training for our leaders each year of the program
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- Everyone who provided feedback in the production of this book
- The organizations, individuals, past staff, and participants who have partnered with us to make this program a success

This story was written and illustrated
by Caylie Gnyra of Saddle Stitch Publishing
www.saddlestitchpublishing.com

To read more stories about Little Eagle and her friends,
check out www.littlecreebooks.com.

The City of Edmonton's Flying Eagle Program gives children the opportunity to learn more about Aboriginal cultures and heritage through games, crafts, and other recreational activities.

Using the Medicine Wheel as a guide, Flying Eagle staff help program participants explore traditional Aboriginal practices, such as making bannock and dreamcatchers and taking part in Aboriginal sports like lacrosse.

The program runs for one week in various neighbourhoods each summer, as part of the City's Green Shack recreation program for children.

