



STUDENTS WEAVE CONNECTIONS TO WITNESS BLANKET

March 4, 2022

Kelowna, BC – Thousands of students across Central Okanagan Public Schools will have the opportunity to learn from the stories embedded in the Witness Blanket by the time the exhibition at Kelowna Art Gallery ends in April. Already, hundreds of students have visited the 40-foot-long reproduction of Carey Newman's powerful work, where they can learn, ask questions, and make connections to their learning about residential schools and Canada's colonial history.

“Children ask the best questions,” says Sumi Ali, Education Coordinator at the Kelowna Art Gallery. “They often ask the things that we’re afraid to. They view the stories and artifacts with a fresh pair of eyes and through their questions and moments to ponder, our hope is that they leave having learned as much from their visit as we have from them.”

When students return to the classroom from their visit to the Witness Blanket, they reflect on the experience with meaningful inquiry. Lauren McCrady, Grade 5 Teacher at Anne McClymont Elementary asked students how weaving relates to the creation of The Witness Blanket and the reconciliation process.

"When you weave a quilt or a blanket, it's almost as if each thread has its own story, just like the objects on the Witness Blanket," says Ashley Klein, Grade 5. "It connects to the reconciliation process because we're trying to weave the relationship of Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people together, after residential schools."

Rory Chan, also Grade 5, made a connection to the name of the Okanagan First Peoples: "Weaving is bringing things all together to make one big thing and the word "Syilx" means to bring things together to make a whole thing. The blanket is also something you wrap around babies and around loved ones when they die, so it resembles protection and what they went through."

The Witness Blanket is made from hundreds of items reclaimed from Indian Residential School Survivors, churches, government, and other cultural organizations, which were borrowed from 77 separate sites across Canada. The true-to-scale reproduction of The Witness Blanket, constructed from cedar with photographic panels to represent the original artifacts, is an exhibition based on the art of Carey Newman and is developed in collaboration with, and circulated by, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (Winnipeg, Manitoba). It is on display at the Kelowna Art Gallery until April 10.