

PRESS RELEASE
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Blue Metropolis 2019 celebrates Indigenous Voices and Literatures including its First Peoples Literary Prize, Student Essay Writing Competition and Children's Festival

Montreal, April 3, 2019 – To highlight the UN's International Year of Indigenous Languages, the 2019 Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival is pleased to present an entire series of events devoted to Indigenous voices and literatures.

This series will bring together Indigenous writers and other artists from Australia, Latin America and Turtle Island (North America). From Australia, writer and language researcher **Bruce Pascoe** and 2018 Australian slam champion **Melanie Mununggurr-Williams**; the 2018 winner of the 2018 Governor General's Award for Non-fiction, **Darrel J. McLeod**; **Terese Marie Mailhot**, winner of the 2019 First Peoples Literary Prize; poets **Joséphine Bacon**, **Liz Howard**, **Arielle Twist** and **Shannon Webb-Campbell**, and multidisciplinary artist **Moe Clark**.

The Festival is also pleased to present the 5th edition of its **First Peoples Literary Prize**, which was inaugurated in 2015 to highlight the work of Indigenous writers. Past winners include Annharte (2015), Thomas King (2016), David Treuer (2017) and Lee Maracle (2018). This year, Blue Metropolis honours **Terese Marie Mailhot**, of the Seabird Island Indian Band of British Columbia, with a \$5,000 prize for her memoir *Heart Berries*. A melding of memory and imagination, *Heart Berries* deals with an inheritance of trauma, dysfunction and shame, and shows how, through the experience of writing this book, the author emerges with a greater understanding of her people and herself.

A social innovation program to inspire students – from the elementary level to university!

Now in its second year, the **Student Essay Writing Competition** is a Blue Met-McConnell Foundation social innovation project. This year, nine Canadian universities promoted the competition among students enrolled in Indigenous Studies or Indigenous Literature programs. The competition presented two awards, one to an English-speaking student, the other to a French-speaking student, each of whom wrote an essay based on an excerpt from a work by a First Peoples Prize winner, providing a personal, critical and political response to the excerpt.

The 2019 winners are **Matthew LeBlanc**, from the University of New Brunswick, for his essay titled "Understanding the Indian Condition", inspired by Terese Marie Mailhot's *Heart Berries*,

and **Coline Souilhol**, from the Université de Montréal, for her essay, “La responsabilité du conteur d’histoire face aux perceptions historiques”, inspired by *Histoires et vérités : Récits Autochtones (The Truth About Stories)*, by Thomas King. The winning students, as well as the programs in which they are enrolled, will each receive \$1,000. The winners will also attend the First Peoples Literary Prize award ceremony, during the 2019 Blue Metropolis Festival, and will give a reading of their essays during the ceremony.

Ten classes of francophone students meet Indigenous authors

For several years, the TD-Blue Metropolis Children’s Festival has devoted part of its programming to Indigenous literature and culture. This edition presents even more Indigenous content, with Abenaki author **Sylvain Rivière** and Wendat storyteller **Yolande-Okia Picard** featured in seven activities taking place in Montreal-area libraries and reaching 10 classes from 6 different elementary schools.

Blue Metropolis at a glance

Blue Metropolis Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1997 that brings together people from different cultures to share the pleasures of reading and writing, and encourages creativity and intercultural understanding. The Foundation produces an annual literary festival of international calibre and offers a wide range of educational and social programs year-round, both in classrooms and online. These programs use reading and writing as therapeutic tools, to encourage academic perseverance and fight against poverty and social isolation.

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Contact:

Shelley Pomerance

Associate Programming Director, Media Relations

Tel.: 514-270-1199

shelley.pomerance@bluemetropolis.org

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