

## THE SOPHIA HILTON FOUNDATION OF CANADA: Future Plans

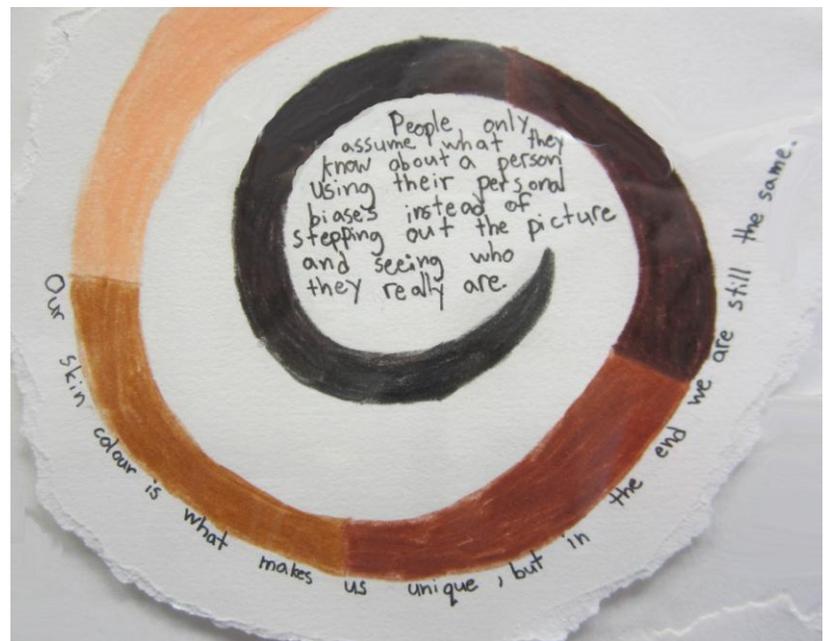
The Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada is hoping to become an educational "ground-breaker" through facilitating an **Expansion of Multicultural Resources and Activity Opportunities in Ontario schools.**



The Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada hopes to help expand the thinking of teachers and students in Canadian elementary and high school settings by making a selection of fresh story-based resources available. We believe sharing these resources will help energize the multicultural learning process. Our plan is linked to and grounded by the reality of Canada's recent multicultural explosion. A new and expanded style of thinking is needed in order to help us better accept and better understand our own vibrant, immigrant population. Such an initiative is also needed in the classroom where it can help the children of new comers feel better "connected" to images of and artwork from their own homelands.... The same is also needed to help

non-immigrant families better appreciate where the new arrivals have come from and to discover the positive features of these varied countries and cultures of origin.

The Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada envisions using its' own fresh and innovative resource materials that hail from one such cultural region (South India's Kongu area) to help initiate a larger trend. Our materials can be used to teach history, to teach art, to teach world religions, to teach sociology and economics... and much more. We believe that once this "tip of the iceberg" is welcomed into a classroom setting that similar materials from other cultures around the world will also find a new appreciation. We want to help teachers "get away" from presenting cultures as simply a collection of colourful "costumes" and "ceremonies." We believe that depicting stories, using traditional colors, motifs and images, can convey considerably more in-depth information to students about social communities found elsewhere around the world. Such stories can ultimately help Canadians build a more memorable and valued understanding of many other rich but still little-known traditions. Because of the popularity of Japanese "manga" this has already happened to some extent due to its' unique ability to popularize various aspects of traditional Japanese culture.



**Our Foundation is asking for help** with "access" to libraries, audiences and interested schools here in Canada. Stimulating public interest in our materials (and the distribution possibilities that can follow) is our biggest challenge. In particular, how can we overcome the rigid curriculum outlines teachers must adhere to... especially in public schools? Secondly, and even more difficult, how do we overcome the mindset that nothing that hints at "religion" should be taught in the classroom... for fear of offending some group or other that believes a teacher might be trying to convert students to whatever particular belief system happens to be imbedded in the story they use? This conundrum is based on the recognized fact that virtually all traditional stories from India (and many other cultures as well) interweave a tale with actions taken by the "gods," in some way or other. Should we "expurgate" gods from certain short story segments (as it has often been suggested that the Foundation do)? This has been

suggested with the aim of "cleansing" traditional legends to make them acceptable in a school context. We are very reluctant to do this as it would entail falsifying genuine and important cultural traditions if we were to disallow the presence of divine beings in stories. We are striving, instead, for a culturally sensitive approach that recognizes that "gods" are part of most cultures and that they play a legitimately role in that culture's story corpus. The fact that there are gods imbedded in a tale or legend does not necessitate the teaching of doctrinal attitudes that might lead to a "belief system" shift among students being introduced to that tale. On the contrary, to take the gods out of most Indian stories will substantially weaken what those tales have to teach.... especially from a moral perspective. The Foundation strongly resists any such kind of "expurgation" approach to traditional tales as being both deceptive and unfaithful to a specific story's worldview, as well as its' sense of morality and intent.

There are ascending degrees of difficulty in what we hope to accomplish. Public schools are the most rigid, private schools are somewhat less so. Home schooling is the most flexible venue of all. And to some extent private "religious" schools may also welcome our materials. However, there is a danger, in the religious school context, of encountering sectarian issues. For example, some may ask if a particular story is explicitly Shaivite or Vaisnavite in its' orientation? (In fact our materials provide a comfortable balance between these two outlooks). We also hope to gift resource materials to public libraries... which, after all, have a mandate to collect material of all kinds. Universities are much, much less of a problem. We already have university teachers interested in our materials.

**Our materials are: Multicultural** (with a South Asian focus), **Animated & Video-based** (we have 26 newly finished half hour animated episodes). We are strong on **Graphics** (we have 26 newly published graphic novels), **Digitally based** (both our graphic novels and our videos are available in a digital format), **Scholarly** (the project's academic credentials are very solid), **Educational** (we have aimed the content squarely at kids, students and families), and we try to center around **Sharing Stories as FUN!**

**We welcome suggestions regarding ways we can EXPAND The Multicultural Resources and Activity Opportunities. We hope to focus on the materials we already have in hand and that are (already) largely displayed on this website. We hope, furthermore, to lead by example, building on our extensive range culturally specific, but also highly educational, resources.**



#### **The Sophia Hilton Foundation of Canada**

\*All illustrations shown above are photographs taken by Foundation members at a June 2015 year-end display constructed and performed by students studying at Aldergrove School, Markham, Toronto.