

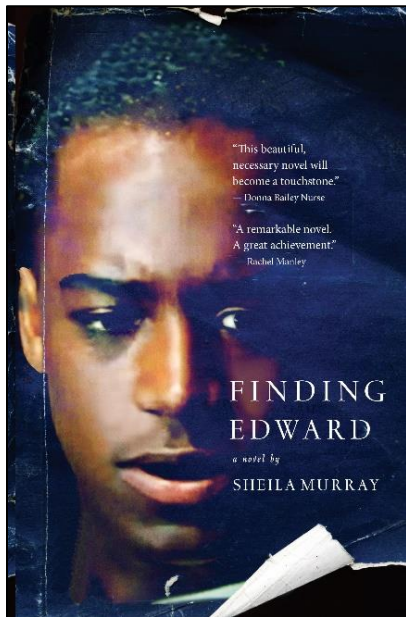


CORMORANT BOOKS

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***Finding Edward* by Sheila Murray Teacher's Guide**

Created by Martha Brack Martin with support from Sheila Murray and the Cormorant Team



A chance encounter with a panhandler named Patricia leads Cyril to a cardboard suitcase full of photographs and letters dating back to the early 1920s. Cyril is drawn into the letters and their story of a white mother's struggle to come to terms with the need to give up her mixed-race baby named Edward. Abandoned by his white father as a small child, Cyril feels a compelling connection to the boy and begins to look for the rest of Edward's story.

This book is a fascinating read for any reader, but it is especially valuable to those who wish to learn more about the historical and current experiences of racialized Canadians and immigrants, as well as students of Civics, Law, Sociology, and English or creative writing classes.

Themes

- Black achievement and contributions to Canada
- Anti-Black racism (current and historic)
- Family
- Identity
- Isolation
- Coming of age
- Loss

The Plot

Cyril is reeling from the sudden death of his mother. With a white father who left the family years ago and two much younger half-siblings, he finds himself feeling untethered and alone. In possession of a small inheritance left to him by his surrogate grandfather and mentor Nelson, Cyril is encouraged by his close-knit Jamaican community to head to Canada, the “land of prosperity.” Intending to go to university, Cyril settles in with extended family in Toronto to begin his new life. Unfortunately, his experiences as a recent immigrant do little to improve his sense of loss and isolation. When he stumbles upon the mystery of another mixed-race boy who lived decades earlier, however, Cyril finds a new sense of purpose. He sets out to investigate the mysterious Edward’s life, and his search leads him to new friends and intriguing revelations. As he works to “find Edward,” Cyril ends up finding himself.

The Setting

This story takes place in Toronto and Jamaica in 2012, as well as various parts of twentieth-century Canada in flashbacks.

What Kind of Reader Will Love This Book? One who...

- Appreciates a good, well-written mystery
- Is interested in Canadian history
- Wants to learn more about historic and current Anti-Black Racism
- Is intrigued by the dark secrets of Canada’s treatment of minorities
- Is fascinated by the immigrant experience
- Likes stories told from two perspectives

Pre-Teaching Prep

Trigger Warning: This book exposes the trauma of anti-Black racism over generations, and particularly in Canada. Some of the questions and activities delve more deeply into the book’s scenes where Cyril or Edward face anti-Black racism. Consider the life experiences of your students and let *them* tell *you* what they can handle. Some exemplary resources are provided below to improve your awareness and support your students:

Teaching African Canadian History

This website by educator Natasha Henry will be tremendously helpful as you move through this novel: <https://teachingafricancanadianhistory.weebly.com/>. Here are some of the other web resources she has curated that will be especially useful:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19XLYawsFsYKjbirdC_fFEkvn9Jaum7we

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/collection/black-history-in-canada>

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/secretlifeofcanada/teaching-guide-the-secret-life-of-the-province-of-jamaica-1.5256878>

Chapter Questions (for Independent Work or Class Discussion)

Pick and choose the questions that work for *your* students in *your* classroom. Use as many or as few as you like.

Chapter 1

1. In this first chapter, the author introduces us to Cyril Rowntree. Create a graphic organizer (e.g. web, mind map) that features everything you learn about Cyril including his family, his history, and his home community in Jamaica. As you continue reading the book, add to your graphic organizer.
2. As he is flying to Canada, we learn that Cyril has an unusual gift. Nelson explained this gift to him, and told Cyril that despite it, he was “not destined to become an Obeah Man” (p. 5). How would you describe Cyril’s gift in your own words? Research the term “Obeah Man” and share your discoveries with a friend or with the class.

Chapter 2

3. In your own words, explain the relationship between Cyril and Nelson Johnson. Use evidence from the text to describe what each of them symbolized for the other.
4. There are several words and phrases in *Finding Edward* that may be unfamiliar to you. Use their context in the book, as well as your own research skills, to define each of these words as they apply in the book:
 - a. patois (p. 19)
 - b. chupse (p. 8)
 - c. duppies (p. 11)
 - d. pre-tertiary studies (p. 12)
 - e. antimacassar (p. 13)
 - f. doilies (p. 14)
 - g. black plastic scandal bag (p. 16)

Chapter 3

5. Cyril settles in the Mount Dennis neighbourhood of Toronto. Research this community using at least two different websites or other sources. Why was it a logical place to set Cyril’s Canadian adventures? Explain.
6. In your opinion, why does meeting Evan have such a big effect on Cyril? Explain.

Chapter 4

7. Cyril takes steps towards independence in this chapter. Do you think he would have made the leap if he didn’t have the confrontation with the cousin’s boyfriend? Why or why not?
8. Most people would find living beside a railroad track a loud distraction, yet Cyril seems very excited about the track and its trains. Why do you think the author chose to put Cyril’s newfound home beside train tracks?

Chapter 5

9. In this chapter, Cyril meets Pat. Would you have chatted with her as easily and respectfully as Cyril does? What does this show us about Cyril's character?
10. Pat leads Cyril to Mr. Addo and his display of mementos and artifacts connected to the mysterious Edward. Why is Cyril so interested in Edward's story? Explain using information from the text and your own ideas.
11. Explain your interpretation of Cyril's dream at the end of Chapter 5.

Chapter 6

12. Chapter 6 begins with "Edward is not a baby. He knows trains like he knows boots and mitts" (p. 58). How does this introduction to Edward connect thematically with the images in the previous chapters? Explain.
13. What do we learn about Edward in this chapter? Create a graphic organizer for Edward, in the same style as the one you created in chapter 1 for Cyril.
14. On page 61 the author shifts the time of the setting, momentarily disorienting the reader. What was the author's purpose in doing this? How do you feel about it?

Chapter 7

15. How does the author use Cyril's experiences in this chapter to demonstrate that though he superficially fits in with the multicultural mosaic of Toronto, he is still isolated and alone?
16. Why do you think Cyril finds himself thinking of Nelson and "talking" to him in this chapter?

Chapters 8 and 9

17. On page 76 the author writes, "Evan would never understand the shame of loneliness." Have you ever felt this shame? Write about a time when you felt isolated or alone. What advice would you give Cyril?
18. Edward again makes an appearance in these chapters. Once more the author blends child-Edward with older-Edward. What more do we learn about Edward's situation, past and present?

Chapter 10

19. What new details do we learn about Cyril's family in this chapter? Add them to your graphic organizer from chapter 1.
20. How does Cyril cope with his uncertainty about entering new situations, especially when he feels insecure? How do you handle times when you don't feel confident?

Chapters 11 and 12

21. Why do you think Cyril hasn't tried to look for his father on Facebook?
22. In chapter 12, the author references the shooting of Michael Eligon. Use at least three different websites or resources to research this event and its aftermath (note: this

research may trigger some readers). How does the author use this real event in the story?

Chapters 13 and 14

23. In chapter 13, the author manages to describe Edward's current reality and, at the same time, to show more of his past. What new discoveries does this chapter reveal about Edward's personality?
24. How did you feel reading about Cyril's experiences with the police in chapter 14? If you are willing, share your feelings and any connections you made while reading, either with a partner or with the class.
25. Why does the author juxtapose Cyril's and Edward's experiences back and forth in chapter 14? How does it affect you as a reader?

Chapter 15

26. Cyril is uncomfortable with Evan's reaction when Cyril shares his encounter with the police. Analyze Cyril's feelings after their discussion. How would you feel if you were Cyril?
27. On page 150, Edward reflects that "In some ways, it is comforting to be identified and categorized as part of a group..." In this chapter, there are many references to different political and social groups. How necessary is it for you to belong to a group? Do you think this need to belong changes as people get older? Explain your thoughts.

Chapter 16

28. What do you notice about the way the author connects Cyril's story to Edward's as the novel progresses? How does the author shift between the perspective of the two different characters? Explain her technique in your own words.
29. Both Cyril and Edward find love in this chapter. What lesson(s) does Cyril learn from this relationship?

Chapter 17

30. Randall tells Cyril, "Everybody gotta carve out their niche. Always gonna be someone left out" (p. 177). Do you agree with Randall? Use evidence from the book and your own ideas to explain your opinion.
31. How is the character of Evan different from Cyril's other friends? What does he represent in the story? Explain.

Chapter 18

32. The first paragraph in chapter 18 describes Cyril's reflections about how "Brown and Black people, Indigenous too, were too often in trouble" (p. 186). Cyril wraps up his thoughts, saying that in his time of 2012 "...he hadn't known how Canada would count him out" (p. 186). What does Cyril mean by that? Would he still feel this way if the story was set today? Defend your opinion with proof from today's media and perhaps your own experiences.

33. This chapter gives a great deal of information about the Black experience in Toronto in the 1800s. Discuss the following:
- Which of these bits of history were familiar to you before reading this chapter? How many were familiar to your classmates?
 - How well do you feel Black achievements and contributions have been shared with Canadians, historically? In your opinion, is this improving?
 - What can *you* do to make people more aware of Black achievements and contributions, individually and/or collectively as a class?
34. Cyril's history professor John says, "It was a force, the Black community back then. Still is, of course, though I guess the enemy is systemic racism. Back then it was slavery, which would have been easier to fight somehow. Not so slippery" (p. 190). What do you think of John's opinion? Why might systemic racism be harder to fight than slavery? What makes it "slippery"?

Chapter 19

35. What are the three astonishing discoveries Edward makes in Africville?
36. Cyril makes a couple of discoveries of his own in this chapter. What are they and how do they affect Cyril?

Chapter 20

37. Why do you think Evan reacts so intensely to Cyril's question about the cousin in the gang?
38. How does the author use Cyril's special "gift" to advance the plot in this chapter? What do we learn?

Chapter 21

39. Update the graphic organizer about Edward which you started in chapter 6. Then discuss as a class which events and experiences are the most significant in Edward's life. Do you all agree? Why or why not?
40. Why does the sudden memory of Celia change Edward's feelings at the end of the chapter? Explain.

Chapter 22

41. In this chapter, Cyril finds himself thinking about Lillian Allen and quoting from her dub poetry. Research Allen, finding and citing at least three different resources. Discuss her work and what themes they share with *Finding Edward*.
42. Cyril's trip home to Jamaica leaves him feeling pulled in two directions. Have you ever felt like Cyril? What advice would you give him?

Chapter 23

43. The author uses Edward's experiences in this chapter to reveal not only more events and societal issues in Canada's history, but also to explore more characteristics of Edward's personality. What do we learn about Edward from his job as a railway porter?

44. Edward receives a letter from Mabel's daughter Gillian, prompting his recollection of his days in Africville, and the demise of the community. Do you think what happened to Africville could happen in today's world? Discuss your ideas with your classmates.

Chapter 24

45. On page 269, Edward describes Rachel as being "alone and strong with it" even though she "lives with shadows all around her" (p. 270). What do we learn about her past that explains why she is surrounded by shadows and alone?
46. When Cyril meets a sociologist at the University of Toronto she tells him, "We have to learn for ourselves the history that is *not* taught to us" (p. 273). Do you believe this is still the case today? Discuss.

Chapter 25

47. Cyril attends a protest against Black killings which Randall helped organize. How does the author use this event to show how Cyril's character has developed?
48. Why do you think Edward sits between the two white men, despite knowing "it's one of the places you stayed away from on a Saturday night" (p. 283)? How does Edward's experience with the law differ from Cyril's in this chapter?

Chapter 26

49. Cyril has a revelation while attending the Black Community Achievement Awards dinner. What has he realized, and how will he make it happen?
50. Edward also has a night of reflection in this chapter. How has Edward made his own small difference in the world?

Chapter 27

51. Why do you think Cyril has dreamed of Edward in a hospital room, especially given that Edward collapses at the *end* of the chapter? Explain.
52. Were you surprised that Cyril didn't immediately go to the address he discovered for Edward? Why or why not?

Chapter 28

53. How do you think you would have handled finally "locating" Edward after such an exhaustive search, only to learn he was in the hospital?
54. Why does the author include the scene where Cyril suddenly envisions himself running beside his father in mutual joy? Share your ideas with the class.

Chapter 29

55. The author's last sentence in the story is "Cyril took ten pictures" (p. 330). Think about how the author has used photographs throughout the story. Why is this a particularly appropriate way to end the novel?
56. Edward is not inclined to believe Cyril's research at first. Why do you suppose this is?

57. Cyril and Edward share with each other some deeply personal feelings and revelations about themselves despite having just met. Are you surprised by this? Why or why not?
58. How do you imagine the relationship between Cyril and Edward will progress now that they've met? What would you like to see happen next between the two? Discuss your ideas with your peers.

Discussion Questions and Essay Topics

These topics can be used for the traditional assessment options of discussion or essay.

- a) The author chose to write this book alternating between the different perspectives of Edward and Cyril. Discuss the pros and cons of this approach, and how effective you find it as a reader.
 - b) Family is a huge theme in this novel. Discuss what the author does with this theme in both Cyril's and Edward's stories. How are they the same? How are they different?
 - c) Why was fascism erupting in Canada in Edward's day, and what is its legacy in today's world? Discuss.
 - d) Nelson used to ask Cyril two questions: "What are you going to give the world?" and "What makes your heart sing?" (p. 287). Pick one of these questions and think about how you would answer it yourself. Share your answer and your reasons for choosing it.
 - e) Familiarize yourself with the *Canada Reads* program run by the CBC each year. Then make a case for why *Finding Edward* is an important and/or essential read for all Canadians and beyond.
- a) The author has intentionally set the novel in 2012. Why do you think she felt this was necessary?
 - b) In your opinion, does tying books to real events and issues make them better than books that are set in unrealistic places or times? Explain.
 - c) Think about your favourite parts of the novel. What made these parts so memorable to you? Explain.
 - d) As a reader, do you value characterization, plot, or descriptive elements the most? Is it possible to have a good book without all three? Defend your answer.

Culminating Activities

Here are some other activities to consider at the end of the novel. These activities will give students the opportunity to make connections to the world and themselves, as well as to other texts, and offer some creative and engaging ways to demonstrate their understanding.

Research Roundup

Think about the various topics introduced in the book. These could include the Great Depression and relief camps in Canada, dub poetry and reggae culture, Africville, the history of sleeping car porters in Canada, the rise of fascism or communism in Canada, the fight for unions, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the culture of Jamaica or the Caribbean Diaspora, immigrant experiences from other countries, or any other topic found in the book and of personal interest to you (with permission from your teacher).

Research a topic introduced in the novel, independently or in groups. Use at least four different resources and cite these in a bibliography you create using a format designated by your teacher. Then present your learning and research through an infographic or other presentation model of your choice.

Take Action

As a new immigrant to Canada, Cyril knows very little about Canadian history. Through his courses at Ryerson, the people he meets, and his research into Edward's life, he is slowly able to fill in the gaps created by a colonial perspective of history centered on whiteness. He refers to what he's learning as "the Invisible History of Canadian Black People" (p. 161), and Randall corrects him, suggesting the history is "hidden" not invisible.

In groups, consider your own local community and its "invisible" history. What gaps can your group identify? Where could you go to find information to fill these "hidden history" gaps? What tools are available to you? If resources are not available or don't appear to exist, what could your group do to address this problem? Who could help?

Share your group's identified gaps with the rest of the groups in the class and collate the results. Then, as a class, create a curated list of resources where the answers to those hidden history gaps could be filled. Are there resources still missing? Create a plan to raise awareness about the need for these resources and then work to locate or craft them.

Love Stinks

Cyril learns some tough lessons from his short romance with Lucy, but his relationship with this mentor, Nelson, teaches him some wonderful lessons. Think about your own relationships throughout your life. What have you learned from the people with whom you have shared your journey?

Select one relationship that has been significant to you – it can be a friendship, a romance, a familial relationship, or even a work relationship. Write an imaginary blog entry, sharing the life lessons this relationship taught you. Think about your target audience for your blog and include elements that would make it relevant to your target audience. If you aren't sure where to start, read this: <https://smartblogger.com/how-to-write-a-blog-post/>

Ryerson Who?

Cyril is attending Ryerson University in Toronto in 2012. Ten years later, the school would change its name to Toronto Metropolitan University. Look into why this change was made in 2022. As a class, discuss the value of changing the names of institutions and places to better reflect Canada's values and our understanding of Canada's history through a more diverse lens.

Cyril's Socials

Social media is vital to many people today. Cyril has no laptop or phone ... but what if he did?

Choose a social medium you think Cyril would be most likely to use. Create an imaginary account for him and then create a series of posts that correspond to events and characters in the book. Be creative and have fun with this but remember to stay in character!

Exploring the Same Themes in Different Texts

After reading *Finding Edward*, consider reading *The Pain Tree* by Olive Senior (9781770864344) and *The Book of Negroes* by Lawrence Hill (9781443409094). How are some of the same themes repeated in these stories? How are they handled differently?

Interview with the Author

Martha: Hi Sheila!

Sheila: Hi Martha. It's really good to meet you, and I'm excited to talk about Edward's and Cyril's stories.

Martha: So, tell me, where did you get the inspiration for Cyril's story?

Sheila: I wanted to write about the experience of being mixed race. I was identified by others as Black because of my skin colour, even though I loved, and identified equally with, my white mother and my Black father. I had white friends and Black friends but was raised in a predominantly white neighbourhood in a town just north of London, England, where Blacks were a small population.

As I wrote, I realized that I was exploring what it means to be racialized. I am a racialized person, but what does that mean? If I am half white, and half Black (as displayed by my skin colour), how does this make me a Black person? These are difficult questions, and what we learn when we try to answer them is hugely important to the health of our society.

I need to emphasize here that I do identify as Black — society makes me check that box. I am very proud of my Black Jamaican heritage which has informed so much of how I think and what, I do. It is also the foundation for *Finding Edward*.

Martha: I understand you, like Cyril, immigrated to Canada as a young person. Were Cyril's impressions yours?

Sheila: When I immigrated to Toronto from St. Albans, England, in the early 1970s I was about 17. My impressions were very different from Cyril's. I came from an urbanized world, unlike Cyril. As an English person, I knew very little about Canada: mainly lumberjacks, Inuit (who were then called Eskimos), and Pierre Trudeau. I wasn't expecting to be very impressed, and that



Photo: Ken Straiton

proved to be right. I remember looking from my hotel room, just off Yonge Street in Toronto's downtown, shortly after we arrived. I was looking for hippies. Those were my people. When I saw young men with long hair, or afros, wearing blue jeans, I figured it might be okay.

Cyril, on the other hand, knows all sorts of things about Canada before he arrives. He has seen it on TV and in film and knows people who've been or have lived there. TV advertisements contribute to his impression of an affluent place, a consumer paradise. Jamaica has very strong ties with Canada and has been a destination for Jamaicans since immigration restrictions based on race and colour were lifted in 1967.

Cyril's experience at school is also very different from mine. He is brown, in a city that the 2016 census found was 51.5% visible minorities. I finished high school in Agincourt, Ontario. When I got there, I was one of three Black kids in my new high school (and one of them was my younger sister). It was a huge school, and I hated it. Cyril, on the other hand, finds connections in the very multicultural environment of his downtown Toronto university. Though that doesn't mean that he finds it easy to fit in.

Martha: Did you know where the story was going from the start? Or did Cyril and Edward take you on their own journeys?

Sheila: I knew that Edward's story would begin in the early 1920s, which is when my father was born (though he grew up in Jamaica, and Edward in Toronto). My father was Black, and my mother white, and it was the story of a mixed-race man growing up in Canada that I wanted to explore. It also needed to make a contemporary connection, which meant introducing the perspective of a young man. I knew that the younger character, Cyril, would come from Jamaica — the relationship between the two countries has always been provocative and challenging. What I didn't know was how those two central stories would come together. The characters really did show me the way. I didn't know how important Edward would become to Cyril's growth and coming of age. I certainly didn't know that his story would develop such a rewarding arc. I knew very little about Edward at all when I started, although I knew I'd give him a hard childhood — abandoned by both parents in a society that refused to accept a mixed-race child. I learned so much about the Canadian Black experience by writing about his life.

Martha: Whose story came first? Cyril's or Edward's?

Sheila: I'm not sure now whose story came first. As I've said, I was interested in writing about our Canadian history and revealing how Black history in Canada has gone mostly uncelebrated. So much of it is only kept by Black historians or small Black historical societies across the country who work hard to collect, document, and preserve their own community's histories that were never recorded in the mainstream. So perhaps it was the story of histories and Edward that came first.

Or it may have been Cyril's story that came first, the rare exploration of a young, mixed-race man's experience in Canada, which is, of course, central to the book.

I wanted to know more about both of these.

Martha: What is your writing process like? Are you a fan of outlines or more of a “fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants” kind of writer?

Sheila: Although this is my first novel, I’ve written a fair bit of short fiction. I am typically inspired by an idea that comes from an overheard line of dialogue; a glimpsed expression on a stranger’s face; an image or a feeling. I tend to begin a story in order to find some imagined context for that spark and then I keep writing: a character begins to form, a place takes shape. The character’s motivation follows. Along the way I may have a growing sense of where the story is going and then, more often than not, I wind up in the weeds. That’s when I might write an outline — once I’ve envisioned that possible ending. The outline should show me what’s missing, what needs to happen in order to get there. Even with that, the ending can change in ways that may surprise me.

Martha: I love your idea of an outline as the method to figure out what’s missing in your story, instead of some sort of map you create before your story even starts. That map idea has never made sense to me. And isn’t it awesome when your own writing can surprise you?

Sheila: I’m invariably surprised by what I’ve written. Through the writing process I learn a great deal about my state of mind, what I’ve been thinking about but quite possibly not articulating. It is not therapy, which is how some people consider writing, but much more a rich and probing conversation with myself that I then need to pour into a structure which is calculated to communicate what really matters to me.

Martha: We learn so much about lesser-known bits of Canadian history through Cyril’s and Edward’s experiences. Was that a happy accident or part of your plan from the start?

Sheila: That was absolutely my plan. And it was challenging. I wanted to write about history in a way that would reach people who might not ordinarily be drawn to reading about Black history. It couldn’t be pedantic or “lecturing.” That was very important, to reach people who might not have any interest in the subject. I had to put the characters first and let the history be told through them.

Martha: Did you have any favourite scenes to write? Or any favourite chapters?

Sheila: My favourites are actually the collection of scenes that make up each of two chapters. The chapter about Edward’s time in Africville, Nova Scotia, is an easy choice. It’s when he is still a young man, and experiences the first sense of family belonging and security that he has ever had in his life. It won’t last, in part because of his personal decisions; but it wouldn’t have anyway, because Africville was deliberately destroyed by a white city government that first starved it of city services and then bulldozed it to the ground.

I’m not quite sure why this second chapter always stands out for me. It is a very ordinary telling of the sort of civic protest that goes on in Toronto with great regularity. Placards and speeches: a compelling mix of righteous anger and frustration over some unfair event or circumstance,

along with the fun of being in a crowd with like-minded and passionate people. It's about demanding change along with an empowering conviction that — if only for just a moment — all things are possible. This is a pivotal chapter for Cyril, who discovers a strength and conviction that he hadn't known he had, all of it earned right here in Canada. But more than that, it is a chapter about human distress, ongoing injustices, and a never-ending fight for fairness and recognition. That's a pretty universal need. If you've never been to a public demonstration over something you really believe in, give it a try!

Martha: I understand you started this book ten years ago. Have those intervening years changed where you thought Cyril's story would go? Or what you wanted to say about Edward's experiences?

Sheila: I think that the most significant change is what's happened since 2016. I started the book sometime around 2012, before Black Lives Matter. There have been extraordinary times in Black history in the Americas: slavery, abolition and emancipation, and the civil rights movement being first among those. But BLM may be a symbol of another all-important time. It has to do with the reach of social media and what I think is a growing and prevailing sense of "now or never."

Since then, a new race-consciousness has surfaced in mainstream culture. Cyril arrived in what mainstream Canada considered its "multicultural" heyday — before Black Lives Matter fiercely challenged the status quo and prevailed. Trayvon Martin was murdered in Florida in 2012 and his killer acquitted in 2014. BLM was formed in the US in 2013. In Toronto, Canada, Michael Eligon was killed by Toronto police in 2012: that officer was also acquitted. Both of those crimes were captured on video. By 2016, Black Lives Matter was established in Canada. In 2017, Colin Kaepernick knelt for the American national anthem, and I suspect that a whole lot of people began to see, for the first time, that something was very wrong in their liberal, democratic worlds. Not only in the US, but also in Canada. Had Cyril arrived in Toronto after BLM was established, his trajectory might have been different. His personal experiences reflect the ambiguities of 2012, although I should add that many of those ambiguities still exist in the mainstream. Edward, whose mystery drives the plot, would have been astonished by the power of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Martha: Your first degree was in Journalism. How did your skills as a journalist help you write this novel?

Sheila: My training was in magazine writing, lots of it focused on literary journalism, which is reporting facts with literary style. It allows the writer to develop a narrative that is more like storytelling — rich with detail and nuance — but always accurate in its telling. It can be outstandingly good and memorable. Much more is learned than the facts.

Finding Edward is fiction, for sure. But the sociological and historical references are all as accurate as I can make them. Journalism taught me how to research, how to triple-check my facts, and how to tell a good story.

Martha: Well, you definitely did that! Now, you subsequently went on to earn a master's degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies, and you write about an immigrant's experiences. Obviously, the topic of immigration is a passion of yours.

How important is it, in your opinion, for people to write about the topics that inspire their passions?

Sheila: I don't think that there's much point in writing something that *doesn't* inspire passions of some kind. I don't think that they need to be issue based, but what you're writing really has to matter to you. So, if it's a murder mystery, you have to write characters you care about and what happens to them has to somehow matter to you. I do think that you have to feel a deep need to communicate — even if your passion is very simply to be as entertaining as you can be.

I do believe that if you “feel” it, and you have the skill, then your readers will feel it too.

It's also true that writing is a long process that takes place in time spent alone. And once it's done, there's another stretch of time during which you may, or may not, find a publisher. And even if all of that is accomplished, there comes the next challenge, which is to have the book noticed. You really have to care about what you're writing to bother going through all of that.

Martha: What message are you hoping young people will take from *Finding Edward*?

Sheila: Young people will shape our society over the coming years. They'll do that, in part, with the knowledge they have about our Canadian slice of the world. I want them to know that Black people have made contributions to our country since the 17th century, and to truly understand — to have real empathy — for those people who continue to struggle against systemic racism.

Martha: What do you hope to leave with your readers as they turn the last page?

Sheila: I can say with some degree of amazement, that what I had hoped for is happening. I've had wonderful feedback on the book. People love the characters; they really care about them. They say that it's a great story, with all sorts of points of connection. And they say that when they'd finished, they'd learned so much about a subject they hadn't known interested them. I am thrilled with the response. I couldn't ask for more.

About Sheila Murray

Sheila Murray Sheila Murray's short fiction has been published in many literary journals including *Descant*, *The Dalhousie Review*, and *The New Quarterly*. *Finding Edward* is her first novel. Murray is an advocate for social justice and currently leads a grassroots, volunteer-driven initiative that engages urban residents in adapting to local climate change impacts. She was born and raised in St. Albans, England, and now lives in Hamilton, Ontario.

Related Weblinks and Resources for Further Learning

<http://jamesstrecker.com/words/?p=3619>

<https://miramichireader.ca/2022/06/the-sheila-murray-interview/>

<https://diasporadialogues.com/emerging-author-month-sheila-murray/>

<https://quillandquire.com/review/finding-edward/>

<https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2022/10/on-how-its-told/>