

Teacher and students collaborate on new book



By Nate Smelle

Michelle Armstrong-Parker, a dedicated teacher with over 25 years of experience at Bird's Creek Public School, has always had a passion for storytelling. This love for weaving narratives has now culminated in her debut children's book, *Yee Haw Grandma!*. Based on a true story from Armstrong-Parker's own life, this book offers a gentle, humorous, and heartfelt look at the complexities of dementia through the eyes of a young boy and his beloved grandmother. At first, Armstrong-Parker's goal was simple: to create an engaging and entertaining story that she could use as a mentor text for her students to teach writing techniques. However, as the story began to take shape, she realized that this book could be much more than just a fun classroom resource—it could offer families who are navigating the emotional challenges of dementia a way to connect, understand, and find hope. According to Armstrong-Parker, *Yee Haw Grandma!* is not just a story about dementia; it's also a celebration of family, love, and the importance of cherishing the moments shared with loved ones, even when their memory fades. The story centres on a young boy and his grandma, whose playful interactions and moments of clarity contrast with the sometimes confusing and unpredictable nature of dementia. By incorporating humour into a sensitive subject, she hopes to make the experience of dementia more approachable for children and families alike. "I also hope *Yee Haw Grandma!* will bring solace to families affected by dementia," said Armstrong-Parker. "Having personal experience with a loved one going through dementia, my family knows the journey is often complicated and emotional. The story is a reminder to cherish those fleeting moments of clarity and to recognize that love can transcend memory loss. *Yee Haw Grandma!* is a labour of love—a gift to families, a celebration of intergenerational bonds, and an enduring testament to the powerful impact of following one's dreams." One of the most unique aspects of *Yee Haw Grandma!* is the collaboration between Armstrong-Parker and two former students, Taevin Jones and Kelton Conlin, who brought the story to life through their illustrations. Having taught these talented boys in Grades 2 and 3, she knew that their artistic abilities were extraordinary. The result is a set of illustrations that perfectly complement the touching yet fun tone of the book. "Rather than outsourcing the illustrations to a professional illustrator, I thought it would be so special to work with former students to bring the story to life," Armstrong-Parker said. "I am so proud of what they've accomplished; their drawings are everything I ever imagined and more. Working together, they've created a beautiful visual world for *Yee Haw Grandma!*, filled with warmth, emotion, and some humour." Acknowledging that the road to publication wasn't easy, Armstrong-Parker said from the initial idea to the finished book, the process took almost two years. Along the way, she was guided by a community member who offered both her expertise and much-needed technology. For Armstrong-Parker, holding the completed book in her hands was the realization of a long-held dream. But the journey doesn't end there. She understands the emotional complexities of the journey, and how *Yee Haw Grandma!* serves as a reminder to families to treasure the small moments of clarity that occur with the people near and dear to them in the midst of memory loss. On Friday, Dec. 6, Armstrong-Parker, provided her class with a special treat: an animated presentation of the book

followed by a question and answer session with herself and illustrators Taevin and Kelton. Adding to the collaborative nature of the project was the fact that the animated version of Yee Haw Grandma! was narrated by Grade 4 student, Nolan Ireland. When the special screening of the short film was finished, the class cheered with the kids immediately asking to watch the story again. Yee Haw Grandma! is now available at Niffers in downtown Bancroft, and copies can be purchased directly from the author by contacting Armstrong-Parker at: mn Parker72@gmail.com