



A documentary film by Lana Šlezić

Written, Produced & Directed by
Lana Šlezić

Genre // Documentary
Country of Origin // Canada
Run Time // 78 Minutes

BEE NATION

Website

www.beenationfilm.com
www.lanaslezic.com

Social

Twitter: @beenationfilm @lanaslezic
Facebook: @beenationfilm @ LanaSlezic
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Hashtag

#BeeOurBest

Press Materials link

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/v70pxfpjgvxw3j1/AAArYSm_n7IO0PippjwKBMIa?dl=0

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Bee Nation will have its broadcast debut as the season premiere of CBC's *Firsthand*, airing this Fall 2017.

About CBC Firsthand

CBC's Firsthand showcases unique and often unexpected point of view documentaries that ignite discussions, question perspectives and open up conversations about relevant issues. From racial discrimination to sugar dating, from mysterious murders to questioning criminal responsibilities, Firsthand will make you see your world in a different light.

Short Synopsis

Bee Nation is a Canadian documentary produced and directed by Lana Šlezić. The film follows the inspirational stories of six students in the first-ever First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee in Canada. Through the eyes of students, parents and educators, we learn of the challenges and opportunities awaiting the First Nations students in Saskatchewan as they strive to make it to the National Championships in Toronto; the highs, the lows, and everything in between.

Long Synopsis

Bee Nation is a heart-warming and inspiring film that transcends stereotypes often associated with Canada's First Nations people. It is set within the framework of the first-ever First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee in Canada. Out on the breathy landscapes of Saskatchewan Reserves, we meet students, parents and teachers in the weeks leading up to the spelling bee. We go ice fishing on a school outing, we revel in a dance at a powwow, we see best friends study together and we hover in the excitement as the day draws nearer. We see the hardships our characters face but we also feel the love and support that exists within the family home. We are drawn in by the intimacy of family life on the reserve set against a backdrop of vast and beautiful landscapes. And as we spend time with the children who will compete, we find ourselves investing in them, cheering for them and wanting them to succeed.

The future of our children is common ground we can all agree is paramount to a better world. *Bee Nation* explores that common ground in a First Nations context and asks us to shed our stereotypes in doing so.

Vision Statement by Director Lana Šlezić:

Bee Nation is a heart-warming and inspiring film that transcends stereotypes often associated with Canada's First Nations people. It is set within the framework of the first-ever First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee in Canada. Out on the breathy landscapes of Saskatchewan Reserves, we meet students, parents and educators in the weeks leading up to the spelling bee. We go ice fishing on a school outing, we revel in a dance at a powwow, we see best friends study together and we hover in the excitement as the day draws nearer. We see the hardships our characters face but we also feel the love and support that exists within the family home. We are drawn in by the intimacy of family life on the reserve set against a backdrop of vast and beautiful landscapes. And as we spend time with the children who will compete, we find ourselves investing in them, cheering for them and wanting them to succeed. And they do! They all do because it is not about the winning. It is about the journey, the facing of fears and the growth that results. Competition gives us the chance to succeed and the opportunity to fail. And when we are up on stage, whatever stage that may be in our lives, we are exposed. To be exposed is to be vulnerable and in vulnerability we are all the same. When those kids quiver up on stage, we quiver with them. When they thrive, we do as well. The fact that they are First Nations becomes secondary. The future of our children is common ground we can all agree is paramount to a better world. *Bee Nation* explores that common ground in a First Nations context and asks us to shed our stereotypes in doing so.



About the Filmmaker

Lana Šlezić

Lana Šlezić is an award winning Canadian photographer and filmmaker who has lived and worked all over the world. Lana grew up in Port Credit, Ontario. From 2004 to 2006 Lana spent two years documenting the lives of women across Afghanistan. She authored the internationally acclaimed book *Forsaken* which won numerous awards and was selected in 2008 by American Photo Magazine as one of the Top Ten photo books of that year. Among other awards, she also won a World Press Photo award for her portrait series on Afghan women entitled A Window Inside. Lana has lived in India, Turkey, Afghanistan and the UAE and has a body of photographic work that has been published globally including National Geographic, TIME, Newsweek, Der Spiegel, Macleans, The Walrus and many more. Her work has also been exhibited internationally.

More recently, Lana has turned her storytelling eye to film and has produced, directed and/or shot several commercial works and short documentaries, including *Breaking Caste*, *Serhiy's Story* and *The Little Things*. Her latest short film *Andy Barrie: The Voice* is a candid portrait of former CBC radio host Andy Barrie's struggle with Parkinson's Disease and was featured at the 2016 Hot Docs Film Festival. *Bee Nation* is Lana's first feature length documentary film and has been selected as the opening night film for the 2017 Hot Docs Film Festival.

When not traveling the world, Lana resides in Toronto, Canada, where she is raising her two beloved children

THE CHILDREN OF BEE NATION

William Kaysaywaysemat III

Kahkewistahaw First Nation Reserve, Saskatchewan



William Kaysaywaysemat III is 9 years old and from Kahkewistahaw First Nation. He attends the Chief Kahkewistahaw Community School where he is in the fourth grade. William is an ambitious child having achieved so many accomplishments already. He excels academically in all areas with math being his favourite subject. He is very active in sports such as hockey, soccer, basketball, golf and softball. His favourite sport is hockey and he just completed his fourth season.

William is also active in his culture. He has been dancing powwow since he was 3 years old. During the Summer, he travels to powwows with his family almost every weekend. In 2014-2015 season, he was the Little Warrior for his own First Nation, Kahkewistahaw. In 2015-2016 season, he was the Little Warrior for the Treaty 4 territory. This was a huge honor and responsibility as he was given the opportunity to represent his First Nation as well as Treaty 4 at all the powwows he attended. 2016 was a memorable one for William.

Makayla Cannepotato

Onion Lake First Nation Reserve, Saskatchewan



Makayla Cannepotato lives in Onion Lake Cree Nation Reserve. She is 12 years old and is in grade 6 at Chief Taylor Elementary School. She has a little sister and an older brother. Her hobbies are playing sports and spending time with friends. She also loves to read and competes regularly at cross country and track and field events.

Alexander Johansson (Xander)

Saulteaux Cree Nation Reserve, Saskatchewan



Alexander Johansson, affectionately known as Xander, is thirteen years old. His parents are Toy Johansson and Joanne Moccasin. Xander was born in North Battleford, SK but later moved to Saulteaux First Nation, Saskatchewan. He attends Saulteaux Heritage School. Xander likes building fires (in their fire pit), reading books (if they're interesting), cleaning up and sometimes participating in sports and building things. His favourite thing to do is play video games because he started playing games when he was little and has been playing ever since. Xander will soon finish grade eight at Saulteaux Heritage school and then is off to high school.

Thomas Isbister

Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation Reserve, Saskatchewan



Thomas Edward Dale Isbister hails from Ahtahkakoop reserve in Saskatchewan. He is eleven years old and enjoys playing hockey. He has received the math award every year and enjoys school. Thomas is the only boy in a large family of six sisters. He wants to play in the NHL and be a power engineer when he grows up.

Savannah Nicks and Josie Singer

Big River First Nation Reserve, Saskatchewan



Savannah Nicks and Josie Singer are good friends at Sesewahum School in Big River First Nation reserve. Josie loves to draw, especially dreamcatchers. She is part of a big family with many sisters, brothers and cousins. Her parents are Marion and Dennis Joseph. Savannah likes school and is very studious. Her dad is Randy LaChance. Both Josie and Savannah play soccer and do many sports at school. They studied together for the First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee.

The Evolution of the Spelling Bee Programs within First Nations Communities

Pauline Favel

President, Saskatchewan Region for the First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee (FNPSB)

Pauline Favel is the President of the Saskatchewan Region for the First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee (FNPSB). Pauline has been at the forefront of volunteering her time to establish this non-profit initiative for First Nations youth across Saskatchewan. Pauline's involvement with spelling bees began in the 2012-2013 academic year while she was employed as a special education teacher at Chief Paskwa School. Her first experience was in coordinating a spelling bee at her school to select winners to represent their school at the File Hills Tribal Council Spelling Bee. The excitement and enthusiasm that she saw with her students was all she needed to continue with Spelling Bees. For the next two years, Pauline increased her involvement and role by coordinating two Tribal Council Spelling Bees. The belief that our First Nations students could compete at a higher level is what inspired Pauline to consider taking the Tribal Council Spelling Bees to the next level. Why not take our First Nations youth to the Nationals? Upon her employment as special education teacher, Pauline began her search for a national spelling bee program. Pauline was able to connect with Julie Spence, Founder and Executive Director of Spelling Bee of Canada (SBOC). Hence, Chief Poundmaker began the plans to host the first ever First Nations Provincial (Regional) Spelling in partnership with Spelling Bee of Canada.

Last year history was made in Saskatchewan! For the first time ever a First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee (FNPSB) was held in North Battleford, Saskatchewan on Friday, April 8, 2016. This event provided First Nations children an opportunity to prepare, practise and compete in the provincial competition sanctioned by Spelling Bee of Canada (SBOC). The 3 finalists earned the right to compete at the national Bee in Toronto on May 14, 2016. Over 120 students ages 6 – 14, who represented nineteen First Nations Schools across Saskatchewan competed in the FNPSB. The FNPSB was very well received and had gained provincial, national and soon international attention.

This year, due to the high interest from the people, the FNPSB has expanded their capacity to include provincial school students. This year will be the largest FNPSB to date with 39 schools and 157 participants from across Saskatchewan.

Additionally, the FNPSB Committee has been granted an opportunity to present at the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (WIPCE) which will be held in Toronto, July 24 – 29, 2017. The presentation category encompasses the following: Innovations in Indigenous Education, Lifelong Learning, Partnerships in Indigenous Education, Literacy Initiatives for First Nations Youth and Student Engagement. Along with sharing our success in Saskatchewan our vision is to host in partnership with Spelling Bee of Canada (SBOC) a National First Nations Spelling Bee. WIPCE 2017 is the perfect venue for Pauline to promote this valuable and innovative literacy initiative for all First Nations and Indigenous Communities.

The first ever First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee (FNPSB) aligns with *Truth and Reconciliation Reports*. The FNPSB hosted in partnership with SBOC was in response to creating partnerships and opportunities for building student engagement and lifelong learning for our First Nations youth in our communities. We know our First Nations youth are just as capable as everyone and we believe we needed to take action on this important and valuable literacy initiative. The FNPSB provides awareness and participation in a provincial/regional literacy competition where they earn the right and have the financial means to move forward to represent our province at the Spelling Bee of Canada Championships (Nationals) in Toronto. Our vision is to host a National First Nations Spelling Bee where all First Nations Schools across Canada come together to compete with the best of the best. Since the inception of the FNPSB in 2015, we had numerous inquiries regarding why The FNPSB is limited only to students of First Nations ancestry. The intention of the FNPSB is to create a venue to increase the literacy rates of our First Nations youth and to demonstrate that our First Nations students are just as skilled and talented and can compete with the best of the best given the opportunity. While we focus only on First Nations youth, we do hope to inspire other non -First Nations parents or groups to make the same investment in increasing the literacy rates of their youth.

Julie Spence

Founder of Spelling Bee of Canada

Julie Spence is the founder of Spelling Bee of Canada. In 1987, Julie listened to the government of the day about the relationship that parents had with their children's education. She was inspired to start a literacy movement that captures Spelling, Finances and Health to improve children's self confidence, public speaking skills and their overall well being. Spelling Bee of Canada was born after a deep introspection as well as her fond memories of the Spelling Bee programme in her hometown of Lucea, Hanover in Jamaica.

Julie Spence believes that in spite of her previous involvements, her life's purpose is to be a difference-maker in literacy. She has the passion, vision and energy to be a beacon of hope in uniting families around education and their children.

About Spelling Bee of Canada (SBOC)

Spelling Bee of Canada (SBOC), established in 1987, is an educational organization that encourages youth, parents, teachers and the community at large to participate in the education process. With the support of schools, student literacy representatives, sponsors, parents, chapter presidents and volunteers, Spelling Bee of Canada aims to encourage young people to expand their vocabulary, communication skills and self-confidence, by providing a foundation for future scholastic achievements.

For more information, please visit: www.spellingbeeofcanada.ca

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SpellingBeeofCa>

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William Kaysaywaysemat III and Family

Makayla Cannepotato and Family

Alexander Johansson and Family

Josie Singer and Family

Savannah Nicks and Family

Thomas Isbister and Family

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Onion Lake Cree Nation Reserve

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Big River First Nation Reserve

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Pauline Favel and The First Nation Provincial Spelling Bee

Julie Spence and The Spelling Bee of Canada

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Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) clip with permission from
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“Raven Song”

Shannon Thunderbird

“Free”

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Choir

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Ever Phoenix
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Salteaux Heritage School

Sesewahum School

Ahtahkakoop School

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Vice Chief Robert Merasty

Katherine Masuskapoe

Nicole Jordan

Clinton Swiftwolf

Lee-Ann Bonaise

Charlotte Campbell

The Katcheech Family

The Yellowbird Family

The Baldhead Family

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