

MEDIA RELEASE

ERIE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



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Erie County Public Library receives National Endowment for the Arts Big Read grant

Erie, PA – Erie County Public Library is one of 61 organizations nationwide selected to receive a 2021-2022 NEA Big Read grant. A grant of \$20,000 will support a community reading program focusing on “An American Sunrise” by Poet Laureate Joy Harjo from September 2021 through June 2022. An initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest, the NEA Big Read broadens understanding of our world, our communities and ourselves through the joy of sharing a good book.

Across the nation, the NEA Big Read offers a range of titles that reflect many different voices and perspectives, aiming to inspire conversation and discovery. The main feature of the initiative is a grants program, managed by Arts Midwest, which annually supports dynamic community reading programs, each designed around a single NEA Big Read selection.

The Big Read Erie County will supply 250 registrants with a copy of “An American Sunrise” to read while participating in the program in addition to collection copies available for check-out. The entire nine-month program is expected to serve nearly 2,500 participants through its 21 events and eight book discussions, culminating with a virtual booktalk and reading with author Joy Harjo.

“The Erie County Public Library is extremely excited to be able to offer this program celebrating Harjo’s work and tying it to Erie’s Native American history,” said Rachel Stevenson, adult services librarian and coordinator for the Big Read Erie County. “It is also an honor that a national organization like the National Endowment for the Arts recognizes the work we do here at the library.”

All events in the program will be published late summer to events.erielibrary.org with additional details and registration dates.

Events to include:

- Lectures from expert faculty on Native American contemporary issues, history, art and artefacts
- Craft activities featuring Native American basket weaving and food
- Demonstrations on Native American culture including singing and dancing
- Poetry workshops exploring themes and poems from Harjo’s book

– more –

- Performances by Native American poets in English and native language
- Book discussion with Professor Elizabeth Fogel, whose thesis centered on Harjo's work
- A children's take-home book box kit including Louise Erdrich's "Birch Bark House" and related activities that help young readers explore Native American culture and history
- A supplemental adult book group on Simon Winchester's "Land," which further investigates forced migration
- A guardian/child book club with the Housing Authority of the City of Erie
- Two other adult book clubs, one based on pre-Columbian Native American history and the other an anthology of Native American poetry edited by Harjo
- Jim Crow Museum designed an event specifically for Big Read Erie County comparing Native American racist memorabilia to Black racist memorabilia, to debut during the program

"For 15 years the NEA Big Read has supported opportunities for communities to come together around a book, creating a shared experience that encourages openness and conversations around issues central to our lives," said Ann Eilers, acting chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. "We congratulate Erie County Public Library for receiving an NEA Big Read grant and look forward to a wide variety of meaningful community events."

The program executed by Erie County Public Library is additionally supported by community partners who have pledged monetary donations and in-kind support such as program supplies, advertising, staffing support, and expertise. Partners include: Pressed, Werner books, Barnes & Noble, Whole Foods Co-op, Wegman's, WQLN Public Media, Erie Arts & Culture, Seneca-Iroquois National Museum (Salamanca, NY), Erie Times-News, Hurry Hill Farms Maple Museum, Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, Jefferson Education Society, Erie Regional Library Foundation, Friends of the Erie County Public Library, and County of Erie.

Since 2006, the National Endowment for the Arts has funded more than 1,700 NEA Big Read programs, providing more than \$23 million to organizations nationwide. In addition, Big Read activities have reached every Congressional district in the country. Over the past 15 years, grantees have leveraged more than \$50 million in local funding to support their NEA Big Read programs. More than 5.7 million Americans have attended an NEA Big Read event, over 90,000 volunteers have participated at the local level, and over 40,000 community organizations have partnered to make NEA Big Read activities possible.

For more information about the NEA Big Read, including book and author information, podcasts and videos, visit arts.gov/neabigread.

*Established by Congress in 1965, the **National Endowment for the Arts** is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit arts.gov to learn more.*

Arts Midwest believes that creativity has the power to inspire and unite humanity. Based in Minneapolis, Arts Midwest grows, gathers, and invests in creative organizations and communities throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six nonprofit United States Regional Arts Organizations, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 30 years. For more information, visit artsmidwest.org.

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