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# News Release

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## NMCC to Host African American Read-In on February 11

**Aroostook County** - To help celebrate Black History Month in February, as well as to promote literacy, Northern Maine Community College will be joining with schools, churches, libraries and other organizations across the county in hosting a Read-In. The public is invited to attend the NMCC event, which will take place at noon on Friday, February 11, in the College library.

Coordinating the annual event is English instructor Jennifer Graham and Gail Roy, assistant dean of learning resources. To keep things interesting for folks from the campus and local community who may have attended in previous years, the duo are taking a different direction with this year's Read-In.

“Previously, I selected authors and gave some biographical information. This year, we have asked students, faculty and staff to identify a piece of work by an African-American author that they like. Once they are done reading, we are also asking them to explain why they like the author and/or the work they selected,” explained Graham. “In doing so, we will be asking participants to explore African-American literature on their own and according to their preferences. This will result in more choice and will reflect what our campus identifies with in literature. In this sense, the event will be more personal than in past years.”

Graham plans to read the poem “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes at the Read-In. “It's one of my favorite poems. The reason it speaks to me is that it is about a student's reaction to a writing prompt given by an instructor. Hughes explores the dynamic between a white teacher and black student at a time (1951) when diversity, in and out of the classroom, was less understood. In the poem, he points out that not only can students learn from instructors, but instructors can learn from their students. This poem is a good reminder for me to try to see things from my students' points of view and to learn from them and the experiences they bring to the classroom,” said Graham.

To both help facilitate the selection of readings for the February 11 event, as well as to celebrate Black History Month, the library will be hosting a display throughout the month of February of books by African American authors. A number of African American authors are represented at the NMCC library in a variety of genres.

“Because African American authors are, above all, American authors, their works are of interest to any reader interested in American literature. But they are of special interest in offering a unique perspective on the American experience, very often an intellectually and culturally challenging one,” said Roy. “The Read-In is enjoyable because it encourages us to discover authors we might otherwise overlook and to recommend new books to add to the library's collection.”

Roy plans to read a short story by Percival Everett during this year's Read-In. Roy became a fan of Everett's work after first hearing his short story “The Fix” read aloud by Isaiah Sheffer on a radio program. She will be reading “The Appropriation of Cultures” during the Read-In. “In this piece, the main character, who is African American, appropriates and proudly displays the Confederate flag and in so doing renders it powerless as a symbol of racial division,” she said.

Nationwide, the Read-In is sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and by its Black Caucus. It has been endorsed by the International Reading Association. Over a million readers of all ethnic groups from the United States, the District of Columbia, the West Indies, African countries and more have participated since the Read-In first began in 1990. The goal is to make the celebration of African American literacy a traditional part of Black History Month activities.

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