



makes you think

## media release

### **TVO'S EMPIRE OF THE WORD EXPLORES READING OVER 5,000 YEARS OF HUMAN HISTORY, STARTING WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 25 2009**

Toronto, October 28, 2009 – The written word: in prehistoric times, it took the form of drawings in caves. Today it speeds past on the screens of our electronic devices at the touch of a finger. How did the simple act of reading come to be? How has it shaped our lives? And what role does a modern society play in providing and protecting literacy for all? **Wednesdays at 10 pm from November 25 to December 16**, TVO examines these questions in the world premiere of *Empire of the Word*, a fascinating four-hour documentary series chronicling the origins of reading and writing and its impact on 5,000 years of human history. *Empire of the Word* is presented by Oxford Learning.

Hosted by renowned Canadian-Argentine author Alberto Manguel and based on his *History of Reading* (Viking, 1996), *Empire of the Word* explores how reading and writing were born; how we learn to read; who or what might prevent us from reading; and the future of reading. Eight years in the making and shot in 15 countries, the series journeys from prehistory to present day and beyond, illustrating how reading and writing are inextricably linked to human evolution and existence.

We witness some of the people and events that create the story of the written word: the genesis of the alphabet; the earliest forms of portable reading; Alexander the Great's dream of the first universal library; the role of Irish monks in saving reading during the Dark Ages; the groundbreaking concept of interpreting your own meaning from a text; the printing press; and the challenges and opportunities for reading in a digital world. At the heart of the series is the question of why reading has survived throughout the ages despite poverty, resistance by organized religion, authoritarian rule, censorship, learning or health impediments and interactive media. While the invention of the Gutenberg press some 500 years ago made reading a universal possibility, the ability – and freedom – to read and write is not as universal as we may think, even in the 21st century.

Insight from authors, bloggers, educators, historians and scientists brings *Empire of the Word* to life and feature interviews in the film include:

- former lieutenant-governor of Ontario James K. Bartleman
- print/digital author and Governor General's Award nominee Kate Pullinger
- U.S. publisher Barney Rosset
- Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard
- Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen

*Empire of the Word* premieres on TVO's *The View From Here* and is the jewel in the crown of TVO's season-long programming commitment to literacy. "Literacy matters more than ever in the 21st century," says TVO's Chief Executive Officer, Lisa de Wilde. "Literacy skills are crucial to thriving and succeeding in today's complex, information-based world. TVO is committed to fostering greater literacy for all Ontarians and *Empire of the Word* is a great example of our commitment to engage people in a conversation about the importance of reading and writing."

Leading up to each Wednesday night episode of *Empire of the Word*, at 8 pm TVO's flagship current affairs program, *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, will support the series and its online companion, *Empire of the Word Online*, with discussions around literacy.

### ***Empire of the Word Online***

Coupled with the documentary series is ***Empire of the Word Online***, an innovative, interactive website available starting today at **[tvo.org/empireoftheword](http://tvo.org/empireoftheword)**. The site immerses visitors in the past, present and future of the written word.

Visitors can engage in a compelling, interactive mystery game that explores the themes of censorship and freedom of expression. Using elements of storytelling, networking, real-world events and dramatized videoblog footage, the mystery unfolds over eight weeks and revolves around the character of Lekha, a young Canadian writer who is trying to collect the pieces of an ancient Hindu text that has been suppressed for centuries. Players must help her locate the pieces with clues provided by another character, a dissident writer, in order to take Lekha to the next stage in her journey and push the narrative forward.

Visitors can also connect with each other in an online community to discuss issues, share ideas about reading and collaborate on the solving of the game.

The site will also provide a variety of educational games, links to relevant sites and a series of video interviews showcasing Canadian authors who discuss the topic of dissident writing. Look for Paul Quarrington (*The Ravine*), April Lindgren (*Headline: Murder*) and Russell Smith (*Noise*), among others.

Additionally, all episodes of the documentary series will be available for streaming at **[tvo.org/empireoftheword](http://tvo.org/empireoftheword)** following the broadcast.

For more information on *Empire of the Word* and *Empire of the Word Online*, including video clips, press kit and high-res imagery, please visit TVO's November 2009 Media Highlights at <http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/mmnr/tvo/nov2009/index.html>

### **About TVO**

TVO is Ontario's public educational media organization and a trusted source of interactive educational content that informs, inspires and stimulates curiosity and thought. TVO's vision is to empower people to be engaged citizens of Ontario through educational media. For more information, visit [tvo.org](http://tvo.org).

### **Where to find TVO**

Cable channel 2 (channel may vary in some areas), Bell TV channel 265, Star Choice channel 353.

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