Broadway production Hamilton celebrates American history, draws in sell-out crowds and claims fans across Canada. (Photo: Walter McBride, Getty Images)

When we heard about Wexford Collegiate School in Scarborough receiving a cease-and-desist letter for their unlicensed production of Hamilton, we got to wondering. First, about heartless intellectual property lawyers. Second: why would a group of Canadian students risk a takedown notice to perform an American history musical?

What about Canada's own history?

Don’t get us wrong—we dig Hamilton mania. The hip-hop musical recounts the American Revolutionary War with a diverse cast playing America’s founding fathers as they deliver rapid-fire verses about politics, love, war and social justice. The show won a GRAMMY and eleven Tony awards this year, and is constantly sold out (unless you’re willing to sell a kidney to pay for resale tickets). Craig found this out during an unsuccessful attempt to secure seats on his last trip to New York.

We also discovered that kids can’t get enough of Hamilton. They connect with the language of rap and hip-hop. They see themselves in the diverse cast. A new generation is finding themselves hooked on American history that also reflects the present.

Canada may have beaten America to the stage in releasing a smash-hit history musical. Billy Bishop Goes to War, released in 1978, recounts the life of World War I pilot Billy Bishop, and is one of Canada’s most widely-produced pieces of theatre.

But there are a few elements in Hamilton that Billy Bishop is missing.

“Hamilton goes beyond American history,” says Albert Shulz, creative director of Toronto-based theatre company Soulpepper. “It’s a cultural revolution of new voices on the Broadway stage, which has been so dominated by mainstream white culture.”

Shulz, like many Canadians, wants to see diversity on the Canadian stage and screen. Soulpepper just helped CBC launch Kim's Convenience, the first Canadian sitcom led by Asian actors. The show, which premiered October 11, is based on a play Soulpepper first ran in 2012.

“We have to make sure that the faces on our stage represent the faces in our community,” says Shulz.

Diversity could be the key to helping more Canadians see themselves in their own history.

Maybe it’s time we took a page from the Hamilton playbill and tried retelling our stories in a way that represents our country today, with new casts, and music that resonates with young people. These are our future leaders, and they have the most to learn from our past.

The next big musical might come from an Aboriginal artist, portraying the resurgence of Aboriginal culture in the aftermath of residential schools, suggests Shulz.

Canada has so many stories worth telling. Imagine a hip-hop remix of the coded gospel songs used to plan escapes and share directions on the Underground Railroad to Canada. Or a memoir musical (memoirsical?) about Nellie McClung and the Famous Five updated with Adele-style power ballads about the rights — and voices — of women.

Imagine an actor belting this out to the tune of “Rolling in the Deep.”

Stoke the embers burning in this land
Rise up like wildfire, in all daughters command
Finally we see what must be done
No more waiting, the revolution’s come

We probably shouldn’t be the ones to write it, but you get the idea.

And let’s not be afraid to show the darker moments in our history. The racism endured by former slaves in Canada. The internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. The exploitation of Indigenous Canadians.

Gord Downie’s haunting new multimedia project, Secret Path, about the death of 12-year-old Chanie Wenjack during his escape from a residential school could inspire other adaptations. They would help keep Wenjack’s legacy alive. Downie performed a song from Secret Path at WE Day, one of the most moving moments we’ve had on the stage.

This is our history, and it’s our duty to learn from and re-tell it. Let’s re-imagine these narratives to show all the diversity and creativity of Canada today. Because these stories belong to all of us, and every one of us has a part in telling them.