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Diversifying Children's Literature: Practical approaches to Inclusive Collections

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Session aim

1. Track the development of diversity in children's literature over the years, highlighting key drivers, successes, and what still needs to be done.
2. Share how we made Birmingham Newman Library's School Experience Collection more inclusive, providing ideas that delegates can apply within their own University Libraries.

There will be a chance for participation and feedback part-way through the presentation and opportunity for questions at the end.



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Developments in Diversity

Where we were, where we are, where next?

Definition and the case for diversity

Diversity within children's literature is the ongoing process of increasing representation of a wide range of identities, cultures and experiences. This includes race, ethnicity, disability, gender identity, sexuality, and wellbeing.

The aim is for children to encounter the full spectrum of human experience through story. Representation supports the development of empathy and personal identity.



Diversity in Children's Lit - Historical development

- 19th Century - moral and religious tales
- 20th Century - introduction of complex themes and major book awards
- American voices of influence:
 - **Langston Hughes** - role of literature to dream and inspire (Lewis, 2023)
 - **Rudine Simms Bishop** - critical for children to see themselves and identify with the experiences





Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors



Mirrors validate personal identity.

Windows offer cultural insight.

Sliding Glass Doors enable immersion
beyond lived reality.

(Bishop, 1990)

Key framework has shaped practice
amongst teachers, librarians and
publishers.

(McNair and Edwards, 2021, p.209)

Diversity in Children's Literature – Britain

- **Professor Karen Sands O'Conner**

- CILIPs Carnegie Awards Diversity Review
- CLPE's Reflecting Realities Research



- **Dame Malorie Blackman**

- Groundbreaking Black British author (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019)
- Children's Laureate 2013-2015



Black representation

- 1990-2000s showed underrepresentation of black characters, and when represented one dimensional and stereotypical (Garad, 2021 and Short, 2025a)
- Recurring Themes: fugitivity, fantasy, hope.
- Better representation - breaking norms, lived experience from black authors

Opportunity for reflection / comment



Cultural authenticity and sensitivity

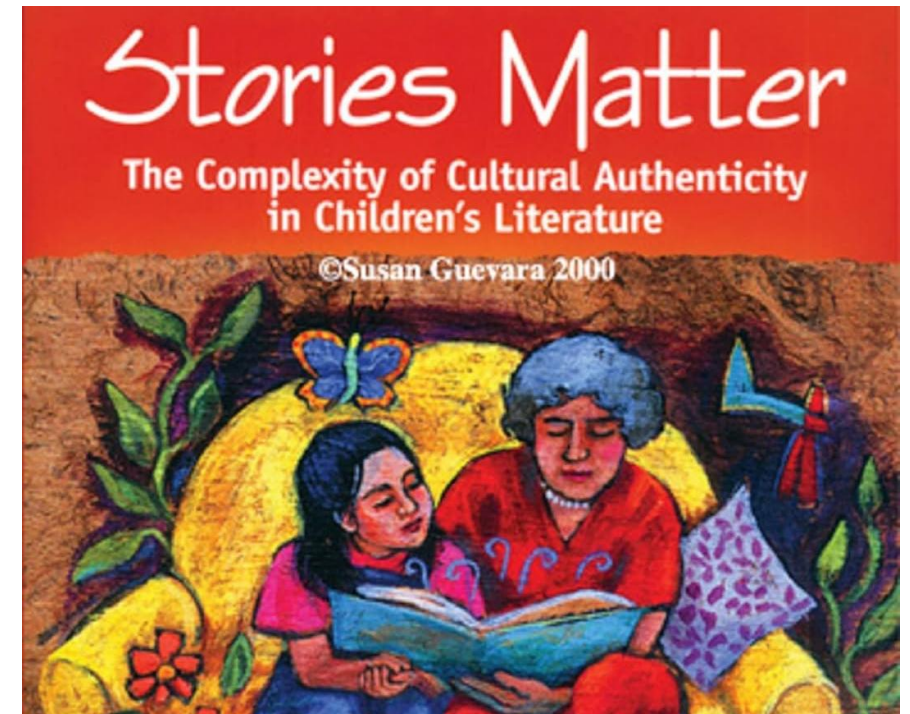
Lived experience enhances authenticity. Culturally authentic books provide readers with a deeper sense of diversity

(Kaczmarczyk and Adams, 2021)

Stories highlight structural and social issues.

Global variations in children's cultural knowledge

(Short, 2025, p.4)



Representation = Impact?

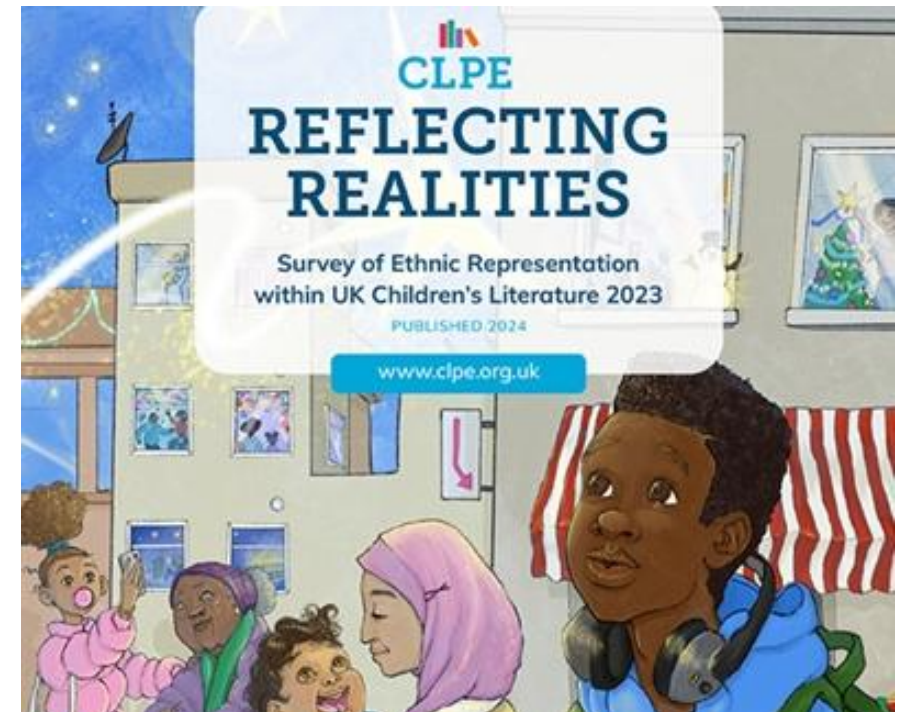
Several studies in the 1990s (Naidoo, 2014) indicated that with Black boys have greater recall if main character is also Black, no evidence for Black girls.

Lack of authoritative studies about effect of diverse literature on children - nothing to argue against it.

Rudine Bishop's analogy of Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Doors is well supported.

Revisions, Censorship, Publishing Trends

- “Classic” children’s literature - Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, P.L. Travers, Laura Ingalls, Dr Suess
 - Superficial edits (Morrisey, 2023)?
- CLPE track ethnic representation - rise and fall in representative publishing (CLPE 2023)
- Why?
 - Complacency
 - BLM and Pandemic



Renewed Focus and Meaningful Representation

“The importance of children seeing a variety of perspectives, ethnicities, and backgrounds in books cannot be overstated. If we don’t create enough nuanced and authentic representations of characters of colour detailing a range of experience and perspectives, we risk crystallising the dangerous and already potent idea that the realm of books and storytelling are for a select few and always will be”

Dr Zaahida Nabagereka (CLPE, 2024, p.27)



Broadening diversity

- Diversity includes lived, social, and regional factors (Nadidoo, 2014a) - sexuality, socio-economic status, differently abled
- Meaningful representation – stories which are not primarily concerned with identity but still represent

Heather Has Two Mummies

- Published 1989 – one of the first LGBTQ children's books to attract broad attention
- Praise and criticism – too simplistic, did not portray same sex parenting accurately (Esposito, 2007, p.69)





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What we did

Diversifying School Experience Collection

Picture Fiction – Revised Themes

- Health, Disability & Neurodiversity
- Culture, Heritage and Global Stories
- Diversity, Inclusion & Equality
- Families & Relationships
- Social Issues
- Kindness, Empathy & Respect



Fiction – Colour Coding

- Colour stickers on book spines – identify suitable titles using the Fiction Themes poster at the end of each bay.
- Books divided by theme *and* key stage – SEC page on the Education Subject Guide





Audit - Identifying black and ethnically marginalised authors

Analysed stock children's fiction and picture fiction to identify authors from the global majority

Categorize titles within broad themes - make more accessible for our users.



Diversity Matters: Education Subject Guides

Birmingham Newman University Library / Subject Guides / Education (PGCE Primary and Birmingham Newman Direct) / Diversity Matters

- Getting started
- Finding sources with Library Search
- Books, e-books and chapters
- School Experience Collection
- Diversity Matters**
- Journals and articles
- Specialist research tools
- Data and Statistics
- Internet research
- Study skills resources

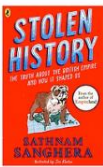
Visit our Diversity Matters Homepage to find out more about what the library is doing to make collections more inclusive.



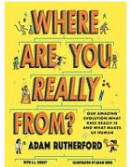
DIVERSITY MATTERS

WIDEN REPRESENTATION IN YOUR READING

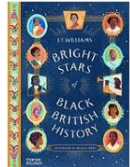
Key texts and recent purchases



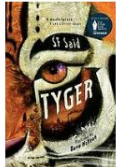
Stolen history: the truth about the British Empire and how it shaped us



Where are you really from?



Bright stars of black British history



Tiger

Diversity Matters for Primary Education

We are committed to improving access to resources that reflect the diverse cultures and inclusive values of our community. As many of our ITE students work with children from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, it is essential that they have access to materials that support both their academic studies and their teaching practice while on placement.

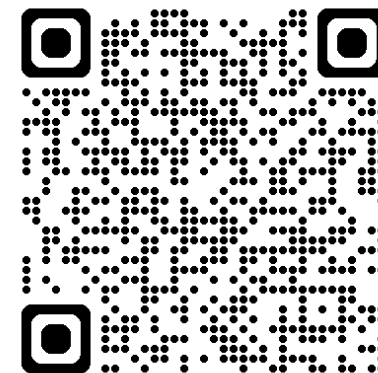
To support this, we are showcasing children's authors who come from ethnically marginalised backgrounds or who champion representation in the classroom.

Spotlight on Authors of Colour



- Recent book purchases and recommend a book
- Spotlight authors
- Shelf Marks for new Picture Fiction Themes
- Useful online resources for trainee teachers
- Part of wider library initiative to decolonise and diversify
- Check it out!

https://libguides.newman.ac.uk/subject_guides/PGCEPrimary/DiversityMatters



Promotion

- Displays
- Online: library website, Moodle, Social Media
- Staff Student Consultative Committees
- Staff Meetings
- Library Champions
- Teaching Sessions & Workshops



Where do I start?

- Audit and Weeding – collection management to develop collection
- Promote - spotlight existing materials
- Create long-term plan – SMART goals
- Academic staff – targeted intervention and input
- Online resources – use your subject guides to promote collection and searching techniques
- Be Enthusiastic!



Where we started...when do we finish?



- Ongoing long-term project
- Gradual process – working within time and budget constraints
- Contributing to institutional values

All Belong

*We treat each and every person,
in each and every community,
with dignity and respect.*

Thank you for listening!

Any Questions?

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