



CENTRE FOR LITERACY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

REFLECTING REALITIES

Survey of Ethnic Representation
within UK Children's Literature 2018



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“I pictured the grandma different than the real one because in my head I thought she was going to be pink because in most of the books people are peach.”

Introduction

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) is an independent UK charity dedicated to raising the literacy achievement of children by putting quality literature at the heart of all learning. We provide a wide range of professional literacy training at our Centre in London and across the country. Research is core to everything we do and our training and resources are all based on sound pedagogy, extensive research and best practice. Established in 1972, our knowledge and expertise is rooted in a rich history and we continue to lead current thinking and practice in the teaching of literacy in primary schools.

We take our jobs as curators and promoters of quality literature very seriously. We have always sought to put the best quality titles in the hands of children because we have first-hand insight of the transformative power of literature. Strong storylines, nuanced illustrations, relatable protagonists and rich language that engages children are just some of the features that make a book stand out. Because we work with thousands of books each year we have noticed the longstanding lack of quality inclusive and representative books that reflect the realities of many of the children in our classrooms.

Our first survey of ethnic minority representation within UK children's literature was [published in 2018](#). Funded by Arts Council England, the 'CLPE Reflecting Realities' report was the first study of its kind in the UK and was received with a phenomenal amount of interest both nationally and internationally. The stark figures in that report highlighted the extent of underrepresentation and sparked much discussion and reflection across all stakeholders. The report has been recognised as ground-breaking across the literacy landscape and we were particularly pleased that Farrah Serroukh was awarded the Brenda Eastwood Award for excellence in the teaching of diversity and inclusion by the UKLA in July 2019.

This is our second Reflecting Realities report and we are committed to providing year-on-year figures to support the continuing conversation around this important subject.



Louise Johns-Shepherd
Chief Executive, CLPE



Project Foreword

Before the publication of the CLPE report in 2018 the term 'Reflecting Realities' was not widely used. In the last year it has become a commonly-used phrase to explain the importance of ensuring the world of books accurately reflects the real life experiences of readers.

We know that the under-representation of minority groups in children's literature is not a new phenomenon and that sourcing quality, inclusively-representative books that reflect the realities of all the children in our classrooms has been a longstanding challenge. For decades pioneers, activists and advocates, from individuals like Verna Wilkins through to independent booksellers such as Letterbox Library, have worked tirelessly to promote inclusive and representative quality children's literature. The challenge isn't new, the arguments are not new and the invaluable advocacy of the many who have come before us certainly isn't new. What is new is this report and its methodological approach to the subject. The first survey was published in 2018 and reported data from the UK publishing output of 2017. Now, one year on, we are producing this survey, which reports on publishing output from 2018.

Our findings in the 2018 report – which covered data for the calendar year 2017 – did not surprise us. What did surprise us, and indeed inspire us, was the range of ways in which last year's report galvanised others. Our report shone a spotlight on the work of independent publishers like Alanna Max, Knights Of, Lantana Publishing, Otter-Barry Books and Tiny Owl whose commitment to reflecting the realities of young readers was already evident in their work. Many of these pioneering publishers participated in the #readtheonepercent social media campaign, which was sparked by our original report. The report also highlighted a range of initiatives within larger publishing houses who are also working to address under-representation. The publication of the report provided the inspiration for a crowdfunding initiative to create Knights Of's permanent Round Table bookshop in the heart of Brixton, London. Our findings also influenced new initiatives from organisations such as Pop Up, Literature Wales, Africa Writes and the British Library, to name only a few.

BookTrust's report *Representation of People of Colour among Children's Book Authors and Illustrators* considered this area of study from the perspective of authors and illustrators. This report highlighted the challenges and campaigned for better representation among the producers and creators of children's literature.

We continue to work closely with all publishers and recognise their continued engagement with this vital issue. More producers of children's literature have submitted their books for review this year, and have supported us to collate the data necessary to further stimulate conversation, monitor change and support efforts to redress the imbalance. This continued willingness to engage is a testament to the industry's recognition of the importance of representation in children's literature.

The data in our 2019 report, based on content from books published in 2018, indicates some small yet positive shifts. That improvement shows that change is possible, but it also serves to emphasise that there is still much to be done.

The first year of this work set a benchmark. This year, and in years to come, we hope to contribute to an ongoing conversation that supports the producers of literature to be critically reflective and considered about the choices that are made in the book making process.

The value of reflecting realities, individuals, identities, cultures and communities is rooted in the importance of elevating all lived experiences and recognising them as worthy of note and exploration. To understand and be understood is at the heart of the human experience. The space between what is written and what is read is often a safe space in which we can make sense of our lives and the world around us. The call for more inclusive books is as much about volume as it is about quality. Better representation means just that, better in all regards, because all young readers deserve just that, the best that the literary world has to offer.

We are heartened by the overwhelming commitment and support of this work across all stakeholders and we look forward to a continued investment in making the highest quality inclusive and representative literature for the benefit of all young readers.



Farrah Serroukh
Learning Programmes
Leader, CLPE

Executive Summary

There were 11,011¹ children's books published in the UK in 2018. Of these 743 featured BAME² characters.

7% of the children's books published in 2018 featured BAME characters, up from 4% in 2017.

4% of the children's books published in the UK in 2018 had a BAME main character, up from 1% in 2017.

Over a quarter of the books submitted only featured BAME presence in the form of background characters.



We received a greater volume of submissions this year compared to the first cycle of submissions in 2018, with more publishers engaging in the process this time. There was a better balance in terms of the spread of titles aimed at readers across age groups.

The percentage of total books published featuring characters from an identified ethnic minority category remained significantly lower than the corresponding percentage of the BAME pupil population³ in England. This was true in all categories.

There were 77 titles defined as 'fantasy', making up 25% of the fiction submissions to the survey. This is a positive shift away from patterns we saw in the 2017 data where BAME characters were confined to a very narrow set of genres.

There was a 10% increase in books featuring social justice themes, with these titles making up 20% of the submissions. This is likely to correlate with a larger volume of social justice-themed books on the market during the year.

As in the last cycle, we considered the type of social justice themes explored. 29% of the social justice-themed titles focused on the generic celebration of difference. Books of this nature have a valid and important role to play as a stimulus for reflection and discussion. However it is important that a balance is struck to ensure that BAME presence is not solely confined to books in which otherness is the underpinning feature.

20% of the 'social justice' themed books submitted in this category focused on the environment. This corresponds with current societal concerns about climate change and illustrates the ways in which art and literature often mirror life and how children's literature can often serve as a vehicle to support producers and consumers of books to grapple with the concerns of the moment.

We categorised the submitted non-fiction titles into subject matter categories. There was a better balance of types of non-fiction submitted this year, with an improvement in the balance of titles targeted at the range of age groups as well.

Although the figures indicate an increase in the proportion of ethnic minority characters featured in children's books, we did receive a number of books which raised concerns about the portrayals of characters and the impressions that such representations could convey. These complex and multi-layered issues emphasise the difficulty in focussing on quantity alone and are discussed in the second section of this report '*Reflecting on content*' (p8).

Whilst we have seen improvements across all areas, the baseline set in the first cycle was tremendously low. There is still therefore much to be done. We hope that the upward trend is a sign of the promise that is to come in the drive towards to redressing the imbalance and is one that is sustained over time.

¹ Source: Nielsen Book Data (includes children's fiction, non-fiction and picture books; does not include comic strips, novelty books, annuals, early learning and reference books)

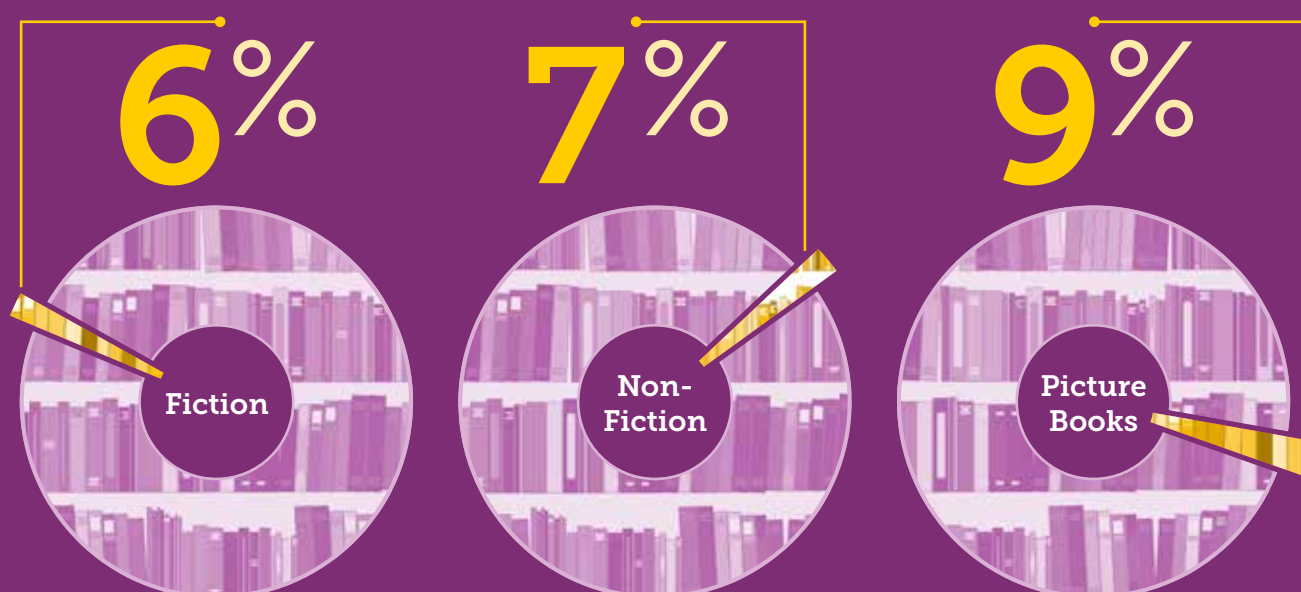
² The acronym BAME meaning Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic can be limiting but is used within the body of this report for the sake of brevity and to provide a common point of reference. Although it is used as a collective term, it is important to note that people from BAME backgrounds are not a homogenous group.

³ Source: The Department for Education reported in 2018 that 33.1% of pupils of compulsory school age in England were of minority ethnic origin: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf

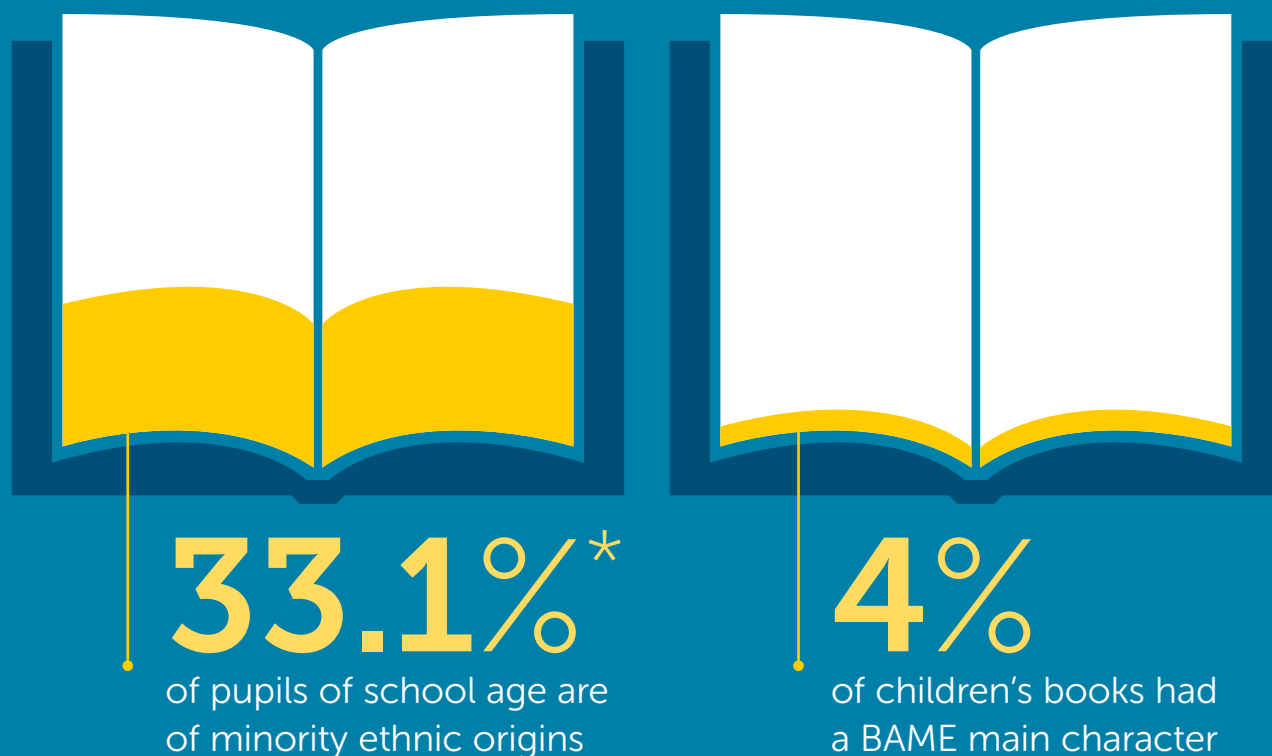
CLPE 2018 Overview of Ethnic Minority Presence in UK Children's Literature



Proportion of Ethnic Minority Representation in Books According to Text Type

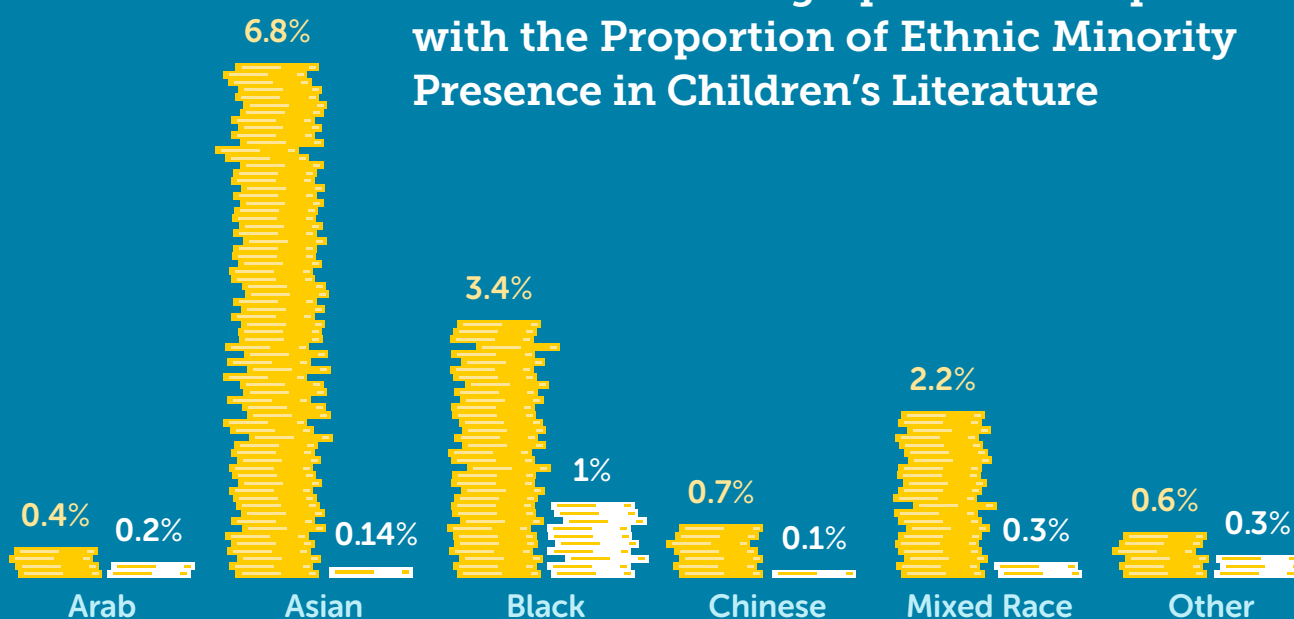


CLPE 2018 Overview of Ethnic Minority Makeup of Main Characters in UK Children's Literature



* Source: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf

Contrast in Demographic Make-up with the Proportion of Ethnic Minority Presence in Children's Literature



KEY: Percentage of Population in England and Wales Reported as Belonging to an Identified Ethnic Minority Category

Percentage of Total Books Published Featuring BAME Main Characters

Source: Office of National Statistics



Reflecting on content

“Most of the people I pictured were white because in most of the stories I read there are no black people.”

Numbers don't tell the full story – Quantity vs Quality

The figures in this study do indicate an improvement in the proportion of ethnic minority characters featured in children's books. This is undoubtedly a positive step in the right direction. The increase in submissions, the willing participation of the publishing industry and the upward shift in the representative numbers are all positive indicators that stakeholders are committed to redressing the imbalance. This is crucial.

However, we would encourage stakeholders to view the slight increase in ethnic minority presence compared to the first cycle with caution. The core purpose of CLPE's work is not solely to redress the imbalance and encourage an increase in the volume of books featuring BAME presence. The other key aim is to encourage quality portrayals and presence. Quantity alone will not suffice, particularly if the quality is poor or, worse still, problematic.

One of the most common questions arising from the first cycle of this work related to why we had not factored in the presence of animals in children's literature – in other words, we were asked why we had not removed the totals for books featuring animals before calculating the totals of books with BAME representation. In this cycle of reporting, publishers asked us to provide data relating to the proportionate presence of animals in the 2018 output. Consequently, we added the reporting of this information as an additional requirement of this cycle. Publishers self-reported the total number of their books featuring main casts solely comprising animals or inanimate objects published in 2018.

Publishers reported to us that 42% of the books they published in 2018 featured animals or inanimate objects as main cast characters and 58% featured human main cast characters. Given that BAME presence makes up such a small proportion of these human casts, these self-reported figures further illustrate the ways, in which under-representation can impact on reader identity and shape reader outlook. The self-reported statistics indicate that a reader from a BAME background is much more likely to encounter a book where an animal is the main character than they are to encounter a book which contains a character that shares their ethnicity or cultural heritage. The same cannot be said for a reader from a white background.

Another common question asked of us has been – "how can we do better?" To help answer this question we have pulled out some common threads from within this cycle of submissions, and we have reproduced these below. We have tried to frame our findings so that they support future dialogue and give those within and beyond the children's literature world a useful way of talking about the complex and multi-layered issues this survey highlights.

We have included specific examples of good practice where appropriate, and we have highlighted problematic themes from across several titles. Nothing we say below is exclusive to any one publisher. Where we have made text specific references this has been done with the express permission of the publisher concerned. We felt it was important to highlight good practice wherever we could.

Throughout this work we have remained committed to preserving the anonymity of publishers. This report is not, and never has been, about vilifying the publishing industry. Publishers have publicly acknowledged their commitment to inclusivity and better representation. This commentary is offered in order to support this.

“In my imagination, when I read chapter books a lot of the people are white.”



Notable Patterns

Characterisation

Whilst the number of BAME characters has increased, this survey raised concerns about the portrayals of some of the characters in the books submitted and the impressions that such representations could convey. It was often the case that characters from BAME backgrounds in the submitted books were less well drawn than equivalent white characters, both in terms of actual illustration and in terms of character development.

For example, there were a significant number of books submitted where characters were drawn with exaggerated features that amplified their ethnicity in a way that reduced them to caricatures. We observed instances of colourism, in which there was a direct correlation with the skin tone and the virtue of a character. The more virtuous the character, the lighter their complexion and vice versa.

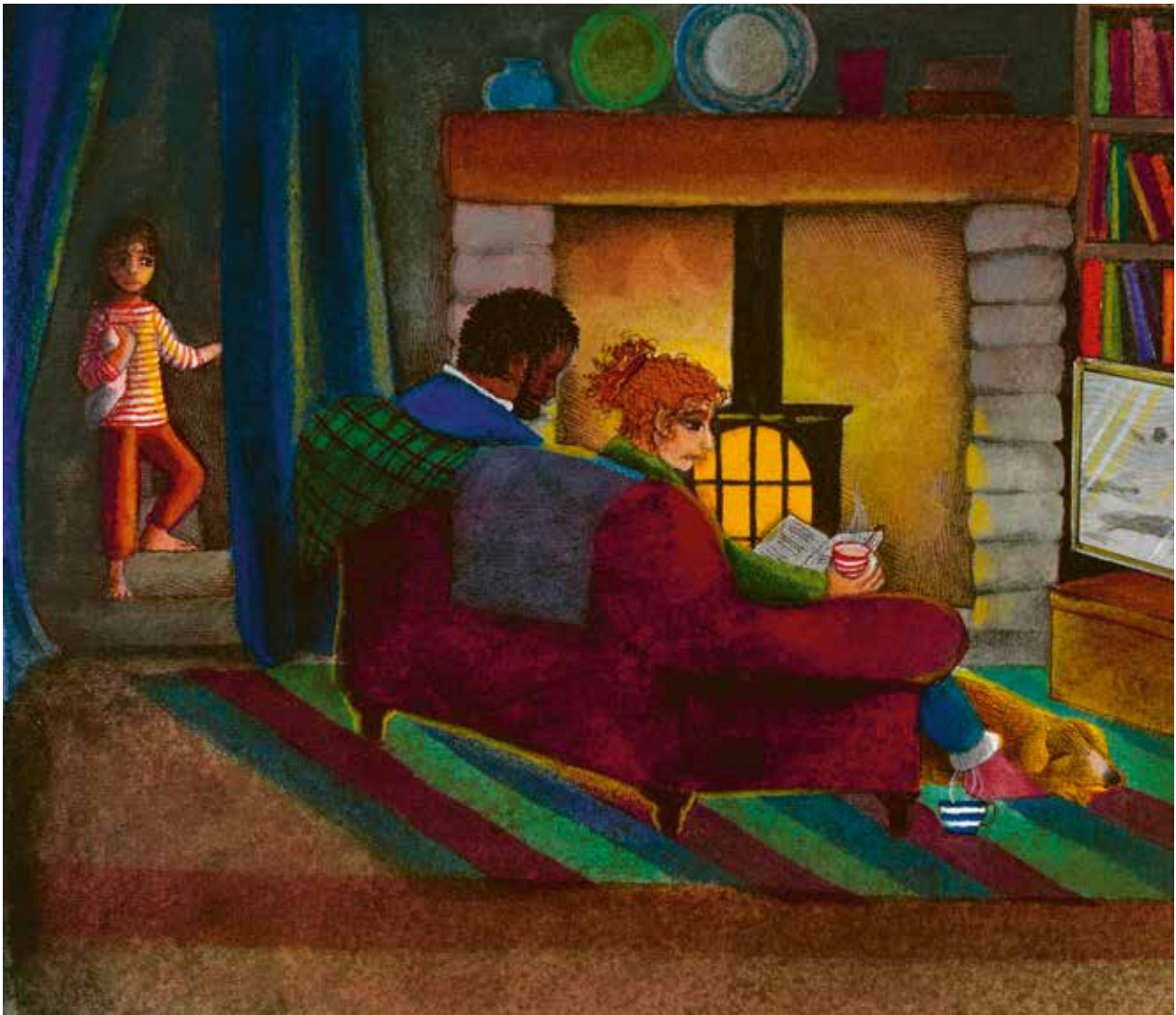
We did receive a number of books in this cycle where characters from BAME backgrounds were underdeveloped, falling victim to lazy typecasting that at times veered towards negative stereotyping and problematic portrayals.

There are obviously many different styles of illustration and illustrators are artists who will want to bring their own flair and style to any book. However, when commissioning books with illustrations of human characters it is important to give due consideration to capturing the distinctive and varied details, features and qualities that convey the unique essence of an individual in a respectful and authentic way.

Anna McQuinn's *Zeki Gets a Check-up*, illustrated by Ruth Hearson, which was submitted in this cycle, is a beautiful example of this. Ruth treats her subject matter with real love and affection, breathing life into each character through careful consideration about hair texture, facial features and skin tones, resulting in illustrations that are relatable and exude life and vibrancy.

Illustrations © Ruth Hearson, 2018 from
Zeki Gets a Check Up by Anna McQuinn.
Reproduced by kind permission of Alanna Max Books.





Illustrations © Jane Ray, 2018 from
Corey's Rock by Sita Brahmachari.
Reproduced by kind permission of Otter-Barry Books.

Readers are more likely to connect with well-drawn, well-developed and well-rounded characters and their ethnicity doesn't necessarily need to define them any more than a white protagonist is defined by theirs. Sita Brahmachari's *Corey's Rock* is a touching story that deals with the universal themes of love, loss and bereavement in a tender, sensitive and moving way. Although moments in the text do address race, this is only ever appropriate to the plot, and the fact that the story is based on a mixed race family does not define or become the overarching focus of the narrative.

Some of the historical fiction and non-fiction titles submitted in this round of the survey featured portrayals of BAME figures which were oversimplified, inaccurate or problematic. Subject matter relating to content about 'explorers', for example, skimmed over the more contentious part of the historical facts, either resulting in misrepresentation or total negation of lived experiences. We accept that it can be challenging to condense complex and mature subject matter into child-friendly language and formats. However, if a publisher chooses to produce a book about a historical subject, theme, era or figure for young readers, there is a responsibility to ensure that the subject matter is well-researched and handled with due care and consideration out of respect for the subject and the reader.

CHAPTER

1

JAMAICA, 1783 BARRATT HALL ESTATE

I swept the paths in the flower garden as if I was the devil cutting down every sinner in hell. But I kept my face cool as an evening breeze. No one would see my anger if I could help it. I screwed up my eyes to stop them prickling. I didn't want anyone to notice how hard I was trying not to think of Mamma and my

1

Text © Catherine Johnson, 2018 from *Freedom*.
Reproduced by kind permission of Scholastic.

baby sister Martha. Would they be on the wagon by now? I'd seen it arrive nearly an hour ago. Mamma had hugged me tight before I left for work, told me to be strong. I didn't want to let her go. I hugged Martha too but she was grizzling like she knew something was up and there was nothing in the world I could do for her.

I would probably never see them again.

Even so, I kept my eyes down, my anger bottled up. I didn't want Missis Palmer, the housekeeper, telling me my business, or worse one of the Barratts. Either the young master or the old mistress who liked to sit on the veranda with her parrot, Mr Bird, her hand resting on her long hardwood stick. Although the young master was callous, sharp-tongued and nasty, it was his mother, the old mistress who was worse. I gripped the broom tighter. On my right hand there were only four fingers. And while the old mistress hadn't chopped it off herself, she had stood by while Mr Bird took his great black beak, sharp as a machete, and pecked it clean off.

Last night the rain had come down heavy as

2

Catherine Johnson's *Freedom* is a prime example of good practice in this area. Her respect for the discipline of historical enquiry and her chosen subject matter are evident in every moment of *Freedom*. Her careful and extensive research, combined with her passion and commitment to creating well-developed, well-drawn, and nuanced characters set against authentic historical backdrops, elevates both the historical subject matter and the reader.

stones, now the hibiscus blooms carpeted the path in every shade of blue and purple, and my job was to sweep up every single one. The roses seemed to have enjoyed the drink and just opened up, white and pink; so much colour. I knew I should have felt joyful at the work of God's hand, but I did not.

Oh, I knew that working in the gardens was a nice, nice job. I knew I was lucky I didn't have to break my back in the fields with Mamma, cutting the sugar cane with baby Martha strapped to her back. So even though I wanted to walk through all the flower beds, stamping on everything, killing it all, I kept sweeping.

Old Thomas, the gardener, with his bent back and barely a hair on his head, called out to me. I looked up and he waved me over. I threw down the broom. He was taking a cutting from a lantana tree, holding the branch so tenderly it might have been a baby.

"This is the one, see, Nat? Cut the stem here where it fork." Old Thomas kissed his teeth. "Are you watching, Nathaniel? How you expect to learn?"

"Excuse me, sir," I said.

Thomas grinned, showing two teeth, one top, one bottom. He shook his head. "You think I don't know

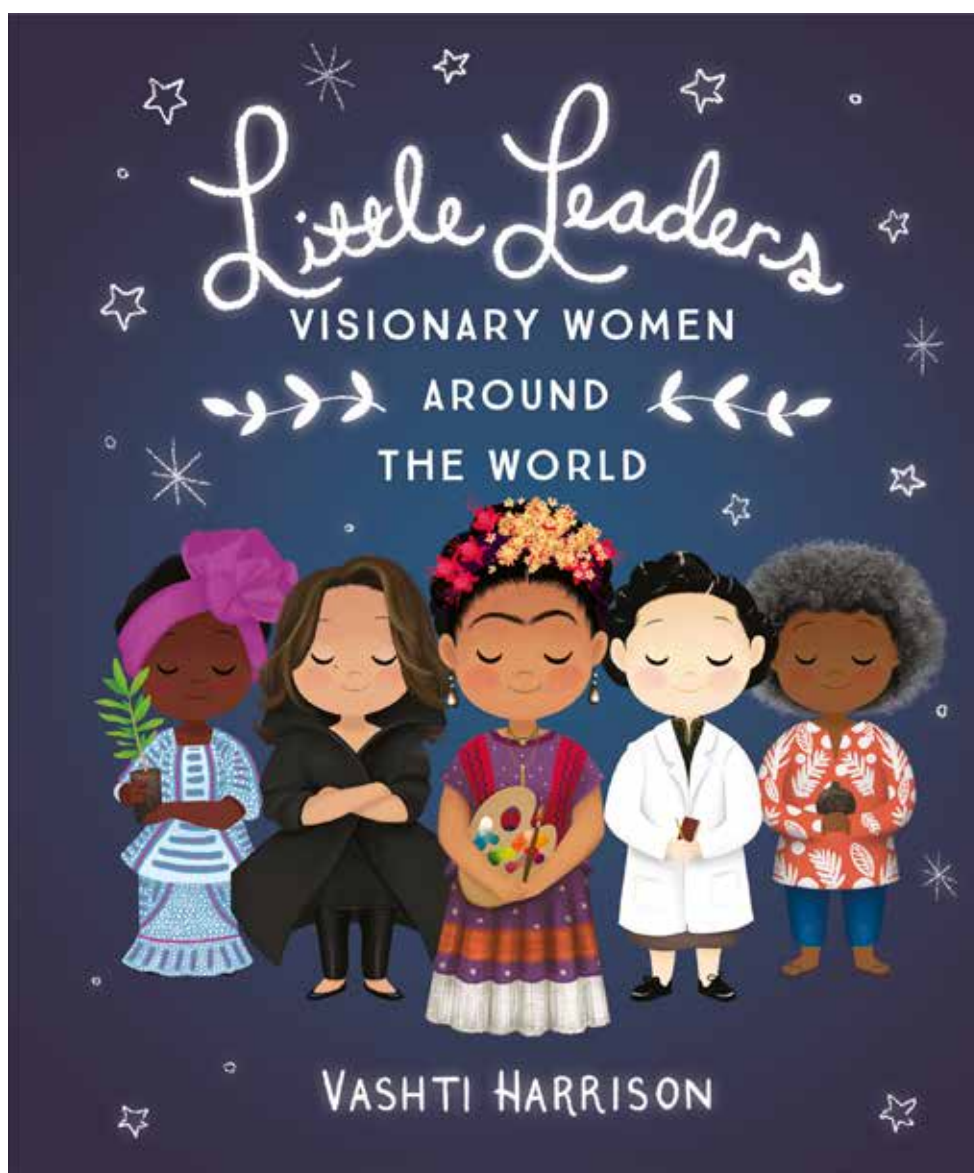
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Palette Choices

We had a significant number of books submitted in this round of the survey where colour choices to denote skin tone made it difficult to identify ethnicity and resulted in problematic representation. Orange, purple and grey were commonly used to represent BAME characters. As reviewers, we weren't always clear if the book was part of the survey because an illustrator had intentionally depicted BAME characters as orange, purple or grey or if this was the interpretation by the publishers when choosing to submit it as a book that represented BAME characters. This raises questions both about choices of colour for portrayal of BAME characters and whether or not such titles should be deemed eligible for the purposes of this study.

We did however, find excellent examples of books where artistic talent, sensitivity and attention to detail resulted in beautifully authentic and varied rendering of skin tones and complexion.

Vashti Harrison's *Little Leaders: Visionary Women Around the World* is a prime example of this. Her distinctive style manages to marry its magical quality with a delicately observed acknowledgement of the breadth and variation of human skin tones and hair textures.



Illustrations © Vashti Harrison, 2018
from *Little Leaders, Visionary Women Around the World* by Vashti Harrison.
Reproduced by kind permission
of Puffin Books.



Illustrations © Tom Percival, 2018 from **Ruby's Worry** by Tom Percival. Reproduced by kind permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Tom Percival's *Ruby's Worry*, not only manages to convey beautifully nuanced skin tones but his work goes a step further to illustrate the ways in which the nuance can be retained and effectively portrayed even in black and white illustrations.

Hena Khan's book, *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: A Muslim Book of Shapes*, illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini offers a master class in how to portray the rich range of complexions that make up the human race with sensitive and beautifully observed nuance.

“I think I'd like to read more about people who aren't known that well.”

Illustrations © Mehrdokht Amini, 2018 from **Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: A Muslim Book of Shapes** by Hena Khan. Reproduced by kind permission of Chronicle Books.





Illustrations © Holly Sterling, 2018 from
15 Things Not to Do with a Puppy by Margaret McAllister.
 Reproduced with kind permission of Lincoln Children's Books.

Holly Sterling's illustrations in Margaret McAllister's *15 Things Not to Do with a Puppy* showcases how to capture and portray a range of complexions through her gentle and distinctively playful style.

Jessica Love's debut *Julián is a Mermaid* is a carefully considered, stunningly beautiful celebration of variations of skin tones and complexions.

Each illustrator uses different techniques and approaches and has their own unique style. What they all have in common is a reverence for their subject matter, which results in lovingly crafted, beautiful, memorable characters for all readers to enjoy and identify with.

Illustrations © Jessica Love, 2018 from
Julián is a Mermaid by Jessica Love.
 Reproduced by kind permission of Walker Books Ltd.



Language Choices

As we witnessed in our first cycle of this work, there were evident challenges in effectively describing skin tone without exoticising the character, patronising the reader or compromising the quality of the writing. In the books submitted for this survey we found it was commonplace to use the name of different types of coffee to describe different skin tones, with characters at times being described as being a 'mocha shade' or having a 'latte tone'. In many instances, this served as a form of shorthand for signifying the ethnicity of a character, with very little meaningful expansion or exploration beyond this.

Hair and the description of hair seemed to be the way in which ethnicity was implied in a number of the submitted books. In some instances the words 'wavy' or 'curly' were the only cue that would suggest that the character was from an ethnic minority background. These cursory and problematic descriptions diminish and undermine the presence of BAME characters.

We did also come across good examples, which counter this within the 2018 submissions. Onjali Q Raúf's debut title, *The Boy at the Back of the Class* introduces the characters in a way that highlights their ethnicity without labouring the point and in doing so normalises their presence within her story. Her description of Ahmet's classmates illustrates how language can be used to effectively capture the individuals in the space without reducing them to a menu item in a coffee shop.

The heart of this research is driven by the desire to improve quality ethnic minority presence and representation in children's literature, with the hope that readers 'see' themselves and others as equally entitled to occupy the literary space. In view of this, purple characters with wavy hair, described as having a 'cappuccino hue' do not suffice and certainly do not contribute to the realisation of this aspiration.

Text © Onjali Q Raúf, 2018 from
The Boy At the Back of the Class, illustrated by Pippa Curnick.
 Reproduced with kind permission of Orion Children's Books.

Josie has large, brown eyes and at least a million freckles across her face. She's tall and gangly and is always chewing on her hair. She's the fastest girl in our year and can kick a football past any goalie from the other side of the pitch. She's the coolest person I know, and I've known her since we were three. Our mums say we became instant friends the first day we started nursery, so they decided to become friends too. I don't really remember much about myself at that age, but Josie is in all my school memories. We even got our first detention together last year – all because of a hamster called Herbert.

Josie had heard one of the upper school bullies say that he was going to flush our class hamster, Herbert, down the toilet at home-time. Josie told me, and we decided to go on a Hamster Rescue Mission. We hid Herbert in my rucksack before home-time and took him straight to my house. But of course, Mum found out and made me take him back the very next day. I tried to explain to boring Mr Thompson what had happened, but he wouldn't listen and gave me detention. And even though she didn't have to, Josie stood up and said she had helped to steal Herbert too – just so we

could do detention together. You know a friend's a Best Friend when they're willing to sit in detention with you.

Michael has the neatest, puffiest Afro out of all the boys in our year. Most people think he's weird. But not us. His glasses are always broken, and his shoelaces are never done right, so he's always tripping up or bumping into things when he walks. But we're all so used to it now that we never notice. He's mostly quiet but when he does say something, grown-ups usually look impressed and say that it's 'ingenious' or 'insightful' or use other strange words beginning with 'in'. I don't know what they mean, but I guess they mean he's clever. Grown-ups always like coming up with long words for simple things.

Michael gets made fun of a lot because he can't run fast or kick a ball in a straight line, but he doesn't care. I wouldn't care either if I was as rich as him. His dad is a professor and his mum is a lawyer, and because they're always busy, they buy him all the latest gadgets and books and the coolest new games. When we went to his house last year for his birthday party, we saw his room for the first time. It looked like the inside of a toy store. I think it must be easier not to care about what people think when you've got that many toys in your life.

Power Dynamics

The problematic imposition of social hierarchies on the grounds of ethnicity were evident in a number of the submitted titles. Examples of this included: inequity in the distribution of dialogue; inaccurate or misleading historical portrayals that either diminished marginalised individuals or sugar-coated problematic figures; instances where BAME characters served exclusively as props and sidekicks; and other instances where the key function

of BAME characters was purely to provide comedic relief. Again, we did not see the same issues for white characters in the submitted titles. The dynamics between a cast of characters and what this implies in terms of their individual roles and agency within the narrative is an important aspect to consider as part of any editorial process.

“Reading books with people who look like you will give you an extra boost of confidence in who you are. I want people to be proud of what they look like and who they are.”



Degrees of Erasure

The increased figures for books featuring BAME characters implies a higher visibility of ethnic minority characters in the books published in 2018. We want to stress that the efforts to improve the volume of presence is commendable.

However, because our survey looks at content as well as numbers, the increase does mask a worrying phenomenon. In the process of reviewing the submitted titles, we were really struck by the range of ways in which BAME characters were effectively presented as “visibly invisible”. Encountering repeated instances in which the presence of BAME characters was diminished led us to develop a way of categorising these practices.

Each term has been created to convey the type of erasure observed in titles reviewed in both cycles of this study. Definitions have been provided in an attempt to help those involved in the creative and editorial processes discuss these issues in the future.

Vacant Landscape

This relates to titles in which the story was located in a country outside of the UK and in which the lack of people featured in the illustration suggested a lack of population or presence. Such spreads and titles could potentially lead the reader to infer that such spaces were under-developed, barren or primitive.

Country specific settings without country specific population

This refers to instances where it was evident that the scene was located in a specific part of the world outside of the UK but the characters present were exclusively or predominantly white, rendering the indigenous population invisible. For example, portrayals of countries in the African continent where readers encounter exclusively white characters on safari or books located in countries like Australia and Canada which are void of the presence of any indigenous populations and again exclusively featured white characters.

Lost in the crowd through wallpapering

‘Wallpapering’ is a shorthand term we developed to describe a style of illustration where the background is densely populated or at least featured a number of background characters. A repeat pattern achieved by intermittently colouring in characters either black or brown to the extent that it almost resembled a wallpaper effect, often resulted in minority characters blending in so much so that they became lost in the crowd. This is fine in principle if everyone is getting lost in a generic crowd but we had repeated incidences of books being submitted as representative of BAME people where this was their only presence in the book – in such cases this could be interpreted as a form of relegation.

Cover Short Change

This is a term devised to describe books we received in which BAME characters were only featured on front covers, conveying the promise of presence within the body of the narrative, only for the reader to open the book and find that the cover is the only place where the character is visible.

Short Term Stay

This is an extension of the idea of ‘cover short change.’ It describes instances in which BAME characters are introduced at the beginning of the book but are either written out very quickly or never mentioned again in the text. In the most extreme case in this cycle of submissions, a BAME character disappeared as early as page three and failed to reappear thereafter.

Ethnic Fluidity

This is a term that describes instances in which the ethnicity of the illustrated character varies from spread to spread therefore making the ethnicity indistinguishable and undefinable. It is one thing for this to be an artistic choice and something that adds to the story or narrative but quite another if the title is being submitted as part of a review process that is determining the quality of ethnic minority representation.

Hair Cue

Hair cue relates to instances where the only point of reference that might suggest that the character was from an ethnic minority background was the description of their hair, specifically as either 'wavy or 'curly.' Again, given the nature of this study, such cues alone are a tenuous and insufficient reason for submission to a survey on representation.

'Jasmine Default'

We acknowledge that there will be multiple reasons as to why a character may resonate with a reader and ethnicity forms only one of those reasons. That said, we experienced a disproportionately high number of female characters named 'Jasmine.' The name was, in many instances, the only cue available to suggest that the character was from an ethnic minority background and therefore appears to be the reason the book was submitted for the survey. The name is commonly used across cultures and does not necessarily denote one particular ethnic minority group, community or culture, and if this is the only cue available then we would question the validity of such submissions.

Faceless or Featureless

This style of illustration, in which characters' faces are featureless, is a valid artistic choice. However, within the context of this study, it made the processing of the books and the identification of ethnic minority presence challenging. The nature of such an illustration style creates a homogeneity that eliminates the ability to categorise ethnicity. Such a choice undermines the validity of the submitted title in terms of it being recognised as an example of representative and inclusive literature, particularly if such a portrayal is the only indicator of ethnic minority presence in the book.

Homogenised Illustrative Style

Homogenised illustrative styles that were evident in some submitted titles made it difficult to identify ethnic minority presence, rendering the title in a number of cases as invalid for the purposes of this study.

This survey has raised important questions for us about what constitutes valid, appropriate and quality presence. If the number of BAME characters in children's books is proportionately less than white characters and animal characters then there is a greater weight of expectation on inclusive titles to ensure that the portrayal and inclusion of minoritised characters is clear, meaningful and well done. We offer the categories above as a way of discussing and talking about these issues and we hope that this proves useful.

Tiers of Presence

Reflecting on Character Voice and Agency

As with our first study, we felt it was important to capture the extent and quality of the presence of ethnic minority characters. We considered their position in the narrative, documented instances in which characters expressed themselves and documented whether or not their ethnicity was overly determined or incidental to the narrative. 72% of the BAME main characters influenced the narrative in their expression of thought, voice or action. This is a positive indicator of the agency afforded to BAME characters. It was interesting to note, however, that a higher percentage of secondary and side-kick characters were identified as influencing the narrative compared to main BAME characters. This suggests that BAME main characters did not consistently appear to be given the opportunity to fully inhabit the role of protagonist.

The ethnic identity of characters was explored and formed the basis of a plot point across a range of genres. This was often within the context of plots focused on themes of social class, racism, civil rights, enslavement, immigration, war and conflict, refugee experiences and celebrating difference. Within the sample of titles that featured a main cast of characters, 6% of the books featured a main character who spoke about their ethnicity and whose ethnicity formed the basis of a plot point.



Cast Dynamics

In this cycle there was a notable shift in the dynamics of casts of characters. In the first year of this study, main casts of characters tended to be made up of a clearly identifiable main character, one or two secondary characters and more often than not background characters. In this second cycle, we found broader, more nuanced relationships within the cast of main characters. We encountered a prominence of joint lead characters, where two leads shared equal presence, agency and weighting in driving the narrative. We also observed the emergence of what we defined as side-kicks in a way that we hadn't in the first cycle. Side-kicks were identified as less prominent in status compared to secondary characters, with their sole purpose being to echo or facilitate the main characters.

Multicultural Cast of Characters with Shared Agency

The alternative to the main cast format was often what we have defined as a 'multicultural cast of characters' that have equal weighting in terms of presence, agency and voice. The number of books submitted featuring a multicultural cast of characters with shared agency amounted to 142 titles, which represents 19% of submissions. This is an increase of 9% from the first cycle.

Background Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Category

27% of the books submitted only featured BAME presence in the form of background characters, this is almost a third of the submissions. This is a 2% increase on the first cycle. So whilst we appear to have more BAME presence than in the 2018 output, this presence is more likely to be located in the background.

Methodology

Text Type	Age Range	Content	Publication Details
Children's Fiction Children's Non-Fiction Picture Books	3-11 years	Featuring Black and Minority Ethnic Characters	Published in the UK First Published in 2018

In the first year of this work, we consulted with the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, seeking insights from their practices and protocols as developed over the last three decades that would help inform our approach.

As in the first year, we invited UK Publishers of Children's Literature to identify, collate and submit all of their titles that fulfilled the criteria in the table above.

In addition and at the publishers' request, we asked each publisher to submit the total number of books they had published with humans as main cast characters, the total number of books published with animals as main cast characters and the total number of books published with inanimate objects as main cast characters.

We made clear both in the first and second cycle of this work that we would not publish data about individual publishers without their express permission.

In this cycle, we received 929 submissions from 46 publishers.

Upon receipt of these books, we applied the eligibility criteria to determine which titles would qualify for processing. 743 out of the 929 titles qualified for processing under the submissions criteria.

We worked with a Steering Group of experts in the field to develop the methodology in the first year of the survey and to refine it this year. With their advice and support we used the analysis framework developed in the first cycle to review both the extent and quality of Ethnic Minority representation in each title. The framework was structured to help us to consider how many BAME characters featured in each book, their position in the narrative, their degree of agency and the quality of the representation both in the text and in illustrations.

The Ethnic categories used in the Study were drawn from the UK Census categories with appropriate extensions to these definitions to accommodate broader representations of ethnicity in literature. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the Census definitions of ethnicity, we chose to apply these to allow us to draw meaningful parallels between the characters in the English population versus the characters who populate the world of books. This report offers a summary of our findings.

“I'd like to see in bookshops more Somali women and their stories because they have a lot to say.”



Recommendations

The recommendations of the report for the first cycle of this work remain just as valid in this cycle. We would urge readers to consider these recommendations alongside the insights offered by the complementary work of *BookTrust Represents: Research into representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators (2019)*.

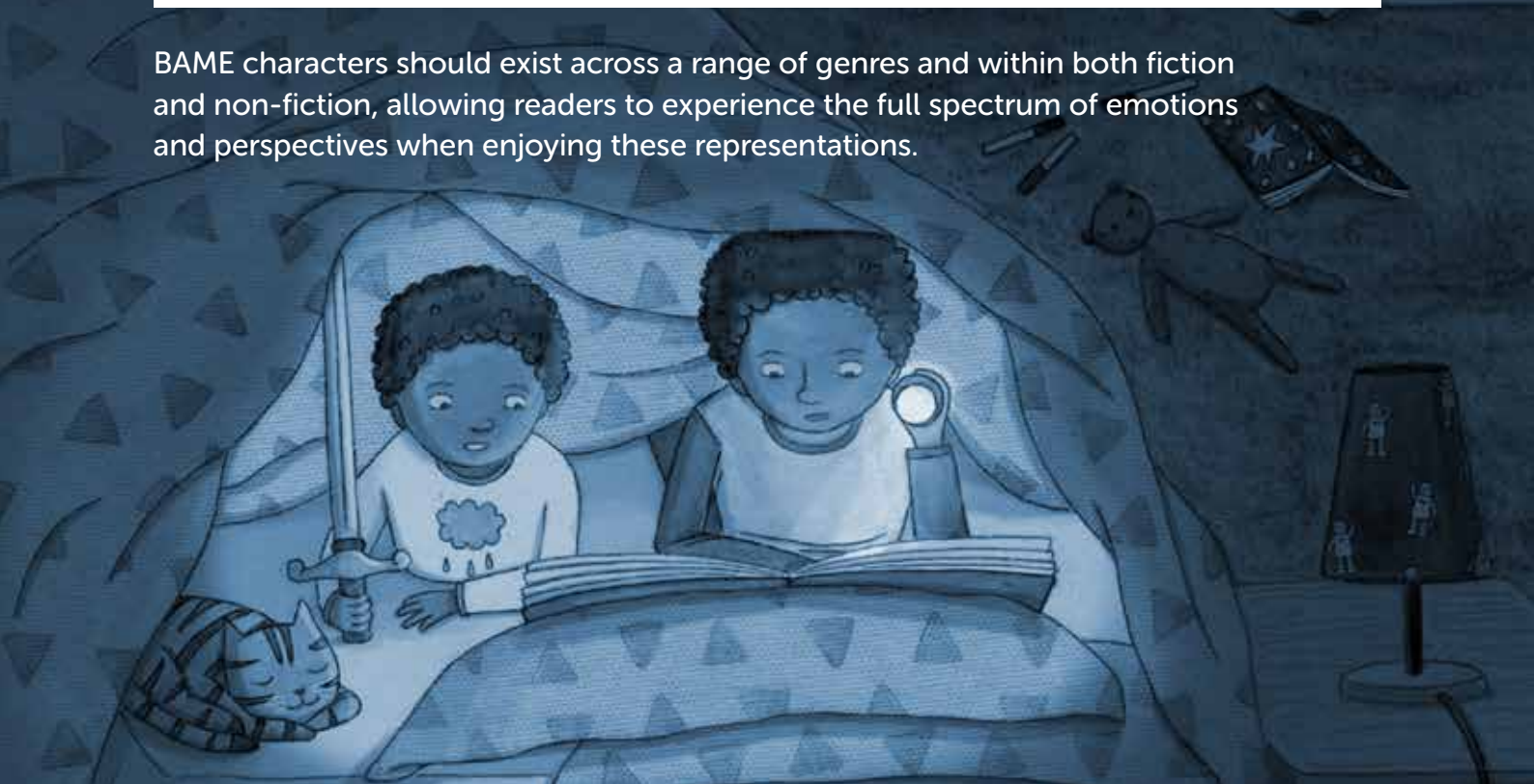
Authorship

- Thorough research and careful consideration should be exercised to ensure respectful, nuanced and layered portrayals.
- The industry should invest in both established and new authors from a range of backgrounds who are able to paint characters and worlds with the integrity that the subject matter deserves.

Content

- BAME characters need to be better represented within children's literature in general, to better reflect the UK population. This should not be reduced to a tick box exercise. It should be a meaningful way of representing the interconnected, multi-cultural society within which our children are growing up.
- Content should be balanced, allowing for cultural specificity without reducing characterisations to derogatory stereotypes or one-dimensional shorthand.
- BAME characters need to be well developed and authentically portrayed.
- BAME characters should not be predominantly defined by their struggle, suffering or 'otherness'.
- BAME characters should be central to many narratives and not only predominantly feature in the margins.

BAME characters should exist across a range of genres and within both fiction and non-fiction, allowing readers to experience the full spectrum of emotions and perspectives when enjoying these representations.



Acknowledgements

Steering Committee

This work was led by **Farrah Serroukh** from CLPE in consultation with a specialist Steering Committee of leading experts in publishing and education who included:

Darren Chetty

Teaching Fellow, UCL

Dr Fen Coles

Co-director of Letterbox Library

Louise Johns-Shepherd

CLPE Chief Executive

Professor Vini Lander

Professor of Race and Teacher Education,
School of Education, University of Roehampton

Nicky Parker

Publisher, Amnesty UK Publishing

Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold

Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor in the Department
of Information Studies at University College London

Professor Karen Sands O'Connor

British Academy Global Professor for Children's Literature,
SUNY Buffalo State University and Newcastle University

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This year we piloted an internship programme allowing us to invite a team of postgraduate students studying their Masters in Publishing at UCL to support us in processing the books. Their dedication, diligence, professionalism, insights, critical reflection, contributions and good humour made for a richer process. They are the future of publishing and this makes us very hopeful. It was a pleasure and privilege to work with each and everyone one of them. Thank you:

Aanya Dave**Antonia Kasoulidou****Charisa Gunasekera****Emma Hair****Eleanor Naylor****Fathima Ali****Veidehi Hans**

We invited a group of children from Surrey Square Primary School to review a sample of the submissions and share their views. We would like to thank Matt Morden, Marcia Patterson and the staff at Surrey Square for engaging with this work. We are also indebted to Rosie Chapleo who shared the views of the children of Netley Primary School with us. The quotes throughout this document are from children at both of these schools.

The illustrations used in this report are reproduced with kind permission of Lucy Farfort whose first picture book will be published this Autumn by Little Tiger. We were lucky enough to connect with Lucy following an event organised by illustrator Dapo Adeola and hosted by Book Trust and Macmillan Children's Books. This was a networking event for Black illustrators to support emerging talent as part of the BookTrust Represents programme. We were very grateful to be allowed to be part of this event.

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The goodwill and continued participation of the UK Children's Publishing industry demonstrates a genuine commitment to better representation in children's literature. Thank you for your engagement with this initiative and we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you on this collective enterprise.

“Reading books with people who look like you will give you an extra boost of confidence in who you are. I want people to be proud of what they look like and who they are.”



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