CLPE

CENTRE FOR **LITERACY**
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

REFLECTING REALITIES

Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature 2017

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

www.clpe.org.uk

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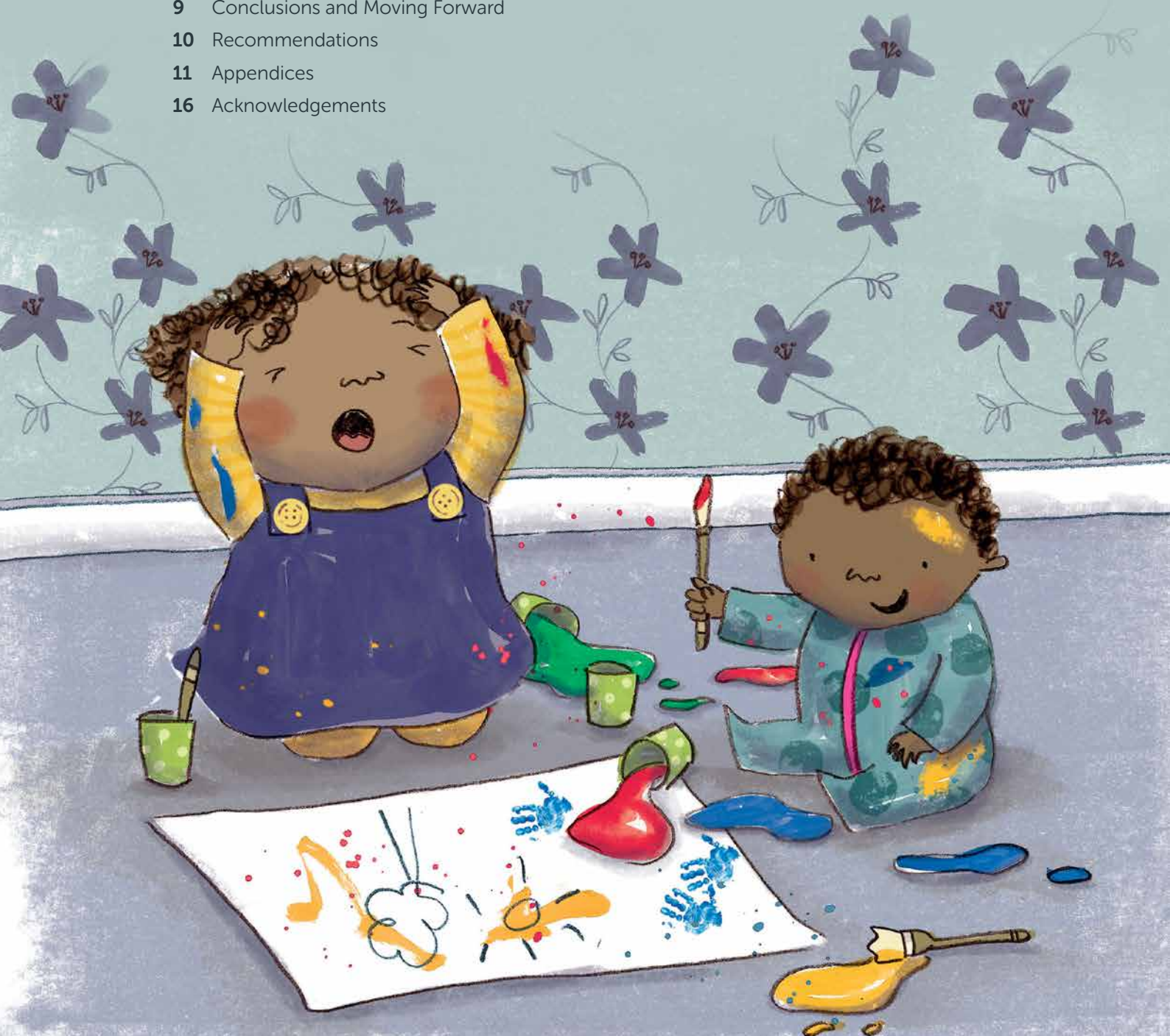


Introduction

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) is an independent charity. Our work raises the achievement of children by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's literature at the heart of all learning. Through our research, training and resources we emphasise the importance of books and literature as absolutely crucial in helping children to become confident, happy and enthusiastic readers and writers with all of the benefits we know this brings.

Louise Johns-Shepherd
Chief Executive, CLPE

We know that being a reader opens the world to children and therefore we absolutely believe in every child's right to access quality literature that honours, values and reflects the reality in which they live. But we also know that reading is a tremendously important factor in developing empathy and understanding for lives and contexts beyond your own. In fact books that offer perspectives from beyond your own life or context can be individually and collectively transformative.

This is why we were so keen to develop our work around Reflecting Realities. At CLPE we read thousands of books every year and are always reviewing our book provision and our book lists to ensure that we are introducing teachers to the best children's literature. However we still find it difficult to find enough books to add to our collections that are truly and authentically reflections of the wide world in which we live. During the process of the survey this year we have learnt a great deal. We are grateful to the publishers of children's books in the UK who have embraced this opportunity to work with us to create a knowledge base from which we can all learn and move forward. We are hopeful that what we have found out and share with you in this report will be useful and helpful as we all continue the conversation.

Project Foreword

Farrah Serroukh
Learning Programmes Leader CLPE

In February 2018, we launched our Reflecting Realities initiative, a new study into ethnic representation in children's literature. Funded by the Arts Council, the aim is to quantify and evaluate the extent and quality of ethnic representation in children's publishing in the UK.

We invited all UK publishers of children's literature to submit any titles published in 2017 that featured Black or minority ethnic characters. (We will use the acronym BAME and the term 'ethnic minority' from this point forward as these provide a common point of reference.) These submissions have been analysed using a specifically designed framework to determine the extent and quality of representation within and across all titles. It was important to capture both components because if we want books to truly reflect the realities of their readership, it is crucial to determine the quality of representation and give this as much weight as the extent of representation. We are aware of the paradox that surveys of this nature can present. All too often, exclusively focusing energies on the business of surveying can serve as nothing more than a distraction, ironically leaving little or no space for action. The fundamental aim of this work is to move the conversation on.

Over the course of processing and analysing the submissions, we have learnt a great deal about what reflecting realities can look like when done well. If we could distil this into one ideal, it would be to understand that we are all complex and multifaceted beings, portray this in the nuance of characterisation and the layering of the world of the story, and appreciate the importance of striving to capture and reflect authentically and respectfully the reality of characters, their lives and their world.

We know that those who work in all areas of children's books and literacy recognise that there is work to be done. The aim of this survey is to provide us with a meaningful annual benchmark so that we can continue to guide all stakeholders to invest in and improve the extent and quality of representation long after the conversation has moved on. We want to channel the momentum to ensure that this isn't reduced to an awkward footnote or 'trend' in the history of UK children's publishing because something as integral as a person's identity and sense of self deserves to be recognised, respected and valued now and always.

So we see this survey as an opportunity for us to provide some in depth analysis that supports all those who work with and love books. We are hoping that we will be able to provide a regular, useful and meaningful benchmark that is not just a counting exercise but gives us all the tools and knowledge to move forward and create truly reflective books and stories across all areas of children's literature.

Executive Summary

There were 9115 children's books published in the UK in 2017. Of these only 391 featured BAME characters.

Only 4% of the children's books published in 2017 featured BAME characters.

Only 1% of the children's books published in the UK in 2017 had a BAME main character.

Over half the fiction books with BAME characters were defined as 'contemporary realism'.

10% of books with BAME characters contained 'social justice' issues.

Only one book featuring a BAME character was defined as 'comedy'.

26% of the non-fiction submissions were aimed at an 'Early Years' audience.

The demographic make-up of the UK did not align with the presence of BAME characters in books published in 2017. Each ethnic minority category was significantly under-represented. The Department for Education reported in 2017 that 32.1% of pupils of compulsory school age were of minority ethnic origins. In stark contrast, only 1% of children's books had a BAME main character and a quarter of the books submitted only featured BAME presence in the form of background characters.

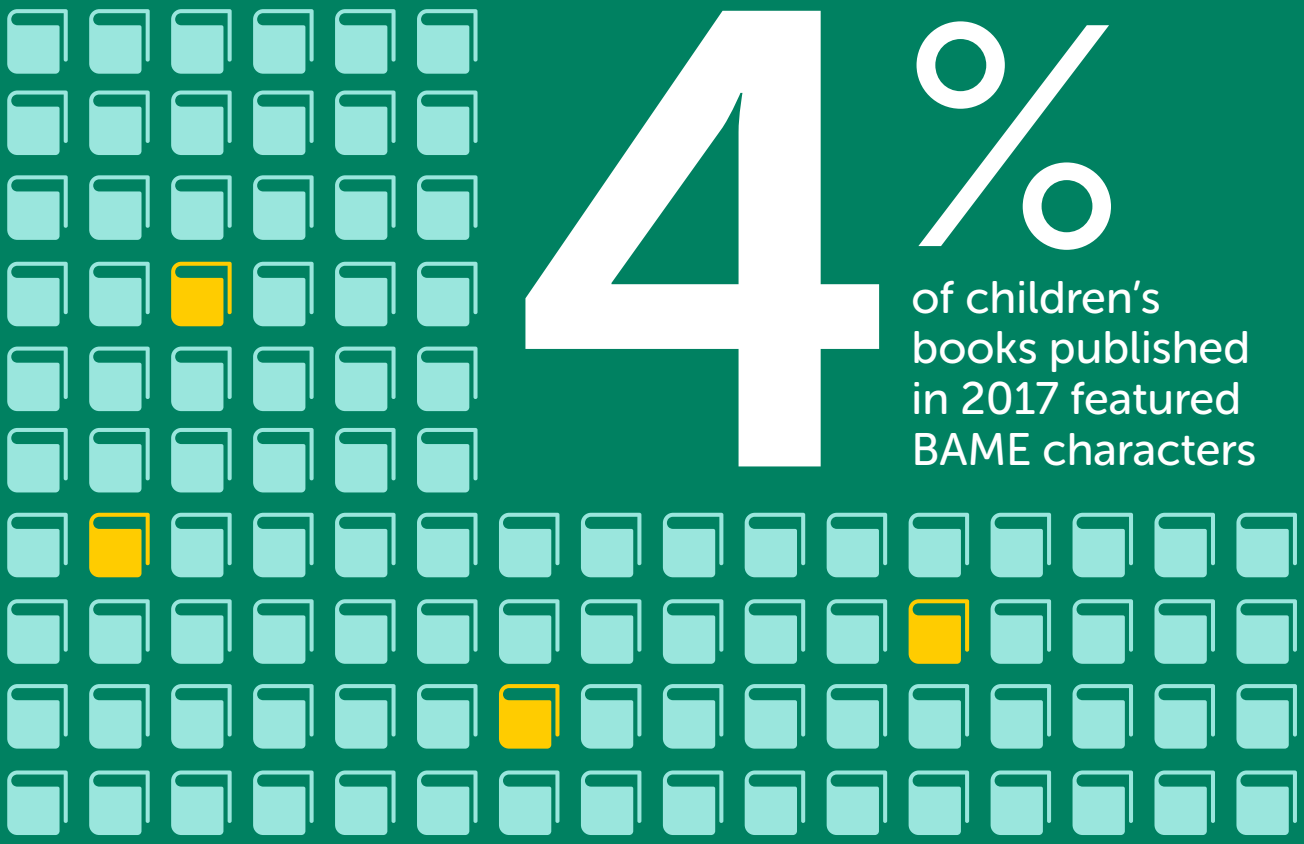
Books intended specifically for a school based audience for educational instruction defined as 'Reading Schemes' made up 29% of the submissions. This would indicate that only two thirds of an already very small set of titles were developed for a mass 'book shop' readership, therefore suggesting an even lower overall proportion of books produced for children featured BAME presence. If we omit the number of books defined as Reading Schemes this would suggest that only 3.7% of books published in 2017 featuring BAME presence were developed for the 'book shop' market.

The fiction titles were categorised according to a set of agreed sub-categories intended to define subject matter. 'Contemporary Realism' was a category defined as books set in modern day landscapes/ contexts; these amounted to 91 titles, which accounted for 56% of the fiction submissions. This category therefore featured the highest percentage of BAME character presence. Only 1 of the children's fiction titles submitted could be classified as comedy, conversely 10% of submitted books featured Social Justice themes. Almost a third of submissions classified as containing social justice issues focused on themes of war and conflict. This very much corresponds with the societal context of recent years and is important to acknowledge, explore and mirror in literature. That said this does however raise some important questions. Do those from minority backgrounds only have a platform when their suffering is being explored? And how does such disproportionate variation of representation skew perspectives of minority groups?

The non-fiction titles were categorised into subject matter categories. The highest percentage of BAME character presence according to type of non-fiction were texts defined as Early Years Concepts titles. These made up 26% of the non-fiction submissions. Early Years Concepts titles were defined as non-fiction books targeted at readers aged 0-5. This raises concerns regarding the extent and quality of BAME presence in non-fiction titles more broadly in terms of publishing output and specifically as children move through the education system. It would appear that as children make the key transition to Primary from Early Years, non-fiction offers fewer opportunities for children of BAME backgrounds to experience positive and varied representations, diminishing chances to nurture self-worth and aspiration.

The data highlights not only the insufficient degrees of representation but also brings into question the quality of BAME representation in children's literature and how meaningfully such presence values, validates and reflects children's realities.

UK Children's Literature Profile 2017



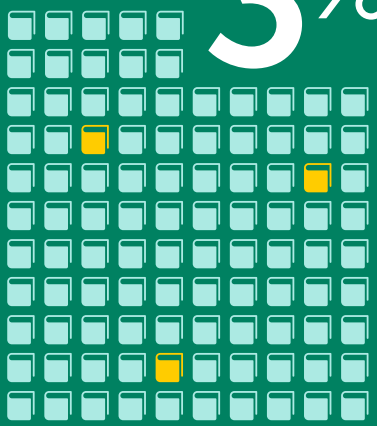
4%

of children's books published in 2017 featured BAME characters

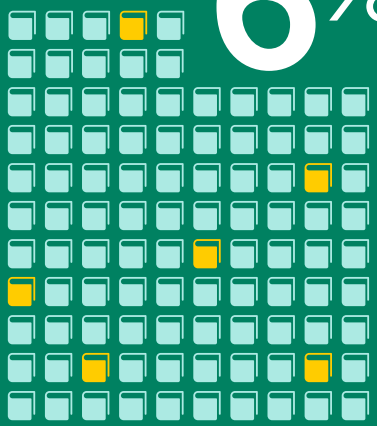
For full details see appendices on page 12

Proportion of Ethnic Minority Representation in Books According to Text Type

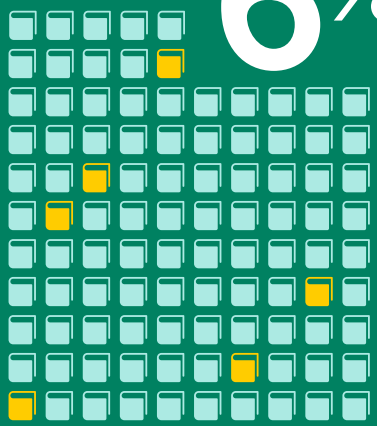
FICTION **3%**



NON-FICTION **6%**



PICTURE BOOKS **6%**



For full details see appendices on page 12

Main characters in UK Children's Literature 2017

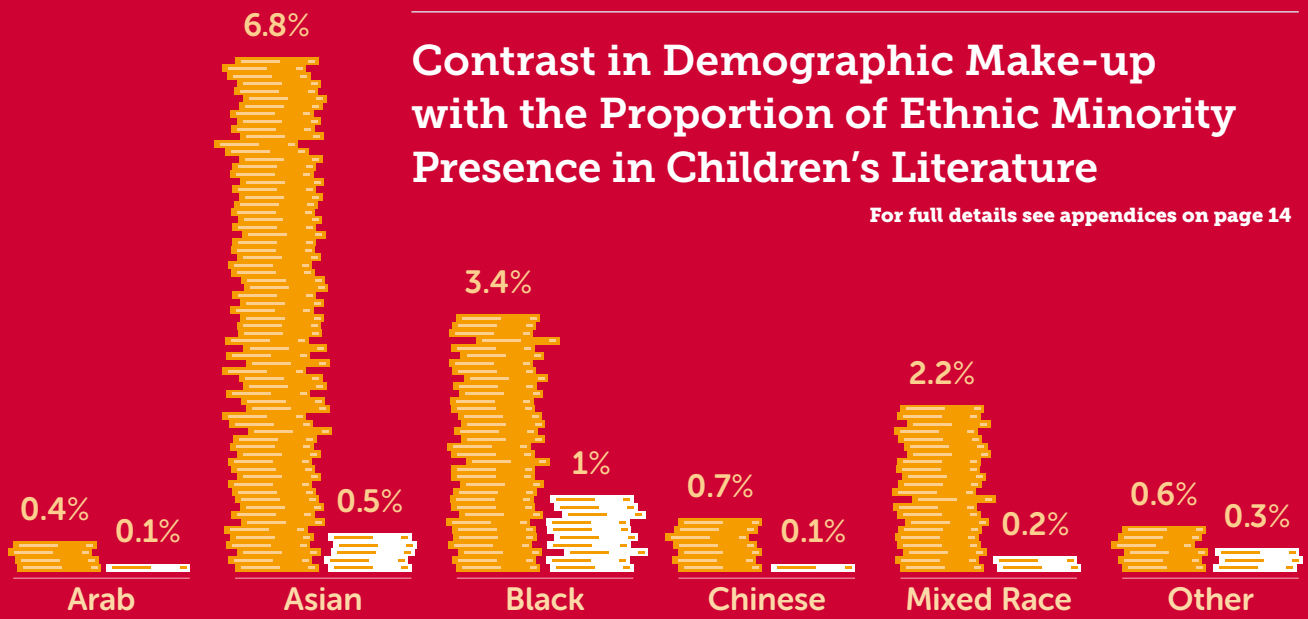
Source: Department for Education

32% pupils of compulsory school age in England were of minority ethnic origins in 2017

1% of children's books had a BAME main character

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

For full details see appendices on page 14



KEY: Percentage of population in England and Wales reported as belonging to an Identified Ethnic Minority category

Percentage of Total Books Published in 2017 featuring main cast characters reported as belonging to an Identified Ethnic Minority category

Source: Office of National Statistics

Tiers of Presence

Reflecting on Character Voice and Agency

As well as noting the number of BAME characters and their position in the narrative, we also documented instances in which characters expressed themselves and whether or not their ethnicity was overly determined or incidental to the narrative. 38% of the BAME main characters expressed their thoughts.

In titles where characters did explore their ethnic identity, this was often within the context of plots focused on the refugee experience, biographies of key figures who had overcome significant adversity and one title focused on Civil Rights. Within this sample of books, therefore only 6% of the titles featured a main character who spoke about their ethnicity.

Multicultural Cast of Characters with Shared Agency

The number of books submitted featuring a multicultural cast of characters with shared agency amounted to 40 titles, which represents 10% of submissions. It is interesting to note that in every ethnic minority category, BAME characters were more likely to feature as part of a multicultural cast member as opposed to a lead main character.

Background Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Category

25% of the books submitted only featured BAME presence in the form of background characters.

Position of Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Minority Category

159 books featured **BAME** background characters

69 of those books also had a **BAME Main** character

88 of those books also had a **BAME Secondary** character

99 of those books **DID NOT** feature a **BAME Main** or **Secondary** character

Illustration © Holly Sterling from Everybody Feels Scared by Moira Butterfield (QED)

Conclusions and Moving Forward

In our experience of working with publishers of children's literature, we know that they are passionate about producing quality books for their readership. Our review has been profoundly eye opening and provided clear insights into how the publishing industry might better serve the needs and interests of their readership. Every child is entitled to feel safe and valued. In the current socio-political and economic climate the risk of marginalisation of minority groups is heightened. If in their formative years, children do not see their realities reflected in the world around them or only see problematic representations mirrored back at them, the impact can be tremendously damaging. To redress imbalances in representation is not an act of charity but an act of necessity that benefits and enriches all of our realities. Energies must be invested into normalising and making mainstream the breadth and range of realities that exist within our classrooms and society in order for all children to feel valued and entitled to occupy the literary space. There is an appetite and demand for better, more broadly representative books, which makes the investment in such books an ethical, moral and commercial imperative.

The publishing industry has recognised an imbalance in representation and as a result has started to invest time and money towards redressing this. At CLPE, we want to help build on this and move the conversation on. The publication of this survey marks a beginning, not an end and we hope that by devising this framework we have produced a tool that will support all stakeholders to continue to review and analyse books through a critically reflective lens so that we can all move forward in this journey. This publication provides a blueprint for an annual survey that helps inform and guide ongoing investment in broadening representation in children's literature. It is a means of capturing industry trends that can lead to a more nuanced conversation about the value and impact of reflecting realities. In time we hope that the findings and supporting analysis will inform how best to meet the needs and interests of all readers.

Recommendations

Content

- BAME characters need to be better represented within children's literature in general – better reflecting the UK population, not as a tick box exercise but as a meaningful and accurate representation of the interconnected, diverse society within which our children are growing up.
- Content should be balanced, allowing for cultural specificity without reducing characterisations to derogatory stereotypes or a two 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.

Text Types and Genres

- Non-fiction beyond the early years needs to be more representative, ensuring that fully representative texts accompany children at each stage of their development and growth.
- 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 when enjoying these representations.
- Particular consideration should be given towards making books produced for the 'gift' and 'trade' markets more representative, accompanied by confident marketing strategies, resourcing and investment to ensure wider access.

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.

Appendices

Methodology

We undertook a fact finding mission and consulted with the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison to glean insights from their practices and protocols as developed over the last three decades that would help inform our approach.

We invited UK Publishers of Children's Literature to identify, collate and submit all their titles that fulfilled the following criteria:

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 2017

We made clear from the outset that we would not publish data about individual publishers or compare them to one another. We have however expressed that we are happy to share the data about publisher specific output with the relevant publisher upon request so that they can see how well we think they reflect the realities of their readership.

We received 587 submissions from 40 publishers. Upon receipt of these books, we applied the eligibility criteria to determine which titles would qualify for processing. 391 out of the 587 titles qualified for processing under the submissions criteria.

In collaboration with the Steering Group we developed an Analysis Framework that would allow us to review both the extent and quality of Ethnic Minority representation in each title. The Ethnic categories 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 parallels with the UK population versus the characters who populate the world of books.

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.

APPENDIX 1

Submissions Profile

FIGURE 1

Publisher Submissions Summary

1	Total Number of Children's Books Published in 2017	9115*
2	Number of Children's Books Published in 2017 featuring BAME characters	391
3	Percentage of Children's Books Published in 2017 featuring BAME characters	4%

FIGURE 2

Summary Breakdown of Children's Literature Published According to Text Types

FICTION		
Total No. of Fiction Titles Published in 2017	No. of Fiction Titles Processed	Percentage of Fiction Titles Published in 2017 featuring BAME characters
4922*	162	3%
NON-FICTION		
Total No. of Non-Fiction Titles Published	No. of Non-Fiction Titles Processed	Percentage of Non-Fiction Titles Published in 2017 featuring BAME characters
2190*	124	6%
PICTURE BOOK		
Total No. of Picture Books Published	No. of Picture Books Processed	Percentage of Picture Book Titles Published in 2017 featuring BAME characters
2003*	128	6%

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)

APPENDIX 2

Proportion of Ethnic Minority Representation in Books According to Text Type

FIGURE 3

Sub-Categories of Fiction Featured

Category	No. of Titles Defined as Belonging to Each Category	Percentage of Proportion of the Fiction Titles Submitted	Percentage of Proportion of Total No. of Fiction Titles Published in 2017
Comedy	1	0.6%	0.01%
Contemporary Realism	91	56%	2%
Fantasy	33	20%	0.6%
Historical Fiction	14	9%	0.3%
Horror	2	1%	0.02%
Mystery	5	3%	0.05%
Science Fiction	6	4%	0.07%
Traditional Tale	8	5%	0.09%

FIGURE 4

Sub-Categories of Non-Fiction Featured

Category	No. of Titles Defined as Belonging to Each Category	Percentage of Non-fiction Titles featuring BAME Presence out of the Total Number of Non-Fiction Titles published in 2017
Art, Design and Technology	5	0.2%
Biography	9	0.4%
Early Years Concepts	37	2%
Faith and Festivals	4	0.1%
Illustrated Dictionary/ Thesaurus	4	0.1%
Geography	21	1%
Mathematics	1	0.04%
Music	2	0.09%
History	14	0.6%
Other	1	0.04%
Science	21	1%

FIGURE 5

Breakdown of Proportion of Submissions Focused on a Social Justice Theme

Category	No. of Titles Defined as Belonging to Each Category	Percentage Proportion of the Total Submissions
Civil Rights	3	7.6%
Celebrating Difference	2	5%
Enslavement	1	2.5%
Environment	3	7.6%
Immigration	2	5%
Multiple Themes	1	2.5%
Other	5	12.8%
Racism	7	17.9%
Social Activism	1	2.5%
Social Class/ Economics	1	2.5%
War, Conflict and Refugees	11	28%
Total No. of Submissions Featuring a Social Justice Theme	**39**	

APPENDIX 3

Extent of Ethnic Minority Representation

FIGURE 6

Proportion of Ethnic Representation in Titles Submitted

Ethnic Category	Percentage of Population in England and Wales Reported as Belonging to an Identified Ethnic Minority Category	Percentage of Total Books Published in 2017 Featuring Main Cast Characters Reported as Belonging to an Identified Ethnic Minority Category
Arab	0.4%	0.1%
Asian	6.8%	0.5%
Black	3.4%	1%
Chinese	0.7%	0.1%
Mixed Race	2.2%	0.2%
Other	0.6%	0.3%

FIGURE 7

Main Cast Characters Broken down into Ethnic Sub-categories

	POSITION IN NARRATIVE							
Ethnic Category	No. of Main Characters	% of Main Characters	No. of Secondary 1 Characters	% of Secondary 1 Characters	No. of Secondary 2 Characters	% of Secondary 2 Characters	No. of Secondary 3 Characters	% of Secondary 3 Characters
ASIAN								
Bangladeshi	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Chinese	3	1%	6	3.4%	9	9%	7	11%
Indian	5	1.8%	14	8%	6	6%	4	6%
Pakistani	2	0.7%	2	1.1%	0	0%	0	0%
Asian Unspecified	5	1.8%	11	6.2%	17	17%	7	11%
Total	**15**	**5%**	**33**	**19%**	**32**	**32%**	**18**	**28%**
BLACK								
African	7	2.5%	10	5.6%	4	4%	4	6%
Black	47	23%	63	32%	20	20%	17	25%
Black British	2	0.7%	4	23.3%	4	4%	0	0%
Black African Caribbean	0	0%	1	0.6%	0	0%	0	0%
Black Other	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
Total	**56**	**20%**	**78**	**44%**	**29**	**29%**	**21**	**32%**
ETHNICALLY AMBIGUOUS								
Black and White Mixed Heritage Unspecified	2	0.7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Brown Unspecified	6	2.2%	28	16%	10	10%	8	12%
East Asian Unspecified	1	0.4%	1	0.6%	4	4%	1	2%
Unspecified	1	0.7%	1	0.6%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	**10**	**4%**	**30**	**17%**	**14**	**14%**	**9**	**14%**

continued...

POSITION IN NARRATIVE								
Ethnic Category	No. of Main Characters	% of Main Characters	No. of Secondary 1 Characters	% of Secondary 1 Characters	No. of Secondary 2 Characters	% of Secondary 2 Characters	No. of Secondary 3 Characters	% of Secondary 3 Characters
MIXED/ MULTIPLE ETHNIC GROUPS								
Asian and White	7	2.5%	3	1.7%	2	2%	3	5%
Black African and White	2	0.7%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
Black Caribbean and White	1	0.4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other Mixed Ethnic Groups	7	2.5%	2	1.1%	5	5%	2	3%
Total	**17**	**6%**	**5**	**3%**	**8**	**8%**	**5**	**8%**
WHITE								
White Unspecified	135	49%	25	14%	11	11%	8	12%
British	10	4%	3	1.7%	5	5%	3	5%
English	2	0.7%	1	0.6%	0	0%	0	0%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Irish	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
Northern Irish	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Scottish	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Welsh	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other White Background	1	0.4%	2	1.1%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	**148**	**54%**	**31**	**18%**	**16**	**16%**	**12**	**18%**
Total	**277**		**177**		**99**		**65**	

FIGURE 8

Position of Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Minority Category

Total No. of Books Featuring BAME Background Characters	159
Total No. of Books Featuring BAME Background Characters that also had a BAME Main character	69
Total No. of Books Featuring BAME Background Characters that also had a BAME Secondary character	88
Total No. of Books featuring BAME Background Characters that did not Feature a BAME Main or Secondary Character	99

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 to whom we are truly indebted. They include:

- **Dr Kehinde Andrews** (Associate Professor of Sociology, Birmingham City University)
- **Darren Chetty** (Teaching Fellow at UCL Institute of Education)
- **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)
- **Professor Karen Sands O'Connor** (Professor of Children's Literature at SUNY Buffalo State, New York)
- **Nikesh Shukla** (Author, Editor and Co-founder of The Good Agency)

Their collective wealth of experience, expertise and contributions in informing this process have been invaluable.

If you have any questions about this report please contact CLPE

CLPE

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Acknowledgements

We are tremendously grateful to all those involved in this enormous undertaking. This work would not have been possible without the invaluable support and contributions of the following individuals and organisations.

Thank you Claire Boulton, Sarah Crown and the team at Arts Council England for funding this project as part of their ongoing commitment to better representation in the arts and across all sectors. We would also like to thank Tom MacAndrew for his support throughout the process.

This project was inspired by the American equivalent and was developed in consultation with Kathleen T. Horning, Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and her team. The team very generously opened their doors to us and supported this initiative from the outset.

We have conducted this survey alongside our colleagues at BookTrust who are simultaneously reviewing data about the correlation between authorship and ethnicity over the last decade.

Thank you to the entire CLPE team for support with lifting, moving, counting and reviewing vast quantities of books with keen interest and good humour.

Special thanks to our Volunteer Librarian Anna Lee, CLPE Librarian Ann Lazim and Fen Coles and Kerry Mason at Letterbox Library for their rigour, reflectiveness, patience, support and guidance throughout.

The goodwill and support of the UK Children's Publishing industry demonstrates a genuine commitment to better representation in children's literature and we are heartened by the overwhelming support we have received. Thank you for engaging with this initiative and we look forward to building on the foundations established this year and working alongside the industry to build on this.

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education is a registered charity no. 1092698 and a company limited by guarantee no. 04385537

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Illustrations © Holly Sterling from Hiccups! (Lincoln Children's Books)

Illustrations © Holly Sterling from 15 Things Not to Do with a Baby/15 Things Not to Do with a Puppy, by Margaret McAllister (Lincoln Children's Books)

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