



CENTRE FOR LITERACY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

REFLECTING REALITIES

Survey of Ethnic Representation
within UK Children's Literature 2020

Published 2021

www.clpe.org.uk



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Contents

Foreword

Why we do this work 03

Introduction and Methodology

How we do this work 05

2020 Survey Insights

What this work tells us

- Key Findings and Reflecting on Content 06
- Reflecting on Character Voice and Agency 14
- Cast Dynamics 14
- Multicultural Cast of Characters with Shared Agency 14
- Background Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Minority Category 14
- Animals and Non-Human Casts in Children's Fiction 15

Changing the Landscape

Learning and Working Together towards a Common Goal 17

Moving Forward

What we will do with this work 20

Our Recommendations

What will you do with this work? 21

Acknowledgements 22

Illustrations throughout © Onyinye Iwu and reproduced with her kind permission.

Page 23 illustration from Hey You! published by Puffin Books Copyright © Onyinye Iwu, 2020

Page 10 illustration from TOO SMALL TOLA written by Atinuke and illustrated by Onyinye Iwu. Illustration Copyright © 2020 Onyinye Iwu. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, London SE11 5HJ www.walker.co.uk

Page 1, 4, 13, 15 and 19 illustrations from My Skin Your Skin by Laura Henry-Allain MBE, illustrated by Onyinye Iwu. Copyright © Ladybird 2021. Published by Ladybird. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Books.

Designed by Ben Cotterill, onemanandhisdog.net

Foreword: Why we do this work

This year there is much to celebrate in the Reflecting Realities Report. Despite a reduction in overall output in 2020, there is an increase in the proportion of books that are representative of children in our schools.

This is news to be welcomed and celebrated and our detailed scrutiny of the books that are submitted to us shows us that there is a real and concerted effort to ensure that more books are containing well rounded, sensitively portrayed and real characters of colour.

So we've seen a year on year increase in representative output since we first published the statistics. Why do we need to keep doing it? Surely the numbers speak for themselves, everybody gets it – we can stop counting and publishing these numbers now? Well no, we can't if we want real, sustained and meaningful change.

We began this work because we wanted to change the bookcorners in the schools we work in and the reading experience for the children we work with. Learning to read is a social process and it is intensely linked with self-image. Put simply, the reading experience can be compromised if you never come across a character or story that reflects your life, culture or background. We also know so much now about how important reading is to developing empathy and broadening outlook; ensuring an opportunity for all children to come across reading material that reflects the wide world in which they live has never been more important.

We recognise the efforts that have made changes over the last five years. We applaud the change that has happened so far, but it is not yet embedded or sufficient. We look at the entire yearly output for 2020, but the picture is very different when you look at the best sellers in children's books. In any list of 2020 'best sellers' it is hard to find a book with a character of colour in it, and many of the best selling books aren't those that were first published in 2020. We still have a long way to go to make sure that the books that are in our survey are truly visible and accessible for all children.

Every year we say, this work is not just about the numbers, and we say it again this year. We look at every single one of the submitted books and use an analysis framework to try and quantify the extent and quality of the representation. This shows us that publishers are making real and concerted efforts to change the quality of pictures, descriptions and stories of people from racialised minorities. But it also shows us that there are areas where this is still not providing the best possible representation. This report highlights those areas and makes recommendations for future and further development.

We know that this survey sits within a wider societal context. To achieve what we set out to do requires deep



Louise Johns-Shepherd
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

and systemic change. We don't presume to think that we can do this alone and we don't think that we would achieve anything if we did. We know our aim is shared by many others who are all working towards a similar aim and we celebrate the many partnerships this work has enabled us to make. As well as looking at representation of characters, we need to look at who gets to write and illustrate the books; where the opportunities in the publishing industry are; who chooses what gets published, marketed, publicised, stocked and sold – all of these things go towards making a change to what

actually gets into bookshops, libraries, classrooms and homes. There are many, many organisations who are doing exceptional work to make sure that what we all do individually becomes greater than the sum of its parts. This report celebrates the work of those organisations – we hope that it is a useful reference point for everyone interested in this work who wants to find out more about real, deep and lasting change.

So back to the children in the classrooms. Making a difference to the reading journeys of children has been our motivating aim from the

beginning. With the publication of this report we are also delighted to announce that we are embarking on a three-year research project with a group of ten schools where we will work together to research and share the impact on reading and writing that a classroom full of representative texts can have. We are so grateful for the support from Paul Hamlyn Foundation who have enabled us to make this a project a reality and to the schools of the Wandle TSA who are coming with us on this journey.



Introduction and Methodology: How we do this work

The 'how' of this work is only possible because of the community of people involved, from the beneficiaries who inspire it, to those involved in the granular level of reviewing the books, to the people who amplify and build on it.

The people who fund it, the **Arts Council**, have believed in and been committed to the core aims of this work from the very start. They understand the tremendous value of a rich and vibrant bookshelf, overflowing with high quality, inclusive and representative literature. They appreciate the benefit this has for all children, all classrooms, all communities and our society and culture as a whole.

The people who enable it, the commercial **Publishers**, who take the time to review, collate and submit their eligible titles. Their willingness and openness to engage in a process that supports them to be more critically reflective and evolve their practices are testament to their commitment to change.

The people who do the work, the team at **CLPE** and the team of **student interns**, who take the time to painstakingly read and review every single submission. The **Steering Group**, who generously share their time and invaluable knowledge and expertise to ensure that the process and final report fulfil the core aims of this work.

The people who amplify and build on the work, the **children, parents, teachers, school leaders, local authorities, librarians, booksellers, academics, authors, illustrators,**

charities and national literacy organisations; in each instance contributing to the discourse by highlighting the need for this work as born out through their own experiences, work or research.

In an average year, the process from the call out to publishers to the publication of the report can take up to 9 months. This year, the disruption caused by the pandemic meant that we had to undertake the same process in half the time. This simply would not have been possible without the emergency grant funding, the responsiveness and flexibility of the publishers and the tremendous efforts of the staff and students at Bath Spa University who made up our intern team this year.

The process for collecting, reviewing, analysing, scrutinising and reporting the data involves a long step by step methodology that was designed in the first year of this work to enable us to provide a meaningful snapshot of the children's literature landscape. Sticking to the methodology that we first devised for the 2017 review has enabled us to produce year on year comparisons and to track changes in the industry and across text types. We have always been very open about the methodology we use and in previous reports we have published a summary of the process. Four years in, we think that our

process needs more than a couple of paragraphs to explain so we have published a detailed account of the approach and methodology we use to collect and scrutinise the data that goes into this report on the [CLPE blog](#).

Books have an important role to play both in supporting children to become literate individuals and in shaping their sense of self, their outlook and their understanding of the world around them. And this is why we remain committed to producing an annual survey that contributes to a more nuanced conversation leading to improved quality inclusive literature that reflects the realities of all readers.



Farrah Serroukh
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, CLPE

What this work tells us 2020 Survey Insights

Key Findings and Reflecting on Content

5875 children’s picturebooks, fiction and non-fiction titles were published in the UK in 2020.

Of these **879** featured characters of colour.

15% of the children’s picturebooks, fiction and non-fiction titles published in 2020 featured characters of colour, compared to 10% in 2019, 7% in 2018 and 4% in 2017.

The continued positive trend in inclusive and representative output makes this a really exciting time in children’s literature.



15% of Children’s Books Published featured Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters

© CLPE



Throughout the review process, there was a real sense across the team that, on the whole, there was a conscious effort by the publishers to make the content more representative. This meant that in many instances, we encountered more multi-faceted characters of colour. We did also however see signifiers of ethnicity that served as shorthand cues that weren't always developed beyond the cues. The smallest increase in minority ethnic presence was in the 'fiction' text type. Fiction is an area in which readers could still be quite significantly shortchanged. Surface signifiers and a lack of attention to detail means this is the text type that probably needs the most investment of time and effort if it is to become truly reflective of readers' realities and representative. However, we did observe a growing breadth of presence of characters of colour across fiction genres.

Significant gains have been made in the picturebook output with 48%

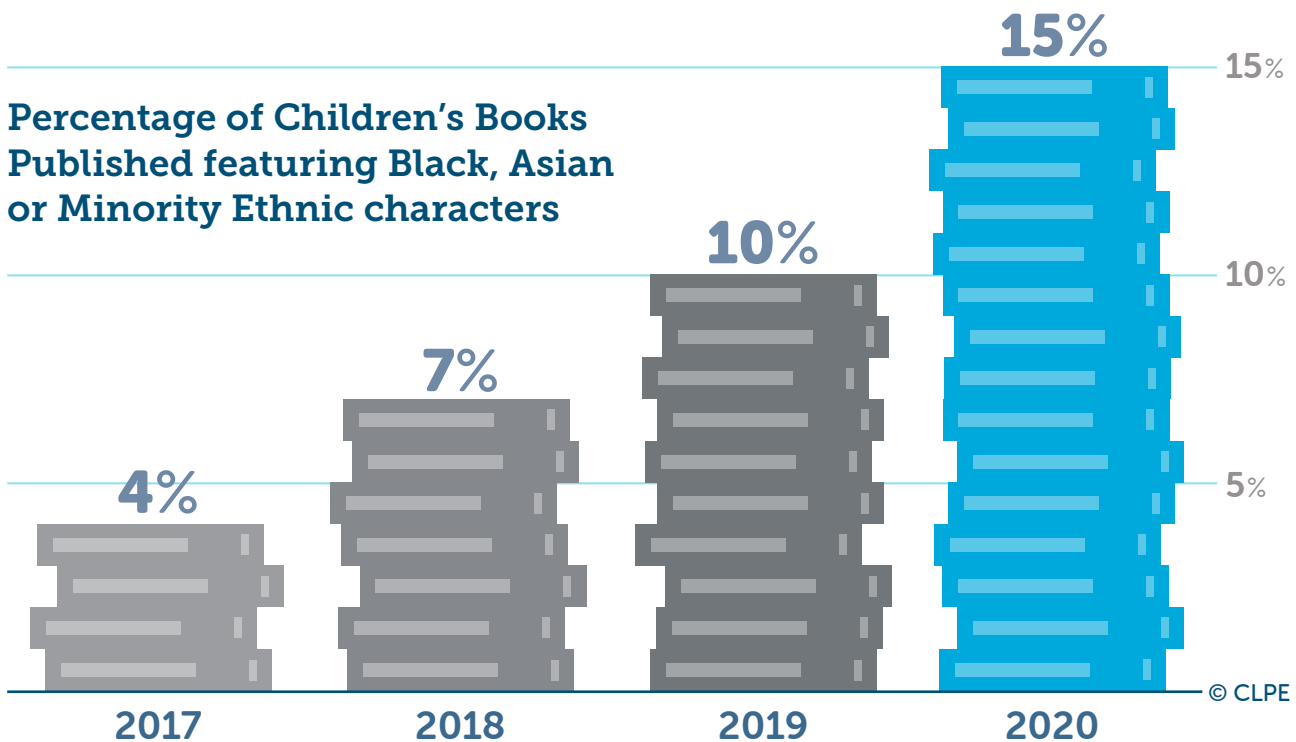
of picturebooks now featuring a character of colour (compared to 6% in the 2017 output). This is a large increase suggesting a significant change in the output. However, whilst we observed a visibly higher presence of characters of colour in the illustrations, this didn't always carry through into the detail of the text itself. There were also instances of ambiguity and fluidity in portrayals of ethnicity in illustrations. We believe that there is still a need for producers of picturebooks to look at the guidance regarding degrees of erasure which was published in the 2018 and 2019 reports. This attention to detail will be crucial in ensuring that publishers are able to guarantee presence without compromising the integrity of the character and that nuances are incorporated without resulting in clunky or laboured writing that compromises the quality of the narrative.

We observed a significant and welcome increase in representation

in non-fiction texts. We received more books in this category than in the previous cycle despite this being an area in which overall publishing output was down in 2020. It is our understanding that the reason for the drop in non-fiction and picturebook output was because of the disruption to supply chains as a result of the pandemic, it's therefore likely that we will see a rise in output in these text types in the next cycle. With that said, it remains really heartening that the proportion of representation rose despite these challenges.

8% of the childrens books published in the UK in 2020 had an ethnic minority main character, compared to 5% in 2019, 4% in 2018 and 1% in 2017. We are heartened by this upward trend and can definitely see that gains have been made in this area but with figures this low, there is still some way to go to ensuring a more representative bookshelf for our young readers. It is crucial that all readers are able

CONTINUED OVERLEAF...



to encounter characters of colour as a meaningful part of the mainstream. The benefit is twofold as it serves as affirmation in one instance and broadens world outlook in another. To encounter characters and worlds that resemble your own can allow for powerful connections to be forged between the reader and the world of the book. To experience people, cultures and worlds beyond

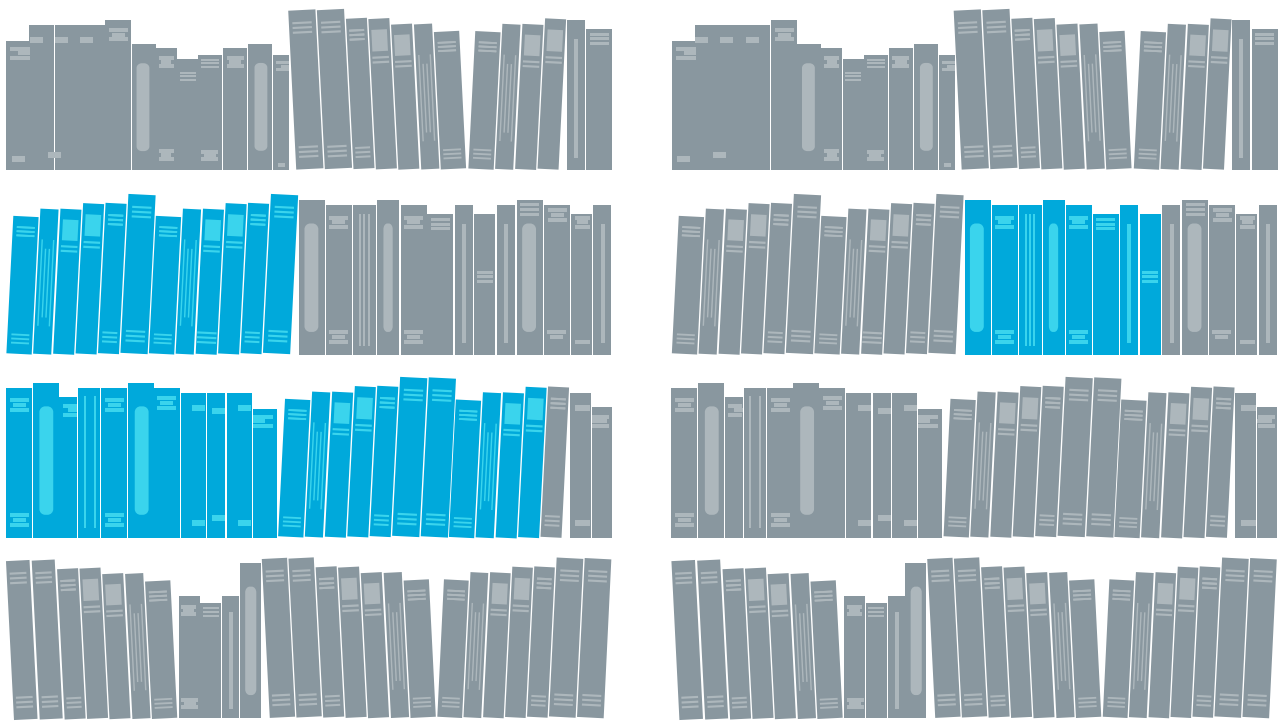
your own can deepen and enrich a reader's understanding of the world and their place in it. A representative and inclusive shelf therefore benefits all readers and should be an entitlement for all of our pupils.

The year on year increase in the percentage of ethnic minority characters and main lead characters featured in commercial children's

literature between 2017 and 2020 is a very positive move in the right direction.

Whilst the numbers allow us to quantify the extent of the presence, it remains important to consider what sits beneath the numbers by reflecting on the qualitative aspects of this presence.

Main characters in UK Children's Literature 2020



33.9% of Children of Primary School Age in England from a minority ethnic background

8% of Children's Books Published featuring a main character from a minority ethnic background

© CLPE

| Publisher Submissions Summary | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Percentage of Children of Primary School Age in England from a minority ethnic background | 32% | 33.1% | 33.5% | 33.9% |
| Percentage of Children's Books Published featuring a main character from a minority ethnic background | 1% | 4% | 5% | 8% |

Source: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

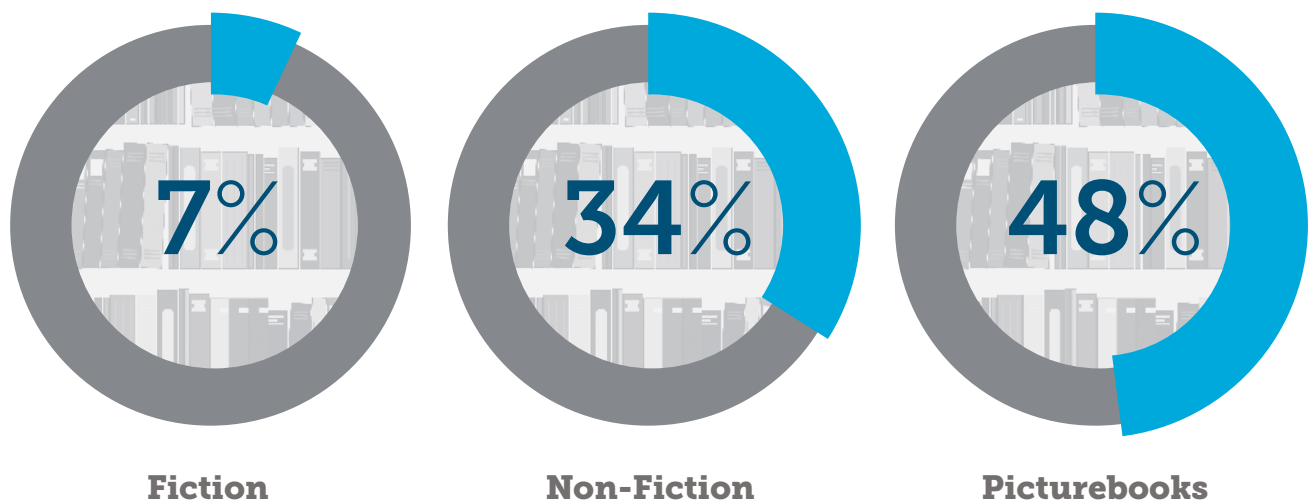
To experience people, cultures and worlds beyond your own can deepen and enrich a reader's understanding of the world and their place in it.





Text Types

Proportion of Minority Ethnic Representation in Books According to Text Type



© CLPE

Fiction

7% of **fiction** titles published in 2020 featured characters of colour. The number of fiction books published in 2020 only increased by 288 titles compared to 2019. The number of submissions from publishers to this survey was similar to the number of submissions in 2019. The percentage of fiction books which contain characters of colour published in 2020 remains the same as the percentage in 2019.

The review team observed that when the portrayals were good they were awe-inspiring. Strong, well-written narratives with compelling characters such as Catherine Johnson's *To Liberty! The Adventures of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas*, illustrated by Rachel Sanson and A. M. Dassu's award winning *Boy, Everywhere* were captivating and a real pleasure to review. We also encountered nuanced portrayals of demographic groups

that traditionally rarely feature as central characters that challenged stereotypes and prejudices through well-crafted and engaging narratives, such as *You Must Be Layla* by Yassmin Abdel-Magied. With that said, of the three text types reviewed, fiction was the category in which it is evident that an investment of time and careful consideration needs to be made. For every stand out title, there were many more that fell short, either because the

presence was too insignificant to reasonably be recognised as a meaningful reflection of realities or the portrayal was insufficiently or poorly developed.

We record the genre of each fiction submission in order to determine the types of narratives in which characters of colour are located. This enables us to ascertain whether there is a disproportionate amount of presence in one type of narrative over another. In our first report, we observed that only one out of the 391 titles reviewed could be classified as a comedy title. Having reported on this and shared and discussed these findings in a range of forums, it is really heartening to see that the volume of comedy titles has continued to grow each year, from the one title in that first report to comedy making up 10% of this year's fiction submissions. Since the success of Zanib Mian's award winning *Planet Omar* series, we have seen a number of comedy series centring on characters of colour such as Konnie Huq's *Cookie and the Most Annoying Boy in the World*, Humza Arshad and Henry White's *Little Badman* series and Katie and Kevin Tsang's *Sam Wu* series.

We have also seen a similar upward trend in the area of mystery adventure. Sharna Jackson's ground-breaking *High Rise Mysteries* that we spotlighted in our last report has been a crucial contribution to this part of the literary landscape. It has since been followed by titles such as Serena Patel's *Anisha Detective* series, Annabelle Sami's *Agent Zaiba Investigates* series, Roopa Farooki's medical mystery series, Patience Agbabi's *Leap Cycle* series and Sophie Deen's *Agent Asha: Mission Shark Bytes*, which have all been really well received.

To be able to list titles and series in this way just 4 years into doing this work fills us with great optimism and suggests the benefit and importance of this work. Furthermore, the fact that a number of these titles form part of a series demonstrates a long-term investment and commitment to this work from publishing houses. Based on our monitoring and observations of fiction genres, we anticipate that the increase of presence in adventure, comedy, fantasy, historical fiction, mystery and sci-fi will continue to make good gains in the coming years. These gains are crucial in normalising and making mainstream the presence of characters of colour across genres, depicted as multi-dimensional, well fleshed out individuals, feeling the full range of emotions and showcasing a spectrum of lived experiences.

Non-fiction

34% of non-fiction titles published in 2020 featured characters of colour. There was a significantly smaller non-fiction output in 2020 compared to the 2019 output (1628 non-fiction titles were published

in 2019 compared to 927 in 2020). However, we received just over double the amount of non-fiction submissions compared to the last cycle of this work (327 compared to 166). This would suggest that although less new non-fiction was published, a concerted effort was made to ensure that there was a presence of characters of colour featuring in what was produced, resulting in an increase from 10% in 2019 to 34% in 2020. We saw a significant increase in the number of books that sought to engage with current affairs and the increased discourse on the legacies of imperialism, anti-racist advocacy and identity politics which was prevalent in 2020. The subjects of such titles were more likely to be individuals of colour. There is real scope and potential to build on this by working towards content that focuses on groups, movements and social history as opposed to limiting content solely to the exploration of exceptional individuals.

As with fiction, we also note the genre of each non-fiction title.



Biography titles were again the highest number of types of book that made up the non-fiction submissions. This is unsurprising given the success of previous biography collections and the appetite and curiosity for learning about inspiring figures who have walked among us. The spotlight on anti-racist advocacy appears to correlate with biography titles making up a high proportion of non-fiction titles. This is a text type that can serve to inform and inspire young readers about the work and contributions that people of colour have made in different areas of life and across disciplines. It will continue to be important that the people profiled are from a range of backgrounds from within the UK, as much as from around the world. We also observed a growing number of submissions that could be classified as Self-help (10%) and STEM (7%) titles. We anticipate that the output of these text types will continue to grow in response to societal interests.

As output in this area hopefully increases over time, doing the research and preparation will be key to ensuring quality publications. Non-fiction output has the potential to be sensitively, creatively and intelligently responsive to the very real concerns and curiosities of young readers. If done well we could see a really interesting, constructive and continued positive peak in output of this text type. The practice of adapting existing adult non-fiction titles for younger readers has shown us that topics and themes traditionally viewed as too mature for a young readership can be refined to engage a younger audience. Titles such as David Olusoga's award winning *Black and British: A short, essential history* and Tim Marshall's *Prisoners of Geography: Our World Explained in 12 Simple Maps*, are

key examples of this. The skilful and careful considerations necessary to effectively bring such titles to fruition will raise the bar in this area of children's publishing. At a time in which the world must feel like such a daunting place, this strand of publishing will have an important role to play in helping young readers make sense of the world around them.

Picturebooks

48% of picturebook titles published in 2020 featured characters of colour. As with non-fiction, we observed a drop in production of picturebooks in 2020 but we processed about the same amount of titles in this category during this cycle (225 compared to 212), resulting in another increase in presence of characters of colour in picturebooks from 30% to 48%.

We are pleased to have seen another increase in the presence of characters of colour in this text type. Often aimed at our youngest readers, the increase shows a positive effort to really change the output of the industry.

Although this is the text type in which it is often easiest to identify characters of colour, it is also a text type in which presence can fail to be fully actualised. Based on our observations, the quality of portrayals of characters of colour in picturebooks tend to sit on a spectrum of vague at worst to great at best.

As detailed in the guidance in our [previous reports](#), we are keen for young readers

to encounter well developed, multi-dimensional characters of colour across all text types. We want readers to encounter characters with agency, who are identifiable, relatable, nuanced, varied and central to the narrative. It is evident when care and attention have been dedicated to ensuring this in the titles that sit at the positive end of the spectrum.

Hike authored and illustrated by Pete Oswald shows the tenderness of a father and child relationship as they enjoy a hiking trip together. The central character in Gaia Cornwall's *Jabari Tries* delightfully exudes the curiosity, playfulness and perseverance that many children will relate to. The whimsical illustrative style that centres a beautiful dark skinned Black female protagonist really captures the lyricism and gentleness of the text in *A Story about Afiya*, written by the late James Berry and illustrated by Anna Cunha. *The Proudest Blue* written by Ibtihaj Muhammad and S. K. Ali and illustrated by Hatem Aly is an affirming tale featuring a Black Muslim family. Ken Wilson-Max's *Lenny and Wilbur* is a playful, joyful example of positive casual inclusion featuring well rounded, loveable and relatable characters in the same vein as Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola's *Clean Up*.



We want readers to encounter characters with agency, who are identifiable, relatable, nuanced, varied and central to the narrative.



Reflecting on Character Voice and Agency

Our analysis framework is designed to enable us to identify each ethnic minority character's position in the narrative, assess whether these characters were given agency to express themselves over the course of the narrative and note whether or not their ethnicity was overly determined or incidental to the plot.

90% of the main cast of characters of colour featured in the submissions influenced the narrative in their expression of thought, voice or action. This is a positive indicator of the agency afforded to characters of colour. This compares favourably with the first year when this figure was only 38%, and indicates to us that significant editorial decisions are being made to ensure that characters of colour are given agency and voice. What will be key moving forward is ensuring that there is just as much effort in ensuring that portrayals of characters of colour are multi-dimensional and well developed.

Through a range of text types from picturebooks to biographies to historical fiction, the ethnic identity of characters was explored and formed the basis of a plot point across a small proportion of the submissions. 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 2020 set of submissions, 18% of the books featured a main character who spoke about their ethnicity and whose ethnicity formed the basis of a plot point. This was an increase from 2019 where this figure was 6%, an upward trend that resonates with our current social context in which discourses on identity seem more prevalent.

Cast Dynamics

When reviewing the cast dynamic in this year's submissions, we noted a higher proportion of characters of colour being designated the role of the main character. In terms of secondary and side-kick characters, a greater degree of agency was afforded them in terms of their proximity and contribution to the plot. This meant that in many instances reviewers enjoyed encountering engaging casts with varied and nuanced relationship dynamics.

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' with equal weighting in terms of presence, agency and voice. 33% of books submitted featured a multicultural cast of characters with shared agency. This is quite an increase from 18% in 2019.

Background Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Minority Category

32% of the books submitted in 2020 only featured the presence of characters of colour in the form of background characters, compared to 8% in 2019 and 27% in 2018.

We concluded in the last report that the decreased shift from 2018 to 2019 corroborated the review team's assessment that in general, the depictions of characters of colour tended to be more considered in that set of submissions. The increase from 8% to 32% this year does not necessarily indicate a step backwards but is more likely to be the result of the significant increase of non-fiction titles submitted in this cycle, many of which feature background scenes including people as a standard part of the design style. This increase in background presence also sits alongside a significant increase in characters of colour forming part of the main cast.



Animals and Non-human Casts in Children’s Fiction

This work is focused on determining the extent and quality of human characters of colour, deliberately to the exclusion of animal and non-human characters. After all, the values underpinning our work are centred on supporting an increase in high quality portrayals of characters of colour in an area of publishing where under-representation has been a long established reality. However, at the request of publishers, following the publication of the first report, we agreed to collate data regarding the proportion of presence of animals

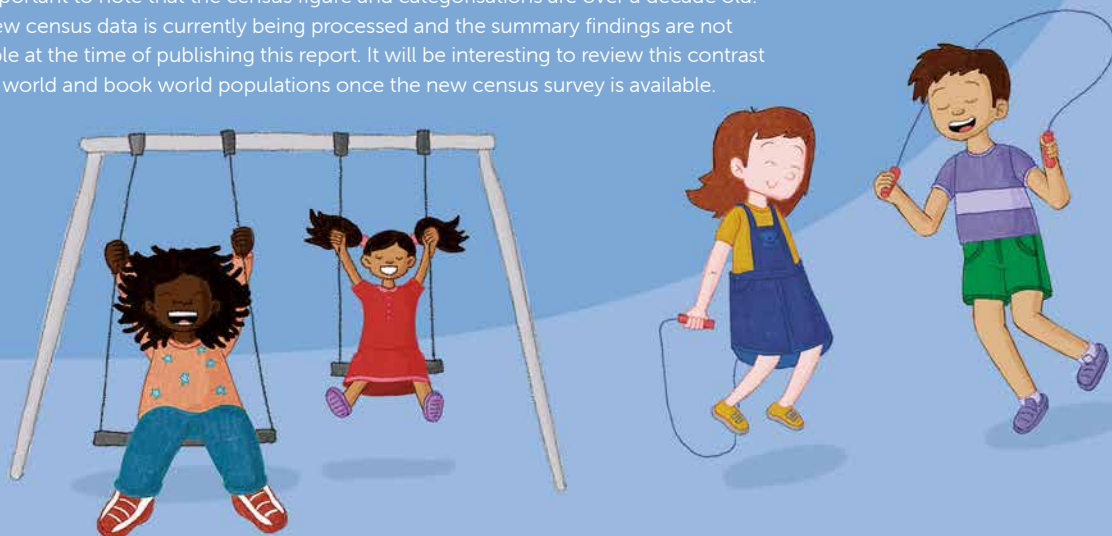
featuring as main cast members if the publishers could provide us with the information necessary to be able to do this. We assume that the hypothesis for those who wish to have data regarding the presence of animal casts is that this would go some way towards qualifying the lack of ethnic minority presence in children’s literature. We touch on the limitations of this position in our blog post, Reflecting Realities, the methodology behind the report. In this cycle, participating publishers reported to us that 33% of the total books they published in 2020 featured animals or non-human characters as main cast characters

and 63% featured human main cast characters. These figures are similar to the previous two reporting cycles.

The distinction between the percentage of main characters of colour compared to the proportion of pupils of colour in classrooms across England as depicted on page 8 illustrate the contrast of realities in the world of books vs the real world. This is also compounded when you consider the significantly small proportion of presence of different demographic groups, which is also lower than the real population equivalents in every instance.

| Ethnic Category | Percentage of Population in England and Wales Reported as Belonging to an Identified Ethnic Minority Category | Percentage of Total Books Published Featuring a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic Main Character | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|-------|------|------|
| | | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Arab | 0.4% | 0.1% | 0.2% | 0.2% | 0.2% |
| Asian | 6.8% | 0.5% | 0.14% | 0.3% | 0.7% |
| Black | 3.4% | 1% | 0.1% | 2% | 2.2% |
| Chinese | 0.7% | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.2% | 0.3% |
| Mixed Race | 2.2% | 0.2% | 0.3% | 0.9% | 0.8% |
| Other | 0.6% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.5% |

It is important to note that the census figure and categorisations are over a decade old. The new census data is currently being processed and the summary findings are not available at the time of publishing this report. It will be interesting to review this contrast of real world and book world populations once the new census survey is available.





Changing the Landscape Learning and Working Together towards a Common Goal

The issue of under-representation in children's literature is not a new phenomenon. When we began our Reflecting Realities work, we were keen to use our knowledge base, resources and longstanding working relationship with the publishing industry to contribute to the decades of advocacy and work in this area.

We hoped that our annual surveys would support the important efforts in moving the discourse forward and improving the quality and quantity of representative and inclusive literature in classrooms, bookshops and libraries. We provide the data and qualitative analysis to raise awareness and support producers and consumers to recognise what quality can look like and the value this can add to the reading experience.

Over the last four years we have delivered training and support in this area for teachers around the UK and beyond. We have delivered consultancy, keynotes, workshops, webinars and a number of CLPE Literacy Library Presents events to build knowledge and understanding about the implications of this work on classroom practice.

The Reflecting Realities reports can only serve as a catalyst for change if they are used to inform action with tangible outcomes. We have worked with many different partners to take the messages from this work beyond the pages of this report. These include: Bath Spa University, BookTrust, the Bookseller, British Library, Cheltenham Literature Festival, Empathy Lab, Goldsmiths

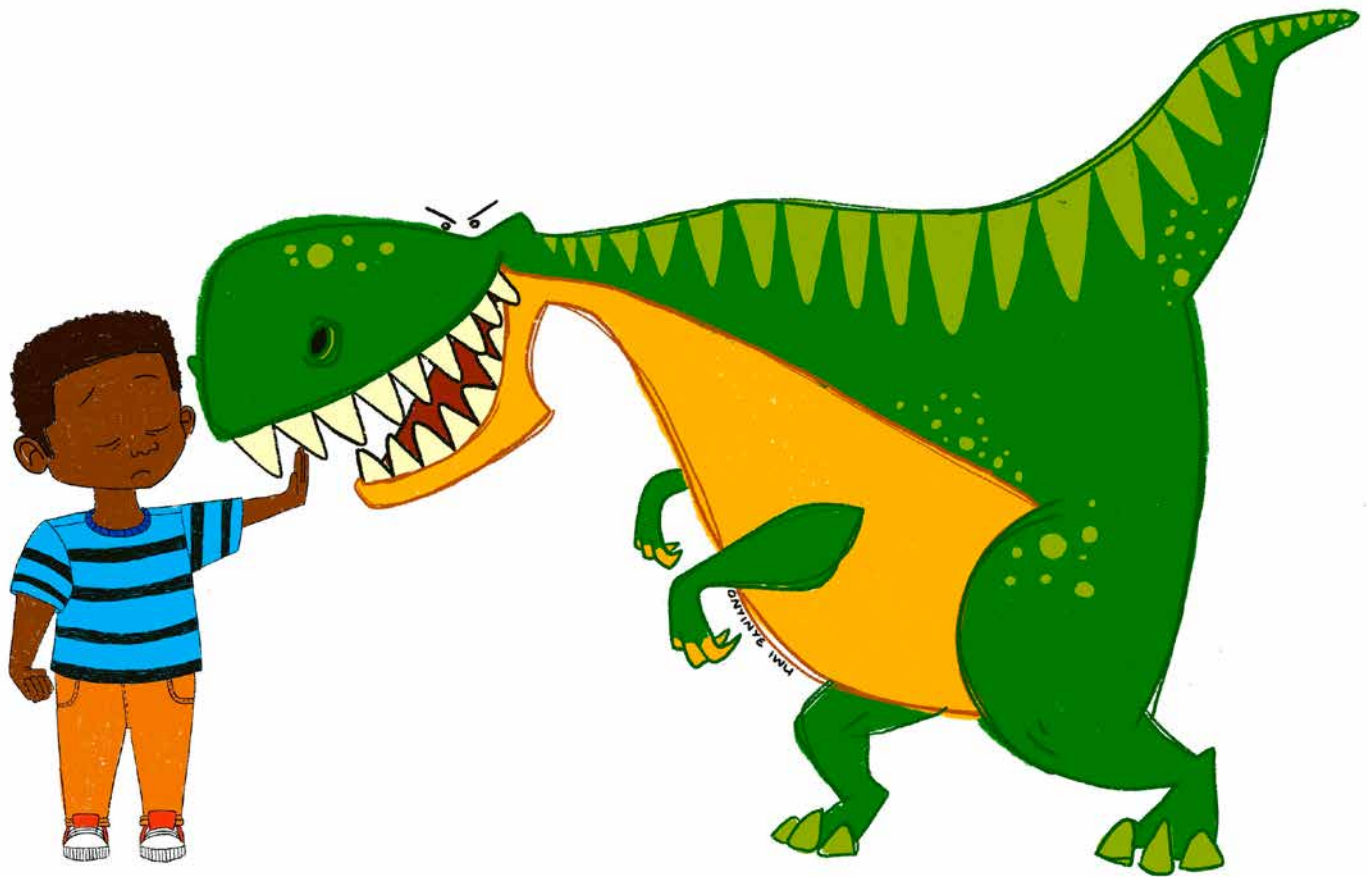
University, Greenwich University, Hay Festival, Literature Wales, Pop Up Pathways project, Royal African Society, Seven Stories, Southbank Centre, UKLA, University of East London and University College London. In addition, we've worked with librarians through our connections with CILIP and the School Library Association and with publishing houses including Knights Of, Macmillan Children's Books, Usborne and Walker Books.

From the outset, we tried to determine ways in which the value of this work could be optimised at every stage in the process to contribute towards meaningful change. This is why we initiated an internship programme to support the collection of data for the survey. We recruit students studying publishing to undertake a paid internship in which they become part of our review team and gain first-hand experience of the publishing landscape. This programme supports them to develop knowledge and enables them to analyse the distinctions between quality and poor representation of characters of colour. This is an important investment in the next generation of publishing, equipping the publishers

of the future with core skills and building capacity in the system.

This work continues to influence every part of our output from the construction of our free 'whole school back to school units', the notes we write for publishers, our poetry programme, our book choices and our training programme. It has also enabled us to build on learning from different areas of our research to develop learning in schools through a specifically designed [Poetry in the Classroom](#) programme that we delivered in partnership with the [Royal African Society](#). This project allowed us to investigate the impact on learning of raising the profile of poets from the African diaspora and creatively engaging with their work.

The complexity and scale of the issues that underpin the Reflecting Realities findings means that partnership and collaboration are key to enabling us all to move forward. The BookTrust Represents programme promotes awareness of creators of colour in children's books and since 2017 BookTrust has conducted research into the representation of creators of colour in the UK.



We work in partnership with BookTrust whose work to support all children to be readers complements our work in schools and whose research provides a picture of the publishing industry from the perspective of creators of books. In 2021 we were pleased to work with BookTrust and the inclusive publisher **Knights Of** to produce a short story collection, *Happy Here*. This book is authored and illustrated by some of the best emerging and long established Black British artists and features a range of stories, genres and styles, with well fleshed

out developed characters that taps into a range of lived experiences and spans across every day, funny, mystery, adventure and fantasy. It is a direct response to our observations that there was a lack of presence and range in this area of publishing and to BookTrust's work highlighting and giving opportunities to writers and illustrators of colour. BookTrust has distributed a copy of this book to every school in England and we are continuing to work together to provide resources, visits and support for schools.

Our contribution is a fragment of the 'we' that is necessary for the change to be meaningful and long lasting. We are fully aware that meaningful change requires a multi-layered, multi-faceted approach. It is only through the efforts and commitment of the many parents, teachers, librarians, booksellers, researchers, third sector organisations, funders and publishers that we will truly achieve the change we hope for.

In previous reports we have concentrated on sharing a vocabulary for talking about representation (our **Degrees of Erasure**) and **questions** to ask about children's books to support a balanced collection. In this report we want to make sure that we highlight the enormous range of information and work that is going on in this area. So many charities, literature organisations and publishing organisations are recognising the need for the work – and doing the work – to support change.

We hope that you will be able to use these links as we have done, to support and influence your work and to learn with, from and on behalf of one another.

We want this to be a useful resource and are sure that there are many more organisations than we have included here. If you know of something we should have included then do get in touch. We will update this list periodically.



Cover illustration by Wesley Barnes.

Resources

Research, Surveys and Reports that give us important information about representation in children's literature and the publishing industry:

- [BookTrust Represents Research](#)
- [CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards Independent Diversity Review Final Report](#)
- [Penguin Random House/Runnymede Trust: Lit in Colour Diversity in Literature in English Schools](#)
- [Publishers' Association Diversity Survey of the Publishing Workforce](#)
- [Spread the Word, The Bookseller and Goldsmiths University: Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing](#)
- [The Arts Council Time For Change Report](#)

Booksellers championing a wide range of diverse and inclusive books:

- [Book Love](#)
- [Letterbox Library](#)
- [Lighthouse Bookshop](#)
- [Little Box of Books](#)
- [New Beacon Books](#)
- [News from Nowhere Bookshop](#)
- [Moon Lane Books](#)
- [Newham Bookshop](#)
- [Round Table Books](#)
- [Willesden Bookshop](#)

The organisations providing resources and opportunities for schools to develop their provision in this area:

- [British Library](#)
- [First Story](#)
- [National Literacy Trust](#)
- [Royal African Society](#)
- [The Black Curriculum](#)

The organisations making space and creating opportunities for creators of colour:

- [All Stories](#)
- [BookTrust Represents](#)
- [Jericho Prize](#)
- [Jhalak Prize](#)
- [Literature Wales](#)
- [Lit in Colour](#)
- [Megaphone](#)
- [Pop Up's Pathway into Children's Publishing Programme](#)
- [Speaking Volumes](#)
- [Spread the Word](#)
- [The Good Literary Agency](#)



Moving Forward

What we will do with this work

The core purpose of our work at CLPE is to support schools in developing the best literacy provision and learning conditions to enable the children in their care to thrive. Everything we do is driven by this.

We are keen advocates of ensuring that quality literature is an integral feature of this provision and our Reflecting Realities research was born out of our desire to improve access to the quantity and quality of representative literature. We have learnt a tremendous amount through this work and as with all of our research, we are committed to taking this learning back into the classroom where the impact matters most.

We have always viewed the aims of our Reflecting Realities work as requiring a two tiered approach. Tier one has enabled us to challenge the supply component of the supply and demand chain by producing an annual survey that quantifies the extent of under-representation in children's literature. In doing so we have contributed towards increasing the publishing industry's transparency and accountability in this regard.

Tier two allows us to tackle the demand component of the supply and demand chain. Increasing volume and choice through the first tier of this work is one way to influence consumption by virtue of the increased availability of quality inclusive titles. However, in order to deepen audience engagement, we believe that schools require support in developing core skills of critical

reflection in this area to enable them to become more discerning in the choices they make when curating and sharing books with young people.

We will take the learning from this research and test our theory of change to determine what happens when children have the opportunity to engage in the work of quality representative literature produced by authors of colour. How might this evolve children's relationship with reading? How might this shape them as writers? And how might these insights influence the demand for the production of more representative literature?

To meaningfully make sustainable systemic shifts in this area, we need to go beyond the book list and be critically reflective about our practices. With the generous grant funding of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, we have been able to engage 10 schools to work with us to investigate these questions and more and to track the learning journeys of 300 pupils across a 3-year period.

We will publish what we learn in a new CLPE book in 2023 and publish the final findings at the end of the project, providing insights into our learning and guidance tools for all schools to benefit from this work.



Our Recommendations

What will you do with this work?

We hope that the **recommendations** outlined in the first report, the lexicon we developed in the second report regarding **degrees of erasure**, the toolkit to guide understanding of what constitutes **exemplary features** of inclusive literature as featured in the third report, as well as insights from this year's report will support publishers in their ongoing efforts to produce high quality representative literature. The key recommendations remain consistent with what we have advocated for from the very first report:

- Characters of colour should reflect the UK population and the world at large, 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 one dimensional shorthand.
- Characters of colour need to be well developed and authentically portrayed.
- Characters of colour should not be predominantly defined by their struggle, suffering, exceptionalism or 'otherness.'
- Characters of colour should be central to a broad range of narratives.
- Characters of colour 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.
- Thorough research and careful consideration should be exercised to ensure respectful, nuanced and layered portrayals.
- The industry should continue to 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.



There is a body of phenomenal emerging and long standing talent creating beautiful, joyful, moving, thought provoking, powerful, exciting and inspiring work.

The abundance of choice is growing.

Be critically reflective in your choices and keep celebrating, sharing and investing in the work.

Acknowledgements

Steering Committee

This work was led by Farrah Serroukh, Research and Development Director at CLPE.

This year, the work was project managed by Fathima Ali. Fathima previously worked as an intern on Reflecting Realities and we are grateful for her invaluable support.

We work with a Steering Committee of leading experts in publishing and education who include:

Darren Chetty

Lecturer, University College London

Dr Fen Coles

Co-director, Letterbox Library

Louise Johns-Shepherd

CLPE Chief Executive

Professor Vini Lander

Director of the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality Carnegie School of Education Leeds Beckett University

Nicky Parker

Head of Literature, Amnesty and Chair of Trustees at CLPE

Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold

Senior Lecturer in Children's Literature Studies – Culture, Literacies, Inclusion & Pedagogy, University of Glasgow

Professor Karen Sands O'Connor

British Academy Global Professor for Children's Literature, Newcastle University)

Dr Zaahida Nabagereka

Lit in Colour Programme Manager at Penguin Random House UK, Lecturer at City University and Co-Founder of Afrikult

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

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 a range of individuals and organisations.

Thank you to Sarah Crown and the team at Arts Council England for your continued support of this research and funding this work as part of your ongoing commitment to better representation in the arts and across all sectors. We are grateful for the information and support provided by colleagues at Nielsen. We would like to thank Tom MacAndrew and Liz Scott for their support throughout the process and our colleagues at BookTrust who continue to work in partnership with us to facilitate change.

Thank you to the review team who meticulously reviewed each and every title, the fantastic staff and students at Bath Spa University; Alice

Wilson, Amy Low, Courtney Jefferies, Emily Bufton, Esther Molyneux, Gemma Wynton, Holly Tonks, Isobel Tupman, Jason Bennett, Joanna De Vries, Jo Horton, Kirsty Hall, Lauren Forester, Megan Miller, Milly Forbes, Nethmi Karunjeewa, Samantha Hopkins and Tyler Jones.

The wonderful team at CLPE; Anjali Patel, Charlotte Hacking, Darren Matthews, Fathima Ali, Jonathan Rodgers, Louise Johns-Shepherd, Phoebe Demeger – and Ann Lazim, who continues to support this work even after retiring from CLPE. We would like to express special thanks to Holly Tonks whose support in co-ordinating and managing the BSU internship was fundamental to the success of this year's review process.

2021 continued to be a particularly challenging year. The production of this report would not have been possible without the support,

flexibility and fortitude of the entire CLPE staff and Trustee team.

The illustrations used in this report are reproduced with the kind permission of Onyinye Iwu. We are truly grateful for her support and generosity.

Thank you to the authors, illustrators, poets, teachers, researchers, booksellers, activists and advocates who have continued to support this work and champion the principles that drive it.

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.

It is crucial that all readers are able to encounter characters of colour as a meaningful part of the mainstream.



“ Reflecting Realities means exactly that. Ensuring that our imagined stories – regardless of genre and theme – include a diverse range of children who are living in our real world. ”

Sharna Jackson, Author

*From her CLPE blog, Reflecting Realities Report:
Examples of Good Practice – High-Rise Mystery.*



If you have any questions about this report please contact CLPE:

Visit the website www.clpe.org.uk/reflectingrealities

Email us info@clpe.org.uk Call 020 7401 3382

Follow us:

 Twitter: @clpe1

 Facebook: CLPE

 Instagram: CLPE

 LinkedIn: CLPE

 YouTube: CLPE

This research has been funded by Arts Council England.