CLPE

CENTRE FOR **LITERACY**
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

REFLECTING REALITIES

Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature 2019

Published 2020

www.clpe.org.uk

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Contents

Foreword 3

Introduction 4

Key Findings 5

Key Findings from Three Years of Data (2017, 2018, 2019) 6

Key Findings from the 2019 Survey 7

2019 Survey Insights 8

- Reflecting on Content
- Reflecting on Character Voice and Agency
- Cast Dynamics
- Multicultural Cast of Characters with Shared Agency
- Background Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Category
- Animals and Inanimate Casts in Children's Fiction

2017-2019 Overview of Trends 10

What does it mean to reflect realities and what does it look like when realities are reflected well? 12

Exemplifications of Good Practice from the 2019 Output 13

Degrees of Erasure – a lexicon to aid discussion 20

Ensuring Children's Literature Reflects Realities – a toolkit to support creation and curation 23

Methodology 26

Acknowledgements 27

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Pages 3, 21, 22, 27: *Where's Lenny*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max
Pages 6, 8: *Lenny and Wilbur*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

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Foreword

At CLPE we do the work we do because we believe, and the research shows us, that being literate changes your life. The research also shows us that if you are a literate child who reads for pleasure then this has more impact on your future life chances than any other factor. Encouraging reading for pleasure is a social justice issue. But we also know that learning to read is a social process, to be successful you need to connect with your reading material, you need to be able to see yourself, in some way, in what you read. The under-representation of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters means that readers from a range of backgrounds do not always have the opportunity to make those connections.

We began this work in 2017 and we know that since the publication of the first statistics work has been done across the charity, arts and publishing sectors to put in place a range of measures designed to institute real change. This change will take time because we also know that the structures and systems in place are entrenched and societal. Whilst the third year of data shows a continued increase from the first and second year of this work, we believe that there is still much to be done. We know that the industry accepts that the root of disproportionate under-representation has come about because of the power and privilege of those who control the decisions and we need to use this awareness to continue to move forward in a positive way.

What the three years of data about representation give us is a benchmark, a way of tracking and understanding progress as we move forward from this place to a fairer, more inclusive future. What the three years of research is also giving us as we investigate and scrutinise so much of the children's publishing industry output, is the language and the tools to help us to make decisions about what that output looks like in the future. In this three-year report, Farrah and her team have drawn together all of the findings from 2017-2019, building a toolkit to ensure that the children of the future will find books in school book corners, libraries and bookshops that are a true reflection of the reality they live and which help them to become real readers and writers with all of the benefits this brings for our entire society.

We are proud to share this report and this work with you.

Louise Johns-Shepherd
Chief Executive

Illustration from *Where's Lenny*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

Introduction

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education is a charity that has been working with teachers for close to half a century to develop best practice and provision in all aspects of literacy teaching. Quality literature sits in the heart of the Centre and at the core of everything we do because we are keen advocates of making literature an integral feature of the Primary experience.

We know that access to quality literature transforms children's personal and academic growth, and lays the foundations for improved life chances. The right book can set a child on this path and open up worlds beyond their wildest imagination whilst giving them a better chance at making it in the world in which they inhabit.

This is why books matter and the matter of the books matters even more.

We take our role as curators of quality literature very seriously. All children deserve to experience books that reflect their realities and give them the opportunity to broaden their world to experience realities beyond their own. Dr Rudine Sims Bishop's seminal work in this area and her analogy of 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors,' perfectly expresses the value of such reading experiences.

The lack of quality, inclusive, representative books that reflect the realities of the children in our classrooms has been a longstanding issue in the UK. Positive change requires collective and consistent efforts and many people have been advocating and active in this field for many years. Our charity was keen to contribute to these efforts by providing the metrics to measure and monitor the extent of the issue, keeping the importance of a commitment to inclusive quality literature in the collective consciousness. We took our inspiration from the long-standing work of the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Three years ago, funded by Arts Council England, we published the UK's first ever survey of ethnic minority representation in UK children's literature. We developed an analysis framework that would allow us to review all of the books published in 2017 that featured ethnic minority presence. The first report provided a benchmark, for 2017 and for years to come.

The 2017 figures highlighted how significantly under-represented ethnic minority characters were in children's literature and sent shockwaves across stakeholders sparking much discussion and reflection. The second report provided a lexicon to frame how we discuss the patterns of different types of erasure we identified. Articulating racist, discriminatory or prejudicial content and attitudes helps make visible the barriers to systemic, long term change in children's books. This year's report provides a toolkit to support both producers and consumers of children's literature to be more critically reflective.

BookTrust's interim report which is a follow up to their important study of Representation of People of Colour among Children's Book Authors and Illustrators provides further data relating to this area of study providing data about the under-representation of creators. It is important to view these reports alongside our work as the implications of these two areas of research are strongly interlinked. We continue to work in partnership with our colleagues at BookTrust to find ways in which we can support continued change.

This year's Reflecting Realities report has involved reviewing the publishing output for 2019 against a backdrop of significant global turmoil and uncertainty. Given the heightened risk of marginalisation that many of our pupils are facing in the current political landscape, it is our duty to counteract such hostility by creating a learning community that gives them the resilience to navigate the world they inherit.

Books have a 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 that leads to improved quality inclusive literature that reflects the realities of all our readers.

Farrah Serroukh
Learning Programme
Leader CLPE

Key Findings

Key Findings from Three Years of Data (2017, 2018, 2019)

7% of the children's books published in the UK over the last 3 years (2017, 2018, 2019) feature characters from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background.

By undertaking such a rigorous review process and reviewing every book published over the last three years which depicts a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic character, we have been able to identify trends and patterns. This work has helped us to devise a new lexicon to articulate instances of erasure and a toolkit to aid stakeholders in taking a more critically reflective approach.

The three years of data shows a positive trend and reflects work that has been done but we do not yet have an output that reflects the population of our readers.

We welcome a year on year rise in representation in children's literature. We do not however think that the work has finished. In 2019 33.5% of the school population were of minority ethnic origins, in stark contrast only 5% of children's books had an ethnic minority main character.

Illustration from *Lenny and Wilbur*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

Key Findings from the 2019 Survey

6478 children's books were published in the UK in 2019

Of these **680** featured ethnic minority characters

10% of the **children's books** published in **2019** featured **ethnic minority characters,** compared to **7%** in **2018** and **4%** in **2017**

5% of the **children's books** published in the UK in **2019** had an **ethnic minority main character,** compared to **4%** in **2018** and **1%** in **2017**

There was a significant drop in the overall percentage of submissions that only featured ethnic minority presence in the form of background characters compared to previous cycles.

Fewer picturebooks were published in 2019, however the number of picturebooks featuring Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters published in 2019 compared to 2018 did not significantly differ. The increase in the overall percentage of representation across all text types is driven by a proportionate increase in representation in picturebooks and non-fiction, whilst the proportion of minoritised characters in children's fiction has not significantly shifted from 2018.

We received a smaller volume of submissions in 2019 compared to 2018, which correlates with the drop in overall industry output. Almost half of the books reviewed were aimed at the middle grade age range.

The qualitative analysis in 2019 highlighted some examples of quality inclusive and representative literature, as well as continued instances of problematic or insignificant presence.

Books defined as 'fantasy' amounted to 74 titles, which accounted for 24% of the fiction submissions. This continues to be a sustained positive shift away from typical patterns of ethnic minority presence, which often confine ethnic minority characters to a very narrow set of genres.

There was a 9.5% increase in books featuring social justice themes, with these titles making up 29.5% of the submissions. This may be as a result of a general trend towards a larger volume of social justice themed books being published. These aligned to contemporary societal concerns about themes such as climate change and may be partly the reason why 20% of the books identified as having a social justice theme were focused on the environment.

Although we received fewer non-fiction titles in 2019 than in 2018, this appears to correlate with the decrease of overall non-fiction titles aimed at this specific age range. Within the non-fiction submissions, biographies continued to form a prominent number of the books, making up almost a fifth of these titles.

Whilst it is heartening to observe a continued upward trend in the increase of both the number of ethnic minority main characters and overall ethnic minority presence in books published in 2019, we remain mindful that these figures still illustrate the significant extent of under-representation of ethnic minority characters in children's literature. These figures along with the qualitative insights highlight the necessity to continue the work of reviewing and monitoring output. This work seeks to shine a light on the extent and quality of ethnic minority representation in children's literature to inform and sustain the necessary efforts to redress the imbalance – we know there is still much work to do.

2019 Survey Insights

Reflecting on Content

The year on year increase in the percentage of ethnic minority characters and main lead characters featured in children's literature between 2017 and 2019 is a positive move in the right direction. However, in light of how low the figures continue to be it is crucial to continue this work, particularly given the immeasurable value that inclusive representative quality literature can add to the book shelf. Although the numbers provide a sense of the size of the problem, numbers alone are not sufficient in conveying the nature and extent of the issue we are seeking to spotlight. As with the two previous reports, it is important to offer an insight into the quality of the portrayals of ethnic minority characters.

Along with the increase in the proportion of ethnic minority main characters compared to 2018, we observed that ethnic minority secondary characters were much better portrayed and well developed. Secondary characters were individuals in their own right, often with identities of their own independent of the lead character, with agency and opportunities to meaningfully steer and contribute to the narrative.

This qualitative shift is important to note as we have maintained throughout this work that presence alone is not sufficient and presence without regard to the quality of a character's portrayal has the potential to be damaging and counter-productive. For example, East Asian characters not only continue to be noticeably under-represented but in the very small number of instances where we did encounter East Asian characters, they often tended to be either stereotypes, often portrayed as geeks or problematically represented as villainous. As curators of children's literature, parents, carers, librarians and teachers we should not just expect more but we should also expect better in terms of the quality of ethnic minority representation in children's literature.

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.

96% of the ethnic minority main characters 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 ethnic minority main characters and is a marked increase on the previous 2018 and 2017.

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 2019 set of submissions, 12% 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 2018 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

In 2019 we noted broader, more nuanced relationships within the cast of main characters than there had been in previous years. There was a varied make-up of sole main, joint lead, secondary and sidekick characters. In contrast to the 2018 submissions there were siginificantly fewer instances of sidekick characters, a drop of 10.2%. There was an increase in the number of main and secondary characters from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to the 2018 survey. However we also observed that there was a higher proportion of secondary ethnic minority characters than those cast in main roles.

Illustration from *Lenny and Wilbur*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

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. 18% of books submitted featured a multicultural cast of characters with shared agency. This is a slight decrease from 19% in 2018.

Background Characters Identified as Belonging to an Ethnic Category

8% of the books submitted in 2019 only featured ethnic minority presence in the form of background characters, compared to 27% in 2018. This shift corroborates the conclusion that in general, the depictions of ethnic minority characters tended to be more considered in this set of submissions.

Conversely, one of the key challenges of the 2019 survey, was the extent to which the books had to be scruitinised to locate ethnic minority presence. In a number of instances we struggled to identify whether or not there were any ethnic minority characters in the title submitted. Under-developed characters and a lack of cues to indicate the background of the characters in these submissions raised questions as to the eligibility of some titles.

Animals and Inanimate Object Casts in Children's Fiction.

One of the most common questions arising from the original survey in 2017 was why we had not considered the presence of animals in children's literature. These questions were rooted in the hypothesis that the data would highlight a disproportionate presence of animal protagonists and casts over and above human protagonists and casts which would go some way towards qualifying the lack of ethnic minority presence. In the 2018 we were asked to provide data relating to the proportionate presence of animals in the total output. Because publishers asked us to collect this data, we added the reporting of this information as an additional requirement of the 2018 survey and we continued this practice in the 2019 survey. Publishers self-reported their summary data of books featuring main casts solely comprising of animals or inanimate objects published in 2019.

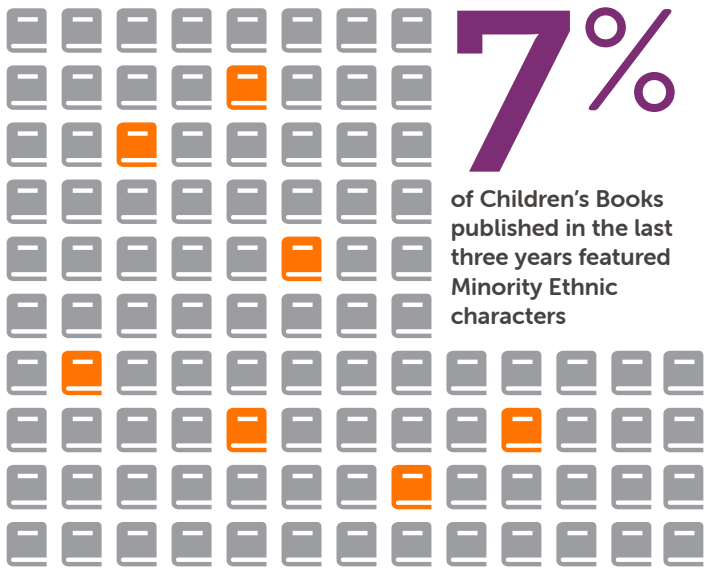
Publishers reported to us that 38% of the total books they published in 2019 featured animals or inanimate objects as main cast characters and 64% featured human main cast characters. A focus on animal characters diverts the attention, energies and efforts of stakeholders from addressing the real issue. Under-representation of ethnic minorities in children's literature is a very real and longstanding issue. Given that ethnic minority 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. These self-reported statistics indicate that a reader from an ethnic minority background is more likely to encounter an animal protagonist than they are to experience a main character that shares their ethnicity or cultural heritage.

> "Better representation means just that, better in all regards, because all young readers deserve the best that the literary world has to offer."
>
> Farrah Serroukh, CLPE

2017 – 2019

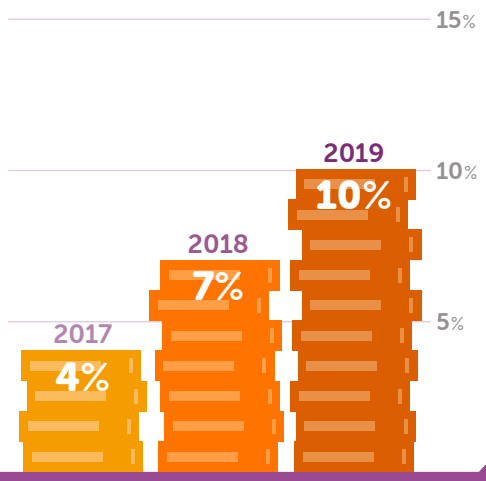
Overview of Trends

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Presence in UK Children's Literature in the last 3 Years



7%

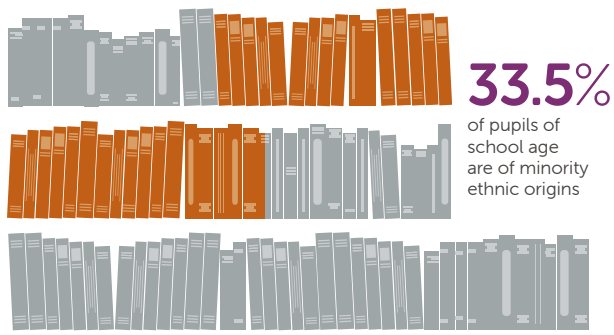
of Children's Books published in the last three years featured Minority Ethnic characters



Proportion of Minority Ethnic Representation in Books Published between 2017-2019 according to Text Type

Fiction					
No. of Fiction Titles Processed			Percentage of fiction titles featuring Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters		
2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
162	312	302	3%	6%	7%
Non-Fiction					
No. of Non-Fiction Titles Processed			Percentage of non-fiction titles featuring Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters		
2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
124	235	166	6%	7%	10%
Picture Book					
No. of Picture Books Processed			Percentage of picture book titles featuring Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic characters		
2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
128	230	212	6%	9%	30%

Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic Makeup of Main Characters in UK Children's Literature in 2019



33.5% of pupils of school age are of minority ethnic origins

5% of children's books had a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic main character

Source: gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019

Summary of Minority Ethnic Makeup of Main Characters compared to Minority Ethnic Makeup of Classroom Population over 3 Years

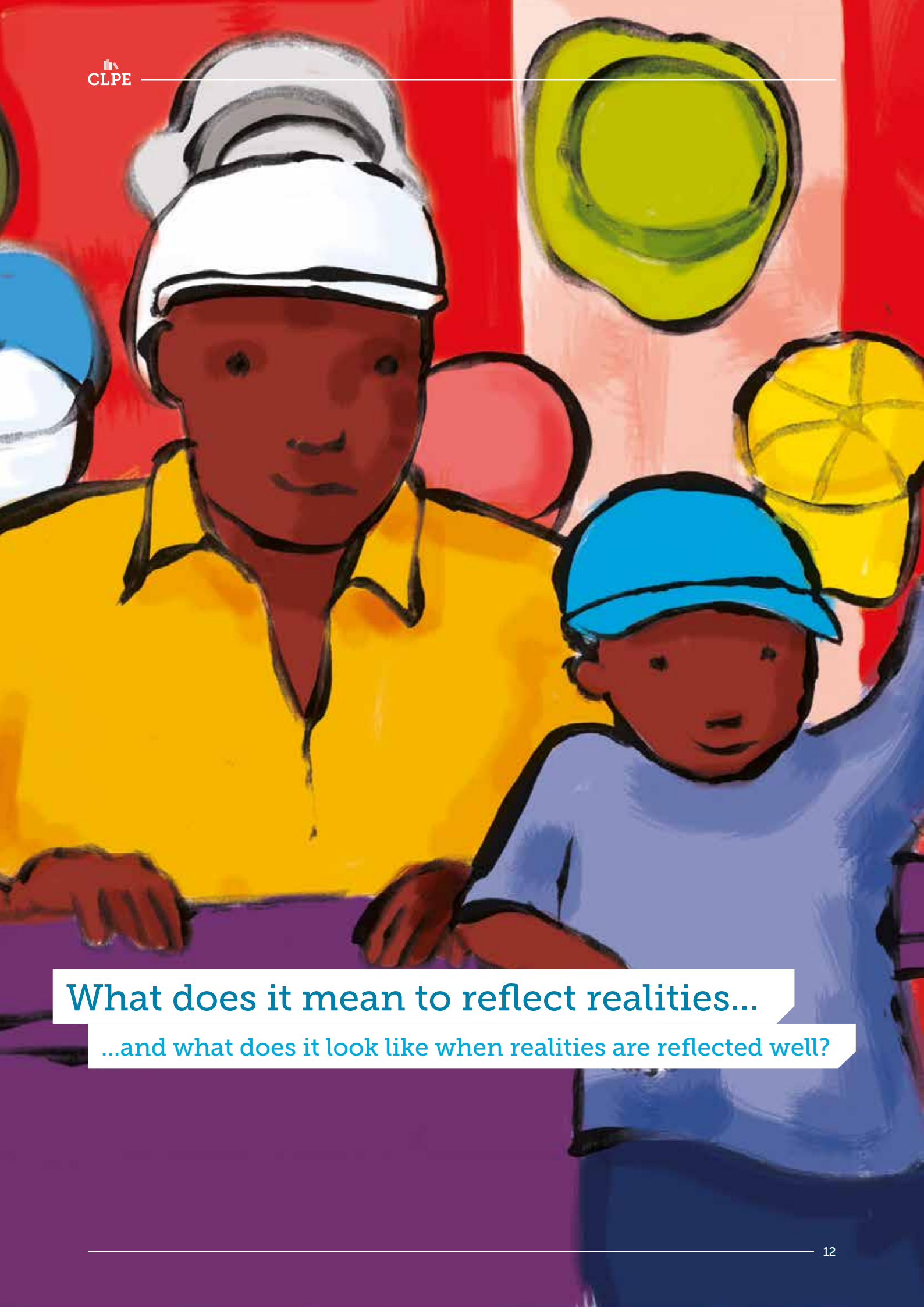
	2017	2018	2019
Percentage of children of primary school age from a Minority Ethnic background	32%	33.1%	33.5%
Percentage of children's books published featuring a main character from a Minority Ethnic background	1%	4%	5%

Contrast in Demographic Makeup with the Proportion of Ethnic Minority Presence in Children's Literature

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 Featuring Ethnic Minority Main Characters		
		2017	2018	2019
Arab	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Asian	6.8%	0.5%	0.14%	0.3%
Black	3.4%	1%	1%	2%
Chinese	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Mixed Heritage	2.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.9%
Other	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%

Source: Office of National Statistics



What does it mean to reflect realities...

...and what does it look like when realities are reflected well?

Exemplifications of Good Practice from the 2019 Output

Our work over the last three years has shown us that there is a willingness and desire to produce better and consume better. As helpful as it is to know and understand the ways in which representation can be compromised and problematic, it is just as helpful to identify the key ingredients that constitute a quality text and to highlight fantastic titles that exemplify and celebrate models of excellence that we encountered during this review cycle.

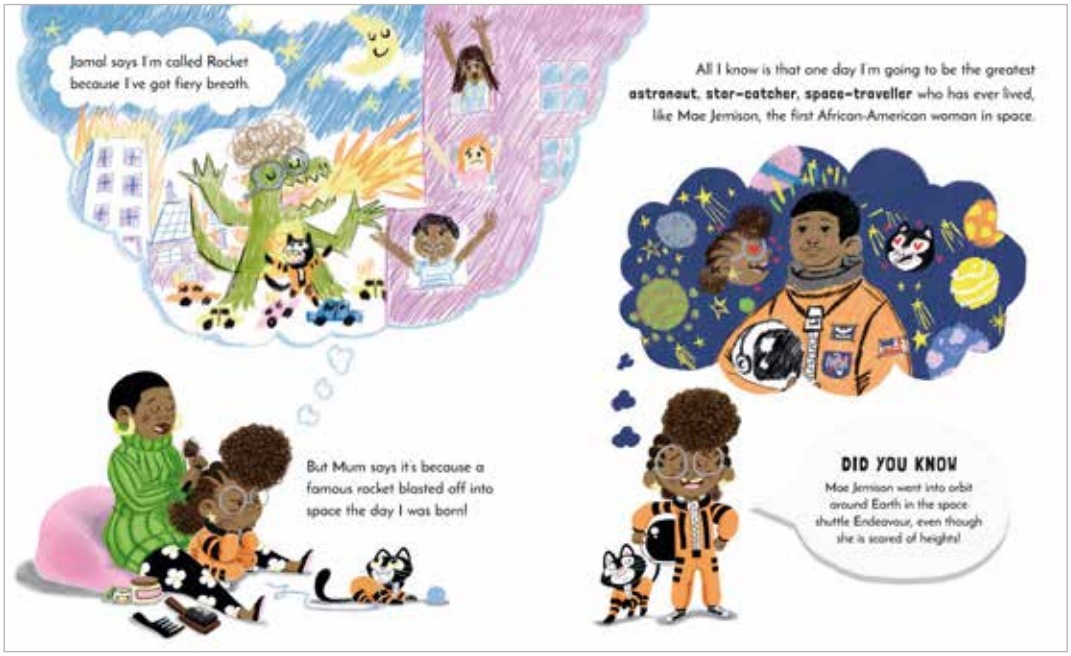
These titles, along with other great submissions across all three cycles, have enabled us to put together a checklist which is designed to help anyone working with or choosing books to identify what constitutes a high quality, ethnically representative inclusive text.

No one title will embody all of these components and no one title should shoulder the burden of being all things to all readers. However, by putting together this list we hope we provide a starting point in supporting producers and consumers to be critically reflective.

Are the characters authentically depicted, relatable individuals living real and everyday lives?

Dapo Adeola is a rising star in the world of illustration. His authentic and sensitively crafted portrayals of children and their lives channel the fun, awe and wonder of childhood through well drawn and well developed memorable and loveable protagonists and supporting casts of characters. He builds the world of a story through carefully observed settings that invite you into the narrative.

Dapo's use of props and visual links invite readers to speculate and infer details about the characters and their story before they fully meet them. Piecing together the visual clues takes the reader beyond the text on the page and provides opportunities for the reader to infer and deduce details about the character, the moment and the wider story. This attention to detail also provides the reader with beautiful representations of everyday, genuine, intimate moments as depicted for example in the hair brushing scene between mother and daughter in the award winning title *Look Up!* This scene is a rare picturebook example of an everyday relatable routine that is universal on the one hand yet nuanced enough through the use of props to make it distinctive to a young Black child's experience, providing a powerful, understated, affirmation for young Black readers and relatability for all readers.



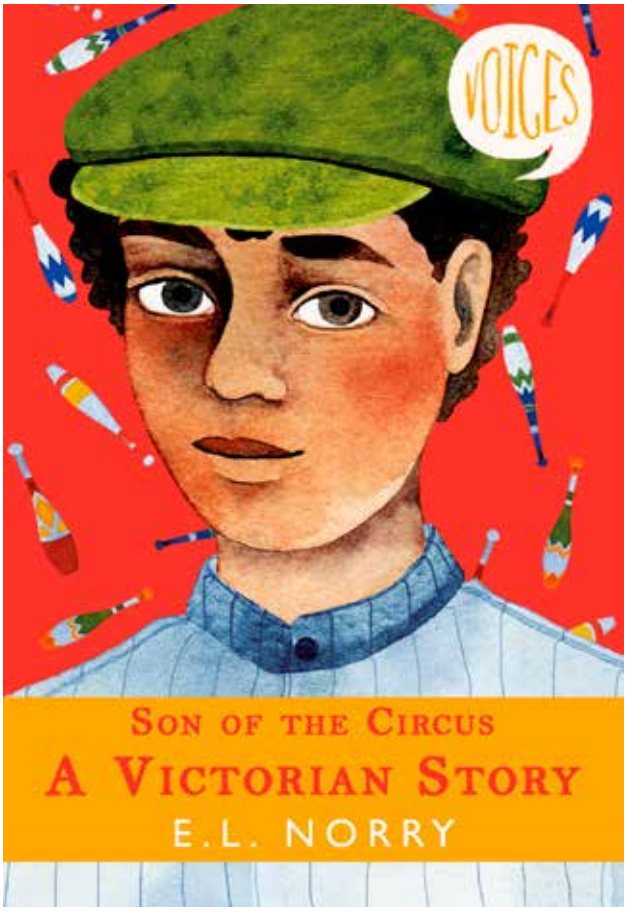
Look Up! published by Puffin Books. Text copyright © Nathan Bryon, 2019. Illustrations copyright © Dapo Adeola, 2019.

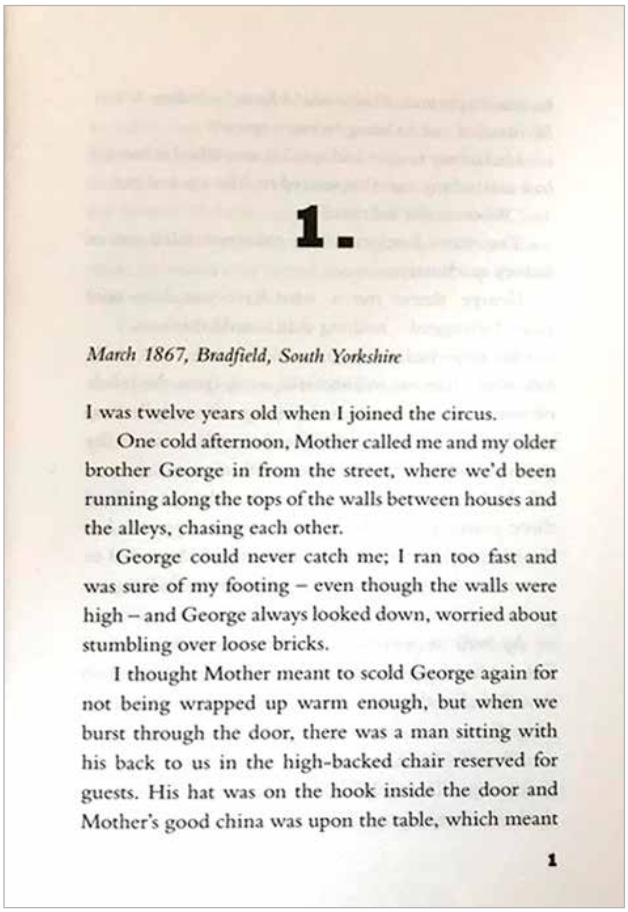
Do we encounter well developed ethnic minority characters who are integral to the narrative in a range of literary genres?

Historical Fiction

E.L. Norry's contribution to the Scholastic Voices series offers a slice of Victorian life told through the perspective of a young mixed heritage boy named Ted. We experience Ted's highs and lows and grow alongside him through his adventures, challenges and the evolution of his personal relationships. From the very outset we are transported to this time and space and quickly become invested in Ted's life and the turns it will take. Each title in the series written by fantastic established and emerging talented authors, Bali Rai, Leila Rasheed and Patrice Lawrence shines an important and necessary spotlight on the presence of ethnic minority characters across different periods of British history. Making ethnic minority characters central to the narrative and meaningfully exploring their existence not only highlights but also normalises their presence in spaces that are usually populated by exclusively white casts.

Historical fiction that makes a concerted effort to do this in well researched, carefully considered and creative ways provides a valuable counter-narrative to either reductive, problematic, fetishised portrayals or outright erasure of ethnic minorities in this area of fiction. Catherine Johnson's body of work as referenced in our second report provides a crucial contribution to this genre. She weaves thorough research and masterful storytelling to create compelling narratives with unforgettable characters. Titles such as these exemplify and attest to ways in which ethnic minority individuals and communities over the ages have formed part of the natural threads that make up the fabric of British society. With new titles aimed at young readers by Catherine Johnson, David Olusoga, Alex Wheatle and Benjamin Zephaniah out in the latter part of this year, it feels like the industry is gradually responding to the appetite for books exploring Black British history and we hope that this momentum continues.





1.

March 1867, Bradfield, South Yorkshire

I was twelve years old when I joined the circus.

One cold afternoon, Mother called me and my older brother George in from the street, where we'd been running along the tops of the walls between houses and the alleys, chasing each other.

George could never catch me; I ran too fast and was sure of my footing – even though the walls were high – and George always looked down, worried about stumbling over loose bricks.

I thought Mother meant to scold George again for not being wrapped up warm enough, but when we burst through the door, there was a man sitting with his back to us in the high-backed chair reserved for guests. His hat was on the hook inside the door and Mother's good china was upon the table, which meant

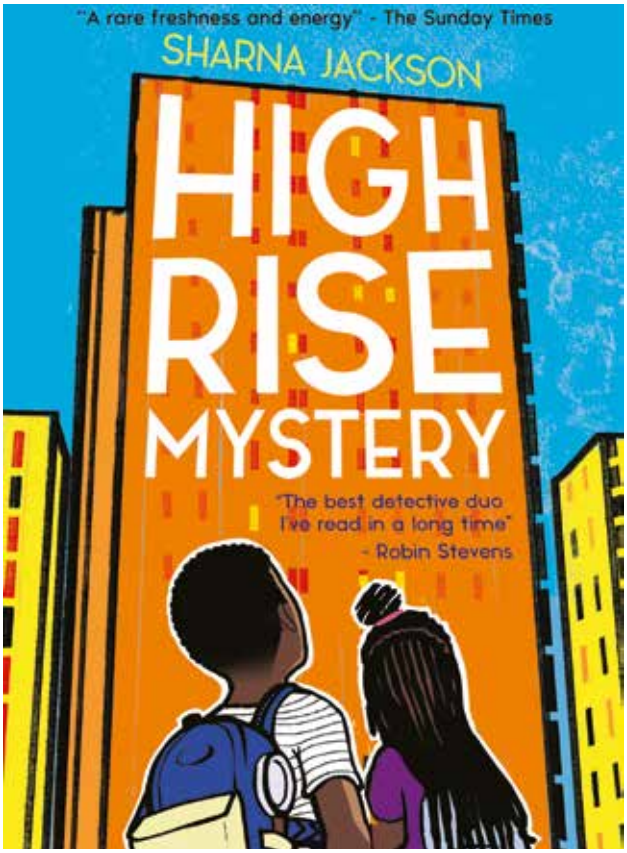
1

Son of the Circus: A Victorian Story
Text © E. L Norry, 2019
Cover by Alette Straathof
© Reproduced by kind permission of Scholastic Children's Books.

Mystery

Sharna Jackson's award-winning middle grade (8-12 age range) novel ***High-Rise Mystery*** tells the tale of two young Black British girls who have to investigate a crime that their father has been wrongfully accused of committing. Writing children's literature requires a great deal of skill, sophistication and mastery of the craft. When writing for a middle grade audience in particular, channelling the right voice and tone in a way that hooks the reader and isn't patronising whilst shaping a narrative that holds their attention is tremendously challenging. In both the second and third cycles of this research, books aimed at middle grade audiences made up the higher proportion of submissions. Books for this age range have a crucial role to play in the reading journeys of young readers. The right book can set a child onto the path of lifelong reading, opening up their world in the most magical way and vitally setting the foundation for positive life outcomes. This is also a key phase in a child's development during which their world view and the place they have in it are being honed. All forms of media that they consume will influence and contribute to their evolving outlook. It is at this juncture that it is crucial that the books they encounter exhibit the full scope of our humanity and include broad and varied representations of well developed, fully realised characters from all backgrounds, inhabiting a range of roles across all genres of fiction. The importance of what authors contribute to this space on the shelf cannot be understated.

As indicated in the first report, the presence of ethnic minority characters in comedy titles was very low; this along with under-representation in mystery titles continued to be an issue in this cycle. Sharna's debut novel does not just raise the bar in terms of quenching the thirst of young readers who want an action-packed mystery adventure full of twists and turns but also exemplifies how to meaningfully centre Black characters in genres from which they are all too often excluded.



Cover Illustration © Wumzum, 2019
High Rise Mystery by Sharna Jackson.
Reproduced by kind permission of Knights Of

Are the subjects of titles documenting inspirational historical figures varied?

19% of the non-fiction submissions were made up of biography titles. This marks a 4% increase on the second cycle. The success of the ***Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls*** title sparked a flurry of subsequent collections and individual biography series trying to strike the same chord and suggests an appetite for celebrating and learning about inspirational figures. It is therefore unsurprising that we observed an increase in this respect. We also encountered a number of titles with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), which again chimes with trends in the market.

These titles are beginning to broaden the range of historical figures from the UK and beyond that young readers are able to learn more about. Such historical icons include the award winning mathematician and scientist Katherine Johnson, the talented architect Zaha Hadid and the pioneering Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai. This is a positive pattern that should hopefully continue to expand, giving readers the opportunity to experience the breadth and range of areas of life that figures from different ethnic minority backgrounds have contributed to over time.

Does the book ensure positive casual inclusion of ethnic minority characters who are not defined by their ethnicity?

It is vital that in our quest to ensure that children have access to a breadth and range of titles on their bookshelves that we stock ample supplies of books featuring ethnic minority characters that are not defined by their ethnicity and in which ethnicity is not the key plot driver. Ethnic minority characters in these books should have license to go on the adventure of a lifetime or stay at home and nurse a star as in the case of Corrinne Averiss's **My Pet Star**. Rosalind Beardshaw's beautiful rendering of the young 'cosmic super vet' in this heartwarming tale would make this a lovely addition to any Early Years classroom book shelf.

My Pet Star by Corrine Averiss and illustrated by Rosalind Beardshaw, 2019.
Reproduced by kind permission of Orchard Books.

Are the characters in the book thoughtfully developed, well fleshed out, multi-dimensional individuals?

Ken Wilson-Max, an important talent and longstanding contributor to the children's book world, is adept at recognising the small moments in a child's life that are a story in themselves and allow young readers to see the significance of their personal narratives and experiences however small they may seem. This starts children on a journey not just into reading but also as storytellers and writers themselves by affirming these key life experiences as credible storytelling opportunities.

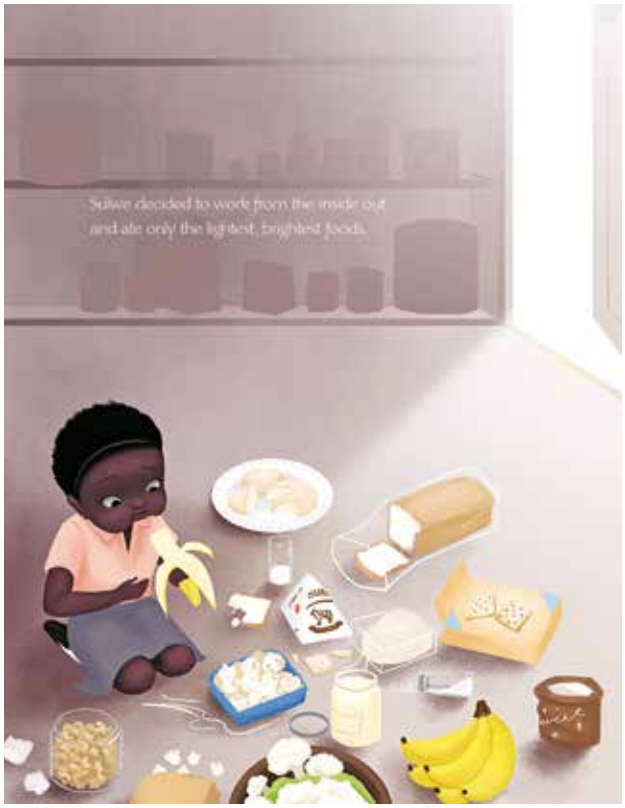
Ken's portrayals of children and their families throughout many of his titles are carefully observed and lovingly crafted, they allow children to see glimpses of themselves, their experiences and fascinations conveyed through story. Such portrayals are crucial in providing self-affirmation for young readers by supporting them to make sense of their lives and the world around them.

Illustration copyright © Ken Wilson-Max 2019, from **Astro Girl**.
Reproduced by kind permission of Otter-Barry Books.

Does the book support the reader to identify with or better understand points of difference?

To paint the collective realities of people with the 'we're all the same' brush diminishes the truth of people's lived experiences. As human beings, there are some key universal similarities that bind us but there are also key distinctions in our lived experiences. A book can serve as a stimulus for exploring points of difference, providing recognition and affirmation for readers who can identify and invaluable insight for those who may not.

Lupita Nyong'o's ***Sulwe***, illustrated by Vashti Harrison is one such title. It is a picturebook that tackles the issue of colourism which rarely forms the subject matter of children's books. It is clearly informed by Lupita's own experiences growing up and speaks to the damaging ways in which it can erode a person's self-esteem and compromise their outlook. The heart-wrenching moments are so powerfully captured through Vashti's breathtaking artistry.

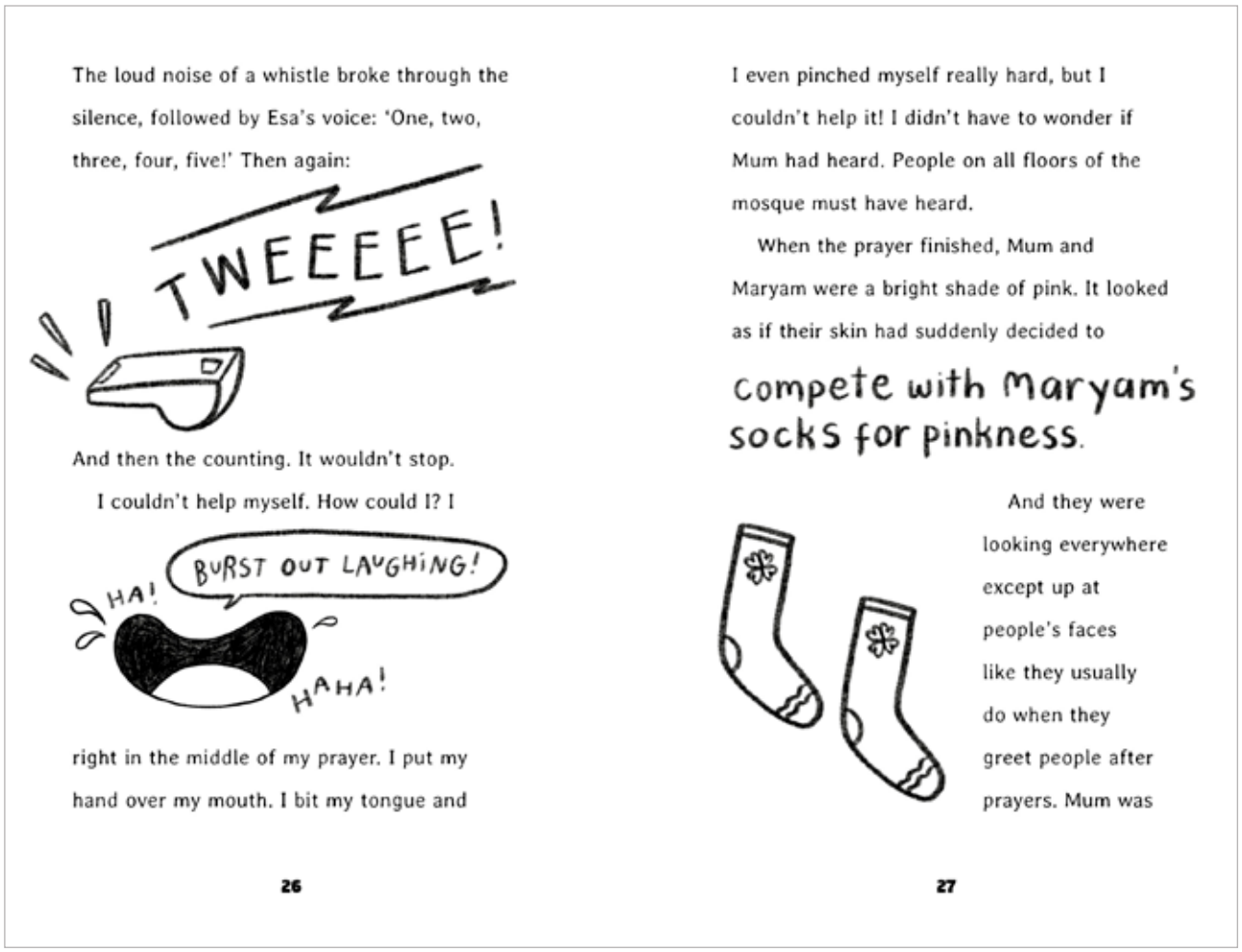


Sulwe published by Puffin Books. Copyright © Lupita Nyong'o, 2019.
Illustrations by Vashti Harrison 2019.

Does the book challenge misconceptions and prejudices about an under-represented group?

Books can provide a forum to explore and lay bare some of the distinctive instances of discrimination and mistreatment experienced within and across different minority groups. This is not to say that every title featuring ethnic minority characters should be laden with such encounters. On balance we would hope that young readers have the opportunity to experience broad, varied and balanced bookshelves with books that depict the vast range of the spectrum of human experience. That said, if a book does choose to explore such territory it should do so from an informed perspective, applying tact, sensitivity and careful consideration about how to relay, address and resolve such experiences.

Zanib Mian's award winning debut title *Planet Omar, Accidental Trouble Magnet* is a middle grade novel based on a young boy named Omar. The book revolves around his home and school life. It is comedic and playful in tone but over the course of the narrative addresses issues such as racism, prejudice and Islamophobia. It doesn't announce itself as an 'issues' book, instead it asserts itself as a fun packed adventure of a loveable, relatable boy with a cheeky sense of humour supported by a great cast of characters. There is a universality about the core of his everyday lived experiences that most young readers will identify with such as his favourite pastimes, sibling dynamics and school life. However, Zanib also adeptly weaves in details that are distinctive to the lived experiences of young Muslim readers, from the everyday through to the more challenging aspects. It is, as a member of our Steering Group, Darren Chetty, describes, 'a story where a child of colour thrives in a world where racism exists.'



The loud noise of a whistle broke through the silence, followed by Esa's voice: 'One, two, three, four, five!' Then again:

TWEEEEE!

And then the counting. It wouldn't stop.

I couldn't help myself. How could I? I

BURST OUT LAUGHING!

HA!

HAHA!

right in the middle of my prayer. I put my hand over my mouth. I bit my tongue and

26

I even pinched myself really hard, but I couldn't help it! I didn't have to wonder if Mum had heard. People on all floors of the mosque must have heard.

When the prayer finished, Mum and Maryam were a bright shade of pink. It looked as if their skin had suddenly decided to

compete with Maryam's socks for pinkness.

And they were looking everywhere except up at people's faces like they usually do when they greet people after prayers. Mum was

27

Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet by Zanib Mian and illustrated by Nasaya Mafaridik, 2019. Reproduced by kind permission of Hodder Children's Books.

Does the book effectively explore and convey the complexity of the social injustices addressed in the title with sensitive due regard and reverence to the subject(s)?

It is important to reiterate that books featuring ethnic minority characters fictional or otherwise should not be required to incorporate social injustice themes or make these integral plot points. Literature is a domain in which the spectrum of lived experiences should be captured and confining the representation of those experiences to one strand of that spectrum suggests a failure of the imagination and failing of the subject. That said, it is important to have books that do explore social injustice, books that can serve as a stimulus for informing readers and helping them to making sense of the world around them. Young readers are likely to be hungry for and receptive to books exploring social justice themes during this particular moment in time. A proliferation of such titles is timely and the industry will need to continue to be responsive to the interests of the readership whilst being mindful of the importance of striking a balance.

Kadir Nelson has an unrivalled talent for capturing and profiling key moments and figures across history. His reverence for the subjects and subject matter of his books shines through in the detail of every spread of every book. His distinctive hyper-realistic style is arresting and demands the attention, connection and engagement of the reader.

As Kadir's books focus on specific moments and figures from history, it's apparent that painstaking efforts are made to research the period to allow him to convey accurate representations of expression, clothing, architecture and props which are key to authentically depicting the period. His books in essence provide young readers with a bridge to the past and a connection to the history of the period and speak to the awe-inspiring resilience and character of his subjects.

The Undefeated which is his award-winning collaboration with the poet Kwame Alexander is a perfect embodiment of how to convey and explore social injustice in a way that honours the subject and does not patronise the young reader.

The content is framed within the distinctive parameters of the experiences, struggles and history of the African American community, providing an invaluable insight for young readers in the UK and an important addition to the bookshelf. It is necessary to note however that although there is a universality to components of the struggle against systemic racism, it is fundamentally important now more than ever that books of this calibre are produced to specifically centre Black British experiences and history.

The Undefeated by Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson.
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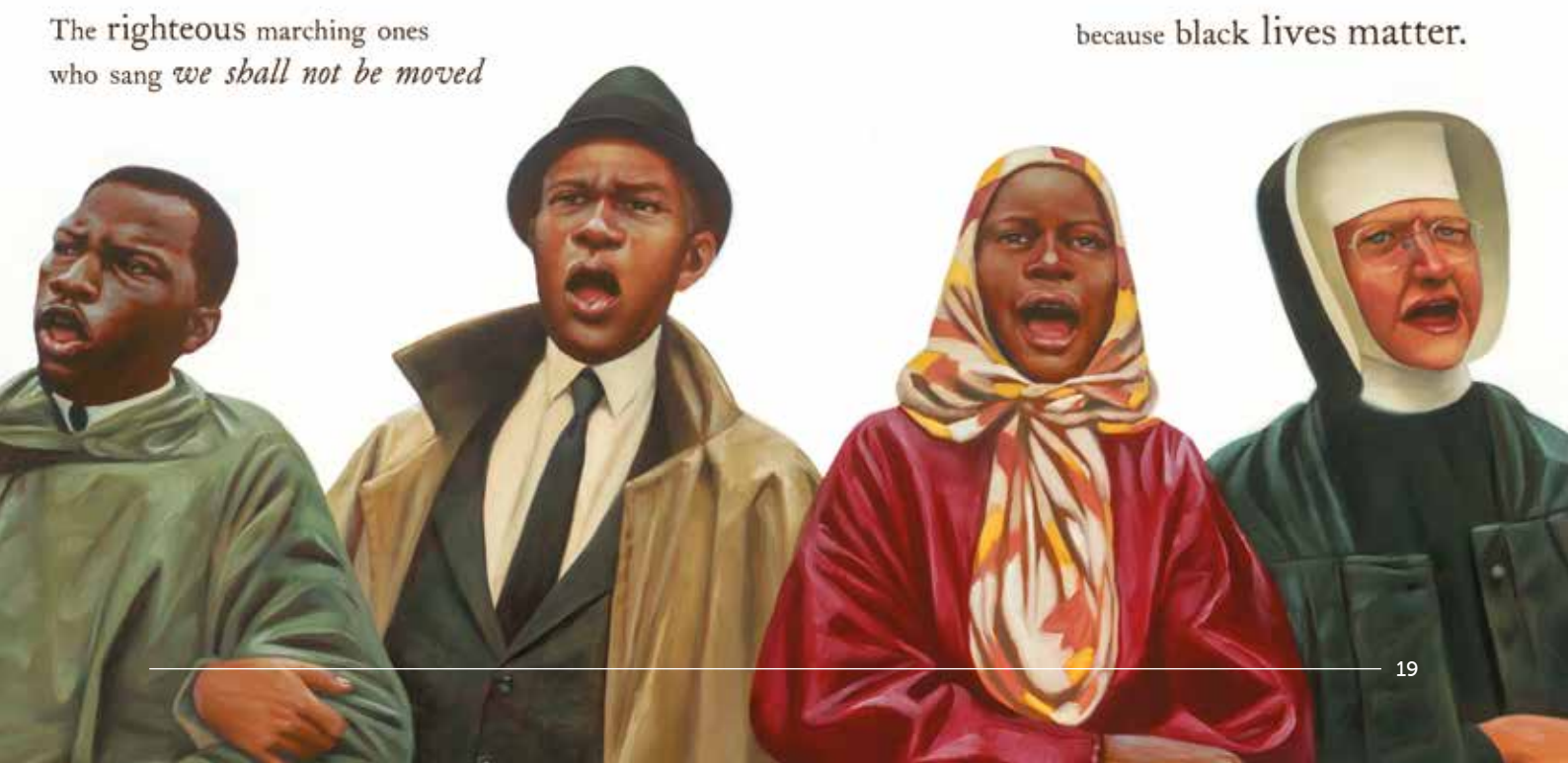


Degrees of Erasure

In the 2018 report we introduced a set of terms that helped define common patterns of instances in which the inclusion of ethnic minority characters was compromised by the quality or nature of their presence in the text. In our review of the 2018 output, we observed that although the increase in figures for books featuring ethnic minority characters might imply a higher visibility of ethnic minority characters, the increase masked a worrying phenomenon.

> It's crucial that teachers and children work with texts that broaden horizons and offer wider views of the world.
>
> Jane Kelly, Harrow Gate Primary Academy

We commented that in the process of reviewing the titles submitted in the second cycle, we were struck by the range of ways in which ethnic minority characters were effectively rendered visibly invisible. We encountered repeated instances in which the presence of ethnic minority characters was diminished, leading us to develop a glossary of terms to enable us to categorise and articulate these practices. Each term was created to convey the type of erasure observed in the titles reviewed in both cycle one and two of this study.

This lexicon has proven to be helpful across stakeholders, encouraging critical reflection and support in articulating features of texts that can undermine the quality of representation. We have restated these terms and their accompanying definitions from the second report here for ease of reference.

Country Specific Setting 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.

Cover Short Change

This is a term devised to describe books we received in which ethnic minority 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.

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.

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.

Illustration from *Where's Lenny*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

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.

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 ethnic minority people where this was their only presence in the book – in such cases this could be interpreted as a form of relegation.

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.

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.

Short Term Stay

This is an extension of the idea of 'cover short change.' It describes instances in which ethnic minority 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 the 2018 submissions, an ethnic minority character disappeared as early as page three and failed to reappear thereafter.

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.

> "Literature helps us to dream differently. It can inspire ambition, plant seeds of hope and, of course, educate us."
>
> Professor Vini Lander, Professor of Race and Teacher Education at Leeds Beckett University

Illustration from *Where's Lenny*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

Ensuring Children's Literature Reflects Realities

During the 2019 review, we often observed a conscious and concerted effort by Publishers to ensure that the content was representative. When reviewing titles featuring illustrations, the team noted a number of instances in which there was real attention to detail in terms of authentically and meaningfully incorporating characters from ethnic minority backgrounds. It is important to note however that although this resulted in a visibly higher presence in illustrations, this didn't always carry through into the detail of the text itself.

The team often found it hard to locate and recognise ethnic minority presence in the texts they were reviewing, particularly in non-illustrated titles. The ability to portray consistently well developed, solid characters from ethnic minority backgrounds who are not defined by their ethnicity without labouring the point, using lazy cues, or through contrived means continued to be a challenge.

The fact that the more positive shifts that were observed appear to be more prevalent in the illustrations of books and less so in the meat of the text poses the question as to whether what we observed in this cycle is the result of a quick fix approach to paint over the cracks or if it is more representative of an early and necessary step of a longer, larger process that will lead towards more and better inclusivity in children's books over time.

> "Reflecting Realities must be just that; we need to honour children's lives by handing them identifiable, relevant landscapes."
>
> Dr Fen Coles, Co-director at Letterbox Library

At the CLPE we produce booklists and work with independent booksellers to curate packs of books to help parents and teachers choose representative books for children. However, booklists date as soon as we stop typing and can only serve as snapshots. To assist stakeholders further, we have devised a series of prompts to guide book selection and creation in this area. The prompts are a distillation of both the positive and problematic practices identified across all three cycles of this work. We share them here as a toolkit to support both producers and consumers to adopt a more critically reflective approach to the production, curation and consumption of children's literature.

Characterisation

- Are the characters in the book thoughtfully developed, well fleshed out, multi-dimensional individuals with agency?
- Are the characters authentically depicted, relatable individuals living real and everyday lives?
- Does the author provide sufficient cues to make the ethnicity of the character identifiable without exoticising the character, patronising the reader or compromising the quality of the writing?
- Does the book challenge misconceptions and prejudices about an under-represented group or does it reinforce them?
- Is the ethnic minority character a well drawn, well developed and well rounded individual whose ethnicity does not define them any more than a white protagonist is defined by theirs and/ or does the book ensure positive casual inclusion of ethnic minority characters who are not solely defined by their ethnicity?
- Does the dynamic between a cast of characters suggest any problematic hierarchies with specific regard to ethnicity?
- If the character is a historical figure, is it evident that the author has undertaken careful and extensive research to create well developed, well drawn, and nuanced individuals set against authentic historical backdrops?

Illustration

- Do the palette choices convey delicate, nuanced observations of the breadth and variation of human skin tones and hair textures?
- Has careful consideration of skin tones, facial features and hair texture been effectively made to ensure that a character's ethnicity is recognisable without being overstated?
- Are the illustrations of ethnic minority characters of a high quality, resulting in characters that are relatable?
- Do the illustrations of ethnic minority characters embody full agency by exuding life and vibrancy?
- How do the props, background and other visual cues add layers to our understanding and appreciation of the character and their world?

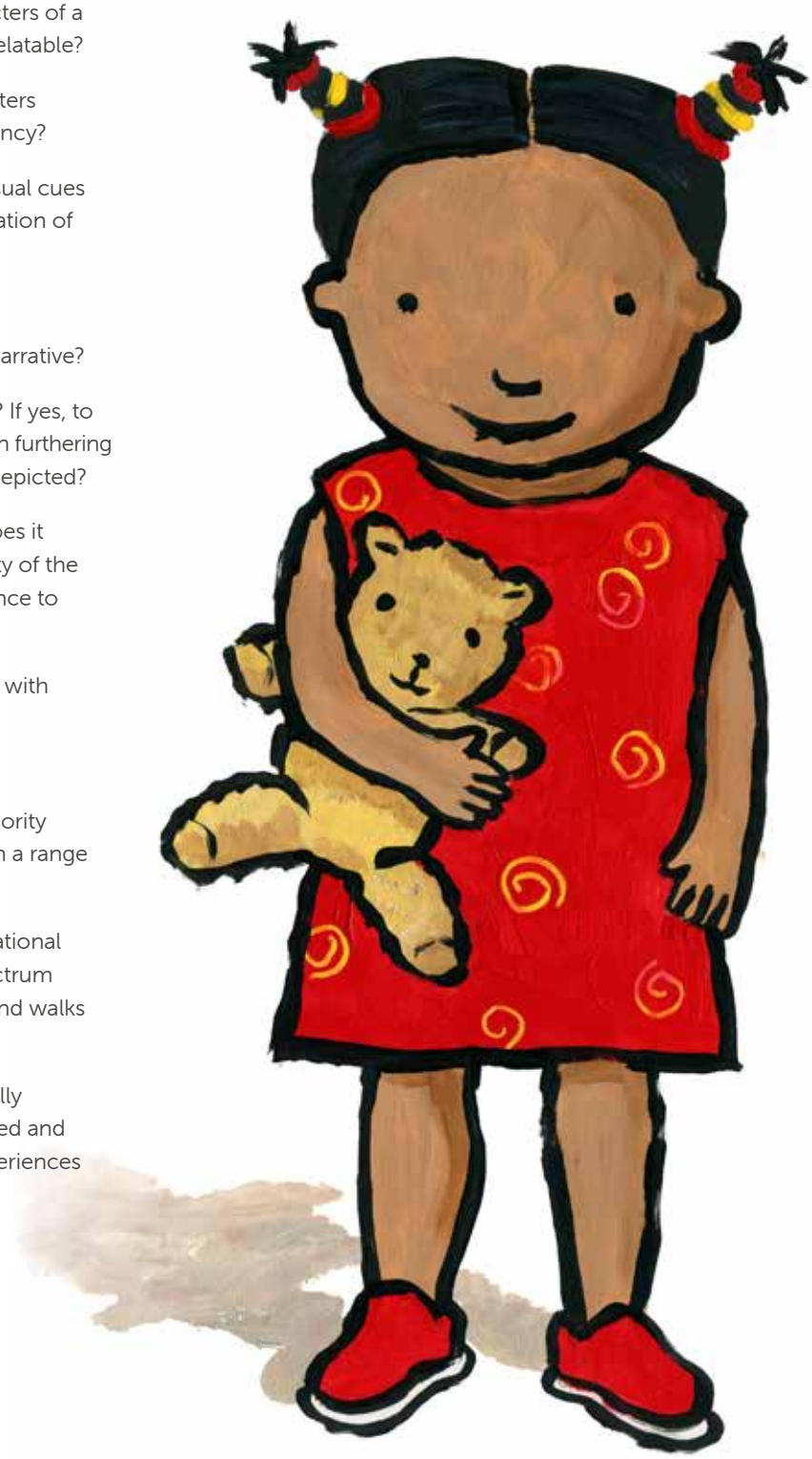
Plot

- Is the character's ethnicity incidental to the narrative?
- Is the plot driven by the character's ethnicity? If yes, to what extent is this necessary and appropriate in furthering the narrative and is the portrayal sensitively depicted?
- If the book includes social justice themes, does it effectively explore and convey the complexity of the themes with sensitive due regard and reverence to the subject(s)?
- Does the book support the reader to identify with or better understand points of difference?

Genre

- Do we encounter well developed ethnic minority characters who are integral to the narrative in a range of literary genres?
- Are the subjects of titles documenting inspirational historical figures varied, showcasing the spectrum of contributions over a range of disciplines and walks of life?
- Does historical fiction skim over the potentially contentious aspects of the era being portrayed and in doing so misrepresent or negate lived experiences of minoritised individuals and communities?

> "Loving murder mysteries and wanting to see young black girls represented in books where they are being funny, smart and clever is what inspired me to write High-Rise Mystery."
>
> Sharna Jackson, Author



Methodology

TEXT TYPE	AGE RANGE	CONTENT	PUBLICATION DATE
Children's Fiction Children's Non-fiction Picturebooks	3-11 years	Featuring Black, Asian and or Minority Ethnic Characters	First published in the UK in 2019

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 with the previous two cycles, 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.

Additionally, as in cycle 2, at the publishers' request, we asked each publisher to submit figures for 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 have maintained throughout this work that we would not publish data about individual publishers without their express permission.

Upon receipt of the publishers' submissions, we applied the eligibility criteria to determine which titles would qualify for processing.

We worked with our Steering Group of experts in the field to review the methodology established and applied in the previous cycles to ensure that it continued to effectively aid the review process and provide meaningful data and analysis. 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 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic 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. Our team of reviewers then set to work, reading every eligible title and using our analysis framework to review the extent and quality of Ethnic Minority representation in each title.

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. In the previous two reports we adopted the acronym BAME, meaning Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic to encompass the spectrum of ethnicities observed as part of the review process. We used the term for the sake of brevity and to provide a common point of reference. We acknowledge now as we did in those previous reports that the acronym is reductive and problematic and that such collective terms can diminish the heterogeneity of each community of individuals classified under this term. It feels inappropriate to continue to adopt the acronym for the sake of brevity at the expense of the offence that it has the potential to cause. We have therefore chosen to omit the use of the acronym in this report and have instead opted to use the terms 'Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, 'Ethnic Minority' and 'Minority Ethnic' to describe racialised minorities.

The figures for total output of children's books are drawn from the Nielsen Book Database, which includes children's fiction, non-fiction and picture books specifically aimed at 3-11 year olds but does not include comic strips, novelty books, annuals, early learning and reference books. The statistic that details the number of minority ethnic pupils of Primary school age in England is taken from the Department for Education Schools, pupils and their characteristics*.

This report offers a summary of our findings.

* January 2019 report:
gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019

Acknowledgements

Steering Committee

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

Darren Chetty
Teaching Fellow, UCL Institute of Education

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

Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold
Associate Professor in Publishing and Book Cultures, University College London

Professor Karen Sands O'Connor
British Academy Global Professor for Children's Literature, Newcastle University

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 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 support and guidance offered by Eliza Kavanagh at the Publishers Association and 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, Fathima Ali, Isha Crichlow, Charlotte Hacking, Louise Johns-Shepherd, Ann Lazim, Darren Matthews, Katie Myles, Anjali Patel and Jonathan Rodgers.

2020 has been 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 Ken Wilson-Max. We are truly grateful for his 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.

Illustration from *Where's Lenny*, written and illustrated by Ken Wilson-Max, published by Alanna Max

> There is always a call to diversify the kinds of books we publish and promote, but more important than that is the need to diversify our lives, that should be the first step to creating an equitable world for our children – we have to make sure our lives reflect the kind of world we want for them.

Kwame Alexander, Author

CLPE

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

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This research has been funded by Arts Council England.

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

Published November 2020