

Recommended Reading: A research digest of diversity and inclusion in English teaching

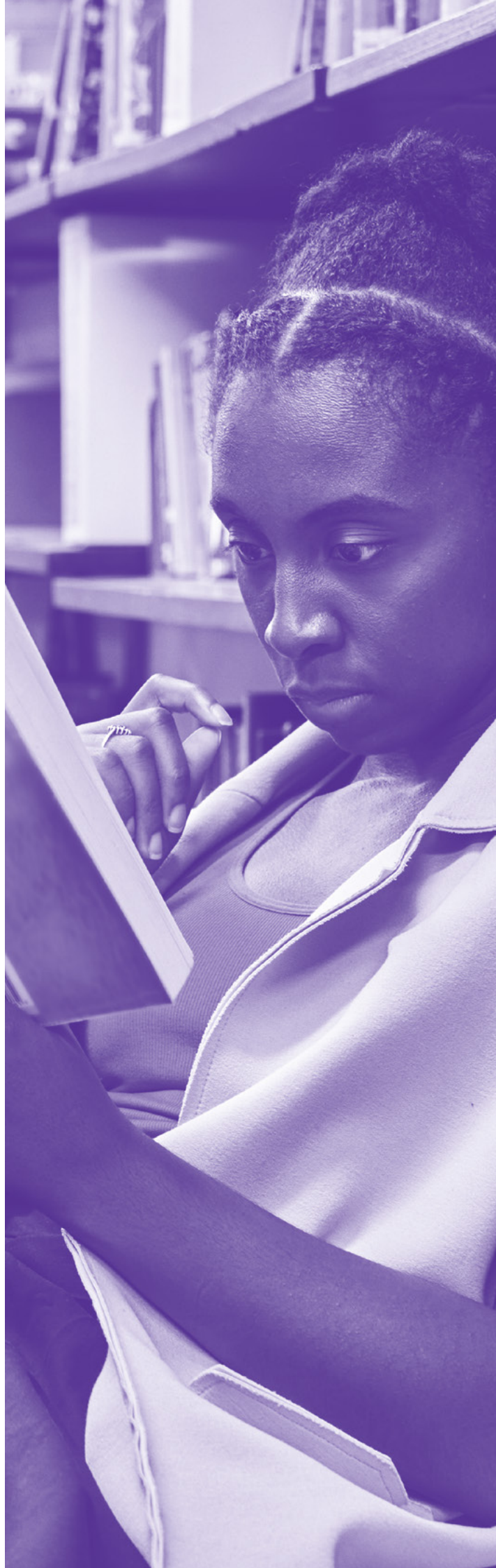
Spark something **powerful**



We understand that designing an inclusive curriculum goes deeper than introducing a more diverse range of authors to your students' reading diet. Whether you have already adopted new texts or are beginning the process of reviewing your existing curriculum, we have selected some of the most influential, inspiring and accessible pieces of research to help you and your team rationalise any changes you might make.

For each read we provide:

- *a brief summary of the research*
- *why we think it's read-worthy*
- *some highlights in case you're short on time to read in full*
- *and ways you could take it further.*



Lit in Colour: Diversity in Literature in English Schools

Published 29 June 2021

Authors: Victoria Elliott, Lesley Nelson-Addy, Roseanne Chantiluke and Matthew Courtney

[Full report](#)

What is it about?

Lit in Colour was created in 2020 by Penguin Books UK and equality think tank The Runnymede Trust. The aim of the campaign was to support schools to make the teaching and learning of English literature more inclusive.

A team of academic experts were commissioned to carry out research to better understand what barriers might be preventing more diverse texts – specifically by writers of colour – from being taught in school, and to make practical recommendations for change.

Why read it?

It's the first major report of its kind investigating diversity in English teaching which has prompted big, ever-expanding conversations across all sectors of the education community.

It's a good starting point to enter the debate on inclusion and representation in education and for a grounding in the current state of both the English curriculum (key stages 2-5) and the teaching profession.

The report provides a review of existing research on this subject with a detailed discussion of the barriers and challenges to introducing more diverse texts into the curriculum (as identified by those who took part in the research) and concludes with specific recommendations for different groups on what needs to change.

Take it further....

The TES hosts a dedicated [Lit in Colour](#) area as part of their Black experiences hub where you'll find a range of free resources including webinars and KS3/4/5 teaching resources.

The [Secondary Teachers Toolkit](#) is an editable PowerPoint that includes questions to prompt discussion in your department.

[The \(incomplete\) Lit in Colour book list: secondary](#) provides a comprehensive list of books and independent reading suggestions from Key Stage 3 to 5 – there are 100 titles by writers of colour to choose from with a helpful synopsis of each one.

More available on Lit in Colour's dedicated [Teachers](#) area.

If you're short on time...

- If nothing else, take note of the recommendations for teachers on page 62 of the [full report](#).
- An infographic summarising the key findings of the research can be found on pages 6-7 (accurate as of date of publication 29 June 2021).
- There is a [10 minute read](#) version of the research report.
- The slide deck that accompanied the '[Secondary Teachers Preview Webinar](#)' of the research report (15 slides) summarises the findings and provides 5 practical things you can do tomorrow to diversify texts in your English teaching.

Bloomsbury Lit in Colour: A spotlight on plays and drama

Published: 23rd November 2022

Authors: Various contributors – produced in collaboration with Lit in Colour and research partners: Jane Ball from the National Theatre and Ali Warren from Open Drama UK.

[Full report](#)

What is it about?

Bloomsbury joined forces with the Lit in Colour campaign to commission a report in partnership with the National Theatre and Open Drama UK to investigate the barriers and challenges teachers face to introducing new play texts to the classroom.

The report (estimated 20 minute read) takes a close look at the current status of drama in the English Literature curriculum, providing a picture of what is currently being taught; assesses the main barriers identified by the respondents; and concludes with three recommendations.

It calls for greater representation in the drama taught in schools and acknowledges that achieving this requires collaborative efforts from publishers, theatre companies, playwrights and educators.

Its findings were drawn from different sources including a survey, in-depth interviews and roundtable discussions (which included representatives from AQA's English and Drama Curriculum teams).

Why read it?

It's an extension of the original Lit in Colour report echoing many of the same themes and issues, through the lens of drama.

It might be of particular interest for those who opt to teach An Inspector Calls – the most popular drama text taught at GCSE – to interrogate why it's endured and why perhaps it is time to try something new.

Take it further....

Bloomsbury offer a range of other free resources you might like to try, including:

- [Drama exercises for secondary students to explore the theme of migration](#) (which is a theme relevant to many of our GCSE English Literature set texts, including our new plays Leave Taking and Princess & The Hustler)
- Bloomsbury's Drama Online platform allows schools to access collections of filmed live performances which can help bring a text to life in the classroom. The [National Theatre Collection](#) is available to state-funded schools and FE colleges in the United Kingdom, free of charge (with no end date).
- The collection includes filmed drama adaptations of many of our GCSE (and A-level) English Literature set texts (including Frankenstein, Jane Eyre, Julius Ceasur, Macbeth, Romeo & Juliet to name a few) and is complemented with learning guides, lesson plans and other resources. You can see what's on offer at a glance to support secondary English teaching in this helpful [guide](#).

If you're short on time...

- An infographic summarising the key findings of the research can be found on pages 6-7
- If you only have time to read one page, go to page 16 as this reflects on why increasing diversity and representation in drama texts is important and necessary and signposts the support available to enable you to take steps to change your curriculum.
- Pages 19 – 21 highlight the main barriers, with recommendations to take action on the following pages 22-23, calling on teachers to take a different approach.

Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors

Published 1990

Author: Dr Rudine Sims Bishop

[Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors](http://scenicregional.org) (scenicregional.org)

What is it about?

This two-page read is an excerpt from Dr Rudine Sims Bishop's ground-breaking essay in which she uses the analogy of 'mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors' to describe the purpose of reading, specifically the importance of young readers encountering a diverse reading experience.

Why read it?

Whilst the essay is a little dated and looks specifically at the experience of young American readers, highlighting the under representation of writers of colour and the implications of this – the message is timeless, profound and relevant.

Take it further....

Snider, G. (2018). Books Are....

[INCIDENTAL COMICS: Books Are...](#)

This comic extends Dr Rudine Sims Bishop's analogy further and beautifully illustrates the joy of reading.

For a more recent take (2017) on Dr Rudine Sims Bishop's essay watch children's author and illustrator, Grace Lin's, [The Windows and Mirrors of Your Child's Bookshelf TEDx Talk](#) (12 mins) She reflects on her personal experience of reading as a young Asian-American.

If you're short on time...

This short video is Dr Rudine Sims Bishop explaining the analogy in her own words [Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors - YouTube](#) (1 min 30)

The key points she raises in the article:

- it's crucial for all children and especially those from marginalised groups to view themselves, their lives and experiences in the books they read (i.e. reading serves as a mirror)
- it's crucial for all children and especially those from dominant social groups to glimpse into the lives and experiences of others in the books they read (i.e. reading serving as a window)
- books help us to better understand each other and enable us to celebrate our differences and similarities (i.e. reading builds empathy and allows us to walk in someone else's shoes, acting as a sliding door to different worlds and lives)

The danger of a single story

Published 2009

Author: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

[TED talk](#) (18 min watch)

What is it about?

Novelist Chimamanda Adichie reflects on her early experiences of reading and writing: the unintended consequence of only having exposure to English and American books meant she didn't know that people like her could exist in literature – until she discovered African writers which completely transformed her perception of literature.

She cautions about the dangers of hearing only a single story about another person or place and the impact of the dominance of Western literature which through time has misrepresented and distorted perceptions of 'foreign' peoples and cultures.

Why read it?

It's deeply personal, self-aware, honest and thought-provoking. It prompts you to reflect on your own reading experience and whether the stories you've been told about a people or place have been one-dimensional or rich and diverse.

She reminds us that it's not enough for people (especially young readers) to have access to literature where they can see themselves and their lives in what they read but it's how they're portrayed and the plurality of those stories which is equally important.

It might prompt you to review the literature on your curriculum and assess whether those stories are presenting a people or a place as only one thing? In a negative or positive light? Perpetuating stereotypes?

Take it further...

In this [blog post](#) Darren Chetty reflects on his teaching in primary schools and shares his observation that whenever children are tasked with writing a story, children of colour will more often than not write a story exclusively about white characters. At the start of her talk, Chimamanda Adichie confesses she did the same as a young writer and theorises why. You can download the full essay "You can't do that! Stories have to be about White people" as published in *The Good Immigrant* edited by Nikesh Shukla (2016) for free [here](#).

If you have a special interest in the representation of ethnicity in UK children's literature delve into the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) [Reflecting Realities](#) report (published November 2022 and updated annually). Promisingly, the research reports that there's been a sustained, significant increase in the number and percentage of books that contain characters from racially minoritised backgrounds over the last 5 years (as a snapshot: 4% in 2017 to 20% in 2021).

If you're short on time...

The key message is that the single story creates stereotypes, and stereotypes are harmful not because they are untrue, but because they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. And if you create a single story and show a people as only one thing over and over again, that is what they become in the eyes of others. The single story emphasises our differences rather than similarities; it 'others' rather than unites. She urges us to reject the single story and realise that there is never a single story about any place or people.

You can read an [academic summary](#) written by Nirmeen Shumpert for the University of Maryland which cites quotes and ideas from the original talk.

What literature texts are being taught in Years 7 to 9?

Published: 2021

Authors: Judith Kneen, Cardiff University (et al.) funded by the UK Literacy Association (UKLA)

[Report](#)

What is it about?

It's a study into what literature is being taught at Key Stage 3 conducted by researchers from six universities across Wales and the south-west of England.

Its aim was to gain insight into young people's engagement with Literature during years 7-9 in secondary school – focusing on what prose texts are being taught in particular.

It focuses on the pre-GCSE years, because teachers generally have more autonomy in their choices of text taught at this stage.

Why read it?

Comparing what you teach with the data in the report may prompt you and your department to reflect on what you currently teach at Key Stage 3 and whether it's inspiring young readers?

Take it further...

UKLA have provided a tool to help you audit the literature you teach – it's designed to act as a catalyst for thought and a framework for discussion about what literature you're currently teaching; how you teach it; and most importantly, why you are teaching it.

[Microsoft Word - KS3 literature audit.docx \(ukla.org\)](#)

If you're short on time...

Some of the most alarming findings from the research you might want to reflect on and discuss in your departments:

- Of Mice and Men is the most frequently read text across Key Stage 3 in the survey (it ranks as the most commonly taught text in Year 9 and second most commonly taught text in Year 8) Generally there's a tendency for dated texts – the most modern text that features on the lists was published in 2011.
- Malorie Blackman is the only author of colour to feature in these prose lists.
- There's a stark gender imbalance: presence of very few women writers and more concerning still is an absence of female protagonists in the top-ranking texts (none in Year 7 and only two in Years 8 and 9).

Teaching poems by authors of colour at key stage 3

Published: 28th March 2023

Authors: Victoria Elliott and Matthew Courtney

[Report](#) published in the English in Education research journal

What is it about?

This article reports the findings of an investigation into the poetry taught at Key Stage 3. Secondary school teachers were surveyed specifically on the what poems by authors of colour they teach in years 7-9 and grouped these poems according to broad themes.

Why read it?

It's very recent and relevant research. Comparing what you teach with the findings from the survey may prompt you and your department to reflect on the poetry you currently teach at Key Stage 3 and what perceptions about poetry this cultivates for your young readers.

Take it further...

Consider auditing / reviewing the poetry your students encounter. We've provided a series of questions you could use as a starting point:

- Where you teach poems by authors of colour, where are these sourced from?
- Are you still drawing on poems from the legacy anthology Poems from Different Cultures and Traditions? If so, is there a clear rationale for why? Do you bolster those poems with others you've sourced from elsewhere?
- Linking back to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk on the Danger of the single story (above) how do you ensure you avoid telling a 'single' story about a place or people? Do these poems only speak of struggle?
- Rapid reading of the poems cited by the respondents left the researchers with a general feeling of melancholy. What's the general mood / feeling(s) aroused by the poems you teach? Is it negatively skewed? How might this affect students' perception of poetry?

If you're short on time...

Here are some headlines from the report that could generate further discussion in your department:

- Poetry is the genre where students are most likely to encounter an author of colour.
- Both teachers and students find poetry to be particularly challenging.
- The 'Poems from other/different cultures and traditions' poetry anthology from our legacy GCSE English Literature specification (first published in 1998 and revised in 2004) still dominates what is selected to be taught in classrooms today.
- The most popular poems by authors of colour (according to the research sample) are: John Agard's 'Half-Caste'; Grace Nichols' 'Island Man'; and Moniza Alvi's 'Presents from my aunts in Pakistan'.
- The poems identified by the survey respondents could be categorised into 4 main themes: identity; war and conflict; racism; and love and relationships (see Table 1 for the full list of categories).
- Encouragingly, there is some evidence that poetry that's taught has been influenced by international events of recent years (such as the international refugee crisis; the Black Lives Matter protest; Amanda Gorman's poetry performance at the inauguration of Joe Biden as President of USA).
- The authors are not suggesting that poems about racism and identity ought to be excluded/erased from the curriculum; they urge that poems about racism and identity must not be the only poems representing poets from the global majority in the classroom.

Consider the pedagogy of poetry:

- The report suggests that due to the high-stakes context of the exam and the pervasive perception that poetry is difficult, teaching is more often focused on knowledge of the poem(s) rather than knowledge of poetry / poetic form more generally – to what extent is this true in your teaching?
- How do you encourage students to authentically engage with the poem?
- How much contextualisation is necessary in deciphering/understanding a poem? Does this vary according to the poem's subject matter? In cases where some contextualisation is necessary, do you lead with context or the student's personal response?
- Where poems are written in accent / dialect with phonetic spelling, how do you tackle this in the classroom? There's an opportunity here to introduce students to language variation and diversity. Do you carve out space in your curriculum to touch on the study of language and discuss 'non-standard' English varieties?
- How does studying poems as part of a themed collection (or 'cluster') aid or hinder their understanding and interpretation of the poems?
- Take a look at our [Teaching guide: unseen poetry \(aqa.org.uk\)](https://www.aqa.org.uk/teaching-guide/unseen-poetry) and Building skills and confidence for unseen poetry course materials (downloadable from Centre Services) for more poems, inspiration and ideas.



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