An Exploration of Representation of Racially Minoritised Characters in Children's Books in UK Primary Schools

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Abstract

This research is an exploration of the representation of racially minoritised characters in children's books used in UK primary schools, with a focus on schools in Norfolk and Suffolk, which are predominantly White areas. It looks at how often these books are included in teaching, what teachers know about them, where their knowledge comes from, and what the implications of representation in children's literature are.

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Critical Multicultural Analysis, a mixed-methods approach was taken, which included a national questionnaire for primary school teachers, semi-structured narrative interviews, and an analysis of the children's books commonly used in classrooms. A new analytical framework was developed to support teachers in assessing how racially minoritised characters are represented in these stories and to create useful narrative summaries of the analysed books.

The findings of this research show that although there is a growing recognition of the importance of representation of racially minoritised characters in children's literature, teachers' subject knowledge about books featuring racially minoritised characters varies greatly. This is sometimes shaped by their own reading habits, limited by curriculum guidelines, and influenced by external factors such as book awards and social media. In addition, access to these books is often limited by school budgets and a reliance on published schemes that may not prioritise representation.

This research intends to bring to light the need for more and better teacher education that goes beyond list sharing and supports teachers in how to choose, and importantly, how to use books featuring racially minoritised characters. It finishes with recommendations for policy and practice and suggests areas for further research. Overall, this research emphasises that all children in UK primary schools deserve representative and inclusive reading experiences facilitated by knowledgeable, confident teachers.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This research came out of an interest in children's literature and an interest in issues related to race and ethnicity in education. During a small-scale research project conducted with trainee primary teachers on a one-year PGCE course in 2018, I found that the majority of trainee teachers were reluctant to engage in conversations related to race and education and lacked the skills, knowledge and confidence to support children in anti-racist practice (Brownsword, 2019). As English lead on the PGCE course, I began to address this through children's literature. I bought and shared books with racially minoritised characters and by racially minoritised authors with the trainee teachers and began to teach them about the importance of representation, of children seeing themselves in stories and of those stories as a way of starting conversations about race with children.

I began to wonder what was happening in schools. Were these trainee teachers going to work in schools that also had books with a good range of representation? Were they working with teachers who had a wide subject knowledge of children's books that represented a range of different ethnicities? Or were they going back to a diet of the same books teachers have always used? How relevant was it that they were teaching in a predominantly White area?

Context

I work at a university in a Norfolk which is a predominantly White area, and this is highly relevant to this research. In addition to having fewer racially minoritised individuals, mainly White counties tend to have less 'communities' of people from racially minoritised backgrounds too because they are often isolated from other people of the same background or who practise their faith or speak their language (Gaine, 1995). Instead, there is often a larger number of people from mixed backgrounds who are not a common group nationally (Gaine, 1995). Norfolk is 94.7% White and 95% of the population of Norfolk speak English as their first language (Norfolk Insight, 2021). This is important because the majority of recent research on representation in children's literature involving teachers and schools has taken place in highly diverse areas with a focus on the representation of the ethnicities of the children in the class and often presumes a multi-cultural starting point. This is very different to the experiences of mono-cultural teachers and children in an area such as Norfolk and this research examines their experiences.

The majority of this research that involved working with participants, took place during the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2021. Originally, I had planned a different a project, one that would involve working in schools with children reading books together and include a case study of a school which would have

children's voice at the heart of it. When the Pandemic happened in 2020, rather than pause the research, I adapted and amended my research questions and the research design.

The questions explored in this thesis sit within a longer historical trajectory in which children's literature, teacher professionalism and conversations about race & ethnicity in education have been shaped by wider social and political forces. For much of the twentieth century, the children's literature available in UK classrooms overwhelmingly centred White, Anglocentric experiences, a legacy of the British Empire and the literary canon that developed alongside it. More recently, important initiatives such as CLPE's Reflecting Realities (CLPE, 2018 – 2024) - and Penguin/Runnymede's Lit in Colour (Elliott et al, 2021) have reframed representation as a matter of educational equity rather than cultural enrichment. Yet these national developments have unfolded unevenly across the country, particularly in predominantly White regions where teachers may have fewer opportunities to encounter racially diverse communities and where racist discourses can remain unchallenged. Situating this research within this wider historical landscape explains why questions of representation, teacher subject knowledge and local demographic context matter, and why this study is necessary at this moment.

Literature in primary schools

Children's literature has an important place in primary education. It is an essential part of the teaching of English, but it is also used across the curriculum and has an important place in the social and emotional development of children, or what Batini et al (2021) refer to as 'socioemotional competencies'. This umbrella term includes aspects such as "social understandings", "empathy", "emotional intelligence" and "Theory of mind" (Batini et al, 2021). If literature can be such a powerful tool, then children having access to diverse literature is even more essential. It can support human rights and contribute to equitable and socially just outcomes for children (Adam, 2021).

Children's Literature in this research includes all books written for or read by children. It includes novels, picture books, graphic novels, poetry and e-books.

Introduction to Representation and Why it is Important.

Seeing characters who share their ethnic, cultural or linguistic background supports children in feeling seen and valued. Bishop (1990)'s now famous analogy of books as mirrors (reflecting children's own experiences), windows (introducing them to new experiences) and sliding glass doors (encouraging them to step into new perspectives) sums up the power of representation.

At the time that the data was being collected for this research in 2020/21, there was a growing interest in representation in children's literature and several research projects were ongoing in the

UK including the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)'s Reflecting Realities research (CLPE, 2018 - 2024) and Penguin's Lit in Colour Report (Elliott et al, 2021). Elsewhere, de Bruijin et al (2020) were examining the diversity of popular children's books in the Netherlands and Gomez-Najarro (2019) was exploring books being used in American schools through an intersectionality lens. These studies and others are explored in more detail in the Literature Review in Chapter Two and highlight the importance of research in this area.

Problem Framing & Research Gap

UK initiatives such as CLPE's Reflecting Realities (CLPE, 2018–2024) have transformed the professional discourse and commissioning practices around representation in children's publishing in recent years. In parallel, educational scholarship drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) has identified how race and racism are reproduced structurally in schooling, including through everyday texts and curriculum practices. Building on Gaine's early work on teacher discourse and racial literacy in schools in predominantly White areas (Gaine, 1995), this thesis addresses how representation agendas are received, and sometimes deprioritised, by teachers working in predominantly White areas.

Reflecting Realities (CLPE, 2018–2024) foregrounds the urgent need for racially minoritised children to see themselves reflected in books, a principle that underpins the "mirrors, windows and sliding doors" metaphor (Bishop, 1990). Yet, in classrooms where teachers work with only one or a small number of racially minoritised pupils, representation work can be seen as a "nice-to-have" rather than an essential literacy and equity priority. This study explores that gap by examining what books are actually used in primary classrooms, how teacher subject knowledge is formed, and how representation is evaluated and enacted in practice in predominantly White regions.

This contribution is threefold:

- it demonstrates how demographic context influences whether representation agendas are enacted;
- it develops a practical analytical framework that helps teachers critically select and use texts beyond tokenism;
- it articulates the CPD and ITE implications for building racial literacy and pedagogical confidence in contexts where representation work risks being sidelined.

'Diverse' and 'Diversity'

Diversity in its widest sense includes representation of ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, sexual orientation and disability. For the purpose of this research, the focus is on race and ethnicity.

Other aspects of diversity are noticed and may be discussed because intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is important, but references to diversity and diverse literature in this research, refer specifically to race or ethnicity.

It needs to be acknowledged that the term 'diverse literature' is problematic as it distinguishes it or 'others' it from literature featuring characters from White backgrounds. Ideally, if literature is truly diverse, it should include all characters from all backgrounds. I have tried to avoid using the terms 'diverse' or 'diversity' in this thesis and where I do, it is usually someone else's term I am referring to.

Language Used in this Research.

Race in this thesis is understood as a social and political construct rather than a biological category. It is a system of classification that has no genetic or scientific basis (Smedley & Smedley, 2005), yet it continues to have profound consequences through racism and structural inequality. Ethnicity in this thesis refers to groups defined by shared cultural practices, histories, languages, or heritage. Ethnicity is therefore more specific than race, and while racial categories are used when discussing how characters are visually represented in texts (e.g., "Black" as a racialised descriptor), ethnic identity is used when referring to more precise cultural or national backgrounds where available. The terminology used throughout this thesis reflects this understanding.

There are many ways of talking about race and ethnicity and many ongoing debates about the language that is used to do this such as ethnic minorities, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME), People of Colour and Global Majority. The language surrounding racialisation is dynamic, context-dependent, and contested. Terms such as "BAME," "ethnic minority," and "diverse" are widely used in policy and practice but criticised for homogenising heterogeneous groups and positioning Whiteness as the norm (Alexander & Arday, 2015).

Campbell-Stephens (2020) describes these debates around language as leaving the "uninitiated confused, disempowered, disconnected and metaphorically, on mute" (P1). The term Global Majority is one which is preferred by many people who are members of that group in recent years because globally they make up around 80% of the population (Campbell-Stephens, 2020).

One of the criticisms of the acronym BAME and terms like People of Colour or Visible Minorities is that it situates Whiteness as the norm, whereas the term Global Majority does not (Campbell-Stephens, 2020). Although the term Global Majority has increased in usage in recent years, in my experience it is not very well known within predominantly White areas such as the area in which this research took place and therefore I decided to use the most well-known term, BAME, within the anonymous questionnaire in this research despite acknowledging that the term 'minority' is

problematic in its focus on a negative, lacking quality that suggests subordination to Whiteness (Together Scotland, 2021).

This thesis tries to avoid umbrella labels unless directly quoting specific sources. For most references to race, I use the term 'racially minoritised'. The term minoritised demonstrates an acknowledgement that people from these groups are minoritised through social and political processes. The term on its own, could include people minoritised for other reasons such as disability or sexuality so including the word 'racially' makes it clear which group of minoritised people are being referred to. The term foregrounds the active nature of racialisation and the structural positioning of certain groups within hierarchies of power and representation. Where specific ethnic or cultural identities are known, these are named.

I use the term mixed-heritage to describe my own children in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The term is used to describe individuals whose family background includes more than one racialised or ethnic identity. The terms mixed-heritage and mixed-race are both in common usage; identity labels in this area are deeply personal and contested with no single term capturing lived complexity. The term mixed-race is disliked by some as it historically positioned Whiteness as normative and can be seen as relating to racist ideologies such as the "one drop rule" (Woozeer, 2022). For others, the term mixed-heritage ignores the racialisation which is embedded in the term; we do not generally use it to describe people of mixed White backgrounds. I use the term mixed-heritage predominantly because that is how my adult children choose to describe themselves. My use of mixed-heritage is therefore descriptive rather than definitive.

References to specific races and ethnicities within this thesis are capitalised, including Black and White, to demonstrate that it is not just a reference to skin colour but to the racial identity and history of a group of people (Nguyen & Pendleton, 2020).

The term Whiteness has no agreed definition and has been conceptualised in different ways by different people, however it is a useful lens through which to explore social relationships (Garner, 2007). In this thesis, Whiteness refers to a system of privilege and advantage afforded to people racialised as White which situates them as superior to others and as the 'norm'. Green, Sonn & Matsebula (2007) describe this as placing White people in dominant positions and granting them unfair privileges at the same time as rendering the positions and privileges invisible to White people.

In Chapter 6, characters such as Handa are described as Black because this is a racialised descriptor of how she is visually represented in the illustrations. This refers to racialisation, not presumed ethnicity. For authors and illustrators, labels such as White refer to their racialised positioning rather than presumed ethnic identity. Ethnic categorisation beyond this (e.g., British, Irish, Nigerian,

Jamaican) is only applied where publicly stated or verifiable through author interviews, publisher biographies, or other reliable sources.

Identity

Identity is understood in this thesis as socially constructed, relational, and shaped through interaction with structural forces such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Fricker (2007) argues that knowledge is situated and connected to power. Lived experience, particularly of marginalisation, can offer a unique insight into oppression that dominant groups may overlook.

This conceptualisation underpins why representation in children's literature matters: texts contribute to whose identities, experiences, and realities are recognised as valid and reliable and whose are centred as "normal".

Positionality

I am a White woman. My teaching career began teaching English as a foreign language in Europe and Southeast Asia before returning to the UK and becoming a primary school teacher. I am now the course director and English lead for a Primary PGCE Initial Teacher Education course in an English University in a predominantly White area. I am a mother of three; two of whom are of mixed-heritage. Bringing up two mixed-heritage children in a predominantly White area opened my eyes to racism in a way I had never experienced before. From explicit racism to microaggressions - teachers and schools never dealt with situations in a way that felt satisfactory, or did not put the emphasis back on my children to work harder and to prove other people wrong. One of my children was able to do that; the other was repeatedly excluded from school. I believe a curriculum that my children saw themselves in, and teachers who were confident in having conversations about race and racism, would have made a difference to my children's experiences of education. I hope that this research, and other developments over the last few years will make a difference to the lives of all children going forward.

I come to this research with a particular standpoint shaped by my experiences as a White educator and a parent of children racialised as mixed-heritage. Rather than "bias," I understand this standpoint as being directly shaped by my own specific context. My experiences inform the questions I ask and the commitments I bring to this work, and I remain reflexive about how my positionality shapes interpretation. Because identity shapes what researchers and participants see and do not see, this study treats identity not as background information but as an interpretive resource. My own positionality as a White researcher intersects with the racialised experiences described by participants and the characters in the books analysed, shaping how data is interpreted.

The Research Questions

This research aims to explore the use of children's books featuring racially minoritised characters being used in primary schools by answering the following research questions:

RQ1. What books featuring racially minoritised characters are being used in teaching in primary school classrooms nationally, and in a predominantly White area (Norfolk & Suffolk)?

RQ2. How do teachers express their subject knowledge of books featuring racially minoritised characters?

RQ3. Where does teachers' subject knowledge of books featuring racially minoritised characters come from?

RQ4. What can we learn from an analysis of the most common books being used in classrooms?

Methodology Overview

This research is about books and about the power of story to influence and change children's lives and so narrative is at the heart of the methodology as well as the findings. Methodological choices were influenced by Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Multicultural Analysis (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Research methods include an anonymous questionnaire for teachers, teacher interviews which are presented in narrative form, the development of a framework for analysing representation in children's books, and analysis of some of the children's books named in the questionnaire.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature around Policy, Children's Literature, Readers and Representation and explores the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Multicultural Analysis. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods in detail including the development of a new framework for analysing representation in children's literature. Chapter 4 presents the findings from a teacher questionnaire question by question and includes discussion of book awards and book lists. Chapter 5 presents the narratives and analysis of teacher interviews. Chapter 6 demonstrates the use of the new framework with selected children's texts and their analysis, and Chapter 7 offers a discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 2 Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

The aim of this chapter is to review the research related to children's literature, how teachers select texts, readers and reading, and representation in children's books. This chapter will start by situating the teaching of English and reading in Primary schools in England within the wider context and explore how policy influences curriculum, it will then explore the concepts of children's literature, reading and representation. In this chapter I will also set out my research aims and the theoretical framework.

Literature Review

Context & Policy

The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum in England's English Programmes of Study: Key Stages 1 and 2 (DfE, 2013a) describes the importance of the place of reading *right from the outset* in the Purpose of Study:

> *Through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Literature, especially, plays a key role in such development. Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know. (P 3*)

It is clear here that the role of reading is not just an end in itself but has an important role to play in all aspects of children's development, and that children's literature is considered an important part of this.

The aims of the curriculum include: "*to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment and appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage"* (P 3). This section goes on to state that:

> *All pupils must be encouraged to read widely across both fiction and non-fiction to develop their knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live, to establish an appreciation and love of reading, and to gain knowledge across the curriculum (P 4)*
>
> *Reading also feeds pupils' imagination and opens up a treasure-house of wonder and joy for curious young minds. (P 4)*

The English Programme of Study refers to 'a wide range of high-quality books' (P12) and 'a wide range of contemporary and classic poetry, stories and non-fiction' (P18) for Key Stage 1. For Lower Key Stage 2, there are similar references to 'a wide range' of genres and forms of books. For Upper Key Stage 2, there are some more specific references to 'fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions' (P 33).

This juxtaposition between 'our literary heritage' and 'other cultures' is problematic. As I will go on to discuss later in this chapter, traditionally, much of children's literature was originally written for and aimed at White, privileged, literate children which is why texts from 'our literacy heritage' are often monocultural and homogeneous at the best, and contain harmful racial stereotypes at the worst. While it is good that the inclusion of books from cultures and traditions other than White British is in the statutory guidance for teachers, the positioning of these books, which may be more diverse in their representation of character, place and culture, as 'other' does nothing to challenge this. In addition, it disregards children's experiences in a multi-cultural world and fixes them as insider (part of the group they're reading about) or outsider (not part of the group) readers. The policy emphasis on "heritage texts" positions Whiteness as culturally authoritative, a dynamic well documented in Critical Whiteness Studies (Applebaum, 2016) and central to understanding how racial hierarchies are reproduced through curriculum decisions.

An important part of teaching British literary heritage texts is being able to talk about race and empire. Heritage texts that are often chosen in primary schools are versions of classics such as Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* written in 1894 and set in India during the British Raj rule, which I have taught to year 5 and 6 children myself alongside Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*. The Jungle Book is set in India, but Nyman (2008) argues that the stories are an "imagining of Englishness as a site of power and racial superiority" (P 206). This is just one example of children's texts such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, or *Treasure Island* which were written during the British Empire and where the notion of Empire has an influence on how the books are written. Chetty & Sands-O'Connor (2024) describe these kinds of books as normalising "racially based hierarchies in the mind of readers" (P 28). Only 12% of secondary and 13% of primary teachers had training on how to talk about race in their initial teacher education (Elliott et al, 2021) suggesting that teachers may not be confident in discussing empire or racism as part of the study of British literary heritage texts.

The ITT Core Content Framework, Early Career Framework and the Teachers' Standards

The ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) (DfE, 2019a) was a framework of the foundational knowledge and skills to be covered by trainee teachers that was introduced in 2019. This fed into the Early Career Framework (ECF) (DfE, 2019b) which supported teachers in their first two years of teaching (Early Career Teachers or ECTs). These were updated in 2024 to form one framework – the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) (DfE, 2024) which will become statutory in September 2025. At the end of training, all teachers in the UK must meet the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013b), a set of professional criteria that define the minimum expectations for teachers' practice.

The current Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013b) have no references to diversity or inclusion. The previous Teachers' Standards (TDA, 2008) did include explicit references to children's 'ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences' (Q18), and to teachers promoting 'equality and inclusion in their teaching' (Q19; Q25). According to Maylor (2015), the current Teachers' Standards have more emphasis on not undermining Fundamental British Values (FBV) than on teaching about racism or tackling inequality. This lack of explicit references to teachers needing to tackle inequality in the classroom and their teaching continues in the ITTECF (DfE, 2024). This new framework refers to inclusion in the context of behaviour and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and talks generally about school culture and values. There is one reference to pupils who speak English as an Additional Language:

> *Pupils' experiences of school and their readiness to learn can be impacted by their home life and circumstances, particularly for EAL pupils, young carers, and those living in poverty.* (DfE, 2024, P12)

While this is often the case, this single reference to EAL is framed negatively and ignores the fact that pupils classed as speaking EAL are extremely heterogenous (Hutchinson, 2018) and that EAL learners are often an asset to a classroom rather than a burden.

Mayer and Mills (2021) describe recent reforms in Teacher Education guidance as coming from seeing Teacher Education as a problem that needs to be fixed which has led to practical techniques, subject knowledge and conformity being prioritised. Although the ITTECF is based on research, much of it comes from or is endorsed by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), which is funded by the Department for Education (DfE), and there is no requirement for teachers to engage directly with research themselves. Within the research base, there is a focus on cognitive science, including memory and cognitive load theory (CLT). Turvey et al (2019) describe the evidence base for this as 'overly simplistic'. Indeed, in 2021 the EEF themselves produced a report reviewing the evidence base for cognitive science approaches. In this they found that:

> *The evidence for the application of cognitive science principles in everyday classroom conditions (applied cognitive science) is much more limited, with uncertainties about the applicability of specific principles across subjects and age ranges.* (EEF, 2021, P 46).

The report goes on to say that special care needs to be taken to ensure the principles of cognitive science are successfully implemented according to subject and age phase, and that teachers should have high quality CPD and adequate time to incorporate the approaches. This is the nuance that is missing in the ITT and ECF Frameworks.

Maylor and Mills (2021) question whether trainee teachers are expected to make sense of the issues they are learning about in schools in the context of institutional racism, gender regimes, poverty and other intersectionality. The fact that there is no requirement of this wider thinking and consideration, may be an example of how teachers become the 'implementers of others' agendas' (Maylor and

Mills, 2021, P 18). Turvey et al (1019) describe the ITT Framework as setting "*worryingly low expectations for a graduate profession based on superficial appropriations of what is already a limited selection of research.*"

Decolonising the Curriculum in ITE

Calls to "decolonise the curriculum" have heightened awareness of how canons and classroom practices reproduce Eurocentric narratives. However, in Initial Teacher Education the implementation is often under-specified leading to trainees having gaps in their understanding (Smith et al, 2023). Trainees often encounter reading lists or one-off sessions rather than a coherent, race-explicit pedagogy for text selection, planning, and classroom discussion. In predominantly White areas, this risks defaulting to colourblind literacy (Bonilla-Silver, 2015), where race is avoided because it is not seen as locally relevant.

DfE Guidance: Political Impartiality in Schools

The Political Impartiality in Schools (DfE, 2022) guidance explains the existing legal requirements those working in schools must understand. It gives guidance on topics such as using external agencies, teaching about political issues, political activity by pupils and public displays and communications within the context of the existing laws. The guidance was criticised by teaching unions when it was released (Henshall et al, 2023). Considering this guidance alongside guidance around Fundamental British Values and The Prevent Duty, Henshall et al (2023) state that the structure of 'Britishness' within these policies has been used to halt the movement towards decolonising the curriculum which gained momentum after the death of George Floyd in the US and toppling of the Colson statue in the UK in 2020. The guidance on political impartiality, in particular, may result in teachers who avoid diversifying their curriculum, including the books they use within in it, through fear of not being politically impartial (Henshall et al, 2023).

From Policy to Practice in Predominantly White Areas

Neither the National Curriculum nor the ITTECF make explicit, substantive commitments to racial literacy through literature (DfE, 2013a; DfE, 2024). The Reflecting Realities reports (CLPE, 2018–2024) demonstrate the publishing sector's progress on representation but policy silence combined with the DfE's Political Impartiality Guidance (DfE, 2022) can create conditions where teachers in predominantly White areas perceive literature featuring racially minoritised characters as peripheral or potentially contentious. This thesis extends prior research by exploring how these structural conditions shape text selection and classroom use in regions where teachers may not encounter daily racial diversity, building on Gaine (1995) and Gaine & George (1999)'s analysis of teacher talk and CRT's emphasis on the normalisation of Whiteness in schooling.

In summary, while the National Curriculum and associated frameworks in England emphasize the importance of reading and literature in children's development, they sit within wider policies and there are significant gaps in how these policies address diversity, inclusion, and the complex realities of a multicultural society. The juxtaposition of "our literary heritage" with "other cultures" in the curriculum risks reinforcing outdated colonial perspectives rather than embracing a more inclusive approach to literature. In addition, the lack of explicit references to diversity in the Teachers' Standards and the new Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Frameworks further exacerbates this issue, potentially leaving teachers ill-equipped to engage with topics of race, empire, and social justice. The recent guidance on Political Impartiality in Schools, coupled with the emphasis on Fundamental British Values, may inadvertently discourage teachers from diversifying the texts they use in their teaching.

Texts

The section will discuss the complexities in defining children's literature and highlight various perspectives on what should be included in the category. Some researchers argue that strict definitions could limit the exploration of texts, while others suggest that a broad definition could be equally unhelpful. It explores the value of popular yet often criticized genres, such as series books, Young Adult fiction, and books by celebrity authors. These genres, though dismissed by some for lacking literary quality, play significant roles in engaging young readers. The discussion also touches on the impact of reading for pleasure on educational outcomes and the importance of expanding the children's literature canon to include diverse voices and experiences, challenging traditional, often exclusionary, standards of what constitutes "good" literature.

What is Children's Literature?

Defining what counts as children's literature is complicated for a number of reasons (Stevenson, 2010; Cadden, 2010; Nodelman, 2008; Hintz, 2019; Gubar, 2011): What counts as literature? What does not count as literature? This section will explore these questions.

What counts as children's literature?

It is important to determine whether when discussing children's literature, we are referring to all books written for children, all books read by children, or just some of the books written for or read by children. Stevenson (2010) asked whether we should include only 'finely written' books (P 180) in the definition or if we can include books which are better known for being popular than considered well-written. But how do we define finely or well written? Eagleton (1983) argued that a set of shared properties which make a text 'literary' does not exist. Miall (2015) concluded that literariness involves an interaction between how the text is presented as well as an immersion and empathy in

the themes which are presented within it. Cadden (2010) argues that this difficulty to define children's literature is what kept it relevant, alive and evolving, and Hintz (2019) would agree with this – stating that definitions which are too strict could prevent the exploration of particular texts and risks narrowing our vision of children's literature. Beauvais (2015) considers children's literature to be 'all texts for which the associated writing, publishing, mediatory, critical and readerly practices display an awareness of their audience as primarily located within the symbolic childhood of their time and place' (P 8). Nodelman (2008) argues that children's literature cannot be understood as a genre by its intended audience because it is all they see; only adults see the binary literature/children's literature.

Hintz (2019) remarks that basing a definition of children's literature on the idea that it only includes books that were written for children as the intended audience, discounts the many books that children have claimed. However, she goes on to state that a definition that is too broad, is no more useful that one which is too narrow. Gubar (2011) suggests children's literature might be texts that are addressed to children by authors who conceptualise them as a distinct audience, but admits that basing a definition on authorial intent could be problematic.

Hintz (2019) suggests that a definition of children's literature could be based on ownership of books by children. However, this would exclude children who are not able to or who choose not to own books but still read. This idea of book ownership, which many studies have found has a strong influence on educational attainment regardless of other factors (Clark & Poulton, 2011), links children's literature with capitalist systems and the process of embourgeoisement (Hintz, 2019).

In 1932, Darton described children's literature as books created to give children pleasure, not to teach them or keep them quiet (Darton, 1932 in Stevenson, 2010). In the study of children's literature there has sometimes been a focus on entertainment, and some books which 'teach' something have been rejected as children's literature in the past (Stevenson, 2010). Most contemporary children's books are designed for pleasure but can also be strongly moral, and children's literature is an important vehicle for education (Stevenson, 2010). There is evidence that reading for pleasure has a positive effect on general knowledge, emotional and social wellbeing (Clark and Rumbold, 2006) and is a better measure of educational success than socio-economic status (OECD, 2002). Reading for pleasure is seen as something which can play a part in addressing inequality in education (Cremin and Scholes, 2024). Although there is a link between reading for pleasure and children's literature, fiction can often be full of factual information which can not only educate but also be used to create a certain way of seeing (Eagleton, 2013). Cremin and Scholes (2024) agree with this, stating that children who read frequently for pleasure are better at academic reading and the cognitive demands of the wider curriculum. In addition, there is evidence that

reading for pleasure has a positive effect on children's writing and their overall emotional wellbeing (Cremin and Scholes, 2024), as well as attainment in vocabulary development and maths (Sullivan and Brown, 2015). However, children who read for pleasure are not always reading 'literary' texts and surveys around children's reading for pleasure usually consider the term 'reading' in its widest sense. Another consideration is that these links between reading for pleasure and attainment are often based upon the outcomes of statutory tests like the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) national reading test or the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In reading tests such as these there is an issue with the unseen texts that are used requiring children to have prior knowledge and experience in order to understand them. This gives some children an advantage based on their background as all tests are culturally and socially located (Tennent, 2020). This is another aspect of what Hintz (2019) referred to as the embourgeoisement of children's literature, where assessment privileges certain modes of reading and cultural capital.

Eagleton (2013) suggests that good literature does not always have to be ground-breaking but that we should include in the definition texts in which what is said is as important as how it is said; texts where the content and language are inseparable and the language is 'constitutive of the reality or experience' rather than just being the vehicle for it (P 3). An example of this for primary aged children would be the post-modern picture book, which often has a non-linear form or self-referential elements that may break the fourth wall such as *Wolves* by Emily Gravett. Another example would be a multi-modal text or wordless picture book where the illustrations are just as important as the text for telling the story and not simply illustrating it, such as *The Tunnel* by Anthony Browne.

Bingle (2017), in her exploration of the representation of teachers in children's stories, concluded that children's literature does the following:

- It is intended to entertain;
- uses imagery and symbolism;
- has freedom to play with form;
- provokes an emotive response;
- pays attention to rhyme, rhythm and metre;
- and uses a creativity of expression.

There is an assumption that the study of children's literature is less complicated than that of adult literature. According to Butler (2014), children's literature is every bit as complicated and although no one would expect one person to be an expert in every aspect of adult literature, this is often the case for children's literature, which creates both opportunities and demands. The study of children's

literature at universities is often situated within Education rather than Literature departments (Butler, 2014).

Meek (1988) describes children's literature as providing a version of youth which is optimistic and comfortable. This allows children to begin to explore the value systems in both the literature and the real world – interrogating life and text (Meek, 1988). Gubar (2011) refers to the 'glorious messiness and multiplicity' (P 214) of children's literature and argues that any definition that can attend to that would be so long and complicated that there would be no value to it.

Books dismissed as 'not literature'.

There are some children's books which have been dismissed as 'not literature' or not counted as 'real reading' by teachers or academics. These are often books which are humorous and have mass appeal to young readers, particularly boys. This might include specific titles such as *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, specific authors such as celebrity authors or entire genres such as romance.

Hunt (2005) argues that there is no such thing as literary quality or value that is inherent in the words on a page but that the idea that there is such a thing as 'good' literature leads to people privately liking some texts while publicly recommending others. In schools, Hunt (2005) suggests that this can lead to children being put off reading and certain books being seen as 'other' when there is a divide between what is read in school and at home. Meek (1988) suggests that instead of condemning some children's texts, adults should take the time to talk to children about what they read so they can express their own judgements.

One such genre, which is very popular with children but has often been dismissed by reading experts, is series books. Children love series books; they contain an inexhaustible supply of stories so that children can repeat the pleasure they gain from reading them (Ross, 2010). The series books genre includes books such as the *Rainbow Magic* series which has seen over 200 titles published since 2003 under the collective pseudonym Daisy Meadows and written by a group of ghost writers. These books have sold over 30 million copies worldwide (Rainbow Magic Website, 2022) and are hugely popular with children despite not being considered 'literature' by some people. The genre also includes more traditional series books where the stories and characters continue and develop, such as C.S Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* or Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*.

The origin of cheap, mass-produced series books which were historically aimed at working class adults is explored by Ross (2010) who claims that these books are important for what they teach their readers about storytelling. Often for children, series books which are not considered particularly high quality will be the gateway into reading. These books play an important role in literacy because they are so enjoyable to read and so help inexperienced readers build up to being

more confident readers (Ross, 2010). Many children like to form emotional connections with the characters they read and so are drawn towards books with characters they identify with; this is another reason why children often prefer books in a series as forming an ongoing relationship with the characters is part of the enjoyment of reading (Merga, 2017). Characters in series novels often stay the same allowing readers to get to know them better and better with each book (Cadden, 2010). Series books have usually been full of White characters with the exception of Malorie Blackman's *Nought and Crosses* series, which was unusual when it was published in 2001 (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024).

Young Adult (YA) is another genre which has been dismissed as not literature by some teachers or academics. It is a genre which has a large amount of power and influence over its readers at a time when their identities are forming (Coats, 2010). In the 20th century, the concept of the 'Young Adult' genre was created. Young Adult literature is aimed at the ages 12 – 18 (Peterson, 2018) who are still considered by society to be children. Stephens (2007) defines Young Adult literature as being written about teens, in a distinctly teen voice, and including a journey towards individual identity. Coats (2010) describes how Young Adult literature is often viewed as a 'gateway drug used to entice readers to try the harder stuff' (P 316) and that when it is included in classroom, it is used to support students to apply theory they have learned to adult texts. Children's literature is naturally read by children before they move on to reading adult literature, but it has also been considered a serious area of academic study for a long time whereas research into the Young Adult genre is still relatively new (Hayn et al, 2011). There was a boom in YA publishing in the early 2000s due in part by the publication and consequent film adaptations of *The Twilight Saga*, *Hunger Games* Trilogy and *Divergent* series, and there has been a decline in YA publishing since 2015 (Ramdarshan-Bold, 2021). Many scholars and researchers of children's literature do not include Young Adult literature within the study of children's literature and consider adolescence separate from childhood. Beauvais (2015), for example, describes adolescence as being a separate social construct to childhood. Within this research, although there may be reference to books or reading for older children, the majority of references to children's literature will be referring to books written for or read by primary aged children. Alongside this, many books written specifically for children, are read by just as many adults, and not just those from the Young Adult genre; J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series being a good example of this.

Another category that gets dismissed, is that of books written by celebrity authors. These are often associated with a large amount of marketing by the publishers, including books signings and TV appearances. Books by authors who were already celebrities before they turned to writing children's books often dominate the bookselling charts in the UK. This includes authors such as the comedian

David Walliams, who sells an average of 20,000 books per week (BookTrust, 2024), Greg James (Radio 1 DJ), Tom Fletcher (musician) and Geri Halliwell (musician). The percentage of books written by celebrity authors increased threefold between 2007 and 2019 (Ramdarshan-Bold, 2022). Despite their celebrity status drawing a huge number of children into reading their books, these books are often dismissed by teachers and academics as not good quality literature and criticised by other authors because the celebrities do not have to go through the usual difficult and long drawn process of submitting manuscripts to publishers. Many of these criticisms are understandable; David Walliams books contain "overtly problematic content"(Ramdarshan-Bold, 2022), but there are other children's books written by British celebrities which have been praised, including for their representation of racially minoritised characters such as Konnie Huq's *Cookie* series (CLPE, 2022) and *The Book of Legends: What if all the Stories Were real?* by Lenny Henry (CLPE, 2023)

In 2008, Harper, Bryan and Walker created a framework to assess the quality of children's books authored by celebrities in the US and 'offer their opinion as to their worth' (p543). They decided that literature should offer the following advantages to children:

- entertain and inform;
- contribute to language growth and development;
- help children become better readers and writers;
- lead to a love of reading;
- and better understand themselves and others (Harper et al, 2008).

They used this framework to authorise or dismiss a list of 20 celebrity authored books as good quality literature. Although some of the books are recommended, many are dismissed with remarks such as 'one of the children's book authors we would warn educators and parents about' (p545); 'improbable that it will ever be applauded as award-winning literature' (p 546); 'would have been more appealing if the slang words and name calling had been eliminated' (p 547); 'Children who have read or listened to good literature will recognize a hollow story. It is an insult to their intelligence when they are not provided with books of substance.' (p548); 'should receive the "vapid and vacant" award' (p549); 'lacking in creativity and relevance' (p 550).

Akrofi et al (2010) also looked at the rise of celebrity children's authors and the perception that they would be low quality noting that no well-known children's literature textbooks or academic/professional journals at that time included any mention of celebrity authored children's books. Akrofi et al (2010) investigated the response of children to celebrity authored children's books, including many of the same books which were heavily criticised by Harper et al (2008). They found that children liked the books, that celebrity authored books were a good way of getting books

into the hands of reluctant readers via parents and that therefore there was a need to reconsider 'course capital' – the knowledge and experiences of those teaching literature courses for pre-service teachers that inform and shape text selection (Akrofi et al, 2010).

The Children's Novel

There has been a struggle with what defines a children's novel; what makes it a novel and not something else and what are the characteristics that distinguish it from other writing for children? (Cadden, 2010). Cadden (2010) also asks whether all of the categories, modes and forms traditionally identified as 'the novel' are present in novels written specifically for children. These may seem like unnecessary questions, as the audience are children who seldom know nor care about the conventions of particular genres, but Cadden (2010) argues that readers use their experiences of generic conventions to set expectations for their reading, even if they do not do this consciously. The ability to track long narratives, several plot strands, many characters, different narrators and points of view (Cadden, 2010), for example, is new to children when they begin to read what they might call 'chapter books'. The term chapter book is often used, particularly in education, to distinguish some books from picture books. This distinction is often related to age, and there is an expectation that when learning to read, children will 'graduate' from picture books to chapter books when they become more confident readers. Cadden (2010) describes this as a 'series of genre canal locks' (P 304) and suggests that once readers progress onto to chapter books, there is no going back or 'regressing' to picture books because the novel is the canal's destination. In fact, picture books can and do develop children's reading just as much as novels, and are sometimes at a higher 'reading level'.

The children's novel comes in many lengths, and the length is often not related to the reading level or any other characteristic of the book. There is a misconception however, by children and parents, that the longer the novel, the more challenging the read (Cadden, 2010). I would argue that a short children's novel such as Philip Pullman's *Clockwork* with just 92 pages, challenges its readers with a narrative which shifts backwards and forwards through time, presenting more than one interrelating plot, more than a novel such as J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* which has more than 750 pages. But many readers who have read such long texts, may not feel comfortable going back to reading a book so short. Research conducted for World Book Day 2023 found that children feel judged for what they read (World Book Day, 2023); this is sometimes perpetuated by teachers who may have an implicit hierarchy of reading materials in their classroom (Cremin, 2014) which may influence children's reader identities. Cadden (2010) explains that novel length has more to do with genre, and fantasy novels will often be much longer than other novels as so much of the

'world' of the novel needs to be explained and cannot be presumed. This is obvious in Pullman's other works, for example *His Dark Materials* fantasy series, the longest of which is over 500 pages.

Picture Books

Nicolajeva and Scott (2006) describe picture books as an art form based on the combination of the verbal and the visual with the process of reading a picture book being a hermeneutic circle of moving from verbal to visual and back again to create ever-increasing meaning. Arizpe and Styles (2023), in their research into how children read visual texts, found that children are sophisticated readers of picture books and are able to understand viewpoints, mood and emotions as well as articulate personal responses even when they cannot read the words. Indeed, picture books are accessible, and allow all children to explore complex themes, including those who may have dyslexia, English as an additional language or any other barrier to exploring text (Brownsword, Merchant & Charlesworth, 2022; Hacking, 2020). Meek (1991) describes picture books as ordering and re-ordering the world, and reading them as a "distinctive kind of imaginative looking" (p 116). The text cannot be understood without the pictures and without the text, the pictures only make up part of the story (Meek, 1991).

During their six-year study into how picture books were being used in primary schools, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) found that most children saw picture books as being for young children as a step into reading or for those who struggled to read (Hacking, 2020). But picture books are not just for younger children, and there are many examples which use complex, multi-layered words and visuals which are suitable for using with older children. An example of this is the postmodern picture book, which requires the reader to fill the gap between the words and the pictures. Sipe and McGuire (2008, in Sipe and Pantaleo, 2010) identified six characteristics of postmodern picture books:

- the blurring of popular and 'high' culture;
- subversion of literary traditions and the distinction between story and real worlds;
- intertextuality;
- multiplicity of meanings;
- playfulness;
- and self referentiality.

However, picture books may contain some of these characteristics but not all of them, as the concept of postmodern picture books exists along a continuum (Sipe & Pantaleo, 2010). Dey (2018) suggests that the meta fictive nature of the narrative in postmodern picture books activates the imagination and empathy of the reader.

Graphic Novels

Defining graphic novels can be difficult as they do not only communicate through images, containing images does not automatically make something a graphic novel and they include nonfiction and biography – genres which are not usually considered 'novels' (Boerman-Cornell & Kim, 2020). Boerman-Cornell and Kim (2020) define graphic novels as:

> *Book-length narratives told using the conventions of a comic book, including panels to show the passage of time and movement through space; word balloons to indicate speech, thought and narration; and an established language of symbols to bridge the gaps between text and image*. (P2)

Graphic novels often contain more diverse representation than other forms of children's literature (Boerman-Cornell & Kim, 2020) and can be used successfully to engage diverse readers, those who struggle with reading and to challenge proficient readers (Brownsword et al, 2022). Graphic novels have much in common with comics and Meek (1991) describes learning to read comics as entering a particular form of literate behaviour that "extends from childhood to political cartoons and beyond" (p 116). The popularity of comics and graphic novels is on the rise in the UK with sales hitting a peak of almost £20 million in 2025 (Thorpe, 2025). Like YA novels, graphic and comic fiction is seen as a gateway into wider, and more traditional, reading (Thorpe, 2025), but this seems like a simplistic view that perpetuates the idea that some forms of reading are better than others. Graphic novels and comics are a particular form of reading and not a simplified one.

Although there is much debate around what constitutes literature and many text forms have been judged as less suitable for children over the years, this research will be including children's texts of all kinds and will consider reading in its widest form.

The Children's Literature Canon

A children's literature canon is a list of texts which have a particular quality, cultural significance or value. Watson (1991) describes children's classics as being part of our national vocabulary within a cultural language we all share, and suggests that books which have survived the age in which they were written to be reimagined for each new generation of readers is a good definition for a classic children's text.

McGillis (2010) explains that after children's literature courses began appearing in universities in the US and the Children's Literature Association was formed in the US, it was inevitable that children's literature canons would be formed, with the first appearing in the 1980s. McGillis (2010) describes the canon as 'a conservative force, a means of managing public fantasises' (P346). This is echoed in Elliott's (2020) suggestions that decisions around what literature is or is not taught in the UK,

particularly if this canon is mandated at a political level, says a lot about what is considered valuable and important; what is considered valuable and important will have an impact on educational attainment.

Defenders of the idea of a children's literature canon will state that the chosen texts are timeless, universal and of high quality (Elliott, 2020), but, as I will explore later in this chapter, traditionally children's literature was aimed at the children of the literate privileged classes. The canon can and does reproduce the same inequalities that existed in society a hundred years ago. Historically underrepresented groups continue to be underrepresented and writers from these groups, particularly Black writers, are more likely to be represented within poetry due to its history in spoken word (putting it outside of society's gate holders), and lower publishing costs (Elliott et al, 2021).

Pirofski (2001) states that the publishing industry has contributed towards making the literary canon for children a 'predominantly Caucasian dominated enclave in terms of titles and authors' (P 7) and the majority of secondary schools in England study dead White men with little criticality (Marshall, 2020). 19th century literature has a strong place in the literature canon in secondary schools currently (Elliott et al, 2021) and it is argued that it is necessary to have an understanding of the British Empire, Colonialism, and how race and racism were constructed and operated in the 19th century in order to properly understand the literature. Chetty & Sands-O'Connor (2024) explain how through such texts, racially minoritised readers learn their place is rarely more than a helper to the White main character and often they act in opposition to the main character. It is not a case of removing these books, or 'decolonising' the literature curriculum, but widening the curriculum and the way it is taught to have a better understanding of the contexts and more open conversations about how inequalities might be reproduced through literature. Rather than removing texts, reading these alongside other texts and having a range of representation is important.

The current National Curriculum and the children's literature canon associated with it, is connected to former Education Minister, Michael Gove. During his 2010 canonical speech, Gove describes 'disruptive, difficult and damaged children who need special help' (Gove, 2010). Shah (2013) suggests that Gove's assumptions about the knowledge and contributions of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is offensive. This focus on 'knowledge' in the current National Curriculum and education discourse is not objective knowledge; it is selected to represent a particular paradigm and as Elliott (2020) asks 'whose values do we espouse? Whose text choices do we follow? Whose version of culture is the one we teach for?' (P 58). Elliott (2020) suggests teachers have a duty of care to their students to ensure they find a way to fit into the narrative of our country. This notion is supported by Fisher (2020) who states that teachers have a responsibility to expose children to new books,

authors, genres etc so that they experience disequilibrium and challenge their thinking and understanding.

Cultural Capital

According to Marshall (2020), Gove's 2010 speech links him to E D Hirsch's work on cultural literacy – the idea that 'literate people' have a shared background of specific information that supports effective communication and the reading of literature (Hirsch, 1985, P47). In 1991, Mullican described how in cultural literacy 'our' culture is favoured and even when 'other' knowledge is recognised, it is inconsequential. The idea of cultural literacy is linked to Bourdieu's concept of Cultural Capital and how social inequality is reproduced through culture. Bourdieu (1986) identified three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised, with institutionalised being the recognition of formal education and qualifications as capital. Since 2019, Ofsted has included cultural capital in its inspection criteria as part of its focus on social justice. Ofsted describe cultural capital as 'introducing them [pupils] to the best that has been thought and said' (Ofsted, 2019). Ball (2003) questions whether social inequalities can be addressed through schools giving pupils access to cultural capital when the education system is structured to perpetuate inequality. Elliott (2020) argues that the version of cultural capital referred to in the current education system is a deficit model which insists a child's educational success is dependent on a particular type of knowledge which we teach in school. The system fails to adequately recognise or value children's own funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al, 2005) and Elliott (2020) argues that it is teachers who often lack the social and cultural capital to engage with the children they teach on their own terms. Guillory (1993) argues that literary canons serve as cultural capital in schools but that they are not objective collections rather collections that mirror and perpetuate social inequalities, excluding marginalised voices.

Teachers Selecting Texts

The way that texts are selected for use in Primary teaching is often overlooked as a significant point in research, but each time a text is selected or omitted for use in a classroom, a message is sent to the children in that class about the importance of that text. A book's significance and importance will be deduced by the children as greater or lesser than another book by its inclusion or omission from their teaching (Stevenson, 2010). The choices that teachers make represent what they value and what they want their children to understand they value (Elliott, 2020). This means that the things which influence how and why teachers select or reject certain texts are important to consider.

In 2008, the Teachers as Readers project, which surveyed 1200 teachers across 11 different local authorities, found that teachers relied on a very limited range of children's books (Cremin, 2009),

often relying on their own childhood favourites. In 2021, not much had changed; when teachers were asked to name their class's favourite authors the top 20 list comprised of many of the same authors who were named in the Teachers as Readers project, only seven women and three from racially minoritised backgrounds (CLPE, 2023). In 2020 an initiative to address the lack of diversity in the English curriculum in schools was set up by Penguin Books in collaboration with the race equality think tank The Runnymede Trust. The research that formed the basis for this initiative found that the most popular authors from racially minoritised groups being read in primary schools were Malorie Blackman and Benjamin Zephaniah – the two most popular Black British children's authors – followed by Onjali Q Rauf and Sharna Jackson – two very recently published and award-winning authors (Elliott et al, 2021).

As well as teaching texts which children will enjoy reading and learn from, primary school teachers need to consider the wider curriculum and will often choose texts that will allow them to cover as much of that as possible. Teachers often choose texts which connect to topics they are teaching in Geography or History lessons; texts which are set in the part of the world being studied or the historical period children are learning about. This can sometimes lead to text selection being narrowed by the curriculum, or texts which would not usually be considered being 'shoehorned' in to match topics being taught at the same time. When teachers are starting with a topic, it can be even harder to find books which represent racially minoritised characters or which are written by authors from racially minoritised backgrounds (Elliott et al, 2021). Many teachers rely on readymade schemes or online resources and these rarely include diverse children's literature or authors (Elliott et al, 2021).

There are a large number of book awards which focus on children's books and because book awards are well-respected, teachers focusing on books which have won awards, or books from a specific award can be a way to create a defined set of books from which to choose (Yakota, 2010). In addition, publishers use award-winning books to design curriculum materials (Yakota, 2010). Research and content analysis on books which have won awards in the USA, including children's classics, has found that there is a lack of representation of characters from racially minoritised backgrounds and where there is representation it relied heavily on stereotypes (Pirofski, 2001). Research on book awards has tended to focus on content analysis of the books themselves after they have been chosen, rather than on the criteria by which they are selected; there has been little research into the awards themselves (Yakota, 2010). If analysis of a particular book award shows that most winners feature male characters, can this be a fair critique of the award if this was not

part of the criteria which led the books being selected? Pirofski (2001) suggests that the underrepresentation in children's book award winners may be due to a lack of racial diversity among the award panel members. As an example, the Newbery Medal is selected by librarians and does not make provision for admitting people from racially minoritised groups onto the panel (Pirofski, 2001). The selection criteria of the Newbery Medal (which covers themes, presentation, plot, characters, setting and style (American Library Association, 2008)) could mean that a book which includes biased language and stereotypes could qualify (Pirofski, 2001).

The Newbery and Caldecott Awards have been criticised for a lack of diversity in their winning books, but in the US there are specific book awards aimed at books written by authors from racially minoritised groups. However, no research has been done into the impact of these awards on the authors' careers (Yakota, 2010).

Kidd (2007, in Yakota, 2010) notes that award winning books often reflect the historical or political times that they are awarded. It would be interesting, then, to see to what extent the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement since 2020 and the Covid-19 Pandemic had on the awards published in the following years. Yakota (2010) suggests that analysing the people behind the awards might be an interesting area of research: their backgrounds, reading preferences, biases.

Taste

Taste varies between teachers as much as it does between anyone and if teachers need to choose between several books which offer similar opportunities for discussion or teaching, they will usually choose the one they simply prefer (Stevenson, 2010).

What books teachers prefer can be influenced by their own education, by their teacher education and by their own engagement with reading. Exploring their own reading histories can be a rich resource for teachers to understand where their taste comes from (Cremin et al, 2023). These reflections can be used to support developing readers in their classes.

Access to Books

In CLPE (2023)'s study into the teaching of reading in primary schools in 2021/22, the majority of primary schools had a library, and most teachers had a book corner in their classroom. However, 57% of those book corners contained fewer than 100 books; this rose to 84% and 73% in Early Years and Year 1 classrooms (CLPE, 2023). Nearly half of teachers shared that they were not able to change the books in their classrooms during the year.

38% of teachers in the CLPE study only got new books for their classrooms if they bought them themselves and 60% of classrooms have no access to a budget for new books. In BookTrust's 2024 teacher survey, teachers described a lack of availability of books to inspire children in their schools as a barrier to children's reading (BookTrust, 2024b) despite it being widely accepted that without support from teachers many children miss out on the benefits of reading (BookTrust, 2024b).

In summary, this section examined the complexities of defining children's literature and literary value, and the inclusion of diverse genres within the definition. Despite criticism of some genres of children's literature, they are essential for fostering a love of reading. It continued to explore the children's literature canon, historically shaped by dominant groups and excluding diverse voices, reflecting societal inequalities. The role of teachers in book selection is important because it is influenced by personal preferences, curriculum demands and resources and this section critiqued potential bias in children's book awards. This section on texts underlines the importance of expanding the definition of children's literature to include a more inclusive and diverse range of texts to better support children's engagement.

Readers and Reading

This section will explore the complexity of child readers, their engagement with texts and the role texts play in reinforcing and challenging dominant societal norms. It will examine how children respond to texts and look at the Science of Reading and relevance of reading enjoyment.

Who Count as Children/Child Readers?

Children's literature has what Stevenson (2010) describes as 'complicated audience issues' (P179). The idea of a 'child' has changed throughout history; the concept we now think of as childhood emerged in the late 19th century along with the first examples of literature written specifically for children. At this point in time, the majority of people, including children, were not literate. Those who were, were the children of the privileged and therefore, the audience that early children's literature was aimed at in the late 19th century was the children of the White privileged classes. It is no wonder then, that children's literature has continued to uphold the ideals of White supremacy unchallenged until recently. According to Butler (2014), within literature study, childhood is seen as both a state of innocence which should be protected and as inferior or incomplete. Beauvais (2015) suggests that the child reader is addressed as the future adult they are expected to become and therefore children's literature is characterised by the 'reproduction of established socio-political conventions' (P 2). However, it is not always the adult who has the power, and it is possible that an

implied child reader may be taught something by a book which an adult does not yet know; Beauvais (2015) describes this as 'a tension of powers – of time-bound powers – between the authoritative adult and its desired addressee, the mighty child' (P 3). Adult agency is not necessarily powerful, and the child reader does not always lack power. One of the reasons this is so difficult to determine, is that there is a lack of evidence of historical children's reading or their responses to books as evidence of agency in reading due to the study of children's literature having a tendency to focus on the literature rather than on the children (Schwebel, 2016).

The Science of Reading

The Science of Reading refers to a body of research on how people learn to read and how reading should be taught based on cognitive science, neuroscience, linguistics and psychology. It includes the Simple View of Reading which states that reading comprehension is the product of decoding and linguistic comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

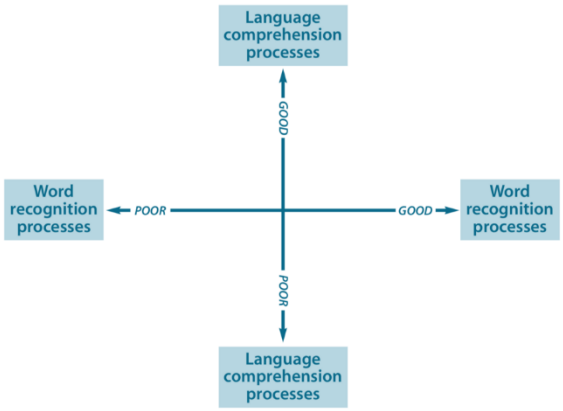


Figure 1. Model Based on the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)

The English national curriculum programmes of study for English reflect the Simple View of Reading model by dividing it into 'word reading' and 'comprehension'.

Scarborough (2001) developed the Simple View of Reading model further into the Reading Rope of Skilled Reading.

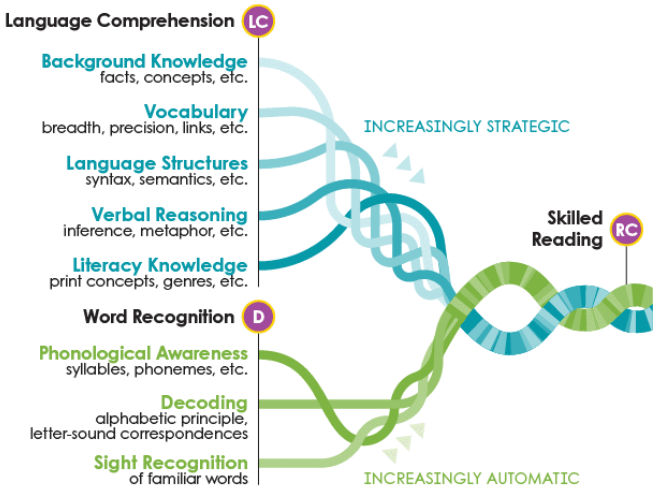


Figure 2. The Reading Rope of Skilled Reading (Scarborough, 2001).

Milner (2020) questions who builds the evidence that contributes to the understanding of the science of reading:

> *What science is missed, ignored, overlooked, underexplored, misinterpreted, overgeneralized, and undernuanced about reading when knowledge construction is not diverse and representative of the varied racial identities of students under study?*

He goes on to state that the studies that contribute to the science of reading are quantitative and therefore only provide one layer of knowledge. Earlier in the chapter, I discussed how there has been a recent 'overly simplistic' focus on cognitive science (Turvey et al, 2019) and this includes in the 2023 Reading Framework (DfE, 2023b) which has a focus on Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) and the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

The Reading Framework

In 2021, the DfE introduced The Reading Framework (DfE, 2023b) which was updated in July 2023. This is non-statutory guidance on the teaching of, and encouraging the love of, reading based on a range of research which appears in the appendix.

The Reading Framework (DfE, 2023b) includes reference to diverse texts, authors, voices and characters and it uses the metaphor of books as mirrors and windows. However, it does this without referencing Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) who used and developed this analogy widely and without referencing any of the recent research around representation of ethnicity in children's literature.

There is concern about the lack of reference to meaningful writing within the Reading Framework considering the links between reading and writing. Instead, there is a focus on writing readiness which means withholding opportunities to write until children have mastered the basics of SSP. The

Writing for Pleasure Centre suggest that the framework risks developing "reluctant, listless and unmotivated" writers and describes it as 'grossly incomplete' (The Writing for Pleasure Centre, 2023).

In addition, there has been criticism around the way that the Reading Framework frames the 'vocabulary gap'. According to Cushing (2022), Ofsted claim that children from minoritised backgrounds have limited vocabularies and as a result are held back in life. The Reading Framework (DfE, 2023b) suggests word gap interventions "as a panacea for social and racial inequalities" (Cushing, 2022). Instead, children's language develops when they are given responsibility to use it and language acquisition is dynamic and creative (The Writing for Pleasure Centre, 2023).

Reader Response

Benton (2005) describes reader-response theory as:

> '*the Loch Ness Monster of literary studies: when we set out to capture it, we cannot even be sure that it is there at all; and, if we assume that it is, we have to admit that the most sensitive probing with the most sophisticated instruments has so far succeeded only in producing pictures of dubious authenticity*.' (p 86)

Previously, much of the work on interpretation of meaning in literature was focused on the author's intent. Hirsch (1967, in Sipe, 1999) distinguishes between the significance of a text (which will be different for different readers at different points and places in their lives) and the meaning of the text which was intended by the author. Barthes (1986), however, suggests that previously there had been too much interest in the author and not enough in the reader. According to Barthes (1986) there is no objective or subjective truth of reading, but only a 'ludic truth' (P 31), which is written in a reader's head 'when we look up' (P 30). Eagleton (2013) describes a text as a 'transaction between itself and a reader' (P 46); a pattern of meaning which does not lead a life of its own.

Writing in 1999, Sipe states that most researchers of children's literature would emphasise that meaning lies within the experience of the reader and their interactions with other readers, not in the author's intentions or the text itself. According to Barthes (1974, in Sipe, 1999), texts can be 'readerly' (in which information is transmitted passively and consumed by the reader) and 'writerly' (in which readers must actively put the text together). Although all texts require active meaning making, they do not all require equal work from the reader to do this (Sipe, 1999). Marshall (2020) stresses the importance of Bakhtin's idea of 'dialogic imagination' in understanding how many voices converse through the interaction of literature and life. Meek (1988) describes how when young children read, they need to become both the teller and told, and that children learn this early without ever being taught. She draws attention to the importance of intertextuality, which children are able to do from a very young age and which is missing from scheme books which teach children to decode.

The work of Louise Rosenblatt was influential in developing reader-response theory, and she described reading as a 'a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances' (Rosenblatt, 1982, p 268). Rosenblatt (1982) refers to 'aesthetic' reading of stories or poems where the reader will notice the sound and rhythm of the words at the same time as experiencing new ideas and feelings. This is similar to what is now generally known as 'reading for pleasure'. Like Barthes and Sipe, Rosenblatt (1982) states that different texts take a different amount of work on behalf of the reader and that some texts give the reader greater rewards. Aesthetic reading has an intrinsic purpose, but often leads to the things that literature is praised for anyway – education, information and the understanding of moral and social values (Rosenblatt, 1982), and this is important for teachers to remember. Rosenblatt (1982) suggests teachers allow children to respond non-verbally to texts – through drawing, drama or dance – and that verbal responses can lead to children believing there is a 'correct' response. Instead, she suggests using open questioning: 'Did anything especially interest? annoy? puzzle? frighten? please? seem familiar? seem weird?' (Rosenblatt, 1982, p 276), which will encourage children to make connections and return to the words of the text. This is similar to Chambers (2011) 'Tell Me' approach which is a structured method for discussing books with children that encourages them to think critically using open-ended questions. The three types of questions are Likes and Dislikes, Puzzles and Patterns and Connections (Chambers, 2011).

Research shows that reading is a highly social process (Cremin et al, 2014; Chambers, 2011; Meek, 1988) and that informal child-led book talk is key in developing children as readers (Cremin et al, 2014). It is common for adults to discuss the books they have enjoyed with their friends, which forms a shared experience of responding to reading (Bearne and Reedy, 2017). This often happens in the form of book groups, which are sometimes referred to as Literature Circles in the context of schools. According to Bearne and Reedy (2017), it is difficult to discover how a reader has responded to a text within a classroom context as traditionally children are asked to write book reviews which can result in little more than "trite comments" (p223). Literature Circles, however, can help children to participate in real-life meaningful discussions about texts (Furr, 2004 in Isler and Dedeoglu, 2019).

Sipe (1999)'s research found that children responded differently to different types of texts; for example, intertextual connections were more frequent when traditional stories were read aloud to them and contemporary realism elicited more personal connection responses. What connected these different types of responses, was pleasure; whether children were connecting stories to their own lives or to other texts they had read, the responding was a pleasurable experience. Wilson and Rennie (2019) suggest that the significance of 'life-to-text' connections depends on the depth of thinking around the connections made, and that 'text-to-life' connections are less often made but

tend to be deeper connections. Beavis (2020) suggests that reading works best when children make connections between school and their own worlds.

Rosenblatt (1994) states that there is no such thing as a generic reader but rather reading involves a particular person at a particular time and place who bring their gender, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and socioeconomic background to the reading process. According to Sipe (1999), children's responses to literature are influenced by the sociocultural contexts that surround them – their class, the school, their family, their neighbourhood, their ethnic and cultural background and popular culture.

Importantly, within a classroom context, the teacher is important within the reader-response process. Children build upon what they are reading using their own experiences and understandings, but the teachers then guide these interpretations by commenting on them: 'the development of meanings is negotiated during complex interactions between the text, the reader and the teacher' (Wilson and Rennie, 2019, P 207). Each child who reads a book, creates their own schema of the text and our schemas are affected by our previous life and reading experiences (Elliott, 2020). Because children bring their own experiences and lives to the texts they read, children from different ethnic, social, economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds will read and interpret literature in different ways. According to Shah (2013), this interpretation according to the lens of their individual experiences allows them to take ownership of the narrative.

Rosenblatt (1982) states that teachers cannot predict how readers will respond to texts without knowing the reader, and Naidoo (1992) argues that how individual readers receive the messages in a text can be problematic. For example, a reader who identifies with a character may project values onto them and a reader who does not identify with a character may misinterpret them (Naidoo, 1992). Stephens (1992) describes reader-focused approaches such as this as "a dangerous ideological tool and pedagogically irresponsible" (p68), because rather than being in control of a text, child readers are susceptible to "unarticulated or implicit ideologies" (p68). It is important then, that books that may contain negative stereotypes or problematic representations of racially minoritised characters are challenged, and it is the teachers who will need to support children in reading critically in order to do this.

Reading Context

This understanding of how meaning is actively constructed between reader, text and teacher is in direct contrast to the idea of a knowledge driven curriculum in which teachers pass on meaning through shared reading of pre-approved texts in order to address a lack of cultural capital.

The context in which children are responding to literature is important. This can range from the context of the classroom to the child's world outside of school, to their ethnic and cultural background, their families, and the influence of popular culture (Sipe, 1999).
Sipe (1999) refers to several important contexts to consider:

- The immediate context (e.g. the classroom, considered both as a physical space and a set of cultural norms)
- The classroom community (each classroom has its own interpretive community formed anew each year)
- Non-school contexts (which may comprise a different set of speech genres)
- Gender (boys and girls may respond differently)
- Cultural background
- Influence of popular culture (this can have both constraining and enabling effects)

Reading for Pleasure

Reading for pleasure can be described as recreational reading, voluntary reading, choice-led reading or volitional reading which is driven by the readers own goals and interests (Cremin and Scholes, 2024) As stated earlier in the chapter, there is growing evidence that reading for pleasure is associated with reading attainment and other positive outcomes (Clark, 2011; Clark & Douglas, 2011; OECD, 2019). Sullivan and Brown (2015) for example, found that children's reading behaviour was strongly linked to their attainment in maths and vocabulary and suggested the progress increases over time, so the link is not just because children who are higher attainers already are more likely to choose to read. This link was both direct (reading influences vocabulary directly) and indirect (improved reading allows greater access to the wider curriculum). Without intervention, the attainment gap between disengaged and engaged readers could grow throughout the primary school years, a phenomenon described by Stanovich (1986) as the Matthew Effect. Children becoming readers, therefore, could reduce educational inequality and is a matter of social justice (Cremin & Scholes, 2024).

There is recent evidence that reading for pleasure has positive social and emotional impacts and children who choose to read in their own time have better wellbeing (Kennewell et al, 2022; Mak & Fancourt, 2020; Sun et al, 2023). Reading for pleasure is also connected to empathy, with research suggesting that identifying with a character in a story is linked to enjoyment of reading and therefore likely to lead to increased reading and a more positive attitude towards reading (McMreary & Marchant, 2016). McCreary & Marchant (2016) found a particular connection between reading and

perspective-taking suggesting that increasing children's enjoyment of reading could lead to improved social development. Vezzali et al (2015)'s study using *Harry Potter* found that there was a relationship between identifying with a positive main character and improved attitudes towards stigmatised or minoritised groups. Farrah Serroukh, writing in Chetty & Sands-O'Connor (2024), describes children's literature as a key resource through which children understand themselves and the world.

In the UK in 2023, the number of children who said they enjoyed reading was at its lowest level since 2005 with only 43.4% of children surveyed stating that they enjoyed reading (Clark et al, 2023). Despite Reading for pleasure being given recent increased attention by government and national education policy makers, a teacher cannot force a child to enjoy reading and finding the time to nurture an enjoyment of reading alongside teaching children to read and pass assessments to a certain standard, is a real challenge (Cremin & Scholes, 2024).

Ideology

Thomas (2013) states that when teaching is culturally relevant and responsive, it is necessary to pay close attention to language and discourse. Wilson and Rennie (2019) suggest that the diversity within classrooms leads to children seeing and understanding in different ways during discussions about books as children draw upon their own experiences and backgrounds. When children are encouraged to draw upon their own out-of-school experiences when reading, it increases their conceptual understanding and leads to a sense of empowerment and belonging in the classroom (Wilson and Rennie, 2019).

McCallum and Stephens (2010) state that 'all aspects of textual discourse, from story outcomes to the expressive forms of language, are informed and shaped by ideology' (P360) and that children's literature has the social function of defining and sustaining group values. There is, therefore, usually an assumption that author and audience share a common understanding. Ideologies in stories are most powerful when they reproduce beliefs which authors and their readers are less aware of; a book which seems to a reader to be free of ideology will actually have an ideology which is more closely aligned to their own (McCallum and Stephens, 2010). Sutherland (1985, in Sipe, 1999) states that authors usually take one of three different stances: 'the politics of assent, the politics of advocacy, or the politics of attack' (P 121). The first of these reflects societal norms and renders the ideology invisible in the same way that McCallum and Stephens (2010) described. In contrast, the politics of advocacy or attack promote or denounce particular aspects of society (Sipe, 1999).

In order to unpick these ideologies, it is necessary to examine the text's language and narrative discourse closely (McCallum and Stephens, 2010). Ideology operates within the discourse, the story and the significance of a text (McCallum and Stephens, 2010).

Sipe (1999) suggests that how children respond to different texts depending on the author's stances can be described as 'accepting', 'embracing' or 'resisting' (P 123). Children's literature can be an agent of cultural reproduction or an agent of change (Sipe, 1999). Ideology is also related to what kind of books are seen as worthy of being included in lists, curriculum and selected for use in the classroom, as we saw in the section that explored series books, Young Adult fiction and celebrity authors earlier in this chapter.

In summary, this section on Reading and Readers explored the role and identity of the child reader, explored reader-response theory and the concept of reading as an interactive and context-driven process. It also discusses ideology in children's literature and the correlation between reading for pleasure and improved well-being, empathy and educational outcomes.

Representation

This section will explore the reasons that representation in children's literature is important, look at representation from a historical perspective and look at more recent research. It will then discuss the representation of authors.

Why is Representation Important?

Representation is important because literature does not just communicate information or exist for pleasure; it can support social identities, and with identity comes agency (Fisher, 2020). Diverse stories do not just reflect a culture, they explain it and help to make sense of it (O'Sullivan and Immel, 2017). Indeed, O'Sullivan and Immel (2017) describe the function of children's literature as "the socialization and enculturation of children" (P 7), telling children about their place in the world.

Style (1988) introduced the concept of the 'house of curriculum' with either mirrors that reflect or windows which frame others' lives. Style (1988), writing as a White woman, emphasised the "fresh air of windows" into the experience of others. This idea was developed in relation to children's books by Bishop (1990) who introduced the sliding glass door into the metaphor as a way of thinking about social engagement (Botelho, 2021). Botelho (2021) describes these metaphors as a way to demand that teachers consider what they read carefully; considering who is "represented, underrepresented, misrepresented, and invisible". These concepts develop the metaphor further with broken mirrors and windows (misrepresentation), missing mirrors and closed doors (underrepresentation) (Botelho, 2021).

Books with characters from racially minoritised groups can act as a mirror for children from that group and as a window for children from different groups. The same book can, therefore, be both a mirror and window for different children within the same class and the way that different children respond to the same text is an area of interest (Sipe, 1999). According to Enciso (1994, in Sipe, 1999) some children may actually resist a text that they do not feel reflects their own reality. Sipe (1999) found that in his research, children's responses to texts depended on both their individual experiences and their cultural backgrounds. Children will not become immersed in reading if they do not have interesting and diverse texts available to them (Taboada Barber and Lutz Klauda, 2020). Children who do not have opportunities to read books which reflect their own backgrounds may experience reading differently as there is a certain amount of knowledge assumed by an author (Duke and Cartwright, 2021). Kirkland (2011) suggests teachers consider reading as an extension of the self.

Yandell (2020) argues that reading always includes encountering other lives, worlds, experiences and ways of representing experience which can produce identification and empathy. Picton et al (2021) found that girls who do not enjoy reading are also more likely to say they cannot find books with characters who are like them. This suggests that having access to diverse books has the potential to support children's engagement with reading (Picton et al, 2021). Milner (2020) describes observing Black students' motivation to read when they have access to and are supported in accessing texts which are meaningful to them. In addition, it is important for children to have access to a variety of texts which represent the same cultural experience rather than a single text – this gives children choices for "reading who they are" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, P265). Barthes (1976, in Sipe, 1999) distinguishes between two types of literary pleasure: plaisir and jouissance. Plaisir takes place when our own lives or experiences are mirrored in literature, and jouissance is what happens when we are surprised or mystified by a story world which is different to our own.

As previously stated, there is a well-documented link between reading enjoyment and reading attainment, and between reading enjoyment and other forms of academic attainment. Representation in children's literature is therefore essential for supporting the academic success of all children.

The History of Representation of race and ethnicity in Children's Literature

British children's literature gained prominence at the same time as the rise of the British Empire, and any representation of racially minoritised characters within it was as characters designed to support White main characters, or as dark, bad characters (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024). Books published

for children during the middle to late nineteenth century were aimed at a White, middle class, protestant audience (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was one of the first examples of a story of a shipwrecked White character who meets 'savage natives'. This book was so popular that there have been many children's books that have followed the same template, including Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Barrie's *Peter Pan* and even Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* (Chetty & Sand-O'Connor, 2024). In the nineteenth century, G.A. Henty published books for children which offered readers the chance to "experience vicariously the conquering and securing of the British Empire throughout the world" (Chetty & Sands O'Connor, 2024, P41) through a young White boy character who goes to colonial outposts to fight against 'natives'.

Many children's books published in the UK up to the early 20th century reflected these colonial hierarchies and featured racially minoritised characters who were stereotypes or exoticised. This continued into the post-war era throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s with authors such as Enid Blyton including many racist tropes in their books, for example the Gollywog in the *Noddy* series and frequent racist references throughout the *Famous Five* series (Morrissey, 2023).

In the 1970s Black and Asian British publishers began to produce children's books that addressed the Eurocentricity of the British school system and by the 1980s other mainstream publishers were producing books for children which explained the links between empire and recent migration (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024).

In the 1980s some Black British authors began writing books for children which reflected the racism and hostility of Britain under Thatcher (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024). However, children's books which portrayed British South Asian children as different and isolated continued to be published into the 1990s; this is now being counteracted by writers from British South Asian backgrounds (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024). Children's literature which represents children from mixed ethnic backgrounds was uncommon before the 21st century (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024).

Although there is a significant Jewish population in the UK, only a small number of children's books featuring Jewish characters have been published since the 1940s (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024). One of those is John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* which is widely taught in both primary and secondary schools. Research by UCL's Centre for Holocaust Education, which involved focus groups with children studying the book, found that historical inaccuracies in the book were leading to misconceptions about the Holocaust and that the narrative reframed Nazis as victims (UCL, 2022).

According to Bishop (2010), children's literature in the USA was mainly homogeneous and mono-cultural until the mid-1960s. Although there was representation of characters who were other than White in some literature before then, throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries this

representation was from the perspective of seeing them as inferior (Bishop, 2010). As early as 1933, Brown was writing about the stereotypes of Black characters in American literature; defining 7 common stereotypes: The Contented Slave; The wretched Freeman; The Comic Negro; The Brute Negro; The tragic Mulatto; The Local Color Negro and The Exotic Primitive. These stereotypes were used in the literature of the time to stress the Black characters' 'divergence from the norm' and as justification for the mistreatment of African Americans (Brown, 1933. P180).

In Broderick's (1973, in Bishop, 2010) research on the image of Black in American children's fiction between 1827 and 1967, she found two distinct types of story: condescendingly racist or liberal do-gooder. These books represented what the White author wanted White children to know about Black people and Black readers were not taken into account (Bishop, 2010). In the late 1960s, African American authors began to write children's literature which sought to transmit knowledge and values at the same time as entertaining with stories which were both specific to the Black experience and also general to human experience (Bishop, 2010). In Bishops' own more recent research into American children's literature, she asked the following questions:

1. To whom are the books addressed?
2. Do they treat Black culture as distinctive?
3. What cultural perspective forms the creation of the fictional worlds and characters?
4. Whose eyes is the story told through?

Bishop (2010) found three categories of books:

1. Melting pot books which ignored racial or cultural differences.

2. Social conscience books aimed at White readers.

3. Culturally conscious books which recognised and reflected some distinct aspects of African American ways of life.

Florez-Tighe was one of the first educators to advocate the use of multicultural literature in the school curriculum in the US and her 1983 research indicated that culturally authentic children's literature enhances language development of African American children (Pirofski, 2001). Other researchers cited in Pirofski (2001) whose research demonstrated that culturally authentic children's literature had a positive effect on children from racially minoritised groups includes Grice and Vaughn (1992), Smith (1995), and Taylor (1997).

In the UK, race and racism have been mainly represented within the English secondary curriculum by *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill A Mockingbird* which both represent the American experience of racism, only view the minoritised characters through a White gaze and demonstrate only one aspect of

Blackness – the experience of racism (Elliott et al, 2021). In Naidoo (1992)'s year-long research project in an English class where all the literature read was written from a perspective that indicted racism, all of the texts studied demonstrated a potential to engage empathy from White student readers. However, the degree to which this happened varied by gender, with male students demonstrating less empathy through their responses to texts.

In the primary curriculum, teachers have more freedom to choose what books are used in the classroom, but it is widely documented that primary teachers often lack subject knowledge when it comes to children's literature (Cremin et al, 2008; Collins, 2014; Farrar, 2021), and that the children's literature they are familiar with lacks diversity with White male authors dominating (Cremin at al, 2024).

Representation and recent research

Many writers and researchers from racially minoritised backgrounds describe their own experiences of not being represented in the children's literature they read growing up. Elliott (2010) describes how she learned as child that only White children got to have magical and fantastical adventures and that now, as an author, her aim is that young African American readers understand that they can find magic and adventures at home. In order to not remain trapped within fictions created by outsiders, it is important that stories are created that reflect all realities (Elliott, 2010). Botelho & Rudman (2009) describe representation as leading to the negotiation of identity. In recent years there has been research into representation within children's literature being published in the UK and elsewhere which will be discussed in this section.

Reflecting Realities

The first UK study on diversity in children's literature, Reflecting Realities, was undertaken by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) in 2017 and it aimed to evaluate the extent and quality of ethnic representation in children's publishing in the UK. This first study (CLPE, 2018) found that 4% of children's books published in the UK in 2017 featured a character from a racially minoritised background and 1% were featured as a main character. More than half of the fiction titles which did feature a character from a racially minoritised background were considered to be 'contemporary realism' and 10% contained social justice issues. Only one book submitted was of the comedy genre and more than a quarter of the non-fiction submissions were aimed at early years children. This study led to the term 'Reflecting Realities' being used more commonly as a way of describing representation of racially minoritised characters in children's literature and to many publishers making an effort to diversify their books.

In the follow- up study (CLPE, 2019), there was an increase of general representation from 4% to 7% and of main characters from 1% to 4%. However, compared to the percentage of school aged children from racially minoritised backgrounds in the UK at 33.1% (CLPE, 2019), this is still significantly low representation. There were also issues with representation: characters from racially minoritised backgrounds were less well drawn than White characters, including exaggerated features and examples of colourism where virtue and skin colour were correlated. Problematic representations were particularly prevalent in non-fiction and historical fiction and there were frequent examples of issues with language choice such as describing skin tone using language related to coffee or referring only to hair to imply ethnicity. This study also explored the ways in which characters from racially minoritised backgrounds were rendered 'visibly invisible' (CLPE, 2019, P18) such as by being featured as background characters and not part of the main story.

In the Year 3 study (CLPE, 2020) there was a positive quantitative shift in all areas including the number of fantasy books featuring characters from racially minoritised backgrounds, as well as a positive qualitative shift in terms of portrayal and agency of characters, with 98% of submissions having narrative agency. This was not equal across the ethnicities however, with East Asian characters not only less represented but often their representations were problematic stereotypes of geeks or villains (CLPE, 2020). Another of the issues raised in the Year 3 study was a difficulty in recognising the presence of characters from minoritised backgrounds in non-illustrated books and the ability to present ethnicity in a way that is not lazy, laboured or contrived (CLPE, 2020). To support both book selection and creation, a selection of prompts was included in the report (See Appendix 2).

In the Year 4 study (CLPE, 2021), representation had risen to 15% overall with a large increase in picture books at 48%, compared to 7% in the 2017 study although they are not all unproblematic representations (CLPE, 2021). There was a positive increase in the number of comedy and mystery titles and books in a series; the presence of more representation of racially minoritised characters in series books suggests 'a long-term investment and commitment to this work from publishing houses' (CLPE, 2021, P 11). Books published in 2020 saw an increase in characters who spoke about their ethnicity and in which ethnicity was part of the plot; an upward trend which reflected the social and political context of the time (CLPE, 2021). This relates back to Kidd (2007, in Yakota, 2010)'s suggestion that award winning books reflect historical or political times. There was also an increase in books featuring multicultural casts with characters who shared agency (CLPE, 2021).

The year 5 study (CLPE, 2022) found that representation was at 20% overall, and at 61% in picture books; this was described as a 'sustained commitment to improvement' (CLPE, 2021, P6) and that main character representation had risen to 9%. However, when published characters are compared

to the demographics of the UK population, there are still large gaps; particularly for Asian characters who are significantly underrepresented in children's literature (CLPE, 2021). It is important to note, however, that this was based on 2011 census data. There was an increase in the percentage of books published where the main character talks about their ethnicity and it forms part of the plot. It is important that this is balanced with books where ethnicity is incidental to ensure that not all diverse children's books are about struggle. The slowest and smallest increase was in fiction titles which rose to 11% but included books where the representation was poorly developed, and particularly low representation within the genres of horror and science fiction.

The year 6 report (CLPE, 2023b) showed an increase in overall representation to 30% and an increase of main character representation to 14%, the biggest increases since the Reflecting Realities research started and included a large increase in representation in fiction titles from 11% to 24%. However, this was not always well-developed characterisation. When examining representation in children's novels, the report found that it was often difficult to decipher ethnicity due to the lack of text-based cues and posed the question:

> *"can a book be considered meaningfully representative and inclusive if the portrayal of racially minoritised characters is indecipherable?"* (CLPE, 2023b, P9)

Examples of this included ethnicity being alluded to through a character's name or a casual reference to a food item.

There was an increase in racially minoritised characters identified as having agency and an increase in diasporic experiences being represented but concerns around the quality of representation in picture books remained. In this report, we were reminded that:

> *"Reflecting realities in picture books means the cultivation of well-drawn, sensitively rendered multi-dimensional characters with agency, who are identifiable, relatable, nuanced, varied and are central to the narrative."* (CLPE, 2023b, P15)

The year 7 report (CLPE, 2024) saw the first overall drop in representation from 30% in 2022 to 17% in 2023. This included a drop of main character representation by half from 14% to 7% and a reversal of the large gain in 2022 of representation in novels from 24% back down to 11%. The report reflects on the political and socio-economic context over the period of all seven reports and discusses the importance of representative books not only being used as a response to specific events or context. There is a danger in viewing these books as a 'text type' rather than books that have inherent value (CLPE, 2024).

As a positive, this report explored the ways that community is supporting representation in children's literature through authors and illustrators collaborating, the development of mentorship programmes, new festivals that showcase authors and illustrators from specific communities, diverse book awards and other significant research in this area (CLPE, 2024).

As a response to the lack of fiction featuring well rounded characters from a range of backgrounds across a range of genres, CLPE and The BookTrust published an anthology of stories by Black British writers and artists entitled *Happy Here* in 2021 which was distributed to all schools in England. In 2021, the CLPE also began working with ten schools in London and the Southeast of England on a classroom-based action research project based on the Reflecting Realities research which was published in 2024. In this book, the potential for children's literature to either exacerbate or redress toxic narratives such as racism is explored and the importance of evaluating the content of the books teachers share with children is emphasised (CLPE & Serroukh, 2024).

Other Recent Research

In 2020, the publishing group Penguin Random House and race equality thinktank The Runnymede Trust collaborated on research and the creation of a resource for schools to introduce more books by people of colour into schools called Lit in Colour. The research found that fewer than 1% of GCSE literature candidates in 2019 answered a question about a book written by an author from an ethnically minoritised background; that 82% of children did not remember ever studying an author from an ethnically minoritised background and that the most common way they did encounter authors from ethnically minoritised backgrounds was through poetry, often as a single poem included as part of an anthology (Elliott et al, 2021).

Research examining representation in children's books in the Netherlands found that characters from ethnically minoritised backgrounds were less likely to have names than White characters but more likely to feature in pictures (de Bruijin et al, 2020), and that while 42% of the books they looked at featured all White characters, there were no books featuring only racially minoritised characters.

Research exploring representation in the book exemplars for the Common Core State Standards in the US, found that children are more likely to see animals as main characters than people from racially minoritised backgrounds (Gomez-Navarro, 2019). The experience of diverse student groups reading books full of White, male, middle class characters from traditional, nuclear families is

described by Gomez-Najarro (2019) as the “amputation of their identities, as well as their motivation to read and engage in school” (P405).

The impact of representation is that children reading about characters who are similar to them can support them in feeling more confident in themselves (Picton and Clark, 2023), particularly for children from racially minoritised backgrounds. However, the annual literacy Survey by the Literacy Trust in 2022 found that almost 33% of children aged 9 to 18 said they did not see themselves in what they read (Picton and Clark, 2023). More than 60% of young people in this survey said they thought that books with representation of lots of different backgrounds was important to them and more than half said they enjoyed reading about characters who were different from them (Picton and Clark, 2023).

Own Voices

Even in the 21st century, almost half of children’s literature in the USA about African American characters, is written and produced by non-African American authors and illustrators (Bishop, 2010). In the UK between 2007 and 2017 only 1.96% of children’s book creators were racially minoritised British people; they were likely to have published fewer books than White authors, and were more likely to self-publish (Ramdarshan-Bold, 2019). The questions raised in the research referred to here were less about who has the right to tell whose stories and more about the barriers racially minoritised authors face in becoming published in comparison to their White counterparts.

There have been many disagreements and controversies around issues regarding an author’s racial and cultural background and the literature they are producing (Bishop, 2010). Bishop (2010) asks whether an author’s cultural background or perspective could or should matter to the reader; who has the right to tell the stories of marginalised groups? Is it right that someone from the dominant, marginalising group is telling the story? Questions around where meaning lies within a text are explored in the section on Readers, but the idea of author authority is important when it comes to children’s literature which represents characters from minoritised groups (Sipe, 1999). Sipe (1999) asks whether an author needs to be in “insider” to the culture in order to write about it? What constitutes insider knowledge? and can outsiders acquire it? Are there valuable perspectives that an outsider can bring? Who has the authority to represent another culture? (P121).

The author Corinne Duyvis coined the term ‘Own Voices’ and it began to be used on Twitter in 2015 to refer to children’s literature featuring characters who share an ethnic, cultural or racial background with their author. This term has become a popular short cut to describing books which

should include authentic representations within them. The questions in this section are made all the more complicated when it comes to children's literature – are children also a minoritised group here? Being portrayed by adult outsiders? As an adult academic critiquing children's literature to what extent should I take into account the fact that I am not the intended audience? Although the intent of the term Own Voices was to highlight authenticity, the term has since been widely critiqued. In 2021, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) formally stopped using term Own Voices, explaining that the label had become reductive, risked pressuring authors to disclose personal aspects of their identity, and opened the door to identity policing (WNDB, 2021). These critiques highlight that identity cannot be reduced to demographic matches; it is intersectional and influenced by social, cultural and individual histories.

The debate around Own Voices raises important epistemological and economic questions. From an epistemological perspective, CRT argues that lived experience can confer insight into racialisation and oppression that dominant groups may fail to recognise (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). At the same time, the publishing industry has been shown to systematically privilege White authors and gatekeepers, limiting economic and professional opportunities for racially minoritised writers (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). The call for more racially minoritised authors is not only about who "knows enough" to write a story, but also about who has economic access, structural opportunity, and institutional visibility within publishing. It is therefore both an epistemic and an economic critique.

CRT also warns against essentialising racially minoritised people by assuming that a shared racial identity guarantees authenticity or authority; no author can speak for an entire community. The term Own Voices, when used uncritically, risks reinforcing the idea that only certain people can produce certain kinds of knowledge. This contradicts CRT's commitment to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). In this thesis, Own Voices is therefore used cautiously and only as a contextual descriptor, not as a quality marker or requirement. Evaluating representation involves examining how characters are portrayed, how ideologies operate, and how power circulates within texts, not simply matching author identity to character identity. This position also avoids the implication that, as a White researcher, I am epistemically disqualified from conducting this analysis. Instead, I acknowledge my positionality and the limitations it brings, adopting a CRT-informed stance that centres transparency and reflexivity rather than presumed neutrality.

The Excluded Voices Report (Inclusive Books for Children, 2024) examined books aimed at children aged 1 to 9 which contained racially minoritised, neurodivergent or disabled main characters published in the UK between 2014 and 2023, and found that 58.5% of those were not written by

Own Voice authors. This statistic was much higher for books aimed at babies and toddlers where 83.9% were written by non-Own Voice White authors.

Owen (2023) describes how issues with White authors writing diverse characters is not necessarily about their ability to write a character, but can be around their intended audience and writerly decisions which centre a White perspective. The concept of authenticity is problematic when it comes to literature because authenticity is not an 'abstract literary value' (Owen, 2023). Botelho & Rudman (2009) describe how insider authors have more access to culturally specific discourses and histories than outsider authors meaning they have a better understanding of how language and power is used. They also remind us that no single person can represent an entire group and so everyone is an outsider to some degree.

The Reflecting Realities to Practice Gap.

The Reflecting Realities reports document quantitative gains in representation but also persistent issues such as genre gaps and ethnic ambiguity (CLPE, 2018–2024). A largely unexamined question is how teachers in predominantly White contexts interpret the relevance of this agenda. This study proposes that without explicit racial literacy and practical frameworks for text selection, teachers risk either ignoring representation work as "not for my class" or reducing it to tokenistic inclusion. The analytical framework developed during this research is designed to enact Reflecting Realities principles for classroom decision-making, regardless of local demographics.

This section provided an overview of diversity and representation in children's literature, highlighting issues with historical and ongoing representation of minoritised voices. Recent studies in the UK have quantified the gaps and studies from other countries support these findings. The importance of Own Voices texts has gained traction but is also critiqued, and research shows that there are still systemic barriers to diverse authors being underrepresented. There have been recent improvements in representation in children's books in the UK, but recent surveys suggest that young readers continue to feel underrepresented.

This Literature Review explored the role of children's literature in primary education, exploring the complexities of defining children's literature and emphasising the need for inclusive texts. This included exploring the relationship between readers and texts, the role of teachers in selecting texts and the value of reading for pleasure. Finally, it reviewed the importance of representation in children's literature.

Theoretical Framework & Methodological Approach

This section will explain how critical theory, critical race theory and critical multicultural analysis along with theories discussed in the literature review, will be central to the approach and methodology of this research which aims to take a transformative approach.

Clough & Nutbrown (2012) state that research is often polarised as either qualitative or quantitative; positivist or interpretivist, and that critical theory offers a third paradigm. Critical theory is transformative as it is often linked to a political or social justice stance which aims to change people or societies (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). Critical theory regards the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism as incomplete, because they ignore political and ideological contexts and seek to understand and improve existing situations rather than question or transform them (Cohen et al, 2007). In contrast to other approaches which are descriptive, the intention of critical theory is to change society, emancipate the disempowered and redress inequality (Cohen et al, 2007). One of the way's that it does this, is by uncovering the 'interests' at work in a particular situation (Cohen at al, 2007).

Transformative research, which has a focus on social justice, differs from research which has a focus on diversity. Whereas diversity looks at an appreciation of differences among and within groups, a social justice approach includes an attempt to understand oppression, the acknowledgement of one's role in the system and a commitment to creating change (Adams & Zuniga, 2018). This research aims not only to examine the differences in teachers' book choices and analyse the content of those books but to also aims to use the findings to engage teachers in understanding the role they play in ensuring all children have access to books which act as both windows and mirrors (Bishop, 2012).

A critical theoretical framework which is central to the thinking around this research, and the examination of its data, is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical race theory (CRT) is a lens through which to make sense of, deconstruct and challenge racial inequality in society (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). What began as part of Law Studies, CRT was introduced into the field of education by Ladson-Billings & Tate in 1995. Five of the themes which are central to CRT are:

1. The centrality of racism – racism is a normal and entrenched in the order of our society. It exists, irrespective of intent.

2. White supremacy – White people must be committed to critically interrogating their own racial privilege and unmasking the invisibility of racism.

3. Voices of people of colour – through story telling.

4. Interest convergence – racism reinforces White supremacy; therefore, White people have little incentive to eradicate it.

5. Intersectionality – various systems of subordination come together at the same time e.g. gender, ethnicity, class.
(Rollock & Gillborn, 2011)

Rather than a methodology in itself, CRT can be used as a tool to inform research at the point of data analysis (Cook & Dixson, 2012). CRT begins with the premise that society is fundamentally racially stratified and unequal (Hylton, 2012), and has a focus on Social Justice.
Because CRT is central to this research project, it is essential that any chosen methodologies and frameworks fit in with this approach. CRT has been critical of mainstream methodologies for being apolitical and reinforcing oppressions of marginalised people. In CRT, marginalised people remain central to the research through the use of voicing, storytelling and counter-storytelling (Hylton, 2012); with counter-storytelling being one of the most commonly used methods (Huber, 2008). Although I am not doing research with marginalised communities directly, they remain an important part of this research through the consideration of their representation within children's literature. In order for a methodology to be suitable for CRT research, it needs to have some impact on, or challenge to, negative racialised relations; this means that the methods chosen, and their implementation, are just as significant as the purpose of the research (Hylton, 2012). Research is for rather than on its participants; as Hylton (2012) says, "A CRT methodology must embrace not only the spirit of CRT but practical liberatory, transformative elements" (p35). In a professional doctorate, such as the EdD, the researcher is not a neutral observer, but can be a powerful vehicle for change (Fulton et al, 2013); this is one of my aims for this research and why CRT remains relevant. There are no set methods in CRT research but rather, there are methodologies which are better suited to facilitate CRT (Hylton, 2012). Solorzano & Yosso (2002) define CRT methodology as a theoretically grounded approach that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the process.

In recent years, CRT has been at the centre of political and educational debate in the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK and other countries. In 2020, Donald Trump (President of the US at that time) described CRT being taught in schools as a "twisted web of lies" and called it a form of child abuse (Wise, 2020). An executive order combating "race and sex stereotyping" was introduced in September 2020 (Trump, 2020). Between January 2021 and February 2022, 121 educational gag order bills were introduced in 33 different US states (Sachs, 2022). Many of them specified certain ideas related to race and ethnicity were prohibited from being discussed or taught about and

insisted on political impartiality in schools similar to the DfE's Political Impartiality guidance discussed earlier in this chapter. Funding was later cancelled for any programs that mentioned CRT and many books were banned in schools and public libraries. Research related to public attitudes toward CRT suggest that it is misunderstood by most people and that the majority of Americans actually agree with its claim that racism is a significant problem (The Economist, 2021).

CRT was also criticised in the UK in 2020 by members of the Conservative Party including the then Equalities Minister, Kemi Badenoch. In a speech in Parliament in October 2020, Badenoch warned that schools teaching the principles of CRT would be at risk of breaking the law (Badenoch, 2020). Both of these examples from the US and the UK demonstrate some misunderstanding of CRT, which is an academic theory used in academic research, rather than something that is taught in schools.

Understanding identity as socially and historically constructed supports CRT's claim that racial categories are products of power, not biology. Identity can shape interpretive authority; those who experience racism have insights that dominant groups may lack (Medina, 2013). This lens informs how identity is analysed throughout this thesis, not only as a demographic descriptor but as a lived standpoint that shapes how authors write characters and how readers interpret texts.

Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies

While this thesis draws primarily on Critical Race Theory (CRT), its arguments are also informed by the overlapping field of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). Both CRT and CWS emphasise that racism is systemic, historically produced, and embedded in the everyday practices, discourses, and institutions of society (Applebaum, 2016). CRT begins with the premise that society is fundamentally racially stratified and unequal (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), while CWS examines how Whiteness operates as an unmarked norm that structures this inequality and was constructed historically (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The following points, according to Nayak (2007), underpin CWS:

- Whiteness is a modern invention which has changed over time.
- Whiteness is a social norm connected to privilege.
- Whiteness should be deconstructed.

Importantly, Nayak (2007) argues that CWS can support the argument that race is socially constructed by examining the historical making and unmaking of Whiteness through questioning who is White and when and why they became White. Both CRT and CWS argue that current educational practices and policies cannot be understood without acknowledging the colonial and Anglocentric histories that shaped them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Applying a historical lens highlights how children's literature has contributed to racial stratification. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts frequently normalised imperial hierarchies, represented

racialised characters as inferior or exotic, and constructed White British childhood as the universal default (Sands-O'Connor, 2022). Simultaneously, education policy (eg. DfE, 2013a) has reinforced these hierarchies through a curriculum centred on a narrow "literary heritage" dominated by White, male authors, implicitly positioning other voices as supplementary or optional (Elliott, 2020).
By situating this study within both CRT and CWS, I acknowledge that teachers' book choices, the construction of canons, and the practices observed in predominantly White schools are part of these broader structural and historical patterns. This theoretical grounding informs the analytical framework used for evaluating texts, the interpretation of teacher narratives, and the argument that representation work must engage not only with individual books but with the racialised systems that shape educational practice.

Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature acknowledges that literature is a historical and cultural product that can reveal the power relations of society; it explores the interconnectedness of language, culture and representation in children's literature (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). By drawing attention to the reading process, particular messages or ideologies related to power relations within the literature can be detected and interrogated (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Critical Multicultural analysis demonstrates how power is exercised by analysing the micro interactions between characters.
Botelho & Rudman (2009) argue that all children have the capacity to be critical multicultural readers and that this type of analysis creates space for children to connect texts to their own experiences, other texts and the world:

> *They can be invited to engage in ongoing dialogue with authors and illustrators as they listen to or read children's literature. They can insert themselves into the story and can question its point of view, the social processes among characters, and its ending. Children can analyze the positions of power the illustrations or photographs provide and ascertain if the illustrations affirm or contradict the messages in the text.* (P11).

Critical multicultural analysis does this by locating how power is "exercised, circulated, negotiated and reconstructed" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p31). Reader response theory is an important part of this as it supports connecting reading to "personal, interactive, complex, multicultural, sociopolitical, and historical factors" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p33).
Cara (2017) suggests that transformative research is collaborative by nature and that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can be used without contradicting each other. According to Fulton et al (2013), a professional doctorate is seldom a highly focused single study. Instead, it is

often a mixture of different types of studies which are linked by an overarching theme (Fulton et al, 2013).

CRT's insistence that racism is ordinary and embedded within social and institutional arrangements (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) provides a lens for interpreting teachers' choices of texts. In predominantly White areas, colourblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) can mask structural inequalities and discourage race-explicit pedagogies (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). By combining CRT with critical multicultural analysis, this study offers both a diagnostic account of current practice and a practical framework for change.

This study will include a combination of questionnaires, interviews and critical reviews of children's literature which will be underpinned by critical race theory & critical multicultural analysis. This will be explored in the next chapter in detail.

Chapter 3 Research Methods

This chapter will describe the research methods chosen and the rationale for choosing them.

This research aims to explore the children's books featuring characters from racially minoritised backgrounds being used in primary schools by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1. What books featuring racially minoritised characters are being used in teaching in primary school classrooms nationally, and in a predominantly White area (Norfolk & Suffolk)?

RQ2. How do teachers express their subject knowledge of books featuring racially minoritised characters?

RQ3. Where does teachers' subject knowledge of books featuring racially minoritised characters come from?

RQ4. What can we learn from an analysis of the most common books being used in classrooms?

These are referred to as RQ1 – RQ4 in this chapter.

This research includes a combination of questionnaires, interviews, critical analysis of children's literature and the development of a new framework for analysing representation in texts. The questionnaires were used to establish broad impressions of participants' experiences and views (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012), which were then explored in more depth through interviews. It was not possible to analyse every example of children's literature named in the questionnaires or interviews, so the most frequently cited books from the questionnaire were analysed.

This study adopts a methodology informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA), all of which emphasise the importance of analysing power and representation within educational contexts. This requires a methodology that is iterative, interpretative, and responsive to emerging insights. Rather than beginning with a fixed analytic tool, the study developed its framework through the research process itself. This framework sits within a wider critical, anti-racist pedagogy.

The following sections outline each method, the reasons for its selection, and its role in addressing the research questions, alongside the ethical considerations underpinning this study.

The Questionnaire

Questionnaire Design

A questionnaire is a type of survey, and surveys are often considered as a quantitative method, the results of which can be used to determine attitudes, beliefs or knowledge of a particular group (Owen, 2017). As I was interested in teachers' subject knowledge related to children's books, a questionnaire was an appropriate approach and was focused on answering RQ1. RQ 2 and RQ3. One of the advantages of using a questionnaire, is that it can be distributed to a large number of participants who make up a sample of the population (in this case, primary school teachers) (Owen, 2017). According to Cohen et al (2007), there is a relationship between the type of questions and the size of the sample; with larger questionnaires needing closed, numerical questions and smaller questionnaires using less structured, more open and word-based questions.

My questionnaire had a combination of closed, structured questions and open questions where the response is not structured. According to Bell (2014), thought should be given to how responses are to be analysed at the design stage of a questionnaire, rather than after the questions have been designed. Closed questions, with a limited number of responses, are useful for generating responses which can be statistically analysed (Cohen et al, 2007). One of the aims of my questionnaire was to discover what books are being used in primary schools and do some critical analysis of the content of those books. It is not possible to read or analyse every book that was used by every teacher who responded to the questionnaire, so open questions were used to ask about children's literature to find the most frequently used books. The use of closed questions allowed me to make comparisons across the data by groups, for example by region, year group or experience.

There were two separate questions in the questionnaire where I decided to use dichotomous questions. These were to determine whether or not participants had read any books which featured racially minoritised characters or read books by racially minoritised authors. Cohen et al (2007) state that using a dichotomous yes or no question compels participants to provide a clear, unequivocal response; it was important to require respondents to interrogate their own teaching and book choices and be able to answer those questions unequivocally, rather than offer them a 'maybe' option. In fact, some participants created their own 'maybe' option by skipping a question; this will be discussed in the analysis section.

The questions that asked participants to give information about specific books they had used with their classes were set as open text questions. Cohen et al (2007) describe how open-ended questions can capture authenticity, richness, depth of response and honesty in a way that closed questions cannot. Although these questions were somewhat restricted by the questions themselves, which

were asking for book titles, open text allowed participants to add information and justify their answers. This led to comments such as “one of the main characters is Asian”, “we have read more but I can’t think of their titles” and “I don’t usually look at ethnicity”. Open text questions were also used when asking participants how decisions were made in their schools about which books to use. This led to a range of responses which would need different kinds of analysis; from a simple “the teacher chooses”, to more complicated long explanations of the principles and practice of book selection.

The order of the questions began with some factual questions about school location, size, teacher years of experience, year groups taught and years of responsibility. According to Cohen et al (2007), questionnaires should avoid setting a particular mood or mind-set early on and begin with nonthreatening questions which are easy to answer. Cohen et al (2007) suggest moving from objective facts, to subjective attitudes and opinions, through to justifications and finally sensitive personalised data. In addition, this means that if a participant is offended by a personal question and decides to abandon the questionnaire, answers to the earlier questions have already been collected (Bell, 2014). This is the reason why the question about ethnicity was left until the final question; although it appears as a simple question, it was the most personal question in the questionnaire. The question ‘How do you self-identify your ethnicity?’ was a free text open question rather than presenting participants with the usual ethnicity categories to choose from. The purpose of this question was firstly to identify ethnicity in order that data could be categorised and analysed according to ethnic categories to determine if there were links, for example, between being from a racially minoritised background and having knowledge of diverse children’s books. Secondly, by not using predetermined categories, it allowed participants to share the parts of their identity they felt were the most relevant and describe it in a way that is most accurate for them. For example, someone who is of a mixed ethnicity, who may tick ‘White and African’ on a census form, may identify as mixed race, or Black or something else when asked to self-identify their ethnicity. Participants did use many of the usual ethnicity categories, but they also described their ethnicities in other ways such as “White non-English” and “American Hispanic”.

Table 1 shows all questions from the questionnaire which will be discussed in more detail below.

Questionnaire Questions
What county or LA is your school in?
Type of school – Primary/infant/junior
Number of pupils in school – Less than 100/101-300/more than 301
Year group(s) you currently teach (tick all that apply) – R/1/2/3/4/5/6
How many years have you been teaching? NQT/2 – 5 years/more than 5 years
What areas of responsibility do you have in school? Class teacher/subject leader/year leader/phase leader/SENDCo/Deputy head/Assistant head/Head teacher
What were the last 3 books you read with your class or used in the teaching of English?
Have you read books with characters that are Black, Asian or from minority ethnic groups with your class or used them in the teaching of English? Yes/no
What were the books?
Have you read books written or illustrated by someone who is are Black, Asian or from minority ethnic groups with your class or used them in the teaching of English? Yes/no
What were the books?
Does your school use a published scheme for English which suggests which children's books to read with your class or for the teaching of English? Yes/no
What scheme(s) do you use?
How do you decide which children's books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English?
Do you make use of any of the following children's book awards in choosing books to read with your class? Blue Peter book award/CLIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Medals/British Book Award/Costa Book Award/Waterstone's Children's Book Prize/UKLA Children's Book Award/Other/I don't use book awards
Do you use any of these recommended book lists to help you choose books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English? CLPE Core Books/Pie Corbett's reading Spine/Book Trust Best Books/Other/I don't use recommended book lists
Where else do you get recommendations of children's books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English? Colleagues/Courses/social media/TV/Subject organisations/Other
How do you or your school get hold of books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English? Order through school/ Buy from an independent local book shop/ Buy from a book shop chain E.g. Waterstones/ Buy online from Amazon/ Buy online from somewhere else/ Buy online from somewhere else/ Borrow from the library/Other
Have you read or heard about diversity in children's books in any of these places? Academic research/CPD/DfE or Ofsted/News articles/Blog posts/social media/TV/Radio
How do you self-identify your ethnicity

Table 1. The Questionnaire Questions.

Questions about participants

The first question asked participants what county or Local Authority their school is in, and allowed me to analyse the data by location. I was particularly interested in looking at data from schools in Norfolk and Suffolk separately from the rest of the data. According to 2021 ONS census data, the population of Norfolk is 94.7% White and Suffolk is 93.1% White, compared to 86.5% in the East of England region and 81% in England as a whole (Norfolk Insight, 2021; Suffolk Observatory, 2021). Other areas represented in the data were much more diverse; for example, Hounslow where the percentage of the population who is White is around 30% in seven of its eight wards (Wikipedia, 2024). Questions 2 – 7 asked about school type, size, years of experience, year groups taught and

areas of responsibility. This enabled the comparison of data. This was important to be able to look at any patterns related to particular types of schools or particular types of teachers.

Questions about children's books

The first question related to children's books, asked participants to name the last three books they read with their class or used in the teaching of English. This question had two purposes. Firstly, it asked the participants to begin thinking about the books they had been using in their teaching in a non-threatening way. It was important that the question did not seem like a test, but would enable participants to begin to reflect on their own use of books in the classroom. Secondly, it allowed me to see if the books with racially minoritised characters or by racially minoritised authors that are asked about specifically in later questions, are books which were used very recently or not. This question was open text and allowed participants to include as much or as little information about the books as they wanted. The purpose of this was to enable participants to tell me about the books regardless of whether they were able to remember the full title, the author, or any other information about the book.

If participants answered 'yes' to questions about the use of books featuring characters or by authors from racially minoritised backgrounds, they were directed to questions which asked them to name some of the books. The purpose of this question was to begin to collect examples of titles of books which feature characters from racially minoritised backgrounds or were written or illustrated by authors from racially minoritised backgrounds which are being used in primary schools in order to critically analyse them. The question about authors and illustrators was also able to highlight misconceptions in participants' subject knowledge such as presuming a book featuring a Black character is written or illustrated by a Black writer or illustrator; or to highlight a lack of knowledge.

Questions about decision making.

Several questions asked participants to explore the way that decisions are made about the books which are used in school either by individual teachers, subject leaders or as a whole school. Questions about published English schemes, book lists, books awards were used to find the most frequently used examples of these in order to find out what might be influencing the decisions made about which books to use. This links to the significance of choices teachers make and the message that sends to the children in their classes about what is valued (Stevenson, 2020; Elliott, 2020). Some of the most frequently cited schemes, books lists and book awards were then critically analysed, looking not only at the books and authors, but also, in the case of book awards, the judging panel and selection criteria, as these can influence what books end up in classrooms (Elliott et al, 2021; Yakota, 2010).

One question asked participants how they access children's books. This was relevant as access to a diverse selection of books differs between a local library and an online international retailer, and because certain books may be promoted above others by some retailers. As we saw in Chapter 2 in the section on access to books, teachers are essential in getting books into the hands of children but there may be barriers to teachers accessing books down to inadequate funding and space. The purpose of this question was to find out where teachers access books.

Another question asked participants if they had read or heard about diversity in children's books in academic research, school based Continuing Professional Development (CPD), from the Department for Education (DfE) or Ofsted, in the news or in the media. The purpose of this question was to gauge participants' awareness of issues surrounding diversity in children's literature. Since the first CLPE Reflecting Realities report in 2018, and consequent annual reports since, there has been an increase in media coverage and training for teachers on this topic.

Questionnaire Analysis

The analysis of questionnaire data involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover patterns and themes. As well as generating lists of books and enabling the data to be separated by location, experience of teacher or type of school, the qualitative data from the open questions was analysed in order to establish patterns in the data; Braun & Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a flexible and useful tool which can provide a rich and detailed account of the data. This thematic analysis also included paying attention to the way in which the questionnaire was answered, not just on the answers themselves. As mentioned previously, the questions which were left out and not answered, were just as important.

Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest a 6-step approach to thematic analysis:

1. Familiarising yourself with your data

2. Generating initial codes

3. Searching for themes

4. Reviewing the themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

The first step was essential in noticing how the questions were being answered, or not and also in noticing unexpected themes or patterns such as teachers linking children's book selection to topics

within the curriculum and the pressure on some teachers to decide in advance what books would be read across a year and then stick with the same books year on year.

This dual approach of looking at both quantitative and qualitative data in the questionnaire ensured a nuanced understanding of teachers' practices and perspectives, laying the groundwork for the next phase of data collection: interviews. While the questionnaire provided breadth, the interviews aimed to provide depth by exploring participants' experiences in more detail.

The Interviews

Narrative Inquiry

Educational research, particularly that which examines teachers' culture, has traditionally been dominated by case study and ethnographic studies (Cortazzi, 1993), and Cortazzi (1993) argues that narrative research offers a way to hear teachers' voices and understand their culture from the inside. Narrative inquiry involves the use and interpretation of narratives and accepts that stories are valuable sources of data (Bell, 2014). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe several forms of narrative inquiry based on data in forms as varied as oral history, stories, annals and chronicles, photographs, memory boxes, interviews, journals, autobiography, letters, conversations and documents.

All of these data may be used in other types of research, but what makes narrative inquiry distinctive is that it takes the story itself as the object of investigation (Riessman, 1993). Rosaldo (1993) argues that stories actually shape human conduct rather than just reflect it. In other forms of qualitative research, personal narratives may be presented in snippets, or edited out of context; this eliminates the structural and sequential features which characterise personal narrative accounts (Riessman, 1993). In many forms of qualitative research, interviews are used to elicit participants' personal experiences. However, the question-and-answer form does not frequently lead to participants constructing narratives (Riessman, 1993), and often narratives elicited by interviews do not display many of the features you would expect to find in a narrative (Cortazzi, 1993).

In order for something to be considered a 'narrative' it is necessary for it to include a sequence of events (Riessman, 1993). However, where the participant chooses to begin and end a narrative can change its shape and meaning. With these aspects in mind, the interviews in this research were designed to elicit narratives, rather than isolated responses to questions.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is interested in how the story is told, not simply in its content. Analysis and interpretation are an important part of the process – how is the story put together? What linguistic and cultural resources does it draw upon? How does it persuade the audience of

authenticity (Riessman, 1993)? People make sense of their own experiences by casting them in narrative form and what is interesting for the narrative researcher is the way in which this happens. Polkinghorne (2007) argues that not all narrative research requires an interpretative section as the finding is in the narratives themselves.

One of the reasons that narrative inquiry would seem to be appropriate for my research is Riessman (1993)'s claim that culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's narrative. Furthermore, Riessman (1993) argues that:

> *"It is possible to examine gender inequalities, racial oppression and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by the individual speakers" (p5)*

Narrative inquiry deals with representations of experiences, and Riessman (1993) presents 5 types of representation in the research process:

1. Attending to experience – Certain phenomena is made meaningful by being noticed.
2. Telling about experience – The personal narrative. The story is presented in a way that makes the interpretation of events clear. Experiences are made real through language which tells an experience but also creates a version of the self.
3. Transcribing experience – the fixing of the experience into written speech. (Like the previous 2 representations, this is "incomplete, partial and selective" (p11)).
4. Analysing experience – The metastory: What the narratives signify.
5. Reading experience – The reader's interpretation adds another layer. Any finding exists at a specific time and ultimately, we cannot speak for others.

These representations of experience have limits because we are using written symbols to stand for a primary experience to which we have no direct access (Riessman, 1993). Participants may not be aware that their experiences are "confined and organised by structures of oppression" (Riessman, 1993, p16)

Cortazzi (1993) presents several data collection methods for narrative research with teachers – autobiography, life history, collaborative biography, narrative observation, study of curriculum stories and collection of teachers' anecdotes.

Narrative Analysis

The structure of a narrative can make events more or less meaningful. Labov suggests that a narrative has 6 elements which can be a means of reflecting on and evaluating an experience (Riessman, 1993; Cortazzi, 1993):

1. Abstract – A summary. What was it about?

2. Orientation – Who? What? When? Where?

3. Complication – Main sequence of events

4. Evaluation – significance and meaning of events. So what?

5. Result – What finally happened?

6. Coda – Returns to the present

As well as interpreting what is said, how it is said is also crucial in narrative inquiry. The style of telling influences how a narrative is interpreted; whispering, pausing, talking loudly, emphasis, pitch and repetition can all indicate what is important to the participant (Riessman, 1993). According to Halliday (1973, in Riessman 1993), language has three distinct but interdependent functions. The Ideational function is the referential meaning of what is said; the Interpersonal function concerns the relationship between speakers; and the Textual function refers to the structure and the syntactic and semantic connections. Meaning is not simply found in content and narrative inquiry examines all three functions (Riessman, 1993).

According to Polkinghorne (2007), the purpose of the analysis of a narrative is to deepen the readers understanding. Rather than it simply being a summary, it should uncover and clarify meaning (Polkinghorne, 2007).

It is also important to take notice of the larger societal context, and this is particularly relevant to my own research and to CRT research in general, which should have a focus on social justice (Hylton, 2012). For example, when interviewing an inexperienced teacher in her first year of teaching, she lowered her voice considerably and turned away from the door of her classroom when explaining where her own focus on diversifying the texts in her classroom sits in relation to that work in the wider school. The volume, and her body language, told me more about how she was feeling about discussing this in school than the actual words which were used.

Interview Design

Although in this research, the interviews come out of and could be seen as an extension to the questionnaire, enabling me to answer RQ 1 to 3, it is important to remember that questionnaire and interview are distinct approaches. Whereas a questionnaire seeks to collect data about life, an interview is part of life; its "human imbeddedness is inescapable" (Cohen et al, 2007, p349).

Traditionally, interviewing was seen as a way of extracting information from passive, subjective participants and the interviewer was seen as separate from the data; interviewers were expected to be neutral and not influence what the participant was intending to communicate (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). In sharing experiences with an interviewer, the participant creates a narrative and

Gubrium and Holstein (2012) argue that there is no information that exists to be extracted in a pure form which may be tainted by the interviewer, rather the interviewer is a necessary part of the narrative which is coproduced. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), even a structured interview is interpretive and contextualised because it is shaped by the researcher's interpretations, the relationship between the researcher and participants, and influenced by the circumstances of the interview. Interview data will vary by how much it is collaboratively constructed, interpreted and influenced by the researcher and it is important that the researcher is aware of this and writes journal entries which describe the circumstances of the interview (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Semi-structured interview questions were originally established in order to answer RQ 1, 2 and 3:

1. Tell me about the children's books with characters who are Black, Asian or from a minority background you have used in your English teaching this year and how you have used them.

2. Tell me about your subject knowledge of children's literature.

3. Rudine Sims Bishop describes children's books as being 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors'. What do you understand this analogy to mean? How do you think it's relevant to your teaching of English?

These questions were then adapted to be more effective at eliciting narratives:

1. Can you tell me about a time you have used children's books with a character from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background in your teaching?

2. Can you tell me about the development of your own subject knowledge of children's literature?

3. Rudine Sims Bishop describes children's books as being 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors'. What does this analogy mean to you? Can you think of an example of a time when it has been relevant to you or your teaching?

Due to the circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic ongoing at the time of the interviews in 2021, interviews were conducted remotely using video conferencing software. This allowed both video and audio to be recorded. The recording of audio within the video conferencing software used (Microsoft TEAMs) involves automatic recognition of speech which provides automatic subtitles (Bokhove & Downey, 2018). These subtitles are recorded automatically in written form, which comprises the first draft of the interview transcript. There are issues around the accuracy of automatic captions and so re-watching the video with the draft version of the transcript to correct and amend is an important part of the process. As well as this, circumstances surrounding the interview such as location and time of day were recorded in written form; this is important because

context can provide additional meaning to an interview transcription (Bokhove & Downey, 2018). Online interviews are valuable in contacting participants who would be otherwise difficult to reach (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014), which during the pandemic was most people, and using online interviews allowed me to continue my research which would otherwise needed to have been paused.

Gubrium and Holstein (2012) question whose voice and opinions we might be hearing during an interview. Remote interviews with teachers, some of which took place in their classrooms at the end of the school day, may provide the voice of the participant as an individual, as an individual teacher and as a teacher who is a member of a school community. All of these 'voices' may have a slightly different viewpoint and may not all be as comfortable being expressed inside or outside of the classroom. For example, a teacher may not feel comfortable sitting in their classroom and expressing the critical 'voice' of them as an individual, and instead may feel obliged to represent the 'voice' of the school. If the same interview took place in their home, a different 'voice' may be heard, so it was important to offer participants flexible times to be interviewed so that they could be interviewed away from their workplaces if they wanted to. By not attending the location of the interviewee in person and the nature of remote interviews, it was not always possible to ascertain if there were other people in the room or the vicinity, who may have overheard our conversation. The possibility of this may have influenced the participant's narrative and it was important to remember this when analysing this interview data. In addition, Deakin & Wakefield (2014) suggest that both work and home can be disruptive environments when conducting online interviews – interfering with the flow of the interview or the concentration of the participant which could affect the data.

The impact of online interviews on rapport has been studied by Weller (2017), who found that greetings and leavings, interactions which are important in establishing rapport, were different in online interviews. Rather than being focused on rapport-building small talk, they were focused on technicalities (e.g. can you hear/see?). Non-verbal gestures cannot be fully seen during an interview where the camera is focused on the face, and this can impact understanding and interpretation (Weller, 2017). However, Weller (2017) also found advantages to online interviews, such as participants being more at ease in their own surroundings and less confident participants being able to speak without the direct presence of a researcher, these can facilitate connection.

Interview Transcription

The interviews were video recorded and transcribed with notes added to describe any changes in body language, tone of voice or other relevant factors, alongside the notes which had already been made about the time, location and context of the interview as described above. According to

Riessman (1993), analysis and transcription cannot be easily distinguished and so a certain amount of analysis happens during the transcription process. Due to using automatic transcription software which was built into the video conferencing software used in the interviews, transcription involved checking and correcting the automatic transcripts. The transcriptions were checked with the participants who were able to make changes or clarify things they had said. Mero-Jaffe (2011) highlights advantages of sharing transcripts with interview participants such as enhancing their validity and gaining clarifications. However, there are also disadvantages such as seeing informal spoken language causing embarrassment or anxiety for the participant which may lead to them wanting to re-write sections to sound more formal (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). In addition, some participants may not respond to the researcher. During this research no changes were requested by participants on reviewing their transcripts.

Interview Analysis

A Grounded Theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) was used during thematic analysis to identify the themes, patterns and relationships within and between the interview data. The data was coded initially by identifying broad concepts and categories, similar elements were then grouped together to create the final categories.

Step 1 – Initial Categories

Windows & mirrors
Curriculum changes
Subject knowledge
Discussing race
Lists & recommendations
Quality texts
Teaching
Own Voices
Curriculum
Use of Language

Table 2 – Initial Interview Categories

Step 2 – Colour coding categories where there were links or relationships across the themes.

Windows & mirrors
Curriculum changes
Subject knowledge
Discussing race
Lists & recommendations
Quality texts
Teaching
Own Voices
Curriculum
Use of Language

Table 3 – Colour Coded Interview Categories

Step 3 - The final four themes used in the narrative analysis which appears in Chapter Five.

Curriculum
Subject Knowledge
Teaching
Own Voices

Table 4 – Final Interview Themes

Re-structuring the Narratives

Narrative analysis has been described as the process through which data is organised into a coherent account (Polkinghorne, 1995). In this research, the transcripts were rewritten as first-person narratives as way of co-creating the teachers' stories (Nasheeda, Abdullah, Kraus & Ahmed, 2019). The inclusion of only two sets of interview data allowed me to use the interviewees' own words as closely as possible and not need to edit them down or cut sections out due to word count limitation. However, there was a big difference in the length of the two interviews, demonstrated in the table below:

Participant	Length of interview	Transcript length	First person narrative length
Rachel	24 minutes	1934 words	1691 words
Claire	39 minutes	4972 words	3246 words

Table 5 – Interview Length

There is no one or best way of analysing and re-writing narratives (Nasheeda et al, 2019) but restorying usually involves the reorganisation and analysis of the important elements into a chronological order which is often missing when participants speak during an interview (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). During the process of narrating the participants' stories, themes emerge, and the analysis is in both the description of the narrative and in the themes that emerge from it (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002).

Tables 6 and 7 include an example of this process from each interview to demonstrate how the original transcription was edited into the narratives:

Original Transcription Participant Rachel	First person narrative
This term we've been focusing on guided reading. Looking at fiction and non-fiction regarding transport and we've had transport books from around the world and they've *had really good* sort of *diverse focus*es. And then, let's have a look [looking at screen] so, we did it in September, a world away September. *So, in September we were looking at Oceania, the continent and we talked a lot about the Māori people, and I made sure we read some books surrounding those. That was really interesting for the children. Then we had a look at pirates and admittedly there wasn't much regarding ethnic minorities in that. Then Spring 1 we had a look at the great fire of London, again not much in that. Then spring 2 we were looking at traditional tales* and within that we were looking at *different perceptions of traditional tales* so there were *different versions*. *I couldn't tell you what the versions were, but we had Snow White in New York* I remember *that was a key one that they really liked.*	In September we were looking at Oceania, the continent and we talked a lot about the Māori people, and I made sure we read some books surrounding those. That was really interesting for the children. Then we had a look at pirates and admittedly there wasn't much regarding ethnic minorities in that. In Spring 1 we had a look at the great fire of London, again not much in that. In spring 2 we were looking at traditional tales and different perceptions of traditional tales, so we looked at different versions. I couldn't tell you what the versions were, but we had Snow White in New York - that was a key one that they really liked. This term we've been focusing on guided reading. Looking at fiction and non-fiction regarding transport and we've had transport books from around the world which have had a really good diverse focus.

Table 6 – Transcription to First Person Narrative Example: Rachel.

Original Transcription Participant Claire	First person narrative
I know and we don't know why it's it's a thing all around the area. We're just really *boy heavy* so that's another thing we've had particularly. But yeah it's predominantly White most of the people are local because it's a city school we don't have people travelling in from around, so they're used to this sort of area as well I mean even we talk about being in [name of suburb*] I find it really interesting* coming from where I am *because they talk about going 'into the city'* (uses finger quotes) *as a thing, like a day out.* Yeah, cos before I worked at [name of school] which also did the same thing but yeah *whilst still being in the city it's a very local area.*	We are also an incredibly boy heavy school. We've got 360 children, 280 of which are boys. Most of the people are local because it's a city school we don't have people travelling in from around. I find it really interesting because they talk about going 'into the city' as a thing, like a day out; whilst still being in the city, it's a very local area.

Table 7 – Transcription to First Person Narrative Example: Claire.

Where interview participants mentioned a children's text which was analysed as part of this research and included in the development of the framework, the narrative description of the book is included in italics as part of the narrative interview presentation. This gives context to the interview and allows the reader to have an understanding of the books being discussed even if they are not familiar to the reader. For example, the narrative description of *Julian is a Mermaid* appears within the body of Rachel's interview when the book is mentioned.

Analysis of texts

To address RQ4, a critical content analysis (CCA) of children's books was undertaken. The children's books titles included in the questionnaire and interview responses were recorded in a table. The following information about the books was recorded:

- Title
- ethnicity of main character(s)
- author/illustrator
- ethnicity of author/illustrator
- type of book
- year group used in
- number of times it appears in the questionnaire.

The books were then coded according to the following information:

- Race or ethnicity of the main character
- Race or ethnicity of other major characters
- Race or ethnicity of the author and/or illustrator

This data was gathered either directly from the books themselves, or using available information from publisher and/or author websites and other online resources. If the characters were nonhuman, this was recorded as 'animal' or 'other'. Where information on the race or ethnicity of either characters or authors and illustrators was not available or ambiguous, this was recorded as unknown. Books containing no human characters or books that could not be identified appear in the list with the titles crossed through. The list of books appears in Appendix 1.

There were limitations to this method of data recording, particularly when analysing picture books where the only information about race or ethnicity is in the illustrations. However, picture books were not the only problematic area, with some children's novels featuring characters where the only indication of ethnicity is in their name.

CLPE (2020) refer to the phenomenon of rendering racially minoritised characters visibly invisible as 'Degrees of Erasure' (p20) and have created a lexicon to categorise and articulate this practice:

- Country Specific Setting without Country Specific Population
- Cover Short Change
- Ethnic Fluidity

- Faceless or Featureless
- Jasmine Default
- Lost in the Crowd through Wallpapering
- Hair Cue
- Homogenised Illustrative Style
- Short Term Stay
- Vacant Landscape

These categories are described in more detail in Appendix 2.

Critical Content Analysis (CCA) and Critical Multicultural Analysis were used to analyse the most frequently mentioned books from the questionnaire in more detail. Critical Content Analysis can use a wide variety of critical theories, including CRT (Utt & Short, 2018). Utt & Short (2018) state that when using CCA, the stance and critical framework employed by the researcher should be explicit, inform the research process throughout, and challenge the idea that the research process or text itself are ever neutral. An advantage of CCA is that is provides a step-by-step process for analysis Huber et al, 2018) such as the one below adapted from Short (2017):

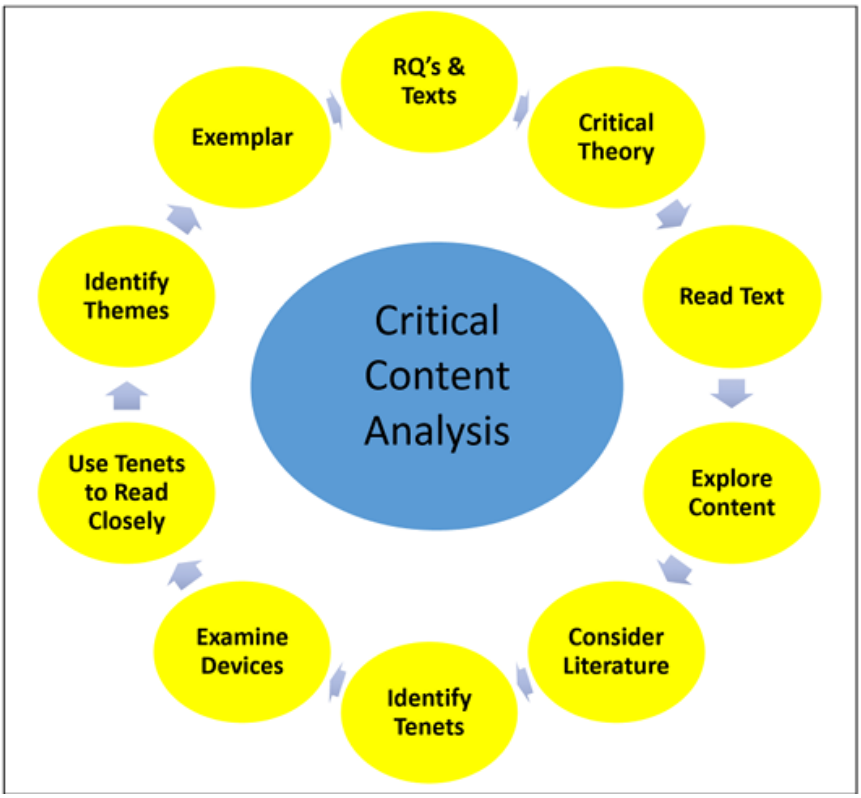


Figure 3 – Critical Content Analysis Step by Step Process (Huber et al, 2018)

Huber et al (2018) argue that although CCA research has been conducted by many researchers using some of the five tenets of Critical Race Theory, or by looking at a specific aspect of one of the tenets such as interest convergence or colour blindness, in order for research to be considered Critical Race Theory Content Analysis, it should include all five tenets of CRT. These tenets, and the ways that Huber et al (2018) suggest they can be used in the analysis of children's literature, are in Figure 4 below:

Tenets of Critical Race Theory and its Application for an Analysis of Children's Literature

CRT Tenet	Application for Children's Literature
1. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination	Structurally, racism is endemic and permanent in U.S. society (Bell, 1992), and often intersects with other forms of oppression, such as classism, sexism, nativism, heterosexism, etc. Such conditions mediate all storytelling, including those in children's literature.
2. The challenge to dominant ideology	CRT challenges the ideologies of objectivity, color-blindness, and race neutrality as the normative presuppositions of children's stories.
3. The centrality of experiential knowledge	CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of People of Color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching narratives constructed about Communities of Color.
4. The interdisciplinary perspective	CRT in education utilizes the transdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, law, and other fields in its analysis of racism and its intersections in children's literature.
5. The commitment to social justice	CRT strives for social justice for Communities of Color as analytical, curricular, and pedagogical work that leads toward the elimination of oppression, and the empowerment of People of Color through stories.

Note. These are tenets of critical race theory in the context of education and children's literature.

Figure 4 – Tenets of Critical Race Theory and its Application for Analysis of Children's Literature.

Huber et al (2018) suggest the use of a descriptive data sheet when analysing texts, to record themes and patterns, and suggest a list of guiding questions to explore story and image. The suggested questions are:

• What identities or characteristics are assigned by race and/or its intersections with class and gender?
• How are the experiences of People of Color represented, or not?
• In what ways does the story become raced, or not?
• Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (e.g., historical, political, social)?
• How/do dominant ideologies operate (e.g., White supremacy, patriarchy, cultural deficits)?
• In what other ways does power operate (e.g., vantage point, resolution, and/or assumptions of the story?

Table 8 – Huber et al (2018) Descriptive Data Sheet

I examined other existing analytical frameworks and questions to explore diverse books to compare. Huber et al (2018)'s questions are similar in many ways to the questions in Mendoza & Reese's (2001) framework for selecting diverse picture books:

• Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures?
• Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes?
• Who has the power in this story? What is the nature of their power, and how do they use it?
• Who has wisdom? What is the nature of their wisdom, and how do they use it?
• What are the consequences of certain behaviors? What behaviors or traits are rewarded, and how? What behaviors are punished, and how?
• How is language used to create images of people of a particular group? How are artistic elements used to create those images?
• Who has written this story? Who has illustrated it? Are they inside or outside the groups they are presenting? What are they in a position to know? What do they claim to know?
• Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing?
• What do this narrative and these pictures say about race? Class? Culture? Gender? Age? Resistance to the status quo?

Table 9 – Mendoza & Reese (2001) Framework for Selecting Diverse Picture Books.

Harper & Trostle-Brand (2010) developed a checklist for selecting and evaluating multicultural picture books divided by themes:

Author(s)
• Are the author(s)/illustrator(s) qualified to write or illustrate material relating to the culture(s) portrayed? How?
• Have the author(s)/illustrator(s) conducted related research? If not, have they lived among (either as a member of, or as a visitor to) the groups of people represented in the book?
Story
• Is the story interesting to children?
• Does the story contain authentic language? Are factual and historical details accurate? Overall, is this a high-quality story, independent of its multicultural aspects?
Characters
• Are the characters believable?
• Are universal human emotions, attitudes, needs, and experiences reflected?
• Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups?
• Are the lifestyles realistic? stereotypes?
• Are females as well as males depicted in leadership roles?
Setting
• Does the story reflect a variety of places and times?
• Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically?
• Are cultural settings and geographical features represented accurately?
Plot
• Are real situations depicted?
• Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity dismissed?

• Are various conflicts presented for children to explore and discuss?
• How are conflicts resolved?
Theme
• Does the story offer children a variety of situations, concepts, and new ideas on which to reflect, question, and consider?
• Are values explored, rather than preached?
• Are there lessons to be learned?
• Are children exposed to multiple perspectives and values?
• How does the story promote understanding of our diverse society?
Illustrations
• Are diverse populations represented?
• Is there diversity represented within cultural groups?
• Are characters realistically and genuinely represented?
• Do the illustrations avoid reinforcing societal stereotypes?
• Do the illustrations and text use authenticity to demonstrate respect for other cultures?
• Do the illustrations and text convey characteristics common to all people and cultures?
Developmental appropriateness
• Is the story age appropriate; can children understand what is presented?
• Is the story individually appropriate in terms of children's family backgrounds?
• Does the story reflect the social, linguistic, and cultural contexts in which children live or to which children can relate?
• Will the story encourage meaningful and relevant discussions?

Table 10 – Harper & Trostle-Brand (2010) checklist for selecting and evaluating multicultural picture books.

In order to guide my content analysis and ensure I was including the tenets of CRT, I decided to take Huber et al (2018)'s descriptive data sheet alongside the questions from Mendoza & Reese (2001) and Harper & Trostle-Brand (2010) to analyse the children's books in this research. I explored this first by piloting the questions from these frameworks to analyse two children's books with diverse characters in order to ascertain whether they were the right framework or questions for my particular research. The two books were *Ghost* by Jason Reynolds and *Little Bad Man and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties* by Humza Arshad and Henry White; illustrated by Aleksei Bitskoff.

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 1 – Cover of Ghost by Jason Reynolds.

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 2 - Cover of Little Bad Man and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties by Humza Arshad & Henry White

I chose novels to trial these framework questions rather than picture books because I anticipated picture books being easier to analyse than novels, and I wanted to be sure any framework used was suitable for both picture books and novels. There was no reason for choosing these particular books other than they both included representation of racially minoritised characters and I happened to be reading them at the time. The entire analysis of both these books using the framework questions can be seen in Appendix 3.

In analysing these two books, I found several limitations to these frameworks. Firstly, reference to 'realistic' representations and the need to avoid stereotypes did not seem to take into account different children's book genres. Eagleton (2013) discusses the notions of type and stereotype. He states that literary characters are at their finest when they are highly individualised. However, if they are too individualised, they would be unintelligible and so they need to be recognisable as 'types' which reveal characteristics we have come across before. There is a difference between a type and stereotype, where the latter reduces characters to mere categories and the former preserves individuality within a broader recognisable context (Eagleton, 2013). This suggests that even within sci-fi or fantasy genres, there is something that the reader recognises in characters or settings that they can relate to. *Little Bad Man and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties* is a comedy fantasy book featuring mainly British Pakistani characters whose storyline and humour is dependent on the 'Asian Auntie' stereotype. The Aunties, which refer to any woman of around the same age as the main character's mum, have been taken over by aliens and are feeding up the children in the school. These characters rely on this stereotype for the humour and not much about them or the storyline is realistic because it is a comedy fantasy story. In *Ghost*, some of the Black characters' back stories include things often negatively associated with stereotypes of Black people in media – for example, violence and gun crime. However, overcoming these things was an important part of the positive storyline for these characters. This is demonstrated in the Table 11 below.

Question based on Mendoza and Reese (2001)	*Ghost*	*Little Bad Man and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties*
Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted	Fully developed characters	Some characters are fully developed.

as individuals or as caricatures?		Some are caricatures which are essential for comedy. One is stereotypical.
Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes?	Some negative stereotypes – violent, gun crime, prison, single mum. But, this is part of the backstory.	Both. Lots of specific cultural references to Pakistani culture. Comedy in the story relies on the stereotype of the 'auntie' which is also culturally specific. Character of Wendy Wang, and 'outside' voice, is more problematic.

Table 11 – Extract from analysis of *Ghost* and *Little Badman* using Mendoza & Reese (2001)

Although it was useful for the questions in this framework to draw attention to these things and considering them was an important part of the analysis of these books, presenting the binary choices of individuals or caricatures; culturally specific or stereotypes, could lead to some of the elements of these books being seen as negative when the reality was more complex and nuanced. A framework that only presents stereotypes as negative may lead to teachers dismissing books in the comedy genre that rely of some kind of stereotype for humour. This is another reason why knowledge around an author's background is so important – these Pakistani aunty stereotypes work in this book partly because they are written by a Pakistani author. This is the same reason that the East Asian character of Wendy Wang felt like it was more problematic and more of a negative stereotype.

Similarly, in the questions by Harper and Trostle-Brand (2010), there were questions about how realistically settings and characters were represented:

Questions based on Harper and Trostle-Brand (2010)	*Ghost*	*Little Badman and The Invasion of the Killer Aunties*
Are the lifestyles realistic? Stereotypes?	Realistic	Both
Are females as well as males depicted in leadership roles?	No	Yes
Does the story reflect a variety of places and times?	No	No
Are urban, suburban and rural settings represented realistically?	Yes	No. This is comedy with an element of fantasy, so it doesn't need to be realistic.
Are characters realistically and genuinely represented?	Yes	Stereotypes are used for comedy. The book doesn't need to be realistic.

Table 12 – Extract from analysis of *Ghost* and *Little Badman* using Harper and Trostle-Brand (2010)

Books in genres such as comedy or fantasy are deliberately written to not be realistic. Knowing that characters from racially minoritised backgrounds are particularly absent from these genres (CLPE,

2018), meant that it was important that the framework that I used did not focus on only realistic representation being good representation.

Another limitation was that there seemed to be a presumption that books with diverse characters are about race, or have been written with an audience of White children in mind and therefore the diverse characters are there to teach them something about race, or diversity in general. Indeed, the title of the article in which Harper & Trostle-Brand (2010)'s framework appears, refers to using children's books for 'promoting respect'. Although my focus in this research was on books being used in a predominantly White area, it is important that diverse children's books are not just seen as a way of 'promoting respect' of other cultures or widening the experiences of White children. Diverse children's books need to appeal to all children; and while there is usually a 'message' or learning point in most children's books, the message in an ethnically diverse book does not need to be related to the diversity itself. This is demonstrated in the example below.

Questions based on Harper and Trostle-Brand (2010)	*Ghost*	*Little Badman and The Invasion of the Killer Aunties*
How does the story promote understanding of our diverse society?	By showing you don't have to live up to stereotypes, you can break from them.	It presents Pakistani culture as a 'norm' that doesn't need explanation. It is not presuming a White audience.

Table 13 – Second extract from analysis of *Ghost* and *Little Badman* using Harper and Trostle-Brand (2010)

The CLPE Reflecting Realities Report, published while this analysis and discussion of frameworks was ongoing in November 2020, contained a series of questions for book selection:

Characterisation

• Are the characters in the book thoughtfully developed, well fleshed out, multidimensional 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 underrepresented 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?

Table 14 - CLPE (2020) Questions for Book Selection

This framework of questions addresses some of the limitations of the other frameworks. Rather than referring to stereotypes (which does not appear in the questions at all), there are references to books challenging misconceptions and prejudices, and the existence of problematic hierarchies. There is also a section of questions which refer specifically to genre including the importance of seeing racially minoritised characters across a range of genres.

Another limitation with many of the questions across the different frameworks that I piloted, was the use of closed questions which led to yes or no answers. I wanted to create a framework that would have a practical use beyond academic analysis; a framework that could be used by teachers. What is a teacher to do with this list of yes or no responses after answering the questions while analysing a book?

After the initial frameworks were trialled and finding some of the questions less practical to work with, I decided to use these questions, along with the CLPE Reflecting Realities (CLPE, 2020) questions to develop a new framework which would include a space for thinking about genre and audience. It is a framework which would have a practical application for teachers working with books and children, rather than one restricted to academic analysis or restricted by closed questions.

New Framework Development

The analytical framework used in this thesis was not predetermined. Instead, it emerged through an iterative, multi-stage process. The process involved:

1. Reviewing existing frameworks (Huber et al., 2018; Harper & Trostle-Brand, 2010; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; CLPE, 2020).
2. Trialling and piloting these questions on two texts to test their suitability.
3. Identifying gaps, including binary treatments of stereotypes, lack of genre sensitivity, and assumptions of a White audience.
4. Synthesising, refining, and expanding the questions into a new 14-item framework.

This iterative approach constitutes a form of methodological bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005), where tools are actively constructed and adapted in response to context. By openly documenting this process, the study treats framework creation as a method in itself; a critical act of constructing more equitable evaluative tools.

The first stage of developing a new framework was to put all the questions from the existing frameworks into a table. Questions which were similar or covered the same themes were grouped together in the table. Once all the questions were grouped, they made up 11 groups.

In the following example, the first group of questions covers the way that the experiences of characters from minoritised ethnic backgrounds or cultural groups are represented.

Huber et al (2018)	Mendoza & Reece (2001)	Harper & Brand (2010)	CLPE Reflecting Realities (2020)
How are the experiences of People of Color represented, or not?	Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures? Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing?	Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups? Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity dismissed? Are the lifestyles realistic? stereotypes? Are diverse populations represented? Is there diversity represented within cultural groups?	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?

Figure 5 – Questions from four frameworks grouped in a table by theme.

Once all the questions from all four frameworks were put into the table, I mapped the responses to the questions I had made when trialling the three frameworks in order to see how useful I had found the questions. The responses for *Ghost* are in italics and for *Little Bad Man and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties* they are underlined.

	Huber et al (2018)	Mendoza & Reece (2001)	Harper & Brand (2010)	CLPE Reflecting Realities (2020)
1	How are the experiences of People of Color represented, or not? *Own voices. Characters of colour have the power in the story.* Almost all of the characters are people of colour. Their experience is represented as 'normal'.	Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures? Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing? *Fully developed characters* Some characters are fully developed. Some are caricatures which are essential for comedy. One is stereotypical.	Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups? *No* To a certain extent Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity dismissed? *Yes* Yes Are the lifestyles realistic? stereotypes? *Realistic* Both Are diverse populations represented? *Yes* Yes	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?

Figure 6 – Questions from four frameworks with responses from analysis of *Ghost* and *Little Badman* mapped onto them.

I then used these responses along with the CLPE (2020) questions to develop a new question.

	Huber et al (2018)	Mendoza & Reece (2001)	Harper & Brand (2010)	CLPE Reflecting Realities (2020)	Brownsword
1	How are the experiences of People of Color represented, or not? *Own voices. Characters of colour have the power in the story.* Almost all of the characters are people of colour. Their experience is represented as 'normal'.	Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures? Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing? *Fully developed characters* Some characters are fully developed. Some are caricatures which are essential for comedy. One is stereotypical.	Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups? *No* To a certain extent Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity dismissed? *Yes* Yes Are the lifestyles realistic? stereotypes? *Realistic* Both Are diverse populations represented? *Yes* Yes Is there diversity represented within cultural groups?	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?	How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?

Figure 7 – Example of Development of New Framework Question.

This was done for all 11 groups of questions. Some groups led to the development of more than one question as in this example:

3	What identities or characteristics are assigned by race and/or its intersections with class and gender? *Intersections with class.* Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (e.g., historical, political, social)? *Yes, the main character's back story explains his motivation.* Race isn't part of the storyline.	Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes? *Some negative stereotypes – violent, gun crime, prison, single mum. But, this is part of the backstory.* Both. Lots of specific cultural references of Pakistani culture. Comedy in the story relies on stereotype of the 'auntie' which is also culturally specific. Character of Wendy Wang, an 'outside' voice is more problematic. What are the consequences of certain behaviors? What behaviors or traits are rewarded, and how? What behaviors are punished, and how? *Honesty and hard work are rewarded.* The behaviours which are 'unwanted' at the beginning of the story eg rapping, are what saves everyone in the end.	Does the story reflect a variety of places and times? *No* No Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically? *Yes* No. This is comedy, with an element of fantasy, so it doesn't need to be realistic. Are cultural settings and geographical features represented accurately? *Yes* Yes Are real situations depicted? *Yes* No Are characters realistically and genuinely represented? *Yes* Stereotypes are used for comedy. The book is not realistic.	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?	How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups? In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded? How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?

Figure 8 - Example of Development of New Framework Questions.

The full table of questions, mapped responses and new questions appears in Appendix 4.

At the end of this process, I had the following fourteen questions developed for my framework:

1. How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?
2. How is ethnicity relevant to the story?
3. How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?
4. In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?
5. How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?
6. How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?
7. How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?
8. Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?
9. How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?
10. Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?
11. Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?
12. How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?
13. Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?
14. Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?

The final two questions were developed to enable anyone using the framework to look at a book as part of a collection rather than only in isolation. Question 13 was in response to the initial questionnaire findings which suggested teachers were only using a very small number of books which featured characters from racially minoritised backgrounds and those that they did have in their classrooms were often set in countries outside of the UK. Question 14 was developed in response to the CLPE (2020) findings that there were some genres that almost never featured characters from minoritised backgrounds to ensure users of the framework to think about the range of genres in their classrooms.

New Framework Template

The next step was to develop a template that would include the new framework questions which would be used to analyse some of the books named by the teachers that took part in the questionnaire. This template needed to include space to answer the fourteen questions described above, background information about a book, space to analyse characters in a book and space for the narrative summary. I considered also including the CLPE (2020) Degrees of Erasure categories (Appendix 2) in the template but in an effort to keep the template as short and easy to use as possible, consequently decided not to.

Figure 9 below shows the new Framework for Analysing Representation of Racially Minoritised Characters in Children's Books template.

Section 1 Background information

Title		Publisher	
Author/Illustrator		Year	
Ethnicity of author/illustrator			
Ethnicities represented			
Genre			
Additional information			

Section 2 The Analytical Framework

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	

How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Section 3 Character Analysis

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes

Section 4 Character Summary

Character Summary

Section 5 Narrative Summary

Narrative Summary

Figure 9 – New framework for Analysing Representation in Children's Books.

Using the Framework Template to Create the Narrative Summary

After the framework template was created, I used it to analyse some of the books named by teachers in the questionnaire and to create a narrative summary of the books I had analysed. Each response to the framework questions was used to inform a sentence in the narrative summary. Below is an

example of the framework responses for *Look Up!* by Nathan Byron and Dapo Adeola which was the first book I analysed using the framework. It is included here to demonstrate how the framework question responses are used to create the narrative summary.

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
1.How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Multi-dimensional representation – family, friends, community. Relatable and realistic lives.
2. How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	It isn't.
3. How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	Challenges stereotype of an astronaut as a White man – discusses first Black American woman in space explicitly who is a role model for the main character.
4. In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	Variety of ages and ethnicities presented sensitively. Different skin tone shades are present, and a variety of ethnicities represented among background characters.
5. How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Inner-city, suburban and park settings represented. Contemporary so familiar to most children.
6. How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	A young Black girl wants to be an astronaut when she grows up. She engages the local community in watching a meteor shower – showing how she can have a positive influence on her community.
7. How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	Rocket's ambition is not seen as incredible or out of reach. Story includes facts and 'did you knows' about real Black women in space.
8. Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Rocket has the power – she influences her community and gets them all involved.
9. How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Ethnicity identified through illustration – range of ethnicities represented through skin tone and clothing e.g. turban.
10. Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Nathan Byron is Mixed race (White British and Jamaican) Dapo Adeola is British Nigerian. Rocket is based on Adeola's niece.
11. Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	Highly engaging story.
12. How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Range of skins tones and hair textures represented. Mum is seen braiding Rocket's hair. A range of ethnicities are included in the background characters.
13. Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Yes.

14. Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Table 15 – New Framework Responses for Look Up! by Nathan Byron & Dapo Adeola.

In the narrative summary below, each framework question response number appears in brackets after the sentence to demonstrate how the responses were used to create the narrative summary. For example, Question 1:

How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?

Answer 1:

Multi-dimensional representation – family, friends, community. Relatable and realistic lives.

These are used to create the first two sentences in the narrative summary:

Rocket lives with her mum and brother and her life is represented multi-dimensionally through friends, family and community. Rocket lives a contemporary, realistic life that many children would be able to relate to.

Narrative Summary
Rocket lives with her mum and brother and her life is represented multi-dimensionally through friends, family and community. [Q1] Rocket lives a contemporary, realistic life that many children would be able to relate to. [Q1] Different ethnicities are represented through illustrations including through skin tone, hair texture and clothing e.g. a turban[Q4]. Skin tones are represented across different ethnicities as well as within ethnicities e.g. Black characters have a range of light to darker skin tones and different styles of Black hair such as afro and braids [Q4; Q12]. Rocket's mum is pictured braiding her daughter's hair [Q12}. Rocket challenges the stereotype of an astronaut as a White man [Q3]. She is inspired by the first Black American woman in space who is her role model[Q3]. Rocket's ambition is not seen as incredible or out of reach [Q7]. The story includes facts and 'did you knows' about real Black women in space [Q7]. Rocket's world includes inner-city, suburban and park settings that would be familiar to many children [Q5]. Rocket is a young Black girl who wants to be an astronaut when she grows up [Q6]. She engages the local community in watching a meteor shower – showing how she can have a positive influence on her community [Q6]. Rocket has power and influence in her family and in her community [Q8]. This is a highly engaging story [Q11] written by Nathan Byron who is Mixed race (White British and Jamaican) and illustrated by Dapo Adeola who is British Nigerian [Q10]. Rocket is based on Adeola's niece [Q10]. There are 3 named characters other than Rocket – Mum, Jamal and Cathy the Cashier – they are all Black. There are 28 background characters – 13 female, 13 male and 2 unknowns. 10 background characters are Black, 13 are White and 2 are Asian/brown skinned. Rocket interacts with many of the background characters of a variety of genders and ethnicities demonstrating the diverse world she lives in. [Character Analysis]

Table 16 – Narrative Summary for Look Up! by Nathan Byron & Dapo Adeola.

The methodology aligns closely with the research aims: to explore representation, teacher knowledge, and children's texts. The literature review highlighted the need for tools that support teachers in making informed, critical decisions about representation, especially in predominantly White areas where racial literacy may be underdeveloped. The iterative development of the framework directly addresses this gap.

The use of narrative interviews, questionnaires, and content analysis reflects CRT's commitment to multiple forms of knowledge and centring the voices of those navigating schooling and curriculum (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The methodology therefore bridges theory and practice, enabling a deep understanding of both texts and teachers' lived experiences within current policy landscapes.

Each method employed in this study is consistent with the commitments of CRT, CWS and CMA:

- Narrative interviews foreground teachers' positionalities and discourses, enabling analysis of colourblindness, race talk, and power (Gillborn, 2008).
- Questionnaires capture broader patterns in subject knowledge and text selection, aligning with CRT's focus on systemic patterns rather than isolated incidents.
- Critical content analysis aligns with multicultural analysis by interrogating how texts represent race, agency, ideology, and difference (Botelho & Rudman, 2009).

Together, these methods operationalise the theoretical frameworks by offering multiple entry points into understanding how race and power circulate through classroom book choices.

Limitations of the Analytical Framework

While the analytical framework offers a structured, practical tool for assessing representation, several limitations must be acknowledged. These include:

- Frameworks inevitably privilege certain interpretations and therefore may not capture all reader-response possibilities.
- The framework relies on visual and textual cues, which can be limited when race or ethnicity is not explicitly stated.
- Despite its iterative development, it may still reflect my positionality as the researcher, as it has not yet been trialled with a diverse pool of teachers.
- The framework provides structured prompts but does not replace contextual professional judgement.
- The framework does not exist in isolation and needs to be used within a wider anti-racist pedagogical approach.

These limitations highlight the need for further testing of the framework and potential adaptation in teacher education or CPD contexts. In addition, the framework needs to be situated within anti-racist pedagogy for literacy rather than an isolated tool.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted and approved in accordance with the University of East Anglia's School of Education's ethics procedures and in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2024). This section will discuss some of the ethical considerations.

Ethical Approval and Participant Consent

After gaining ethical approval from the University of East Anglia in 2021, I shared the details of my study with the networks that I am part of through my work as a teacher educator and previous work as a primary school teacher. These included the University's Primary PGCE Partnership and online teacher networks on social media (Facebook and Twitter). This meant that information reached both local and national networks of teachers. Information about the research, participant information and consent forms were hosted on a website to enable potential participants to read the information before committing to being involved in the project (www.sarahbrownsword.co.uk). This information appears in Appendix 5. Those that wanted to participate, clicked through to the questionnaire directly from the website which was hosted online on Microsoft Forms. At the end of the questionnaire, there was a call for participants who would be willing to be interviewed to email me directly. This means that the interview participants are also included in the questionnaire data.

Consent & Right to Withdraw

Voluntary informed consent was obtained at the start of this study from all participants in the questionnaire and interviews. Participants were made clear that they can withdraw the consent at any time without needing to provide an explanation. The nature of this study and its aims were outlined in the participant information shared with participants. Examples of the participant information and consent forms can be found in the Appendix (see Appendix 5 and 6).

Some participants in Norfolk were accessed through established connections with schools through my university's Primary PGCE. Access to these participants was through the Headteacher of the schools and did not presume that a prior relationship with the school would guarantee participation. Participants from other areas were accessed through other networks of teachers which I am part of; again, a prior relationship did not presume that participation was guaranteed.

Participants were initially invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire; at the end of the questionnaire, they were asked to contact me by email if they wished to take part in an interview. It was made clear to participants that taking part in the questionnaire did not mean an obligation to be interviewed.

Mitigating Harm

All participants were made aware that their data would be anonymised and that they had the right to withdraw their participation up until the time when I began analysing the data.

It is necessary for researchers to inform participants of any predictable disadvantage or harm that could arise from participation (BERA, 2024). It is possible that taking part in a questionnaire or interview about diverse children's literature being used in primary schools could reveal a lack of subject knowledge for participants. In order to alleviate this, participants of the questionnaire were directed to two websites to support them with this:

> *For recent research on the importance of diversity in children's books, see the CLPE Reflecting Realities Research https://clpe.org.uk/publications-and-bookpacks/reflecting-realities*
>
> *For recommended diverse children's book packs, visit www.letterboxlibrary.com*

The participant information gave the names of my supervisor and head of the school of education for participants to contact if they were not happy with any aspect of this study and wished to raise a complaint.

Privacy and Data Storage

In order to ensure the privacy of the participants in this research, the questionnaire was anonymous. Any teachers who were interested in being interviewed were asked to email me directly at the end of the questionnaire.

The interviews were anonymised with both participants names changed and any identifying facts removed from the presentation of the data. The original and re-storied transcripts were shared with the interview participants in order to confirm accuracy, give participants control over their own words and involve them in the research process which are all important for upholding ethical principles (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

Data from the questionnaires and interviews were kept securely online in a password protected folder throughout the study and raw data was deleted on completion. The captions generated within Microsoft TEAMs which were used for the interview transcripts, comply with the university's ethics procedures and policies.

Disclosure

There was a possibility that this study could lead to conversations about race and racism and teachers disclosing racist opinions. If a teacher's opinions or attitudes towards children suggested racism and I believed children were at the risk of harm, it would have been necessary for me to break confidentiality and disclose this information in line with the university's safeguarding policy. More generally, this was also the case for any child-protection issues. Fortunately, there were no cases of this happening during the study.

By addressing these ethical considerations, this research balanced rigorous enquiry with respect for participants wellbeing.

In summary, the methodology and analytical framework used in this study reflect a commitment to critical inquiry grounded in CRT, CWS and CMA. Through iterative development, multi-method data collection, and reflexive adaptation, this methodological approach studies and responds to the inequalities identified in the literature. It offers a rigorously developed but flexible tool that can be used by teachers and researchers to interrogate representation within children's literature more critically and contextually.

This chapter outlined the methodological approach taken. The combination of questionnaires, interviews and critical content analysis using a new framework, enabled me to develop an understanding of teachers' practices and perspectives regarding children's books with racially minoritised characters. The next two chapters will present the findings.

Chapter 4 Findings & Analysis – Questionnaire

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the questionnaire conducted with primary school teachers in the UK. The chapter summarises some demographics of the respondents then focuses on their responses to key questions. Analysis highlights the difference in responses between teachers in a predominantly White area (Norfolk and Suffolk) and other respondents. In addition, this chapter uses the findings and analysis of the questionnaire to begin to explore book awards and book lists.

Questionnaire Respondents

The participants in this research are primary school teachers in the UK teaching children between the ages of 4 and 11. Data from participants have been analysed as a whole group, but data from teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk have also been analysed separately because I was interested in the effect that teaching in a predominantly White area may or may not have on the data.

A total of 46 participants completed the questionnaire during March, April and May 2021. 32 of the respondents (70%) were working in Norfolk or Suffolk schools (Norfolk & Suffolk Respondents), and 14 (30%) were working in schools in other areas (other respondents). Of the 14 other respondents, 2 were teachers working outside the UK with the others working in schools across the UK.

Ethnicity

Only two participants did not describe themselves as White and instead self-identified as 'mixed other' and 'American Hispanic'. One was from the Norfolk & Suffolk area, and one was located in the US. Of those that did describe themselves as White, 32 used the term White British with others describing it in another way (British; Irish; White European; White non-English). Two respondents did not complete this question and were presumed White. In 2023, 16.2% of teachers in England identified as being from a racially minoritised group, although this includes White minoritised groups (DfE, 2024b) such as Any Other Ethnic Group, Any other White Background, White Irish, and Gypsy or Irish Traveller (DfE, 2024b). The percentage of teachers who identified as Asian or Asian British was 5.5%, and who identified as Black or Black British was 2.7% (DfE, 2024b). These are small percentages but the ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce in the UK continues to increase yearly – this is not reflected in the participants of this research.

Type of School

The majority of respondents (83%) were working in Primary Schools (children aged 3 – 11) with the remaining working in either an Infant school (children aged 3 – 7) (13%) or Junior school (children aged 7 – 11) (4%). The percentage of respondents working in either an Infant or Junior school was

higher in Norfolk & Suffolk (22%) than in the other respondents (7%). This may reflect the higher number of Infant & Junior schools in Norfolk and Suffolk, compared to other areas of the UK.

Size of School

Across all respondents, the percentage of teachers working in large (more than 300 pupils) or average (101 to 300 pupils) sized schools was similar, 43% and 46% respectively, with only a small percentage working in small schools with less than 100 pupils. However, the percentage of teachers working in a small school was higher in Norfolk & Suffolk schools (12%) than in other areas (7%). This reflects the rural nature of both counties and the higher numbers of small schools, including those with less than 50 pupils.

Year groups represented.

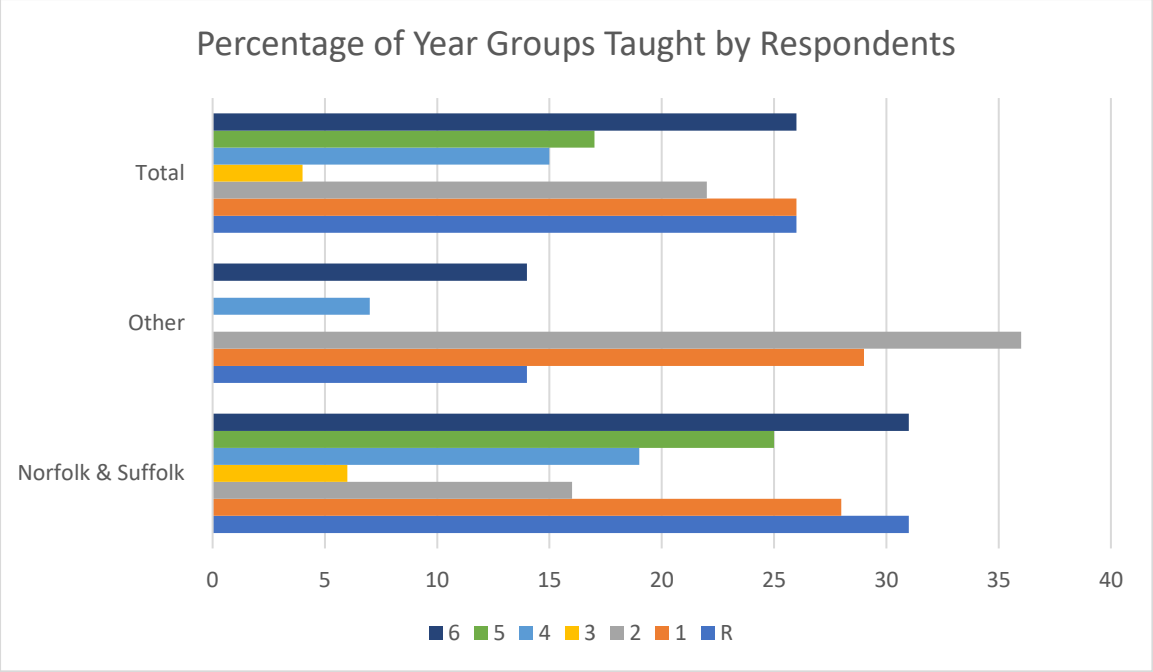


Figure 10 – Percentage of Year Groups Taught by Respondents

The distribution of year groups taught by the questionnaire respondents was not equal, with Norfolk and Suffolk respondents more likely to be teaching in either Reception or Year 1, or Upper Key Stage 2 (year 5 or 6), and other respondents more likely to be teaching in Year 1 or Year 2. Across the respondents, there is a lack of representation of those teaching in Lower Key Stage 2 (year 3 or 4); particularly year 3. This is important to take into account when analysing the lists of books generated by the questionnaire respondents as these are likely to represent many more books for younger and older primary children and fewer for those in the middle primary years.

Teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk schools were more likely to be teaching more than one year group (34%) than other respondents (14%). The majority of the mixed classes in Norfolk & Suffolk schools were in UKS2 and the others in mixed Early Years & KS1 classes. This is likely to be related to the higher number of small schools in Norfolk and Suffolk which are more likely to have more than one year group being taught together in mixed age classes.

Respondents' Teaching Experience

The majority of respondents (57%) from all areas were experienced teachers (teaching for more than 5 years). There were more less-experienced teachers amongst the respondents from Norfolk and Suffolk schools, where 16% were in their first year of teaching compared to only one from other areas.

Areas of Responsibility of Respondents

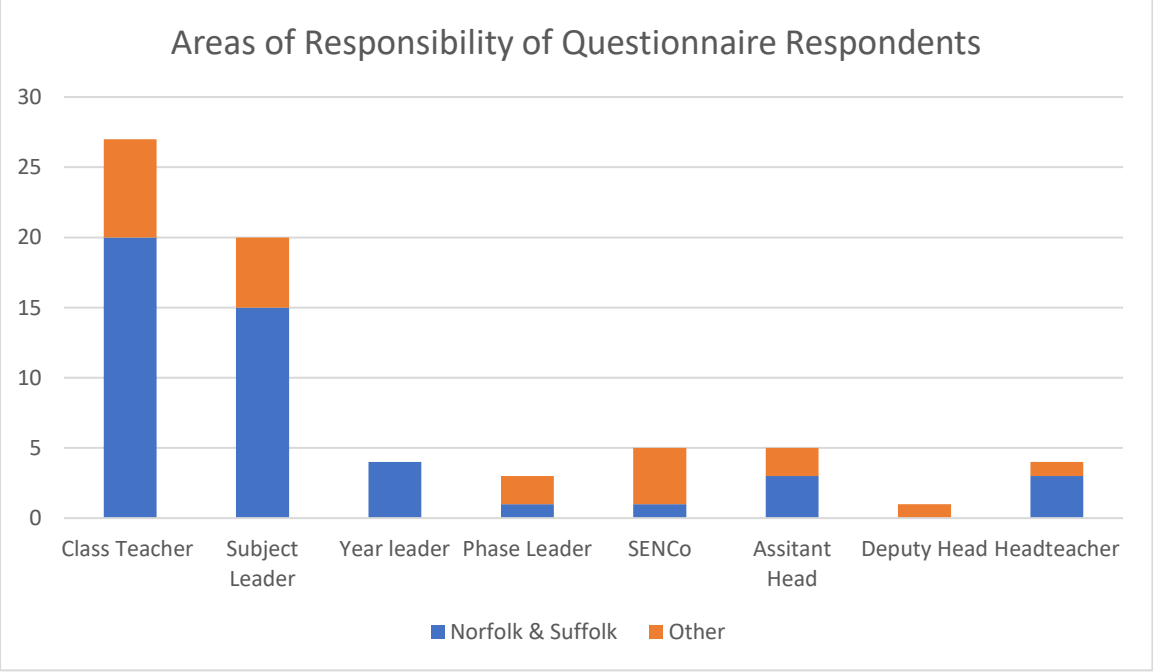


Figure 11 – Areas of Responsibility of Questionnaire Respondents

Respondents represented a range of roles and responsibilities across the Primary School from class teacher to headteacher. Many of these roles overlapped with several respondents having teaching and leadership responsibilities.

Question Analysis

Question: What were the last 3 books you read with your class or used in the teaching of English?

As stated in Chapter 3, this question allowed participants to begin thinking about and reflecting on the books they had read with their class. Exactly half of the participants named at least one book

featuring a racially minoritised character in their answer to this question which demonstrated that many of these books were being shared recently, and therefore across the academic year rather than only being brought out for Black History Month, for example, which is a positive finding. One respondent named a book featuring a racially minoritised main character in response to this question but then went on to answer no to the following question.

Question: Have you read books with characters who are Black, Asian or from minority ethnic groups with your class or used them in the teaching of English?

83% of all respondents answered positively to this question, but there was a difference between the responses from respondents in Norfolk and Suffolk and those in other areas. Respondents in Norfolk and Suffolk were less likely to have read books with characters from minoritised backgrounds – 78%, compared to 93% from other areas.

The follow up question asked respondents to share some of those books and 94 individual children's book titles were mentioned in response to the question, which included mostly picture books (62%) and novels (30%), but also non-fiction and poetry. The majority of books were named once by individual respondents. Four of the books were not included in this research – three only contained animal characters and were not useful for looking at representation of ethnicity and one could not be identified from information given in the questionnaire. This left a list of 90 individual children's book titles. A list of all books named in the questionnaire appears in Appendix 1.

The spread of ethnicities represented across the 90 books appears in the table below. Outside of Black, many ethnicities only appeared in one book and so have been grouped into categories such as 'South Asian' or 'Middle Eastern'.

Ethnicity	Percentage
Black	56%
Various	13%
East Asian	8%
South Asian	7%
Middle Eastern	4%
Mixed race	4%
Latinx	2%

Table 17 – Ethnicities Represented in Books Named in Questionnaire.

If you look at these percentages by area, the books being read by teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk had less variety of ethnicities represented and were much more likely to be using books featuring Black or South Asian characters.

Ethnicity	Percentage
Black	63%
South Asian	14%
Various	12%
Mixed Race	2%
Latinx	2%

Table 18 – Ethnicities Represented in Books Named by Respondents in Norfolk & Suffolk.

Black is one of the smallest ethnic groups in Norfolk and Suffolk, with only 0.9% of the population of Norfolk and 1.3% of the population of Suffolk identifying themselves as Black in the 2021 census (Norfolk Insight, 2021; Suffolk Observatory, 2021) compared to 4.2% in England as a whole and yet made up 63% of the books featuring racially minoritised characters being used in the region. There is a higher percentage of people identifying themselves as Asian than Black in both areas – 2.1% in Norfolk and 2.3% in Suffolk, which is still lower than the England average of 9.6%. This suggests that book selection decisions being made by teachers were probably not based on the demographics of the children who may be represented in their classes. The high number of books featuring Black characters might also be down to either availability of titles or the proximity of the Black Lives Matter protests in Summer 2020 when the questionnaire was completed in early 2021.

The picture books and novels which were named by more than one respondent appear in the tables below and some were chosen to be analysed in more detail. This analysis appears in Chapter 6.

Picture Books

The table below shows the picture books which were named by more than one respondent in the questionnaire.

Book	Author	Number of respondents
Handa's Surprise	Eileen Browne	8
Ruby's Worry	Tom Percival	7
Look Up!	Nathan Byron Dapo Adeola	7
The Proudest Blue	Ibtihaj Muhammed SK Ali	5
Julian is a Mermaid	Jessica Love	4
Clean Up!	Nathan Byron Dapo Adeola	4
My Hair	Hannah Lee	3
Little Leaders – Bold Women in Black History	Vashti Harrison	3
Izzy Gizmo	Pip Jones	3
We Are All Welcome	Alexandra Penfold	3

	Suzanne Kaufman	
I am Enough	Grace Byers	2
Amazing Grace	Mary Hoffman	2
Last Stop on Market Street	Matt de la Pena Christian Robinson	2
Fantastically Great Women who made history	Kate Pankhurst	2
I Love My Hair	Natasha Tarpley	2
The Skin You Live In	Michael Tyler	2
Meesha Makes Friends	Tom Percival	2

Table 19 – Picture Books Named by More Than One Respondent in Questionnaire.

Most of these picture books were written within the previous 5 years. The exceptions to this are *Handa's Surprise,* which was first published in 1994, *Amazing Grace* which was published in 1991 and *Last Stop on Market Street* which was published in 2015. With the exception of *Handa's Surprise* which is set in Kenya, and Clean Up! which take place on holiday in the Caribbean, all of the picture books are set in contemporary UK or USA so have the potential to more closely reflect the experiences of children from minoritised groups in UK schools. Characters who may be similar to the readers or different from them but living in a familiar context are less likely to perpetuate the notion of ethnic diversity being 'other' or existing only in places outside of the children's own experiences. Due to the number of books in the list, the decision was made to analyse the first eight books which were mentioned by more than three questionnaire respondents.

Novels

The table below shows the novels which were named by more than one respondent in the questionnaire.

Book	Author	Number of respondents
The Boy at the Back of the Class (2018)	Onjali Q Rauf	7
Holes (1998)	Louis Sachar	7
Cloud Busting (2004)	Malorie Blackman	4
High Rise Mystery (2019)	Sharna Jackson	2

Table 20 – Novels Named by More Than One Respondent in Questionnaire.

There were 27 novels named in the questionnaire in total, 30% of the total number of books, but only four were named by more than one respondent. The teachers who named them, were teaching across the age range in KS2.

Question: Have you read books written by an author or illustrated by someone who is Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group with your class or used them in the teaching of English?

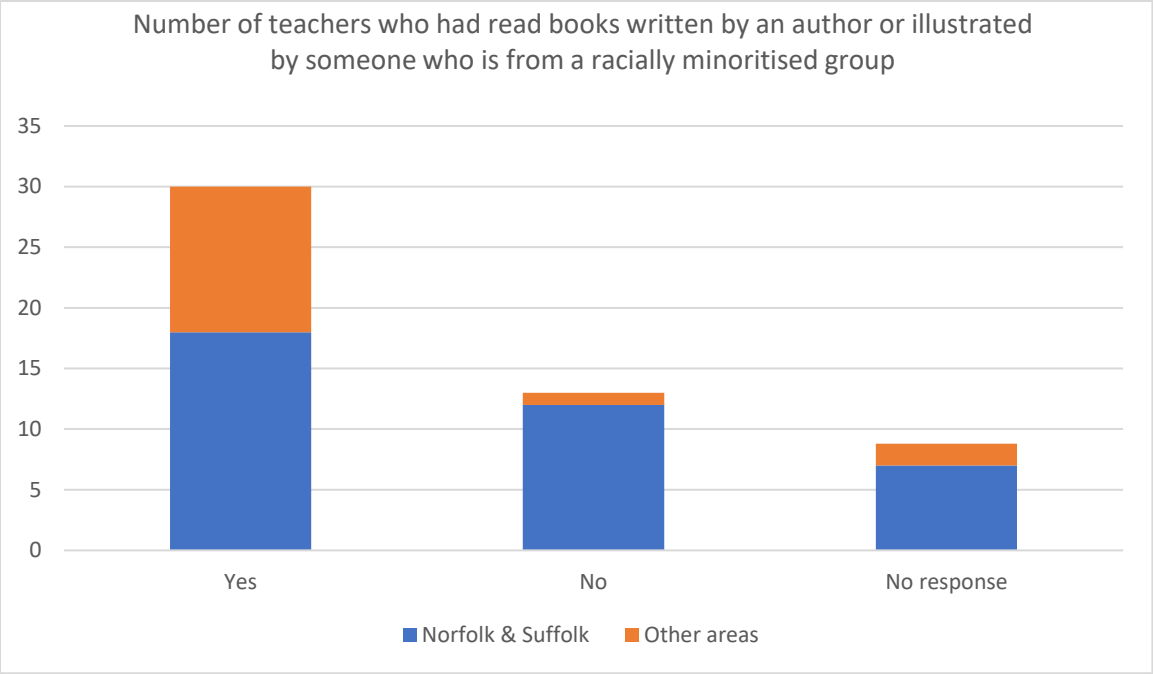


Figure 12 – Number of Teachers Who Had Read Books Written by an Author or Illustrated by Someone Who is From a Racially Minoritised Group.

There was a big difference in the responses to this question from respondents in Norfolk and Suffolk compared to other areas. 86% of teachers from other areas had read books by a racially minoritised author but this fell to 56% of teachers from Norfolk and Suffolk. This question was the only one to receive a significant number of non-responses. 17% of respondents did not answer this question, but this rises to 22% when looking at those working in Norfolk and Suffolk schools. All of the respondents who did not answer this question, answered no to the question 'Have you read books with characters who are Black, Asian or from minority ethnic groups with your class or used them in the teaching of English?'. It may be that the reason this question was skipped was that there were only two options – yes and no – and these respondents needed a third option – I do not know.

Respondents were asked to name some of the titles they had used which were written or illustrated by someone who is Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group. 63 individual titles were mentioned in total: 43 Individual titles by respondents from Norfolk & Suffolk and 20 by respondents from other areas. One of the titles was not identifiable so was removed from the data, leaving 62 titles. More than a quarter (26%) of those titles were not in fact written or illustrated by someone from a racially minoritised background. The incorrect identification of authors and illustrators from racially minoritised backgrounds was higher in the Norfolk and Suffolk respondents, where it rose to 30% of

titles compared to 16% in respondents from other areas. Incorrect identification also included one of the respondents who self-identified as an ethnicity other than White, but with numbers of non-White participants being so small, it is difficult to say if this is relevant or not.

The following authors were incorrectly identified as being from a racially minoritised background:

Corrinne Averiss Sam Boughton Eileen Browne* Gaia Cornwall Caryl Hart Sophy Henn Mary Hoffman Jessica Love* Beverley Naidoo Alexandra Penfold Tom Percival* * Indicates those who were mentioned by more than one respondent.

Table 21 - Authors Incorrectly Identified as Being from a Racially Minoritised Background.

The majority of the books named in the questionnaire which were written by these authors, feature Black main characters; the others feature a range of ethnicities. So there seems to be a particular issue with White authors being presumed as Black if they write Black characters. I wonder if this is down to authors from other racially minoritised backgrounds being less likely to have anglicised names and so are more easily identifiable as not White if a teacher has no information about the author other than the name.

The most frequently cited picture books in response to this question are in the table below.

Book	Author
The Proudest Blue	Ibtihaj Muhammad SK Ali
Look Up!	Nathan Byron
I Love my Hair	Natasha Tarpley
My Hair	Hannah Lee

Table 22 – Most Frequently Cited Picture Books Written by an Author from a Racially Minoritised Background.

The most frequently cited novels in response to this question are in the table below.

Book	Author
The Boy at the Back of the Class	Onjali Q Rauf
Cloud Busting	Malorie Blackman
High Rise Mystery	Sharna Jackson

Table 23 - Most Frequently Cited Novels Written by an Author from a Racially Minoritised Background.

The authors of novels most frequently cited in response to this question, mirror closely the findings of the Lit in Colour research (Elliot et al, 2021) which found that the most popular authors from minoritised backgrounds being read in primary schools were Malorie Blackman, Benjamin Zephaniah, Onjali Q Rauf and Sharna Jackson – two very popular Black British children's authors who have been writing for a long time, and two recently published and award winning authors. In the Teachers as Readers Phase 1 research Malorie Blackman was the only Black author named by teachers (Cremin, 2009).

Although respondents were not asked or expected to add comments in response to this question about the ethnicity of authors, some of them did; indicating that there was an awareness from some respondents that this was an area for improvement but also an indication that this was seen as less important by some respondents.

> "*I assume so, but I would not know which ones*." Experienced class teacher & subject leader teaching Reception & Year 1 in medium sized primary school in Norfolk.
>
> "*I'm much less aware of the authors of books compared to thinking about those represented in them – this is what we need to focus on next as a school*." Experienced class teacher & subject leader teaching year 2 in a medium sized infant school in Norfolk.
>
> (After incorrectly identifying an author as being from a minoritised background) "*Maybe more I don't usually look at ethnicity- focus is on content & linking to topic areas/ skills to be taught*" Experienced class teacher, subject leader, year leader, phase leader & assistant head teaching year 5 & 6 in a medium sized primary school in Norfolk.

What is interesting about these quotes is that they seem to suggest teachers see the story and content of the books they are using as more relevant or important than, perhaps even separate to, who has written them. They assume some of the authors are from racially minoritised backgrounds but do not know for sure.

This question was clearly difficult for teachers to answer. One of the reasons for this, is that information about authors ethnicity does not routinely appear within the books or information shared about books by sellers or publishers. This leaves teachers to guess ethnicity based on a photograph of the author, the author's name or, as seems to be the case here, the content of the book itself. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

Question - Does your school use a published scheme for English, which suggests which children's books to read with your class or for the teaching of English?

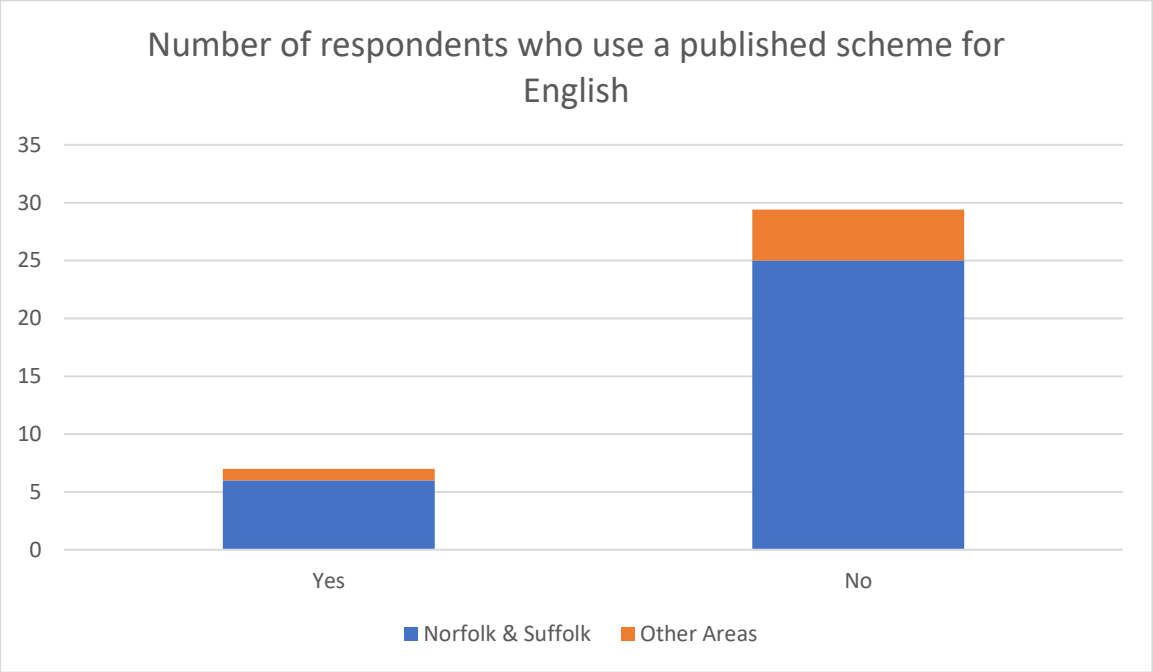


Figure 13 - Number of Respondents Who Use a Published Scheme for English

Overall, 83% of respondents said that they did not use a published scheme for English which suggests which children's books to read. This was lower in Norfolk and Suffolk respondents (78%) who were more likely to be using such published schemes.

The schemes mentioned by respondents, including any relevant comments made by them, appear in the table below:

Scheme	Comments
Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing/Reading Spine	"*Some of us are still fighting to supplement and change this to include authors and books that fit cohort needs/new publishers and so forth. This freedom to select for ourselves is diminishing constantly.*" Experienced class teacher, subject leader & year leader teaching Year 2 in medium sized primary school in Norfolk.
The Write Stuff	"*supplemented with own choice of books".* Experienced class teacher & subject leader teaching in year 4 in a medium sized primary school in Norfolk
Literacy Tree	
Herts for Learning	"*but it's not a complete scheme, so we add our own units too*" Experienced subject leader, SENCo and Deputy Head teaching year 2 in a medium sized primary school in Central Bedfordshire
Diverse Bookshop Mirror Me Write	

Table 24 - Schemes Mentioned by Respondents

The only mention of a scheme with a specific focus on diversity was Mirror Me Write, a diverse bookshop based in Manchester which has book lists by key stage and year group on their website. https://www.mirrormewrite.com/ This response was from an experienced Headteacher of a large infant school in Norfolk.

The comments alongside some of these schemes seem to suggest some dissatisfaction with the use of schemes when it comes to considering children's books. More than one teacher used the word 'supplement', suggesting something lacking in these schemes. One teacher described 'fighting' to include additional texts that met the needs of the children in the school and their statement that freedom to select texts is diminishing suggests the choice of texts is being decided by people in school leadership roles or restricted by the use of a scheme. This links to the next question.

Question - How do you decide which children's books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English?

There was a wide range of responses to this question but many of the most popular responses were those related to having the decision about what books to use being made for teachers by someone or something else – The English lead; the progression document or curriculum plans (which may be a published scheme); linking the decision to the topic being taught. Responses to this question appear in the table below.

Norfolk & Suffolk respondents		Other respondents		Overall	
Progression document or curriculum planning	25%	English Lead decides	36%	English Lead decides	21%
Children's Interests	22%	Recommendations	14%	Children's Interests	20%
Links to topics	22%	Children's interests	14%	Progression document or curriculum planning	17%
Seek out representation	19%	Schemes	14%	Recommendations	15%
Recommendations	16%			Links to topics	15%
English Lead decides	16%			Seek out representation	13%
Quality of the text	9%			Schemes	11%
Use a scheme	9%			Quality of text	6%
Range of genres	6%			Range of genres	4%
Vocabulary	6%			Vocabulary	4%

Table 25 – Decision Making Around Book Choices

The responses to this question may link to the comment by the experienced year 2 teacher in Norfolk who stated the freedom for teachers to select their own books was "*diminishing constantly*". It is

interesting that following children's interests was mentioned by 20% of respondents and was the second most popular response overall. The majority of these were from respondents teaching in Early Years or Year 1 where following children's interests may be a usual part of daily practice as part of continuous provision; but children's interests and book choices were also mentioned by UKS2 teachers who may be teaching children they feel are old enough to make their own informed decisions about what books are available in the classroom.

The quality of the texts being used was only cited by a very small number of respondents.

Question - Do you make use of children's book awards in choosing books to read with your class?

A large majority of respondents from all areas did not use book awards, as demonstrated in the table below.

Norfolk & Suffolk respondents		Other respondents		Overall	
I don't use book awards	63%	I don't use book awards	50%	I don't use book awards	59%
CLIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway	16%	CLIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway	43%	CLIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway	24%
Blue Peter	13%	Blue Peter	21%	Blue Peter	15%
Waterstones	13%	Other	21%	UKLA	13%
UKLA	13%	UKLA	14%	Waterstones	9%
Costa	9%			Costa	7%
				Other	7%

Table 26 – The Use of Children's Book Awards

Books which either win or are nominated for a children's book award are usually considered to be of high quality and this may be linked to the fact that according to the previous question, very few of the respondents were considering quality when choosing texts. For example, the criteria for the Carnegie Medal for Writing includes reference to 'an outstanding reading experience' and 'a deeper subconscious satisfaction' and goes on to explain that these are achieved through plot, themes, characterisation and style (The Carnegies, ND). According to the questionnaire responses, teachers are much more likely to be considering their curriculum, their scheme and their children's interests. Publishers sometimes use book awards to design curriculum materials (Yakota, 2010) and so it is possible that teachers' choices are being indirectly influenced by children's book awards, if the scheme or book list they are using includes award winning books. Book awards will be analysed in more detail later in this chapter.

Question - Do you use recommended book lists to help you choose books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English?

Overall, the most commonly used book lists were Pie Corbett's Reading Spine and the Book Trust Best Books. However, there was some difference between the responses from Norfolk and Suffolk and those from other areas, as demonstrated in the table below.

Norfolk & Suffolk respondents		Other respondents		Overall	
Pie Corbett's Reading Spine	44%	Pie Corbett's Reading Spine	43%	Pie Corbett's Reading Spine	43%
Other	22%	Book Trust Best Books	36%	Book Trust Best Books	26%
I don't use recommended book lists	19%	CLPE Core Books	36%	CLPE Core Books	22%
Book Trust Best Books	19%	I don't use recommended book lists	14%	Other	20%
CLPE Core Books	16%	Other	14%	I don't use recommended book lists	17%

Table 27 – The Use of Recommended Book Lists.

Respondents were equally as likely to be using Pie Corbett's Reading Spine, but respondents from other areas were more likely to be using the Book Trust Best books or CLPE Core Books. Although the CLPE Core Books were the 3rd most popular list overall, just 16% of Norfolk & Suffolk respondents stated they used this list.

Pie Corbett's Reading Spine was first published in 2015 and is a list of 82 core books divided into year groups which suggests that schools use the list as their core reading 'spine':

> *"Schools that have a reading spine, build a common bank of stories that bind the community together. These are shared and deeply imagined common experiences."* (Corbett, 2015).

The teachers' guide makes it clear that the list is a starting point which should be supplemented by other books by teachers, however one respondent in the questionnaire stated that they were 'fighting' to be able to do this in their school. Respondents who named the Reading Spine were often using it alongside Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing English scheme, but some were also using the list alone. It is a static list which has not changed since its initial publication in 2015 and lacks diversity.

The BookTrust's 100 Best Books is a list of 100 children's books published in the last 100 years and was created in 2021 (BookTrust, 2021). The list is available as one, or divided into key stages and year groups. According to the website, the diversity of authors and illustrators and the representation within the books was taken into consideration when compiling the list. The panel of experts who supported the Book Trust in compiling the list, includes people from Black and Asian backgrounds as well as those whose work is directed related to the improvement of representation in children's books such as Dr Fen Coles, Co-Director of Letterbox Library and member of the CLPE Reflecting Realities Steering Group, and Alex Strick, co-founder of Inclusive Minds.

The CLPE Core Books Literature Collection is a list of more than 700 books divided into Early Years, KS1 and KS2 sections (CLPE, ND). There is also a Learning to read collection and an Information Collection, but for the purpose of this research, only the literature collection was considered. The lists are regularly updated and added to and include a diverse range of representation as would be expected from the CLPE who are responsible for the Reflecting Realities reports.

It is interesting that the BookTrust's and CLPE's lists of recommended books were much less likely to be used across Norfolk and Suffolk schools and this may be related to CPD opportunities which are discussed later in this chapter.

Although the percentages of teachers using the Pie Corbett Reading Spine was the same across all areas, teachers from Norfolk and Suffolk schools were far more likely to be using the static Pie Corbett Reading Spine than either the Book Trust or CLPE lists, and more likely to be using it alone with no additional lists. For this reason, the Pie Corbett Reading Spine has been analysed in more detail. This analysis will appear later in this chapter.

Question - Where else do you get recommendations of children's books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English?

The order in which the places for recommendations appeared by popularity was the same for both Norfolk and Suffolk and Other respondents, with social media and recommendations from colleagues being far more common than other means of getting book recommendations. All places teachers used for recommendations appear in the table below.

Norfolk & Suffolk respondents		Other respondents	
Social media	78%	Social media	93%
Colleagues	75%	Colleagues	86%
Courses	34%	Courses	50%
Subject Organisations	16%	Subject Organisations	14%
Other	9%		

Table 28 - Other Places for Recommendations of Children's Books.

Findings from the interviews suggest that often social media recommendations are coming from teacher-led accounts rather than the social media accounts of publishers or booksellers. There was a difference when it came to CPD courses, with Norfolk and Suffolk respondents less likely to have received book recommendations from a course they had attended than respondents from other areas.

Question - How do you or your school get hold of books to read with your class or use in the teaching of English?

The most popular place for all teachers to get books for their class from was Amazon, as demonstrated in the table below.

Norfolk & Suffolk respondents		Other respondents		Overall	
Amazon	72%	Amazon	64%	Amazon	70%
Order through school	53%	Buy Second Hand	57%	Order through school	46%
Local Independent Book shop	38%	Borrow from library	43%	Local Independent Book shop	39%
Second hand	28%	Local Independent Book shop	43%	Buy Second hand	37%
Borrow from library	25%	Order through school	28%	Borrow from library	30%
Book Shop Chain	22%			Book Shop Chain	15%
Online elsewhere	22%			Online elsewhere	15%
Borrow from others	16%			Borrow from others	11%

Table 29 – Where do Respondents Obtain Books

Although it is not certain, the popularity of Amazon may suggest these teachers were buying books themselves which would make sense as research shows 60% of teachers have no access to a budget for books, and 38% only get new books if they buy them themselves (CLPE, 2023). When you browse children's books on Amazon.co.uk, as opposed to searching for a specific title, the 'Book Trust picks' recommended titles appear at the top of the page. If you click on it, it takes you to a page which explains who Book Trust are and explains that 'experts' picked the books. There are then three categories of books - 3 to 5, 6 to 8 and 9 to 12. These are then broken down into genre categories. However, when accessing this in December 2024, and again in March 2025, it was not working and no children's book titles appeared under any of the categories.

The Best Sellers list in children's books on Amazon.co.uk contains little diversity. In January 2023, eight of the top ten books were from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, plus one celebrity author and the Guinness Book of Records. This was checked again in August 2024, in case this was due to the proximity of Christmas influencing the books being sold. This time, 50% of the titles in the top ten were from the Harry Potter series, two were commercial game tie ins (Pokemon and Minecraft), one classic picture book (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*) and only one recently published children's novel aimed at 8 – 12-year-olds. Many teachers will go to Amazon to purchase a specific title, but as a place to browse for book ideas, it would not support teachers' subject knowledge very well.

Question - Have you read or heard about diversity in children's books in any of these places?

Responses to this question, again demonstrate the importance of social media for teachers' development as outlined in the table below.

Norfolk & Suffolk respondents		Other respondents		Overall	
Social media	75%	Social media	86%	Social media	78%
Academic Research	38%	CPD	64%	CPD	43%
News Articles	38%	Academic Research	36%	Academic Research	37%
CPD	34%	Blog Posts	36%	News Articles	35%
Blog posts	28%	News Articles	29%	Blog posts	30%
DfE or Ofsted	6%	DfE or Ofsted	14%	DfE or Ofsted	9%
Radio	3%	TV	7%	Radio	2%
				TV	2%

Table 30 – Where Have Respondents Heard About Diversity in Children's Books.

Teachers across all areas were far more likely to have encountered information about diversity in children's books on social media than anywhere else. Teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk were twice as likely to learn about diversity in children's books on social media than through CPD and much less likely to learn through CPD than teachers in other areas. This may be related to the fact that it is a predominantly White area and the representation of race or ethnicity in children's books is not seen as a priority for CPD, or that there is less CPD available in the area.

It is possible that some of the questions explored in this section could highlight gaps in teachers' subject knowledge regarding children's books featuring racially minoritised characters so links to places where participants could gain further information about this were included at the end of the questionnaire. This included directing participants to the CLPE Reflecting Realities research and to Letterbox Library, a website that provides diverse book packs to schools.

The Book Awards

Although the majority of teachers (59%, rising to 63% in Norfolk and Suffolk) stated that they did not use book awards in making decisions about what books to use, book award winners are pushed by publishers and book sellers and often make their way into classrooms anyway. So, this section will look at the two most popular awards with the questionnaire respondents in more detail.

The CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Medals.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) confers both the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway medals. The Carnegie medal recognises books written for children or young adults, and the companion Kate Greenaway medal recognises outstanding illustration in a children's book and is awarded to the illustrator. Books nominated for both awards must be written in English and published in the UK or Ireland. In 2022, the Kate Greenaway medal was renamed the Carnegie Medal for Illustration and between 2022 and 2024 the awards were sponsored by the audio technology company YOTO and known as the YOTO Carnegies. Since 2025, the awards are sponsored by Scholastic and the Author Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) (The Carnegies, NDb)

Diversity in the CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Medals

As discussed in the Literature Review, underrepresentation of racially minoritised characters or authors in book awards may be due to a lack of racial diversity on judging panels (Priofski (2001). The nominations and judging panel for both the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals are made up of CILIP member librarians. The UK library and information workforce are 97% White (CILIP, 2018) and in 2017 there was some controversy when the 20-title longlist for the Carnegie Medal contained only White authors (Kean, 2017). The Carnegie Medal was originally set up in the 1930s to go to a British author and during the first twenty years, the majority of winning books were set in England and written by English authors; by 2018 only six out of seventy-two winners were from home nations other than England (Pearson, Sands-O-Connor, and Subramanian, 2019). Other cultures were rarely depicted in the early winning titles, and when they were they were depicted with a sense of otherness against the English norm (Pearson, Sands-O-Connor, and Subramanian, 2019). Pearson, Sands-O-Conner and Subramanian (2019) demonstrate this through two examples – Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (2000), which is about Nigerian refugees, and Tanya Landman's *Buffalo Soldier* (2015) which is set outside the UK. Although these texts both contain main characters from racially minoritised groups, being from a racially minoritised group is also part of many children's British identities and this is not reflected in these or many other Carnegie Medal winners. An all-White longlist in 2017 was not unusual for the Carnegie Medal, but the winning of other children's book prizes by authors from minoritised groups in the same year led to authors speaking out about it in a way they had not before.

The controversy around the 2017 longlist led to an independent diversity review the following year chaired by Dr Margaret Casely-Hayford, which found that there was a lack of awareness of titles by authors from racially minoritised groups among librarians which was leading to nominator bias (CILIP, 2018). Significant barriers to knowledge about diverse books, found in the review, included budget, a reliance on certain suppliers and fewer connections with smaller, independent publishers (CILIP, 2018). The review also revealed that the awards process did not include the collection of diversity monitoring data making it difficult to be monitored.

This diversity review led to changes in the nomination and judging process. This included a new mission for both awards: "*To inspire and empower the next generation to create a better world through books and reading.*" (CILIP; P11, 2018). Further changes included opening the nominations up to external bodies, expanding the judging panel and providing diversity training for them (CILIP, 2018).

In 2019, an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Advisory panel was established for the awards which observed the judging panel discussions, reviewed the award criteria and provided feedback on the

shortlisted books (CILIP, 2019). The reviewing of the criteria was important as the initial reaction to the 2017 all-White longlist was to claim that the books are judged equally on merit. However, as Pearson, Sands-O-Conner and Subramanian (2019) point out, unless criteria explicitly include reference to specific dimensions such as gender or ethnicity, some privileged voices are judged to be of higher merit than others. The panel also provided further training for judging librarians. Following the review, new criteria for the Carnegie medal was developed and piloted in 2020.

In 2020, CILIP further developed this work, partnering with Calibre Audio, a charity for print disabled people, and developing new criteria for the Kate Greenaway medal which was piloted in 2021. The necessity for all librarian judges to be CILIP members was removed in order to widen participation and a target of 20% racially minoritised representation on the CILIP board was introduced. A partnership with Inclusive Minds was established (CILIP, 2020).

The judging criteria for the Carnegie Medal now includes references to protected characteristics, respectful representation, stereotypes, prejudicial or problematic portrayals, varied backgrounds, inequality, and discrimination (The Carnegies, ND) The judging criteria for the Kate Greenaway medal now includes a section on Visual Representation which includes reference to protected characteristics, opportunities for incidental inclusion, non-homogenised representation, well-researched & respectful cultural representation and the act of silencing by not visually representing certain characters (The Carnegies, NDc)

The awards are managed by an Awards Team which in 2023 had membership in which 50% of members were from racially minoritised groups. Out of the 12 members of the 2025 judging panel, two are from a racially minoritised background – the Chair Elect, and the West Midlands judge (The Carnegies, 2025).

The shortlists and winners of the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway medals for 2020 would be the most recent ones considered by the teachers responding to the questionnaire in 2021, so it is interesting to look at how the diversity actions implemented by CILIP since 2018 had an impact on the diversity of representation and authors/illustrators in the shortlist in that year.

Impact of the CILIP Diversity Review

Half of the eight books shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal in 2020 had main characters from racially minoritised groups, and three of those four books were written by authors from racially minoritised groups. The list appears in the table below.

Title	Diverse Representation?	Author	Ethnicity
The Black Flamingo (Hachette Children's Group)	Gay mixed-race teen growing up in London	Dean Atta (illustrated by Anshika Khullar)	Mixed Caribbean & Greek Cypriot
Nowhere on Earth (Hachette Children's Group)	YA	Nick Lake	White
Lark (Barrington Stoke)	**Teen**	**Anthony McGowan**	**White**
Patron Saints of Nothing (Little Tiger)	Filipino-American teenager	Randy Ribay	Filipino
Lampie (Pushkin Children's Books)	KS2	Annet Schaap (Translated by Laura Atkinson)	White
Voyages in the Underworld of Orpheus Black (Walker Books)	Teen	Marcus Sedgwick and Julian Sedgwick, (illustrated by Alexis Deacon)	White
On the Come Up (Walker Books)	Black 16-year-old rapper in US	Angie Thomas	Black
Girl. Boy. Sea (Head of Zeus)	British boy, Berber girl set at sea. Teen	Chris Vick	White

Table 31 - CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlist & Winner 2020

However, all four of the books featuring characters from racially minoritised groups are aimed at the teenager and young adult market; none of them are for primary school aged children. In fact, only one book on the list is aimed at primary school aged children at all – Annet Schaap's *Lampie.* Of those four books, only one is set in the UK with two set in the USA and one at sea. For primary school teachers, there is little here by way of recommendations to take back to their classrooms, and when considering racially diverse characters, there is nothing at all.

For the Kate Greenaway medal in 2020, there is wider representation of illustrators from racially minoritised backgrounds with three out of the eight shortlisted illustrators, including the winner Shaun Tan being from a racially minoritised background. The full list appears in the table below.

Illustrator	Ethnicity	Title	Diverse Representation?	Author	Ethnicity
Poonam Mistry	Indian	*You're Snug with Me* (Lantana Publishing),	Animals	Chitra Soundar	Indian
Chris Mould	White	*The Iron Man* (Faber & Faber),	No	Ted Hughes	White
Chris Naylor-Ballesteros	White	*The Suitcase* (Nosy Crow)	Animals		
Kadir Nelson	Black	*The Undefeated* (Andersen Press),	Black Americans.	Kwame Alexander	Black
Levi Penfold	White	*The Dam* (Walker Books),	No	David Almond	White
Júlia Sardà	White	*Mary and Frankenstein* (Andersen Press),	No	Linda Bailey	White
Shaun Tan	**Mixed**	***Tales from the Inner City* (Walker Books)**			
Beth Waters	White	*Child of St Kilda* (Child's Play)	No		

Table 32 - CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal Shortlist & Winner 2020

However, there is less diverse representation within the illustrations themselves. Some of them do not include human characters but feature animals which is not unusual in children's illustrated books. Poonam Mistry's illustrations in *You're Snug with Me* feature animals and are influenced by traditional Indian art, so although they do not contain 'representation' in the way we might think of in terms of character, they do represent culture through the illustration style. The only book which predominantly features characters from racially minoritised backgrounds is Kwame Alexander's *The Undefeated*, which celebrates Black Americans. Although there are more books on this list aimed at primary school aged children, there is little that reflects the lives of British children from minoritised groups.

One questionnaire respondent named The Undefeated in response to both the question about characters and authors; an experienced class teacher from a large primary school in Norfolk teaching year 5 and 6. This teacher stated they did not use book awards, or published book lists to make decisions about books, but they do use colleagues, social media and courses. They also stated that

"*Extra effort is being put in to ensure our books cover a broader spectrum of the world"* in response to the question about how decisions are made about what books to use. While this teacher probably did not find out about The Undefeated directly from interacting with the Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist, the inclusion of this title on the shortlist would have made it more likely to be recommended by colleagues, appear on social media reviews or recommendations, and be included as part of CPD. The comment about the "*broader spectrum of the world*" may demonstrate an understanding of diversity being something which is 'out there' and unlikely to be part of this teachers' own classroom or experience.

Both shortlists demonstrate a positive impact of the Diversity Review with a wider representation of minoritised groups both within the texts and amongst the authors. However, there was a still a lack of representation of the experiences of British children from racially minoritised backgrounds and less still for primary aged children in both lists in 2020.

The Blue Peter Children's Book Award

The Blue Peter Children's Book Award was conferred by the BBC children's television programme Blue Peter between 2000 and 2021, with the award being managed by BookTrust since 2006. A panel of judges compiles a shortlist, and the winner is voted for by children from 12 schools across the UK which are chosen each year. The shortlist and winner for 2020 appear in the table below.

Title	Diverse Representation?	Author	Ethnicity
Wildspark	**No**	**Vashti Hardy**	**White**
Owen and the Soldier	No	Lisa Thompson	White
Vote for Effie	Main character from Greek background	Laura Wood	White

Table 33 - The Blue Peter Children's Book Award Shortlist & Winner 2020.

In 2020, one out of four judges in the Blue Peter Children's Book Award were from a racially minoritised background. All of the shortlisted authors were White, and one book had a main character from a Greek background. The Blue Peter Children's Book Award was discontinued in 2021.

None of the books that were shortlisted or winners of these two awards in 2020 were included in the list of books generated from the questionnaire. However, several of the most popular books cited by respondents were shortlisted or won awards in other years as demonstrated in the table below.

Title	Award	Year	Nominated or winner
Handa's Surprise	Sheffield Children's Book Award	1995	Shortlisted
Look Up!	Waterstone's Children's Book Prize	2020	Winner
The Proudest Blue	Goodreads Choice Award	2019	Nominee
Izzy Gizmo	Sainsbury Children's Book Awards	2017	Shortlisted
Julian is a Mermaid	Stonewall Book Award Klaus Flugge Prize	2019	Winner Winner
I am Enough	Goodreads Choice Award	2018	Winner
The Boy at the Back of the Class	Blue Peter Book Award Waterstone's Children's Book Prize Carnegie Medal Children's Book Award Jhalak Prize	2019 2019 2019 2019	Winner Winner Nominee Winner
Holes	US National Book Award for Young People's Literature Newbery Medal	1998 1999	Winner Winner
Cloud Busting	Nestle Children's Book Prize Silver Award Carnegie Medal	2004 2004	Winner Longlisted
High Rise Mystery	Waterstone's Children's Book Prize	2020	Winner
Amazing Grace	Kate Greenaway Medal	1991	Shortlisted

Table 34 – Awards Popular Books from the Questionnaire Have Won.

In fact, of the list of books cited by more than one person in the questionnaire, only three were not nominated or winners of children's book awards. This suggests that although teachers may not be following the awards or seeking out award winning books deliberately, they are much more likely to be aware of award-winning books than books that have not won awards.

This analysis of book awards highlights their significant influence on the books that reach classrooms, even when teachers do not actively use them as selection criteria. While the diversity review of the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals has led to some improvements in representation, there remains a gap in books that reflect the lived experiences of British children from racially minoritised backgrounds, particularly for primary-aged readers. The now-discontinued Blue Peter Children's Book

Award showed even less diversity in its 2020 shortlist. Despite teachers not intentionally relying on book awards, award-winning books are more likely to gain visibility and be recommended through social networks and CPD. This underscores the need for diverse representation both in judging panels and award criteria to ensure a broader range of voices and experiences are recognised and, ultimately, included in classrooms.

Pie Corbett's Reading Spine

43% of questionnaire respondents named Pie Corbett's Reading Spine when asked if they used recommended book lists to help them choose books to read with their class or use in the teaching of English. This section will examine the Reading Spine in more detail.

Pie Corbett is an English education trainer and writer who created the Talk for Writing approach to teaching English (https://www.talk4writing.com/). The Reading Spine is a commercial partnership with Scholastic Education and although lists of the 82 core books from the spine exist on some schools' websites, it is usually necessary to purchase the list and the teachers' guide (published in 2015) from Scholastic. The list is divided into year groups from Reception to Year 6.

Of the books named by teachers in the questionnaire which appear in this chapter, the following appear on Pie Corbett's Reading Spine:

Handa's Surprise - Reception

Amazing Grace - Year 2

Holes - Year 6

All three Norfolk & Suffolk respondents who named Holes, and one of the two who named Amazing Grace also said they used Pie Corbett's reading Spine.

Out of the 82 books on Pie Corbett's Reading Spine (See Appendix 7), only five of them have main characters from a racially minoritised background, which is 6%. These books are:

Handa's Surprise

Amazing Grace

The Firework Maker's Daughter

Holes

The Arrival

Only one of those is a picture book for younger children – *Handa's Surprise*. Eleven of the questionnaire respondents who named Pie Corbett's Reading Spine did not name any other book lists they were using alongside it, which means more than half of those teachers may be using the Reading Spine as the sole source of their book recommendations. None of the five books above is set

in the UK. One is set in Kenya, two are set in the USA, one in Asia and in one the location is ambiguous. It is possible that a child from a racially minoritised background in a school that uses this Reading Spine alone, does not encounter themselves reflected in any of the books they read in their English lessons in a school that is using this reading spine alone. Where they may encounter someone who is from a similar background as themselves, it would be in a different country. It is important that books lists do not lead to the 'othering' of racially minoritised groups. In addition, British children from racially minoritised groups need to have their own contemporary experiences reflected back to them. As Botelho (2021) stated, one book cannot be a mirror or a window because cultural experiences and identity are complex.

It is also important for White British children to have access to books which act as windows not just to 'other' worlds but to their own world which is inclusive of all different types of people. Referring back to Pie Corbett's statement that a reading spine binds the community together through shared common experiences, it could be argued that the experiences of children from racially minoritised backgrounds are completely excluded from this shared community experience. This relates back to the discussion around the literature canon and cultural capital in Chapter 2 where we saw that literary canons are often not objective collections but those that perpetuate social inequalities (Guillory, 1993).

In 2020, Pie Corbett and Scholastic produced a 'Rich and Diverse' Reading Spine, although by 2024 this was no longer available on the Scholastic website. By having these as separate lists, it is necessary for teachers to seek out the list which again makes this appear as something different, or other.

This chapter analysed data from 46 questionnaire respondents and found that teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk were less likely to use books featuring characters from racially minoritised backgrounds or written by racially minoritised authors compared teachers in other areas. Some respondents demonstrated limited awareness of author backgrounds, misidentifying racially minoritised authors. Many teachers rely on social media and their colleagues for book recommendations with fewer using book awards or lists. Where they did use lists, these were sometimes outdated, and responses suggest this can lead to teachers having restricted freedom to select their own books. These findings demonstrate the need for teachers to have more support and resources to develop diverse book collections in their classes.

Chapter 5 Interview Analysis

This chapter examines the findings from interviews conducted with two primary school teachers. It explores how their choices of texts and classroom practices reflect their understanding of representation of racially minoritised characters in children's literature and develops insights into how primary teachers may be navigating issues around diversity in predominantly White schools.

The analysis presented in this chapter is informed by a long tradition of using teacher narratives to illuminate how wider structural forces manifest in everyday practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Anthony-Stevens et al (2022) describe the specific and nuanced relationship between place, identity, and power in predominantly White spaces which makes teacher accounts particularly significant. Previous scholarship, from Gaine (1995)'s early studies of teacher talk in monocultural schools to more recent CRT-based examinations of teacher beliefs (Eg. Matias et al, 2017; Smith, 2020), demonstrates that teachers' narratives provide insight into how race and racism shape the beliefs and practices of teachers and their curriculum choices. By analysing these interviews narratively rather than thematically alone, this chapter foregrounds how teachers position themselves, and how they make sense of representation in the absence of visibly diverse pupils. This historical and structural positioning helps to explain why certain patterns of knowledge and decision-making recur across the teachers' stories.

Why Teacher Narratives Matter in Predominantly White Areas

The narratives in this chapter illustrate how teachers discursively negotiate the perceived relevance of race and representation. In predominantly White schools, teachers' avoidance of race-explicit language and reliance on generic terms ("diverse," "different," "culture") function as colourblind strategies that can unintentionally sideline the Reflecting Realities agenda. These accounts demonstrate why a practical analytical framework and targeted CPD are essential for building confidence to discuss race and select texts critically, irrespective of cohort demographics.

The teachers' language reflects how identity is understood and negotiated in predominantly White contexts. Their reliance on terms like "diverse" or "different" can be seen as colourblind strategies (Bonilla-Silva, 2015), which obscure the ways children's identities are racialised and experienced. These teachers may lack access to epistemic experiences of racialisation; race and racism are taboo subjects at the same time as playing a central role in structuring classroom conversations (Eriksen, 2022).

The Participants

Two teachers were interviewed in May 2021. Rachel was a year 1 teacher in a one form entry Church of England primary school in a village location. Rachel was in her first year of teaching. Claire was an experienced year 6 teacher and English subject lead at a three-form entry Junior school in a city. Both teachers were working in Norfolk. Both teachers were White and contacted me to be interviewed after initially completing the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, all respondents were asked if they were interested in contributing to an interview and asked to submit their email addresses if they were. Three respondents gave me their emails addresses but only Rachel and Claire responded to my email inviting them to take part in an interview.

The teachers' interviews are presented below as a first-person narrative, followed by an analysis. Where the teachers talk about books which were analysed as part of this study, the narrative description of the book appears in italics.

Emerging Themes

Nine separate themes emerged from the interview data on the first analysis:

Windows & mirrors
Curriculum changes
Subject knowledge
Discussing race
Lists & recommendations
Quality texts
Teaching
Own Voices
Curriculum
Use of Language

Table 35 - Colour Coded Interview Categories

These were then condensed into four main themes:

Curriculum
Subject Knowledge
Teaching
Own Voices

Table 36 - Final Interview Themes

The analysis of the two interviews in this chapter is divided into these four sections. Use of language was not considered a theme but the interviewees' use of language around ethnicity and diversity was an interesting aspect of the interviews and also formed part of the analysis.

Rachel

Rachel was interviewed online at the end of a school day in her classroom. There were no children present in school but there were other staff and cleaners in the school. I had not visited the school so was not aware of the lay out of the school or the classroom and could only see Rachel while I was interviewing her.

The following three questions were used to as prompts during the interview:

1. Can you tell me about a time you have used children's books with a character from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background in your teaching?

2. Can you tell me about the development of your own subject knowledge of children's literature?

3. Rudine Sims Bishop describes children's books as being 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors'. What does this analogy mean to you? Can you think of an example of a time when it has been relevant to you or your teaching?

Rachel's responses are presented below as a first-person narrative.

Rachel – "*books are places they can go to understand, to imagine*"

I'm a year one teacher and we're a one form entry primary academy in a Church of England trust. I have 99% White British in this class. One Black child and that's it. Reception is pretty much White British. Not sure about languages but we are pretty much a White British school. I've been here since September and I'm an NQT. We've just done our Talk for Writing training. So English is an improvement focus for us at the moment with regards to sequencing and things like that.

In September we were looking at Oceania, the continent and we talked a lot about the Māori people, and I made sure we read some books surrounding those. That was really interesting for the children. Then we had a look at pirates and admittedly there wasn't much regarding ethnic minorities in that. In Spring One we had a look at the Great Fire of London, again not much in that. In Spring Two we were looking at traditional tales and different perceptions of traditional tales, so we looked at different versions. I couldn't tell you what the versions were, but we had Snow White in New York - that was a key one that they really liked. This term we've been focusing on guided reading. Looking at fiction and non-fiction regarding transport and we've had transport books from around the world which have had a really good diverse focus.

Outside of lessons, there's much more freedom. At the start of the year, Upcircle Beauty the company had a massive campaign and were trying to get diverse books in school. You could apply for

an entire pack so that's what I did. That's really helped my class massively as there wasn't really much before in the book range there hence why I applied for it, and we got seven or eight books just representing people from around the world. I've used those, I've now got a windowsill there [turns camera around] and it's a diverse bookshelf so I send a table during reading time to go to that shelf so they're in contact with those sorts of books because I think if children are given choice they go for what they like and what they know and I'm quite passionate that we have a whole world and in Norfolk especially we are probably not as diverse as the rest of the country; we're sort of in our little bubble. It's getting more diverse now I've noticed.

I think I'm very honest and matter of fact - this is the world, and this is what it looks like. In PSHE when we're talking about what makes us us, what we look like makes us us, it's not just our personalities. I try to weave it in everything I possibly can so it's not just 'let's talk about ethnicity, now it's time to do that'. In the book area, it's woven in. I still think it could be done better but as a predominantly White British school it's something that you don't want to draw too much attention to, because you don't want to make it a thing. I'm hoping I've done as best I can, weaving it in where I can. When we did Pirates, I showed them a picture of your bog-standard pirate or stereotypical pirates but then I said, "actually these are pirates" and we looked at different pictures together and how they were different - different pirates from around the world: Spanish pirates and Caribbean pirates.

In year one they're at the age where they're matter of fact, they don't overthink things like adults do they're just so accepting. They haven't got that stereotypical view to things yet. I think the reason I talk about it so heavily now is because I want to make it normal to talk about rather than just - this is a thing we don't talk about.

Where I got this from in the first place is Instagram surprisingly because I've got a teacher Instagram, I keep it anonymous but it's such a wealth of knowledge because you've got all those practitioners in one place from Early Years up to high school sharing their knowledge and some of those have then taken their knowledge of those sorts of areas and made businesses and charities out of them. There's one page that I follow, I think it's literally called Diverse Kids Books or something like that, but it's brilliant. There's a book a day and they talk about the context and what's happening in it. There's just a wealth of books on there so from that I'll look them up myself and see what's in them. It's probably not the most academic way of doing it however it doesn't take up much time and it's just there for you. I wouldn't say my subject knowledge is amazing, at all, but it's something I want to improve. Especially with the changing world.

I think the analogy of books as windows and mirrors is lovely. I think that's fair because I think that sometimes seeing the practitioners on Instagram, they've taken it as we're now not allowed any other books apart from ethnic minority books. Well actually that's not the case because then you're not talking about things that are realistic to the children. It's all about finding that balance, I think. We're all unique, we are all different, I think you could fill a classroom with books and you still wouldn't have a book that met every child's realistic home life because everybody is so different. So, I think it's all about balance. You can introduce it in, but you need to mirror their lives back to them because for children, books are places they can go to understand, to imagine - they have such big parts in children's lives for different reasons. So, I try to have a range. I'm terrible, this classroom is full of books, I spend most my money on children's books which I need to calm down on, I think. I've bought maybe two or three books through school since September, most of them I've bought myself because I like them, and I see the value in them. And I think how I'm going to use them in my career. So, I like to have them with me. Books are such an important part of my life hopefully I reiterate that back to the children as well; I've got books hidden in every corner. If I'm ever teaching a new topic, I'll find a book that links to it, so you have a reading aspect to it as well.

The children in my class really like *Julian is a Mermaid*. They love that cos they love the fact that this boy is allowed to dress up as a mermaid. It's such a simple book, barely any words, barely any text but they just love the illustrations and just having a nose, they love it, they love to use it as sort of a discussion point. I'll do quiet reading, and I'll say, 'ok nice quiet reading, share an idea with your partner' and they'll go full force about the different books in the classroom, bless 'em.

> *Julian is a Mermaid is the story of Julian and his Nana who live in New York and are of Afro-Hispanic origin. One day on the Subway, Julian sees some women dressed as mermaids on their way to the Coney Island Mermaid Parade. He wants to dress up as a mermaid and at the end of the story, Nana takes him to the parade in costume. Although we find out almost nothing about Julian and Nana's lives, they are relatable and sensitively presented characters. Nana accepts and embraces Julian's difference and his desire to dress as a mermaid and it isn't presented as a problem that needs to be overcome. The story takes place in a range of urban settings and the beach. The story is told mostly through illustration, with minimal text, and skin tone, hair texture and features are sensitively represented making the characters recognisable. The illustrations allow and promote discussion around feelings – How does Julian feel when he sees the Mermaids? Why does he dress up while Nana is in the bath? How does he feel when she sees him? In addition to Julian and Nana, there are 30 background characters – almost all of them appear to be Black or Afro-Hispanic and the majority are female. Jessica Love is a White American woman who based the story on the gender transition of a friend.*

I haven't got a clue about the ethnicity of authors. I tell the kids who the authors are, but I can't say I've ever researched them. Unless on the Instagram there's an author who has written more than one book and it's a set and I'm interested in that. But that's not something I really look at. I think

author ethnicity has an element to it. You couldn't judge someone's life, because although they might not be Black or White or whatever, it doesn't mean their family isn't or they've been adopted or they don't know about it but also, I think you can't write for someone else, again it's a balance. I will look at a book and I will literally judge a book by its front cover and then look at its contents and if I like the sound of it, I like the sound of it. I think because I'm mostly early years you'll know your Michael Rosen, your Julia Donaldson, because it's just what everyone seems to do. I think branching out from that is not unheard of, but you do just naturally go for your H*ungry Caterpillar* and *Gruffalo.* I think it's people talking about it because you hear a title and you like that title. It's like *Julian is a Mermaid* and everyone loves *Julian is a Mermaid*, however I haven't looked at that author and whether they've done any other books whereas that is something I could do now. Because I do that when I read books myself, if I like one book, I will research the author and look at whatever other books they've done and buy it. Again, it's time, I read a book here and it's lovely but it's time, isn't it?

There was a report about diverse books that we were shown in SCITT training, I can picture it, but I couldn't tell you what it was called. It was really good and explained why those sorts of books were needed and why it's important. I think it was something to do with Black History Month and then we started to talk about why it's important to include that, but I cannot remember the name of it. What was the one you mentioned? Reflecting Realities. That one doesn't ring a bell; it was one we were shown in SCITT.

My colleagues, I think they mainly think about it themselves but it's not anything that's ever been mentioned in CPD. I've tried to sort of hint that the books are really old and outdated and need a bit of a refresh but… In my school, as long as you can show sequencing and you are covering the curriculum, you have pretty much freedom as to what books and things you can focus on. Next term my theme is animal kingdom so I'm hoping I can get some really lovely books there. Yeah, sort of half and half. As long as you can show you know what you're doing.

Analysis of Rachel's Interview

Curriculum

Rachel was making an effort to diversify the books she was using across the curriculum and in termly topics being taught with no support from the wider school. It is important to note that I was interviewing Rachel remotely at the end of the school day in her classroom. I could only see her and not the rest of her classroom, and had no idea of the location of her classroom in relation to anything or anyone else in the school. She seemed comfortable and talked freely about the books she had been using until I asked about the wider school support and then she began to talk less, use more pauses and seemed less comfortable with the conversation. I acknowledged I was aware she was

sitting in her school, and it might make it more difficult to talk freely about this. "*I just think there's other priorities probably"* was all she wanted to say on the matter while acknowledging that she thought it should be a whole school priority. As we saw in Chapter 3, whose 'voice' we hear during an online interview can be influenced by the location (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012), particularly when interviews are online, and the interviewer cannot see the context beyond the view on screen. This may have been a case of Rachel wanting to express her individual voice but feeling the need to represent the voice of the school. While the words she used said one thing, her volume and body language communicated her discomfort in discussing it.

The Questionnaire data suggested that for the majority of teachers the decision about what books are being used in the classroom was being made by someone or something other than the class teacher. This was usually a subject leader or a specific curriculum. A teacher who commented on the questionnaire commented negatively about this, stating that teachers are losing their freedom to choose. Rachel had the freedom to choose and spoke positively about this. It is the freedom that Rachel has to choose her texts that is important in a school where neither the subject leader nor curriculum have the books as a focus.

Rachel was making an effort to modernise the texts being used in her class, referring to the books as "*old and outdated".*

In addition to *Julian is a Mermaid*, the books which Rachel showed me on her Diverse Bookshelf were:

Title	Author(s)
Julian is a Mermaid*	Jessica Love
The Last Stop on Market Street*	Matt de la Pena
Little Leaders: Exceptional Men in Black History	Vashti Harrison
Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History*	Vashti Harrison
My Hair*	Hannah Lee & Allen Fatimaharan
Clean Up!*	Nathan Byron & Dapa Adeola

Table 37 – Books on Rachel's Diverse Bookshelf.

Five out of these six picture books (asterisked above) also appeared on the list generated by the questionnaire responses and were mentioned by more than one respondent. This is interesting as there are more picture books which contain characters from racially minoritised backgrounds than there are novels published recently in the UK. Between 2017 and 2021, the percentage of children's fiction novels with minoritised characters rose from 3% to 11%; picture books rose from 6% to 61% (CLPE, 2022). With such a high percentage of picture books in the UK now including minoritised characters, it seems unusual that there would be such overlap of the books mentioned by the teachers in the questionnaire and the teacher that was interviewed. A possible explanation for this is

that some of the questionnaire respondents had also received the same book pack as Rachel; or a reliance on social media recommendations where the same books are being recommended.

Rachel talked about finding diverse books to fit in with the topics she had been teaching that year in year one which included Transport, Oceania, Pirates, the Great Fire of London and traditional tales. She had found some topics, such as transport and Oceania, easier to find diverse texts related to them and talked about the restraints of the curriculum compared to choosing books outside of the curriculum for reading for pleasure within the class. This corresponds with Elliott's (2020) findings that starting with a curriculum topic can make texts with diverse characters harder to find.

Subject Knowledge & Pedagogy

Bearne and Reedy (2017) suggest that subject knowledge in Primary English is made up of four interconnected strands:

- Contextual subject knowledge – the historical, cultural, social & ideological aspects derived from reading, PD, and discussion.
- Textual subject knowledge – different kinds of spoken and written texts.
- Linguistic subject knowledge – how language is put together to make meaning.
- Pedagogical subject knowledge – the classroom, how children learn, planning.

Rachel was using social media to inform her textual subject knowledge rather than formal training or CPD, like 78% of the questionnaire respondents from Norfolk and Suffolk schools and 93% of respondents from other areas. The educational benefits of social media are contested but could support collaborative learning, the development of new skills, and greater agency (Greenhow & Lewin, 2015). Goodyear et al (2019)'s study on the use of Twitter (now called X) as a Personal Learning Community (PLC) for PE teachers demonstrated that observing and participating in online discussions supported teachers in developing new understanding and shared practices. Prestridge (2019) suggests that social media sites such as Instagram provide an environment where teachers can share resources and connect with colleagues "unconstrained by time or place" (P143).

Unusually, Rachel had ordered books from a beauty company she followed on Instagram rather than a teacher or education account. Upcircle Beauty responded to the death of George Floyd in 2020 by offering to donate 'a bundle of children's books, which have a Black protagonist and are written by Black authors and illustrators - to 100 schools across the UK' (Upcircle, 2020). She saw this and ordered the books for her class. All but one book which Rachel mentioned in the interview were part of this book pack. Rachel also talked about having an anonymous teacher Instagram page and the

how she uses it to improve her subject knowledge and mentioned an Instagram account that she uses called Diverse Books for Kids https://www.instagram.com/diverse_kids_books/ . This page was set up by an Early Years teacher who wanted to diversify the books in her own classroom and set up the page to share her ideas with other teachers. Rachel acknowledged that this is not typical CPD and went on to say that she bought a lot of books with her own money. Without a whole school focus, support from a subject lead, or a budget for diversifying books, Rachel is using the social media she is already familiar with to learn from others and then do her own research about the suggested books. Harvard (2018) suggests that teachers should be critical consumers of professional development, particularly when it is informal online CPD. However, there was little evidence of criticality when Rachel was looking at the recommended books or lists on social media; just an acceptance that if they were being recommended, they were ok to use.

The books Rachel received in the free book pack are on display in her classroom and she talked about using the display as a deliberate way of widening the kind of books children choose during reading time. She also referred to diversity being 'woven' into the book area, although the use of a diverse bookshelf would suggest that diversity is initially being separated rather than 'woven in'. This is a challenge for teachers – Rachel wants the White children in her class to notice and read the diverse books but in creating a separate space for them, she could be accidentally 'othering' the books. The Black child in her class would not see himself reflected in any of the books in the main book area, only on the diverse bookshelf.

Julian is a Mermaid, which Rachel talked about as being one of the children's favourite books, has been celebrated and awarded, but also banned and protested against. The version sold in the UK is also different to the original version sold in the USA. These things will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of *Julian is a Mermaid* in Chapter 6. Rachel did not mention or seem to be aware of any controversy around the book. *My Hair*, which sits alongside *Julian is a Mermaid* on Rachel's diverse bookshelf, offers lots of opportunities for Black children share things from their own communities and for White children to learn and discuss new language and culture - from the pictures of hair accessories such as afro picks and du-rags to the language of Black hair like afro and Bantu knots.

Rachel focused on discussing the use of diverse texts during 'reading time' when children can choose and read books independently or together with peers for pleasure, rather than on discussing the framing of diverse books in her teaching. She talked about how the children particularly enjoyed reading *Julian is a Mermaid* and that it generates a lot of discussion amongst the children.

Own Voices

The concept and importance of Own Voices texts seemed to be completely new to Rachel who had no idea about the ethnicity of the authors of the books she was promoting and sharing with the children in her class. When she was asked if she thought it mattered if a book was written by an Own Voices author or not, she seemed undecided but concluded that you cannot write for someone else.

When it came to not doing research about the authors of the books she had in class, it came down to not having the time. Unlike some of the questionnaire respondents, who thought they were naming Own Voices texts but were not, most of the books Rachel talked about in her interview were Own Voices texts although this was not deliberate, and she did not know this.

Claire

Claire was interviewed online while she was at home on a day when she was working from home.

The following three questions were used to as prompts during the interview:

1. Can you tell me about a time you have used children's books with a character from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background in your teaching?

2. Can you tell me about the development of your own subject knowledge of children's literature?

3. Rudine Sims Bishop describes children's books as being 'windows, mirrors and sliding doors'. What does this analogy mean to you? Can you think of an example of a time when it has been relevant to you or your teaching?

Claire's responses are presented below as a first-person narrative.

Claire – "Narrative does it in a way which is non-confrontational".

I am a year five teacher and English lead in a junior school in a suburban area of a city. I run an OU/UKLA [Open University and United Kingdom Literacy Association] Reading for Pleasure Teachers as Readers group [https://ourfp.org/schools-teachers/teachers-reading-groups/].

Using books with characters from minority ethnic backgrounds or written by authors from minority ethnic backgrounds is something we've specifically been looking at in our curriculum. So, at the minute we're using *Moonchild* by Aisha Bushby which is obviously people from a minority ethnic group but it's also good because it's got a family with two mothers and it's also about adoption. We use a book in year four which is by Layla Rasheed, set in Roman times, it's one of the Roman Voices ones. Those are our class novels, but we also do a lot of reading aloud and sharing stories, so we've used things like, *The Highrise Mystery*, *A Pocket Full of Stars* - we read a lot of those in our library.

> *High Rise Mystery is an exciting adventure story about two Black sisters acting as detectives to solve a murder in their estate in inner-city London. The range of multi-cultural characters are multi-dimensional living relatable and realistic lives. The main characters have agency, power and wisdom in the story. They are able to solve a crime and help the adults around them. Black characters are represented well although ethnicity is not part of the story. There is much that British children of all backgrounds would relate to including authentic representation of young people's language. Sharna Jackson, the author, is Black British.*

We also have *Ashushar and the Mystery of the City of Gold*. We've read a lot of them in our school because part of the thinking is exposing children to beyond their current experiences. In Norfolk, it's a very strongly White British and here in [name of city suburb] where I am it's quite middle classy. The school is predominantly White British; we do have people from other cultures, but we are also an incredibly boy heavy school. We've got 360 children, 280 of which are boys. Most of the people

are local because it's a city school we don't have people travelling in from around. I find it really interesting because they talk about going 'into the city' as a thing, like a day out; whilst still being in the city, it's a very local area.

As English lead, I made the decision to diversify the curriculum about three or four years ago. The first year was just establishing myself and then I looked at our curriculum and it was really disparate, we had some really good texts but there was lots of reliance on traditional texts so I modernised the texts but also tried to expose them to more books because, as you said, they should be a window into the world and we do have children from other backgrounds than here who come into school and they don't have texts that reflect them and they need to be able to find themselves in a text as well. And also, because they're more engaging to children as well and they don't actually seem to notice particularly so when we read the text they don't say 'oh this character is different' they just accept it. We only go up to year six obviously but there isn't a discussion of 'this character is different from me; I don't understand this' they just say 'ok' and move on. I did wonder whether there would be a difference between fantasy and non-fantasy texts but actually when we were reading things which were set in non-fantasy worlds they still accepted that that's their life that's how they do it which is really good and I think that's why we need, at this age, to expose them to as much of that as we can while they've still got that openness before they start getting older and it starts to narrow down a bit. Sometimes I draw attention to the differences and similarities in the character, but it very much depends, because I really don't want it to be, not virtue signalling, but just signalling, going "look here is our character, who is this person? this character?" It should just be recognised - people are different, it doesn't matter what the specific differences are. Sometimes there is knowledge in texts they need to know - we were reading the *Planet Omar* text, and we were reading the text about Ramadan in assembly, so they need to know what that is because they don't know that background and understanding and that sort of culture. But I don't like to particularly emphasise it because it just brings it out that this is a difference, and this is another difference whereas really everybody is different and has different experiences.

In order to diversify the books in school I did research. I looked obviously at the OU RfP [Reading for Pleasure] website (https://ourfp.org/) and I looked at Books for Topics (https://www.booksfortopics.com/). I looked at the Black Curriculum (https://theblackcurriculum.com/) and I asked other professionals. Just because texts are on a list somewhere doesn't mean anything because you have to find texts that work, texts that are effective not just because they meet these criteria. I struck a balance between creating a diverse curriculum and still making sure it's a quality curriculum not just saying "this text has got this character in let's use this". So, it was finding high quality texts and part of that is speaking to other professionals and

asking, “what do you use?” We’re really lucky because we’re in the [name of] Trust and one of our feeder infant schools is the [name of] English Hub. I spoke to the head of the hub there; it’s interesting because they’re Key Stage 1 predominantly so we’re their junior school so it was interesting to do that bit of work.

Some teachers have been really open to diversifying their texts but there has been resistance from some and that’s not limited to diverse texts, it’s changing any texts in the curriculum, it’s the change. They’ve all been really open to that widening of expectations and we’re really lucky we have a librarian, who is really keen on getting the books into the library and promoting them to children as independent reading books as well. We always try to pick things that are either a series, or by similar authors as well so we can widen their choice based on the text we do in class to then suggest and entice them to read them outside of it. Most people are really keen, there’s just been the odd bit of not wanting to change the books they’ve always done - *The Explorer* by Katherine Rundall for example. That’s been a bit tricky, but people have been open to it and open to finding out about it themselves because it’s not always a thing that we know. I’ve created a list of novels & non-fiction texts for each year group, for subjects and then one for calendar days that are happening around the year so some of them can be read in assembly and other texts we can talk about. Events are happening that I don’t know about; I was trying to find a book about Purim [Jewish holiday] because we are predominantly Christian or non-denominational here, but I hit a wall because there are lists of these texts, but I don’t know what they’re like so, this sounds like such a hardship, I have to read them!

The list that I’ve made for our teachers are books that I’ve read or books that I’ve taught and have worked well. I’ve opened it out to the English leads in our Trust and I’ve asked them to add some. I remember I was on the RfP [Reading for Pleasure] Facebook page, and someone asked for a book about architects, and someone recommended Elaf Sharikh *The Architect’s Apprentice*. They said, “this looks really good, I haven’t read it” and I thought “no, that’s a book for adults set in the Middle East” it’s not a book you teach Year five. They just saw it and because it has that nice decoration on the front, they recommended it and that’s the whole issue of finding a book that ticks a box - is it appropriate for our age range? I’m ‘quite flexible’ in changing our curriculum, but also you need to know the children. For example, *Pocket Full of Stars* is a fantastic book, I loved it, we were going to use it in Year five. I thought it looked fantastic then I read it and it’s about this girl who has an argument with her mother and then her mother has a stroke and is in hospital and it’s a bit like a video game so it’s fantasy. She finds things of her mothers and goes into her mother’s memories and solves quests and finds stuff. It’s really great and a fantastic book and I loved it, then at the end she solves the problem and finds her mother in this room. They have a heart to heart and then her

mother dies and the book ends. I thought we can't use that because we have a child in year five whose mother died and is really struggling with it. But that's the text knowledge you need to have, it's a fantastic book, it's incredibly diverse and I would recommend it with the caveat of you need to know your children.

That is the issue that I have with lists, I would never say to someone 'Oh you should really read this book' if I didn't know what it was about. You would never do that as an adult so why do we do it to children? We have a staff meeting coming up whereas a staff we are going to add to that list to create a list of books that we know are good but also that are high quality and are engaging. We've also branched out a lot into graphic novels which is a thing I did not know a lot about, but we've been using Richard Ruddick's website (https://padlet.com/rruddick9zra/graphic-novels-73uh2srzpbia). Graphic novels are a good way in for children who sometimes find it challenging to read a longer novel, or even people who just prefer a graphic novel as it's a completely valid text type. I'm going to say to the staff that every term they must read at least one of the books from either your subject or your year group. That's three books a year and that's not a lot. It's really hard because I love children's literature, so I had to ask my head and deputy how many is reasonable? Is it three, is it six, is it 18? And they said three! I'm going to ask them to read at least three books and that will widen their knowledge because that's part of my role as English coordinator. I'm not blaming them at all because we don't know that we don't know everything - I'm not up to date with what's going on on the cutting edge of science, I can find out, but I need someone to tell me where to look. I can understand why people do rely on those published lists, but I don't like them and that's why we're not doing it. We need to build our own and create ones that we know because every year five is different, every school is different.

The analogy of books as Windows and Mirrors that you shared is something I've been trying to put into words for ages and it just completely summed it up. It's about reflecting and children being able to see themselves in texts but also exposing them to the wider world and different ways of life; different concepts and narratives. We are focused on narrative, but we have been looking at non-fiction as well. Narrative does it in a way which is non-confrontational. I'm in the working party for a project which is ensuring that every child is read to by their teacher live once a day and we're also looking at the texts and teachers' knowledge of children's literature. The project is around looking at texts which are read to children and looking at the differences between schools and the different relationships. We were talking about how and what the different challenges of working in each school are; some classes are much more transient, and you have much higher turnover. Here we have four or five schools really close together, so they sort of dart between. We have children who were here for a year then went to [name of another school] then came back again then went to

somewhere else then came back again so they've been in four different schools in four year groups but they've all been within about a ten-mile radius. That's what we're looking at. Are the texts open and welcoming for all children as well as challenging them and their world views a bit when they're still young enough that they haven't got rigid ideas and they're a lot more flexible in their thinking.

In terms of children's responses, I've noticed that independently they read more diverse texts. I have noticed they are making that choice to continue to read wider rather than those rigid paths they get on as children when they read. They are choosing to read wider texts where the character is Muslim, or where the character is a different religion or a character who is a different ethnicity to them or characters with different family groups or characters that have a disability so they're choosing different books rather than those traditional standard authors.

A lot of this reading happened in the last two years while we've been in lockdown, so I think it'll be really interesting to see what happens when they're read to more continuously in person by a class teacher. Over this next year hopefully we will stay in person, and they can ask questions and discuss and see whether they choose to ask more about it because quite a lot of the discussion is child led. They come to us and ask, 'what does that mean or why do they do that?' and we encourage them to ask questions because they're reading for pleasure so we're not discussing the books in a 'why does the author mean this?' way they're just enjoying the story. It's interesting because when they make 'predictions' when the teacher closes the book and leaves it on a cliff hanger, their reasoning of what could happen is getting a bit more realistic based on the culture of the text. Because it's a narrative or a fiction text of some description when children ask questions about the book they're not saying "I don't know this" which removes that whole level of not wanting to seem ignorant or stupid. They're asking questions about the book which allows them to ask questions in a safer less confrontational way. We do have some families who can be much more rigid in their thinking.

Considering the authors and whether it matters if the author is of the same background as the characters, I've got myself in such a tangle around this, because I think it does matter. Research is one thing, lived experience is another. There are so many authors out there that, using the example of the characters from *High Rise*, could write a book about Black teenagers in London. I can google and find out stuff but actually people who have lived that and understand that are better placed to write about it. There are so many White authors, so they deserve to tell their own stories. We have our own wealth of stories and texts, they deserve to tell their own rather than us colonising their stories, for want of a better term. When people are writing about things they're not familiar with sometimes it can be really good. We're having an issue around wanting to find a really good book about Walter Tull. We've studied World War One in year five and we read *War Horse,* and we read *BeoWolf* which is also by Michael Morpurgo. I was trying to find texts and there was a really good

one that I looked up and it was a thriller and then I looked, and it's written by Michael Morpurgo and I wanted to find a text written by someone that understands that culture - it's not like it's alien. It's not like they're inhuman. Equally someone who lived in London might not be able to write about rural Norfolk life. You need to understand it, and I do think it's important that they have a voice and it's a recognised and promoted voice. The more texts that are written by minority authors, the more popular, hopefully, they will become. And then there'll be more quality of literature out there. There is a presumption that because it's got a character, they are reflected in the author. I've found that there's a presumption that characters with 'unusual' names must be… but actually, they're White British or whatever, but it doesn't mean they're a minority, it doesn't devalue from their texts at all, but you can't make those assumptions you need to actually do your research. This is the conversation I have around subject knowledge, reading children's texts is just as big a part of teachers' English subject knowledge. Talking about authors and reading books in advance, but also finding out about authors and not just presuming that this book has got an African American child in it therefore the author is African American. It doesn't match necessarily. What we've been focusing on is giving them quality texts that they can then find out more. Things like the author – googling, it's not a challenging task to find out about a particular author; you don't have to go into their life history but where are they from, what life culture are they from? I think that's a basic skill set of a text, and, you need to read the book as well. There was a text that was on all the lists, I can't remember what it's called, but I read it, and I really didn't like it, the writing was really clunky. So, I wouldn't suggest that to someone but that's based on my personal opinion, someone else might read it and love it which is therefore fine. That's the difficulty I find at the moment, quite a lot of the list is based on me because I've read them. I want that balance of texts, so I want some good texts about water or rivers because our topic is rivers. We haven't got any quality non-fiction texts about rivers. We've got the old 'discover rivers' textbooks. We were reading *Floodlands* because it's about Norwich when it's flooded but the children didn't engage particularly this year. I asked if anyone had read a non-fiction book, and I was sent the link to a list of recommended texts about water and books for the topic. My response was that's great, but have you read them? I don't just want a list of books, I wanted someone to tell me I've used this and it's useful. On a selfish level I want someone I can have that discussion with. I did buy a load of books for our head of year, head and deputy head, for SLT, and said "read these", because then you can actually have that discussion with people. Do you agree with me? Do you not agree? I can have that conversation with children but it's promoting those conversations between staff that we're working on. We're getting there. We've rewritten the curriculum to give them time but equally we need to get running on this. We had a conversation on Twitter about getting teachers to read. Do you expect science teachers to go home and do

experiments? No, but you would expect them to read around their subject and we're a research-based profession, I would expect them to know what's up to date in science. Like when Pluto was declassified as a planet, I'd expect them to know that. You should know your subject. Just because it's English, it's reading, but that underpins everything.

Analysis

Curriculum

Like Rachel, Claire was making a conscious effort to diversify the curriculum, and this was particularly around the teaching of English. As English subject lead, Claire had a whole school approach to making curriculum changes and was supporting all the other teachers across the school with this. While she was supported by the Senior Leadership Team at her school, this was her decision rather than one that came from the Headteacher.

In Claire, we have an example of an English subject leader who is deliberately developing her subject knowledge of diverse children's texts in order to diversify her school's curriculum. Although a teacher in the questionnaire suggested teachers are losing their freedom to choose, in this case, having a subject leader to make the decision is a positive thing.

Like Rachel, Claire referred to modernising the texts being used in school due to a reliance on traditional texts. In discussing curriculum changes, the following books were referred to:

Title	Author(s)
Moonchild	Aisha Busby
Empires End a Roman Story	Leila Rasheed
The Highrise Mystery*	Sharna Jackson
A Pocket Full of Stars	Aisha Busby
Aru Shah and the city of gold	Roshani Chokshi
Amari & The Night Brothers	B.B. Alston
Planet Omar	Zanib Mian

Table 38 - Books Mentioned in Claire's Interview.

Only one of the novels that Claire discussed was on the list of novels named by more than one questionnaire respondent – *The Highrise Mystery*.

Claire discussed the way that her suggested changes had been received by other teachers in the school which was met positively by most teachers but with some resistance by a small number. She explained that this was not a resistance to the diversity of texts being introduced, but to change in general. She spoke positively about the support of their school librarian who had made sure all the books introduced into the curriculum were also available in the library and promoted to children as independent reading books.

Subject Knowledge

Claire is an active member of the Open University/UKLA Reading for Pleasure community and runs a Teachers' Reading Group (TRG) (https://ourfp.org/schools-teachers/teachers-reading-groups/). These groups provide evidence informed CPD to develop reading for pleasure pedagogy and practice for teachers. TRG leaders are provided with training and CPD from the OU and UKLA regularly throughout the year to support the running of their groups. This meant that Claire talked confidently about children's literature, reading for pleasure and the importance of representation in texts.

In making decisions about which books to add to the curriculum, Claire used the resources and expertise available to her through the OU and UKLA, and also referred to Books for Topics and The Black Curriculum.

Chapter two explored how teachers beginning with a topic can make it more difficult to find books with representation of racially minoritised characters or those written by minoritised authors (Elliott et al, 2021). However, Books for Topics https://www.booksfortopics.com/ , a website which contains recommended booklists by age or topic for primary teachers, has a Diverse and Inclusive Children's Books section which includes lists by year group, a list of books with racially minoritised characters and a list of books which promote cultural diversity. Alison Leach, the Director of Books for Topics, has an MA Education in Critical Approaches to Children's Literature and the website states that it has a "panel of 50 reviewers from across the primary education community, we are now able to try out new books in a variety of school settings before we recommend them on the website, making sure that we are only recommending the most suitable books for your classrooms" (Books for Topics, ND) There is no indication of who the panel of 50 reviewers are for Books for Topics from the website but this is important, because as Claire stated in her interview, it is not enough to add a book to a list because it meets diversity criteria. Claire was one of the few teachers from the questionnaire or interviews that prioritised the quality of the books she was using with her class over them just being diverse or fitting into a curriculum topic.

As a junior school teacher, Claire also liaised with the local English Hub which is an infant school so that she had a good understanding of the books available at Key Stage 1.

Claire demonstrated an understanding of the need to know the books she is recommending and adding to the curriculum, giving an example of an inappropriate book she saw being recommended on a social media. Here Claire is demonstrating criticality around what she has seen on social media, rather than simply accepting a suggestion. This is an example of what Harvard (2018) called being a critical consumer of online professional development.

She also demonstrated an understanding of needing to know the children in your class and that not all books are suitable for all children - using the example of *A Pocket Full of Stars.* This is an example of how Claire's contextual and textual strands of subject knowledge (Bearne & Reedy, 2017) come together when selecting texts for her class. Claire is also aware of the importance of intersectionality, referring to a book with same sex parents and representation of racially minoritised characters, for example.

The next stage in her development of creating book lists for her school was to use existing staff knowledge and add to them during a staff meeting and to work on developing the subject knowledge of the whole school staff by asking them to read three new books over the year and facilitating conversations about books between staff, seeing that as an important part of her role as English subject leader. Claire's criticality when looking at book suggestions, along with her understanding of the importance of knowing the children in your class, means that Claire is not satisfied with simply compiling a list and giving it to all the teachers. She understands the need for input from individual teachers who know the children.

Teaching

Claire talked about the impact that introducing more books with racially minoritised characters into the curriculum had had in her class. She noticed that children were choosing to read more diverse texts independently and moving away from "*rigid paths they get on as children when they read*" to "*choosing different books rather than those traditional standard authors*". When it comes to reading, children respond well to familiarity and once they find a genre or author that they like, many children have a tendency to stick with safe choices rather than take risks by trying something new (Woodfine, 2015). By reading aloud and teaching with books that feature racially minoritised characters and supporting children in becoming familiar with a wider range of authors, Claire was creating a new kind of familiarity meaning that some children were seeking similarly diverse texts in their independent reading. Claire was interested in what would happen going forward as many of the changes made to the curriculum were made during the time the country was in Covid-19 lockdown and children were not in school. Although children had access to books, Claire was not able to be with the children as they were reading to see their reactions, their questions and how the book discussions took place. Before the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, reading enjoyment levels among children in the UK were at a 15-year low at 47.8% (National Literacy Trust, 2020). During the first lockdown this increased to 55.9% with a third of children saying they read more during lockdown (National Literacy Trust, 2020). 46.3% of children had read new books and many stated that reading supported their mental wellbeing and encouraged them to dream about the future (National Literacy

Trust, 2020). Since children returned to school full time, the level of reading enjoyment has gone back down to an all-time low. This may be due to children simply having more time to read during lockdown, but it is also important to remember that not all children have access to books, a quiet space to read or a supportive adult.

In Claire's class, discussion around books is often child-led and children are encouraged to ask questions and discuss their reading with both staff and peers. Claire believed that reading more diverse texts will allow the children to ask questions about things such as ethnicity, culture or religion in a "safe" way, because they are asking about the text:

> *"Narrative does it in a way which is non-confrontational."*

Bowen & Schutt (2007) suggest that picture books can be used to support children in understanding that different can mean good and that they can learn to become change agents by safely exploring issues such as racial prejudice through books. Lazar & Offenberg (2011) state that these kinds of discussions can be compromised if teachers either ignore or gloss over controversial topics such as racism when they appear in literature. This is discussed further in the section on language below.

Own Voices

Claire had considered Own Voices texts and described getting herself "*in such a tangle around this"* and "*going round in circles on this*" but had come to the conclusion that it was important. She described the fact that she could write about Black characters by doing research but that it was different from having lived experience. She also talked about the number of White authors there already are, and the importance of ownership of stories. Claire referred to this as being part of a teacher's subject knowledge for English. Although she also stated that authors and Own Voices had not been a focus in the development of her school's English curriculum, with the focus being on representation through characters and finding quality texts.

Analysis of interviewees' language

In addition to analysing what the teachers who were interviewed said, it was also interesting to analyse the way that they said it and the language they chose to use when talking about race, ethnicity and diverse representation in children's literature.

Despite discussing this topic for a considerable length of time (Claire's interview was 40 minutes long, and Rachel's was 25 minutes), neither of the teachers used the word race or racism. Both teachers used the words 'diverse' and 'diversity' frequently although there was no clarification of what they meant by these terms, and I did not seek to clarify it at the time. There was also frequent use of the word 'different' in both interviews. Both teachers used the words 'Black' and 'White' to

talk about specific ethnicities, but no other ethnicities were named. Claire used the term 'culture' frequently, rather than referring to ethnicity or race.

Both the teachers who were interviewed were White British and teaching in predominantly White schools. Rachel had one Black boy in her class. This predominant Whiteness meant that the teachers spoke from a place of Whiteness. When talking about 'the children' in their class, they seemed to be referring to White children. When discussing the benefits of using diverse texts, the benefits considered were mainly those of White children, although Claire was able to talk about the analogy of Windows and Mirrors and the importance of children from '*other backgrounds*' being able to find themselves in texts.

'Other backgrounds' is an example of the way that Claire used language that was general to talk about characters in books from racially minoritised backgrounds:

> *"…expose them to as much of that as we can…"*
>
> *"…they don't know that background and understanding and that sort of culture."*
>
> *"…this text has got this character in…"*

Sometimes she sounded as she was going to use a word such as race or ethnicity, but did not actually finish the sentence:

> "*…because it's got a character of…[stops] well any kind of thing, that they are reflected in the character"*
>
> "*…also I've found that there's a presumption that characters with 'unusual' [finger quotes] names and they're going 'well this must be… [stops]' but actually they're White British or I don't know, whatever"*
>
> *"you can't make those assumptions based on...[stops] you need to actually do your research."*

In terms of the framing of race, ethnicity or diversity in her teaching, Claire stated that she does not draw attention to this when they are reading books and asserts that the children do not really notice it:

> *"…because they're more engaging to children as well and they don't actually seem to notice particularly so when we read the text they don't say 'oh this character is different' they just accept it."*

Here she seems to be suggesting that children are 'colourblind'; that they do not see race or ethnicity and that this is a positive thing. Claiming to not be able to see race, or that other groups of people such as children, cannot see race is often known as Colourblind Racism as it dismisses the need for anti-racist practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Teachers sometimes try to treat all children 'equally' to avoid appearing racist, avoiding noticing children's race or ethnicity. But there is a difference between equality and equity, and avoiding noticing race or claiming children do not notice it so it

does not need to be talked about, can enable the continuation of structural racism in schools (Gaine, 1995). Claire also went on to suggest that she believes children become more racist as they get older, again using general language ('that') in this example:

> *"expose them to as much of that as we can while they've still got that openness before they start getting older and it starts to narrow down a bit."*

When I asked Claire if she draws attention to characters' race or ethnicity, she talked about differences not mattering which seems contradictory to the work she has been doing to diversify her curriculum:

> *"But I don't like to particularly emphasise it because it just brings it out that this is a difference and this is another difference whereas really everybody is different and has different experiences."*

It is possible that Claire has an understanding that there is a need for more representation of different ethnicities in children's literature through the CPD she has engaged with, without a real understanding of why; or the understanding or confidence to engage children in discussions about race or ethnicity. The richness of representation that has been added to the curriculum is potentially going unnoticed or misunderstood by the children if their teachers are not able to discuss it openly. Children who see themselves in texts for the first time could potentially miss opportunities to talk about this if it is not something the teachers are encouraging discussion about. If Claire, as English subject lead, is not confident to have these discussions, they are even less likely to be happening in other classrooms across the school as she is unlikely to be able to support other teachers in holding these discussions. As discussed in the Literature Review in Chapter 2, the teacher is important within the reader-response process as the complex interactions between teacher, reader and the text are where meaning lies (Wilson & Rennie, 2019); with children bringing their own backgrounds to the reading and interpretation of texts. An important part of a teacher's job is to support children in thinking critically about what they read.

Claire suggested that children might feel less ignorant or stupid when asking questions about a book rather than questions about real life. This links back to Meek (1988)'s description of books enabling children to explore value systems in the real world through literature and Wilson & Rennie (2019)'s concept of 'life-to-text' and 'text-to-life' connections. When children make the connections from books to their own lives, this is often when reading works the best (Beavis, 2020), but they need the teacher to support them in making those connections.

Claire went on to suggest that there may be some families in her school whose thinking is racist and it may be that she would feel more comfortable discussing themes related to race, ethnicity or religion when they are based around books, through fear of a negative reaction from parents if these

themes are discussed more generally. Again, Claire uses general language here; she refers to 'rigid thinking', rather than naming racism directly.

When Rachel talked about 'diversity' she was almost always referring to 'other places' and diversity being 'out there' or in different countries, rather than thinking about the diversity within her own school, town or country.

She described the diverse books she ordered from Upcircle Beauty as "*representing people from around the world"*. Many of these picture books do feature people from countries other than the UK – *Last Stop on Market Street* is a story about a Black American boy taking a bus ride; the *Little Leaders* series features important Black people from around the world (as well as Black British people from the present such as Stormzy, and the past such as Mary Seacole); and *Clean Up!* is a story of a Black British family visiting Jamaica. However, what they all have in common is positive representation of Blackness which could be relatable to for Black British children as well as all other children at school in the UK. Despite telling me that there was a Black boy in her class, Rachel did not refer to that child at all during the interview, focusing instead on the impact diverse books may have on the White children she teaches. Despite teaching a Black boy herself, she spoke about diversity as something which was 'other'. One of the difficulties of doing this research in a predominantly White area with such small numbers of Black children is that Rachel may be avoiding talking about this child for ethical reasons to avoid discussing a single, possibly easily identifiable child. Or she may not have been aware of this child's need to have his own contemporary experiences reflected in the books he read, or the White children's need to see racial diversity as something that exists in their own world and not something which is 'other'.

Like Claire, Rachel used general language and avoided naming ethnicities. She also used words such as '*stereotypical*' or '*bog standard'* to talk about Whiteness, suggesting that she was coming from a starting point of Whiteness = the norm.

Like Claire, Rachel seemed to be suggesting that children get more racist or less tolerant of difference as they get older. Again, general language is used here:

"I think in year one you're at the age where they're matter of fact, they don't overthink things you know like adults do, they're just so accepting. They haven't got that stereotypical view to things yet."

Here Rachel is using the word 'stereotypical' in a different way to earlier and seems to be suggesting that a 'stereotypical view' is a negative or racist view which young children in year one have not developed or learned yet. It is interesting that both teachers seemed to be suggesting that children inevitably get more racist as they grow older.

The interviews with Rachel and Claire reveal progress and challenges in diversifying the children's literature that teachers use. Both teachers demonstrated a commitment to representation but found discussing race and ethnicity explicitly challenging, often framing racially minoritised groups as external to their own contexts. This highlights the importance of supporting teachers with professional development to support their subject knowledge and build confidence in facilitating discussions about race and ethnicity with both colleagues and children.

Chapter 6 Children's Books and the Framework

This chapter contains an analysis of the most frequently mentioned books from the questionnaire and interviews using the analytical framework and narrative summaries described in Chapter 3. The analytical framework was designed to examine the books narrative content, representation, and cultural significance. By applying this framework, the analysis explores how characters are represented, how settings and themes engage with societal ideologies, and how these stories might encourage meaningful discussions about diversity.

The textual analyses that follow are situated within a broader historical shift in which children's books have increasingly been recognised as sites where racial ideologies are produced, circulated and contested. While the literary canon taught in UK schools has remained remarkably stable over time, the last decade has seen a parallel growth in research that exposes both quantitative underrepresentation and qualitative issues such as erasure, ambiguity and stereotype (Reflecting Realities - CLPE, 2018 – 2024; Elliott et al, 2021; de Bruijin et al, 2020). Existing analytical tools help highlight these concerns but sometimes struggle to account for genre, audience, authorial position or the complexities of incidental versus explicit representation. The framework developed in this thesis responds to this gap by offering a historically and critically informed way for teachers to interrogate how ethnicity is constructed within texts, and how power operates across both narrative and illustration. By applying this framework to books commonly used in UK primary classrooms, this chapter illustrates how representation functions in practice and demonstrates the interpretive work required to move beyond tokenistic or surface-level diversity.

The framework raises critical questions such as: How are characters of underrepresented groups portrayed? Do they have agency, and are they multidimensional? How do these stories challenge or reinforce societal stereotypes? These questions guide an examination of the nuanced ways the stories reflect or depart from dominant cultural narratives.

Applying the framework to frequently used texts shows how representation quality and contextual relevance vary. It illustrates how teachers in predominantly White areas can use the same framework to select texts that both reflect local realities and expand them, ensuring every child encounters books as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors (Bishop, 1990).

The chapter's exploration spans genres, from picture books to novels; however there is a focus on picture books suitable for KS1 and novels suitable for Upper KS2 because of the lack of questionnaire respondents who were teaching in year 3 or 4. It includes consideration of the authors' and illustrators' qualifications and experiences in representing their chosen characters and themes. The

books analysed include those that celebrate cultural heritage, confront societal challenges, and provide vibrant, relatable narratives.

In this chapter, terms such as “Black” or “White” refer to racialised categories, describing how characters or authors are positioned socially and visually. Where specific ethnic identities (e.g., Jamaican, Indian) are verifiable, these are named. This approach avoids reducing identities to simplistic categories while recognising the constraints of relying solely on contextual information.

The term Own Voices is used cautiously in this thesis. While originally created to spotlight books where authors share a marginalised identity with their characters (Duyvis, 2015), the term has been criticised for essentialising identity, policing authors, and assuming that shared identity guarantees authenticity (Acevedo-Aquino et al., 2020).

In this thesis, Own Voices operates only as a contextual descriptor, not as a marker of quality. Evaluation focuses instead on multidimensional representation, ideological positioning, and character agency.

Analysis of Books

Handa's Surprise

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 3 – *Handa's Surprise* Cover. **Picture 4** - *Handa's Surprise* Page. **Picture 5** – *Handa's Surprise* Page.

Title	Handa's Surprise	Publisher	Walker Books
Author/Illustrator	Eileen Browne	Year	1995
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	White		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Picture book		
Additional information	Set in Kenya – information in introduction of the book. The book has been adapted into a play which includes song and puppetry. Eileen Browne compiles a list of picture books including those with representation on Association of Illustrators website. https://theaoi.com/2022/06/22/emily-brownes-choice/ Shortlisted for Sheffield's Children's Book Award 1995		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Characters are realistic but fairly one-dimensional – rural, 'poor' Africa. Children have agency – Handa is able to walk to the next village to see her friend.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	It isn't, apart from being set in Africa.

How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	Reinforces stereotype of Africa being hot, rural country where people live in huts surrounded by exotic animals and fruits. Carrying on heads, wearing babies, working in fields.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Rural only. Urban & suburban Africa are not represented.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	These are not explored.
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	This is a simple story for young children, but wider representation of Africa could begin a discussion on what this country is like for young children.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	The animals take Handa's fruit, and she doesn't notice so they have more power and wisdom than she does. Even the 'surprise' at the end is created by an animal.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Language is not used to identify ethnicity beyond the names of characters – Handa and Akeyo.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Author and illustrator is a White British woman. Worked as a teacher.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	Interesting & entertaining multi-modal story.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Skin tone, features and hair texture and style represented sensitively. Characters recognisable as African.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	No. Takes place in Africa.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Handa	Main	Black	F	Brown skin, black hair in plaits, pink dress
1 & 2	Background	Black	F x2	Blurred. Black.
3	Background	Black	M?	So distant, almost like a stick figure. Black. Pulling a cow.

4 & 5	Background	Black	M? x2	Very distant working in field. Black bodies, yellow clothing.
6 & 7	Background	Black	M & F	M distant working in field. F working in field closer to foreground. Wearing headdress and wearing a baby.
8	Background	Black	F	In background working in field. Carrying stick, wearing blue head dress
9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	Background	Black	3 x M 1 x F 2 x baby	Watching Handa in the village. Boys wearing shorts and no tops. 1 boy has baby sitting on his lap. Girl is wearing a baby on her back.
Akeyo	Secondary	Black	F	Black skin, cornrow plaits. Traditional dress.
15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	Background	Black	3 x F 3 x unknown	Older woman in traditional dress sitting with basket between her open legs. Wearing headdress. Woman in background carrying large bag on her head. 2 unknown characters in the background working in the fields.
21, 22	Background	Black	1 x M 1 x F	1 not wearing a top so presumed male. Looking at backs of Handa and Akeyo and smiling.

Character Summary
1 main character and 1 secondary character – both female and black 22 background characters – 9 female; 8 male; 2 babies; 3 unknown. No interaction between main characters and background characters.

Narrative Summary
Handa lives in rural Africa in an environment which is a realistic but one-dimensional view of Africa which reinforces the stereotype of Africa being a hot, rural country where people live in huts surrounded by exotic animals and fruits. Information about the book tells us that the story is set in Kenya, but this does not appear in the story. People carry things on their heads, women wear their babies and work in the fields. Urban and suburban Africa are not represented in the story. The children in the story have agency – Handa is able to walk alone to the next village to see her friend, but the animals take Handa's fruit, and she doesn't notice which means they have more power in the story than she does. Language is not used to identify ethnicity in the story beyond the character's names. It is an entertaining and multi-modal story written by a White British Woman who worked as a teacher. Skin tone, features and hair texture and style are represented sensitively. The characters are recognisable as African, even those who are 'blurred' background characters. There are 24 characters in the story. Handa is the main character and the other named character, Akeyo, appears at the end of the story. Handa does not interact with the 22 background characters, but she is surrounded by 9 female and 8 male characters, 2 babies and 3 characters who are so in the background it is impossible to identify gender. Many of the background characters are adults working in fields or children playing in villages.

Table 39 – Completed Analytical Framework for *Handa's Surprise*

The analysis of *Handa's Surprise* reveals that this is a book which presents a rural African village which is a realistic but one-dimensional view of Africa which reinforces stereotypes. Skin tone, features and hair texture are represented sensitively and Handa has agency in the story. It is one of only two books analysed in this chapter which only has characters from racially minoritised backgrounds.

When *Handa's Surprise* was published, it was to critical acclaim and the book was shortlisted for several awards. Graham (1996) described it as 'quite perfect':

> *"A teacher of this area of Kenya says Eileen Browne has not put a foot wrong…. There are too few books with Black characters of this quality; I hope this quite perfect book will reach as many classrooms as possible."* (P30)

In 2014, The Guardian newspaper included *Handa's Surprise* in its Diverse Voices list of 50 of the best culturally diverse children's books (The Guardian, 2014). Almost 30 years after publication it is still very popular with teachers and was the most cited book with racially minoritised characters by the teachers in this study.

The narrative summary of *Handa's Surprise* demonstrates that although this text has many qualities, it is a one-dimensional view of Africa containing stereotypes. The issue with a book like *Handa's Surprise*, is less in the text itself and more about what else is being read alongside it. Out of the 37 books recommended for children from nursery to Year 1 on Pie Corbett's reading spine (Corbett, 2015), it is the only one that features characters from a racially minoritised background. If a teacher is using this reading spine and not supplementing it with other representations of Black children there is a danger that White children will continue to see Blackness as something which is 'other' and exists only in exotic far away countries, and that Black British children will not see themselves reflected in familiar contexts or locations. This is particularly important in predominantly White areas such as Norfolk and Suffolk where many White children may never have met a Black child and where Black children may feel isolated. In addition, it is not unusual in Norfolk for the primary years to be split into separate infant and junior schools. If an infant school were only using books from Pie Corbett's reading spine, Handa's Surprise could be the only book with racially minoritised characters that children in that school ever read. None of the teachers who named *Handa's Surprise* in the questionnaire named it alone; they all named other books they had used which included other characters from minoritised backgrounds, which is positive, although for some it was the only representation of Black characters. It is important that children have access to a range of texts which represent urban as well as rural African experiences and Black characters in the UK. *Handa's Surprise*'s author, Eileen Browne, has been compiling a list of books which include representation of

both racially minoritised and female characters on a website since 2016; it was last updated in 2022 and includes many books which would supplement *Handa's Surprise* (https://theaoi.com/news/emily-brownes-choice).

Eileen Browne was the author most mis-identified as being from a racially minoritised background in the questionnaire. As I suggested in Chapter 4, this may be because she is writing Black characters, and my questionnaire findings seem to suggest White authors writing Black characters are more likely to be mis-identified by White teachers.

Look Up!

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 6 – *Look Up!* Cover. **Picture 7** – *Look Up!* Page **Picture 8** – *Look Up!* Page

Title	Look Up!	Publisher	Walker Books
Author/Illustrator	Nathan Byron & Dapo Adeola	Year	2019
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Black		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Picture book		
Additional information	Won Waterstones Children's Book Prize in 2020. Won UKLA 3 – 7 Book Award in 2021.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Multi-dimensional representation – family, friends, community. Relatable and realistic lives.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	It isn't.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	Challenges stereotype of an astronaut as a White man – discusses first Black American woman in space explicitly who is a role model for the main character.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	Variety of ages and ethnicities presented sensitively. Different skin tone shades are present, and a variety of ethnicities represented among background characters.
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Inner-city, suburban and park settings represented. Contemporary so familiar to most children.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	A young Black girl wants to be an astronaut when she grows up. She engages the local community in watching a meteor shower – showing how she can have a positive influence on her community.

How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	Rocket's ambition is not seen as incredible or out of reach. Story includes facts and 'did you knows' about real Black women in space.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Rocket has the power – she influences her community and gets them all involved.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Ethnicity identified through illustration – range of ethnicities represented through skin tone and clothing e.g. turban.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Nathan Byron is Mixed race (White British and Jamaican) Dapo Adeola is British Nigerian. Rocket is based on Adeola's niece.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	Highly engaging story.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Range of skins tones and hair textures represented. Mum is seen braiding Rocket's hair. A range of ethnicities are included in the background characters.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Yes.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Rocket	Main	Black	F	In bedroom surrounded by toys: Telescope; pencils; books; robot; plane; roller skates; spaceship. Wearing PJs and glasses. Cornrows and afro. Cat in spacesuit.
Mum	Secondary	Black	F	
Jamal	Secondary – Rocket's brother.	Black	M	Rocket always looks up; Jamal always looks down at phone. Presented as opposite characters. On phone. Older.
1, 2, 3	Background	2 x Black 1 x White	1 x m 2 x f	Not 'real' characters but drawings Rocket has done.
Mae Jemison	Secondary	Black	F	Real person who Rocket wants to grow up to be.

4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	Background	3 x White 5 x Black	3 x F 3 x M 2 x unknown	2 unknown are very blurred in window of café. Other background characters on this page are either on their phone or reading a newspaper. There is 1 child. A variety of skin tones are represented including very dark.
12, 13, 14, 15, 16	Background	4 x White 1 x Black	3 x M 2 x F	
Cathy the cashier	Background	Black	F	Serving Rocket & Jamal in the supermarket
17	Background	White	F	Supermarket cashier.
18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23	Background	3 x Black 2 x White 1 x Asian	3 x F 3 x M	Shoppers int eh supermarket. Variety of skin tones represented. Asian man wearing turban.
24, 25, 26, 27	Background	3 x White 1 x brown	3 x m 1 x f	Old lady; 2 men

Character Summary

1 main and 3 secondary characters. All black. 3 female and 1 male. 28 background characters. 13 male 13 female 2 unknown 10 Black 14 White 2 Asian/brown Variety of skin tones represented within the ethnic categories. Rocket interacts with many of the background characters.

Narrative Summary
Rocket lives with her mum and brother and her life is represented multi-dimensionally through friends, family and community. Rocket lives a contemporary, realistic life that many children would be able to relate to. Different ethnicities are represented through illustrations including through skin tone, hair texture and clothing e.g. a turban. Skin tones are represented across different ethnicities as well as within ethnicities e.g. Black characters have a range of light to darker skin tones and different styles of Black hair such as afro and braids. Rocket's mum is pictured braiding her daughter's hair. Rocket challenges the stereotype of an astronaut as a White man. She is inspired by the first Black American woman in space who is her role model. Rocket's ambition is not seen as incredible or out of reach. The story includes facts and 'did you knows' about real Black women in space. Rocket's world include inner-city, suburban and park settings that would be familiar to many children. Rocket is a young Black girl who wants to be an astronaut when she grows up. She engages the local community in watching a meteor shower – showing how she can have a positive influence on her community. Rocket has power and influence in her family and in her community. This is a highly engaging story written by Nathan Byron who is Mixed race (White British and Jamaican) and illustrated by Dapo Adeola who is British Nigerian. Rocket is based on Adeola's niece. There are 3 named characters other than Rocket – Mum, Jamal and Cathy the Cashier – they are all Black. There are 28 background characters – 13 female, 13 male and 2 unknown. 10 background characters are Black, 13 are White and 2 are Asian/brown skinned. Rocket interacts with many of the background characters of a variety of genders and ethnicities demonstrating the diverse world she lives in

Table 40 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Look Up!*

The analysis of *Look Up!* reveals that this is a representation of multi-dimensional characters living contemporary, realistic and diverse lives. There is a range of ethnicities represented using a range of techniques such as a focus on skin tone, hair texture or religious apparel. Blackness is represented in different ways and the story challenges stereotypes.

Sands-O'Connor (2022) describes the Black characters in another of Byron and Adeola's children's books as never alone, and part of a community who support each other. This idea is also central to *Look Up!.* There is a diverse range of characters that the main character interacts with, and the story is all about community, set in a contemporary setting which would be familiar to children in a UK primary school. CLPE (2020) include *Look Up!* in the third Reflecting Realities report as an example of good practice. They describe how illustrator Adeola uses props and visual links to take the reader beyond the text which enables them to infer about the characters before they're introduced (CLPE, 2020). The book has a combination of general family and community activities which would be familiar to everyone and specific cultural references, such as Rocket's mum braiding her hair into cornrows, which brings an authenticity to the representation beyond simply using skin colour to represent ethnicity.

> *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.* (CLPE, 2020).

In an interview with the BookTrust, Adeola talks about how he did not see himself visually represented in books when he was a child (BookTrust, 2020). He highlights that he was aware of books like *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, but Grace is a girl so he could only relate to her up to a certain point (BookTrust, 2020). In terms of representation for young Black men, Adeola goes on to say:

> *I started to look at the representation that does exist for young Black men in cartoons, pop culture and other things that we look to. It's always seemed to revolve around sports and athletics with the same tired tropes being trotted out over and over again. This made me start to question representation across the board. I feel that if we are only given one image of ourselves, it severely limits our aspirations as people.* (BookTrust, 2020).

The intersectionality between ethnicity and gender and its relevance to representation is discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Ruby's Worry

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 9 - *Ruby's Worry* Cover. **Picture 10** – *Ruby's Worry* Page. **Picture 11** – *Ruby's Worry* Page.

Title	Ruby's Worry	Publisher	Bloomsbury
Author/Illustrator	Tom Percival	Year	2018
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	White		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Picture book		
Additional information	Won Judy Newman Book Award in 2020.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Main character represented sensitively (story is about mental health) and multi-dimensionally (home, school, garden, park, cinema). Her life is realistic and relatable. Background characters appear in B&W which makes it difficult to tell.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	It isn't.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	Neither challenges nor reinforces.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	Only the main character is well-developed and well-rounded. Ruby's skin is dark, and her hair represents afro hair. However, her features are generic and the same as all the other background characters in the story. Background characters are black and white, so although they are different shades, their ethnicity is ambiguous, and it is impossible to say who else is represented in the story. The boy who appears at the end of the story is a White boy.

How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Home, school. Garden, park, cinema.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	The story does not explore these themes.
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	The story does not explore these themes.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Ruby and the other boy have power and wisdom – the children. They work out that their worries get smaller when they talk about them by themselves. The children have agency.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Language is not used to identify ethnicity.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Tom Percival is a White man. There is little about his background available online.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	The story is interesting and relevant for children who may struggle with anxiety which is on the rise in children.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Hair texture is represented well through illustrations of the main character. There are a variety of skin tones amongst the background characters but as they are in black and white, ethnicity is ambiguous. Facial features are generic across all characters.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Yes, the context is familiar for British children of colour.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Ruby	Main character	Black	F	Only named character. She only interacts with her parents and the boy.
Teacher	Background	Ambiguous	F	
Children in class x 8	Background	Varied but ambiguous	5 x M 3 x F	
Mum	Background	Black	F	

Dad	Background	Black	M	
Characters on bus x 3	Background	Ambiguous	2 x F 3 x M	
People in cinema x 8	Background	Ambiguous	6 x M 2 x F	
Other people with worries x 3	Background	Ambiguous	2 x M 1 x F	
Boy	Secondary character	White	M	

Character Summary
In addition to Ruby, the main and only named character, Ruby's parents and the boy Ruby meets at the end of the story make up secondary characters. In addition, there are 25 background characters whose ethnicities are varied but ambiguous. There are 11 female characters and 18 male characters. Ruby only interacts with her parents and the boy.

Narrative Summary
Ruby is a young Black girl who is struggling with 'worries', represented by coloured scribbles with faces which grow throughout the story. Ruby is represented sensitively and multi-dimensionally at home, school, in a garden, at the park, taking a bus and at the cinema – her life is relatable and realistic. Illustrations of Ruby are well-developed; her skin is dark, and illustrations represent the texture of her afro hair. Facial features are generic across all characters, so her ethnic representation is dependent on illustrations of skin and hair. There are 25 background characters; 60% of them are male. They are represented in black and white so although their skin tones and hair colours are different, their ethnicity is ambiguous with the exception of her parents who you can tell are Black. Towards the end of the story, Ruby meets a White boy. This is the only character Ruby speaks to in the story and the only one also represented in colour. The story does not explore themes of race or social justice; it neither reinforces nor challenges misconceptions of prejudices and language isn't used to explore ethnicity. Ruby and the boy have power, wisdom and agency. They do not need adults to help them to work out that talking will shrink their worries. The story is relevant to children who may struggle with anxiety which is on the rise. Tom Percival is a White male illustrator and author and there is little information available about him online.

Table 41 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Ruby's Worry.*

Ruby's Worry is another example of a book that was revealed by the analytical framework to include sensitive, multi-dimensional representations in a range of relatable and realistic settings. There is no discussion of race in the story, and it is not part of the story line.

Ruby's Worry is featured in the second Reflecting Realities report (CLPE, 2019) in the Reflecting on Content section where there are different examples of how ethnicity can be represented. Percival's illustration is described as conveying "beautifully nuanced skin tones but his work goes a step further to illustrate the ways in which the nuance can be retained and effectively portrayed even in black and white illustrations" (CLPE, 2019, P14). One of the interesting things about *Ruby's Worry* is the inconsistency in the way racially minoritised characters are represented. As demonstrated in the figure below, Ruby's skin is represented as dark, and the afro texture of her hair is represented well. However, all of the other characters are in black and white, and all the child characters have very similar features regardless of whether their skin tone is light or dark or somewhere inbetween. It is clear that there are different ethnicities among the background characters from the nuance of the skin tones even in black and white, but, in my opinion, the lack of further detail in their features makes their ethnicities ambiguous.

Picture 12 – Page from *Ruby's Worry* Demonstrating Ambiguity in Illustrations.

Thomas (2019) describes 'dark girls' in fiction as both "the problem *and* the solution, always" (P139) and I was reminded of this quote at the end of the story when Ruby approaches the boy and asks him what is on his mind. Despite spending the entire story with her own worry and sadness, she approaches the boy and helps him with his worry before talking about her own. It is Ruby that finds the solution, but for the boy first. I was reminded of how Thomas (2019) describes that in fiction Black characters are often sidekicks to White characters or there to save the White character in some way. Ruby is not the sidekick in this story, but she could be interpreted as saving the White boy and it made me reflect on whether this would be a different story if both characters were Black.

The questionnaire analysis found that some authors, particularly those who had written Black characters, were misidentified by teachers as being from racially minoritised backgrounds themselves. Tom Percival was one of the authors who was misidentified as being from a racially minoritised background by more than one teacher who completed the questionnaire. Both teachers that named Tom Percival, referred back to their list of books featuring racially minoritised characters when answering the question about the author/illustrator, rather than naming him directly. This seems to suggest that there was a general presumption that books which feature racially minoritised characters must be written by a person from the same or similar background, rather than a specific misidentification of Tom Percival.

My Hair

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 13 – *My Hair* Cover. **Picture 14** – *My Hair* Page. **Picture 15** – *My Hair* Page.

Title	My Hair	Publisher	Faber & Faber
Author/Illustrator	Hannah Lee & Allen Fatimaharan	Year	2019
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Black British & Sri Lankan		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Picture Book		
Additional information	Hannah Lee was only 18 when My Hair was published. 2nd Place Diverse Book Award 2020 Shortlisted for BookTrust Storytime Prize in 2020.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	A range of realistic, relatable characters with agency – choosing their own hairstyles from a large range available.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	The story is about Black hair – ethnicity is central to this story.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	The story celebrates Black hair and its different styles. It includes accessories such as afro picks, du-rags and bonnets which would be familiar to Black children and good learning opportunity to other children.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	All characters are detailed in their features, skin colour and particularly, hair texture.
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Urban settings represented – the home, the park, the hairdressers.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	

How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	The story doesn't discuss these within it but provides opportunities for readers and teachers to discuss Black hair in a positive way.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Black characters have the power and wisdom.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Language related to Black hair is used – e.g. corn rows, afro, du-rag
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Black British author and Sri Lankan illustrator.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	The story is interesting to all children, and includes boy hair styles so it's not just for girls.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Hair texture is excellently presented and is the point of the book. Skin tone and features are varied.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Yes
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Main character	Main character	Black	F	
Mummy	Secondary	Black	F	
Daddy	Secondary	Black	M	
Waiting room x 7	Background	6 x Black 1 x White	5 X F 2 X M	
Hairdresser x 2	Background	Black	F	
Customers x 4	Background	Black	3 x M 1 x F	
Sister	Secondary	Black	F	
Brothers x 2	Secondary	Black	M	
Uncle	Secondary	Black	M	

Aunt	Secondary	Black	F	
Baby	Secondary	Black	F	
Grandma	Secondary	Black	F	
Grandpa	Secondary	Black	M	
Friends x 8	Background	Black	5 x F 3 x M	
Barbers x 2	Background	Black	M	

Character Summary
In addition to the main character, there are 30 secondary or background characters who are all Black apart from one. 18 are female and 12 are male.

Narrative Summary
My Hair is the story of a young Black girl deciding what hairstyle to have for her birthday. This book celebrates Black hair and its different styles. It includes accessories (such as afro picks, du-rags and bonnets) and language related to black hair (such as afro, corn rows and Bantu knots) which would be familiar to Black and mixed-race children and good learning opportunity for other children. The story features a range of realistic, relatable characters with agency, power and wisdom – choosing their own hairstyles from a large range available. Ethnicity is central to the story and all characters are detailed in their features, skin colour and particularly, hair texture. There are 30 secondary or background characters who are all Black apart from one. 18 characters are female and 12 are male. The story takes place in a range of urban settings - the home, the park, the hairdressers – which would be familiar to most children. Although the story doesn't discuss themes of difference or social justice, it provides opportunities for teachers and readers to discuss Black hair in a positive way. My Hair is written by a young Black British author and a Sri Lankan illustrator.

Table 42 - Completed Analytical Framework for *My Hair.*

My Hair was the only picture book that was analysed in this study that had ethnicity at the heart of the story, although the story is not *about* ethnicity. The representation and celebration of Blackness in a contemporary setting in this book provides Black children an opportunity to see themselves celebrated and other children an opportunity to see Black children in their own communities, telling their own stories.

Botelho & Rudman (2009) describe how picture books that depict distinctively Afrocentric hair can demonstrate resistance to conform to White beauty standards. What is important in *My Hair*, is that the hairstyles represented are a combination of natural hair and traditional Afrocentric hairstyles. The characters in the salon are not getting their hair chemically treated to make it look less like Black hair; there are no subtle messages that Black hair is inferior. In fact, the language used to describe Black hair in the book, is deliberately positive:

> *"the most dazzling dreadlocks, such a joy to see them swing!"*
>
> *"cool, stylish and carefree"*

At the end of the book, the main character decides to wear her hair as an afro:

> *I love my Afro when it's out,*
>
> *So BIG,*
>
> *So GREAT*
>
> *And FREE.*
>
> *My daddy says it is my crown,*
>
> *It defies gravity!*

Afro hairstyles have been a symbol of power and resistance since the 1960s, and as many Black hairstyles have been banned in the workplace and school. This includes recent incidents in the UK of Black children as young as five being sent home from school or being made to cut off dreadlocks (Dabiri, 2020). In 2022, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) created a decision-making tool for schools to prevent hair discrimination (EHRC, 2022). This guidance includes reference to hairstyles often used by people from specific racial or religious groups which it would be unlawful to discriminate against.

Many different hairstyles are represented in the book through the illustrations, and specific language is used to describe them: dreadlocks; Bantu knots; high top fade; braids; cornrows; plaits; mohawk; twist out; Afro. Many of these are the same hairstyles referenced in the EHRC guidance, suggesting that they are hairstyles that schools are most likely to discriminate against (EHRC, 2022). In addition,

specific Black hair related items are referred to and/or appear in the illustrations: Afro comb; du-rag; turban; tie-head, scarf; bonnet; cutters. The celebration of different hairstyles for both boys and girls in this book for young children and the decision for the main character to choose to wear her hair in an Afro style can be seen as a powerful symbol.

In an interview in 2019, Hannah Lee explained how as a young child the books she relied on to see a glimpse of herself were *Handa's Surprise* and the *Grace* series, both books which appeared on the list generated by the questionnaire in this study with *Handa's Surprise* being analysed earlier in this chapter. She describes this as ironic considering they were both written by White women (Metro, 2019). The *Grace* series was also mentioned by Dapo Adeola which may demonstrate how few books featuring Black characters there were in the 1990s that two contemporary authors name the same book as one of the only books they saw themselves in.

Julian is a Mermaid

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 16 – *Julian is a Mermaid* Cover. **Picture 17** – *Julian is a Mermaid* Page.

Picture 18 – Extract from US Version of *Julian is Mermaid* Demonstrating Difference to UK Version.

Title	Julian in a Mermaid	Publisher	Walker
Author/Illustrator	Jessica Love	Year	2018
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	White American		
Ethnicities represented	Afro-Hispanic		
Genre	Picture Book		
Additional information	Love's inspiration for *Julián is a Mermaid,* was a friend who transitioned later on in life. In the original version, Julian is Julián and Nana is Abuela. Won Stonewall Book Award in 2019. Won Klaus Flugge Prize in 2019.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Actions of characters are relatable – riding the subway, dressing up. Although we find out almost nothing about Julian or Nana.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	The story is set in New York, most of the characters represented are afro-Hispanic but ethnicity isn't part of the story.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	Nana accepts and encourages Julian's desire to dress up as a mermaid. This isn't presented as a problem he has to overcome.

In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	Characters are sensitively represented.
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	There is a range of urban settings – streets, subway. And a beach.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	The story is mostly told through illustration – this could allow discussion around characters' feelings. How does Julian feel when he sees the mermaids? Why does he dress up while Nana is in the bath? How does he feel when Nana sees him? Etc.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Nana – she embraces Julian's difference and takes him to the parade.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	In the original version published in the US, Julian is called Julián and Nana is Abuela. The UK version has been anglicised and Spanish references have been removed. It feels like ethnicity has been diluted.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Jessica Love is a White American who based the story on a friend who transitioned. See above for justification of writing the character.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	Yes
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Skin tone, hair texture and features are sensitively represented making the characters recognisable.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Takes place within Afro-Hispanic community in New York.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Julian	Main Character	Afro-Hispanic	M	
Nana	Main character	Afro-Hispanic	F	

Mermaids x 3	Background	Afro-Hispanic	F	
Girls playing in water x 3	Background	Afro-Hispanic	F	
Man in street	Background	Afro-Hispanic	M	
Man walking dog	Background	Black	M	
Women in street x 2	Background	Black	F	
Carnival goers x 7	Background	Black		
Carnival goers x 8	Background	Various		
Mermaids x 5	Background	Afro-Hispanic	F	

Character Summary
In addition to Julian and Nana, there are 30 background characters. The vast majority of them are from racially minoritised backgrounds with one or two who could be White, but it is difficult to tell. Of the 30 background characters, two are clearly male and 13 are clearly female. The rest are in carnival costumes, and it is not possible to tell their gender.

Narrative Summary
Julian is a Mermaid is the story of Julian and his Nana who live in New York and are of Afro-Hispanic origin. One day on the Subway, Julian sees some women dressed as mermaids on their way to the Coney Island Mermaid Parade. He wants to dress up as a mermaid and at the end of the story, Nana takes him to the parade in costume. Although we find out almost nothing about Julian and Nana's lives, they are relatable and sensitively presented characters. Nana accepts and embraces Julian's difference and his desire to dress as a mermaid and it isn't presented as a problem that needs to be overcome. The story takes place in a range of urban settings and the beach. The story is told mostly through illustration, with minimal text, and skin tone,

hair texture and features are sensitively represented making the characters recognisable. The illustrations allow and promote discussion around feelings – How does Julian feel when he sees the Mermaids? Why does he dress up while Nana is in the bath? How does he feel when she sees him? In addition to Julian and Nana, there are 30 background characters – almost all of them appear to be Black or Afro-Hispanic and the majority are female. Jessica Love is a White American woman who based the story on the gender transition of a friend.

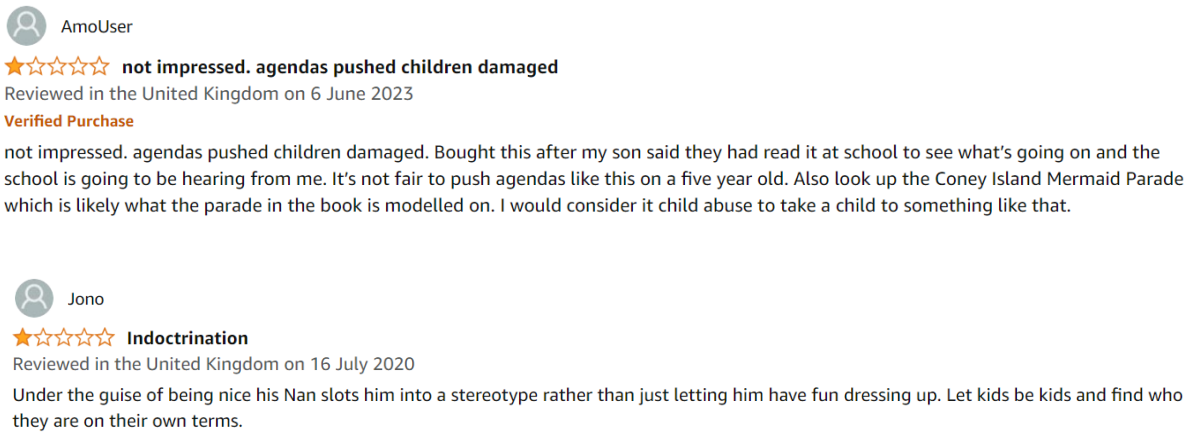
Table 43 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Julian is a Mermaid.*

The analysis of *Julian is a Mermaid* reveals that this is a picture book featuring Afro-Hispanic characters in New York where the story is mostly told through recognisable illustrations.

Julian is a Mermaid was published in 2018 in the USA and in 2019 in the UK. It won a Stonewall Book Award in 2019, a series of awards for LGBTQIA+ books (American Library Association, 2024). In the USA, there has been controversy around its inclusion in curriculum for primary aged children and several areas where parents have demanded it is removed (Baquero, 2022; Hicks, 2023). In the UK In 2019, parents protested in Birmingham about its inclusion in the No Outsiders reading list (www.no-Outsiders.com), a programme that aims to teach children about protected characteristics (BBC News, 2019). In 2022, Fox News ran an article about New York City's Department for Education's book recommendations which included *Julian is a Mermaid*. The article states that New York City is "pushing transgenderism" to children in Kindergarten with the inclusion of books like *Julian is a Mermaid* which teach about LGTBQ+ "and other left-wing issues" (Grossman, 2022).

This seems unusual as the book does not explicitly discuss gender, transgenderism or any LGTBQ+ issues; it is the story of a boy who wants to dress up as a mermaid.

The book has a 5-star rating on Amazon.co.uk, but there are negative reviews which include references to "agendas pushed" and "indoctrination" of children:


AmoUser

★☆☆☆☆ **not impressed. agendas pushed children damaged**

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 6 June 2023

Verified Purchase

not impressed. agendas pushed children damaged. Bought this after my son said they had read it at school to see what's going on and the school is going to be hearing from me. It's not fair to push agendas like this on a five year old. Also look up the Coney Island Mermaid Parade which is likely what the parade in the book is modelled on. I would consider it child abuse to take a child to something like that.

Jono

★☆☆☆☆ **Indoctrination**

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 16 July 2020

Under the guise of being nice his Nan slots him into a stereotype rather than just letting him have fun dressing up. Let kids be kids and find who they are on their own terms.

(Amazon.co.uk, 2024)

In contrast to these negative views from a minority of parents, Sciurba and Bell (2022) describe *Julian is a Mermaid* and its sequel *Julian at the Wedding* as books which disrupt CIS heteronormative tropes often found in children's literature and as a "queertopia" where gender and sexual identity are sources of "joy, communication and connection". As stated in the narrative description of the book

above, Julian's desire to dress up as a mermaid is not presented as a problem that needs to be overcome which makes it different from other children's books (Sciurba and Bell, 2022).

Interestingly, the original version of *Julian is a Mermaid* published in the US, is different from the version published in the UK (see Picture 18 Above). In the American version, the main character is Julián and the story starts:

"This is a boy named Julián. And this is his abuela."

Compare this to the UK version:

"This is a boy named Julian. And this is his nana."

Although these are the only changes in the book, they seem significant. The anglicisation of the Spanish 'Julián' to the English 'Julian', and the translation of abuela to nana effectively Whitewashes this book for an English audience. These two words are the only references within the story to its Hispanic context, and although nana is a translation of the word abuela, I would argue that the word nana does not hold the cultural significance that 'abuela' has in Hispanic Culture where 'abuela' is often seen as the root of the family who passes on traditions to the next generations, and a source of friendship and storytelling (Whitaker, 2022; Wonderopolis, 2011). Presuming this translation decision was made due to the significant smaller number of Spanish speakers in the UK compared to the US, removing the word 'abuela' removes not only an important part of the context of the story, but also a trigger for research and learning. *Julian is a Mermaid* was the one books Rachel mentioned in her interview that the children in her class really loved and were consistently engaged by. The opportunity for Rachel to research what abuela means and give the story more context by teaching her year 1 class about Hispanic or Latinx culture, or just to learn some Spanish, has been translated away. In my experience, young children love to learn words in new languages and what fun they might have to not only enjoy the story, but to play with the word abuela and for Rachel to perhaps use it as an opportunity to introduce more language learning.

Little Leaders. Bold Women in Black History

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 19 – Little Leaders Cover. **Picture 20** – Little Leaders Page. **Picture 21** – Little Leaders Page.

Title	Little Leaders. Bold Women in Black History	Publisher	Penguin
Author/Illustrator	Vashti Harrison	Year	2018
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Black		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Illustrated Non-fiction		
Additional information	Features women born between 1788 and 1960. Won NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literacy Work – Children 2018.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Chosen life stories are presented sensitively. Agency is emphasised and their successes are relatable and realistic
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	All are Black, being 'firsts' or overcoming adversity
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	It challenges the whitewashing of history
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	All forty women featured in the book have the same face and body. Their clothing and accessories are changed to identify them, but they are identical otherwise. This would not help children to identify these forty women in photographs or real life. Vashti states in the introduction to the book "I designed them to be interchangeable because I want you, the reader, to see yourself in any one of them, and to feel their strength and possibility in you."

How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	There are no 'settings' in this book.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	All forty women are doing things which challenge dominant ideologies including White supremacy and patriarchy
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	This book is a good starting point for discussions around slavery, racial segregation, racism and other social justice themes.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	In most stories, the power and wisdom is with men and/or White people and the women fight for their own power and wisdom.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	All forty women are Black, this is clear from the title, so language doesn't need to be used to explore ethnicity.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Vashti Harrison is a Black woman.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	Mini biographies are interesting and accurate.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Although all forty have identical faces, they do have different skin tones and hair textures which are well-represented.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Majority of women featured are American, but some are British.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Narrative Summary
Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History is a collection of illustrated mini biographies of forty Black women who have all achieved 'firsts' or overcome adversity in their lives to challenge dominant ideologies including White supremacy and patriarchy. The mini biographies are interesting and accurate and are a good starting point for discussions around slavery, racial segregation, racism and other social justice themes as for most of them, the power and wisdom sit with men and White people rather than the Black women. This book challenges the Whitewashing of history. All forty women featured in the book have the same face and body, but skin tones and hair texture are different and well-represented. Their clothing and accessories are changed to identify the different women, but their faces are identical otherwise. This would not help children to identify these forty women in photographs or real life but the author designed them to be interchangeable so children could see themselves in them. There are some British women featured, but the majority are American. Vashti Harrison, the author, is a Black American woman.

Table 44 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History.*

The analysis of *Little Leaders. Bold Women in Black History* shows us that this is an illustrated non-fiction book featuring 40 Black women who challenge dominant ideologies. The book could be used as a starting point for discussions around slavery or racism or just to find out more about these important figures from history.

Little Leaders. Bold Women in Black History was one of a small number of books named in the questionnaire which is a non-fiction book. Although all 40 of the women featured are Black, it is a very diverse group of women born between 1788 and 1960 who have accomplished and overcome all manner of things.

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 22 – Shirley Bassey and Mae Carol Jemison in *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History.*

Another book in this series, *Little Leaders: Visionary Women Around the World* appears in the CLPE's second Reflecting Realities report as an example of a book where "artistic talent, sensitivity and attention to detail resulted in beautifully authentic and varied rendering of skin tones and complexion" (CLPE, 2019, P13). It goes on to state that Harrison's illustration style "manages to marry its magical quality with a delicately observed acknowledgement of the breadth and variation of human skin tones and hair textures" (CLPE, 2019, P13).

The attention to detail and carefully observed tones appear in *Bold Women in Black History* too. However, all 40 of the Black women represented in this book have the same face and are illustrated with their eyes closed. The example in Picture 22 above demonstrates this in the illustrations of Welsh singer Shirley Bassey and American NASA astronaut Mae Carol Jemison.

In the introduction to the book, Harrison says:

> *"I designed them to be interchangeable because I want you, the reader, to see yourself in any one of them, and to feel their strength and possibility in you."*

Although it sounds like it was a deliberate design choice to make all the women look alike, it makes me question whether a child who has read this book would be able to recognise the women featured within in it in photographs or other illustrated books. I think this is an issue more generally with illustrated non-fiction picture books and would recommend that teachers use real pictures alongside illustrations of important figures.

The Proudest Blue

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 23 – The Proudest Blue Cover. **Picture 24** - The Proudest Blue Page. **Picture 25** – The Proudest Blue Page.

Title	The Proudest Blue. A Story of Hijab and Family	Publisher	Andersen Press
Author/Illustrator	Ibtihaj Muhammad with S.K. Ali & Hatem Aly	Year	2020
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Black/Indian/Egyptian		
Ethnicities represented	Black with multiethnic background characters.		
Genre	Picture fiction		
Additional information	Goodreads Choice Award Nominee.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	The two sisters and their mum are represented sensitively and multi-dimensionally. The first day back to school wearing a Hijab is presented as a special occasion and the prejudice that may face is represented realistically.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	Ethnicity, combined with Islam, is central to the story which is about wearing a Hijab. Although the book does not mention Islam directly.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	Asiya experiences prejudice at school when she wears her Hijab. Mama's words counteract this, so it does not affect her. "Don't carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them."
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	Characters are represented with a range of ethnicities through skin colour, hair texture and features.
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	The story takes place in an urban home, streets and school. It also refers to the sea and the sky through analogies about the blue Hijab.

How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	The story explores Islamophobia through demonstrating a child laughing at the Hijab. This character is blurred and has no face and therefore no power in the story.
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	There are opportunities to discuss feelings around being laughed at, being proud and difference.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Asiya, Faizah and their Mama have all the power and wisdom in the story.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	The word Hijab is the only work used to identify ethnicity and it is used consistently throughout the story.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Ibtihaj Muhammad is a Hijab wearing Black American Muslim woman.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	The story is about sibling bonds, pride and belief and uses authentic language.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	In addition to the main characters, there is a multi-ethnic cast of background characters who are recognisable.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Set in USA.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Mama		Black	F	“The first day of wearing Hijab is important. It means being strong” “Don’t carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them.”
Asiya	Main character’s older sister	Black	F	Gets her first Hijab for going back to school.
Faizah	Main Character	Back	F	
Character who laughs at Asiya		White	M	Blacked out – has no face or ethnicity. ‘I’m going to pull that tablecloth off your head’
Teacher	Background	Asian	F	

Character Summary
The main characters are Black. A White boy bullies Asiya. Background characters – four female and three male. Three Black, four White and one Asian. Four background characters are so in the background that you cannot tell their gender or ethnicity.

Narrative Summary
The Proudest Blue tells the story of two sisters, Asiya and Faizah, and their mother as they navigate a significant day in their lives. It is Asiya's first day at school wearing a Hijab, the event is marked as a special and proud occasion. Ethnicity and Islam are central to the story, though Islam is not mentioned explicitly. The story explores Islamophobia; Asiya faces prejudice at school when a child mocks her Hijab. However, her mother's wise words equip her with resilience: "Don't carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them." The story gives power and wisdom to the sisters and their mother, while the prejudice they encounter is diminished in importance—represented by a blurred, faceless figure that holds no power in the narrative. The book celebrates sibling bonds, pride, and belief, using authentic language and a thoughtful depiction of identity. It also offers opportunities to discuss complex emotions, including dealing with prejudice, standing strong in one's identity, and feeling proud of differences. The illustrated story is set in an urban environment in the USA at home, on the streets, and at school. Imagery of the sea and sky is woven in to draw parallels with the Hijab's colour and symbolism. The background characters in the book form a diverse cast, reflecting a range of ethnicities through varied skin tones, hair textures, and features. Written by Ibtihaj Muhammad, a Hijab-wearing Black American Muslim woman and S.K. Ali, a Hijab-wearing Canadian Indian Muslim woman. Illustrated by Hatem Aly, an Egyptian Muslim illustrator.

Table 45 - Completed Analytical Framework for *The Proudest Blue.*

The analysis of *The Proudest Blue* highlights how ethnicity and religion are central to the story through the symbol of the hijab despite there being no direct references to Islam. The story explores Islamophobia through depiction of childish playground bullying. The girls and their mother have the power and wisdom in the story with the bully's face blanked out. Alford & Yousef (2023) suggest this is an attempt to make them appear less powerful than the girls.

The story is set in an urban environment which would be familiar to many children but includes symbolic imagery of the sea and sky and the colour of the Hijab. Griffin (2021) describes how the colour blue and references to the ocean represent the power of faith and the ability to turn negativity around to highlight the beauty of both the actual hijab and the practice of hijab wearing more generally. Alford & Yousef (2023) explain that blue is significant to Islam and often used in Islamic religious architecture. Permatasari & Murtiningrum (2023) suggest that the colour blue is the most dominant symbol in the book because it appears in the title, dominates the illustrations and is the most frequently used word in the story.

Starting the story with the family buying the Hijab presents it in a normal everyday way (Alford & Yousef, 2023). The hijab is an important symbol for Muslim women, linked to both religion and culture, and is commonly misinterpreted in the Western media (Alford & Yousef, 2023). It has been banned in schools across Europe and in certain industries, so some Muslim women wear it as a sign of pride or resistance (Alford & Yousef, 2023). In The Proudest Blue, the Hijab is personified as something friendly and non-threatening:

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 26 – Page from *The Proudest Blue* Demonstrating Personification of the Hijab.

'*Her hijab smiles at the me the whole way*'.

Alford & Yousef (2023)'s analysis of The Proudest Blue begins with a reaction from a year 6 child who states that the story is about bullying and is relevant for everyone, not just those who wear the hijab.

> *"She emphasises that for her, the key message is that girls who wear the hijab are both special and normal so its power lies in normalising a visible marker of difference 'when people say something is special, they mean it as unique, but special and normal it's like they are normalising something which is pretty nice. It's better than just special'."* (Alford & Yousef, 2023, P306).

Alford & Yousef (2023) show how this book draws attention to the question of who gets to tell the stories we share with children. In Chapter 2, I discussed the rise in popularity of celebrity authors and

how they are often dismissed as not good enough for the classroom; Alford & Yousef (2023) draw attention to this story being written by an Olympic fencer with lived experience of the hijab who should indeed have a place in our classrooms alongside well-known children's literary authors.

Griffin (2021) suggests teachers use the symbolism in The Proudest Blue to engage children in discussion around why the colour blue and the comparisons with the ocean are important in the story. Alford & Yousef (2023) suggest that teachers can use the book to demonstrate cultural identity and as a starting point for a discussion with older primary children around discrimination.

The Boy at the Back of the Class.

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 27 – *Boy at the Back of the Class* Cover.

Title	The Boy at the Back of the Class	Publisher	Hachette
Author/Illustrator	Onjali Q Rauf	Year	2018
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Bangladeshi		
Ethnicities represented	Various		
Genre	Children's novel		
Additional information	Won Blue Peter Book Award in 2019. Won Waterstone's Book Award in 2019.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Range of characters presented multi-dimensionally living relatable and realistic lives.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	The 'Boy' is a Syrian refugee and there is a discussion of negative reactions to refugees as part of the story.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	The story challenges negative misconceptions and prejudice about refugees.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	N/A
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Urban school and city setting.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	The story explores refugees and racism in a child-friendly way through the eyes of children.
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	Meaningful discussion about refugees is encouraged through the innocent perspectives of the children, prejudiced adults and informed adults.

Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	The children have power, wisdom and agency. Taking things into their own hands and trying to visit the queen to get her to listen to the plight of refugees.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Ethnicity is identified through reference to physical appearance (E.g. afro and turban), names (E.g. Mrs Khan) and countries referred to (E.g. Indonesia Nigeria and Syria).
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Onjali Q Rauf is a British Bangladeshi woman inspired to write the story after hearing about Alan Kurdi, the 3-year-old boy who died crossing the Aegean Sea with his family and visiting refugee camps in Calais.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	Excellent, engaging, interesting story.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	N/A
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	British
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
I	Narrator	Mixed race – Indonesian and Austrian.	F	Nearly 10
Mum		Indonesian	F	Librarian. Works long hours.
Mr Thompson			M	
Dad	Died when narrator was 6	Austrian	M	
Tom	Best friends		M	Short spiky hair, moved from America, 3 older brothers.
Josie	Best friends		F	Large brown eyes, a million freckles. 'My dad said refugee Kids are dangerous and that they lie and steal things.'

Michael	Best friends	Mixed race – Nigeria & France	M	The neatest puffiest afro out of all the boys in our year. Glasses always broken. Clever. Rich. Dad professor; Mum lawyer.
Mrs Khan	New teacher		F	Extra bouncy hair and always smells of strawberry jam.
Mrs Sanders			F	
Ahmet	Refugee	Syrian	M	Short dark hair, large eyes that hardly blinked and smooth pale skin. From Syria. Speaks Kurdish.
Clarissa	Sits next to Ahmet		F	Friend Dena had left
Jennie	Next class, famous for knowing everything		F	Longest hair in school.
Mr Owen			M	Sorry for Mrs Khan as boy would be difficult to deal with
Mrs Timms			F	Sorry for Mrs Khan as boy would be difficult to deal with
Woman in red scarf	Picks Ahmet up	Syrian	F	
Brendan Brooker	Bully		M	
Liam	Brendan's friend		M	
Chris	Brendan's friend		M	
Nigel	Taddle Tale		M	
Mrs Grimbsy	Nelly's grandmother		F	It'll cause trouble – they're only coming over to take our jobs. Wouldn't trust one as far as I could throw 'em. It's our kids who will suffer.
Mr Brown	Charlie's dad.		M	Long beard. Doesn't agree with Mrs Grimsby.
Charlie	Mr Brown's son.		M	Gets in trouble
Nelly	Year below		F	Very popular for burping.
Uncle Lenny	Mum's brother		M	Visits once a week.
Aunt Christina	Married to Uncle Lenny		F	
Jacob	Lenny & Christina's son		M	2
Mrs Abbey	Next door neighbour		F	Old & has trouble walking.

Officer Denny	Gave speech about war		M	
Parvinder	In class		F	
Dean	In class		M	
Felicity	In class		F	
Natasha	In class		F	
Ms Hemsi	TA supporting Ahmet		F	Scarf on head. It looked like a silver river and had a diamond clip that looked like a star.
Mr Irons	Teacher		M	Strict. Moustache. Shouts at Ahmet and gives him detention.
Aunt Selma	Lives in Turkey		F	Not real aunty, mum's best friend.
Uncle Turgay	Lives in Turkey		M	
Mr & Mrs Marbles	Fruit stall owners		F/M	
Frank Smith	Supermarket worker		M	
Fruit shop man			M	Large white beard, curly moustache and bright red turban.
Mr Whittaker	School cleaner		M	
Grandma Jo	Dad's mum		F	Refugee in WW2, lives in Austria. Jewish?
Victor	School messenger		M	
Syrah	Ahmet's sister who died		F	
Mr Gaffer	Deputy head		M	
Foster mum			F	
Mrs Finnicky	School librarian		F	Bright coloured clothes and red lipstick
Taxi driver			M	
Davinder	Paramedic		F	
Officer Martina			F	
Coldstream guards x2			M	
Mrs Gillingham	Neighbour		F	

Mr & Mrs Rashid	Neighbours		F/M	
Mr Greggs	Neighbour		M	Racist views about refugees
Mr Fry	MP		M	
Mrs Hall & Mr Myers	Journalists		F/M	
Mrs Khalid	Ahmet's case workier		F	
Mr Banik	newsagent		M	
Mrs Duncan	Home office		F	

Character Summary
61 characters. 30 female and 31 male. Range of ethnicities and nationalities including mixed race, Indonesian, Syrian, Nigerian and names like Parvinder, Mrs Khalid, Mrs Khan which suggest Asian or Arabic backgrounds.

Narrative Summary
The Boy at the Back of the Class is the story of Alexa (who is not named until the end of the story) and her three best friends who make friends with Ahmet a new child in their class who they discover is a refugee from Syria. The story takes place in an urban school and city setting. There is a range of characters from different ethnic backgrounds in the book who are represented multi-dimensionally. Ethnicity is identified through reference to physical appearance (e.g. afro and turban), names (e.g. Mrs Khan) and countries referred to (e.g. Indonesia, Nigeria and Syria). The story challenges negative stereotypes of refugees and racism in a child-friendly way through the eyes of children. There are discussions of negative reactions to refugees as part of the story and meaningful discussion about this could be encouraged through exploring the innocent perspectives of the children, prejudiced adults and informed adults. The children in the story have power, wisdom and agency, taking things into their own hands and trying to visit the queen to get her to listen to the plight of refugees. Onjali Q Rauf is a British Bangladeshi woman inspired to write the story after hearing about Alan Kurdi, the 3-year-old boy who died crossing the Aegean Sea with his family and visiting refugee camps in Calais.

Table 46 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Boy at the Back of the Class.*

The analysis of *The Boy at the Back of the Class* reveals that this novel is set in an urban environment with a diverse cast of characters from a range of ethnicities. The children have agency and power and the book challenges stereotypes of refugees in a child-friendly way.

The Boy at the Back of the Class has won or been nominated for several awards since its publication in 2018, including the Blue Peter Book Award, the Waterstones Children's Book Prize, the Carnegie Medal and the Jhalak Prize. It has been adapted into a stage play which toured the UK in 2024. Nick Ahad, who adapted the book for the stage, described Rauf's book as:

> *remarkable as Harper Lee in humanising a group of people by allowing a reader to walk around in their shoes. For Lee it was Black Americans in the middle of the civil rights movement. For Onjali, it's refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in the middle of whatever this epoch will be called when more evolved humans look back in years hence.* (Ahad, 2024)

The book tackles racism and prejudice against refugees head on and is an excellent example of a book that could be used as a starting point for discussing the plight of refugees specifically, or racism more generally with children in KS2.

It is an example of a book that the CLPE defined as having a 'multicultural cast of characters' (CLPE, 2021). Some of the characters' ethnicities are named directly either through reference to countries, languages or specific identifiers. Some are implied through names, although in this case I have not completed the ethnicity section in the table above and would not recommend that teachers or anyone else using this framework presumes ethnicity based solely on a name. There are many British people from racially minoritised backgrounds with anglicised names and fewer, but still some, White British people who have taken their racially minoritised partners' names.

Hope (2023) describes an increase in the number of children's books about refugees since 2000, with a particular focus on children from Syria since 2015. For the most part these books, including *The Boy at the Back of the Class* have been received overwhelmingly positively with "unquestioning claims that these books stimulate empathy for the refugee situation" (Hope, 2023, P191). Hope (2023) suggests many of these books follow a formulaic representation of the refugee experience, often finishing with a rescue, a powerful 'White saviour' who sorts out a situation and a happy ending. *The Boy at the Back of the Class* does follow this formula, although it is a multi-cultural cast who do the saving which may be what has prevented it from coming under critical scrutiny. Vassiloudi (2019) describes how problems associated with the refugee condition are minimised in children's literature in order to focus on Western charity and a happy ending. Hope (2023) describes how very few children's books about refugees are written by people who have direct experience of displacement

themselves and as the subject has been tackled by more mainstream authors, they sometimes portray a romanticised version of the refugee experience. In the back of the book, Rauf is described as delivering emergency aid to refugee families in France which demonstrates that she does have direct experience of working with refugees, although it is represented as something she does in her spare time alongside having her head buried in a book at a local bookshop as if it is a hobby. Vassiloudi (2019) notes that references to real experience of engagement with refugee children is common in children's books about refugees:

> *They aspire to serve as conduits of transformative knowledge in the case of non-refugee children and as tools for alleviating the distress of refugee children. Authors of these narratives seem to implicitly promote themselves as militant activists in as far as they contribute to foregrounding a crucial issue; yet, such activism seems to exhaust itself in the publication of their books via commercial publishing houses, while the politics and economics of such publications remain largely unquestioned.* (P38)

Refugee Critical Race Theory, or RefugeeCrit was pioneered by Strekalova-Hughes (2019) and aims to forefront refugee voices in the discourse around their representation in children's literature. She describes how children's literature often presents a duality of countries which are either safe or unsafe, with the safe countries being represented as utopian societies. In *The Boy at the Back of the Class*, issues related to race, social justice and class are not ignored and the reality of the hostility against refugees in England is addressed. Hope (2023) developed RefugeeCrit further with a framework with which to examine books that depict the refugee experience.

Depiction of the refugee experience:

- Origins—Is the location prior to flight disclosed? Does the book suggest the cause of the conflict? Is it seen as self-created? Is the wider political and possibly imperial/colonial past touched on?
- Journey—Is the journey the main focus of the book? Is it long and perilous? Is it depicted as an exciting adventure at any point? Is the West seen as the desired destination throughout—the "promised land"?
- Rescue—Is the protagonist rescued from their situation? If so, by whom? Is there a "white saviour" involved? Are refugees the recipient of charity from a Western benefactor?
- Arrival—Is this part of the experience depicted? If so, where is the protagonist received? Do they receive a warm welcome? Are they helped by good people, perpetuating the myth of Western philanthropy?
- Ending—Is there narrative closure and a happy ending? Does this encompass a binary of safe/unsafe countries?

Profile of protagonist:

- Does the book "other" the refugee characters? Is the protagonist portrayed as a victim? Are they defined by their suffering or flight? Do they have an agential voice? Could they be admired? Do they have skills, abilities, and cultural resources? Do they have a complex identity?

The role of the reader:

- Who is the "implied reader" of the book? Could a refugee child derive pride from the story? Does the book encourage the reader to feel empathy? Does the book tend the reader towards "pity"? Does it provide ideas on ways to "make a difference"? Does it suggest the reader should feel grateful for what they have?

The positionality of the author:

- What is the author's background? In what ways are they qualified to write about this subject matter? What research have they conducted? Do they include cultural references surrounding the refugee? Do they implicitly reinforce myths of Western supremacy?

Figure 14 - RefugeeCrit Framework for Examining Books that Depict the Refugee Experience.

It would be interesting to do further analysis of *The Boy at the Back of the Class* using questions from the RefugeeCrit Framework. How this might be included in further development of the framework used in this study is discussed in the final chapter.

Cloud Busting

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 28 – Cloud Busting Cover.

Picture 29 – Illustration from Cloud Busting.

Picture 30 - Illustration from Cloud Busting.

Title	Cloud Busting	Publisher	Penguin
Author/Illustrator	Malorie Blackman Helen Van Vliet	Year	2004
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Black White		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Novel in verse		
Additional information	Won Nestle Smarties Book Prize Silver Award 2004 Shortlisted for Carnegie Medal 2004		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Sam is a normal young boy grappling with growing up and friendships represented sensitively and multi-dimensionally through different forms of poetry.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	It isn't.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	It doesn't.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	Illustrations demonstrate relationships and emotions as well as physical characteristics.
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Urban setting mainly in school, the town, the park.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	It doesn't. It explores bullying but not racist bullying. The Black character is the bully in this story.

How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	The story explores differences of perspectives, values and ideas in general and presents them as interesting and fun.
Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Power and wisdom are shown through the relationships between different children and Sam's power and wisdom to tell the story of his own wrongdoing in his own way.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Language is not used to identify ethnicity apart from one example of Davey being described as having 'light brown hair'.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Malorie Blackman is a Black British author. Helen Van Vliet is a White Dutch illustrator.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	An honest portrayal of relationships told through verse.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	Black and white illustrations accompany each chapter. Careful shading and representation of hair texture and features ensure Sam is recognisable as a Black boy.
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Yes, take place in the UK.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Sam	Main Character & class bully	Black	M	
Mr Mackie	Teacher		M	
Oliver	Friend		M	
Davey – Fizzy Feet	Bullied by Sam	White	M	"His light brown hair"
Alex	Sam's ex-best friend		F	
Alicia	Class beauty		F	
Mrs Spencer	Headteacher		F	
Mum	Sam's mum		F	
Dad	Sam's dad		M	

Pete	Friend		M	
Gennifer	Pete's cousin		F	
Lucy	Background		F	
Claudia	Background		F	
Martin	Background		M	
Davey's mum			F	
School secretary	Background		M	

Character Summary
Sam and Davey are the main characters. Sam is Black and Davey is White. The ethnicity of other characters is unknown. There is a balance of genders in the story with 8 male and 8 female characters.

Narrative Summary
Cloud Busting is the story of Sam, a normal young boy grappling with growing up and his friendship with Davey who is different to his other friends; the relationship is represented sensitively, honestly and multi-dimensionally through different forms of poetry. The story takes place in urban settings – the school, town and park which would be recognisable for most children. Ethnicity is not relevant to the story and is not described in the text. The story explores bullying, but it isn't racist bullying, and the Black character is involved in the bullying. The story explores differences of perspectives, values and ideas in general and presents them as interesting and fun. Power and wisdom are shown through the relationships between different children and Sam's power and wisdom to tell the story of his own wrongdoing in his own way. The chapters are accompanied by black and white illustrations which reveal ethnicity - careful shading and representation of hair texture and features ensure Sam is recognisable as a Black boy. The illustrations demonstrate relationships and emotions as well as physical characteristics. In addition to the main characters, there is a balance of male and female background characters. Malorie Blackman is a Black British author. Helen Van Vliet is a White Dutch illustrator.

Table 47 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Cloud Busting.*

The analysis of *Cloud Busting* demonstrates that this is a story of the relationship between two boys who happen to be of different ethnicities, but ethnicity is not described or included as part of the story either explicitly or implicitly. Of all the books which appear in this chapter, *Cloud Busting* is the one where ethnicity probably has the least relevance in terms of story line and opportunities for discussion. Teachers including books like this in their teaching or book corners is important – books which are great stories that just happen to include characters from racially minoritised backgrounds.

High Rise Mystery

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 31 - *High Rise Mystery* Cover.

Title	High Rise Mystery	Publisher	Knights Of
Author/Illustrator	Sharna Jackson	Year	2019
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Black		
Ethnicities represented	Black		
Genre	Children's novel		
Additional information	Won Waterstone's Book Prize in 2020.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Characters are multi-dimensional living relatable, realistic lives on an estate in inner-city London. The children in the story have agency and are able to solve the mystery of Hugo's death.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	It isn't.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	It neither challenges reinforces as ethnicity is incidental to the story.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	N/A
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Settings are urban London – a high-rise tower in an estate, a London market.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	It doesn't.
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	It doesn't.

Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	The Black main characters have power and wisdom. They are able to solve the crime and free their dad.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Black children are identified through very limited references to braids and kissing teeth. There is an overt reference to ethnicity in the comment 'The Black man did it' when Pap is arrested.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Sharna Jackson is Black British.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	The story is an exciting adventure of children acting as detectives to solve a murder.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	N/A
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	Represents British children of colour well through setting of London and the language children use to speak.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Hugo Knightly-Webb	Dead body	White	M	45, antiques dealer & art teacher. Curly white hair.
Norva	Main character	Black	F	13, Anika's sister. Long braids, short temper. "she kissed her teeth"
Anika 'Nik' Alexander	Narrator	Black	F	Narrator. 11, shaved head.
Barry West			M	62, grey hair. Landlord of Bermuda's.
Pap – Joseph Alexander	Nik and Norva's dad.	Black	M	39, single dad. Caretaker of The Tri. 'The Black Man did it' comment on video.
Jane Cooper			F	42, manager of The Hub. Overly sweet.
Mrs Kowalski			F	Neighbour, 60 – 150.
George Shah		Asian	M	13, tall, thin.
Nina Shah	George's mum	Asian	F	37, short, long dark hair.
Serena Knighlty-Webb	Hugo's sister	White	F	38, blonde, thin, tall.

Mark Walker			M	16, works with Pap.
Sissy St Claire			F	59, wheelchair
Katie Smyth			F	31, black hair blue eyes
Officer Burnett			M	
DCI Sharp			F	
May Burton			F	56, cloud news reporter
Ellis Silvertoe			M	Architect of estate
TrojKat			F	Singer who used to live on the estate
Timothy, the fabric man			M	American, early 40s, long brown-grey hair, green eyes, beard.

Character Summary
19 characters. 11 female, 8 male. The main characters are Black and the rest are a mix of backgrounds and ethnicities.

Narrative Summary
High Rise Mystery is an exciting adventure story about two Black sisters acting as detectives to solve a murder in their estate in inner-city London. The range of multi-cultural characters are multi-dimensional living relatable and realistic lives. The main characters have agency, power and wisdom in the story. They are able to solve a crime and help the adults around them. Black characters are represented well although ethnicity is not part of the story. There is much that British children of all backgrounds would relate to including authentic representation of young people's language. Sharna Jackson, the author, is Black British.

Table 48 - Completed Analytical Framework for *High Rise Mystery.*

The analysis of *High Rise Mystery* highlighted an example of a book which is an interesting and exciting adventure featuring main characters who have agency, power and wisdom and who just happen to be Black. However, stating that they 'just happen to be Black' minimises the importance and power of what Sharna Jackson has created with this book. Chetty & Sands-O'Connor (2024) describe the presence of two young Black detectives in British children's literature as "momentous" (p108). They describe how the language the main characters use adds to a sense of place and how ethnicity in the book is implied, with Black as the default (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024).

Within the narrative their ethnicity is barely there, with brief references to braids and "kissing teeth", and yet it is entirely there. Kissing teeth, also known as sucking teeth, refers to "the gesture of drawing air through the teeth and into the mouth to produce a loud sucking sound" (Rickford & Rickford, 1976, P 302). It is used to express anger, impatience, exasperation or annoyance and is considered rude, particularly when used by children (Rickford & Rickford, 1976). This gesture and sound originated in African countries but has spread throughout the world and is usually associated with Black culture. Like many things that started in Black culture, including the hairstyles discussed in the section on *My Hair*, it has been banned – in this case in some French schools (Samuel, 2015), an example of anti-Black policy. In researching this phenomena, Patrick & Figueroa (2002) noticed how often they found it in daily interactions, but how rarely it appears in literature. In *High Rise Mystery* it is one of the examples of a number of references which suggest that the main characters are Black. The only explicit reference to ethnicity in the book is a racist comment on a video stating 'the Black man did it', accusing Pap of the crime. This brief comment would be easy for a teacher to brush over or not pay too much attention to if reading the book aloud or using it as a teaching tool in a UKS2 class, but it provides an opportunity to begin discussions around racism.

Holes

Images have been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Picture 32 - *Holes* Cover.

Title	Holes	Publisher	Bloomsbury
Author/Illustrator	Louis Sachar	Year	1998
Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Jewish		
Ethnicities represented	Black, White, Hispanic		
Genre	Children's novel		
Additional information	Won Newbery Medal in 1999 and over 20 other awards and nominations between 1998 and 2003.		

Analytical Framework Question	Analytical Framework response
How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?	Characters of colour lack agency, but this is deliberate to highlight historical and current racism and prejudice in the judicial system.
How is ethnicity relevant to the story?	In part of the story sent in the past racism and segregation is integral to the story. Zero is treated badly at Camp Green Lake because he is Black.
How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups?	The story challenges racism.
In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded?	N/A
How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?	Settings include urban and rural in the present day and historical settings.
How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)?	The story explores racism, negative attitudes towards mixed race relationships, and racism in the judicial system.
How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?	There are several opportunities to discuss racism in the story although the story would also be enjoyable without stopping to discuss the themes.

Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?	Power and wisdom are with the White people in the story, this is deliberate to highlight racism.
How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or compromising quality of writing?	Language is direct – e.g. Black, Hispanic to describe ethnicity and accurate – e.g. the use of the word negro during the flashback parts of the story which is the word that would have been used.
Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?	Louis Sachar is a Jewish American writer.
Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent of the representation is contains?	The story is interesting, has intrigue and jeopardy and is an adventure mystery.
How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?	N/A
Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?	The story takes place in Texas, USA.
Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?	

Character	Involvement in story	Ethnicity	Gender	Notes
Stanley Yelnats	Child – main character	White	M	Poor family. Overweight & teased “Stanley was thankful there were no racial problems” P84 Teaches zero to read
Mrs Bell	Teacher who humiliated Stanley		F	
Stanley’s father Stanley III			M	Inventor
Mr Sir			M	
Mr Pendanski			M	
Alan - Squid	Child	White	M	
X-ray	Child	Black	M	‘the black kid’/ Glasses. “The White boy sits around while the black boy does all the work”
Jose – Magnet	Child	Hispanic	M	

Theodore – Armpit	Child	Black	M	
Ricky - Zigzag	Child	White	M	
Zero	Child	Black	M	Can't read Runs away
Clyde Livingstone			M	Stanley stole his sneakers
Derrick Dunne			M	Bullied stanley at school
Elya Yelnats	G G Grandfather	Latvian	M	Pig Stealer
Myra Menka			F	Elya in love with
Igor Barkiv			M	Wants to marry Myra
Madame Zeroni	Egyptian woman		F	Dark skin and a very wide mouth. Wheelchair – no left foot.
Sarah Miller			F	Elya is in love with
The Warden			F	
Kissin Kate Barlow		White	F	Robbed G Grandfather School teacher on lake 110 years ago Rejected Trout Walker Falls in love with Sam Shoots the sheriff & goes on the run
	G Grandfather		M	Pig Stealer's son
Trout Walker		White	M	Took class with Kate Barlow. Son of rich man Rejected by Kate Shoots Sam
Dr Hawthorn		White	M	Doctor on Green Lake 110 years ago
Sam The Onion Man		Black "a negro"	M	Donkey called Mary Lou People visit for health advice. Fixed school roof
Hattie Parker		White	F	Sees Sam and Kate kissing
Sherrif		White	F	Wants to kiss Kate & hang Sam
Linda Miller		White	F	Marries Trout & tries to make Kate show them where her loot is buried

Brian Twitch			M	New boy
Gladys Tennyson			F	Daughter saved by Sam
Hattie Parker			F	Butcher's wife
Jim Parker			M	Butcher
Mr Pike			M	Owned general store
Ms Morengo		Hispanic	F	"She appeared to be Hispanic with straight black hair and dark eyes. She spoke with a little bit of a Mexican accent, trilling her rs.
Texas Attorney General			M	

Character Summary
There are 33 characters – 21 M and 12 F. 4 characters are Black, 2 are Hispanic and the rest are White.

Narrative Summary
Holes is an adventure mystery that intertwines historical and contemporary narratives to expose and critique racism and prejudice. Set in Texas, the story alternates between the present day and a past shaped by segregation and racial injustice. It confronts issues like systemic racism in the judicial system and societal prejudices against interracial relationships. Black characters, such as Zero, lack agency in the narrative—a deliberate choice to highlight the impact of racism, both historically and in present-day contexts. Zero's treatment at Camp Green Lake reflects broader societal inequities, creating opportunities for meaningful discussions about race and power dynamics. The narrative is framed by historical flashbacks where language, including terms like "negro," is used authentically to reflect the time period. Power and wisdom rest with White characters, a deliberate representation to underscore racial disparities. The story's settings are diverse, spanning urban and rural locations and contrasting past and present. Louis Sachar is of Jewish American background. Although the book encourages exploration of social justice themes, it stands up as an adventure story.

Table 49 - Completed Analytical Framework for *Holes.*

The analysis of *Holes* reveals that racism and prejudice are central to the story, with historical and contemporary narratives intertwined to create a mystery that exposes racism despite it not being the main focus of the actual story plot. The historical part of the story takes place in the late nineteenth century during a time when racism and segregation were a normal part of life in the US and explores societal prejudices against interracial relationships. The contemporary part of the story explores racism in the judicial system. Mollegaard (2010) describes how in *Holes* "Echoes of slavery and the legendary lawlessness of the frontier mingle with present day systems of inequality and injustice, creating a strong tension between past and present" (P 142). Race and ethnicity are presented using direct language – there is no hinting; characters are described using terms such as 'Black' 'White' and 'Hispanic'. During the historical narrative, the term 'negro' is used to describe Sam – a term which would have been used during that period. Power, wisdom and agency in the story is with the White characters and this is deliberate to highlight historical and contemporary racism, particularly within the judicial system. Wannamaker (2006) describes the depictions of race in *Holes* as "complex and contradictory" (P 21) because it is simultaneously trying to say that race is not an issue at the same time as race being central to what happens to some of the characters. According to Wannamaker (2006), the way that Holes makes contemporary racism a part of the continuum of history is one of its more important and positive aspects. The book exposes White privilege, and you could argue that on the surface this seems like a 'White saviour' story where a racially minoritised character is only able to reach their potential by being helped or rescued by a White character acting from a superior position. But Stanley represents a positive and pro-active model of Whiteness and can therefore act as a role model for White readers (Wannamaker, 2006). Coats (2004) states that one of the things that makes *Holes* so interesting is the way that it "quite unashamedly suggests that all of nature is under strain because of the failures of White honor" (P 135).

The complexity around the way that race and racism are presented in the book means that although it presents several opportunities for teachers to discuss racism with their classes, many teachers may not feel confident to do so without support. Holes is a book often used in UKS2 in the UK and there are many guided reading resources online to support teachers in using this book as part of reading comprehension. The majority of resources that I have seen, do not fully address the issues of race in the book and would not adequately support teachers in having those discussions.

Pinsent (2002) describes *Holes* as having lots in common with a traditional fairy tale despite the story feeling like a tale of gritty realism. In particular the themes of fate, fortune, curse and treasure which work together to ensure the happy ending, and the polarisation of good and evil characters (Pinsent, 2002). Wannamaker (2006) explores how *Holes* is sometimes seen as a useful book for getting boys interested in reading due to the two main characters being boys. However, the depictions of

masculinity in the book are stereotypical and reinforce hegemonic ideas about how boys should behave (Wannamaker, 2006).

Summary of Analysis

Representation of Ethnicity

The analysis of the most frequently mentioned children's books from the questionnaire demonstrated that there was a variety of different kinds of books and different representations of ethnicity. While books like *My Hair* and *Little Leaders* place ethnicity at the forefront, others, such as *Ruby's Worry*, *High Rise Mystery* and *Cloud Busting*, treat it as incidental. This allows for both celebration of culture and normalisation of diversity. It is important that teachers have access to a range of books that both support conversations about race and ethnicity and include diversity of representation without the need for it to be a discussion point. The fact that there was a range of both types of books in the list mentioned by teachers in this research is positive. Returning to the quote from the 2022 Reflecting Realities report which was discussed in the Literature Review, we can see that the majority of the books being used by teachers who took part in this research, did indeed meet these criteria:

> *"Reflecting realities in picturebooks means the cultivation of well-drawn, sensitively rendered multi-dimensional characters with agency, who are identifiable, relatable, nuanced, varied and are central to the narrative."* (CLPE, 2023b, P15)

Handa's Surprise was the only book which contained a more limited racial representation by only presenting a stereotype of rural "exotic" Africa.

There were examples of books where characters have strong agency and power such as *Look Up!* and *High Rise Mystery* where the female characters influence their communities and solve problems independently. In contrast, *Holes* deliberately presents racially minoritised characters who lack agency in order to critique racism and social inequality in both the past and present. In terms of illustration, *Look Up!* and *My Hair* stand out in their representation of diverse, accurate skin tones and hair styles.

The majority of books which were analysed in this chapter have racially minoritised characters who are Black. Some books have other ethnicities represented too but books featuring black characters were far more frequently mentioned in the questionnaire than any other ethnicity.

Settings

There were several books in the selection, such as *High Rise Mystery*, *The Boy at the Back of the Class* and *Look Up!,* which are set in everyday familiar settings which present diverse urban communities. *My Hair* does this alongside presenting specific cultural references to Blackness. In contrast, the UK version of *Julian is a Mermaid* dilutes the Hispanic cultural references for a UK audience. *The Boy at*

the Back of the Class represents a familiar setting at the same time as addressing a large global issue, the refugee crisis.

Some books, such as *Handa's Surprise* and *Holes* are set in specific geographical locations. Although there is some representation of parks and gardens in the books in this chapter, the majority of the settings are urban, with the exception of *Handa's Surprise* which takes place in rural Kenya and would be less familiar to children in British primary schools. Something that is missing, was racially minoritised characters in rural UK settings. The majority of people from racially minoritised backgrounds in the UK, live in cities and other urban areas but so do the majority of White people and there is no lack of White children in rural settings in children's literature (Chetty & Sands-O'Connor, 2024).

Themes & Opportunity for Discussion

Several of the books challenge stereotypes and could be used by teachers to draw attention to or discuss this. For example, *Look Up*! challenges gender and racial stereotypes by portraying a Black girl as an astronaut. *Holes* explores themes around systemic racism and *The Boy at the Back of the Class* addresses the prejudice against refugees in the UK directly. There is opportunity to discuss beauty standards through the celebration of natural Black hair in *My Hair,* and opportunities to discuss emotions and identity in both *Julian is a Mermaid* and *Ruby's Worry.*

Gender

All of the picture books have female main characters except *Julian in a Mermaid* which features a character who wants to dress as a girl. This suggests there is a gap in teachers' knowledge of children's picture books which represent both racially minoritised and male characters. Rachel, interviewed in chapter 4, was an exception to this with her gender balanced selection of books, but this could have been because she purchased a pack of books.

In an interview with Dapo Adeola, *the illustrator of Look Up!,* he remembers the only picture book he had when he was a child which had a Black character was *Amazing Grace* and discusses the lack of male racially minoritised characters available when he was a child (Drabble & McFarlane, 2020). The lack of boys represented in this collection of picture books raises the question of whether this is still an issue of availability (Thomas (2019) suggests that the vast majority of Black protagonists in Young Adult fiction are female) or whether it is an issue of teachers' knowledge of picture books.

The representation of gender within the novels in this chapter is much more balanced.

Awards

All of the books featured in this chapter have won or been nominated for children's book awards including the awards which were discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4 we saw that almost 60% of teachers in the questionnaire said that they did not use book awards to get recommendations of books, but the discussion went on to demonstrate how award winning or nominated books often end up in classrooms anyway as they are marketed by publishers and book sellers and so teachers are more likely to be aware of them.

This collection of books analysed in this chapter demonstrates the way that the framework can be used to consider the range of approaches in children's literature when it comes to representation and storytelling. The framework supports teachers in noticing that while some books focus on celebration and identity, others tackle pressing societal themes. Together, the framework and the narrative summaries, provide a toolkit for teachers to explore diversity, inclusion, and empathy within the literature they are using in their classes and schools.

Chapter 7 - Discussion of Findings and Future Implications

This research developed out of my converging interests in issues related to race and ethnicity in education, and my interest in children's literature. While developing trainee teachers' racial literacy through children's books, I began to wonder what was happening in schools and what impact being in a predominantly White area might have. This wondering developed into my research questions. This thesis demonstrates that national progress in representation documented by Reflecting Realities (CLPE, 2018–2024) does not automatically translate into classroom practice in predominantly White areas. Teachers' subject knowledge is uneven and shaped by social media and schemes rather than racial literacy and critical evaluation. The consequence is a practice gap: representation agendas risk being perceived as "for other schools," precisely where CRT would locate the normalisation of Whiteness and colourblindness. The framework developed during this research is a practical tool to close this gap.

The findings show that teachers' interpretations of children's identities, and their own, shape how they select and use literature. CRT and CWS help explain why practitioners in predominantly White areas may struggle to recognise the significance of racialised identities when choosing texts. Without explicit racial literacy training, teachers may default to colourblind practices that obscure how identity shapes experience.

This chapter will answer the four research questions that were set out in the introduction:

RQ1. What books featuring racially minoritised characters are being used in teaching in primary school classrooms nationally, and in a predominantly White area (Norfolk & Suffolk)?

RQ2. How do teachers express their subject knowledge of books featuring racially minoritised characters?

RQ3. Where does teachers' subject knowledge of books featuring racially minoritised characters come from?

RQ4. What can we learn from an analysis of the most common books being used in classrooms?

I will start with an overview of the diversity in representation of books used in primary schools which will answer RQ1; the section on the impact of subject knowledge on text selection will answer RQ2; RQ3 will be answered in the section on teachers' decision making and finally, the section on representation of ethnicity will answer RQ4. Following this summary of the research I will discuss the

study's implications for policy and practice and its limitations and recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Diversity in Representation of Books used in Primary Schools.

Findings from the questionnaire and interviews demonstrated that there is a range of books featuring racially minoritised characters being used in primary schools across the UK, although teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk are less likely to be using them and there is a significant gap in the representation compared with books featuring predominantly White characters. 22% of the teachers from Norfolk and Suffolk that responded to the questionnaire, had not read any books with characters from a racially minoritised background with their class or used them as part of teaching. Where books with racially minoritised characters are being used in Norfolk and Suffolk, the books are more likely to feature Black or South Asian characters than any other ethnicities. This may have been a deliberate attempt to reflect the ethnic groups represented in individual schools or classrooms, although there is no evidence to suggest that kind of careful choice in either the questionnaire or the interviews. Botelho (2021) states that we must question whose culture gets reflected in children's literature and how often, because children's books are resources for identity work. A range of texts about different ethnic groups allows children to see and develop an understanding of diversity within cultural communities (Botelho, 2021) and we need to see not just more representation in this region, but a wider representation of different communities and within communities. The majority of the books analysed in Chapter 6 featured Black characters, but this may have been due to the timing of the questionnaire. This took place in Spring 2021, just a few months on from the Black Lives Matter protests of Summer 2020 and it may be that this had influenced the books being used primary classrooms at this time. Half of the questionnaire participants named a book that featured racially minoritised characters in the question about books they had read recently which demonstrates that many of these were books being used across the year, rather than just for Black History Month for example, and this is an encouraging finding.

These findings echo CRT and CWS critiques that education systems reproduce racial stratification through curriculum choices, monocultural literary canons, and colourblind pedagogies that mask structural inequalities.

The teachers in the predominantly White area were more than three times less likely to be using children's books featuring racially minoritised characters than teachers in other areas. Although this is a small sample which may not be representative, teachers completing a survey about children's literature are more likely to have an interest in it and there is a possibility that the situation is worse

than appears from the questionnaire meaning that not only are a large number of children not seeing themselves in books, but the White children across both counties are not being offered the opportunities to widen their world views through the "fresh air of windows" (Style, 1988) meeting racially diverse characters in books. The rural context of both Norfolk and Suffolk may be having an impact on this, with teachers in less diverse schools overlooking diverse texts and relying on books they are already familiar with which is likely to impact children's engagement with reading negatively. As Kirkland (2011) states in his research into engaging young Black male readers:

> *Black men like Derrick do not loathe reading; they loathe the incredible sacrifice required when reading for school. They loathe the texts working as a uniform outfit not necessarily stitched to fit them, but forged in fabrics of socialization that reshape them into something that feels strangely irregular.* (P 206)

In Summer 2024, racist rioting by right wing extremists took place across the UK targeting Black British people, British Muslims and Asylum Seekers (Olusoga, 2024). Children as young as 11 and 12 were involved in the violence (Sherlock, 2024; Payne, 2024). Understandably, teachers were concerned about how to discuss and tackle this when school reconvened in September 2024. Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) found that teachers who read children's books which explicitly dealt with race themes believed it would support their pupils' ability to understand multiple viewpoints and talk openly about racism. However, the findings of Lazar & Offenberg (2011)'s research with teachers using picture books to tackle racism, suggest that teachers often avoid directly talking about structural racism or issues of Whiteness even when they're reading books for the purpose of having difficult conversations with children about race. Even when teachers had learned about these ideas in their teacher education, they were not always able to identify and discuss them through children's literature. This was seen in Claire's interview where she talked about the importance of using children's literature to discuss issues in a non-confrontational way but then avoided directly talking about race or racism herself. Both teachers who were interviewed displayed challenges around discussing race and ethnicity using general rather than direct terms and avoiding referring to race, racism or ethnicity at all. Despite Claire's wealth of knowledge around children's literature and reading for pleasure, she was unsure how to engage children in discussions about race. This could possibly be limiting the impact of the diverse curriculum she is creating for her classroom and the wider school. In Chapter 5, the concept of being 'colourblind' when it comes to race was introduced and it is important to explore this concept in more depth here. Colourblind racism is one of what Picower (2009) called 'Tools of Whiteness', where White people claim not to see or notice a person's ethnicity. Bonilla-Silva (2015) describes how White people who do this appear moral or noble at the same time as dismissing the need for anti-racist practice. This is common among teachers who will

attempt to treat all children as 'equal', particularly in a context where political neutrality is being promoted, but in doing so fail to see that the children are working within a system where Whiteness is an advantage. If teachers see being colourblind as a virtue, they will continue to avoid conversations about racism no matter the books they are sharing in their classrooms.

In a US study, Ginsberg and Glenn (2020) used story to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices that teenagers held about Muslims, but they suggest that story alone may not have been enough to support this development. The thoughtful planning and teaching that went alongside the stories were key in their research and they go on to state:

> *Although we believe unequivocally that schools need to diversify the texts selected for classroom use, how any text is mediated through the instructional approach and practices used carries significant weight in student interest, motivation, and subsequent learning.* (Ginsberg and Glenn, 2020, P 617)

A year 6 child in Alford & Yousef (2023)'s analysis of *The Proudest Blue* describes how learning to ignore racist bullies takes years and according to Alford & Yousef (2023) this is a "lengthy emotional, cognitive and social process where teachers play a pivotal role in supporting both parties" (P307).

The implications of this are that teachers need to learn how to talk about racism, teachers need to have knowledge of racially diverse texts, and teachers need to be taught how to use these texts to talk about racism as they will not necessarily have the confidence or ability to connect these two things without explicit support. Despite the development of resources such as the Anti-Racism Framework for Initial Teacher Education/Training (https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-race-education-and-decoloniality/anti-racism-framework/) which explores how teacher educators can support teachers in developing racial literacy, and the CLPE's Reflecting Realities and Penguin's Lit in Colour reports which explore racially diverse texts published and used in schools in the UK, these resources are not being used consistently across the sector and there is a lack of training for teachers which explicitly focuses on how to use and discuss race through children's literature. This demonstrates the importance of schools not just needing book lists, books packs or diverse curricula, but also needing CPD to go with it. CPD that supports teachers in using books featuring racially minoritised characters to begin discussions with children about race, ethnicity and racism. There is currently little training for primary teachers to develop their knowledge of children's literature and CPD for Primary English tends to focus on assessment and moderation; this can lead to a disjointed and narrow understanding of English (Ofsted, 2024).

Claire's and Rachel's beliefs that children become more racist as they grow older further complicate their efforts to promote diversity, as it could suggest a passive approach to combating racism if this is

something which is simply accepted by teachers. Their efforts, though well-intentioned, may be undermined by a lack of explicit engagement with these critical issues.

Many of the questions in the framework developed in this study are an attempt to address this. The questions direct teachers to think about how ethnicity is relevant to the story, how ethnicities are represented, how dominant ideologies are explored and how power or wisdom is represented as they read. It encourages them to focus on language, on the author and to consider whether the stories exist within or outside of the child readers' own contexts. It is my hope that teachers using this framework and considering these questions as they read, would be supported in having better and more open conversations with children about race and ethnicity.

When looking at the year of publication of the most frequently mentioned books in the questionnaire, it was interesting that all but one of the picture books were written within the last five years, with the other being published in the nineties. What happened in the twenty years between? There were authors of colour publishing books consistently throughout that time which do not seem to be known to the small sample of teachers that took part in my questionnaire. I wonder if this is a combination of the focus on recently published texts and a reliance on texts remembered from when the teachers themselves were at school which has created a gap in the teachers' knowledge of children's literature featuring racially minoritised characters.

The implication of this is that a similar gap could continue to exist for future teachers if they are only taught about recently published books. Ideally, training around children's literature for teachers and book lists developed and shared with teachers should cover a range of good representation which spans the years between when they were reading children's literature themselves and when they trained to teach, in addition to recently published books.

The book analysis showed that the most commonly mentioned books from the questionnaire and interviews is, on the whole, a range of appropriate books where race and ethnicity are represented well. Two of the books analysed, *Handa's Surprise* and *Little Leaders*, only contained characters from racially minoritised backgrounds. This is not surprising as *Handa's Surprise* is the only book set outside of the UK or US and *Little Leaders* is a non-fiction book about Black women. It is also not surprising when taking into account de Bruijin et al (2020) found zero examples of this in 64 books analysed in the Netherlands, despite 42% of them having 100% White characters. Even *My Hair*, a celebration of Black hair, featured one White background character. De Bruijin et al (2020) found that books which included racially minoritised characters, had more characters in general which suggests they play a less prominent role.

Impact of Subject Knowledge on Text Selection

Teachers in the questionnaire and the interviews demonstrated some lack of knowledge and some misconceptions related to Own Voices authors.

Acevedo-Aquino et al (2020) warn that it is a mistake to presume that Own Voices authors automatically produce perfect books and that authors who write beyond their own experiences produce bad books. They go on to discuss the importance of the Own Voices movement as an act of resilience and challenge but question the use of the label "diverse" when it comes to children's literature. This label could be used to "other" books which are outside the representation of the mainstream, encourage competition between diverse and mainstream books and be used to maintain problematic concepts of 'culture' being something that is outside of the mainstream norm (Acevedo-Aquino et al, 2020). We see this in Rachel's diverse bookshelf and in the separate diverse book packs marketed to schools by publishers and booksellers rather than adding books featuring racially minoritised characters to the existing shelves, lists and packs.

Arnold and Sableski (2020) describe Own Voices literature as that which is able to build bridges rather than walls and which fosters connections rather than categorization. The Own Voices movement has been important, but it is possible that it could marginalise the very authors it sets out to support, narrowing the things they feel able to write about. An author from a racially minoritised group should not be restricted to only telling the stories of characters from that group; they are able to tell other stories just like White authors have always done. All authors need to be able to write fantasy, Sci-fi and comedy in a way that is completely unbelievable and unrelatable – when a child falls in love with the fun of the story, that is when books truly build bridges and create connections.

In June 2021, the US We Need Diverse Books organisation stopped using the term Own Voices, deciding to only use specific descriptions that authors use for themselves from then forward (WNDB, 2021). In a press release on their website, they described the term as a 'catch all' marketing term that was being used by the publishing industry and go on to describe authors being in uncomfortable and unsafe situations due to the vagueness of the term (WNDB, 2021). Owen (2023) also describes how the misuse of the term has led to online identity policing and has begun to act as a form of gatekeeping. Owen (2023) suggests that instead of focusing on identity, we consider the following:

> *How does one ethically write characters that share one's own marginalized positionalities? And how does one ethically write characters who do not share one's own positionalities?*

Jessica Love, author of *Julian is a Mermaid,* one of the books which was mentioned in both the questionnaire and interviews, writes about this on her website. She states that her greatest fear was

that someone would pick up her book because they saw themselves in it, only to feel betrayed when they discover her background:

> *"I thought about these questions ceaselessly during the 6 years I worked on the book. Do I have the right to tell this story? Is this cultural theft? Will I be doing more harm than good? Am I taking some other author/illustrator's spot? To this day I would say I spend a solid chunk of my thinking-time on these questions, and none of them have simple answers. However, at the end of the day I decided to make the book, rather than not make it. I think my decision to proceed ultimately came down to this: while the characters' backgrounds are different from my own, the essence of the story I was trying to tell is about the longing to be seen. And that is something I do know."* (Love, https://jesslove.format.com/julian-is-a-mermaid)

She goes on to explain how she did this by researching, speaking to people, examining her own biases and starting on brown paper instead of white. She describes these as "accountability practices" along with using a portion of her income from the book to support Black Lives Matter and groups working on gaining better representation for marginalised authors and illustrators.

The researchers involved in the Excluding Voices report (Inclusive Books for Children, 2024) considered the use of the term Own Voices and decided that in order to improve author representation, it was necessary to have quantitative evidence of under-representation and that the term Own Voices was still the best way of describing this.

It is important that teachers are considering authorship as part of text selection and the majority of teachers who took part in this study were using Own Voices texts in their classroom, but this number dropped significantly from 86% to 56% when analysing the data of teachers in the predominantly White area separately. These teachers were also more likely to mis-identify Own Voices texts. This gap reveals a need for CPD which includes an understanding of the impact of authors' lived experiences on literature's authenticity and cultural relevance.

Author knowledge is one of the more difficult areas for primary teachers, particularly those who are teaching younger children where they may be using hundreds of picture books in their classrooms, but also for teachers of older children who may be fitting in their reading with their curriculum or being guided by lists and schemes who do not prioritise authorship in their decision making.

The framework and narrative descriptions of children's books developed during this research, are an attempt to address this. Ethnicity of author/illustrator appears in Section A of the framework to encourage teachers using it to find out this information before they even begin analysing the text. And the narrative summaries, which could be presented alongside books lists and curricula, always include information about the authors and/or illustrators. These are deliberately created to enable descriptions of authors' ethnicities or backgrounds, rather than an 'Own Voices' box to tick because

it is not as simple as yes = good and no = bad. Teachers need to develop an understanding of how an author may ethically write a character even if they do not share a 'marginalised positionality' (Owen, 2023). An English Lead such as Claire, who reads many children's books and creates lists for the teachers in her school, could use the framework as she reads and create her own narrative summaries using it. These could then be shared alongside the lists, giving teachers information about the representation in the books as well as background information about the author. This would support teacher knowledge about authors without adding to their workload.

Teachers' Decision Making

Autonomy or Structure?

Both teachers who were interviewed, valued their autonomy in decision making when it came to choosing texts. Having that autonomy can be either a blessing or a curse depending on the teacher's subject knowledge (Cremin et al, 2008) and teachers often do not know what they do not know.

In 2021, teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk were more likely to be using a scheme for English that suggests which books to read than other respondents to the questionnaire.

This quote from a year 2 teacher in Norfolk who completed the questionnaire and was using Pie Corbett's Book spine demonstrates one of the issues related to this:

> "*Some of us are still fighting to supplement and change this to include authors and books that fit cohort needs/new publishers and so forth. This freedom to select for ourselves is diminishing constantly.*"

The introduction of the CUSP (Curriculum with Unity Schools Partnership) curriculum by the Unity Schools Partnership in September 2022 means the number of schools using a scheme in the region is likely to have gone up (CUSP, ND). Unity Schools Partnership is a multi-academy trust which has 33 schools across Norfolk and Suffolk as well as others in the eastern region. The CUSP curriculum is now used in 600 schools across the UK including in other large trusts based in Norfolk and Suffolk (CUSP, ND). The CUSP reading curriculum includes a literature spine which is diverse and highlights author gender and ethnicity to teachers using the scheme (CUSP, NDb). I have not, however, seen the literature spine so cannot comment on the quality of it.

Whether it is better for teachers to have autonomy of choice, or the structure of a pre-defined curriculum depends on both the content of the curriculum and the expertise, experience and confidence of the teacher. The questionnaire findings suggested a lack of CPD for teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk around texts featuring racially minoritised characters and this new curriculum which is

being used in many schools in the region may be an improvement on the reliance of Pie Corbett's Book Spine which was being used by almost half of teachers in the questionnaire and which is problematic in its Whiteness. What is certain is that we need to be asking the question 'who wrote this list?' whether books lists come from schemes, publishers, teachers or libraries. As Milner (2020) states:

> *A problem is that the folks who decide what books are included on lists for young people to read rarely are Black students or people who appropriately understand what piques the interests and motivation of Black students. Myopic, White, racist pedagogical, ideological, and curricular practices may result in troubling cycles that blame Black students for being unmotivated.*

20% of teachers who responded to the questionnaire, which included those working across Early Years, KS1 and KS2, stated that they chose books related to the interests of the children. This was the second highest response after 'The English Lead decides'. It is positive that teachers are taking the needs of their children into consideration but are they considering diversity and inclusion? Do they have a diverse selection of books that children can choose from in the first place?

The discussion in Chapter 4 about book awards, and the number of books analysed in Chapter 6 which had won book awards, demonstrate the significant influence that winning an award can have on the ability of a children's book to make its way into a classroom and the hands of a reader. Although this research suggests teachers may not be using the awards to directly make decisions, they are indirectly influenced by award winning books. This is why it is so important that judging panels and award criteria includes consideration of diversity.

The Influence of Social Media

The questionnaire suggested a reliance on social media for learning about new books which was echoed in the teachers who were interviewed. The overlap between the books most commonly mentioned in the questionnaire and the books which Rachel talked about in her interview suggests teachers were using common sources for ideas, such as social media, or for ordering, such as Amazon. It could also suggest the limited availability of texts.

Claire and Rachel differed in the way they were using social media to learn about children's books. Claire talked about a Reading for Pleasure Facebook page she was a member of and seeing an inappropriate book being recommended there:

> *They said, "this looks really good, I haven't read it" and I thought "no, that's a book for adults set in the Middle East" it's not a book you teach Year five. They just saw it and because it has that nice decoration on the front, they recommended it.*

And she talked about using Twitter (now called X) to engage in conversations around children's books:

> *We had a conversation on twitter about getting teachers to read. Do you expect science teachers to go home and do experiments? No, but you would expect them to read around their subject and we're a research-based profession, I would expect them to know what's up to date in science.*

For Rachel, social media was used to directly obtain books and recommended titles:

> *It's probably not the most academic way of doing it however it doesn't take up much time and it's just there for you.*

This was not surprising considering the lack of available CPD or focus on children's literature in her school. Nor was it unusual, with 93% of questionnaire respondents saying they use social media for book recommendations. This reliance on informal networks highlights a gap in formal support. Claire talked about her membership of the UKLA and using the OU Reading for Pleasure resources and how this supported her in making informed decisions regarding text choices. Her active participation in subject associations was supporting her understanding and knowledge of children's literature. But this was unusual for the teachers who took part in this study – only 14% said they used subject organisations to get recommended children's books.

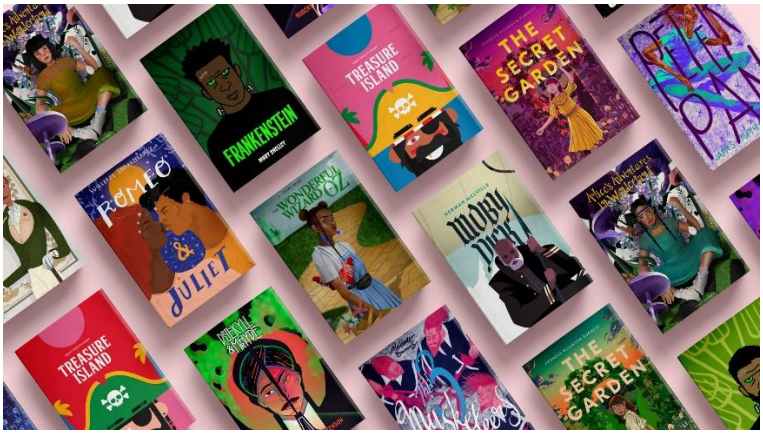
Access to Books

Schools in the East of England are less likely to have a school library than schools in other regions (CLPE, 2023) The fact that this was also the case in the Southwest of England suggests this may be down to the rural nature of the region and the number of small schools who simply cannot accommodate a library. A large proportion of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire in this research were teaching in Reception or Year 1, and as was highlighted in the Literature Review in Chapter 2, teachers in those year groups are more likely to have fewer than 100 books in their classrooms. The number of teachers in the questionnaire who said they ordered books for their classrooms through their school was much higher in Norfolk and Suffolk (53%) compared to teachers from other areas (28%). Without knowing where they are ordering books from or how they are making ordering decisions, it is difficult to know if this is a positive or negative thing.

What is evident is that there is an issue around the number of books teachers have access to and a lack of funding for schools to buy books.

It is clear from the CLPE Reflecting Realities reports that the publishing industry in the UK is making an effort to diversify the books they are publishing, however they remain a barrier to teachers accessing high quality examples of representation. In 2020 in the US, in a collaboration between Penguin Random House and the bookseller Barnes and Noble, 'Diversity Editions' of classics were

published to celebrate Black History Month (Wheeler, 2020). In these editions, some characters were coloured in using AI on the front covers. These were soon highlighted as problematic and removed from sale.



Picture 33 - 2020 'Diversity Editions' of Classic Books.

Chetty & Sands-O'Connor (2024a) describe how publishers continue to return to classic children's literature in an effort to diversify literature by publishing 'cleaned up' versions or versions that include contemporary authors illustrating them. Another way is to publish 'return to' versions, such as Katherine Rundell's *Into the Jungle: Stories for Mowgli*. Despite cleaning up the racist language in original classics, racist tropes remain a key element of these stories which can then get picked up by teachers who teach them to the children in their classes. Nel (2010) argues that removing references to skin colour or other racial language in children's literature does not remove the ideological assumptions but leads to racist and colonial messages being more subtly encoded. Nel (2010) describes this as 'dressing up racial and colonial ideologies in different costumes'. Classic children's texts are so lucrative to publishers that there is often much less space for new or minoritised authors (Ramdarshan Bold, 2022). Ramdarshan Bold (2022) describes initiatives by publishers to get racially minoritised authors to re-write versions of classics as "ornamental" (p433) and states that they do not give those authors the time to create their own content.

In 2024, the same publisher who launched the 'Diversity Editions' in the US, was criticised for publishing a book by celebrity author Jamie Oliver which stereotyped First Nations Australians (Burke, 2024). During publication, no consultation with any First Nations organisations took place and an authenticity reader (a professional who evaluates writing for its representation outside of the author's lived experience) was not used. Although the book has now been removed from sale worldwide (Snow, 2024), it was on sale for six months. How many teachers have taken the book into their classrooms and introduced inaccurate and damaging stereotypes of First Nations Australians to their children in that time? And when you see the number of five-star reviews of the book on

publishers and book sellers' websites, who could blame them? It is very important that teachers are able to critically evaluate the books they bring into their classrooms, and the framework developed through this research can support them with that, but teachers also have a huge number of other responsibilities. The responsibility to not sell children's books that include racist tropes or inaccurate stereotypes must lie with publishers.

Ramadarshan Bold (2022) describes how recent changes in the publishing industry has transformed the way books are commissioned and marketed with a small number of large companies controlling the market. It is important to remember that Penguin Random House are the same publisher who developed the Lit in Colour project so there is expertise and understanding of these issues within the organisation. It needs to be embedded throughout all areas, and the same goes for all other children's book publishers.

Representations of Ethnicity

Stereotypes, Settings and Contexts

The majority of books explored in this study included positive elements of representation. Although in Chapter 3 I argue that stereotypes are not always bad and that the comedy genre often relies on them, the kinds of stereotypes represented in books like *Handa's Surprise* which depict Africa as rural and underdeveloped and leave out modern, urban Africa can be harmful if they are the only representation of Blackness that children see. Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor (2014) describe the work required of teachers as "taking those single stories down off the shelf, adding to them a range of other stories that make historical events, people, and cultural narratives messy, more complex, and more validating to all students" (P36). Chetty and Sands O'Connor (2024b) describe how African-born British writers such as Atinuke and Sabine Adeyinka are challenging this single view of Africa in children's books by representing a wider variety of experiences. In addition, there have been fantasy stories recently published in the UK based on traditional African tales (Chetty and Sands O'Connor, 2024b). It is this sort of range of representation across genres that we need to see in classrooms.

In contrast, books such as *Look Up!* and *My Hair* provide children with multi-dimensional portrayals of Blackness, featuring children having everyday experiences that are relatable for many different children. Picture books such as *Julian is a Mermaid* and *Look Up!* include familiar urban and community settings which makes them accessible to a range of diverse readers.

The question about genre in my analytical framework is there as a reminder that teachers need a range of genres in their classrooms, so children see themselves reflected in comedy, fantasy, romance and everything in between.

Agency and Realistic Portrayal

The characters in novels such as *The Boy at the Back of the Class* and *High Rise Mystery* demonstrate relatable agency. The children in the stories face challenges and solve their problems independently without relying on adults or White saviours. The title character of *Ruby's Worry* was also able to face her mental health issues without adult intervention, although the representation of background characters in this picture book was less distinct.

Opportunity for Discussion

Many of the books named in this study provided opportunities for meaningful discussion. *The Boy at the Back of the Class*, in particular, could be a vehicle for exploring and discussing refugee experiences and racism. *My Hair* is a celebration of Black hair which highlights Black identity and culture in a positive everyday way which could be the starting point for conversations about race and diversity with young children without the need to address racism or themes of social justice. It is important, particularly in KS2 when children are often accessing books independently, that children see positive representations of themselves in books and do not only see themselves reflected in books that feature difficult or traumatic scenarios or story lines. As this quote demonstrates, children need access to positive representation as well as an adult to discuss their reading with:

> *"Around ninth grade some of my homegirls began to read street literature (see Greene, 2016). I was immediately drawn to the stories of Black girls who looked like me. However, while I appreciated those texts because they offered me some form of a mirror, I often felt distressed as I read stories of Black pain and trauma and had no adult to turn to as I processed what I read."* (Griffin, 2021)

Griffin (2021) describes how she chose books with Black characters that looked like her and her teachers encouraged her to do this, but she was left to deal with traumatic storylines about racism without support. Eventually this put her off reading:

> *"Reading felt like a place of solace. Until it wasn't."* (Griffin, 2021).

Thomas (2019) describes how Black characters in particular are trapped in narratives about slavery, civil rights and survival and missing from other types of fiction.

The analytical framework developed in this research could support teachers in finding those opportunities for meaningful discussion in the books they read by focusing their attention on how and where ethnicity is represented, or not. But, as I argued earlier in this chapter, children need to be supported by teachers who are confident in exploring the themes of race and racism in children's literature. Teachers do not become confident in this by accident, it needs to be supported with good CPD.

Intersectionality

In Chapter 6 we saw that all of the picture books which were most frequently mentioned by teachers in the questionnaire and were analysed in the chapter, had a female main character apart from Julian is a Mermaid, which features a boy who wants to dress as a girl. Although there was more balance of gender representation in the novels and recognising that this was a small sample of books, this may highlight an issue with racially minoritised boys being represented in children's earliest experiences of reading.

Gooden & Gooden (2001) state that girls have been portrayed in narrow and biased ways in children's books for many years but in their analysis of 83 picture books published between 1995 and 1999, they found a balance of gender representation. In contrast, Hamilton et al (2006) found nearly twice as many male main characters as female main characters in their analysis of 200 picture books which included top selling books from 2001 and a 7-year sample of Caldecott Award winners demonstrating under-representation of female characters in picture books. In an even larger study, analysing 5,618 children's books published throughout the twentieth century in the US, male characters were represented more than twice as often as female characters (McCabe et al, 2011). Research on bestselling picture books in the UK also found a male dominance of main characters in addition to a dominance of male representation within non-human characters (Li, Terras & Li, 2023).

With so much research pointing to the dominance of male characters in children's picture books, it is unusual that female characters were so dominant in the books named by teachers in my questionnaire. I did not ask about gender in the questionnaire or interviews so I cannot speculate why this might be the case, but it does highlight the importance of intersectionality in research around representation in children's books. In the US, the website Diverse Book Finder (https://diversebookfinder.org/) is a collection of 6320 children's books which can be filtered by categories such as genre, setting, race, ethnicity, gender, immigration, religion, disability and author lived experience. Each book that appears in the catalogue includes representation of a racially minoritised character, and the filters allow you to then select specific other areas of representation. Although there are some limitations to the categories including a lack of single or same-sex family representation (Rivas, 2023), this is an incredibly useful tool for teachers to ensure they are considering intersectionality and a range of representation. At the time of writing, the website shows 1018 books featuring boys and 1114 books featuring girls. Although the number of books featuring girls is higher, it is not significantly so at a 48%/52% male/female split. In the UK there is a similar website called Inclusive Books for Children (https://www.inclusivebooksforchildren.org/). This website has lists of books as well as a search function which allows you to filter books by age,

representation, format and genre. Although it does not have a separate gender category, it does allow you to filter for books with a female lead character at the same time as a category of ethnicity. In February 2025, the percentage of books with female leads ranged from 40% (E.g. Muslim and South Asian) to 48% (E.g. Middle Eastern) across all categories of ethnicities apart from East and Southeast Asian which was significantly lower at 29%. This may indicate that there is still some work to do around representation of female characters in books which feature racially minoritised characters, particularly those from East or Southeast Asian backgrounds.

Predominantly White Schools

Much of the recent research that has taken place about representation in children's literature has involved racially diverse school communities or teachers working in racially diverse schools. The CLPE's Reflecting Realities in the Classroom project took place in ten schools in London and the southeast of England (CLPE, 2024). These schools, their children and the experiences of their teachers are very different to those working in predominantly White areas like Norfolk and Suffolk, where some small schools have no children other than those who are White British. Even a title like 'Reflecting Realities' may be difficult for teachers in predominantly White schools to properly engage with. The blurb on the back of the 2024 book 'Representation in Children's Literature' (CLPE, 2024) simply says "All children deserve to experience books that reflect their realities" – teachers in Norfolk and Suffolk schools are indeed reflecting the realities of their all White cohorts with their all White books written by all White authors.

Bishop's (1990) analogy of books as windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors is at the heart of the Reflecting Realities work which has been transformative for publishers, authors and teachers since it began. The importance of focusing on the reading experiences of thousands of children from racially minoritised backgrounds in schools in the UK is paramount. But its focus on children seeing themselves in texts means it is research and professional development which could be ignored by teachers working in predominantly White areas like those interviewed for this research who may have a single child from a racially minoritised background in their class. For the majority of children in predominantly White areas, diverse books serve not to reflect their realities but to broaden their horizons through the "fresh air of windows" (Style, 1988) which offer a "panoramic view of society" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, P265) and invite action through the doors which represent a reader's critical engagement (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). It is important, therefore, that teachers focus on which mirrors and windows are broken (where children are misrepresented), which mirrors are missing and which doors are closed (where children are underrepresented) (Botelho, 2021). Having a range of books, with a wide range of different ethnicities represented, will enable children to

experience both the ‘plaisir’ of familiarity and the ‘jouissance’ of difference through their reading (Barthes, 1976 in Sipe, 1999).

Conclusion

This research has found that primary teachers, particularly those in predominantly White areas, face significant barriers in accessing racially diverse texts, developing their subject knowledge and accessing CPD. The majority of research on representation of racially minoritised characters in children’s literature and the curriculum in general has taken place in racially diverse areas and this research fills a gap in the research around diverse children’s books by focusing on a predominantly White area and the particular challenges that come with monocultural classrooms.

The findings of this research suggest that teachers benefit from autonomy of book selection but also require support when discussing themes related to race and ethnicity. CPD will be key to developing teachers’ subject knowledge and enabling teachers to use texts that represent racially minoritised children effectively. Akrofi et al (2010)’s notion of ‘course capital’ is important here – the knowledge and experience of people delivering training around children’s literature informs and shapes the content of that training. The current lack of knowledge and experience is a perpetual cycle that needs to be broken. In addition, any CPD which is developed, needs to be accessible to small, rural schools whose teachers may find it more difficult to attend.

The analytical framework and narrative book descriptions developed as part of this research could support teachers in understanding the quality of representation in children’s literature and developing their confidence in having conversations about texts. Existing CPD for primary teachers could be enhanced by using either the framework, or the narrative descriptions, or both.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Schools should prioritise professional development on representation in children’s literature that goes beyond sharing book lists and focuses on enabling teachers to use literature to support discussion and exploring the concept of ‘Own Voices’, whether that terminology is used or not. All teachers, but particularly those who are teaching children who are linguistically or culturally different from themselves (which we may argue is all teachers), need specific training and mentoring on effectively meeting the needs of all children (Clark, 2020)

Teachers not only need to improve their knowledge about racially diverse children’s books, but they also need access to them, and funding to properly support this access. Schools need to understand that a handful of children’s books that include racially minoritised characters is not good enough. All

ethnic groups need to be represented, and children need to see variation within those groups. As Botelho et al (2009) argue:

> *"One text and one author cannot do it all; it is the reading of multiple texts and the juxtaposition of these texts against lived experience and secondary sources that is central. Children's literature can redress injustice as much as reflect it. It can inspire readers to reflect on their lived experience, re-imagine socially just worlds, provide new ways of exercising power, and offer tools for building cultural and historical understanding"* (P266)

If the number of books in book corners that was reported in the CLPE 2023 research (fewer than 100) is typical, then this is even more urgent, particularly for those children in Early Years who need to see that variety of representation in order to develop implicit enjoyment of reading.

The dip in the number of books featuring racially minoritised characters being published in the UK in 2023 (CLPE, 2024) after a steady rise, demonstrates how important it is that this work is embedded rather than it being an add-on or after thought. While a rise in publishing and teaching about Black characters after the Black Lives Matter protests is understandable, the diversification of children's literature cannot just be reactive. Schools need to be strategic in their planning of their English curriculums, including the literature that underpins it.

Since Autumn 2024, there has been a government curriculum and assessment review taking place in England in order to examine whether the existing national curriculum is "fit for purpose and meeting the needs of children and young people" (Gov.uk, 2024). One of its specific aims is to deliver "a curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented". A national curriculum that includes representation as a key value or principle, particularly in Primary English, at policy level would support all schools in ensuring this happens. But it has to come with training and funding.

Recommendations for Further Research

The sample size used in the questionnaire and interviews for this research was very small and may not be representative or reflective of all teachers or schools. However, the data gathered for this research did reflect the findings of existing research. The questionnaire took place between March and May 2021. March 2021 was when schools returned after a second national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions remained in schools. This may have had an impact on teachers' ability to engage with this research project. Finding teachers to be interviewed, for example, was particularly difficult.

Some important and interesting elements of the discussion around children's literature in the UK are missing from this research. Firstly, supermarkets as a place to buy books and secondly, World Book Day. In addition, the discussion around representation of racially minoritised people did not include White minoritised groups including those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) backgrounds. Finally, I consider the importance of including children's voices in future research.

Teacher Education

The findings of this study highlight the need for substantial reform in how Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and ongoing professional development address race, literacy, and representation. Building on CRT's assertion that racism is systemic and embedded within everyday educational practices, teacher education must move beyond implicit or generic notions of "diversity" to embed explicit racial literacy and critical text analysis within literacy training. This could be done through the following:

1. Embed racial literacy within literacy pedagogy.
ITE programmes should include dedicated modules on racial literacy, text selection, and the sociopolitical role of children's literature. This includes helping trainees recognise colourblind ideology, understand racialisation processes, and feel equipped to discuss race openly with children.

2. Require engagement with evaluative frameworks.
Trainees should be taught how to analyse texts using structured tools, such as the analytical framework developed in this research, so that inclusive book selection becomes a pedagogical skill.

3. Develop knowledge of authorship and publishing.
Teacher education must engage with questions of authorship, Own Voices, and the systemic barriers that racially minoritised authors face, helping trainees become critical consumers of book lists, awards, and published schemes.

4. Reframe representation as core literacy work.
Representation should not be positioned as something relevant "only if you have diverse pupils," but as a matter of literacy, identity, and justice for *all* children.

5. Promote antiracist pedagogies in English teaching.
Teacher education should support trainees in facilitating discussions about power, fairness, identity, and racism through children's books, ensuring such work is embedded in reading practices, not isolated as an add-on or risk-averse activity.

In addition, the above suggestions need to sit within an ITE framework where anti-racism and racial literacy is addressed more generally within Professional Studies, and developed in more detail in other curriculum areas. Mentors have a responsibility to bridge the gap between theory and practice

and this has implications for mentor training. Finally, these reforms should be picked up within the Early Career Framework so that Early Career teachers continue to develop their racial literacy.

Supermarkets

Although supermarkets in the UK sell books, they usually only have a small section and the section for children is particularly small. Yet supermarket sales accounted for 16% of children's book sales in 2020 (Cain, 2020). In that year, out of around 50 children's books stocked by Tesco, 40% were by celebrity authors and 20% by JK Rowling (Cain, 2020). Supermarkets probably have the most diverse customers of anywhere that sells children's books; people who do not venture into book shops or libraries need to go to supermarkets and yet they probably cannot access books with racially minoritised characters there. This may be changing as in January 2025, Sainsburys were selling *The Best Eid Ever* by Sufiya Ahmed as part of a Ramadan promotion (Ahmed, 2025), but this is only one example I have seen across the years I have been doing this research.

We do not know if the teachers who responded to the questionnaire in this study used supermarkets to buy children's books because the question about places to access books did not include this as an option. If the questionnaire were to be repeated in the future, including this option would be an interesting way to see if teachers ever use supermarkets to buy children's books.

World Book Day

World Book Day is celebrated annually in March in the UK and is organised by a reading charity. Part of their 2023 – 2027 strategy is to increase the reach and impact for families "whose identities and experiences have not been reflected in World Book Day" previously by "actively seeing ways to include a more diverse range of identities and experiences in the World Book Day campaign and content" (World Book Day, 2023b). In 2025, the twelve World Book Day books which are sold for one pound include four books written by authors from racially minoritised backgrounds. Much of the content on the website includes photographs of children and characters from books who are from racially minoritised backgrounds. It is clear that effort is being made to create more diverse content and it would be interesting in future research to see what impact this may be having on supporting teachers' text selection.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Representation

This research focuses on children's texts which represent children from racially minoritised backgrounds. The decision to focus on non-White backgrounds means that White minoritised groups were not included. Representation of all minoritised groups is important and one group which is often overlooked, despite having some of the lowest attainment outcomes at all levels including in

reading, is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children. Children from GRT backgrounds are either not represented in children's literature at all, or their representations are what Chetty and Sands O'Connor describe as exotic and mysterious or tragic and trapped (2023). Both of these types of representation are problematic, and it is rare to see well-rounded examples or culturally sensitive portrayals (Dobson et al, 2021) of GRT characters in children's books. The one exception to this is the books of Richard O'Neill who is an Own Voices Romany Gypsy author (https://richardthestoryteller.weebly.com/). Future research looking at teachers' knowledge of children's books featuring books from GRT backgrounds and using my framework (perhaps with adapted or additional questions) to analyse some of those books would be a useful next step.

Books about Refugees

In Chapter 6, I discuss the use of RefugeeCrit (Strekalova-Hughes, 2019; Hope, 2023) to analyse children's books which feature stories about refugees and sanctuary seeking. This is a theme that more teachers are looking to explore through children's literature due to its prominence in the news and the number of refugee children from Ukraine who joined UK schools. At the start of the 2022/23 academic year, there were more than 20,000 Ukrainian children in UK schools (DfE, 2023). Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary network is active in supporting schools in the Norfolk area and includes a book list on their website (Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary, ND) containing 68 books for exploring sanctuary with children from KS1 to KS3. In future, developing my framework to include questions from the RefugeeCrit framework (Hope, 2023) or including a section for exploring books featuring refugee characters would make the framework more useful to exploring this particular area.

Limitations of the Study

As with all qualitative research, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged.

Small Interview Sample.

Only two teachers were interviewed, both from predominantly White areas. While their narratives offer rich insight, they cannot represent the full range of teacher experiences nationally.

Limited Pupil Voice.

Originally, I intended to do research with children in schools and include a case study as part of this research but the timing of the research period coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this was not possible. As a consequence, children's voices are missing from this research about children's literature, in the same way that they are often missing from children's literature itself (Dobson et al, 2021). As Thomas (2019) states, there has not been much "sustained scholarly

conversation" (P7) about how children are affected by their representation and more research needs to take place around the consequences of children either not being represented in books or only seeing problematic representations. A priority is to incorporate children's voices into analyses of how representation affects identity, empathy and engagement.

The Framework

The analytical framework and narrative summary template developed as part of this research have only been used by me. They were developed by me to work in a way that I prefer to work so it is understandable that I believe they would be useful to other teachers. The next step in my work on this is to have practising teachers work with the framework in their classrooms and do further research into how it could be used to develop teachers' subject knowledge, and how it could be developed to support as many teachers as possible. Using the framework with teachers across different demographics would enable an evaluation of its impact on subject knowledge and text selection.

Geographic Concentration.

Because many questionnaire responses and all interviews came from Norfolk and Suffolk, findings are shaped by the demographic and cultural characteristics of these regions.

Constraints in Identification of Race or Ethnicity

Textual and paratextual information does not always allow for precise distinctions between race, ethnicity, nationality, or heritage in authors or characters, which may affect the analysis of some texts.

These limitations do not undermine the study's contributions but point to important areas for further development.

The recommendations in this chapter align with a wider CRT critique that education systems in the UK continue to reproduce racial inequities through curriculum choices, assessment practices, and unexamined norms around "quality" and "heritage" texts. CRT challenges the assumption that schools are neutral or meritocratic, highlighting how Whiteness is embedded in the literary canon, policy frameworks, and teacher practice.

This study's findings, particularly the teachers' avoidance of race-explicit language, the reliance on monocultural book lists, and the absence of critical engagement with representation, support CRT's argument that racism is structured into everyday professional habits. The analytical framework

developed through this research is therefore not simply a practical tool but a response to CRT's call to make visible and disrupt these racialised structures within literacy education.

Taken together, the findings, recommendations, and limitations of this study demonstrate the need for systemic change in how teacher education conceptualises literacy and representation. By situating children's literature within broader racialised histories and supporting teachers with structured tools and racial literacy training, the study contributes to the transformative aims of CRT and offers a practical route for embedding antiracist pedagogy into everyday English teaching.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Complete List of Books Featuring Racially Minoritised Characters Named in Questionnaire

Shaded = One or more author/illustrator is from a racially minoritised background.

Name of Book	Ethnicity of main character(s)	Author/Illustrator	Ethnicity of author/illustrator	Type of book	Year group used in	Number of times appears in questionnaire
Clean Up!	Black	Nathan Byron Dapo Adeola	Black	Picture fiction	1	4
Julian in a Mermaid	Latinx Trans	Jessica Love	White	Picture fiction	1, 2	4
~~Christianity information book~~						
Last stop on market street	Black	Matt de la Pena Christian Robinson	Latino Black	Picture fiction	2	2
Ruby's Worry	Black	Tom Percival	White	Picture fiction	R,1,2	7
Fantastically Great Women who made history	Various	Kate Pankhurst	White	Picture non-fiction	R, 1	2
Handa's Surprise	Black	Eileen Browne	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	8
Race to the frozen North: Matthew Henson Story	Black	Catherine Johnson	Black	Novel	3, 4	
The Boy at the back of the class	Various incl Black, Afghani	Onjali Q Rauf	Bangladeshi	Novel	3, 4, 5, 6	7
I am enough	Black	Grace Byers	Mixed race	Picture fiction	3, 4	2

I love my hair	Black	Natasha Tarpley	Black	Picture fiction	3, 4	2
Sulwe	Black	Lupita Nyongo	Black	Picture fiction	R	2
Crater Lake	Various	Jennifer Killick	White	Novel	6	1
Journey to Jo'Burg	Black	Beverley Naidoo	White	Novel	5, 6	1
Holes	Various	Louis Sachar	White	Novel	5, 6	7
Look Up!	Black	Nathan Byron	Black	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	7
Izzy Gizmo	Black	Pip Jones	White	Picture Fiction	R, 1, 2	3
My Hair	Black	Hannah Lee	Black	Picture fiction	2	3
My daddy changed the world	Black	Jasmine Newton-Langi Kyrome Adams Toni Ansell	Black Black White	Picture fiction	6	1
Hidden Figures	Black	Margot Lee Shetterly	Black	Non-fiction	6	2
Snowy Day	Black	Ezra Jack Keats	White	Picture fiction	6	1
Fly me home	Black	Polly Ho-Yen	Mixed	Novel	6	1
Boy Giant	Afghan	Michael Morpurgo	White	Novel	5, 6	1
Coming to England	Black	Floella Benjamin	Black	Novel	5, 6	1
Hostage	Black	Malorie Blackman	Black	Novel		1
Mr Scruff	Black	Simon James	White	Picture fiction		1
Secret Friends	Black	Elizabeth Laird	White	Novel		1
The Mega magic hair swap	Black	Rochelle Humes Rachel Suzanne	Mixed White	Picture fiction	R	1
The proudest blue	Black	Ibtihaj Muhammad	Black	Picture fiction	R, 1	5

		SK Ali	Indian			
Malamander	Black minor character?	Thomas Taylor	White	Novel	5	1
Counting by sevens	Various	Holly Goldberg Sloan	White	Novel	5	1
The extraordinary gardener	Black	Sam Boughton	White	Picture fiction	2	1
Little Leaders – bold women in black history	Black	Vashti Harrison	Black	Picture non-fiction	2	3
The Undefeated	Black	Kwame Alexander	Black	Poetry	5, 6	1
High Rise Mystery	Black	Sharna Jackson	Black	Novel	5, 6	2
No Ballet Shoes in Syria	Syrian	Catherine Bruton	White	Novel	5, 6	1
Kensuke's Kingdom	Japanese	Michael Morpurgo	White	Novel	5,6	1
The Unforgotten Coat	Mongolian	Frank Cottrell-Boyce	White	Novel	6	1
The Journey	Ambiguous refugees	Francesca Sanna	White Italian	Picture fiction	6	1
Moonchild	Middle Eastern	Aisha Bushby	Bahrain	Novel	5, 6	1
Amari & the Night Brothers	Black	B B Alston	Black	Novel	5, 6	1
A Girl of Ink & Stars	Mixed	Kiran Millwood Hargrave	Mixed Indian	Novel	5, 6	1
Jabari Jumps	Black	Gaia Cornwall	White	Picture fiction	5, 6	1
Where the River Runs Gold	Indian	Sita Brahmachari	Indian	Novel	5, 6	1
A Murder Most Unladylike	Chinese	Robin Stevens	White	Novel	5, 6	1
Cinnamon	Indian	Neil Gaiman Divya Srinivasan	White Indian	Picture fiction	2	1

My 2 Grandads	Mixed	Floella Benjamin	Black	Picture fiction	2	1
Agent Zaiba Series	Indian	Annabelle Sami	Indian	Novel	4	1
Henry's Freedom Box	Black	Ellen Levine	White	Novel	4	1
Cloud Busting	Black	Malorie Blackman	Black	Novel	4	4
Everywhere Bear	Background characters in class	Julia Donaldson	White	Picture fiction	R	1
Young, gifted & black	Black	Jamia Wilson Andrea Pippins	Black Black	Picture non-fiction	2	1
~~The hodgeheg~~						
~~The hungry caterpillar~~						
~~The lost mittens~~						
From beans to batteries	Peru	Steve Brace	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
You Choose	Various background	Nick Sharratt	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
On the Way Home	Various	Gill Murphy	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
We're Different, We're the Same	Various	Bobbi Jane Kates Joe Mathieu	Unknown White	Picture fiction	1	1
The skin you live in	Various	Michael Tyler	Black	Picture fiction	1	2
Don't Touch My Hair	Black	Sharee Miller	Black	Picture fiction	R	1
Amazing Grace	Black	Mary Hoffman	White	Picture fiction	R, 1	2
The Doorbell Rang	Various	Pat Hutchins	White	Picture fiction	R	1
Superhero Like You	Indian	Ranj Singh	Indian	Picture fiction	1	1
Astro Girl	Black	Ken Wilson-Max	Black	Picture fiction	1	1
If All the World Were	Black	Joseph Ceolho	Mixed	Picture fiction	1	1
Ada Twist Scientist	Black	Andrea Beaty	White	Picture fiction	2	1

My Pet Star	Black	Corrinne Averiss	White	Picture fiction	1	1
Sam Wu is Not Afraid of Ghosts	Chinese	Katie Tsang Kevin Tsang	White Chinese	Novel	2	1
Meesha Makes Friends	Black	Tom Percival	White	Picture fiction	2	2
We're Off to Find a Fairy	Various background characters	Eloise White Cory Reid	Unknown Black	Picture fiction	2	1
The Firework Maker's Daughter	Asian	Philip Pullman	White	Novel	4	1
The Great Race	Chinese	Emily Hiles	White	Picture fiction	R	1
Errol's garden	Mixed race	Gillian Hibbs	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
Handa's Hen	Black	Eileen Brown	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
Monster Trouble	Black	Lane Fredrickson	White	Picture fiction	R	1
Super Duper You	Black	Sophy Henn	White	Picture fiction	1	1
We are All Welcome	Various	Alexandra Penfold Suzanne Kaufman	White White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	3
Baby Goes to Market	Black	Atinuke	Black	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
So Much!	Black	Trish Cooke	Black	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
What if	Black	Samantha Berger	White	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
Ghanain Goldilocks	Black	Tamara Pizzoli Phil Howell	Black	Picture fiction	R, 1, 2	1
Mirror	Arabic	Jeannie Baker	White	Picture fiction		1
The Extraordinary Gardener	Black	Sam Boughton	White	Picture fiction	1	1
Lila and the Secret of Rain	Black	David Conway Jude Daly	White White	Picture fiction	1	1
Kaya's Heart Song	Malaysian	Diwa Tharan Sanders Nerina Canzi	Malaysian Argentinian	Picture fiction	2	1

Together We Can	Various	Caryl Hart Ali Pye	White White	Picture fiction	1	1
The Star Outside my Window	Mixed Brazil/English	Onjali Q Rauf	Bangladeshi	Novel	5, 6	1
Werewolf Club Rules	N/A	Joseph Coelho	Mixed black	Poetry	2	1
Funky Chickens	N/A	Benjamin Zephaniah	Black	Poetry	5, 6	1
Rain Before Rainbows	Indian	Smiriti Halls	Indian	Picture fiction	5, 6	1
My Monster and Me	Indian	Nadya Hussain	Bangladeshi	Picture fiction	1	1
A Story About Afiya	Black	James Berry	Black	Picture fiction	1	1
Brown Boy Joy	Black	Thomishia Booker	Black	Picture fiction	1	1

90 books

44 Own Voices = 49%

50 Black = 56%

13 various = 14%

6 Indian = 7%

3 Chinese = 3%

Appendix 2

CLPE Reflecting Realities Degrees of Erasure (CLPE, 2019)

Degrees of Erasure

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

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

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

Vacant Landscape

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

Country specific settings without country specific population

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

Lost in the crowd through wallpapering

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

Cover Short Change

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

Short Term Stay

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

Ethnic Fluidity

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

Hair Cue

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

'Jasmine Default'

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

Faceless or Featureless

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

Homogenised Illustrative Style

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

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

Appendix 3

Pilot analysis of *Ghost* and *Little Bad Man & The Invasion of the Killer Aunties* using questions from Huber et al (2018), Mendoza & Reece (2001) and Harper & Trostle-Brand (2010)

Questions from Huber et al (2018)	*Ghost*	*Little Bad Man & The invasion of the Killer Aunties.*
What identities or characteristics are assigned by race and/or its intersections with class and gender?	Intersections with class.	
How are the experiences of People of Color represented, or not?	Own voices. Characters of colour have the power in the story.	Almost all of the characters are people of colour. Their experience is represented as 'normal'.
In what ways does the story become raced, or not?	Race is significant to the storyline. E.g. Ghost sees running as a 'Black' sport but overcomes this with the support of his coach.	Race isn't part of the storyline.
Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (e.g., historical, political, social)?	Yes, the main character's back story explains his motivation.	No.
How/do dominant ideologies operate (e.g., White supremacy, patriarchy, cultural deficits)?		
In what other ways does power operate (e.g., vantage point, resolution, and/or assumptions of the story?	Characters of colour have power and autonomy in their story.	Characters of colour have power and autonomy in their story.

Questions from Mendoza & Reece (2001)	*Ghost*	*Little Bad Man & The invasion of the Killer Aunties.*
Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures?	Fully developed characters	Some characters are fully developed. Some are caricatures which are essential for comedy. One is stereotypical.
Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes?	Some negative stereotypes – violent, gun crime, prison, single mum. But, this is part of the backstory.	Both. Lots of specific cultural references of Pakistani culture. Comedy in the story relies on stereotype of the 'auntie' which is also culturally specific.

		Character of Wendy Wang, an 'outside' voice is more problematic.
Who has the power in this story? What is the nature of their power, and how do they use it?	Characters of colour hold the power and use it to empower each other.	Characters of colour hold the power and use it to save the world.
Who has wisdom? What is the nature of their wisdom, and how do they use it?	'Coach' – wisdom and experience passed on to younger generation.	The children and 'Uncle Grandpa' – use it to save the world.
What are the consequences of certain behaviors? What behaviors or traits are rewarded, and how? What behaviors are punished, and how?	Honesty and hard work are rewarded.	The behaviours which are 'unwanted' at the beginning of the story e.g. rapping, are what saves everyone in the end.
How is language used to create images of people of a particular group? How are artistic elements used to create those images?	Language is direct. Race and ethnicity are represented unambiguously.	Specific cultural aspects are described using language which is not explained E.g. Shalwar Kameez. This provides a talking point for readers.
Who has written this story? Who has illustrated it? Are they inside or outside the groups they are presenting? What are they in a position to know? What do they claim to know?	Insider voice.	Insider voice supported by outsider established author voice.
Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing?	Black voices	British Pakistani voices
What do this narrative and these pictures say about race? Class? Culture? Gender? Age? Resistance to the status quo?	You don't have to live up to stereotypes, you can break from them.	I don't think this book is trying to say anything about race, class, gender, age or the status quo.

Questions from Harper & Trostle-Brand (2010)	Ghost	Little Bad Man & The invasion of the Killer Aunties.
Author(s)		
Are the author(s)/illustrator(s) qualified to write or illustrate material relating to the culture(s) portrayed? How?	Yes. Black author writing about Black children.	Yes. British Pakistani author writing about British Pakistani children. And no, Wendy Wang is a British Chinese character and neither author is British Chinese. The illustrator is Estonian.
Have the author(s)/illustrator(s) conducted related research? If not, have they lived among	Yes	Yes. And no.

(either as a member of, or as a visitor to) the groups of people represented in the book?		
Story		
Is the story interesting to children?	Yes	Yes
Does the story contain authentic language? Are factual and historical details accurate? Overall, is this a high-quality story, independent of its multicultural aspects?	Yes	Yes
Characters		
Are the characters believable?	Yes	Yes
Are universal human emotions, attitudes, needs, and experiences reflected?	Yes	Yes
Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups?	No	To a certain extent.
Are the lifestyles realistic? stereotypes?	Realistic.	Both
Are females as well as males depicted in leadership roles?	No.	Yes
Setting		
Does the story reflect a variety of places and times?	No	No
Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically?	Yes	No. This is comedy, with an element of fantasy, so it doesn't need to be realistic.
Are cultural settings and geographical features represented accurately?	Yes	Yes
Plot		
Are real situations depicted?	Yes	No
Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity dismissed?	Yes	Yes
Are various conflicts presented for children to explore and discuss?	Yes	Yes
How are conflicts resolved?	Through discussion	By the children
Theme		
Does the story offer children a variety of situations, concepts, and new ideas on which to reflect, question, and consider?	Yes	Yes

Are values explored, rather than preached?	Yes	Yes
Are there lessons to be learned?	Yes	Yes
Are children exposed to multiple perspectives and values?	Yes	Yes
How does the story promote understanding of our diverse society?	By showing you don't have to live up to stereotypes, you can break from them.	It presents Pakistani culture as a 'norm' that doesn't need explanation. It is not presuming a White audience.
Illustrations		
Are diverse populations represented?	Yes	Yes
Is there diversity represented within cultural groups?	Yes	Yes
Are characters realistically and genuinely represented?	Yes	Stereotypes are used for comedy. The book is not realistic.
Do the illustrations avoid reinforcing societal stereotypes?	Yes	Yes
Do the illustrations and text use authenticity to demonstrate respect for other cultures?		
Do the illustrations and text convey characteristics common to all people and cultures?	Yes	Yes
Developmental appropriateness		
Is the story age appropriate; can children understand what is presented?	Yes	Yes
Is the story individually appropriate in terms of children's family backgrounds?	Yes	Yes
Does the story reflect the social, linguistic, and cultural contexts in which children live or to which children can relate?	Yes	Yes
Will the story encourage meaningful and relevant discussions?	Yes	Yes

Appendix 4

New Framework Development

	Huber et al (2018)	Mendoza & Reece (2001)	Harper & Brand (2010)	CLPE Reflecting Realities (2020)	Brownsword
1	How are the experiences of People of Color represented, or not? *Own voices. Characters of colour have the power in the story.* Almost all of the characters are people of colour. Their experience is represented as 'normal'.	Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures? Whose voices are heard? Whose are missing? *Fully developed characters* Some characters are fully developed. Some are caricatures which are essential for comedy. One is stereotypical.	Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups? *No* To a certain extent Are rigid boundaries of class, culture, religion, and ethnicity dismissed? *Yes* Yes Are the lifestyles realistic? stereotypes? *Realistic* Both Are diverse populations represented? *Yes* Yes Is there diversity represented within cultural groups? *Yes* Yes	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?	How are characters of colour represented sensitively, multi-dimensionally, and with agency, living relatable, realistic lives?
2	In what ways does the story become raced, or not? *Race is significant to the storyline. E.g. Ghost sees running as a 'Black'*			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	How is ethnicity relevant to the story?

	sport but overcomes this with the support of his coach. Race isn't part of the storyline.			necessary and appropriate in furthering the narrative and is the portrayal sensitively depicted?	
3	What identities or characteristics are assigned by race and/or its intersections with class and gender? *Intersections with class.* Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (e.g., historical, political, social)? *Yes, the main character's back story explains his motivation.* Race isn't part of the storyline.	Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes? *Some negative stereotypes – violent, gun crime, prison, single mum. But, this is part of the backstory.* Both. Lots of specific cultural references of Pakistani culture. Comedy in the story relies on stereotype of the 'auntie' which is also culturally specific. Character of Wendy Wang, an 'outside' voice is more problematic. What are the consequences of certain behaviors? What behaviors or traits are rewarded, and how? What behaviors are punished, and how? *Honesty and hard work are rewarded.* The behaviours which are 'unwanted' at the beginning of the story e.g. rapping, are what saves everyone in the end.	Does the story reflect a variety of places and times? *No* No Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically? *Yes* No. This is comedy, with an element of fantasy, so it doesn't need to be realistic. Are cultural settings and geographical features represented accurately? *Yes* Yes Are real situations depicted? *Yes* No Are characters realistically and genuinely represented? *Yes* Stereotypes are used for comedy. The book is not realistic. Do the illustrations avoid reinforcing societal stereotypes? *Yes* Yes	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?	How does the story challenge or reinforce misconceptions and prejudices about underrepresented groups? In illustrations how are the characters well-developed and well-rounded? How are a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural, cultural, geographical) represented?

			Do the illustrations and text use authenticity to demonstrate respect for other cultures? Do the illustrations and text convey characteristics common to all people and cultures? *Yes* Yes Is the story age appropriate; can children understand what is presented? *Yes* Yes Is the story individually appropriate in terms of children's family backgrounds? *Yes* Yes		
4	How/do dominant ideologies operate (e.g., White supremacy, patriarchy, cultural deficits)?	What do this narrative and these pictures say about race? Class? Culture? Gender? Age? Resistance to the status quo? *You don't have to live up to stereotypes, you can break from them.* I don't think this book is trying to say anything about race, class, gender, age or the status quo.	Does the story offer children a variety of situations, concepts, and new ideas on which to reflect, question, and consider? *Yes* Yes Will the story encourage meaningful and relevant discussions? *Yes*	Does the dynamic between a cast of characters suggest any problematic hierarchies with specific regard to ethnicity? If the book includes social justice themes, does it effectively explore and convey the complexity of the themes with sensitive	How does the story explore dominant ideologies (White supremacy, patriarchy, class, culture etc)? How does the story encourage meaningful discussion of perspectives and values, new ideas, exploration of social justice

			Yes Are values explored, rather than preached? *Yes* Yes Are there lessons to be learned? *Yes* Yes Are children exposed to multiple perspectives and values? *Yes* Yes Are universal human emotions, attitudes, needs, and experiences reflected? *Yes* Yes	due regard and reverence to the subject(s)? Does the book support the reader to identify with or better understand points of difference?	themes and better understanding of points of difference without preaching?
5	In what other ways does power operate (e.g., vantage point, resolution, and/or assumptions of the story? *Characters of colour have power and autonomy in their story.* Characters of colour have power and autonomy in their story.	Who has the power in this story? What is the nature of their power, and how do they use it? *Characters of colour hold the power and use it to empower each other.* Characters of colour hold the power and use it to save the world. Who has wisdom? What is the nature of their wisdom, and how do they use it? *'Coach' – wisdom and experience passed on to younger generation.* The children and 'Uncle Grandpa' – use it to save the world.	Are females as well as males depicted in leadership roles? *No* Yes Are various conflicts presented for children to explore and discuss? *Yes* Yes How are conflicts resolved? *Through discussion* By the children		Who has power or wisdom in the story? How does power and wisdom operate?
6		How is language used to create images of people of a particular group? How		Does the author provide sufficient cues to make the ethnicity of the character	How is language used to identify ethnicity without exoticising the character or

		are artistic elements used to create those images? *Language is direct. Race and ethnicity are represented unambiguously.* Specific cultural aspects are described using language which is not explained E.g. Shalwar Kameez. This provides a talking point for readers.		identifiable without exoticising the character, patronising the reader or compromising the quality of the writing?	compromising quality of writing?
7		Who has written this story? Who has illustrated it? Are they inside or outside the groups they are presenting? What are they in a position to know? What do they claim to know? *Insider voice.* Insider voice supported by outsider established author voice.	Are the author(s)/illustrator(s) qualified to write or illustrate material relating to the culture(s) portrayed? How? *Yes. Black author writing about Black children.* Yes. British Pakistani author writing about British Pakistani children. And no, Wendy Wang is a British Chinese character and neither authors are British Chinese. The illustrator is Estonian. Have the author(s)/illustrator(s) conducted related research? If not, have they lived among (either as a member of, or as a visitor to) the groups of people represented in the book? *Yes* Yes & no	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?	Who has written and/or illustrated the story? How are they qualified to portray the characters they are representing?
8			Is the story interesting to children? *Yes* Yes		Is the story interesting, contain authentic language, accurate and of high quality independent

			Does the story contain authentic language? Are factual and historical details accurate? Overall, is this a high-quality story, independent of its multicultural aspects? *Yes* Yes		of the representation is contains?
9			Are the characters believable? *Yes* Yes	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	How has the illustrator taken skin tone, hair texture, and features into account when ensuring characters are recognisable, relatable, embody agency & exude life without being overstated?

				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?	
10			Does the story reflect the social, linguistic, and cultural contexts in which children live or to which children can relate? How does the story promote understanding of our diverse society? *Yes* Yes		Are British children of colour represented or does the story take place outside of their own context?
11				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?	Do the books include a variety of genres which contain well-developed racially minoritised characters?

				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?	

Appendix 5

Questionnaire Participant Information Statement
(www.sarahbrownsword.co.uk)

Research Questionnaire Participant Information Statement

Sarah Brownsword EdD student March 2021		Faculty of Social Sciences School of Education & Lifelong Learning University of East Anglia Norwich Research Park Norwich NR4 7TJ United Kingdom Email: s.brownsword@uea.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 1603 591007 Web:www.uea.ac.uk

An Exploration of Diverse Children's Books in Primary Schools

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Teachers

- **What is this study about?**

You are invited to take part in a research study aboutthe use of diverse children's books in the teaching of English in primary schools. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a primary school teacher.This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- Understand what you have read.
- Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- You have received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

- **Who is running the study?**

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

Sarah Brownsword, EdD student.

EdD supervisor – Dr John Gordon, Reader in English Education

- **What will the study involve for me?**

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, which will require you to provide both short and longer answers. The questionnaire will be anonymous.

At the end of the questionnaire, there will be an option for you to indicate whether you would like to participate in an interview related to this study.

- **How much of my time will the study take?**

Completing this questionnaire will take around 10 minutes.

- **Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?**

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers, the school, or anyone else at the University of East Anglia.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time before you have submitted the questionnaire. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because they are anonymous and therefore we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

- **Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any costs associated with taking part in this study.

It is possible that taking part in this study may reveal gaps in your subject knowledge or pedagogy around teaching diverse children's books.

It is possible that taking part in this study may reveal negative attitudes or opinions towards teaching diverse children's books.

At the end of the study, there will be details available for resources that can support this area of your work.

- **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**

The findings of this research aim to help teachers and schools improve their provision of diverse children's books, benefitting children from all backgrounds and helping to improve children's engagement in reading.

- **What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019).

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will **not** be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

- **What if I would like further information about the study?**

When you have read this information, Sarah Brownsword will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Sarah s.brownsword@uea.ac.uk

- **Will I be told the results of the study?**

You have the right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. This feedback will be in the form of a short summary. You can access this feedback after my thesis has been submitted in September 2023 by visiting www.sarahbrownsword.co.uk

- **What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Sarah Brownsword

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

s.brownsword@uea.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisor:

Dr John Gordon, john.gordon@uea.ac.uk 01603 593921

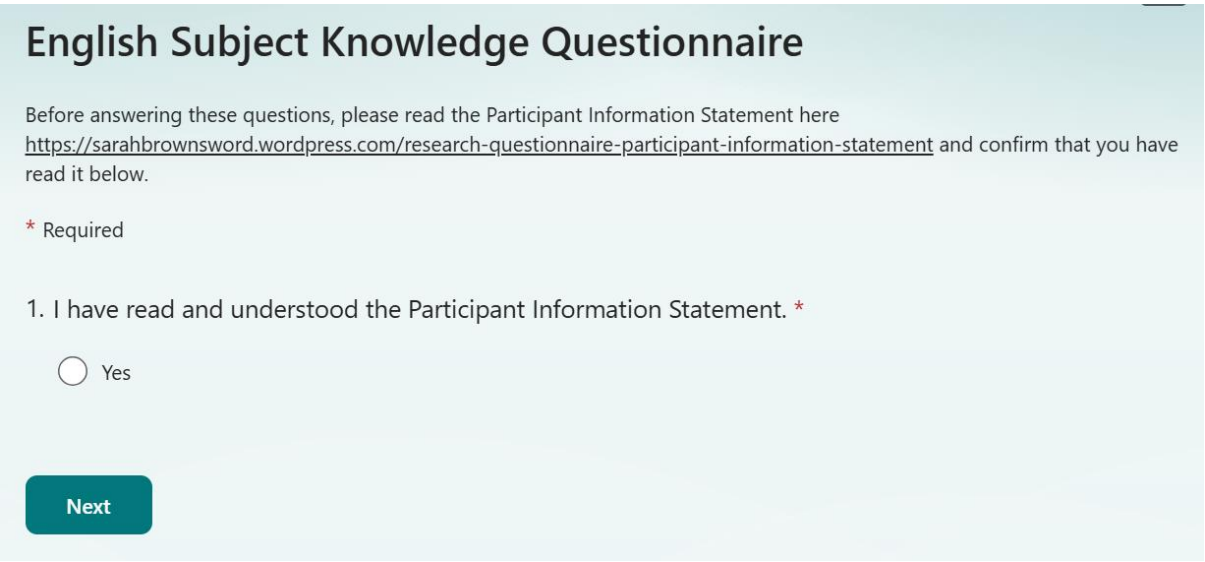
If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk.

- **OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?**

If you are happy and consent to take part in the study simply access the questionnaire by clicking HERE and answer the questions. By submitting your responses you are agreeing to the researcher using the data collected for the purposes described above. Please keep the information sheet for your information.

Appendix 6

Participant Consent Form



English Subject Knowledge Questionnaire

Before answering these questions, please read the Participant Information Statement here https://sarahbrownsword.wordpress.com/research-questionnaire-participant-information-statement and confirm that you have read it below.

* Required

1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Statement. *

Yes

Next

Appendix 7

Pie Corbett's Reading Spine

Highlighted books feature characters from racially minoritised backgrounds.

Reception	Author Ethnicity
Owl Babies – Martin Waddell	White
The Gruffalo – Julia Donaldson	White
Handa's Surprise – Eileen Browne	White
Mr Gumpy's Outing – John Burningham	White
Rosie's Walk – Pat Hutchins	White
Six Dinner Sid – Inga Moore	White
Mrs Armitage – Quentin Blake	White
Whatever Next – Jill Murphy	White
On the Way Home – Jill Murphy	White
Farmer Duck – Martin Waddell	White
Goodnight Moon – Margaret Wise-Brown	White
Shhh! – Sally Grindley	White
Year 1	
Peace at Last – Jill Murphy	White
Can't You Sleep Little Bear? – Martin Waddell	White
Where the Wild Things Are – Maurice Sendak	White (Jewish)
The Elephant and the Bad Baby – Elfrida Vipont and Raymond Briggs	White
Avocado Baby – John Burningham	White
The Tiger Who Came to Tea – Judith Kerr	White
Lost and Found – Oliver Jeffers	White
Knuffle Bunny – Mo Willems	White
Beegu – Alexis Deacon	White
Dogger – Shirley Hughes	White
Cops and Robbers – Alan and Janet Ahlberg	White
Elmer – David McKee	White
Year 2	
Traction Man is Here – Mii Grey	White
Meerkat Mail – Emily Gravett	White
Amazing Grace – Mary Hoffman	White (and illustrator Caroline Binch)
Pumpkin Soup – Helen Cooper	White
Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book? – Lauren Child	White
Dr Xargle's Book of Earthlets – Tony Ross	White
Not Now Bernard – David McKee	White
Tuesday – David Wiesner	White
The Flower – John Light	
Gorilla – Anthony Browne	White
Emily Brown and The Thing – Cressida Cowell	White
Frog and Toad Together – Arnold Lobel	White
The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark – Jill Tomlinson	White
Fantastic Mr Fox – Roald Dahl	White

The Hodgeheg – Dick King-Smith	White
Flat Stanley – Jeff Brown	White
Willa and Old Miss Annie – Berlie Doherty	White
Year 3	
The Iron Man – Ted Hughes	White
Cat Tales: Ice Cat – Linda Newberry	White
The Sheep-pig – Dick King-Smith	White
The Abominables- Dick King-Smith	White
The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe – CS Lewis	White
The Battle of Bubble and Squeak – Phillippa Pearce	White
Year 4	
Bill's New Frock – Anne Fine	White
Charlotte's Web – EB White	White
Why the Whales Came – Michael Morpurgo	White
The Firework Maker's Daughter – Phillip Pullman	White
The Snow Walker's Son – Catherine Fisher	White
Perry Angel's Suitcase – Glenda Millard	White
Voices in the Park – Anthony Browne	White
Year 5	
The Wolves of Willoughby Chase – Joan Aiken	White
Varjak Paw – SF Said	Lebanese
Wolf Brother – Michelle Paver	White
Street Child – Berlie Doherty	White
The Midnight Fox – Betsy Byars	White
Tom's Midnight Garden – Phillipa Pearce	White
FArTHER – Grahame Baker-Smith	White
Year 6	
Holes – Louis Sachar	Jewish
Clockwork – Phillip Pullman	White
The Hobbit – JRR Tolkien	White
Skellig – David Almond	White
Fireweed – Jill Paton Walsh	White
River Boy – Tim Bowler	White
The Arrival – Shaun Tan	Mixed Chinese Malay/White