

Diversifying texts in English:
Finding contemporary reads
for children and young adults

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This booklet draws together online resources to help teachers identify recent, English-language texts, with a focus on racial and ethnic diversity. The texts the resources feature include poetry, plays, and prose – fiction and non-fiction. This booklet is also for policymakers, awarding bodies, publishers, booksellers, librarians, and parents. A companion booklet to the one you are reading now focuses on texts in Welsh. It highlights resources for finding recently published Welsh-language texts.

The booklet is organised into three sections. The first is devoted to resources produced by UK literary organisations and sites. The second features resources produced by publishing houses and booksellers. The third presents resources by teacher-focused organisations. Most resources in this booklet are freely available, although some require a subscription or membership.

For each resource, we provide information about its creator and a summary of key features. These include an indication of the content, thematic choices, characters, and accompanying teaching materials. The entries are not intended to be exclusive. Rather, they represent a snapshot of currently available resources. Some generalisable observations about the resources available are that:

- Most resources offer a range of texts organised by their thematic content.
- Other content varies by resource, including whether texts' age appropriateness is given.
- Popular themes are family, friendship, relationships, grief, and adventure.
- Several lists and texts focus on migration and refugees. See this EMC [blogpost](#).
- Most texts centre the experiences of children and young people.
- Prose fiction dominates these resources.



Context

Our 2022 research, with Mrs Gwawr Maelor (Bangor University), conducted an audit of texts and authors taught in secondary schools across Wales, in English, Welsh, International Languages and Drama. Our findings are summarised in a booklet available in [English](#) and [Welsh](#).

We found that texts taught are predominantly by White, male authors, while people from the Global Majority are largely excluded. Six Global Majority writers were reportedly taught, across all levels and three subject areas. No Global Majority authors featured in Welsh. Women are less well represented than men. Both Global Majority and women authors were especially marginalised in the plays and poetry identified and historical works. This does not reflect the diversity of the population in Wales or the UK generally. It does resonate with roughly contemporaneous studies in England, Wales and the UK (Elliott et al, Kneen et al).

Why does diversifying texts taught matter? It helps meet statutory requirements to teach the experiences and contributions of BAME communities and individuals in Wales, past and present. Beyond this narrow policy context, teaching diverse texts benefits all children in countries with majority White populations. This includes children from both marginalised and majority groups. It boosts attainment, sense of belonging, self-esteem, and empathy (Elliott et al). It also has the potential to boost engagement with reading, whether for school or pleasure. Reading is, in turn, a key indicator of children's future life success, including their qualifications, income, occupation status (Richardson and Eccles). It also has implications for wellbeing (Boucher et al). Finally, it may be key to students engaging with and choosing to study literature-rich subjects (Elliott et al).



The discoverability of diverse texts was identified as a barrier to teaching a diversified curriculum by teachers with whom we shared our findings. An additional challenge is posed by the relative popularity of a narrow range of texts, dealing with traumatic issues such as slavery, violence, crime, and conflict. Although these texts tell important stories, using them alone to teach diversity risks telling a single story about people of the Global Majority, rather than being truly diverse (Elliott et al).

'Diverse' and 'diversity' are terms with wide-ranging understandings, often associated with 'texts featuring the perspectives of particular identity groups' such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, disability, age, culture, and religion (EMC, p. 1). Race and ethnicity are the focus of our booklets. Some resources consider 'diversity' in terms of topic or thematic content. So, several lists include White authors writing on topics like race, slavery and immigration or about Global Majority characters, through a 'White gaze' (Elliott et al, p.14). Teaching diversity through White authors' words cannot redress the lack of representation of Global Majority writers in the curriculum. Such texts are not our focus, but they feature in some resources.

Literary Organisations and Sites

Books Council of Wales

This national charity supports the publishing industry in Wales and promotes reading for pleasure. They provide free [diversity booklists](#) for English and Welsh language texts, available on Hwb. Entries for books feature key bibliographical information, such as the front cover, ISBN, short title, author, publisher, type of book (e.g. Young Adult fiction), price, key themes, plus a short description of each text. The focus is largely on lower secondary level. In their English list for secondary level texts, there are three fiction texts, the rest are factual or non-fiction texts, all with a Welsh or Wales-based focus. Nearly all authors included are White. Global Majority writers featured include Alex Wharton and Angham Abdullah.

Books for Keeps

The website for this online children's book magazine produces lists of texts that are relevant to diversifying teaching. Examples of these include the following: [recent YA books that centre the experience of British Asian Muslims](#); [rap, rhythm and rhyme texts](#), mainly written by Global Majority writers; [Jewish representation in children's books](#); and [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller representation in children's books](#). They provide useful context about the representation of specific identities in children's literature, a brief descriptive overview of selected texts, and a list of texts with author and publication details. Recommendations cover picture books, non-fiction, and biographical books, as well as books to teach concepts such as [transitions](#) and the [natural environment](#). The focus is on prose fiction, but the article on British Asian Muslims' experiences includes an example of short story collections by Farrukh Dhondy, and rap, rhythm and rhyme includes biography and poetry. The article on Jewish representation features Michael Rosen's poetry and *The Missing* (2020), which combines narrative non-fiction and poetry. The magazine has a free column called [Beyond the Secret Garden](#) by authors Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O'Connor, which provides several informative [articles](#) examining the way 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic voices have been represented in the English national story, through children's literature'. Some of the texts listed are referenced to highlight their harmful stereotypes of specific identities (e.g. Fagin's Jewishness in *Oliver Twist*), so texts do not always promote diversity, but discussion of representation. Age appropriateness is not usually indicated. Their article, ['It Starts in Wales'](#), offers examples of non-fiction and fiction by Welsh authors.

BookTrust

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity dedicated to getting children reading. [BookTrust Represents Teen Book List](#) promotes Global Majority authors. The contemporary texts showcased are mainly novels, with a few written in verse, and one collection of short stories and poems. It includes one female author of Welsh and Jamaican heritage, Catherine Johnson. Each entry contains a blurb, author information, keywords (e.g. 'Coming-of-age', 'fantasy', 'LGBT+'), reviews, and suggestions of 'More books like this' at the bottom of the page. Reading age and interest level recommendations are provided. Their [Books About Refugee and Asylum Seekers List](#) includes texts by Global Majority and White authors, mainly for lower secondary level. The website is easy to use, with book finder tools where users can browse by age and genre.



Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) Reflecting Realities Reports

The CLPE is a children's literacy charity working with primary schools. The considerations they raise about representation of culture and ethnicity are also relevant for secondary schools. Their reports aim for a wide audience – teachers, parents, carers, publishers, and librarians. Six annual reports are currently available. The 2023 report offers recently published picture books and a couple of non-fiction texts, all with illustrations, which 'make a concerted effort to address the prejudice, discrimination and injustices experienced by racially minoritized individuals and communities' and honour 'the truths of their lived experiences' (pp. 20-21). Book recommendations include author and illustrator names and a summary of why they are suitable for educational purposes.

EmpathyLab

'EmpathyLab is the first UK organisation to build children's empathy, literacy, and social activism through a systematic use of high-quality literature'. They support primary and secondary schools, young people, and publishers 'to raise an empathy-educate generation, inspired to build a better world for everyone' (EmpathyLab). They offer annual *book lists* and guides for primary and secondary schools, which can be downloaded as PDFs. Their *2023 reading list* contains twenty-five texts and is arranged by form: graphic & verse novels; poetry and short stories; non-fiction; and novels. It weighs towards prose, with a smattering of poetry. Each entry contains a front cover image, title, author, a summary of the text and the name of the publisher. Themes covered include race, family, gender, grief, and sexuality. It contains Global Majority and White authors. Nearly all are British or UK-based. The list gives warnings of mature content in texts, as an aid for discerning suitability. All texts in this list were published in 2021 and 2022, so they are extremely recent. The website contains blog posts and video clips of authors reading their texts, which could be used in the classroom.

Literature Wales – Our Wales: teacher resources

Literature Wales is a registered charity and the national company for the development of literature. They offer opportunities to participate in creative writing and reading programmes, develop writers' talents, and celebrate Wales' literary culture. They published 'Books by Welsh Black and Asian Authors, or Black and Asian Authors with a Strong Connection to Wales', edited by Dr Ann Alston (University of the West of England), to support teachers to fulfil requirements to teach the experiences and contributions of BAME people to Wales. It showcases work with diverse characters, by authors from 'a diverse range of backgrounds'. It is divided into primary and secondary level, then subdivided by the type of text e.g. fiction, poetry, non-fiction, essays and memoirs. Some texts are videos and links are provided to these. Entries include the front cover, publisher, date of publication, language, 'progression step' suitability, themes (sometimes including genre), an explanation of the authors' Welsh connections and a summary of contents.

World Book Day

World Book Day was created by UNESCO in 1995 and is celebrated annually in over 100 countries. World Book Day is a charity that aims to change 'lives through a love of books and reading'. They promote reading for pleasure among children and young people, working with publishers, bookshops, schools, other literacy and reading charities, and libraries. They create educational materials suitable for schools and families. Apart from display materials, book information sheets, activities and dressing up ideas for primary and secondary schools, they provide *reading recommendations* by several authors, including a *Black Girls' Book Club list*. Texts centre Black female experiences and many contain young, Black, female protagonists. Most are by African American authors, with a few Black British authors, spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It combines authors who are well-established (Alice Walker, bell hooks, Maya Angelou) with those who are more recent (S.A. Domingo, Alexandra Sheppard, Angie Thomas). Texts are mostly prose fiction, with some non-fiction. Themes include family, relationships, love, childhood, marriage, violence, trauma, and time travel. A click on the cover for each entry takes you to a page on bookshop.org that provides a description of the text, price, and the option to purchase it. The descriptions indicate thematic content but not age appropriateness. However, the list has been compiled for World Book Day, with independent young readers in mind.



Publishers and booksellers

Bloomsbury's The (Incomplete) Lit in Colour Play Lists

Bloomsbury, a leading independent publishing house in the UK, partnered with Lit in Colour to recommend plays written by Global Majority writers for teachers and students aged 11-18. The list contains fifty-seven plays presented in alphabetical order by author surname. One play per playwright is featured and a brief resumé of their other plays is given. Each entry contains a synopsis and list of themes for each play, plus content warnings. Some plays included use verse, poetry and/or music. A couple are for one person, the others have varying cast sizes. Nearly all centre Global Majority characters. Some plays are all male, others all-female. Overall there is a balance of male and female protagonists. Themes explored include love, family, and relationships; immigration and belonging; politics and activism; youth and growing up; identity and culture; history; class and society; and adaptation. No indication of age appropriateness is given.

Penguin's Black Britain: Writing Back series

Penguin are a leading British publishing house. Booker Prize-winning author Bernardine Evaristo has compiled this list of books by authors who have focused on Black Britain and the diaspora over the last century. It rediscovers and celebrates eleven pioneering books, republished in 2022/23, providing a summary, ISBN and the length of each book. Books span a short story collection, fiction, and non-fiction including travelogue and memoir. The texts reflect the diverse authors' backgrounds: Hannah Pool's text reflects her visit to Eritrea to meet her birth family; C.L.R James focuses on West Indian working-class society; and A.B.C. Merriman-Labor subverts the colonial gaze of a tour of London at the turn of the 20th century. Two texts are set in Wales: *Sugar and Slate* (2002) by Charlotte Williams and *Dat's Love* (1995) by Leonora Brito. Male and female authors and protagonists are balanced. Themes include family, mental health, colonialism, identity, womanhood, culture, empire, and community. The series is aimed at a general, adult audience, so the suitability of these texts for learners needs further investigation.

Penguin's Lit in Colour book lists & supporting materials

In partnership with *The Runnymede Trust*, the UK's leading equality think tank, Penguin are supporting schools to make English literature more inclusive by increasing students' access to more books by writers of colour. Lit in Colour offers materials to aid learners from Key Stages 2 to 5. The [website](#) features digestible research and materials for schools to prompt discussion in their departments. [Materials](#) are available on poetry, non-fiction, and fiction for lower secondary level; exam practice for KS4; and English Language for KS5, to develop students' critical thinking and discussion skills. Up-to-date [reading lists](#) group texts by secondary school level. Each entry contains the book cover, a summary, key themes, and information about each text – such as the publisher, date, author name and sometimes brief biographical information. An index at the end of the list clusters texts by theme. The list mainly contains prose fiction, with a few memoirs, essay and poetry collections within each age category. One play is listed, for Years 12 and 13, *The Empress* by Tanika Gupta. Most texts focus on teenagers and young people, with a mix of male and female protagonists. Themes include love, family, politics, friendship, mental health, coming-of-age, grief, and feminism. More unusually, food, foster care, and music are highlighted. The list features authors from across the world, including Korea, Jamaica, Libya, Sri Lanka, and India. There are two authors with Welsh identities: Natasha Bowen, who is Nigerian-Welsh; and Angela Hui, born and raised in the Welsh valleys after her parents emigrated from Hong Kong.

Peters

Peters are a specialist supplier of children's books to schools and public libraries. They supply a wide range of fiction, non-fiction, and educational titles, for early years to teenagers. Their librarians and curriculum advisors read and review over 1,000 newly published texts every year. The logos of famous book awards (e.g. British Book Awards, Children's Book Award) feature under texts that have been shortlisted for or won prizes. As well as individual titles, they supply book packs, such as the [Lit in Colour secondary booster pack](#), the [Lit in Colour comprehensive pack](#), the [Lit in Colour starter pack](#), and several other [diverse and inclusive packs](#). Their website provides a [free diversity book list](#) for secondary schools, including books that feature 'characters of colour or characters from minority ethnic backgrounds' and Global Majority authors. Each entry includes the book cover, title, author, publication date, a brief blurb and price. Genres and themes include fantasy, sport, social injustice, family, friendship, and refugees. Age appropriateness is not indicated. Advisory content warnings are displayed on some texts. While plays and poetry were not in evidence, the prose books listed include a couple of graphic novels and short story collections, with a mix of male and female protagonists. The list contains two authors with connections to Wales: E.L. Norry was born and raised in Cardiff, Emma Smith-Barton is also from South Wales.

Teacher-focused organisations and resources

BAMEEd Network

This network was initiated to increase intersectionality and diversity in the education sector. They organise events, connect regional networks across the UK, offer mentoring and support to educators across career stages at schools, colleges, and universities. Their website contains a resources database for teachers covering topics such as allyship and anti-racism, Whiteness and privilege, curriculum and pedagogy. Their [booklist](#) contains contemporary prose texts by Global Majority authors. Each entry includes cover images with links to bookseller websites with further information about each text. The resource largely showcases prose fiction and picture books, with some stories based on real events, and a couple of poetry collections. There are no plays. Themes include family, friendship, growing up, coming-of-age, adventure, school, mystery, outer space, racism, and Black lives. Many texts are set in the UK, others in Iran, the Himalayas, West Africa, and Bethlehem. The list mainly contains Global Majority authors and illustrators, most of whom are based in the UK, plus some US-based and Indonesian creators. Four Welsh or Wales-based authors are featured: Emma Smith-Barton; E.L. Norry; Atinuke; and Catherine Johnson. The list is visually accessible, and easy to scroll through quickly.

Funky Pedagogy

Funky Pedagogy is an online platform by Jennifer Webb, with the contribution of Gemma Molyneux, both experienced secondary school teachers. It includes an online CPD library, a guest blogging platform, a free resources library, and links to conference and podcasts talks. [The Reading List project](#) hosts texts curated by teachers, for teachers. Users can browse texts using filters, such as key stage level, genre, 'non-white authors', or texts by women. For each list, a series of texts displayed by book cover, title, and author, appear. Clicking on a text, the following details are provided: the recommender's name, the author's name, form (e.g., historical fiction – novel), book length (pages), brief synopsis, age recommendation, flag of challenging content, and reasons for recommending. The order of texts is hard to discern. For example, in category 'non-white authors', the first four texts are suitable for year 9 upwards, followed by a text suitable for primary school ages, and then a couple of lower secondary level texts. Users are unable to filter and view multiple categories in the same search. You must browse categories such as 'non-white authors' and 'KS3' separately.

Teach It

Teach It hosts thousands of educational materials written by teachers, for teachers, aligned for AQA, Pearson, and OCR. Teaching packs contain lesson plans on texts for various levels and qualifications as well as the following: [Diverse Short Stories](#), which celebrates Black and Asian writers, and [Diverse Anthology](#), which includes GM, disabled, LGBTQ+, and working class writers. The website offers a [diverse reading list](#) for lower secondary school, plus key stages 4 and 5, but you must create a free, online account to download the PDF. No poetry or drama features, but the list includes twenty-four novels, graphic novels, anthologies, and collections of short stories, featuring Global Majority, LGBT, neurodiverse, Jewish, working-class writers and writers with disabilities. It highlights popular YA texts available as film or television. Each entry contains the book title, author's name, keywords, brief synopsis, key stage recommendation, and cover image.

Subject associations and teaching journals

May require membership or subscriptions to access materials:

English Association (EA)

The EA is a subject association for people passionate about English literature, language, and creative writing in primary and secondary schools, further and higher education. Items freely available for secondary school teachers include the Bookmarks series, providing commentary and notes on specific texts and writers. Under the professional development section of their website, there is an English Subject Specialists as Champions of Change page. Annual membership – individual, institutional or concessionary – gives access to more.

English and Media Centre (EMC)

The EMC support English and Media secondary school and Further Education (FE) teachers through publications and classroom materials, CPD, student magazines, and research. Their website contains a sample of free materials available through their standard teaching account, such as revision items for GCSE texts, and home-learning workbooks for learners aged 11-14. Other resources need to be purchased or subscribed to. Publications include *Diverse Shorts: Literature to Promote Critical Thinking* and *Iridescent Adolescent – Diverse Literary Short Stories*, both of which include short stories and novel extracts for 11-16 year olds by Global Majority authors.

The National Association for The Teaching of English (NATE)

NATE is an independent, non-funded, not-for-profit educational charity that provides publications and training for English teachers at all key stages. They publish *Teaching English*, *English in Education*, NATE News (Primary and Secondary), create exclusive teaching materials, provide on-demand CPD, and conduct research. *Teaching English* features short articles on a range of topics – from sharing new pedagogies to thoughts on the curriculum. Each issue contains a 'Text for Teachers' recommendation. Annual membership – individual, institutional, concessionary, and digital – gives access to more.

The UK Literacy Association (UKLA)

The UKLA has been working to improve literacy education since 1963, with primary, secondary school and university educators. They create publications on classroom research and teaching guides in various formats e.g. magazines, published texts, academic journals. The UKLA book awards is the only UK book award judged by teachers. The awards are not focused on diversity but the 2024 longlist features a range of authors of different ethnicities. These lists categorise texts by age appropriateness (e.g. 11-14+). Their website has free materials such as *Developing a Culturally Inclusive Curriculum*, which includes activities for sessions with teaching staff, for planning and delivering classroom work, as well as *annual book awards long lists*. The UKLA provides a free *Diversity list* and a *Black Lives Matter book list* centring Black culture, including fiction and information books. Both contain collages of front covers at the top of each section. The lists are split into the categories: 3-6+; 7-10+; information books, 3-14+; YA; adult; information books, and are followed by relevant links, including on improving race relations. The texts are mainly prose novels, with quite a few in verse, a graphic novel, and a poetry book. Common themes include sexuality, refugees, race relations and prejudice in America, friendship, family, and education. The Diversity list features Global Majority authors and characters, internationally. No blurb, biographical information, or age recommendation (other than 'YA') are provided for texts. Publication details and a summary of each text are provided. Annual membership – individual, institutional, or concessionary – gives access to more.

A Note on Terminology

Terms such as BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) or People of Colour are frequently used when talking about diverse authors and texts. The challenge presented by these terms is that they centre whiteness, perpetuating a white default. Antiracist educator [Britt Hawthorne](#) suggests that the phrase 'People of the Global Majority' challenges this and affirms that people with Black and Brown skin represent the majority of the global population. People of the Global Majority includes those of Asian, African, Arab, Latin American descent, people indigenous to the global south, biracial and multiracial people, and people and groups who have been racialised as ethnic minorities. We use the term Global Majority throughout. We also sometimes refer to specific national or ethnic identities and reflect the language used by the resource.

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