



Graphic by Pen Mendonca

Diverse Voices?

Curating a National History of Children's Books



Overview

Newcastle University's Children's Literature Unit, Seven Stories and Professor Karen Sands O'Connor hosted a symposium and two public events which interrogated how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices are represented and included in the national narrative of children's books. The events were attended by over 150 people, including children's authors, illustrators and publishers, museum and archive professionals, academics, and interested members of the public.

Organising team

- Dr Lucy Pearson and Dr Aishwarya Subramanian, Newcastle University
- Sarah Lawrance, Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books
- Professor Karen Sands O'Connor, SUNY Buffalo State
- Rachel Pattinson, Vital North Partnership



Speakers included

- Sita Brahmachari
- Candy Gourlay
- Jake Hope
- Catherine Johnson
- Patrice Lawrence
- S.I. Martin
- Beverley Naidoo
- Yu Rong
- SF Said
- Alex Wheatle MBE
- Verna Wilkins



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New research projects for the Children's Literature Unit

Diverse Voices? gave Newcastle University's Children's Literature Unit valuable new ways of thinking about the issues of diversity and how they might be integrated into their work. Since November, they have successfully supported a PhD student and Dr Aishwarya Subramanian to secure funding to explore related topics, and the Children's Literature Unit are appointing two additional postdoctoral researchers this autumn and hope this will extend this work further. But most importantly, the event helped to highlight how BAME voices could and should be included in children's literature research across the board.



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Exploring BAME activist networks in children's publishing

In December 2017, Dr Aishwarya Subramanian received funding for a postdoctoral fellowship project titled *Networked Voices: connecting BAME activism in children's literature*. This was in response to a concern, expressed at the *Diverse Voices?* event, that individuals and small organisations found it hard to spread awareness of their own activism and to stay abreast of the work carried out by other groups in the UK. The project, which will run from March - August 2018, explores the potential of digital platforms for creating an activist network. Aishwarya will be contacting the *Diverse Voices?* respondents individually, but also welcomes feedback and suggestions at networkedvoices@gmail.com

Seven Stories: exhibitions, archives and events

Since *Diverse Voices?* Seven Stories' highlights have included:

- A new exhibition, *Time to Get Up*, features titles by Verna Wilkins and Atinuke.
- Seven Stories announced the acquisition of the archives of John Agard and Grace Nichols, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Sita Brahmachari returned to Seven Stories in June 2018 hosting a Q&A with David Almond to launch our summer exhibition, *Where Your Wings Were*.
- Collections Manager, Kris McKie, spoke about the archive material Seven Stories shared at *Diverse Voices?* at the 'On Whose Terms?' conference at Goldsmiths with Professor Karen Sands O'Connor, and is continuing to work with her on the planned digital exhibition.

A digital exhibition of Black British children's literature

Professor Karen Sands-O'Connor used responses from symposium participant surveys to formulate recommendations for an online exhibition on Black British children's literature for Seven Stories. This will highlight the history of children's literature by and about Black Britons using items in Seven Stories' archival collections. In March 2018, Sands-O'Connor met with Seven Stories to discuss ways to set archival material in its historical and cultural context, and to use video footage from *Diverse Voices?* to highlight the voices of the Black British community. Work on the exhibition will continue throughout the summer, with a launch planned for early autumn 2018.



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For more information, visit research.ncl.ac.uk/diversevoices



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