

BookTrust

Represents School

Support:

Evaluation Report

**Learnings
from 2021–22**



I really liked being able to see an author in real life and I think he is a really inspiring person. He has inspired me to write a story of my own and to try and publish it."

– Year 5 student from Ipswich

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful to the teachers and students who took part in learning activities for this report.

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Executive summary



Introduction

Representation matters, especially in the books children read. At BookTrust, we believe all children should be able to see their experiences and communities reflected in the books they read because we know books impact how children see themselves and the world around them. When creators of colour are excluded from the publishing world, children miss out on a richness of perspective, a nuance in narrative and, ultimately, good stories. In 2019, BookTrust launched BookTrust Represents, a programme promoting the representation of people in colour amongst children's book creators.

BookTrust Represents supports new and upcoming creators of colour through development and mentoring activities. Alongside these activities, each term BookTrust works with schools in England to organise a creator of colour to visit Year 5–6 or Year 7 pupils. These schools receive free books, teaching resources and links to relevant Continued Professional Development courses. BookTrust Represents also hosts a virtual event with a creator of colour, which is open to all schools in the UK to take part in. This report describes the positive impact of this programme on authors' career networks and support, and children's learning experiences in schools.

Methodology

This report draws on what teachers, pupils, and authors have told us about their experience of participating in BookTrust Represents. Data from this report comes from multiple sources of data collected from March 2021 up to July 2022.

Key findings

1. Schools recognise the importance of representation in their books and curriculum, but often face challenges to making substantial changes

- Pressures on time and a lack of resources stops schools from doing more in terms of including representative books in their curriculum.
- Even when budgetary issues are not at play, schools we spoke to worried about whether they had the appropriate training or language to effectively engage pupils in conversation about diversity and representation.
- There was a tension in some schools we heard from with diversifying materials and avoiding the 'othering' of identities and cultures by doing so. Teachers highlighted a need for materials that could be appropriately embedded into classroom practices.

2. Resources from BookTrust Represents are flexibly used by schools to meet their needs and objectives

- BookTrust Represents met needs around diversity and representation in the schools we spoke to.
- Some schools we heard from embedded BookTrust Represents resources into their curriculum planning.
- Taking part in the programme helped schools to meet their broader objectives of increasing pupil aspirations and engagement in reading for enjoyment.

3. Meeting an author can create a memorable experience for students which increases motivations to read and supports aspirations around writing and creating stories

- Meeting an author created excitement in all the schools we visited.
- Receiving the same book as a class also prompted a shared reading experience, with pupils talking to one another about the story outside of lesson time.
- Many students felt inspired to write their own stories, with the authors they met serving as positive role models.

4. High-quality texts resonate with teachers and students alike

- BookTrust Represents amplifies new talent in children's literature, and most teachers and students valued the exposure to high-quality texts.

5. BookTrust Represents mentoring and development programmes helped creators build their confidence and their networks in the industry early on in their careers

- Development opportunities supported new creators' confidence in themselves.
- Authors felt their networks were expanded by taking part in the programme.
- Many valued having support and feedback from more well-established peers.

Conclusions

Representation matters. Schools want their students to read a diverse range of books with characters, themes and creators who are reflective of the diversity of the United Kingdom. They work hard to give their pupils rich and diverse learning experiences. Our learning activities show that BookTrust Represents can have a positive impact on students, and support schools in delivering high-quality learning experiences. We also found that exposure to positive role models and access to high-quality texts can support students' aspirations, school practices and motivations to read. BookTrust is learning how to further strengthen its contribution to representation in UK children's literature. We are committed to being active partners in the wider sector engaging with families, schools, creators and other sector partners who share this objective.

Introduction

Books are powerful. They offer windows looking into new experiences, mirrors into our own lives and sliding doors into new worlds¹. Great stories can spark creativity, capture imaginations, provide joy and offer moments for escapism. We also know that reading brings profound and wide-ranging benefits that can have a lifelong positive impact.



Diversity in children's books

We believe children should have access to a wide range of books and stories. Whatever a child's interest, age or reading ability, there are stories that can capture their attention, and we need to ensure children have the opportunity to find these stories. We also know books prepare children for life.

When books are windows, children see people, worlds and experiences removed from their own. These books build bridges of understanding across racial, cultural and identity differences² by nurturing empathy and compassion³.

When books are mirrors, children find themselves in the stories they read. This process helps children form meaningful connections with books, making reading itself a more enjoyable experience⁴. Relatability in a story also boosts self-esteem and can shape children's perceptions of themselves and who they aspire to be⁵.

However, many children may find it hard to access diverse literature at school or at home, meaning they may miss out on a richness of perspective, a nuance in narrative and, ultimately, good stories. BookTrust's Family Survey found that 11% of children aged 7 to 17 said not being able to find books they can relate to stops them from reading⁶. In addition, Penguin's *Lit in Colour* report found that less than 1% of candidates for GCSE English Literature answered a question on a novel by an author of colour, while 52% of 11 to 18-year-olds agreed that the English Literature curriculum did not reflect the diversity of British society⁷. These findings highlight a lack of representation of creators of colour in the texts students access at school.

¹ Bishop (1990).

² Adam (2021); Southard et al (2014).

³ Newstreet et al (2019); Rimmel (2020); Tschida et al (2014).

⁴ Vyas (2004); Sutherland (2005); Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009).

⁵ Zambo (2007); Zambo and Brozo, (2008); Sutherland, (2005).

⁶ BookTrust Family Survey (2021).

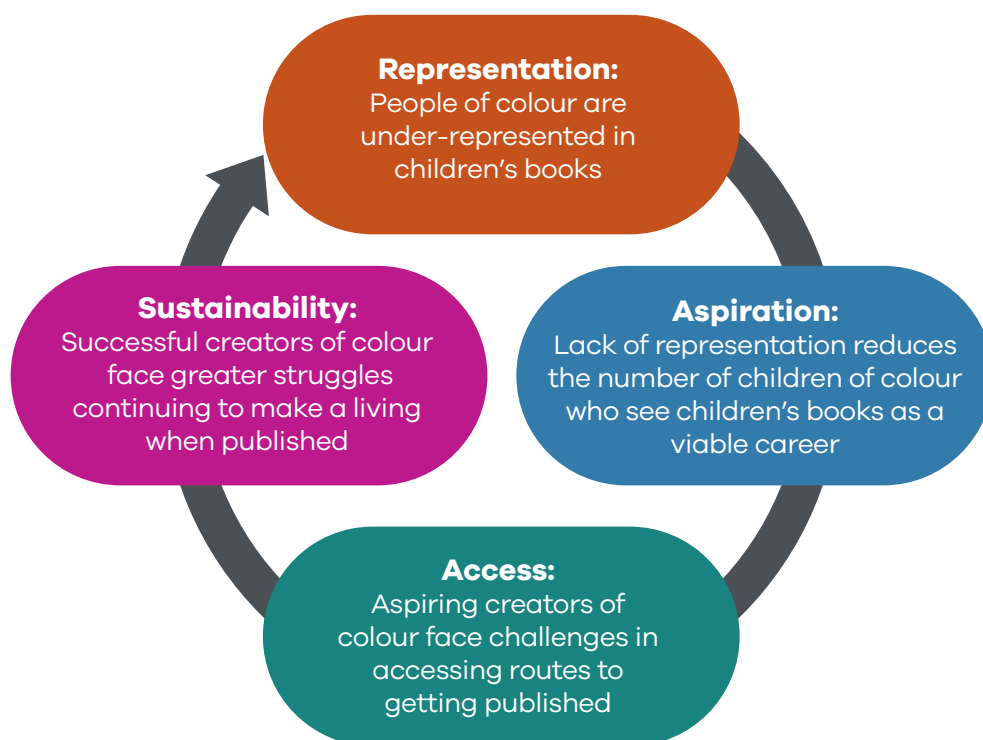
⁷ Elliot et al (2021).

BookTrust Represents

In 2019, BookTrust commissioned research to establish a clear picture of who writes and illustrates the books children read. This report found that between 2007 and 2017, 8.62% of children's book creators were people of colour and only 1.96% were British people of colour. Authors cited complex and multifaceted barriers to inclusive publishing, many of which

compound to create a negative cycle (figure 1). When children don't see themselves in the books they read, they are less likely to see creating books as a viable career. For those that do aspire to create books, challenges in accessing publishing and sustainability in the sector mean people of colour remain underrepresented in children's books.

Figure 1. Barriers to inclusivity among children's book creators⁸



BookTrust Represents was created in response to these barriers. The programme supports authors of colour in building their confidence as creators, making the most of their network and learning from other well-established creators in this space. Alongside these activities, the programme gives authors the opportunity to visit schools across England each term – physically and virtually – and talk about their books, lives and inspire a love of reading amongst primary (Year 5–6) and secondary (Year 7) school pupils.

The aim of this programme is to get more children reading books by creators of colour. To do so, BookTrust Represents supports creators of colour in getting their work published, recognised and into the hands of teachers and students. Schools are then provided with support, resources and memorable experiences to help them use these texts in their classroom practices and expose pupils to role models from diverse backgrounds.

This report explores the reach and impact of BookTrust Represents over the last year. It assesses the extent to which the programme delivers on its key aims, and maps out how this programme currently fits within the school climate.

Programme Structure

School support

Each term, BookTrust Represents selects up to ten schools to take part in the in-person strand of the programme. The selection process considers area-level information on deprivation and the proportion of students eligible for Free School Meals in line with our strategic priorities of reaching students from less advantaged backgrounds. These schools are visited by an author or illustrator of colour and receive enough copies of the creator's book for an entire year group. In addition, teachers receive lesson prompts around the book they are given (to support general discussion around the author visit and book), one copy of *Happy*

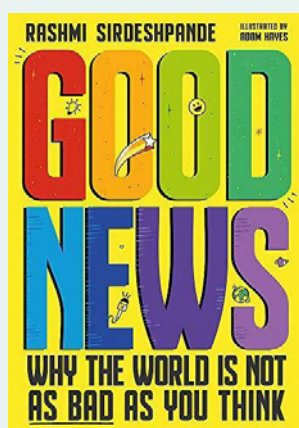
*Here*⁹ for their school, and links to training from CLPE¹⁰ on creating a text-based curriculum inspired by *Happy Here*.

Alongside these activities, each term BookTrust hosts an author for a virtual school talk. While in-person visits achieve depth of connection with a small group of schools, virtual visits achieve breadth of reach. Any school can sign up for this one-hour session and all schools are able to submit questions for the author to answer live. The 100 schools with the highest proportion of students eligible for Free School Meals also receive up to 100 copies of the author's book each.

Much of this report focuses on the 2022 Summer term activities of BookTrust Represents. This term featured the following authors and titles:

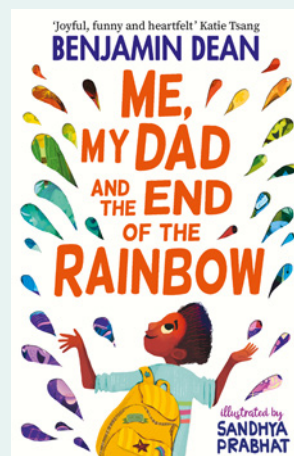
**Rashmi Sirdeshpande (author),
Adam Hayes (illustrator)**

Good News: Why the World is Not as Bad as You Think
Publisher: Hachette Children's Group.



**Benjamin Dean (author),
Sandhya Prabhat (illustrator)**

Me, My Dad and the End of the Rainbow
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Ltd.



⁹ *Happy Here: 10 Stories from Black British Authors* by Sharna Jackson et al (Knights Of, 2021).

¹⁰ Planning a text-based curriculum around *Happy Here*

Tolá Okogwu

Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Ltd.



Annabelle Sami (author), Allen Fatimaharan (illustrator)

Llama out Loud

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers.



Priscilla Mante

Jaz Santos vs the World

Publisher: Penguin Random House
Children's UK.



Author support

New and upcoming authors and illustrators are invited to take part in BookTrust's development programmes. These creators receive training and mentoring support from more well-established creators.

Our latest report¹¹ shows that more creators of colour than ever are being published. But there are still challenges relating to systemic issues in the industry hindering progress, and continued efforts are required to sustain improvements.

Methodology

This report draws on multiple sources of data collected from March 2021 up until July 2022 including registration forms with schools; in-depth Summer term learning with teachers and pupils in Year 5; online feedback forms with schools taking part in virtual events; feedback forms from authors taking part in the development programmes; and informal feedback via email and conversations with teachers.

1. Registration forms with schools

Statistics on how schools prioritise representation and barriers they face come from registration forms from 1,689 UK primary and secondary schools signing up for a virtual event since Spring 2021.

2. Summer term learning

Qualitative learning with four primary schools that BookTrust facilitated to receive an in-person creator visit. We conducted interviews with two members of senior leadership and four class teachers before the event and follow-up interviews with the same four class teachers and their Year 5 pupils.

3. Virtual event feedback form

Schools watching the Summer term virtual event were invited to complete a feedback form (n = 41). This form captured their level of satisfaction of the event.

4. Feedback from authors

Feedback from authors on BookTrust's 2021 Development Week, *Perfecting an author visit* workshop and an external event at the Cheltenham Literature Festival.





Findings

1. Schools recognise the importance of representation in their books and curriculum, but often face challenges to making substantial changes

Views on the importance of representation

Representation is important to schools. Some teachers told us that diversity in books is something Ofsted looks for, and therefore is an expectation that must be met. Many teachers also expressed personal social values as those driving changes around representation in their schools.

“Ofsted looks for it [diversity and inclusion in books] but it is the right thing to do anyway.”

– English Lead, Primary school, Ipswich

For those with a diverse student body, schools told us it was crucial their students see and identify with positive role models in literature. Teachers commented that they wanted students to experience the benefits of seeing accurate representations of their worlds and lives, which included boosts to self-esteem, feelings of belonging in the school community, and the facilitation of safe and optimistic life aspirations.

“We are a diverse school with more than 40 languages spoken by children and families. Allowing children to read about and see their own cultures represented on the page gives them confidence, ambition and self-worth.”

– Primary school, London

Schools with monocultural student bodies also commented that representation in books was an important way for their pupils to understand and build sensitivity towards people who are different to themselves.

“As a predominantly white British community we seek to support the children in their understanding of what it is to be a global citizen and that Britain has a history rich in cultural diversity.”

– Primary school, Shropshire

Barriers to diversifying texts

56% of schools signing up for BookTrust Represent's Summer term virtual event said budget was the main factor stopping them from increasing representation in their books. Schools we spoke to also shared the difficulties they face in buying new books for their pupils, particularly enough copies of a book for an entire class to read as would be needed for texts on the curriculum.

However, teachers also commented on the limited time they have to research new books, a lack of knowledge on new books and authors, and not knowing where to look for this information. Many teachers we spoke to did not have one 'go-to' place they looked for new, relevant, engaging and diverse books, meaning looking for these texts, researching them and buying them was often labour intensive.

"I always feel like I'm playing catch-up [...] I would like to feel as though I have [knowledge of] more diverse books that I feel comfortable to recommend."

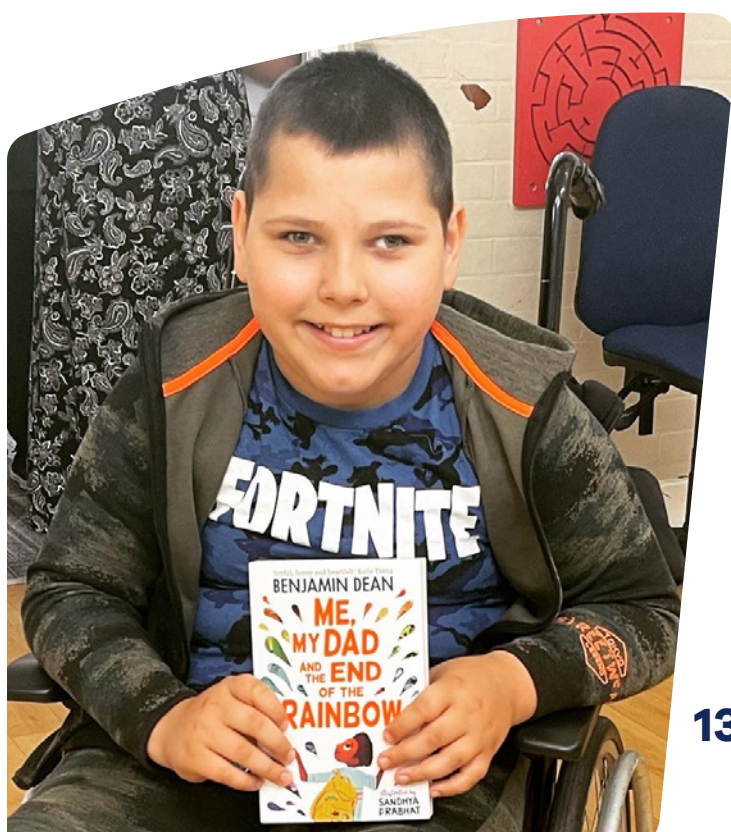
– Class teacher, Primary school, Ipswich

Even when budgetary or time issues are not at play, many teachers we spoke to expressed worries about their own knowledge and language in effectively engaging students in conversations about diversity and representation. However, two schools we spoke to had training in this area which increased confidence.

"The staff were always worried about saying the right thing and are a white British population [...] the training has covered how issues can be covered without having uncertainty [...] this has given the teachers the courage to accurately represent the children of the UK and beyond."

– Head Teacher, Primary school, Ipswich

Concerns around 'othering' were also prevalent. Teachers were conscious of how their own practices, however well intentioned, may contribute towards the othering of communities or identities. To spark interest in students, teachers mentioned that diverse texts must still involve topics students already find enjoyable or interesting, not representation that has been tokenised or trivialised. BookTrust also shares this perspective, and books and creators supported through BookTrust Represents are carefully selected based on the quality of their stories.



2. Resources from BookTrust Represents are flexibly used by schools to meet their needs and objectives

Reach and views of BookTrust Represents

BookTrust Represents has had extensive reach. Since 2021, we have:

- Reached 1,689 primary and secondary schools and approximately 48,800 students in the UK with virtual author events.
- Provided 50,705 books to schools.
- Supported 406 creators of colour through wider development opportunities.

Schools we spoke to said that BookTrust Represents is an easy way for them to address gaps in representation in their activities and achieve their broader objectives. They commented that giving students the opportunity to meet an author in person allows students to see positive role models from different backgrounds. Many schools were also keen to take part in BookTrust Represents because they felt these authors could help raise pupil aspirations, as well as their general interest in reading.

“The children look up to these authors as cool and it makes writing and reading seem cool. They need to be able to see that.”

– Assistant Head Teacher,
Primary school, Ipswich

Use of BookTrust Represents resources

Schools used the free books they received as gifts for students to take home and kept extra copies within the school. Some used the texts as material for guided reading, while others used the text as supporting material in other lessons – for example, in PSHE to discuss family structures and relationships.

Case study: Summer term primary school 1

This school used *Me, My Dad* and *the End of the Rainbow* as a stimulus text in their literacy for a term. Teachers did not at first call attention to the fact that the story featured LGBTQ+ characters and themes, and instead allowed students to encounter these naturally. In doing so, the school were able to organically discuss ideas surrounding LGBTQ+ identities in a way that did not ‘other’ these identities.



A few schools were further ahead in their curriculum planning and had considered the ways in which more diverse texts could be used in their lesson plans. For example, one school we spoke to had conducted an overhaul of their English curriculum and was already in the middle of this process when they signed up to BookTrust Represents. This overhaul meant the school was better placed to incorporate (and plan for) new reading materials in their curriculum.

Other schools were still in the process of diversifying their curriculum planning, describing themselves at 'the beginning of the journey'. For these schools, resources from BookTrust Represents offered insight into how stories and fiction could promote school values and representation.

“We want to promote [our school ethos of looking out for others] even further through the characters [students] come across in books. In this way, the BookTrust programme [has] influenced our literacy.”

– Teacher, Ipswich

Although based on a small number of examples, the views discussed demonstrate the impact resources like free books and author experiences can have on a school. BookTrust will continue to develop resources that can be used flexibly by schools.

3. In-person author events can create a memorable experience for students which can increase motivations to read and build aspirations around writing and creating stories

Students' experiences with the BookTrust Represents creator visits

In some schools, BookTrust Represents offered students the opportunity to meet an author for the first time in their lives. Pupils from the two rural schools we visited particularly commented on the specialness of the event, feeling like it was a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity'.

“I think it was very inspiring as if you were thinking of being an author it might have been the thing to give you that extra boost. I also felt quite lucky as it was probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

– Pupil's review of Rashmi Sirdeshpande's talk



We heard from some pupils about the value of seeing themselves represented by the author or author's book. This connection supported students' wellbeing, helping them feel seen.



“So I like this book and I would give this book four stars. I like in this book that it makes me feel happy when I read it [...] It makes me feel better when I read it and I can see something like me and I can understand that is not only me like that.”

– Pupil's review of Benjamin Dean's talk

“It was very fun. I liked that she was from India and how she explained her life as I'm also from India!”

– Pupil's review of Rashmi Sirdeshpande's talk



Our evaluation activities took place in predominantly white British schools. Students who did not personally relate to the author or the author's book still appreciated learning about different cultures, communities or ways of life. For example, we found this theme in relation to Benjamin's book, *Me, My Dad and the End of the Rainbow*, which features LGBTQ+ characters.

“I like how it shows diversity in different ways such as LGBTQ+ community.”

– Year 5 pupil

Impact of BookTrust Represents on reading and aspirations

When all pupils in a class were gifted a copy of the same book to keep, teachers observed a positive effect on reading. Pupils were speaking with each other about the book, creating a shared reading experience for the class. One school had copies of the book for guided reading in addition to the copies for students to take home, and this connection in home and school reading materials appeared to have facilitated an even stronger shared reading experience for pupils. Although based on only a few case studies, this learning suggests that a connection between home and school reading materials may be a mechanism to explore further in relation to behaviour change around reading.

“ [After the author event] I looked around at the class at break and all the students were sat faces in the book, completely in silence. They couldn’t stop reading. I’ve never seen them do anything like that before.”

– Teaching Assistant, Ipswich

The event impacted aspirations. Many pupils revealed that they had started writing their own stories after hearing from an author, with some saying the event inspired them to want to become an author themselves.

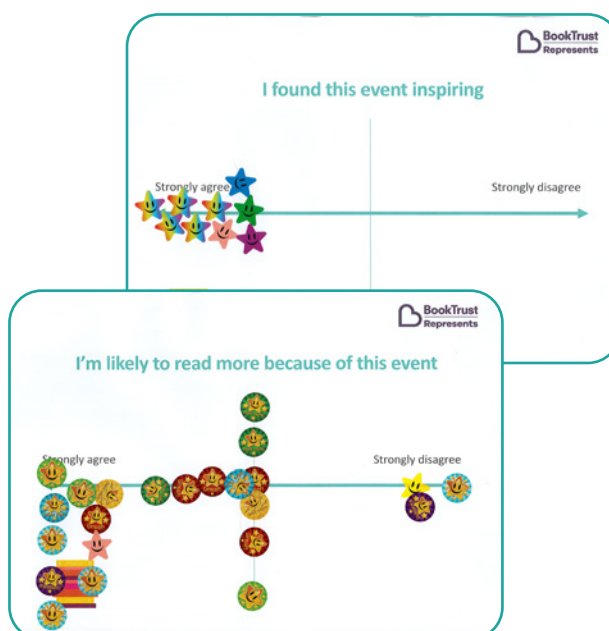
“ I really enjoyed this event as we got to imagine making a book. We were really inspired and I got to make my own story. It made me write my own story about pride.”

– Year 5 pupil

“ I think it is important to take time out for the children, especially for things like this. It has inspired the children a lot.”

– Teacher, Ipswich

Of the 41 teachers providing feedback on the virtual event, the average rating of the event was 4.63 stars out of 5. All schools said they would recommend the programme to others. BookTrust will be learning more about the impact of our virtual events in future evaluations of the BookTrust Represents programme.





4. High-quality texts resonate with teachers and students alike

Our learning activities took place in schools with a predominantly white British population in England. We found that representation in books was not always front of mind for the students we spoke to, and it did not come up in conversations unprompted. However, this is not to say representation was not important to them. Particularly in schools with slightly more diverse student bodies, pupils expressed in conversation or in their actions the value of representation, even when they could not do so in words on paper. For example, when read aloud the blurb for *Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun*, a Black girl was visibly excited and ranked the book as one she would be highly interested in reading. In another conversation, a boy mentioned reading a book with bilingual text, and how he enjoyed seeing things in both English and his first language.

Teachers we spoke to valued having exposure to high-quality texts featured in the programme. Books were used in class as source material for reading and writing

exercises, demonstrating the teachability of the content, and extra books were kept by some for guided reading. Another teacher commented on the appropriateness of the book they received, and valued how accessible the text felt for their year group.

“ [The class] liked opening [the book] and not seeing pages and pages of words [...] as soon as they opened it, they knew it was something they could read and enjoy.”

– Teacher, Ipswich

BookTrust Represents supports new talent in children’s literature, and in doing so, allows schools to better access good books and stories from diverse authors.

5. Mentoring and development programmes

can help creators build their confidence and their networks in the industry early on in their careers

Since 2021, we have hosted a series of events supporting authors and creators of colour in their career development. Authors have shared that these events have increased their confidence as creators, provided valuable learning opportunities from more well-established creators and facilitated network building.

“It’s one of the best things I have ever done... I came away from the session feeling both confident and inspired and with a clear plan of how to take my work forward.”

– Author, feedback on Development Week series



Conclusions

Representation matters. Schools want their students to read a diverse range of books with characters, themes and authors who are reflective of the diversity of the United Kingdom.

Our learning activities show that programmes like BookTrust Represents can have a positive impact on children. Exposure to positive role models and access to high-quality texts can support students' aspirations, school practices and motivations to read. BookTrust is learning how to further strengthen its contribution to representation in UK children's literature. We are committed to being active partners in the wider sector engaging with families, schools, creators and other sector partners who share this objective.





Limitations

This report draws mainly on qualitative insights and feedback. As such, the generalisations of these findings to the wider school landscape is limited. We will continue to learn about the impact of BookTrust Represents across different school settings, phases of education and regions.

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BookTrust

No. 1 Aire Street
Leeds
LS1 4PR

T: +44 (0)20 7801 8800

E: booktrust.represents@booktrust.org.uk

booktrust.org.uk/represents

Charity number: 313343



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