

# The corners

*Newsletter of the Teaching Resources Collection at Bishop Grosseteste University Library (BGU)*

**Welcome** to the seventh issue of *The Four Corners*, a free children's literature newsletter published by the Library at BGU to promote children's literature and its Teaching Resources Collection (TRC). It is published bi-annually and edited by Rose Roberto, Teaching Resources Librarian and historian, and Amy Webster, Senior Lecturer in Education Studies. In addition to our regular features listed below, this issue's special theme is 'diverse literature, diverse literacies', which links well with Black History Month (BHM) that is celebrated across the UK in every October, and across the BGU campus with numerous events.

Diversity remains a key issue in the field of children's literature and literacies with an ongoing emphasis on how books and literacy practices should allow all children to see their own lives reflected back to them. Whilst this issue is widely agreed to be significant and progress is happening, published statistics repeatedly show that there is still much progress to be made to ensure an equitable representation of minorities. This representation of diversity is important in itself so that all children can see themselves in texts, but it also allows children to see people who are not like themselves and that helps to foster an appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism. This topic forms the focus of the conference on 30<sup>th</sup> October hosted by the Literature and Literacies (LiLi) group at BGU. The conference features keynotes from Dr Verity Jones on how picturebooks are relevant in a time of climate crisis, and from Dr Sabine Little on children's multicultural reading, and includes talks by BGU academics. Author, Eva Wong Nava, makes a virtual appearance.

In line with the approach adopted in children's literature scholarship this issue conceives of diversity in a broad sense to encompass areas such as neurodiversity, as reflected in Olivia Macnab's article on the Identity Inclusion project. Additionally, it features pieces on linking BHM to BGU library collections, and book reviews by students from the Early Childhood Studies programme. We are also delighted to have the voices of children's authors and illustrators included in the second part of Rose's interview with Rachel Ignatofsky, and an interview with Lucy Tandon Copp who discusses the need for greater representation of East and South East Asian regions in children's literature.

*The Four Corners* always welcomes submissions at: [fourcorners@bishopg.ac.uk](mailto:fourcorners@bishopg.ac.uk). All photos in this issue by Rose Roberto, except where noted otherwise.



Joseph Coelho, Waterstones Children's Laureate, 2022-2024

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## Black History Month Highlights BGU Library Collections

BY ROSE ROBERTO, TEACHING RESOURCES LIBRARIAN

In the UK, the month of October is Black History Month (BHM), which has been commemorated nationwide for over 40 years as a way to celebrate and recognise the contributions of Black people to British history, with the first celebrations taking place in London in the 1980s. The campaign to dedicate a national holiday in recognition of Black History was initiated in 1926 by a man called Carter Wilson, an academic and American historian, who believed that Black Americans were not being taught about their ancestors or their own history. Black History Month was founded to fill the gaps in mainstream education and public awareness. It is normally recognised by schools and cultural institutions such as museums and libraries, as well as businesses, and in the UK involves celebrating the achievements of famous Black Britons, learning more about pivotal events in Black history like colonialism, abolition and the Civil Rights movement.

Creating a better society, according to the Runnymede Trust, involves acknowledging a country's



One of the BHM displays in the TRC, October 2023.

historical role in the African diaspora and 'critically examining the influence of colonial legacies on education systems as a whole'.<sup>1</sup> BHM also provides a period for people to reflect upon and actively challenge personal biases that might influence perceptions based on the lens of personal experience.

Some of the arguments against dedicating an entire month to Black History are: 1) It is 'outdated' and how can Black History be taught in a single month?; 2) Campaigns to celebrate other identities with protected characteristics are just as important, but they do not have a whole month dedicated to them; and 3) Some entities use BHM programming to signal that they are anti-racist without doing any work to understand the complexity of racism or how to practically assist their employees, customers, or local community.

Counter to these reasons, Bishop Grosseteste University, and by extension BGU Library,

believes that lessons from 'Black History' can unite us as a community, that celebrating differences and generating empathy have countless social benefits for everyone, and that we better understand how important our own stories are when we learn the social justice struggles of others, because unfortunately violence and bigotry are still in the news—in ways that personally affect many of us. Additionally, there is still a lot to learn during this month that can be applied throughout the year.

For us at the Library, BHM provides a cross-campus programming structure to engage with the university community and plan sessions intended to educate, entertain, and challenge existing ideas and knowledge. Furthermore, it gives us the opportunity to share our collections and spaces

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, M. and Mouthaan, M. 'Decolonising the curriculum: the importance of teacher training and development.' Runnymede Trust. 25 June 2021.

NOTES FROM OUR LIBRARY COLLECTIONS (CONT.)

through a series of displays, highlighting material in our collections that are thematically linked to other BHM events on campus. For example, working in partnership with colleagues at the University of Lincoln, the BGU Library displayed history-themed posters revealing the Black Presence in Lincolnshire. These posters are part of an illustrated presentation that Heather Hughes, Professor of Cultural Heritage Studies and Victoria Araj, Lecturer in EDI, delivered on 19 October at the Chapel on the BGU Campus. Likewise, the display in the TRC on the week of 3 October was themed ‘Black Poetry’, and was coordinated with the events on Thursday, 5 October celebrating National Poetry Day in the UK.



This year BHM also allowed the Teaching Resources Collection to play a part in BGU’s outreach with both the regional and more local Lincolnshire community.

A film crew from ITV interviewed Dr Sheine Peart, BHM Planning Chair, and Dr Wahiba Toubal (pictured below) prior to her on-campus lecture, ‘Influential Black Scientists Past and Present’ on Wednesday, 11 October, as part of an *ITV News Calendar* segment. The show discussed the lack of diversity in STEM fields, and the general lack of knowledge that there are prominent Black British mathematicians and scientists. The programmes and events organised by BGU helped to educate the public and local schools were in attendance.

Closer to home were BHM events at the Ermine Library and Community Hub. Lauren West, who coordinated the events at the hub said, ‘It was amazing to tap into the BHM resources held at the TRC. The local community learned so much thanks to the posters, the books, and the music of the group, *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, that were recommended by the knowledgeable BG librarians. Our local community went from uncertainty of this topic to enjoyment of it. The volunteers and I also learned a lot. We appreciate that BHM is our history and is important.’



Left: BHM Poster in TRC. Right: ITV Film Crew in the TRC interviewing Dr Wahiba Toubal, October 2023, photo courtesy of BGU Marketing.

## Meeting the UK Children's Laureate BY IRIS, A YEAR 7 SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT

Last year I met Joseph Coelho at the *Off the Shelf* literary festival held every year in Sheffield. It took place at the Tanya Moiseiwitsch Playhouse in the Crucible Theatre, and was a great experience. I want to be writer, but not necessarily a poet. However, he made the writing poems activity really fun.

First, he talked about his life. He said he studied marine biology but after school decided to be a writer instead of a biologist. He knew he liked writing since he was 7-years-old, when he entered a national writing contest. Although he didn't win, he really enjoyed the act of creating something. But he didn't think he could do writing as a job because he didn't think people who became writers looked like him. It was not until a writer of colour came to speak at his school while he was studying for his A-levels that he changed his mind. She inspired him to become a writer himself, because he said if she could be a writer, so could he. That is why he thinks it's important to meet children doing his job as UK Children's Laureate. It is to show us that we all can be writers, too.

Joseph Coelho then talked about where he got some of his ideas. He writes lots of poems. In fact, *Off the Shelf* commissioned him to write a poem about the environment. We were the first to hear it.<sup>2</sup> However, he also writes plays and novels. I want to write those and illustrate them, too. He encouraged us to use our own voices and then we created a poem.

For most of the session, we talked about memory and the 'MORPERS' technique of writing poems. 'MORPERS' gives you a structure while you reach into your memory for ideas. First he wrote 'MORPERS' diagonally on the left side of a large paper on an easel. Then he asked us kids in the audience to come up with different examples of something which he wrote next to each letter. So, for instance, he asked, 'What is a metaphor?' When I answered, 'When something **is** something else,' he said, 'That's right.' Then he asked us to come up with a metaphor for the sun. Someone suggested, 'The sun is a shiny coin' so he wrote that down. Here is a list of other things he wrote down.

**Metaphor** - Sun is a shiny coin  
**Onomatopoeia** - Sizzles  
**Rhyme** - Sun fun  
**Personification** - The sun smiles  
**Emotion** - feel happy  
**Repetition** - the day, the day moves across the sky  
**Simile** - The sun is like a ball of fire

On the last item, simile, the audience gave some really funny answers. Some were pretty dark, too. While he wrote down things about the sun, he also gave us other words to find similes for. 'What about a television aerial?' he asked, saying similes could be about anything we saw around us.

I said, 'The aerial on the roof stuck out like an obsidian arrowhead.' Joseph said he liked that. Somebody else said, 'The aerial on the roof stuck out like daggers pointing into the sky.' He liked that too. Other people talked about food or desserts that stick up. We had a laugh, and he ended this part by telling us, 'Now, I'm hungry.'

After this activity, he read his specially composed poem, 'The Children on the Throne' then he asked us if we had any questions.

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<sup>2</sup> A recorded version of the poem is available here:  
<https://player.sheffield.ac.uk/events/watch-waterstones-childrens-laureate-joseph-coelho-reads-children-throne>

One question was: ‘Who would you like to write a poem about that you haven’t already?’

He answered, ‘Sir David Attenborough.’

Another question was: ‘How do you keep track of ideas?’

He suggested, ‘Keep a notebook on you at all times. Keep the first page blank. Then when it is filled up, go back and number the pages, then make a table of contents.’

I liked this idea, but I haven’t done it yet on my notebooks.

Another question was: ‘Do you illustrate your own books?’

He said, ‘No. I work with great illustrators, but I do want to take art/drawing classes so that I can do one of my own books in the future.’



(Iris’ mother), Joseph Coelho, and Iris, 2022

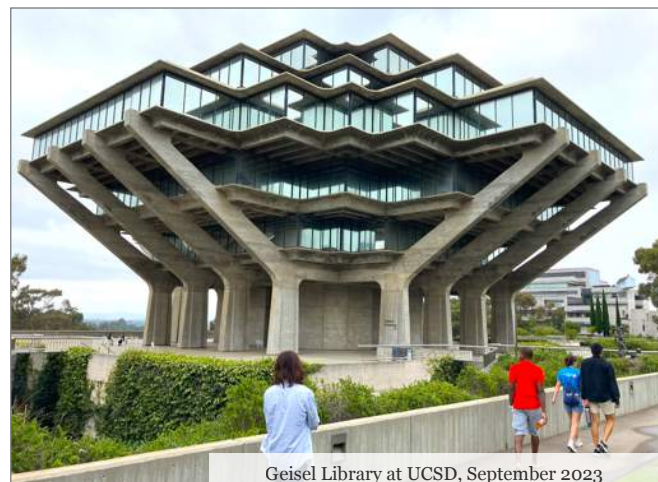
Overall, it was interesting and fun to meet an author like Joseph. I liked all his books that I’ve read.

## Dr. Seuss: the Man, the Library BY ROSE ROBERTO, TEACHING RESOURCES LIBRARIAN

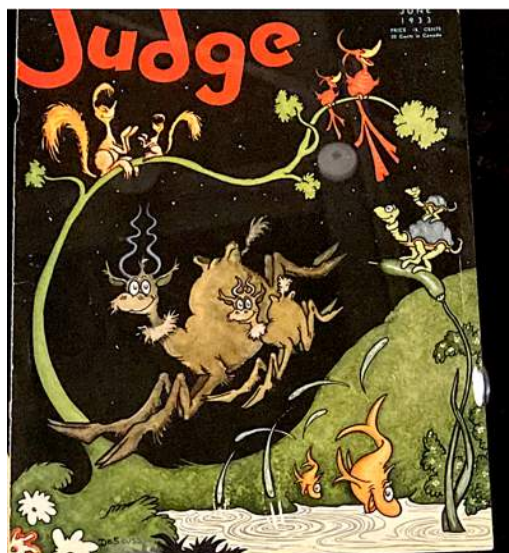
On the campus of UCSD (University of California, San Diego), is a library named after American writer and cartoonist Theodor Seuss Geisel (1904-1991), known for over 60 children’s books under the name ‘Dr. Seuss’.

Geisel began using this pseudonym when he was studying at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire for a BA awarded in 1924. He was caught drinking alcohol, which was a problem in the era of Prohibition in the US, where *any* consumption of alcohol was illegal. While he was not expelled, his participation in any school organisation was barred, including

the student’s humour magazine, *Jack-O-Lantern* for which he had been a writer. Geisel continued to clandestinely contribute work to the magazine under the name ‘Seuss’ or ‘T. Seuss.’



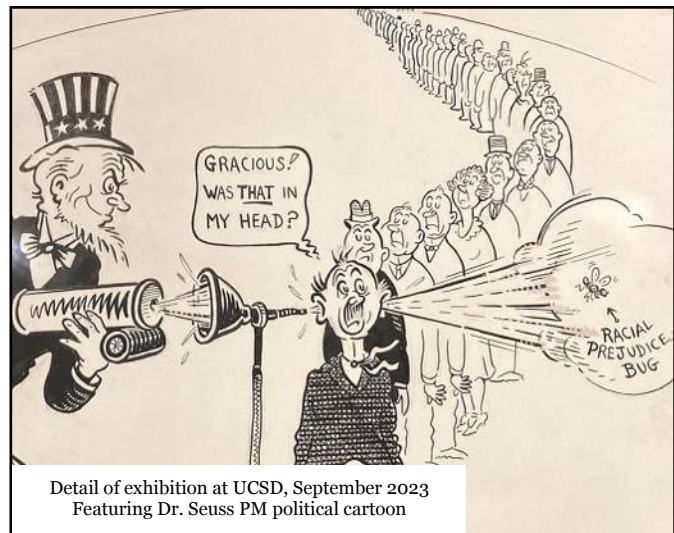
Geisel Library at UCSD, September 2023



Detail of exhibition at UCSD, September 2023  
Featuring 1933 *Judge* magazine issue

The ‘Dr.’ was adopted later as an homage to his father who had hoped Theodor would complete his PhD at Oxford University. However, while studying literature at Lincoln College, Oxford, Theodor met his first wife, Helen Palmer (1898-1967), who convinced him that he should be earning a living through his drawing, rather than by lecturing in English literature. In 1927, he moved back to the US and then to New York where he accepted a job as a writer and illustrator for *Judge* magazine. His first published work there was signed ‘Dr. Seuss.’ Geisel also published cartoons in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Liberty* and *Vanity Fair* magazines, but also free-lanced for advertising campaigns.

At the outbreak of WWII, Geisel began drawing political cartoons for the left-leaning New York City daily paper, *PM*. He created over 400 drawings, strongly criticising Isolationists who opposed the US joining the Allies, others supporting President F. D. Roosevelt, and others deploring racism at home against Jews and African Americans which harmed the war effort. In 1942, Geisel worked for the US Treasury Department, then War Production Board, and finally a joined the Army as a captain. In this post he headed the Animation Department of the First Motion Picture Unit of the United States Army Air Forces, creating several training, propaganda and documentary films. He and his wife, Helen Palmer, moved to La Jolla, California at the end of the war. Palmer also wrote children's books.



Detail of exhibition at UCSD, September 2023  
Featuring Dr. Seuss PM political cartoon

Although Theodor Geisel had written two children's books prior to WWII, he fully dedicated himself to this part of his career in the 1950s. Many of his books received awards, including: Caldecott Honor Awards, the Children's Literature Legacy Award, and a Pulitzer Prize Citation.

In 1954, *Life* magazine published a report on low literacy rates in the US, stating that school children were not learning to read because their books were too boring. The director of education at Houghton Mifflin publishing house, William Ellsworth Spaulding, contacted Theodor Geisel to help improve these reading statistics. He provided Geisel with a list of nearly 350 words that 6-year old children were required to read in order to pass first grade reading standards and asked if he could come up with a storybook 'that kids could not put down.' Geisel took nine months, used 236 words from the list, and came up with *The Cat in the Hat*. His archival material on display at the Geisel Library shows that early drafts for this classic and other books were composed using crayons. Also on display were some of his political cartoons.

When I was attending library school at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Prof. Anne Gilliland told our class that the Geisel papers were originally donated to UCLA, but that shortly after they were processed, Geisel's widow (second wife, Audrey Dimond, 1921-2018) requested that they be moved closer to her in San Diego, much to the chagrin of the archivists who'd spent time and effort processing the collection. Since the donation had been made to the 'Regents of the University of California', the Regents decided it did not matter which one of the ten UC campuses the papers were held at, as long as they stayed within the UC System. In 1992, almost 20,000 drawings, sketches, notebooks and other memorabilia, valued at \$2.3 million were moved to the UCSD Library. Following a further \$20 million donation, the main library was renamed the Geisel Library. In addition to exhibition cases displaying archival material which changes several times per year, UCSD has digitised many Geisel items and made them available online to benefit researchers.



Detail of exhibition at UCSD, September 2023  
Featuring Dr. Seuss unpublished artwork.

## Identity Inclusion

BY OLIVIA MACNAB, FORMER BGU STUDENT, BA IN APPLIED DRAMA IN THE COMMUNITY

'Identity Inclusion' was a twelve-week-long creative writing and performance project which I ran for my Community Project module during my BA in Applied Drama in the Community from February to May 2023. It was produced with students from the Creative Writing Society and the Autism Resources and Community Hub at Bishop Grosseteste University.

Throughout the course of the project, I encouraged my participants to join me in creating a number of pieces of poetry, prose and script based on a series of prompts, from which they then selected some pieces to enter into an anthology, printed by Digital Printing Services and sponsored by Eat More Good Stuff. We then selected extracts from these pieces and created a performance of dramatic readings, recordings and theatrical interpretations with each participant performing in each other's pieces and directing their own. This performance was given on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2023, accompanied by a book fair featuring local authors, and a literature-themed quiz night in the Student's Union Bar after the show, all in celebration of the release of the anthology and to encourage the project's aims.

'Identity Inclusion, empowered its participants to use their voices, carrying them on a creative journey to self-discovery and self-expression. It boosted their confidence, built their communication skills and literacy, and encouraged them to express their identity and experiences. Equally, it granted its audience increased empathy and understanding of diverse experiences, particularly surrounding neurodiversity, granting them meaningful and empathic connections with the experiences and identities of autistic students. It evidenced the importance of the applied arts to people's lives, and their ability to cross barriers, overcome stigma and encourage intersectional supportive communities.

Below are three examples of writing produced during the project; one of prose, one of poetry and one of script. This provides just a taste of the interesting work produced. All the pieces included in the anthology, as well as discussion of the project's findings and explorations from the authors, will be published in a collected volume, *Creative Reading and Writing in Autism* by Dr. Clare Lawrence and Olivia Macnab in early 2024 by Straightforward Books.

### **A Peaceful Memory (Prompt: your favourite place on campus)**

There was a time in first year, when I sat next to the student's union gazing out at the small field. I spend a lot of time lurking there, having a cigarette, staring at my phone, sitting atop the picnic table rather than on the bench, but somehow, this one day in first year, it was the perfect break between winter and spring. I hadn't seen snow in years, and it was a blanket; I couldn't hear anything. The biggest tree stood bare, but not naked and scared like so many trees do, but with its own little white caps on each of its branches, and old nests from the seasons gone by sat quietly in the crooks. The sun was golden - I always loved winter sun, bright and welcoming, but not too warm - just reminding you that I am here, and I will rise another day. What was fascinating to me was the flowers gently poking their heads through; snowdrops and crocuses fighting to be heard through the all-encompassing silence, and the blossoming trees closer to the patio where I was. I've always loved cherry blossom, their recognition of how fleeting life can be, and how it welcomes the spring. Sakura never lasts too long - the trees bloom for maybe two weeks - but somehow, this year, it was brave enough to argue the cold and snow and start budding, pink against white against the gold of the sun. For a few moments, I was surrounded by my two favourite seasons simultaneously, and I was at peace. I don't recall where my mind went, or how long I stayed there. I never saw spring as nature fighting back against the winter, as I never saw winter as the death of the world. In some versions of the story, Persephone went willingly. There is a cycle. The snowdrops will always bloom, the cherry blossom will always die away, and the sun will always rise another day.

**Yellow (Prompt: sensory experiences)**

Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow  
I think my favourite colour is yellow  
It sends such joy into my life  
My gender and my colour wife

My favourite colour once was red  
I painted where I rest my head  
The colour of hearts, held  
in pounding beat  
it throbs  
that means it's my favourite  
right?  
and yet  
and yet  
does it hurt or help?

Nowadays I know myself  
I know my mental space and health  
I mark in every space I meet  
The colours each one I must greet

In golden light I find myself  
bright  
too much  
is still not me  
but if the light has golden shine  
I usually feel dandy and fine  
but white  
is bright

no matter what  
and blue, when used  
to light a room  
can spiral  
like a helter-skelter in the park  
I used to love  
That was yellow, too.

When flashes  
flare  
into my brain  
the rhythm breaks  
But so many things  
Feel helpful to me through the years  
music lilting in my ears  
While gentle colour changing light  
Protects me when nonverbal mind

Reflects exhaustion from my days  
Spent toiling in the sunlit haze  
So often hid with my sunshades  
Despite my love of golden light

And sunshine, daisies, butter mellow  
Make joy within me as I grow  
As those experiences I seek  
Grant freedom from the ones which reek

And so I still maintain my love  
For yellow, my peace offering, my dove.

**The Love that Moves the Sun and Other Stars (Prompt: the opening scene of a movie about your life, or that of your childhood best friend)**

*Paige's room, the forbidden library.*

*Paige is absentmindedly stroking Dewey, the library cat. Her other hand is gently touching the pages of a book, fingers softly brushing over a few passages. One in particular catches her attention.*

*Pov: looking directly at the pages of the book, the words seem to glow in a golden colour. L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" The love that moves the sun and the other stars.*

**Paige:** *[to Dewey, sad voice]* Do you ever think that someday we would be able to see, the love, the sun and the stars

**Dewey:** *[Miaows a few times.]*

**Paige:** *v/o-* (Translation - we already have love, we have each other).

*Paige gets up from the floor and gently places the book down, that is written entirely in Italian. One of her favourites. She goes over to the cold stone wall of the library that she has never been allowed to leave and opens the thick curtains, just so she could see, for a small second, the world outside. It was a cloudy day but that did not make the sky any less beautiful and any less forbidden.*

*And of course, there was the dragon that created the little flames that always seemed to rest as smoke along the clouds. The dragon did not let anyone out of the library, other than by the means of learning knowledge from books. Of course, you could always escape into a different world through a book.*

*Pov- we see a combination of Paige's sad face and a large green dragon in the courtyard.*

**Paige:** *[sighs and draws back the curtain.]* We do. We have each other, and we have these books.

*Her elbows are placed as she starts to sing as she does every day to the sky outside, her voice as beautiful as every bird that passes in the early mornings. But the difference today, is that it is not the early morning, and her song was not drowned out by the birds, or the insects, or the early morning roaring of the dragon. It was a song of hope, of peace, of a child who learned about the world, but is not off the world.*

This project forms part of an upcoming book from Straightforward Publishers, *Creative Reading and Writing in Autism* by Clare Lawrence and Olivia Macnab, to be released in 2024.



# Illustrating STEM and Non-fiction titles

## Part 2 of Rachel Igotofsky's interview with Rose Roberto

Rachel Igotofsky is a New York Times best selling author and illustrator, based in Santa Barbara, California, whose work is inspired by history and science. Her titles include: *What's Inside a Caterpillar Cocoon?* (ISBN: 978-0593176573, Crown Books), *What's Inside a Flower?* (ISBN: 9780593176474, Crown Books), *The Incredible Ecosystems of Planet Earth Earth* (ISBN: 9781526361745, Wren & Rook). *The History of the Computer* (ISBN: 9781526365132, Wren & Rook) American spelling is retained to keep the authenticity of Igotofsky's voice. Also see Part 1 in the July 2023 issue of *The Four Corners*.

**Please tell us about yourself & how you came to write and illustrate your own books.**

I'm originally from New Jersey. I went to Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, and literally right after college, I moved to Kansas City, Missouri, because I got a job illustrating and doing graphic design for Hallmark Greeting Cards. It was a wonderful first job, really. I was very lucky. I was drawing birthday cakes and flower bouquets all day, but weirdly, it felt like I was living someone else's life and taking *their* dream job. At the time I had all these ideas for illustrating topics that I was really interested in, weighty topics that I thought were important.

So, on the side, I started doing a lot of freelance work. I did illustration projects for places such as children's cancer research foundations, or science magazines. I had a ton of friends who, like me had just graduated, and teaching was their first job. Many of my friends participated in Teach for America, a program that operates in disadvantaged, under-resourced communities across the US. They were based in schools that don't get much aid. I started creating resources that my friends could use in their classrooms.

These resources were also about topics that kept me up at night, like climate change or women's rights and social equity. I started getting lots of commissions for projects that resonated with science professionals too. I opened my own little online shop, and then eventually I had so much work that I was able to quit my job and work from home by the age of 25.

**Some of the non-fiction science books you've written, such as *The Ecosystems of Planet Earth*, can be pretty technical. How do you decide which topics a book will focus on?**

I always wanted to make non-fiction books. Specifically, I wanted to create the kind of informational books that I loved to read when I was a kid, but my own, more visual, version of them. If I care about a topic, I follow what interests me, then I approach the books from there. First I learn as much as I can about the subject by reading and researching, in this case about ecosystems and climate science, then I think about what will make a good hook.

What went into the *Workings of Planet Earth* was the idea that there are so many incredible places on Earth—really precious and important places that are so amazing, just thinking about them will motivate people to better protect them.

Then I thought, what if you could see these big places all at once? Take the big abstract concept of complexity in nature, but visually shrink it so that it's small enough for us to wrap our brain around. Like, what if the coral reefs were presented to readers like a little terrarium or a big fish bowl that fits in the palm of their hand? We'd all be able to see and care about how much we were damaging different ecosystems that we live in, which are our homes.



Rachel Igotofsky with *Women in Science* and *The Wondrous Working of Planet Earth*  
Photo used with permission.

**I did notice that in this book in particular, all the different biomes look like they are held in different sorts of containers. One is a jar that has a stopper on top, whereas the outline of another one was kind of open. That's really quite clever.**

[Chuckling] Yes, I did that on purpose.

I think if you can hook a reader with the whimsy of a design, one that is also a metaphor, it allows these complex scientific processes to sink in gradually as they're reading more about it. By the end of one of my books, I hope you realize and understand just how cool nature really is.

I have noticed in the UK, especially, is there's a delight in whimsical illustrations. My books seem to have given teachers over there, a vehicle in which to drive forward a class project. So, every year I get pictures and letters from kids telling me what they worked on something related to an apex predator for example, and what they learned. It's feels great and is so rewarding.

**How long does it actually take for you to work on one of your books? What is the process between finishing a book and it getting to press?**

The time scale that we're dealing with is long and complex, too. When I finish a book, it's another six months, typically, before it is published. In the meantime, I have already started another project, but am likely traveling around marketing a previous book which has been recently released. So, I pretend that I just did that book, and keep up my enthusiasm for the subject from the audience. It's a balancing act. For instance, I'm currently working on a dinosaur book, and have been thinking about and drawing dinosaurs all day. Then the next day I will have to go speak at an event to promote,

*What's Inside a Caterpillar Cocoon?*

I have to change my mindset, to focus on butterflies, because it has just come out and needs attention. But that is fine. I'll say something like, 'You know, every single caterpillar, like every butterfly and moth, has a host plant where they lay their eggs. When the eggs hatch the little caterpillars think, 'time to eat this plant until there's no plant left.'



Detail from Rachel Igonofsky's *What's inside a Caterpillar Cocoon?* Image used with permission.

Of course if I get asked by kids, what are you working on next, I will be honest and tell them, and they usually do get super excited when they hear about dinosaurs.

**Are there any science topics you think you might revisit in future books?**

I just went to the local the aquarium about two weeks ago, and I thought it it might be fun to work on a book about jellies. Some people call them jellyfish, but they are not really fish. Anyway, I was thinking about them because they are really weird, and immortal.

There is a certain type of jelly that starts out as a larva then metamorphoses into a polyp. When the jelly dies, it sinks to the ocean floor and begins to decay but then its cells regenerate, polyps, and from these polyps it'll grow back into a jelly again. It's weird, and amazing, and I like doing weird. I missed out on jellies last time.

## Becoming an author for UK children's books

### Lucy Tandon Copp's interview with Rose Roberto

The *Reflecting Realities* report is an annual survey by Centre for Literacy in Primary Education. CLPE reviews the quality and extent of ethnic minority presence in children's literature published in the UK, and conducts analysis data on the books produced and considering the extent to which they reflect the realities and outlook their readership. Although improvements have been made, there is still much work that needs to be done in terms of reflecting people from backgrounds of East and South East Asian regions, which include the countries of Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, North Korea, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

Several initiatives in the publishing sector have been started in the past couple of years to address the poor portrayals and shortfalls in representation. This interview was conducted with an up-and-coming author, who discusses her personal experiences and the need for ESEA representation in British children's books.

#### Please tell us about yourself and what it's like to be a 'new' writer (for this genre).

Absolutely! I am a mixed race Malaysian-Chinese and English author, a journalist and a mum based in Buckinghamshire – and the proud owner of a mischievous miniature schnauzer called Moose, who also moonlights as my writing companion! My debut picture book for children aged 3-6 is due to be published in early 2025. Unfortunately the title and book cover are 'under wraps.'

Before book writing, I spent over a decade working as a full-time journalist. I wrote across a range of publications, platforms and industries, contributing news and features, and doing a lot of editing. Then in 2021, all that changed, when I applied for the Penguin WriteNow Editorial Programme, which supports underrepresented writers in their journey to publication, either at Penguin itself or another publisher. At the end of the year, I found out I was one of several aspiring authors to be offered a place on the programme, which that year focused specifically on children's books. As luck would have it, almost simultaneously, I was offered representation by Lydia Silver from the Darley Anderson Children's Book Agency. Over the following 12 months I worked with an editor to develop one of my manuscripts and learn about the industry first-hand. It was a life-changing year in so many ways and I feel humbled whenever I think about the opportunities and people that came my way and helped me to kick-start this new stage of my career.



Lucy Tandon Copp  
Photo used with permission.

#### Which books and their illustrators were your favourites and why?

When I think back, most of my favourite children's books included strong-minded characters who weren't afraid to be different. I still own my childhood board-book of *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, which I remember being fascinated by as a young child. Meanwhile, when I was a little older, I clearly remember borrowing and re-borrowing a battered hardback copy of *Matilda* by Roald Dahl from the Oxfordshire County Library – I must have taken it out about 10 times! Unfortunately, until the publication of *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah in 1999, which I borrowed from my school library, I wasn't able to easily access any children's stories that reflected my heritage or my family in a meaningful way. But, if I had been able to, I often wonder what kind of positive impact that could have had.

## Why is diverse representation important for children?

There is something incredibly affirming about seeing yourself as a main character, as someone who is worthy of being the focus of a story and capable of great things. It's important to say that every child deserves to be seen, but representation in children's books goes beyond just that; it helps to create empathy, grow confidence and to know, in our hearts, that we truly belong. Picture books act as 'windows and mirrors' depending on the reader – you either see yourself reflected or you catch a glimpse into another person's life. Both perspectives are important, but what happens if a reader only looks through windows? What if they only look at mirrors? I often wonder what those children are missing out on and how that limited viewpoint may affect them if not immediately, then at some point in the future.

## You've recently been awarded Arts Council England funding to develop your creative practice. Please tell us about that.

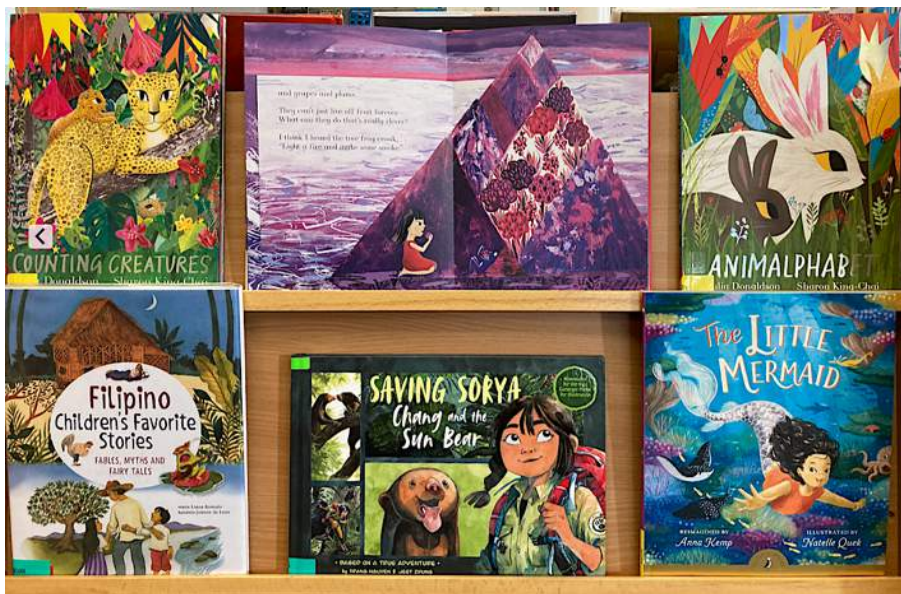
This summer, I applied for a DYCP (Developing Your Creative Practice) grant with my application titled 'championing diversity in children's books'. The application process is complex and requires you to really hone in on why you think now is the right time to apply for the grant, as well as to pinpoint exactly what you plan to do with the funds should you be successful. Luckily I had plenty in mind! As I am at such a step-change point in my career, this year really is the perfect time for me to work on developing my craft as an author and to set up my author brand for the long term. So far, I have launched my website [www.lucytandoncopp.com](http://www.lucytandoncopp.com) and signed up to several writing courses and workshops, which will allow me to explore writing for older children, as well as poetry.

## I know you're not allowed to say too much about your new picture book, but can you say what the inspiration is?

The picture book process is a long one and it takes approximately 18 months to two years from acquisitions to hitting shelves. Luckily the inspiration behind my book is something I feel as passionate about today as the day the text was acquired – mixed race and British East and South East Asian (BESEA) heritage, identity and belonging. I also have a number of other books in the works too. These feature BESEA culture and tradition alongside universal themes and lovable characters that everyone can relate to. All of my stories contain elements of magical realism and are written in prose.

## We look forward to seeing your book when it is out, and wish you great success.

Thanks very much.



Latest books in the TRC featuring ESEA authors or illustrators

## *The Story Orchestra: The Sleeping Beauty*, illustrated by Jessica Courtney-Tickle

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN MACDONALD, USER SUPPORT LIBRARIAN (AND MUSICIAN)

*The Sleeping Beauty*, published by Lincoln Children's Books, forms part of *The Story Orchestra*; an innovative visual series that connects the stories behind well-known classical music with orchestral excerpts from classic opera, programme music, and in this case, ballet. Each page of *The Sleeping Beauty* features a 'press here' button which, when selected, plays a music excerpt from Tchaikovsky's 1890 ballet.

The first page starts with the *Entrance of the Fairies* a delightful string cantabile melody filled with excitement and anticipation, that complements the brightly lit ballroom surrounding the multi-cultural characters wearing colourful costumes of red, sky blue, gold, and a range of hues shifting from rich purple to pale lavender. As we start reading, the flute's *Songbird Melody* sets the scene, rudely interrupted by the entrance of black raven with the dark-clad Carabosse, whose ostinato causes havoc as a curse is cast. Spiky thorns follow in her wake. The Lilac Fairy's return, signalled by the oboe, sets the story on course as Princess Aurora waits for her sixteenth birthday. We then hear two of Tchaikovsky's most famous excerpts; *Sleeping Beauty Waltz* and *Rose Adagio* which chart Aurora's first sixteen years, culminating in her sixteenth birthday. The serenity is rudely interrupted, however, by *The Spell* where disconcerting 'scrubbing strings' depict Carabosse's curse, sending Aurora into a deep sleep.

Not all is lost, as a triumphant fanfare signals the entrance of Prince Florimund who, escorted by the Lilac Fairy, rushes through rain and snow to Aurora's bedchamber. The not completely harsh, white landscape has red berries, green trees, and curious animals which offer hope in these the pages. Here, Tchaikovsky's *Panorama* depicts tension with frantic ascending strings. Finally, as the curse is lifted, we hear *The Wedding*, a celebratory finale where Aurora and Florimund wed in a green forest, crowded with dancing and joyous guests, which is emphasised to readers/listeners by the brass church bells.

The book finishes with a concise biography of Tchaikovsky, a useful musical glossary, and a short explanation of each excerpt.

*The Sleeping Beauty* is an informative and aesthetically pleasing book, ideal for stimulating visual and audio enjoyment in young children. It connects them to a piece of classic orchestral repertoire and in a fun and engaging way at a time when, perhaps, classical music struggles to cut through to younger audience. The illustrations by Jessica Courtney-Tickle reflect diversity, bringing the story up to date, and engage the reader as the story progresses. I would recommend this book and look forward to seeing others in the series – *The Story Orchestra* – of which it is a part.

It's also a win for parents, when your child hits that button, instead of an annoying sound effect or soulless pop tune, you hear some of the greatest music ever written.



(ISBN: 9781786030931, Francis Lincoln)

## *Arc of the Scythe* series by Neal Shusterman

REVIEWED BY ROSE ROBERTO, TEACHING RESOURCES LIBRARIAN

This past year, AI (artificial intelligence) has been the major topic of conversation across school and university campuses, as well as in other workplace settings. ChatGPT has made AI more visible in most people's lives today. However, Neal Shusterman incorporated AI as one of his main characters in his *Arc of the Scythe* book series, with the first instalment released in 2016. In fact, the second book of the trilogy, *Thunderhead* is narrated by the AI character, who governs much of humanity's day-to-day life. Unlike the YA science fiction series of the early 2000s set in the future, like *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*, or other well-known more adult examples of the genre with such as Orwell's *1984* or Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*, this series constructs humanity's improvement through technology, advanced medicine, and benevolent utopian governance.

*Arc of the Scythe* imagines a future where the default setting for people is not to die by accident, through disease or even from old age. This feat is achieved by in the form of 'nanites' or micro-robots medically inserted into the blood of all people and animals in the 'Age of the post-mortals'. The nanites are an extension of the central AI, and carry out different functions which control pain, and allow natural functions of the human body to heal at an accelerated pace. Theoretically nobody has to die, or pay the consequences for individual mistakes since the nanites can fix broken bones, damaged organs, and revive a person after they have jumped (or been pushed) off a building. Nanites inoculate bodies from harmful viruses, bacteria or parasites. Nanites can even reset the body's chronological age. Several characters we meet in this series are nearly 200 years old, but appear to be in their 30s, 40s, or 50s, after choosing to undergo a process called 'turning a corner.'

Obviously, this does cause a problem—overpopulation—which in this imagined post-mortal world is 'solved' in the form of the Scythe, an elite, venerable organisation, whose individual Scythe members literally have the power to dispatch death or grant life. Since the AI has been programmed to uphold the tenet that permanent death is the domain of humankind, it cedes this responsibility to the Scythe to chose who should die or be 'gleaned.' Paradoxically, the Scythe can also grant immunity from being gleaned for one year to anyone, which they often do to comfort relatives of an individual that a Scythe has gleaned. In theory, the Scythe not only chose who should die, they have an obligation to make all their selections in an 'unbiased manner' while they fulfil a required yearly-kill-quota, set at regular Scythe conclaves (meetings) through the year. In this post-mortal age, the AI can speak directly to any person via their nanites, and many people regularly have daily conversations with the AI. However, since the AI cannot interfere with Scythe business, the AI goes silent in the presence of a Scythe—perhaps foreshadowing a gleaning is about to take place to the truly observant.



There are four books that make up the *Arc of the Scythe* series: *Scythe*, *Thunderhead*, *The Toll* (ISBN Set: 9789123978793, Walker) and *Gleanings* (ISBN: 9781529509540, Walker). The first

three titles loosely follow two characters, Rowan Damisch and Citra Terranova, who at the beginning of the series are teenagers that are apprenticed under Scythe Faraday, and are set to become part of the next generation of Scythe. Through these two characters, readers are introduced, then situated into this futuristic world, which although it has seemingly solved the major problems in our own time, such as Climate Change, global war, economic inequality and disease and death, other problems have arisen in their place with an equally existential nature. After hundreds of years, the Scythe are the only humans with any power that matters, and as immortals they have become like mercurial ancient gods. Like the ancient epic narratives, battles in the future between 'good' and 'evil' play out, only now incorporating sophisticated technology, as the AI, itself, has become a key player working behind-the-scenes to shape human events.

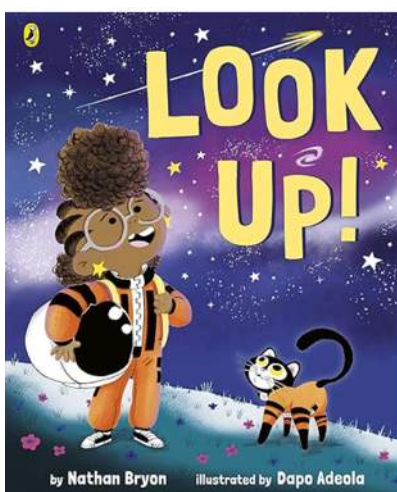
The fourth volume, *Gleanings* is a series of short stories which expand on the lives and histories of characters introduced in the trilogy, and serve to further expand on Neal Shusterman's fictional universe. Released in 2022, it was written in collaboration with fellow writers: David Yoon, Jarrod Shusterman, Sofia Lapuente, Michael H. Payne, Michelle Knowlden, and Joelle Shusterman. *Gleanings* is as engaging as all of the books in the series, and while it can be read as a stand-alone work, it is more appreciated if it is read with the others. All of these books are thought-provoking and thrilling to read.

## *Look Up* by Nathan Bryon and Dapa Adeola

REVIEWED BY ABBY WILKINS, SECOND YEAR BA HONS STUDENT, EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES

For Black History Month, Abbie Briggs, Megan Jackson and I visited a primary school to share stories. Using the book, *Look Up!* by Nathan Bryon and Dapa Adeola, I was able to share a story with the children there that depicted characters with different ethnicities. *Look Up!* follows a young female character wanting to become an astronaut and who has a fascination with space. She wants everyone to look up, come off their mobile phones, and see the beauty of a meteor shower.

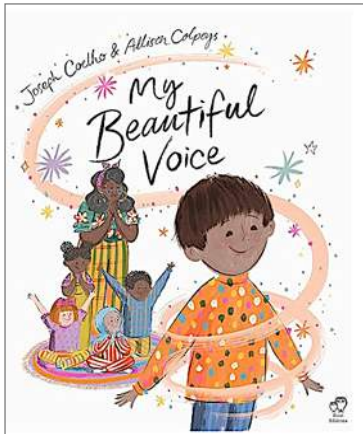
The children that I read to listened, and asked questions related to the book. They also expressed the desire to know more about meteor showers. We spent time talking about what they could see and what they thought was happening throughout the narrative. The book contained many topical facts and the children showed interest in understanding them. They also enjoyed the pictures. I believe this book provided both a mirror and a window for the children I met. In an engaging way, it reflected the diversity of family situations within the book.



Left image: *Look up!* (ISBN: 9780241345849, Puffin) Right: BA Early Education Students. Photo by Samantha Hoyes

## *My Beautiful Voice* by Joseph Coelho and Allison Colpoys

REVIEWED BY MEGAN JACKSON, SECOND YEAR BA HONS STUDENT, EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES



(ISBN: 9780711248311, Francis Lincoln)

*My Beautiful Voice* by Joseph Coelho and Allison Colpoys is one of the most beautiful stories I've ever read. Not only does the book support Black History Month, it explores other aspects of childhood experiences and personal development such as teacher presence, children supporting each other, bullying, anxiety, and being an introvert—aspects beyond school and gaining confident independence.

The story centres around a child struggling to speak in front of her class after she's written a poem. She feels anxious with classmates making comments about her being a quiet person. However, by the story's end the girl finds her voice after seeing her classmates' reactions to her speaking. They were smiling, and their supportive teacher demonstrates nonverbally she is very proud of her. Furthermore, when the girl hears herself properly for the first time, she realises her voice matters in that classroom. This book shows children who are reading or listening to the story that even though a child is quiet, it doesn't mean that is a negative quality.

*My Beautiful Voice* helps children grow in confidence and become more independent. In addition, the illustrations are truly mesmerising. The neon orange, blues and pink spill out of the page into smiles on the children's faces. It is attractive and entices the children. Overall, this story is written beautifully.

## *Later* by Curtis Ackie and Constanza Goepfinger

REVIEWED BY ABBIE BRIGGS, SECOND YEAR BA HONS STUDENT, EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES

*Later* is short and sweet, perfect for young children learning to read as the text was well-spaced and not presented in large paragraphs. The printed text used two different colours to indicate each speaker, which was a good visual technique. It allowed young children to see the difference between who was speaking throughout the book without the need for added speech marks or other signs that someone has spoken that sentence.

The words throughout *Later* also rhymed, which I enjoyed since it enabled the story to flow. The illustrations throughout were simple, yet they allowed the young children listening to picture a family in a house; they were also colourful and large, providing a focus for the children. Having large images allowed children to imagine what is taking place in the story through the detailed photos throughout the book.

*Later* is a fantastic children's book to share during Black History Month, as it depicts children in a loving family with a working mum. It shows children diverse families, but also how others can have similar lives to theirs. The children at the school where I read this book seemed to really like the illustrations, and they interacted by performing actions like knocking, that the narrative described as I read it aloud.



(ISBN: 978-1838395940, Formy Books)

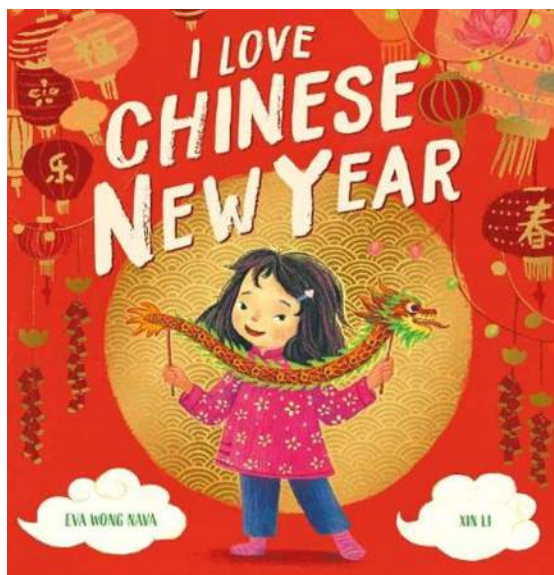


## *I love Chinese New Year* by Eva Wong Nava and Xin Li

REVIEWED BY MARY-LOUISE MAYNES, SENIOR LECTURER, EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Eva Wong Nava and Xin Li have captured the sense of excitement and special occasion surrounding Chinese New Year from the perspective of a young Chinese girl getting ready, and then celebrating the festival with her family. The home setting makes the story accessible for young readers and frames the traditional fable of the 'Great Race' in which the characteristics and special powers relating to each of the 12 animals are explained.

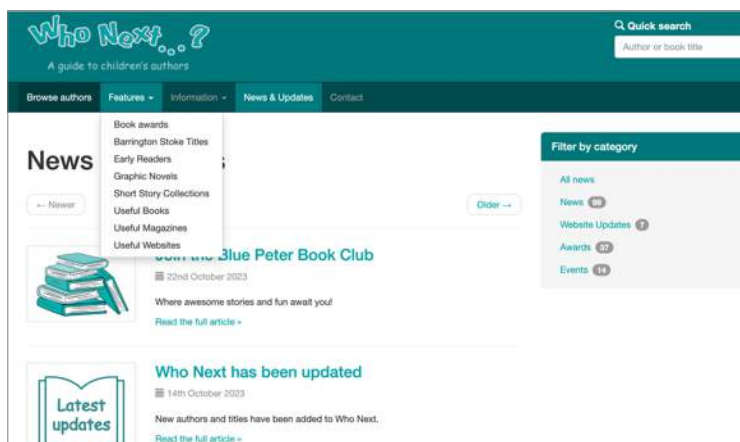
The red and gold front cover and full-page illustrations are bold and colourful and reflect the themes of warm family relationships and pride in cultural traditions, which come through strongly in the story. There is a back section giving facts about Chinese New Year and the Dragon Dance. Although links to further reading would have been useful there is a resource pack on Eva's website and some suggestions from BookTrust about how to use the book in the classroom.



(ISBN: 9780702315732, Scholastic)

### AROUND THE BGU CAMPUS

The database, *Who Next...?* is available from the Library and accessible on campus. It is an easy-to-use interactive online tool designed to help children and their carers by encouraging them to read more widely by providing suggestions of other authors who write in a similar way. It is searchable through genre, theme, settings or aspects of characterisation via keyword and book or series titles. It is also a good research tool to use when studying children's literature.



Access *Who Next...?* via the 'Databases' tile, at [libguides.bishopg.ac.uk](http://libguides.bishopg.ac.uk).



### MA Children's Literature and Literacies Bishop Grosseteste University

The MA Children's Literature and Literacies is a vibrant, wide-ranging degree course that offers professional development and academic progression in these interdisciplinary fields of study. Informed by current scholarship, research, and practice, it provides you with an opportunity to develop in-depth and advanced knowledge

## Introducing BGU's Reading for Pleasure Ambassadors

EMMA ROGERS, SENIOR LECTURER IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

*Reading for pleasure (RfP) refers to independent, leisure or recreational reading. The National Literacy Trust (UK) defines reading for pleasure as 'Reading we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction we will get from the act of reading.' Research shows that benefits of RfP are extensive and long lasting, and that reading for pleasure improves learning and is the best way to improve literacy. There is also a demonstrated link between reading, motivation and achievement. This year we have two RfP ambassadors that will tell you about themselves, why they were interested in these roles, and importantly, what they like to read.*

I'm Jess, and I was inspired to become an ambassador after seeing how my placement school used books to help a child process grief and loss. I love picture books and exploring how they can be used within my teaching practice across all age groups. This year I hope to prioritise creating time and space for more reading for pleasure alongside my studies.

With this edition being about diversity, my recommended read would be *The People You May See* written and illustrated by Lisa Koehler. This is a picture book that Jessica Kellgren-Fozard, a deaf and disabled activist, suggested on her Instagram page as a great way to educate and introduce children to all kinds of people they might encounter and which would be good for KS1.



(ISBN: 9781539070467, CreateSpace)

—Jessica Freeman, BA Primary Education

My name is Emily and when I volunteered at a primary school, I had the opportunity to read to and with the children. Being able to witness how much they loved story-time and reading ignited my own love for reading out loud. Knowing what reading for pleasure has brought to my own life, I want to be able to share this with others and be a part of both children's and adult reading journeys.

When it comes to teaching, I do gravitate towards the Early Years and lower KS1 making some of my favourite books to read children's picture books; I find they can actually be really moving or just super fun and funny. A great silly one is *The Book with no Pictures* (ISBN:978-0141361796, Puffin) by B.J. Novak. One of my favourite children's authors is Joseph Coelho due to the pairing of beautiful illustrations along with the engaging stories. My favourite book by Joseph is definitely *If All the World Were...* this is a really touching story and can be used to help children and even adults with big emotions such as grief.



(ISBN: 978-1786036513, Lincoln)

Adult books I enjoy range from fantasy, Greek mythology, romance, literary fiction, non-fiction and so on. My current favourite book is *Just Kids* (ISBN:978-0747568766, Bloomsbury) by Patti Smith, whose poetry I adore. This book recounts stories from her life which includes many other famous faces and what inspired her to become the writer and singer she is today. Some other adult authors I would also recommend are Madeline Miller and Sarah J. Mass.

—Emily Hurk, BA Primary Education

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