

Black British Authors


for children and teens



This booklist celebrates authors of Black heritage in Britain. The authors listed came to the UK from an African or Caribbean country or were born here.

The list includes books for all ages from picture books for younger children to hard-hitting novels for teens.

If you need help finding any of the books please ask a member of staff. You can also reserve any of these books for free.

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Acheampong, Sophia Heritage: African

Teen Reads

Sophia is originally from Ghana and her books feature first and second generation Ghanaians in England working tirelessly to find a compromise between the culture of their homeland and that of their adoptive country. They also revolve around the heroine Makeeda's family tensions, relationships with boys, discovering her Ghanaian roots. "Technology punctuates our existence. I felt compelled to incorporate text messages and IM in Growing Yams in London as it was an essential part of Makeeda's teenage experience."

Key book: "Growing Yams in London"



Ade Adepitan Heritage: African

Older Reads

After growing up in Nigeria with a disability, his family came to London and he became Paralympic medal winner, commentator and a successful TV presenter. His books focus on the character Ade's tough introduction to London's east end, bullying and the Parsons Road gang he joins. On disabled characters in books the author says "I rarely saw a disabled character [in books], and where I did, it was a negative one. I realised I could do something really valuable".

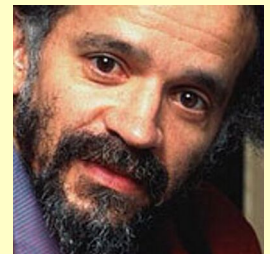
Key book: "Battle of the Cyborg Cat"

John Agard Heritage: Caribbean

Older Reads, Poetry, Tales & Myths

Born in Guyana, Agard came to Britain in 1977. In response to the question "why is poetry important for children?" he replied "it's important for children to be in touch with the language of poetry which not only tunes their ear to the music of words but keeps alive their sense of wonder". As well as poetry, Agard has written fiction on themes of language and science and interpreted Caribbean folk tales.

Key book: "Goldilocks on CCTV"



Atinuke Heritage: African

Picture Books, Older Reads

Originally from Nigeria, after falling "head over heels into storytelling" she started writing books after she fell ill in 2005. Her "No. 1 Car-Spotter" series was followed by the Anna Hibiscus one, plus several picture books. "Storytelling is the play of one person's mind and heart and imagination. I love making up stories, playing and playing with them, and then sharing them in my books".

Key book: "The No. 1 Car Spotter Fights the Factory"

Dean Atta Heritage: Caribbean

Teen Reads

Atta was been listed by The Independent newspaper as one of the 100 most influential LGBT people in the United Kingdom. As well as his poetry for adults, he's written teen fiction about a boy coming to terms with his identity as a mixed-race gay teen, who at university finds his wings as a drag artist. "I am a black, queer, working-class writer from London, with Greek Cypriot and Jamaican heritage. I got into writing poetry as a way to tell my story".

Key book: "The Black Flamingo"



Floella Benjamin Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books, Poetry, Children's Information

Actor, TV presenter, singer, politician, businesswoman...and writer. As well as her autobiographical work she has written warm picture books featuring a child with grandparents from different ethnic backgrounds. "I believe that denying children access to books is like starving them of creativity, stifling their imagination".

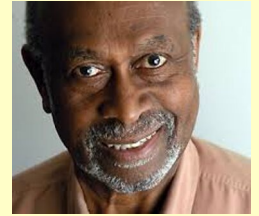
Key book: "Coming to England"

James Berry Heritage: Caribbean

Older Reads

Known for his poetry for adults, Berry also wrote for fiction and interpretations of traditional Caribbean tales for children. "We can't read money for books/Yet without it we/don't read, don't write numbers/don't open gates in other countries/as lots and lots never do".

Key book: "A Thief in the Village and Other Stories"



Malorie Blackman Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books, Younger Reads, Older Reads, Teen Reads

Former Children's Laureate, Malorie Blackman is possibly the best-known black author of children's and teen fiction in the country. Her teen novels pose key questions about major issues from organ transplanting to people from pigs, to reverse worlds where it is the white population that experiences racism. She also writes for younger children. On books featuring black characters she says "I once had a bookseller tell me, 'Your books are just for black children and we don't have that many black children in this area'".

Key book: "Noughts and Crosses"

Valerie Bloom Heritage: Caribbean

Poetry, Early Learning

Valrie Bloom's poetry often comes accompanied by beautiful illustrations. "Both poetry and music speak to the emotions and in fact I think they are closely linked. Part of the beauty of poetry is the music in the words, and a vital part of music is often the poetry in the lyrics".

Key book: "Fruits: a Caribbean Counting Poem"



Tanya Byrne Heritage: Caribbean

Teen Reads

The author addresses a number of provocative subjects such as drinking, sexual assault and murder but portrays such adult themes in a way that makes them suitable and accessible to a younger audience but never making them seem simplified. "Everyone deserves to see themselves represented in books, that diversity isn't a trend, it's reality, and that should be reflected in the books that young adults read".

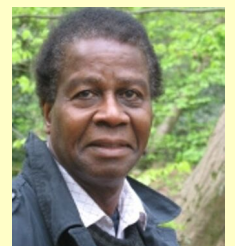
Key book: "Heart-Shaped Bruise"

Faustin Charles Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books, Poetry, Early Learning

Charles came to London as there were no publishers in his native Trinidad at the time. As well as writing poetry and fiction, he's held the unusual post of writer in residence at Wormwood Scrubs prison.

Key book: "The Selfish Crocodile"



Joseph Coelho Heritage: Caribbean

Poetry

As well his poetry and guides for children on writing poetry, Coelho has also written picture books for children dealing with experiences that they meet in life such as grief, family and loneliness. "I wanted to provide a story that would offer a gentle way for parents to open up that conversation and to perhaps offer a tool to help process the emotions around death and mourning – writing and drawing".

Key book: "If All the World Were..."

Trish Cooke Heritage: Caribbean Picture Books, Older Reads, Tales & Myths

Yorkshire-born of parents from Dominica, Trish Cooke is an author, scriptwriter, actress and tv presenter. She says "In my books I like to create characters that I recognise in real life so I have sometimes used 'Caribbean' rhythms in my dialogue".

Key book: "So Much"



Ellie Daines Heritage: Caribbean Older Reads

Born in London, Ellie says the best thing about being a writer is "Not wanting to go to sleep because I want to keep writing and being so excited about waking up every morning so I can do more writing. I love playing with the English language and developing characters as I take them on an emotional journey".

Key book: "Lolly Luck"

Catherine Johnson Heritage: Caribbean Older Reads, Teen Reads

Despite writing a number of historical fiction books, the author admits to being so bad at history at school that she wasn't even allowed to sit the exam. "Although it's lovely to find a story that makes it feel like you can't type fast enough to keep up, sometimes it can feel like pulling particularly painful teeth. The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo took a gazillion drafts. I wrote the story so many different ways before I found a way that works".

Key book: "The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo"



Peter Kalu Heritage: African Teen Reads

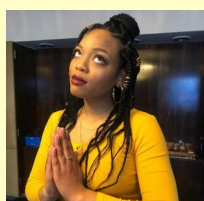
Peter Kalu is a poet, fiction writer and playwright. He cut his teeth as a member of Manchester Moss Side Write black writers' workshop. His two teen fiction titles feature football with zombies playing a role in one of them. "The Silent Striker's main character, Marcus, is black, and the complexity of blackness – its multiplicity – is embraced. Marcus has other black friends of differing origins – black, white and everything in between – the team that features in the story is a teenage 'United Nations' of footballers. The influence of racism on black teen lives is not shirked but investigated un-squeamishly".

Key book: "The Silent Striker"

Patrice Lawrence Heritage: Caribbean Older Reads, Teen Reads

As well as fiction for pre-teens - including a Mallory Towers story set in Enid Blyton's school and a story inspired by The Simpsons tv show, Patrice has gained most acclaim for her teen fiction work which deals with escaping gangs, drugs and violence. "I love being able to say to young people: look, I'm from a working class background, I was the first generation of my family born in the UK and I never saw myself in books, I never saw writers like me writing books, but actually I got to be a writer".

Key book: "Orangeboy"



Hannah Lee Heritage: Caribbean Picture Books

Hair is one of the symbols of pride in being black and this new author has created a fun, joyful picture book on the subject which will encourage black children to wear their hair with pride!

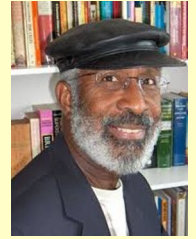
Key book: "My Hair"

John Lyons Heritage: Caribbean

Poetry

John Lyons mostly writes for adults but his 2015 book "Dancing in the Rain" which has been described as "enjoyable, affectionate poems that travel back to the vivid colors and sounds of his childhood in the Caribbean". "I have kept contact with family and friends from the Caribbean, and especially from Trinidad and Tobago. When we have a 'lime' over food and drink, with calypso often in the background, I am happy in a way that feeds my soul".

Key book: "Dancing in the Rain"



Millie Murray Heritage: Caribbean

Teen Reads

Millie has written a number of books for young adults dealing with contemporary issues ranging from teenage pregnancy to bullying.

Key book: "Jade"

Grace Nichols Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books, Poetry

"It is too easy to blame racism for everything and see oneself as a victim. It's better to get on with your life and focus on developing yourself. People who are racists are usually narrow-minded, unhappy people who probably envy you". Grace has edited numerous poetry collections of poetry, especially with a Caribbean focus.

Key book: "Asana and the animals: a book of pet poems"



Ifeoma Onyefulu Heritage: African

Early Learning, Children's Information

"The idea for A is for Africa came to me when I was reading a very boring book to my son, then aged two. We had gone to our local library hours earlier in search of books set in Africa and found lots on wild animals and jungles, but nothing on African people or our culture". Born in Nigeria, Onyefulu is a professional photographer who has written mostly non-fiction children's books.

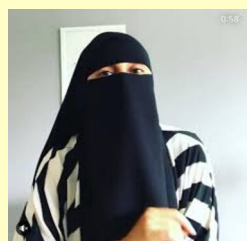
Key book: "A is for Africa: an alphabet in words and pictures"

Leila Rasheed Heritage: African

Older Reads, Teen Reads, Children's Information

Born in Libya, her work includes the "At Somerton" series, depicting class and fortune, trust and betrayal, love and revenge and her aspiring-actress series featuring Bathsheba. On writing for teens she says "I can't think of any subject that shouldn't be covered in children's literature. It's more a question of 'how' you cover it". The author also runs a writer development scheme, called Megaphone, for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic writers who want to write their first novel for children.

Key book: "Secrets and Sapphires"



Na'ima B. Robert Heritage: African

Picture Books, Teen Reads

Robert began writing multicultural picture books with Muslim themes for children before moving onto teen fiction which depicted Muslim teens - something quite rare at that time. "Young children are emphasised in the West to read. I know what kind of novels they read, Harry Potter, Twilight, all the vampire romance stories. There were no alternatives to represent Muslim teens".

Key book: "She Wore Red Trainers: A Muslim Love Story"

Ben Bailey Smith Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books

TV actor and rapper (stage name "Doc Brown"). Of his first children's picture book he says "This is the thing I feel most proud about in my career. It's an opportunity to create something that's there forever".

Key book: "I am Bear"



Michael de Souza Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books

Creator of hit children's tv series, "Rastamouse", gave up his job as a swimming instructor to spend more time with his newly-born daughter. On the success of Rastamouse he says "A lot of the children have said that they really do love it. Imagine a session at an all-white school, and when you're leaving the session, 250 - 300 children are saying, 'Irie, man!' "

Key book: "Rastamouse and the Crucial Plan"

Malaika Rose Stanley Heritage: Caribbean

Picture Books, Young Reads, Older Reads, Teen Reads

The author gave up teaching when cancer returned (she eventually died in June 2019) to focus on writing. On diversity in children's books she said "To me, diversity means recognising, accepting and valuing difference. This means the inclusion of positive characters and stories that represent, reflect, celebrate - and question - the lives of everybody - not just the dominant, majority population".

Key book: "Skin Deep"



Alex Wheatle Heritage: Caribbean

Teen Reads

Wheatle's books are hard, uncompromising examinations of urban life, dealing with gang culture, family life and choices in life. On switching to writing for teens rather than for adults he says "I felt like I was this token black writer who writes about ghetto stuff".

Key book: "Crongton Knights"

Verna Wilkins Heritage: Caribbean

Under 3s, Picture Books, Children's Information

Talking about the representation of black people in children's books the author recalled: "One of my sons, for his 'This is Me' school project painted himself a peachy white on his little booklet, I offered a brown crayon to put this right. He refused. 'It has to be that colour. It's for a book,' he said." The experience inspired Wilkins to not only write books featuring black characters but to found the publisher, Tamarind Books.

Key book: "Dave and the Tooth Fairy"



Ken Wilson-Max Heritage: Caribbean

Under 3s, Picture Books, Early Learning, Children's Information

Zimbabwe-born author and illustrator Ken Wilson-Max is a prolific creator of children's books.

"My first few books were all about vehicles...they had just my name on it...and they sold hundreds of thousands. When they saw who I was, they sold just evenly".

Key book: "Astro Girl"

Benjamin Zephaniah Heritage: Caribbean

Older Reads, Teen Reads, Poetry, Children's Information

Highly respected both as a poet and fiction author, Zephaniah is one of the best-known black writers in the UK. His fiction covers themes as broad as facial disfigurement, gang culture, murder of a teacher and child refugees while his poems, while using a lot of humour, still tackle serious issues.

Key book: "Funky Chickens"



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