



Representation in Fiction Books

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Representation in fiction reading

- Representation of racially minoritised characters in books ^[1]
- Representation of authors of colour ^[2]
- Representation of LGBTQ characters ^[3]

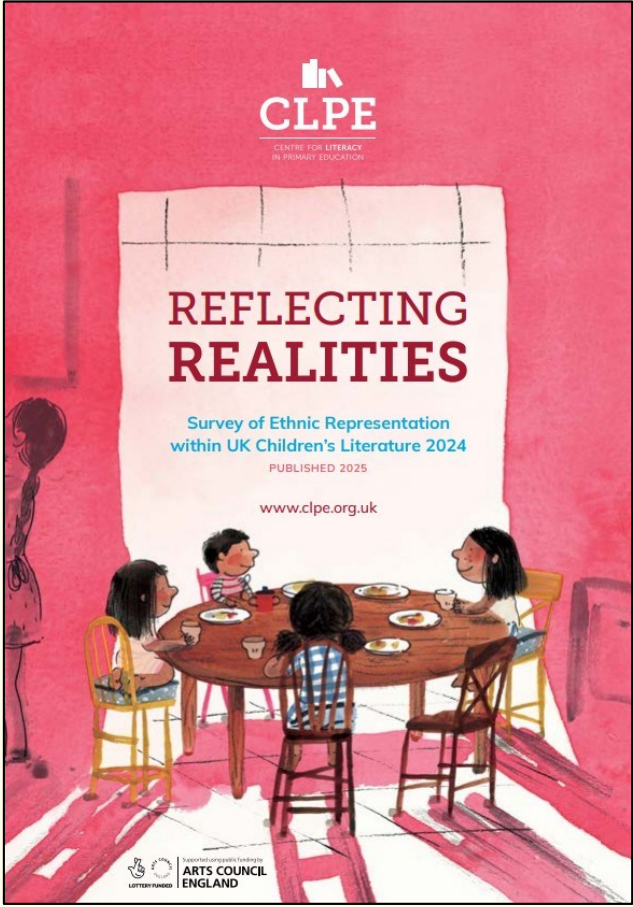
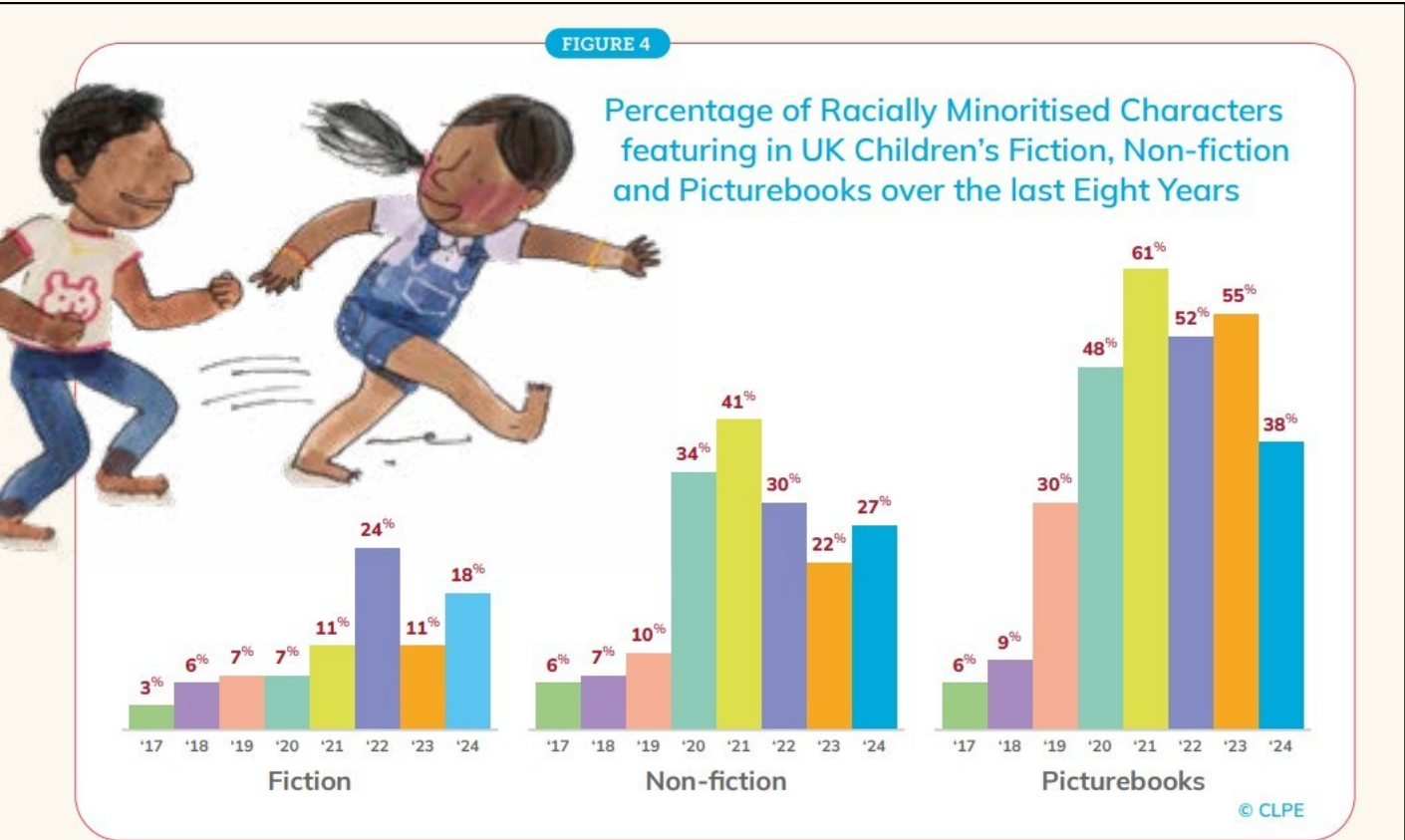
[1] CLPE (2025) CLPE Reflecting Realities - Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature. [CLPE Reflecting Realities Report 2025.pdf](#)

[2] Penguin Random House & The Runnymede Trust (2020) Lit in Colour: Supporting Inclusive Reading in Schools. [Lit in Colour - Penguin Books UK | Official Site](#)

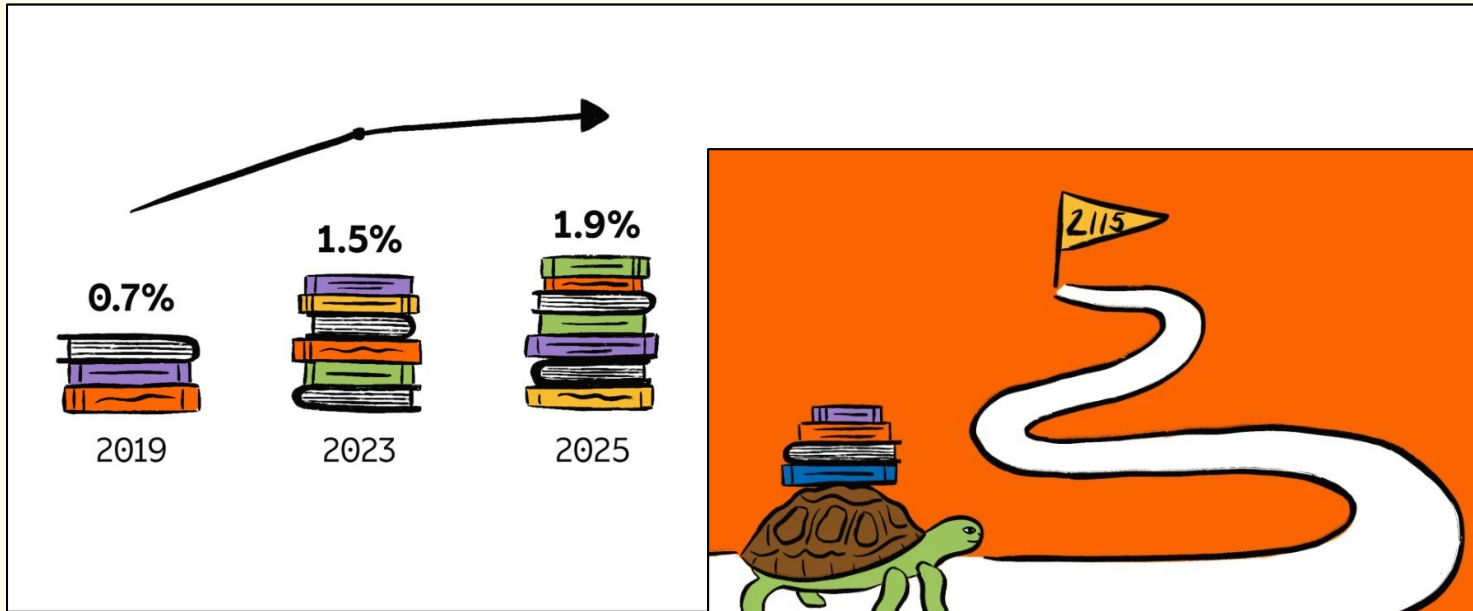
[3] Keyser & Whitford (2025). Plot, Characters, and Representation: Patterns and Gaps in Award-Winning LGBTQ Children's Books. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2024.2340032>



Representation of racially minoritized characters in books



Representation of authors of colour in GCSE



If our goal was for 38% of students – the current proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic British school students – to study a book by an author of colour, we might get there some time around 2115.

So, we believe the pace of change must be much faster, and our ambition much greater. It is unsustainable for publishers alone to deliver this: we need more organisations including government to partner with us and fund this work.

Representation of LGBTQ characters in books

- Rather than focusing on number/proportion, examines diversity of narratives within books featuring LGBTQ characters.
- Repeated plotlines of coming out, resisting bullying, love stories and LGBTQ rights.
- Repeated plotlines limit representation of LGBTQ people's complex multifaceted lives.

LITERACY RESEARCH AND INSTRUCTION
2025, VOL. 64, NO. 3, 364–386
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2024.2340032>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

 Check for updates

Plot, Characters, and Representation: Patterns and Gaps in Award-Winning LGBTQ Children's Books

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^aEnglish Studies, Fitchburg State University, Fitchburg, MA, USA; ^bEducation Department, Hope College, Holland, MI, USA

ABSTRACT

Children's books representing LGBTQ identities are a vital part of elementary school classrooms and libraries, as well as family resources, and more of these diverse books have been published over recent years. While existing research on these books catalogs how many of them represent traditionally marginalized groups, our research examines the diversity of narratives within these books. In this study, we used narrative critical content analysis to examine 51 books from three award lists: the Lambda Literary Awards, the Rainbow Booklist, and the Stonewall Book Awards for Children's and Young Adult Literature. These books are age-appropriate for read-alouds for all elementary grade levels based on their text complexity and storylines. We categorized books with identity-based conflicts and conflicts not based on identity. Overall, we found that books rely heavily on LGBTQ identities as the main source of conflict, using repeated plotlines of coming out, resisting bullying, love stories, and LGBTQ rights. In most cases, these repeated plotlines limit representation of LGBTQ people's complex, multifaceted lives. We discuss the implications of these repeated plotlines, and we provide a list of recommended books that represent LGBTQ characters with more multifaceted lives and provide more unique stories.

KEYWORDS

Children's literature;
children's books; LGBTQ;
diversity; content analysis

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2024.2340032>

Neurodiversity and neurodivergent



Neurodiversity is the fact that people process information differently to one another, and that people learn in a variety of ways.



If someone is **neurodivergent** it means that they process information differently from most other people - perhaps by being dyslexic, autistic or having ADHD.

Neurodiversity & Narrative Fiction project

Explored neurodivergent young people's experiences with **representation** in **fiction** books.

Database

- Explored the scale and scope of representation of neurodivergent characters in fictional texts for teenage readers.
- Created a database of these texts for future use.

Collaborative project including University-based researchers, literacy organisations (BookTrust, National Literacy Trust, Scottish Book Trust), children's publisher (Barrington Stoke) and YA author (Victoria Williamson) and two teachers. Also involved neurodivergent young people in the design and piloting of interview schedule.



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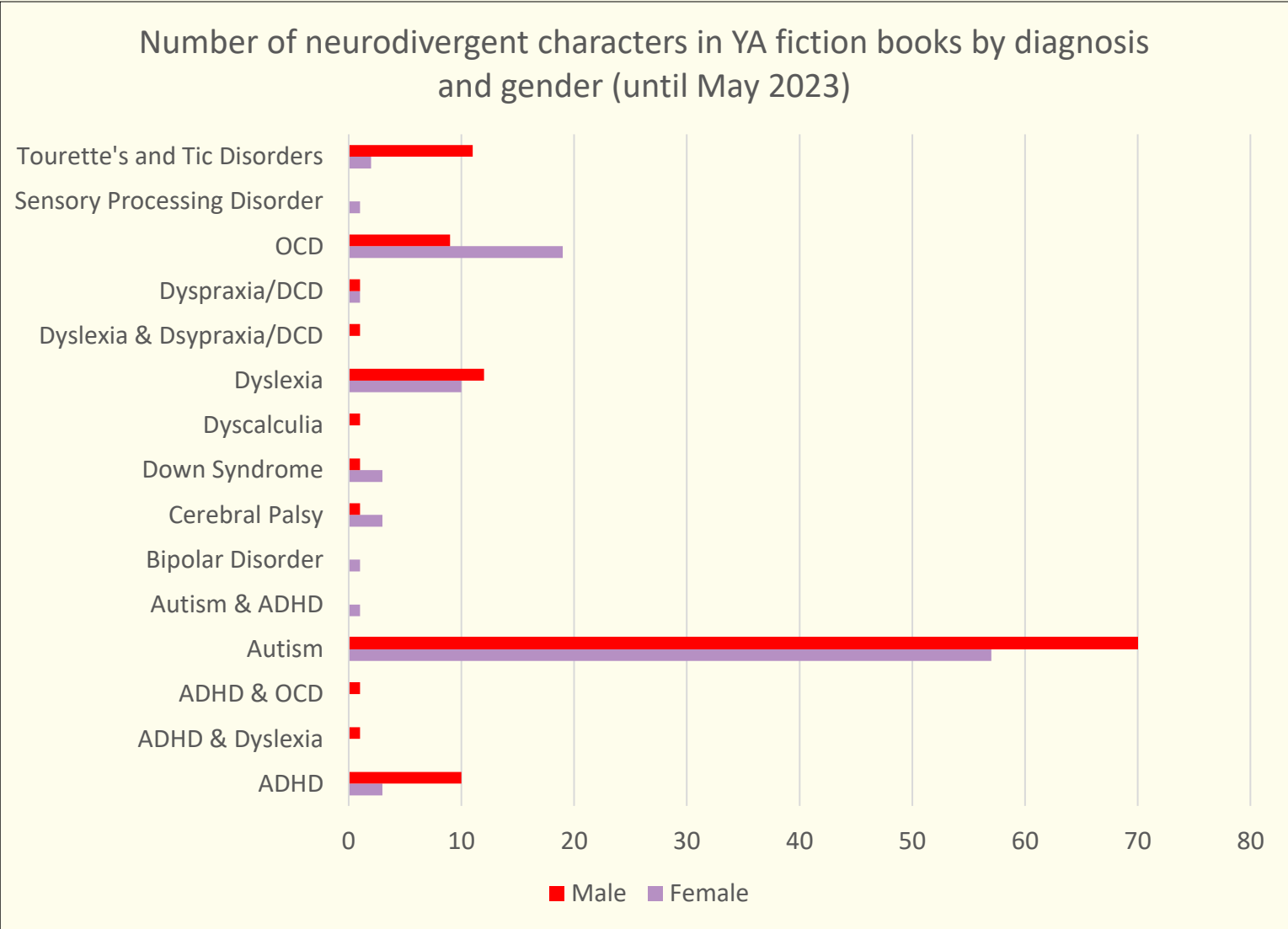
Interviews

- Interviews with 16 neurodivergent young people, (14–16-years-old) from 2 Scottish secondary schools.
- Focused on benefits and potential harms associated with neurodivergent representation in fiction, and perceptions of 'good' representation.

Collaborative project including University-based researchers, literacy organisations (BookTrust, National Literacy Trust, Scottish Book Trust), children's publisher (Barrington Stoke) and YA author (Victoria Williamson) and two teachers. Also involved neurodivergent young people in the design and piloting of interview schedule.



Database



Outcomes

- 239 books.
- 15 different neurodivergent identities.
- Autism (127) most frequent, followed by OCD (28), Dyslexia (22), ADHD (13), and Tourette's and Tic Disorders (13).
- Slightly more male characters represented (119) than female (100); 1 non-binary character.
- Most characters had one diagnosis.

Neurodivergent characters in YA fiction: who is being represented?

www.scottishbooktrust.com/articles/neurodivergent-characters-in-ya-fiction

Database

LITERACY LAB

Collaborative research practices, to understand and improve children and young people's literacy experiences and outcomes

Welcome

Our Team

Current projects

- Love to Read: Primary
- Love to Read: Reception
- Reading and Wellbeing
- The Young People's Reading Project
- Narrative Fiction: Understanding Ourselves and Others
- Adults' e-Reading Behaviour
- Augmented Reality Books
- Measuring Reading Engagement
- Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction
- Disability Picturebooks
- The Writing Lives of Children and Young People

Previous projects

Publications

Open Research

Resources for teachers

Alumni

Talks

Literacy Lab > Current projects > Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction

Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction

2022-2023

Stories often reflect the social world we live in, and can enrich our understanding of ourselves and ethnic representation. This study will be the first to provide detailed insight into neurodivergent people's perceptions of how their lives and experiences are represented in narrative fiction (and with neurodivergent young people informing our research process.

Project Aims:

To understand the scale and breadth of representation of neurodivergent young people in fictional texts for secondary school readers.

To understand neurodivergent young people's opinions and experiences of representation of neurodivergence in narrative fiction.

Project methodology:

Read a summary of how we carried out the research here: [Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction preregistration](#).

Project Findings:

Database of YA books featuring neurodivergent characters

[Database of YA books featuring neurodivergent characters](#)

Please note: the database search finished in May 2023; any books published after this date will not be recorded.

When referencing this website database, please cite: Santi, E., Webber, C., McGeown S, and the Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction project team. (2024). Fiction Books for Teenagers featuring Neurodivergent Characters. University of Edinburgh Literacy Lab.

docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1J1nSqJF0Bg596yxuvlyY5XtSifaX5Jf6jVA-YzDUo/edit#gid=0

Database of YA books featuring neurodivergent characters (May 2023)

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Extensions Help

100% 123

A1:L1 This database was created using publically available sources. Specifically, from searching the following book lists: BookTrust book list; Goodreads book list – Neurodivergent YA Novels + Disability in KidLit Goodreads List; Lizzie Huxley Jones - THE

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	This database was created using publically available sources. Specifically, from searching the following book lists: BookTrust book list; Goodreads book list – Neurodivergent YA Novels + Disability in KidLit Goodreads List; Lizzie Huxley Jones - THE					
2	The search stopped in May 2023; books published after this date will not be listed in the database.					
3	We have not read all the books listed in the database and therefore cannot endorse any of the titles included. Please conduct your own research regarding the suitability of each text before recommending it to readers.					
4	To cite this database: Santi, E., Webber, C. & the Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction project team. (2024). Fiction Books for Teenagers featuring Neurodivergent Characters. University of Edinburgh Literacy Lab.					
	Book title	Author name	Diagnosis of Neurodivergent character/s	Are there neurodivergent	Has the author disclosed	Publication year
6	Sidetracked	Diana Harmon Asher	ADD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2017
7	Check Mates	Stuart Foster	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2019
8	Concentr8	William Sutcliffe	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2016
9	Focused	Alyson Gerber	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Yes (ADHD)	2021
10	I am not a Label	Carrie Burnell	ADHD	Yes (Author's own voice)	Not disclosed	2021
11	It's the End of the World and I'm in my Bathing Suit	Justin Reynolds	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2022
12	Joey Pigza Series, 1: Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key	Jack Gantos	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2014
13	Joey Pigza Series, 2: Joey Pigza Loses Control	Jack Gantos	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2014
14	Joey Pigza Series, 3: What Would Joey Pigza Do?	Jack Gantos	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2014
15	Joey Pigza Series, 4: I Am Not Joey Pigza	Jack Gantos	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2014
16	Joey Pigza Series, 5: The Key That Swallowed Joey Pigza	Jack Gantos	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2015
17	Kat and Meg Conquer the World	Anna Priemaza	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2019
18	The Boy with the Butterfly Mind	Victoria Williamson	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2019
19	The Extraordinaries	T.J. Klune	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2020
20	The Love Letters of Abelard and Lily	Laura Creddie	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Yes (Dyslexic + ADI)	2018
21	This is Not the Abby Show	Debbie Reed Fischer	ADHD	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed	2016
22	Percy Jackson and the Olympians series, 1: The Lightning Thief	Rick Riordan	ADHD + Dyslexia	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed (Auth)	2005
23	Percy Jackson and the Olympians series, 2: The Sea of Monsters	Rick Riordan	ADHD + Dyslexia	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed (Auth)	2006
24	Percy Jackson and the Olympians series, 3: The Titan's Curse	Rick Riordan	ADHD + Dyslexia	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed (Auth)	2007
25	Percy Jackson and the Olympians series, 4: The Battle of the Labrynth	Rick Riordan	ADHD + Dvslexia	Yes (Main character/s)	Not disclosed (Auth)	2008

Access via our website:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/neurodiversity-and-narrative-fiction/>



Interviews

Neurodivergent young people's perceptions of representation in YA fiction

N=16 neurodivergent young people (14–16-years-old) from 2 Scottish secondary schools



Webber, C., Santi, E., Crompton, C. J., Fletcher-Watson, S., & McGeown, S. (2024). Representation in fiction books: Neurodivergent young people's perceptions of the benefits and potential harms. *Neurodiversity*, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330241237881>



Webber, C., Santi, E., Cebula, K., Crompton, C. J., Fletcher-Watson, S., & McGeown, S. (2024). Representation of neurodivergence in fiction books: Exploring neurodivergent young peoples' perspectives. *Literacy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12369>



What are the benefits of neurodivergent representation?

1. Helps neurodivergent young people to understand and accept their neurodivergent identity

“if I was to read a book that, like, accurately represented someone with a similar neurodivergence to me... I’d sort of understand and be able to, like, connect [my] experiences to neurodivergency.”

“[The book] was about accepting that this is a thing that you have, and that it has strong points as well. That it is not all bad.”



What are the benefits of neurodivergent representation?

2. Helps neurodivergent young people understand other neurodivergent identities

“I know what neurodivergence I have, but I don’t know about what it's like to have other neurodivergences, so I think I could benefit from that by learning about others that have similar things to me, but not the same as what I have.”



What are the benefits of neurodivergent representation?

3. Helps neurodivergent young people feel positive emotions (e.g., happiness, comfort, safety)

“I could like, figure out, like, a few things, like, that remind me of autism and stuff, and it's really cool to spot like stuff like that in characters ... it made me feel, like, really comfortable and happy.”

“It could also be good for other people who may feel left out ... and it can make them feel like they're not alone, even though it is just a book.”



What are the benefits of neurodivergent representation?

4. Could help reduce stigma and increase peer understanding

“it's quite hard to explain what you struggle with when it's not something that you can physically see with the person, because if they don't-, if you've never experienced it, then it's probably harder to understand...So if they read the book, then they might understand.”

“It's easier when you see things as, like, a story than if you're just meeting someone, because if you don't understand prior then you'll just think they're weird ...[they could understand] the way we think and the way we see the world and the way we feel. Seeing us as actual people.”



What are the benefits of neurodivergent representation?

4. Could help reduce stigma and increase peer understanding

...but where young people had friends who they felt already understood their needs and experiences, reading books about neurodivergent characters was not as necessary

“Because [your friends] already know you more as a person and they’re going to know ways how you will struggle and how you can cope with that, and the things you’re good at.”



What are the benefits of neurodivergent representation?

5. Reading about neurodivergent characters at a younger age could have helped them experience all these benefits sooner

“I think if I read more books with dyslexic characters, I think I would-, I think, I don't know. I think I would realize that maybe I'm not just really rubbish at spelling, maybe I do have a problem that can be supported.”

“When I was diagnosed, I was very scared of telling people...but I feel like maybe if I'd sort of read books at a younger age...think it probably would have helped me a lot more back then, sort of, telling people.”



What are the potential harms of neurodivergent representation?

1. Negative, inaccurate, or stereotypical representations of neurodivergence could increase stigma

“What the misrepresentation could also do is it can lead to stereotypes, it can lead to things being built, it can lead to these sort of, you know, misunderstandings or hatreds of the conditions.”

“I think a good way for representation is when...[it] doesn't, like, sort of perpetuate, like, harmful stereotypes, because otherwise I'd just rather not be represented if it's, like, offensive.”



What are the potential harms of neurodivergent representation?

2. (Negative) changes in peers' attitudes/behaviour

“The way [others] act around you, or maybe the way they perceive you would probably change if they’re seeing all these negative things about a condition and then, you know, it can just sort of change how they might behave towards you.”

“The only thing I wouldn’t like is, if it came off as a thing where people will start like being, around me all the time, like asking me how I am ... it would need to be a positive thing that isn’t coming off as ‘I feel sorry for you’, you know?”



How do neurodivergent young people want to be represented in fiction?

- (1) Representation of neurodivergence should be complex, realistic, and positive**
- (2) Representation of neurodivergence should be normalised**
- (3) Representation of neurodivergence beyond books is important.**

“Especially as a trans person, like, usually if you see autistic representation it's, you know, a cisgender white child and it just doesn't feel very true to life”

“Just don't make a big deal out of it. Making a big deal out of it sort of gets rid of the actual point that we want this to be casually embedded, we don't want a big deal made”.



Implications....

- Support pupils to access to texts **featuring a diverse range of neurodivergent characters** (with different diagnoses and demographics) which capture a variety of neurodivergent experiences.
- **Involve neurodivergent pupils** in recommending and selecting books (but be mindful that they might not want to).
- Provide access to texts in **different formats** (e.g., graphic novels, audiobooks) and **modes** (e.g., reading aloud, linking to film/TV adaptations).
- Encourage pupils to **critically engage** with representations of neurodivergence in texts.



New project.....

Neurodivergent reading realities: Identity and collective meaning-making through neurodivergent-led book groups

Empowering neurodivergent students to **co-construct** meaning and understanding about their (collective and individual) neurodivergent identity/identities through participation in neurodivergent-led book groups, exploring:

- (1) Whether/how reading books about neurodivergence can affirm, undermine, challenge and/or expand their neurodivergent (and intersecting) identities.
- (2) The methodological potential of neurodivergent-led book groups as a safe space for facilitating collective meaning-making regarding neurodivergent identity and culture.

Email: charlotte.webber@strath.ac.uk



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Building Anti-Ableism Through Representation in Children's Material Culture

Seminar Series

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Join us for seminar 2: Books and Reading

Explore how disability and neurodivergent representation in books can support anti-ableist practice and challenge ableism.



21 April 2026
1300 - 1630 BST



Hybrid - MS Teams and On
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Strathclyde, G1 1XQ



For questions and more
information, email:
charlotte.webber@strath.ac.uk



Free to attend
Register by 17-04-2026

Submit an abstract



Or visit: <https://forms.office.com/e/gh4S7FUfdF>

Submit by 20-03-2026

Register to attend online or in
person at Strathclyde



Or visit: <https://edin.ac/4aU9DtL>

Quick reads...

Neurodivergent characters in YA fiction: who is being represented? (Scottish Book Trust)

Writing neurodivergent characters: advice from neurodivergent teens (Scottish Book Trust)

Why schools need books featuring neurodivergent characters (BookTrust)

25 Scottish Book Trust

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Neurodivergent characters in YA fiction: who is being represented?

This article was written by Charlotte Webber, an Autistic researcher on the Neurodiversity and Narrative Fiction project who works at Scottish Book Trust and the University of Edinburgh.

Genre: Identity
Age group: 15-18, Adults
Audience: Writers
Topics: [Disability and Neurodiversity](#), [Writing tips](#), [Creative writing](#)
Last updated: 17 April 2024

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Why schools need books featuring neurodivergent characters

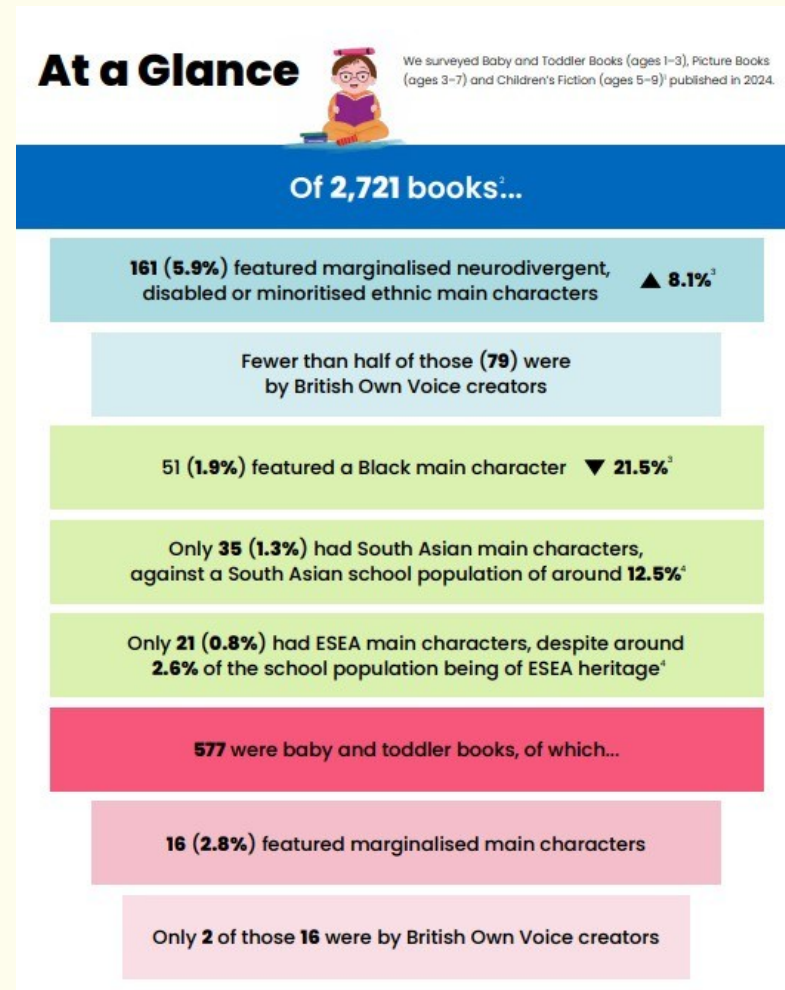
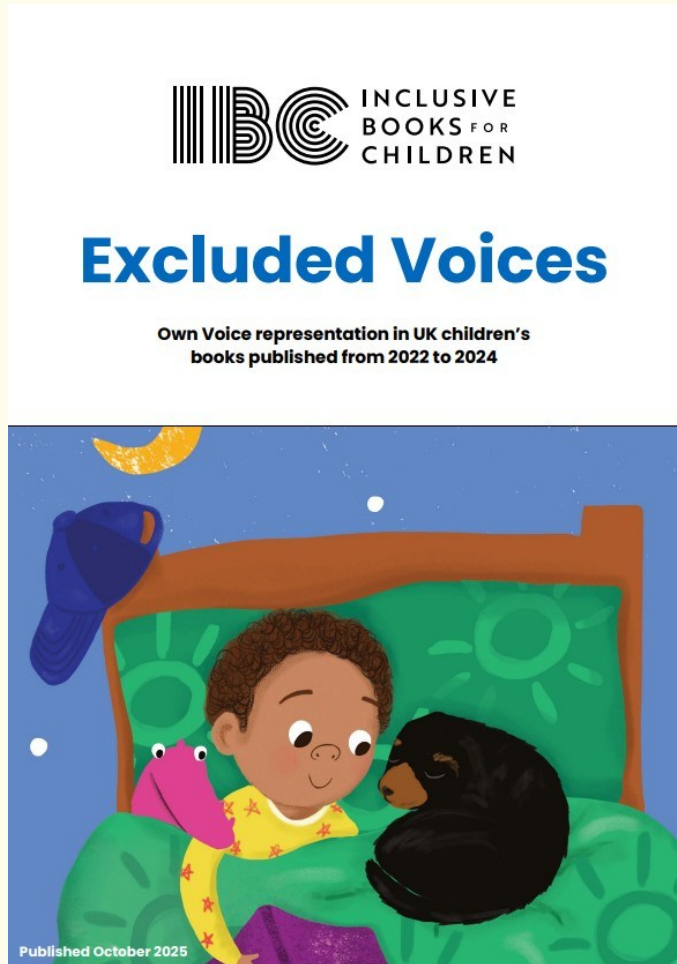
Published on: 19 December 2023

We at BookTrust know that children benefit from seeing their experiences, and those of their friends, reflected in the books they read.

We asked Charlotte Webber to share some of the findings from a University of Edinburgh project on neurodiversity in children's fiction.



Representation: For younger readers....



<https://www.inclusivebooksforchildren.org/excluded-voices-report>

Many thanks to all the **young people** who participated and so generously shared their reading perspectives and experiences.

Research team:

Dr Charlotte Webber, Elena Santi, Prof Sarah McGeown, Dr Katie Cebula, Dr Catherine Crompton, Prof Sue Fletcher-Watson

Practice partners:

Dr Christina Clark, National Literacy Trust
Lucy Jukes, Barrington Stoke
Katie Jukes, Teacher
Eadaoin Lynch, Scottish Book Trust
Daniel Payne, BookTrust
Emily Weston, Teacher
Victoria Williamson, Author

Funding from University of Edinburgh Challenge Investment Fund.



Reflection and discussion

- What key messages did you take from this webinar, and how could you use these to support your practice?
- What does your current book provision look like in terms of diversity, representation, and intersecting identities?
- Thoughts on future research interests and priorities...



University of Edinburgh Literacy Lab:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/>