



**English  
Mastery**



## **Equality, diversity and inclusion in English Mastery**

Our ongoing work towards an authentic study of the diverse discipline of English

**ArkCurriculum+**



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“It is important to make diversity a part of all of the units of work rather than something separate or tokenistic.”

**Survey respondent**

“We know that diversity is important. We’ve all been thinking about it in our respective contexts and obviously what has happened this year with Black Lives Matter, and the mood of the world and country – there is more of a hunger and appetite from people. I want to be teaching a curriculum where I am represented, and my pupils are represented too.”

**Daniel Opoku, Ark Blake Academy**



# Foreword by Patrice Lawrence



**Patrice Lawrence is an award-winning writer based in Sussex. Her books include *Orangeboy*, *Indigo Donut*, *Rat*, *Diver's Daughter* and *Eight Pieces of Silva*.**

I grew up in Sussex and went to a large comprehensive school in a small village called Cuckfield. Out of around 1700 students, there were, at the most, two or three students of colour in each year group. I absolutely loved English, writing, reading and studying it. The English literature curriculum in the 1980s was very similar to the one students study now. My mother grew up in colonial Trinidad and still adores throwing random Tennyson quotes at me when I see her. We send books to each other by post and the last one that thumped through the letterbox was an anthology of Britain's favourite poems. Our home bookshelves held Shakespeare, Dickens, Keats and Oscar Wilde, all excellent preparation for passing my exams. It also drilled into me the 'fact' that writers of quality were always white and overwhelmingly male and dead.

I was lucky to be taught by English teachers who encouraged me to read widely. Mr Jones introduced me to Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, a (nearly) contemporary story about young adults written sympathetically from their point of view. My local library in Haywards Heath bolstered me with the other Zindels and a hefty

dose of S E Hinton's too. All of those stories sunk into my imagination and influenced the books I write as an adult. However, it took me a very long time to find my writer's voice. For me, there was always something missing.

As Nick Wallace writes in the introduction to this report, literature in the classroom brings us stories that change the world – they 'give us a poetic insight into the human condition'. *Macbeth* prompts us to explore power and gender relationships. John Donne opens up discussion about the religious and the secular. *To Kill A Mockingbird* – racism and segregation, of course, but also a child's eye view of adulthood and stigma. But again, for me, there was something missing.

As a Black child, a young Black woman, the first in my family to be born in the UK, a person who experienced overt racism from my first day at school, I knew that I held a different perspective. I knew that there were other ways to talk about books. I longed for other stories to be told. The African American academic, Rudine Sims Bishop has used the analogy of children's literature having the potential to be mirrors, windows, and sliding doors<sup>1</sup>. We should see a reflection of ourselves in stories as well as encounter new worlds that open a portal in our imaginations for us to step through and immerse ourselves. The journalist and writer Christopher Myers takes this one step

further. In an article for the New York Times, he argues that books can also be a map<sup>2</sup>. They show us where we can go. I was missing that map.

That map is now a global map. Young people's popular culture is shaped by Korean pop music and drama, Japanese graphic art and storytelling, African visual and musical aesthetics. Young people gather online to share their fandom passions and creative responses. As I write this now, large exhibitions of work by the British-Ghanaian artist, Lynette Yoadim-Boakye and South African artist, Zanele Muholi, have just closed at the Tate galleries in London. Yinka Shonibare's beautiful installation in the Tate Modern celebrates the contribution of immigrants to Britain through Ankara fabric-covered books. The Serpentine Gallery in London is hosting a retrospective of photographs of London and Accra by British-Ghanaian James Barnor.

And of course, there has always been a rich pool of literature by writers of colour. Dickens may have written with depth and detail about London, but likewise Sam Selvon, Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith, Bernadine Evaristo and Kamala Markandaya. Catherine Johnson writes historical novels for teenagers that places young people of colour firmly back into 18th century England. Spoken word artists such as Caleb Femi, Theresa Lola, Dean Atta, Raymond Antrobus, Sophia Thakur, Joseph Coelho and

Manjeet Mann are changing perceptions of what poetry can be. The latter two have been shortlisted for the 2021 CILIP Carnegie Medal. An episode of the Cbeebies programme *JoJo and Gran Gran*, about a Black British family, was awarded Best Pre-School Programme by the prestigious Broadcast Awards. It is inspired by books written by Laura Henry and illustrated by Amy Bradley. *Look Up*, a picture book by Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola about a space-obsessed Black girl won the 2020 Waterstones Prize. This and so much more is modern Britain.

I am heartened by this report and wish the English Mastery community good luck in the next steps to embed equality, diversity and inclusion across the English curriculum and wide programme. I meet many teachers when I'm invited into schools to deliver author events; they want their students to encounter stories that both reflect the students' experiences and challenge them. Like the teachers in this report, they want literature that provokes discussion, nurtures critical thinking and engenders empathy. Yes. We must now explore literature in a way that reflects our modern world, as something dynamic, exciting and inspirational.

1 <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>

2 <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/the-apartheid-of-childrens-literature.html>





# Introduction by Nick Wallace, Head of Programme Design, English Mastery

Our mission at Ark Curriculum Plus is to empower teachers to give every young person, regardless of their background, the subject knowledge and skills that will allow them to succeed. Since English Mastery launched in 2014, we've had the privilege of working with thousands of colleagues to bring this mission to life in classrooms across the country. But there is always room for improvement, and over the past year we have been looking specifically at our curriculum through the lens of diversity and inclusion, to make our programme stronger and even more effective.

## **Breadth, depth, diversity and richness**

English Mastery attempts to apply the best educational research into curriculum materials and professional development. We refer to these pedagogical principles as our 'four pillars'. The first pillar – a knowledge-rich approach to the teaching of English – is the very bedrock of English Mastery and cuts through everything we seek to achieve with the programme. Over the past few months, we've been examining whether the programme has adequate range for us to be fully realising this pillar.

In practice, this means that we've been interrogating all parts of our programme to determine

whether we are offering a true, authentic study of the diverse, evolving discipline of English. Our subject has been forged by writers, scholars, critics, teachers, students, and performers from every background imaginable. They have all contributed to the bodies of powerful knowledge that comprise our discipline, and we have spent the last few months listening to our partners to better understand how we can better represent the breadth of peoples who shape the study of English.

This interrogation has cut through every part of our programme, not just in the composition of authors and texts that make up our curriculum maps. The lesson materials that we develop with teachers, the experts we consult with when developing the curriculum, the themes, perspectives and intra-curricular links we study in English Mastery, and the ways we structure and develop professional development have all come under close examination as we seek to improve and develop the programme to offer our schools a more authentic experience of teaching English.

## **Why now?**

When the programme was developed and launched back in 2014, our chief consideration at

the time was to prepare students for the rigours of – what were then – the new GCSE specifications. They had a greater emphasis on the traditional Western canon, and it's widely accepted that this specification presented a much higher challenge than previous specifications. We focused on finely mapping the subject knowledge and skills that students needed to develop and master throughout Key Stage 3 to offer them the best chances of success at GCSE.

As a result, we have a programme that we know gets results – that helps students make four times the expected progress in English – but that we acknowledge can, and should, now evolve.

We want to better reflect some of our school communities, yes, but more importantly, to fulfil the higher purpose of the study of literature, which is to offer students the opportunity to study stories which have changed the world, that give us a poetic insight into the human condition.

Over the past year, many of our teachers took the time to write to us and invite us to take a more critical approach to our curriculum composition. Excitingly, lots of them have offered us their time, expertise and ongoing support and challenge to make our programme even better. I am delighted to

share their insights and voices throughout this report, and also to share the ways that we have changed our programme so far, how we've worked in partnership with colleagues across our schools, and the changes we are hoping to make over the coming months.

This certainly isn't a 'how to', or a celebration of all the things we've done recently – far from it. Instead, this report may offer some insights to colleagues in other schools and contexts into the depth of thought, the patience and determination required to make meaningful, authentic changes to the curriculum. We have made many missteps on the path so far, and no doubt are going to make many more, but the entire process has offered us and our schools a clearer sense of purpose and direction for how to offer students of all backgrounds the best, most authentic experience of studying English at school.



**Video: 2.5 minute watch**

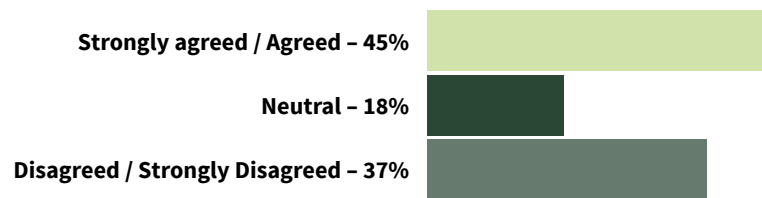


# Seeking the views of the English Mastery community

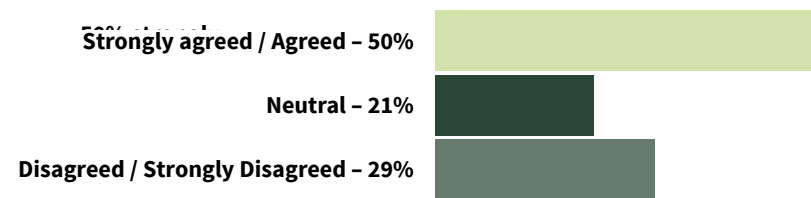
English Mastery works with over 160 schools across the country in a range of educational contexts. As part of Ark Curriculum Plus, we work closely with Ark schools to refine and evolve our curriculum, turning research and theory into practice. We have used these excellent networks to discuss and learn more about how we can improve our representation of the discipline of English in our curriculum.

We initiated our research in September 2020, gathering feedback and analysis on the strengths and areas for development within the English Mastery curriculum.

**Q** The composition of the English Mastery curriculum offers students ample opportunities to learn about writers and protagonists from a diverse range of backgrounds.



**Q** English Mastery supports me to teach the curriculum to a diverse range of students.



Only 24% of our teachers agreed that English Mastery supports them to teach challenging themes and subjects linked with identity and representation, emphasising the need to build Professional Development in this area.





# Working with our English teaching community



English Mastery is a national programme that aims to support teachers in a wide range of contexts. The decisions that we make, from the texts we select to the Professional Development we provide, are all there to support teachers' delivery.


Diversity, representation and inclusion are massively important to our teaching community. Every teacher, student and scholar has a personal take on its definition and relevance. We investigated why it matters to our teaching community so that we could inform our curriculum in a way that helps teachers bring diversity, representation and inclusion to life in their classroom as they guide students through the study of English.



Because literature, history and society are diverse and multifaceted. If we are to equip pupils with the knowledge they need to participate and understand the world around them then we need to cover a number of voices and experiences.

**Survey respondent**

“To be able to see themselves in books is such a powerful thing because it shows that their experiences, values and lives are validated to a degree... but also that other people are learning about them.”

 **Hear more from Narayan**

## “Why is diversity, representation and inclusion important in the English curriculum?”

To expose students to different cultures, and ways of life. It is important to encourage positive conversation about race, religion, sexuality, class, etc.

**Survey respondent**

Diversity in the curriculum is also important as it pushes students to think beyond their own experiences and to see things from different perspectives.

**Survey respondent**

“ There are so many writers from different cultures, countries and backgrounds who have a story to tell and something to share... I think it adds more quality and richness to the curriculum and to our lives.”

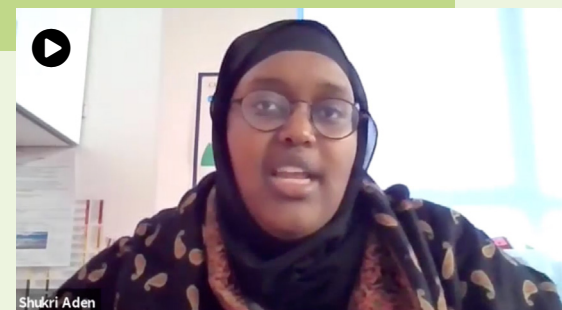
**Hear more from Shukri:**

Students from all backgrounds need to feel that their history and identity is worthy of celebration and reflection in art and literature.

**Survey respondent**

Literature opens people’s eyes to the world around them – a different world, cultures, races. It’s a chance to break barriers in a creative way.

**Survey respondent**



**Video: 1 minute watch**



“ I am at a very diverse school in Tottenham with, quite unusually compared to schools I’ve worked at before, quite a diverse staff and diverse English teaching department so that’s great, but it is then strange teaching texts and a curriculum that don’t really reflect that.”

**Survey respondent**

“ Students need to see themselves represented in positive and diverse ways whatever their backgrounds.”

**Survey respondent**

“ What is taught through a curriculum, and therefore what is not taught, speak loudly about what is valued. A rigorous curriculum that is proud of the traditional literary canon can and should include a diverse range of voices.”

**Survey respondent**

“ Students need to be exposed to a wide variety of experiences, voices and issues. Our students also need to see themselves represented in the texts we study, so they feel that their lives and experiences are important and valid.”

**Survey respondent**

## Representing the discipline of English

Our research confirmed how passionate teachers are about improving the approach to equality, diversity and inclusion in the curriculum.

These quotations illustrate some of the ways this impacts teachers and their students, and how we can make our approach to the English more reflective of the discipline of English and the world in which we live.<sup>1</sup>

“ It is a powerful tool to teach about the past, present and future of the society in which we live and how literature is representative of a society. We can’t do that if part of society is excluded from the curriculum.”

**Survey respondent**

“ English is crucial for students to develop an understanding of the world, their place in it and their relationship with others. Without an inclusive curriculum, students of diverse backgrounds will feel unrepresented and may become disengaged. It’s a moral imperative to have adequate opportunities to explore and discuss a spectrum of diversities in order to model appropriate celebration of diversity.”

**Survey respondent**

<sup>1</sup> <https://neu.org.uk/media/13026/view>  
National Youth Trends Time and Time Again, p30  
CLPE Reflecting Realities report 2020





“It is important for pupils to experience a range of voices similar to and different from their own. It should be a mirror for their own lives and a window to others.”

**Survey respondent**

“Literature opens people’s eyes to the world around them – a different world, cultures, races. It’s a chance to break barriers in a creative way. Students need to know the contributions other cultures have made and be acknowledged.”

**Survey respondent**

“To expose students to different cultures, and ways of life. It is important to encourage positive conversation about race, religion, sexuality, class, etc.”

**Survey respondent**

## Widening perspectives

Through literature in the Arts, we develop our understanding of humanity, are given the opportunity to discover and reflect on different perspectives, and experience emotional connections. Literature has the potential to expand our horizons and cultural awareness, helping us develop an understanding of, and empathy for, those different from ourselves.

“It helps our pupils to have more understanding of the world around them. As well as this, it promotes tolerance and acceptance of those who have different values and ideals. The English curriculum allows this message to be explored in a safe space.”

**Survey respondent**

“It’s important for all students to learn about different cultures and identities so that they are equipped to enter society and navigate the adult world, in whichever industry they choose. We have a moral responsibility as educators to teach them the whole picture, rather than being complicit in the underrepresentation and inequality that exists now.”

**Survey respondent**

“The study of literature and the development of writing skill are both dependent on the ability to empathise and consider varied viewpoints and experiences. Without a range of texts written by diverse authors/poets/playwrights, diverse settings and diverse characters, students will struggle to build their empathy and understanding.”

**Survey respondent**



“A curriculum that does not reflect the diversity within literature in English does not represent a broad and balanced literature education.”

**Survey respondent**

“The human experience should be represented in texts rather than a particular categorised ‘experience’ as I think that is too generalised.”

**Survey respondent**

“As a major humanities subject, we are currently not embracing all of our diverse and rich culture. It is our job as citizens to provide a truly rounded curriculum that supports and explores all of British heritage and culture.”

**Survey respondent**

## A truthful study of English

We want to offer students the opportunity to study stories which have changed the world and that give us a poetic insight into the human condition. Through this, we may see reflections of ourselves and learn about others. Always, we are celebrating and pursuing a reflective and engaging study of English.

“So students recognise that there isn’t just one form of correct and important literature.”

**Survey respondent**

“I realised that students from years 7–11 have only been exposed to writers from diverse backgrounds 6 times (out of 40 opportunities). This doesn’t reflect the varied and diverse nature of literature.”

**Narayan Deb, Ark Globe**

“Students need to understand that English literature has been influenced by other cultures – that it’s part of a wider context of global literature.”

**Survey respondent**



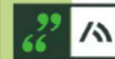
# English Mastery Diversity & Inclusion Working Group

We were overwhelmed by the thoughtful and insightful responses to our survey. We approached a number of the teachers who had contacted us, and were delighted to hear that they would like to establish a working group focussing on diversity and representation in the English Mastery curriculum.

The teachers have joined us from Ark schools and our wider partnership, and the group has set the agenda for ways in which we can – and are – evolving the curriculum. Many of the teachers are featured throughout this report, and their ongoing support and challenge has informed many of the decisions and changes we've made so far.



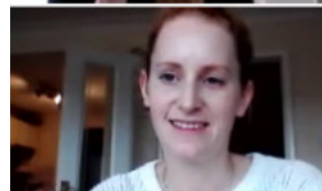
Video: 2 minute watch



## Welcome

Which book did you **most enjoy** and **why**?

If you didn't get to read any, please share the one you're **most excited** about reading and why.



The working group met regularly to discuss diversity and representation in the English curriculum.



# Introducing the English Mastery Diversity and Inclusion Working Group



**Alice Tribe**  
(*English Mastery*)

Alice joined the English Mastery in September 2018. She embarked on the Teach First development programme in 2015 and since worked as a teacher and Head of KS3 in south London. Alice read Art History at the University of Nottingham, has a PGCE in Secondary English and a Masters in Leadership and Education from UCL: The Institute of Education. Alice loves working with English teachers and discussing all things related to the beautiful subject.



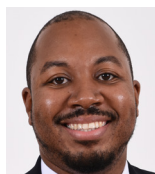
**Chris Fountain**

During this project, Chris was Principal Design Lead at English Mastery where he led on curriculum and training developments, and supporting schools to implement the curriculum successfully. Before then, he was the KS4 English Curriculum Lead at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School in Islington, North London. He is currently the Curriculum Manager at Oak National Academy.



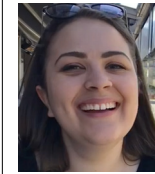
**Kay Tinsley**  
(*TKAT*)

Kay Tinsley is an English Teacher first and foremost. With 25 years experience teaching and leading English in a range of contexts, she currently is the English Strategic Lead for TKAT. She is also a doctoral student at Sussex University focussed on research exploring 'A Transformative Poetry Pedagogy' and is enjoying Caleb Femi's new anthology 'Poor'.



**Daniel Opoku**  
(*Ark Blake Academy*)

Having joined the Ark network in June 2020, Daniel currently serves as the Vice Principal at Ark Blake Academy, the brand new secondary school located in Croydon. He has a passion for teaching & learning and curriculum, and when not reading fantasy books, Sherlock Holmes novels or books about the experiences of Black minorities in Western countries, Daniel is geeking out reading books about pedagogy. The most impactful novel he's read is 'The Color Purple' by Alice Walker. His favourite book series is, obviously, the Harry Potter series.



**Charlie Brennan**  
(*Astrea Sheffield*)

Charlie Brennan has taught English in Sheffield since 2012. She is passionate about reading and teaching great literature. This year, Charlie has enjoyed working with English Mastery to explore what a curriculum built on great literary works can look like for her students.

**Narayan Deb**  
(*Ark Globe Academy*)



**Video: 12 minute watch**







# Introducing the English Mastery Diversity and Inclusion Working Group



**Elmina Ferguson-Small**  
(Ark Pioneer Academy)

Elmina Ferguson-Small is an English teacher and Head of Department at Ark Pioneer. Her work focuses on ensuring high quality teaching for all pupils. The importance of literacy is a huge driver in her pedagogical thinking. Elmina has a huge passion for teaching and learning. A huge area of her work involves developing trainees and NQTs.



**Shukri Aden**  
(Ark Walworth Academy)

As part of the English Mastery anti-racism working group, we reflected on the curriculum we have currently in our schools for Key Stage 3 and the ways in which it could be adapted in to be more diverse and representative of our communities and values. Having the chance to meet, discuss and collaborate with other teachers was invaluable and rewarding; I was able to learn from them as well as have a space to share my own thoughts listened to. From this came real change and I am incredibly excited, for both students and teachers, to benefit from this work.



**Samantha Reece**  
(Dukes Aldridge Academy)

Samantha has been a teacher of English at Duke's Academy for the last eight years and has taught a range of engaging and varied texts. She feels that being part of the working party is a wonderful opportunity to diversify the types of writers and texts students study in English Mastery, providing many students with stories and experiences more reflective of their own and those around them.



**Madeleine Weedon**  
(BACA)

Madeleine has been a teacher for six years and has experience teaching all year levels. She currently leads on Year 7 and Year 8 curriculums and will be leading Year 9 in the next academic year. She also leads KS5, which encompasses English GCSE re-sits, functional skills and A Level Literature. She is passionate about planning and delivering robust and rigorous curriculums to our students and loves to help facilitate and deliver engaging topics and texts.



# What changes have we made so far?

We are making changes to the English Mastery programme, committed to making inclusion and diversity a seamless aspect of the curriculum.

- We have adapted our approach to the teaching of Caliban and colonialism in *The Tempest*.
- We are introducing a new literary heritage unit for Year 7, based around the text *Small Island* by Andrea Levy.

See how we have changed our teaching in *The Tempest*

English Mastery  
Diversity and Inclusion audit: *The Tempest*  
Changes for 2021-22 units of work

Pathway	4HC Lesson No.	Slide No.	6HC Lesson No.	Slide No.	What was the previous task or moment in the lesson?	What changes can be made in consultation with the Diversity and Inclusion Panel?	Why make this change?
Traditional	11	17	17	12	The end of lesson discussion questions are: "Does Prospero treat Caliban fairly? How do you feel towards Caliban?"	Change the discussion questions: "How does Prospero's treatment of Caliban change your view of Prospero? How does it change your view of Prospero's attitude towards Caliban?" "How is Prospero's treatment of Caliban at this point an example of colonialism?"	Previous discussion questions didn't allow students to think about racial inequality and colonial experience.
Traditional	12	10-11	18	12-13	Task after 11 reads: "Describe Caliban's scene." "Make a list of the features of Prospero from this scene. Make another list of the reasons why it is sad for Caliban."	Made this moment more focused on the audience for Caliban. On Slide 11 - two discussion questions added: "Why is it particularly sad that Caliban chooses two Jewish comic characters to be his messengers? What does Caliban's choice reveal about his character and emotion?"	This will help to draw out more of the issues around Caliban's character.

"We specifically looked at *The Tempest* and colonialism because it's one of the texts that deals directly with something that we can pick up on."

**Shukri Aden**

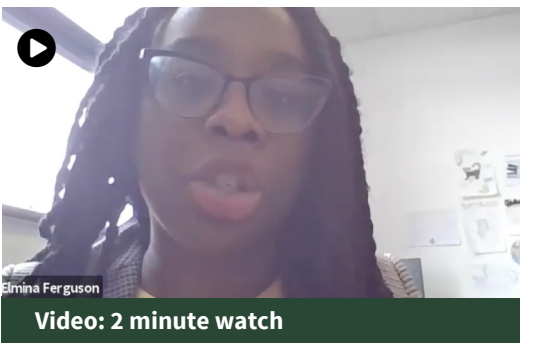
Discover more about the work of the Diversity & Inclusion panel from Shukri:



"It was very exciting because the text that we were mainly looking at was mainly *The Tempest*. I absolutely love *The Tempest*, However, I felt uncomfortable the first few times I taught it. The images that they chose, particularly for Caliban were deeply problematic."

**Elmina Ferguson**

Elmina discusses the changes to the teaching plans for *The Tempest* and the importance of looking at the wider context:







# What next?

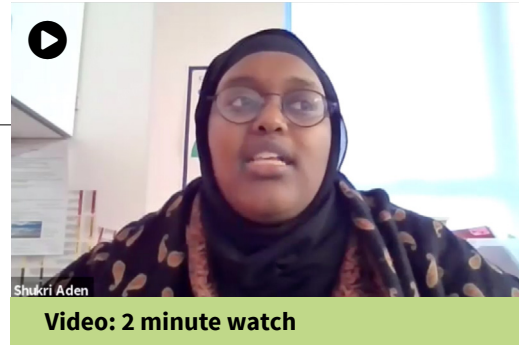
We are pleased to share the insights and developments we have made so far by working in partnership with teachers from across the English Mastery community. This remains an ongoing, fluid piece of work, and our team and partners are fully committed to evolving English Mastery to best reflect the disparate needs and views of the English teachers we work with.

The sheer love of literature and of teaching English has shone through clearly in all the discussions we've had to date. As we make changes to the programme with the benefit of a more secure, refined understanding of diversity and representation in English, our fundamental passion of sharing stories that have shaped the world will continue to sit at the heart of what we do, and the impact we want to have in schools across the country.

We still have lots to do. We have taken our first steps to address some problematic issues around the presentation of people of colour in some of our curriculum texts, and are developing processes to ensure that – as much as possible – we do not misrepresent, or under-represent these voices in our curriculum and wider programme in the future.

We also acknowledge that our work on diversity, representation and inclusion in the curriculum must cover racial representation, as well as a broader, deeper consideration of how people with other protected characteristics must be represented and integrated into an authentic study of the subject of English.

Colleagues from across the sector – and beyond – continue to grapple with this vital issue. We have lots to learn from and with them, and we will continue to share the phenomenal experiences and insights of our teachers, as well as the lessons we are learning along the way.



“It’ll be interesting to see how people react to this and how people take this onward in their schools. I think in terms of ... thinking about the KS4 and the GCSE texts, in terms of the importance of them and the amount of weight that’s put on them – I wonder if it will actually be taken into that – as a nationwide text that everyone has to study in the same way as Shakespeare. And in the same way that certain texts are upheld, whether we’ll be able to see more diverse texts on that same curriculum, on the national curriculum, I feel like that would be a massive change.”

**Shukri Aden**



*“This is just the beginning really, isn’t it?”*

**Narayan Deb**

We extend our full appreciation to all our working group, with special thanks to Elmina Ferguson-Small, Shukri Aden and Narayan Deb.

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