

KS3 English Texts

Canon and Contemporary

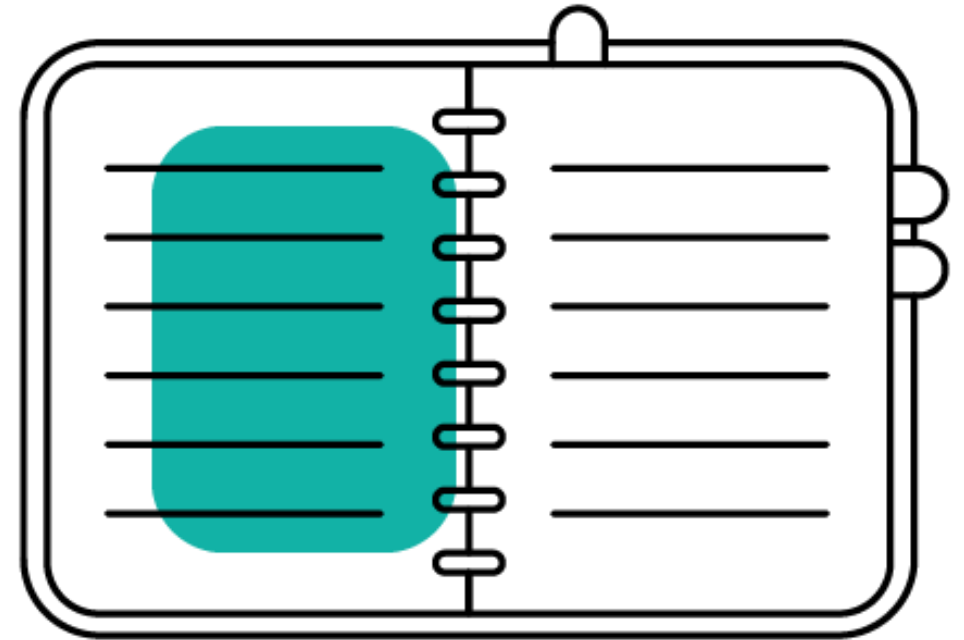
Bennie Kara



Agenda

Session Objectives

- To explore common diverse texts taught at KS3 and the challenges they may present.
- To introduce the concept of *social literacies* and why they matter in literature education.
- To offer practical strategies for teaching race, gender, disability, and class confidently and sensitively.
- To provide resource suggestions and a reflective framework for curriculum planning.



Introductions

Bennie Kara

- Former Deputy Headteacher
- Author
- Trainer
- Speaker



The Perfect Storm

Time pressures in
education

Lack of training on
social literacies

Discomfort in
teaching sensitive
topics

Diversity Matters

Reflecting diversity

- Children deserve to see themselves in the stories they read.
- Representation promotes pride in cultural heritage and strengthens self-identity.
- Exposure to different cultures and experiences builds appreciation and respect for others.

Building empathy and understanding

- Diverse stories allow children to experience life through others' eyes.
- Helps broaden perspectives and reduce prejudice.
- Encourages emotional connection with people who face different challenges (e.g. characters with disabilities).

Challenging stereotypes

- Portraying diverse characters in varied and complex roles breaks down harmful stereotypes.
- Encourages children to question societal norms and see people beyond fixed narratives.

Fostering identity and belonging

- Especially important for children from marginalized communities.
- Validates their lived experiences and gives them role models.
- Reinforces the belief that they can achieve great things and be proud of who they are.

Empowerment through literature

- Helps children resist societal pressures and celebrate uniqueness.
- Inspires them to dream big and embrace their identities.

Common Diverse KS3 Texts

- *Of Mice and Men* – race and disability
- *The Bone Sparrow* – refugees and asylum
- *Ghost Boys* or *The Hate U Give* – race and policing
- *Boy Everywhere* – migration and identity
- *Welcome to Nowhere* – war and displacement
- *Refugee Boy* – immigration, mixed identity
- Diverse poetry anthologies – class, race, sexuality

Have you taught any of these?

Common Responses to Diverse Texts

- I can't teach this – I don't know enough about the historical and social context.
- There are tricky themes in this book – I would need to spend a lot of time preparing.
- Characters in this book have identities I am unfamiliar with – I don't want to say or do the wrong thing.
- There is language in this book that I can't pronounce – I don't want to look foolish/ignorant.
- My students might be quite sensitive to this – or hostile – don't want to have a battle.

Critical Social Literacies

What Are Critical Social Literacies?

- Analytical skills for understanding identity and power
- Includes race, gender, sexuality, disability, class, and religion
- Moves beyond 'diversity' to examine systems and impact

Core Dimensions

- Race and Racialisation
- Gender and Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation and Queerness
- Disability and Neurodiversity
- Social Class and Economic Access
- Religion and Belief Systems

Developing awareness

Ignorance and Invisibility

Lack of awareness of racialised systemic injustices in the US when teaching *Of Mice and Men*

Cultural blockspots on Islam and women when teaching *Safiyyah's War*

Comfort in the status quo when teaching about Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*

Discomfort and Awakening

Moments of confrontation – experiencing a Black student's view of the language in *Of Mice and Men* as being violent and distressing

Seeing injustice in the way that Estella is presented in *Great Expectations*

Feeling resistance to paralleling texts that counter dominant narratives, such as the poetry of Langston Hughes

Learning and Listening

Educating oneself by reading critical analysis of pre-20th century texts with a decolonial lens and listening to marginalised voices about prejudice.

Centring marginalised voices – hearing student feedback on texts and the patterns they create.

Becoming familiar with the language, arguments and ideas surrounding critical social literacies

Sustained Allyship

Using your voice to advocate for diverse texts

Supporting students to engage with critical dialogue

Amplifying ways in which texts can be read with critical social literacies

How do we shift our awareness?

To Kill a Mockingbird
by Harper Lee

One by Sarah Crossan

The Picture of Dorian Gray
by Oscar Wilde

- Encourage empathy and multiple perspectives
- Challenge stereotypes and structural bias
- Foster inclusive classrooms and discussions
- Apply intersectional thinking to teaching

Surface Diversity vs Deep Engagement

Tokenism

- Including books simply because they have diverse characters.
- Pointing out differences in characters, such as race, sexuality, gender.
- Skimming roles within texts, or sticking to established narratives.

Transformation

- Examining power dynamics in texts with diverse characters, e.g. Sherlock Holmes stories.
- Analysing coding within texts to enable critical dialogue, e.g. queer coding in Gothic short stories.
- Layering contextual information to include contemporary interpretations, e.g. Crooks in *Of Mice and Men*.

Contextual Layering

Foundational Knowledge

Historical context: Introduce the period and key social dynamics that shape the world of the text. Example: For *Of Mice and Men*, explore Jim Crow laws, the Great Depression, and the treatment of disabled people. For *The Hate U Give*, examine systemic racism and the history of police brutality in the US.

Author background: Explore the author's identity and intentions. What social, cultural, or political experiences might inform their writing?

Terminology primer: Define terms that may be new or complex (e.g. “queer coding,” “racialisation,” “intersectionality”) so students can use accurate language in discussion.

Critical Reflection

Spot contextual references: Pause to highlight moments where historical or cultural knowledge deepens understanding.

Ask layered questions:

- What does this scene reveal about power dynamics?
- How does the character's identity shape their experiences?
- How might this be interpreted differently by someone with a different identity?

Use parallel texts/media: Supplement the core text with:

- news articles
- documentary clips
- poetry or nonfiction by people from the identity group represented.

Apply Understanding

Compare interpretations: How might a modern reader respond differently to this text than a contemporary one? What are the tensions?

Introduce real voices: Read responses from readers who share the identity of a character (e.g. blog posts, YouTube commentary, critical essays).

Creative responses: Ask students to write from the perspective of a marginalised character, or reimagine a scene with modern-day awareness.

Common Pitfalls

Don't reduce the character to a symbol: Avoid treating diverse characters as only representations of their identity group.

Avoid “single story” narratives: Balance one text with others that show varied experiences from the same group.

Check your own lens: Reflect on what you know, and what you don't, about the identity/issue being explored. Model that process with students.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon

‘Epsilons’ in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley

Progression

Ancient	Medieval	Renaissance	17/18th century	20th century	21st century
Au1	Au2	Sp1	Sp2	Su1	Su2
Global Stories	Medieval Tales	Intro to Shakespeare	Non-Fiction Writing	War Poetry	<i>Safiyyah's War</i>
<p>Mythology and origin stories from across the globe</p> <p>Introduce connections and tropes in literature</p>	Writings – fiction from the medieval world	Great snippets from famous speeches – from <i>Henry V</i> to <i>Othello</i> (sets scene of early black presence)	<p>Sources: travel descriptions, reportage</p> <p>Tasks: recreation, composition, creativity</p>	War Poetry from across the ages and cultures – include narratives from all cultures	Contemporary narrative shifts from war writings – centring of marginalised characters

Progression

Ancient	Medieval +	Renaissance	19th century	20th century	21st century
Au1	Au2	Sp1	Sp2	Su1	Su2
<i>The Odyssey</i>	Form in poetry	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Akala's <i>The Dark Lady</i>	Essays and Speeches	Retellings and Rewritings
Use Geraldine McCaughrean's version	Explore ballad, haiku, ghazal, sonnet, terza rima, alexandrine	Can be used to teach about character, mysticism and roles of women/colonial fighting	Link to teaching on Shakespeare's sonnets – Elizabethan age and race	Thunberg, Malala, political speeches Writing polemic	Include feminist rewritings from Miller, Carter etc. How would you rewrite famous fairy tales?

Progression

17th century	18th century	19th century	19th century	20th century	21st century
Au1	Au2	Sp1	Sp2	Su1	Su2
<i>The Tempest</i>	The Romantics	Gothic Short Fiction	Writing Gothic	Black Experiences	<i>The Black Flamingo</i>
Colonial narratives	Blake, Wordsworth, Hemans, Barbauld and Landon	Include queer coding and sexuality, deviance	Description, narrative, theme, metaphor	Framing around <i>Of Mice and Men</i> , including Langston Hughes and bell hooks	Brings together strands from this year

Resource Suggestions

1. The Lit in Colour Initiative (by Penguin & Runnymede Trust)

- Free resources, reading lists, CPD packs.
- Includes texts by Black, Asian and minority ethnic authors for KS3–KS5.
- <https://www.penguin.co.uk/litincolour>

2. The Freedom Curriculum – The Black Curriculum

- History and literature resources designed by and for teachers.
- Poetry, oracy, and Black British narratives.
- <https://www.theblackcurriculum.com/>

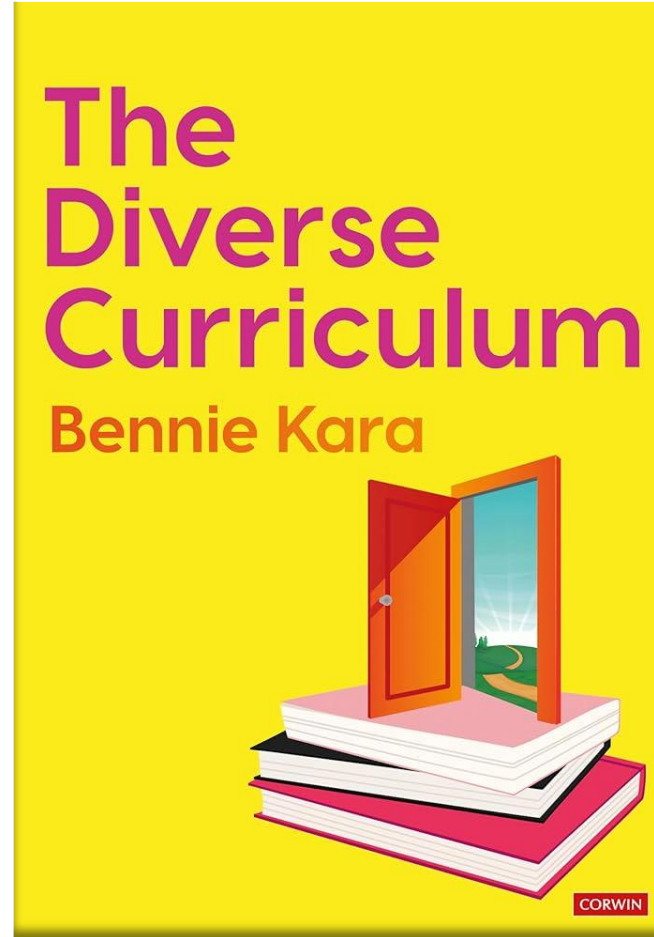
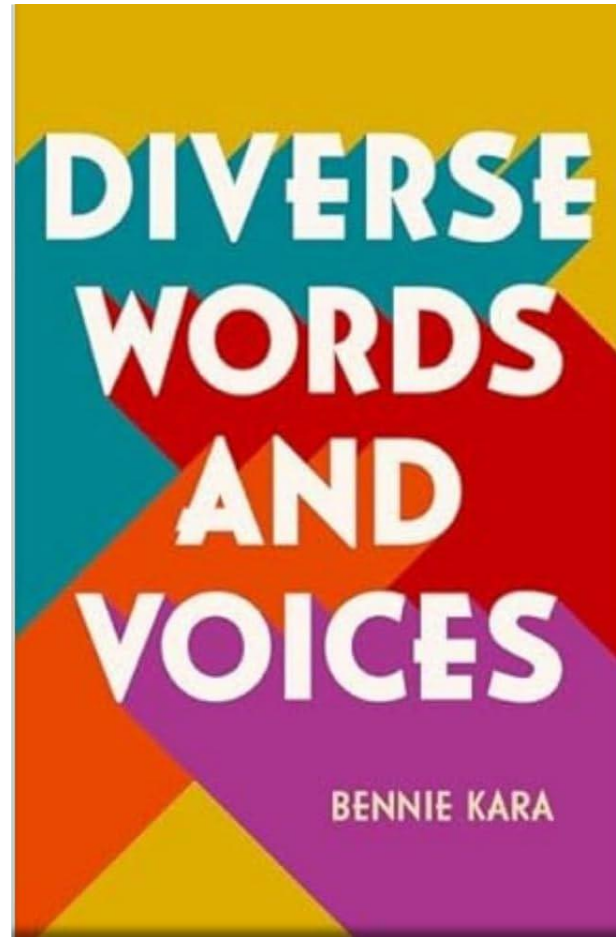
3. Reimagine KS3 (by CLPE and Forward Arts Foundation)

- Poetry-focused KS3 unit plans centred on diverse voices.
- Includes works by Raymond Antrobus, Malika Booker, Grace Nichols.
- <https://clpe.org.uk/reimagineks3>

4. Decolonising the Curriculum Guide – The English and Media Centre (EMC)

- Framework for questioning representation in texts and curriculum design.
- Includes sample schemes, readings, and teacher reflections.
- <https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk>

Other Resources



Pearson resources

[Accessible Shakespeare](#)

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Shakespeare texts



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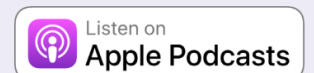
[The Full English Podcast](#)

Latest episodes



Ep 14: Practical ideas to improve your students' feelings of belonging and an exploration of the future of GCSE English with Bennie Kara

Join Pam and Bennie Kara as they discuss a range of topics, including Bennie's new book 'The Diverse Curriculum,' and the practicalities of enriching your curriculum to be more inclusive and diverse. Other aspects discussed include what the future of English GCSE could look like and how to foster a love of literature in the classroom.



Pearson Edexcel: Let's Talk English campaign

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Let's Talk English

Let's talk about why we love it.

Let's talk about why it matters.

At its best, English unlocks knowledge, nurtures empathy and values diverse voices. But this vital subject is being challenged by pressures like never before – and it's time for change.

It's time for us to revive English and make it the engaging, innovative and inclusive subject it truly can be.

So let's talk English...

[Join the conversation](#)



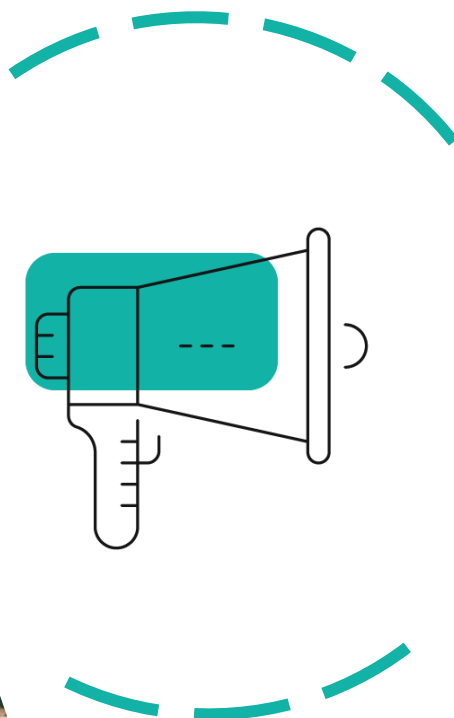
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