
**BLACK
HERITAGE
SUPPORT
SERVICE**

AFRO MANGA

IMPACT REPORT

Increasing reading for
pleasure among
Black Caribbean boys





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📈 The Statistics

In **2024**, around 67% of Black Caribbean pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage. ¹

This is lower than the national average, which is 78%.



💡 The Real Issue

The issue is not ability.

Research shows the gap is more strongly linked to engagement, expectations and structural racial inequalities within schools rather than academic potential. In the 1950s, Afro-Caribbean people were the largest ethnic minority group in Britain and faced consistent direct and institutionalised racism. ²

The literacy gap has **narrowed compared with the 1990s** but widened again in recent years with Black Caribbean boys remaining among the groups least likely to meet national standards after Gypsy Roma pupils.



The gap reflects systemic barriers, not capability

67%

Black
Caribbean

vs

78%

National
Average

Historical Context

A long standing myth within British education suggests that Afro Caribbean children underachieve because their parents lack interest in education. Historical evidence does not support this narrative. Many members of the Windrush generation arrived in Britain with strong academic traditions and professional qualifications. Caribbean societies placed high value on education and intellectual achievement.

The generation that migrated to Britain included highly educated individuals such as the economist Arthur Lewis, the pioneering teacher Yvonne Conolly, and cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Their achievements demonstrate that Caribbean communities arriving in Britain were deeply invested in education and intellectual advancement.

However, their children became the first visible ethnic minority generation to be educated in a Britain that had not yet developed modern equality protections. These children entered schools decades before legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 existed. As a result, many experienced open racism within classrooms, low expectations from teachers and structural barriers that affected their educational progress.

Historical evidence shows that Black Caribbean children were unfairly and frequently mislabelled as educationally subnormal and placed into inappropriate schooling streams.³ Parents were often unfamiliar with the British education system and were advised by schools to accept placements that limited their children's opportunities. Rather than receiving support many children were neglected within classrooms and framed as disruptive or incapable.

Historical Context

Concerns about the presence of Caribbean pupils were also reflected in official documents of the period. A leaked local authority document known as the Doulton Report⁴ warned that increasing numbers of West Indian children in schools could lower academic standards. Statements such as these created fear within local communities and reinforced racist assumptions about Black pupils.

In response to the discrimination their children experienced, Caribbean parents and community activists organised their own educational solutions. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Black community groups established supplementary schools across the UK. These weekend schools were designed to support children academically, rebuild confidence and counter the low expectations they encountered in mainstream education.

These initiatives were not created because Caribbean families lacked interest in education. They emerged because families recognised that the mainstream education system was failing their children.

The challenges facing Afro Caribbean children during this period were not limited to the classroom. Many families were navigating poverty, housing discrimination and racial violence. Communities experienced aggressive policing practices and economic exclusion that placed additional pressure on family life. In many cases parents were forced to work multiple jobs in order to support their households, often raising children in difficult social conditions while confronting racism in their daily lives.

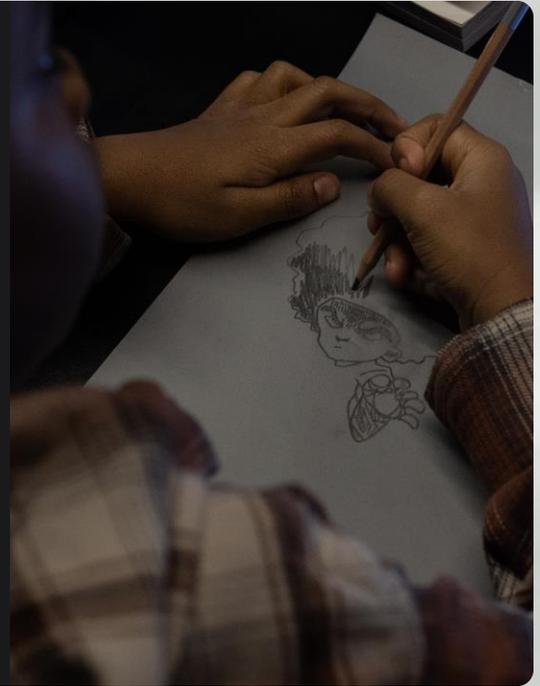
Understanding this historical context is essential when examining present day educational inequalities. Afro Caribbean children were not failing the education system. For many years, the education system failed them.

3x

Disproportionate Impact

Black Caribbean pupils are around **three times more likely** to be permanently excluded from school than the national average.

Government data consistently shows Black Caribbean boys have one of the highest exclusion rates of any ethnic group in England.



Unequal Treatment

Research into disciplinary practices shows that **similar behaviours are often interpreted differently** if the pupil is white.⁵



Support vs. Punishment

White pupils displaying the same behaviours are **more likely to receive support interventions** such as mentoring or behavioural programmes.

i

Studies examining school discipline have documented these disparities.

!

Black boys are more likely to face disciplinary action such as suspension or exclusion.

“ The same behaviour receives different consequences based on race ”



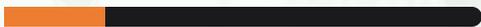
The Shocking Reality

Research into children's publishing has repeatedly found that less than 20 percent of children's books published in the UK feature a main character from a minority ethnic background.

This is despite the fact that around one third of children in UK schools come from minority backgrounds.

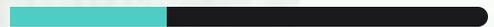
<20%

of children's books feature minority ethnic main characters ⁶



~37%

of UK school children come from minority backgrounds



When children cannot see themselves in the books they read, they receive a powerful message about whose stories matter and who belongs in the world of literature.



Representation is not luxury, it's a necessity for engagement





Creative reading initiatives that centre culture, representation and creativity are important because they address several of these barriers at once.



Identity Reflection

They create environments where young people can see characters who reflect their identity, validating their experiences and making reading personally meaningful.



Interest-Led Engagement

Participants engage with reading through interest-led activities, following their passions rather than prescribed curricula, which increases motivation and enjoyment.



Visual Storytelling

Young people can explore storytelling through art and visual culture, engaging multiple learning styles and creative expressions beyond traditional text.



Safe Peer Environments

Young people build confidence in safe peer environments, developing social connections and a sense of belonging that supports their overall wellbeing.



Rather than focusing purely on literacy attainment, programmes like Afro Manga focus on rebuilding the relationship between young people and reading, which is often the first step toward long term engagement with education. We want our children to fall in love with reading.



About Afro Manga Book Club



Programme Vision

The Afro Manga Book Club was developed by the Black Heritage Support Service as a creative reading initiative designed to help young people fall in love with books.

🎯 Target Audience

The programme focused particularly on Afro Caribbean boys who have historically been excluded from seeing themselves represented in literature.

The idea came from the founders son, Rishon. At age 7 he displayed little interest in reading because he could not relate to the literature at school. As a result and his literacy levels were low and his school failed to detect dyslexia.

Seeing his love for anime, Natalie took Rishon to a local comic shop every fortnight. Rishon would read 4-5 manga books in a weekend. As a result, Rishons literacy levels improved and he passed his English GCSE.

Natalie wanted to test this method to see if it would work for other Black Caribbean boys.

📖 The Manga Approach

Manga and comic-based storytelling were used as an entry point into reading because these formats combine visual storytelling, imagination and character development.



Pilot Programme

The programme was delivered as a pilot of **12 workshops** across Birmingham and Brixton for children aged **10 to 14**.

Brought together reading, illustration and storytelling

Workshop Activities

Peer reading

Story discussion

Manga exploration

Creative drawing

Character design

Narrative structure

Inclusive Space

Although designed to support Afro Caribbean boys, the sessions created an **inclusive space** that attracted a wider group of young people.

Afro Caribbean girls

White British Neurodivergent participants

Those who experienced marginalisation

Partnerships

National Literacy Trust

Supplied books and supported delivery

Local Comic Shop

Trip to bring the world of comics to life

Lighthouse Youth Centre and Brixton Library showed young people that reading exists within wider cultural spaces

12 Workshops

2 Locations

10-14 Age Range



Evaluation from the pilot shows strong engagement from participants

Survey Overview

13

young people completed the survey



Reading Habits (Participants who were already active readers)

9

read daily outside school

4

read a few times each week

😊 Enjoyment of Reading

BEFORE

5 participants enjoyed reading **very much**

AFTER

8 participants enjoyed reading **very much or quite a lot**



Programme attracted story-interested youth while expanding their exposure to new genres



★ Positive Responses

9

agreed book club linked to their interests

5

reported it helped them meet new people

7

said sessions made them feel better

13

liked the volunteers (ALL participants)



Strong engagement from all participants



Representation Matters

Representation was a **key outcome** of the programme.

9

participants agreed they could see people like themselves in the resources



Significant given historic absence of Black characters in mainstream reading materials

Creative Engagement

Creative engagement was a **strong feature**:

4 participants said sessions helped their creativity, sketching at home and learning illustration styles

5 participants learned about story structure through drawing and narrative activities

Motivations to Attend

Participants were asked what motivated them:



Drawing



Reading



Manga



Story Writing



Family



Promotions

Book Feedback

Feedback about the books was **largely positive**:



Described as interesting, enjoyable and amazing



Valued being able to choose titles



Representation was meaningful

 **Peer reading** was a new experience, some felt unsure about reading aloud and found it uncomfortable, but others said it sparked curiosity and helped deeper engagement



Key Findings & Future Potential



Overall Success

The Afro Manga Book Club demonstrated that creative and culturally relevant reading programmes can successfully engage young people who may not feel connected to traditional literacy activities.

♥ Programme Philosophy

The workshops created a space where **imagination, creativity and representation** came together.

Rather than focusing on raising literacy scores or academic outcomes, the programme centred joy, identity and storytelling .

📍 Future Expansion

The pilot shows **strong potential for future expansion:**

- 👥 Support more young people
- 📅 Extend number of sessions
- 🏫 Partner with schools & libraries
- 📦 Collaborate with comic retailers

“ ”

*Most importantly it has demonstrated that when children are given access to stories that reflect them and space to create their own , reading becomes something they **want to do** rather than something they are required to do.*



Families traveled significant distances



High demand for culturally rooted initiatives 🏠

Acknowledgements



Venue Partners

The Black Heritage Support Service extends sincere thanks to the **Lighthouse Youth Centre** and **Brixton Library** for providing a safe and welcoming space for the Afro Manga workshops.

Book Partners

We are grateful to **Kyle and the National Literacy Trust** for supplying the books and supporting the delivery of the sessions. Their contribution ensured access to engaging manga and comic titles.

Tutor

Special thanks go to **Lashante Brotherson** for her exceptional talent, creativity and dedication in tutoring the young people. Her guidance helped participants explore illustration, storytelling and character design.

Team & Volunteers

We would also like to recognise the commitment of the **BHSS team and volunteers** whose time, energy and belief in the project made the programme possible.

Finally, we would like to thank Rishon Scarlett Jenoure for being an inspiration to Black Caribbean boys everywhere. Your love of comics, mangas and storytelling sparked the idea that became Afro Manga. You found your love for reading through ani-manga. **This project began with you.**





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