

‘My skin colour matters’ Newcastle teens make film about their experiences of everyday racism

Written and performed by 16-year olds from the West End of Newcastle, Colour Blind tackles the girls’ own experiences of racism and the importance of acknowledging the daily experiences faced by people of colour. [The film can be viewed here.](#)

From the man in the corner shop asking, ‘When are you going to get away from my country?’, to those who feign ‘colour blindness’ out of their own discomfort, the girls demand:

*‘See my colour
And see the assumptions you have already jumped to
See my colour
And see the stories you have told about me before I have taken a breath to
tell my own’*

Colour Blind is the latest short film to come out of New Writing North’s Young Writers’ City programme.

The students at Excelsior Academy worked with writer and producer Emily Wiseman and teacher Diarmuid Mullin to write the piece inspired by their own lives. It was originally performed at the Young Writers’ City Celebration at Sage Gateshead in 2017 and was so well-received that the young women have since been asked to perform at multiple events around the North East.

Now funding from the Virgin Money #iwill Take Action Fund has allowed them to film the performance on location in Newcastle, meaning it is set to reach a much larger audience.

Young Writers’ City is an established New Writing North programme run in partnership with secondary schools, that introduces young people to creative writing and supports those who find a talent or interest to continue to develop over the long term. The programme is funded by Newcastle Culture Investment Fund, Culture Bridge North East Partnership Investment Fund, and Excelsior Academy. It has been embedded in the school since 2015.

Participant comments:

Tessy (16): ‘We always tell people that, in order for us to get along, we have to forget who we are. That shouldn’t be the case. We should remember who we are. We should remember that we are different; we should explore that and discuss that, rather than hide from it.’

‘I hear a lot of people saying ‘It’s offensive to say she’s black or she’s white, or whatever skin colour’. It’s not offensive to call people what they are, but it’s

more offensive to me when you try and make me hide who I am to make you feel comfortable. That shouldn't be happening. We should all show who we are, we should express who we are openly, so everybody can understand what it's like to be different."

"We've performed the piece almost everywhere. It's been a really good experience and I've learned a lot about how to compose myself, how to act on video. I hope that it will continue, more from here. I've met some good people."

"Not everyone could go to see a play, but with a video, it's right in your living room you're getting the message - it's really important to get that. The message will play more in your mind, you can spread it around everywhere."

Manaar (16): "It came about because we all felt that we needed to tell everyone what happens in our day-to-day life. It's not something that should happen, but it does happen and people just let it go. It felt really surreal to write it down knowing that it would be presented to people, knowing that we were going to raise awareness."

"I want them to know what happens to kids on a day-to-day basis and I want them to know that they need to do something. Every little thing to raise awareness helps."

Organisation quotes

Anna Disley, Executive Director, Programme and Impact at New Writing North said: "Young Writers' City aims to create the circumstances for young people to express their own ideas through creative writing, and to be supported to develop their work over the long-term. We also want to ensure their work finds the audience or readership it so deserves. Colour Blind is testament to that. When Tessy, Angelica, Zara, Manaar, Shakira and Lucie first performed we were blown away by its power. We are so pleased that with the help of Virgin Money they are able to create this film so that many more people can see it. We continue to work in partnership with Excelsior Academy on an ongoing basis to support these young women and many more to develop their ideas."

Emily Wiseman, writer and project producer of Young Writers' City said: "The creative arts have a tremendous potential to meaningfully bring about positive social change."

The young writers of the poem, experts on their own experience, are committed to boldly harnessing this transformative potential, seeking out platforms from which to powerfully advocate for social justice.

The live performance of Colour Blind has already brought about real world social change, profoundly impacting on audiences and resonating by word of mouth through their communities. In creating a film, the young writers hope to extend that reach, confronting people in their every day environments with a

systemic social injustice that might be otherwise easily ignored or misunderstood.”

David Thornton, Executive Principal at Excelsior Academy said:

“We have been working in partnership with New Writing North for the past three years and our students always relish the experience to work with established writers and poets who can help them to develop their creative skills and clearly express their thoughts and feelings in poetry and prose.

“This year has been exceptional in that our students have been able to communicate their experiences in writing, live performances and on film which is enormously empowering for them. The level of detail and how they have articulated their encounters of everyday racism is very thought provoking.

“We place great emphasis on developing our students’ self-expression and belief as we aim to nurture strong and resilient students who can communicate effectively.”

[Watch Colour Blind now](#)

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New Writing North is the development agency for creative writing and reading in the North of England. It works in partnership with regional and national partners to produce a range of literary and performance activities including flagship projects such as New Writing North Young Writers, The Northern Writers’ Awards, the Gordon Burn Prize and Durham Book Festival.

New Writing North specialises in developing and investing in writers of all ages and acts as a dynamic broker between writers, producers, publishers and broadcasters across the creative industries. Current partners include BBC Radio 3, Channel 4 Drama, Faber and Faber, Northumbria University and Durham University. As a producer of new work New Writing North commissions a wide range of writing from topical essays and publications to award-winning dance theatre productions, short films, live literature and broadcast projects.