

NEW WRITING NORTH

North East schools celebrate diverse literature as New Writing North launches new reading programme

Four North East schools are celebrating the transformative power of literature this week as they are the first to take part in a new school reading project, **Balance the Books**, from Newcastle-based reading and writing development agency, New Writing North.

The new project led by New Writing North's award-winning Young Writers programme celebrates diverse literature and encourages young people to read widely and for pleasure.

Balance the Books is launching in Belmont Community School, Durham; Callerton Academy and Excelsior Academy, Newcastle; and Kingsmeadow Community School, Gateshead.

Balance the Books was developed by New Writing North after conversations with young people who felt their own lives were not always reflected in the literature they read. The project aims to inspire young people to read for pleasure, encouraging them to discover more books by authors with whom they identify, as well as challenging them to read broadly and adventurously, learning about experiences that have historically been marginalised and underrepresented in literature. The project celebrates literature's unique ability to provide both a mirror on our own lives and a window to the world.

Following a shortlisting process by a panel of young people, teachers, librarians and expert readers, the final selection of twenty Balance the Books titles was chosen by participants of the Young Writers programme. The selected titles are written by authors from a wide range of underrepresented backgrounds, including people of colour, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, working class people, care experienced people and neurodivergent people.

Belmont Community School, Callerton Academy, Excelsior Academy and Kingsmeadow Community School will each receive package of 100 books to form their Balance the Books shelf; reading resources; book clubs and other shared reading activity. New Writing North already works in partnership with the four schools, delivering a wide range of activities from creative writing workshops in English, Music and/or Drama classes to extra-curricular clubs. Young people outside of these schools will also be encouraged to take part by sharing their reading and recommending books using #BalanceTheBooks on social media or joining in with New Writing North Young Writers Groups in their local community.

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Ruth Dewhirst, Senior Programme Manager at New Writing North said: “We believe that every young person should have access to art and culture that speaks across the spectrum of human experience. Exposure to different voices and experiences provides us with new stories that remind us who we are, challenge our existing understanding, inspire us, and help us to develop a richer understanding of others.

We’re so excited to bring Balance the Books to our four partner schools this term and we can’t wait to start sharing the books with the young people and opening up some really important conversations, as well as celebrating the sheer brilliance of contemporary literature.”

Alison Warr, Head of English at Belmont Community School said: “We are thrilled to be a part of New Writing North’s Balance the Books project. We are excited about the opportunities that this will give our students to further develop their views and perspectives of the wider cultural landscape that we all belong to and to consider the different viewpoints of those whose experiences may be different to our own.”

Katie Innes, Principal at Callerton Academy said: “We’re very excited to be part of New Writing North’s Balance the Books project. As a growing, diverse school with a fantastic reading culture, we are looking forward to these new books being part of our library so that they can be shared with students and staff alike. The books, resources and support will spark conversations and learning within our community. Thank you to New Writing North for being champions of all students.”

Holly Knox, Assistant Principal – Year 8 and 9, Excelsior Academy, said: “To feel valued and understood...to be represented while inspiring others; who wouldn’t want to be involved with that? Balancing the books, is balancing human happiness, we are thrilled to be a part of that at Excelsior.”

Callum Lennox, English teacher (2nd in English) at Kingsmeadow Community School, said: “This is a great opportunity for us to diversify Kingsmeadow’s Learning Zone library to further reflect the wider community. We hope these stories will inspire and challenge our students in equal measure, and that the relatability of many of the books will engender a love of reading across all year groups.”

On having his novel *The Black Flamingo* selected for Balance the Books, author **Dean Atta said:** “I never sat down to write a diverse book. I wrote a book about the world I know. The world I know has ethnic diversity, has working class and middle class people in the same family, has many kinds of family, has many sexualities and gender expressions. The world I know may not be like the world you know but now it sits proudly on a bookshelf for you to pick it up.”

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Elle McNicoll, author of *A Kind of Spark*, said: "I'm thrilled that *A Kind of Spark* has been chosen for Balance the Books. It's so important that neurodiversity has a place in conversations about representation, and that ND authors are at the forefront. Underrepresented authors are writing the most exciting stories so it is wonderful New Writing North is championing this."

The full list of Balance the Books titles is as follows:

- *A Kind of Spark* by Elle McNicoll
- *Afterlove* by Tanya Byrne
- *And The Stars Were Burning Brightly* by Danielle Jawando
- *Black and British: A Short, Essential History* by David Olusoga
- *The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta
- *Cane Warriors* by Alex Wheatle
- *Careless* by Kirsty Capes
- *The Dark Lady* by Akala
- *I am Thunder* by Muhammad Khan
- *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds
- *My Name Is Why* by Lemn Sissay
- *Oh My Gods* by Alexandra Sheppard
- *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi
- *Poor* by Caleb Femi
- *Run Riot* by Nikesha Shukla
- *Stay a Little Longer* by Bali Rai
- *Tall Story* by Candy Gourlay
- *Under Rose Tainted Skies* by Louise Gornall
- *What's the T?* by Juno Dawson
- *You're Not Proper* by Tariq Mahmood

Find out how to take part in Balance the Books at [Balance the Books - New Writing North](#)

Notes to Editors

High-res images of all the titles on the Balance the Books list are available.

For any enquiries, interviews or images, contact Laura Fraine

laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com