

# NEW WRITING NORTH

Press release: for release Friday 10 December

## Twenty titles selected for Balance the Books: a celebration of diverse literature in schools

A new project from New Writing North's award-winning Young Writers programme celebrates a diverse range of literature and encourages young people to read widely and for pleasure. BALANCE THE BOOKS will launch in secondary schools in North East England in January 2022.

Balance the Books was developed by New Writing North after conversations with young people who felt their own lives were not reflected in the literature in their school libraries. 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 authors from a wide range of underrepresented backgrounds, including people of colour, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, working class people, care experienced people.

New Writing North's partner schools will each receive package of 100 books to form their Balance the Books shelf; reading resources commissioned by the authors; book clubs and other shared reading activity. 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.

The Balance the Books list is:

- *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

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- *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

On being selected for Balance the Books, **Dean Atta, author of *The Black Flamingo*, 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."

**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."

Lisette Auton, Jake Hope, Christopher Moore and Okechukwu Nzelu formed the expert reading panel for Balance the Books.

**Lisette Auton said:** "I can't express how important this project is. Every person deserves to see themselves represented in the books that they read. But not just represented, represented well - authentically in a diverse manner that opens up questions and wonders, and never closes them down. It was a privilege to read and then work together to create a shortlist of these books. But even more exciting that we were only doing this small part - that it was the young people who had the ultimate say, exactly as it should be."

**Okechukwu Nzelu said:** "I was delighted to be part of Balance the Books. I was a secondary school teacher for years, so I know first-hand the importance of providing

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children and young people with a diverse and engaging diet of quality books. I'm really excited for young readers to get stuck into this list!"

**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."

*Balance the Books will launch in schools in January 2022. Find out how to take part at [Balance the Books - New Writing North](#)*