

DO STORIES BRING US TOGETHER?



October is UK Black History Month. 2026 is also the National Year of Reading. So, for this year’s celebration, we are taking the opportunity to think about stories and their power to bring people together. Stories are often the bedrock of Black History Month activities in schools with teachers around the country sharing stories of remarkable Black Britons with their pupils. Often discussed as “cognitively privileged”, narratives are highly memorable and can be powerful tools in building empathy and improving representation in the classroom. Yet, society is becoming increasingly polarised with conflicting stories battling for attention; we are continually exposed to the power of stories to divide, blame and isolate. Which story do young people believe? Do they see stories as a tool for unity or as a driver of division?

Alex

Data Coordinator

61,792	12,555	47,152	2,085
TOTAL VOTES	VOTES AGE 5-11	VOTES AGE 11-16	VOTES AGE 16+

The VoteTopic question discussed was:

Primary 5-11, Secondary 11-16, 16+ College: “Do stories bring us together?”



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Primary pupils had a strong sense of stories being able to connect people. Many discussed how they can help people make friends, whether by bonding over a shared love of particular stories or by reading a story together. There was an appreciation that stories can help us understand other people, how they may think and feel differently to us and how their background may differ to our own. A number of pupils shared that they see stories, and reading in particular, as powerful learning tools. A minority discussed stories' potential for moral education, such as helping to build empathy. However, a number of voters argued that other things are more powerful in uniting us, such as conversation, socialising and play. A few stressed their own dislike of reading.

I said no because you can do something else together like playing outside or playing a game.

Primary Voter

Stories can bring us together as we discuss and can understand each other, our cultures and feelings.

Primary Voter

Secondary discussions were more nuanced, mostly centring on different interpretations of what the word "story" could mean. The most common response to the debate question was "it depends" - both on the story being shared and on the person sharing it. As in Primary, there was a keen

sense that stories can be powerful tools in helping us understand other people's points of view. Secondary students also echoed that shared fiction can be helpful in making friendships. Many voters also stressed the powerful effect that stories featuring shared experiences can have in uniting people. Multiple students commented on how stories allow them to connect with family members and their family backgrounds. A minority commented on the link between stories and history, finding value in their ability to connect to the past via stories.

Every story can bring us together as long as the story has been shared right. It depends upon who you share it with and the subject matter.

Secondary Voter

Some 11-16 voters shared the view of their younger peers that other things are more powerful in connecting people than stories. A small number of voters found personal stories helpful in terms of connection, but found general fiction less so. A handful of voters shared concerns around subjectivity, arguing that stories can be one-sided or deliberately deceptive.

Students said it depends on what kind of story. If it's non fiction it may only relate to a specific group but if it's fiction then it doesn't relate to anyone.

Secondary Voter

16+ & College voters stressed how stories build empathy and allow listeners to experience things they might not encounter in their own lives. 'Yes' voters of all ages shared a joy in experiencing new stories, whether through books or in-person speakers.