National Literacy Trust

Change your story

In partnership with

GO ALL IN.

National Year of Reading 2026

Soundtrack your story

KS3/S1-S3
Classroom storytelling project with author and broadcaster Jeffrey Boakye

National Storytelling Week

Contents

Project aims 3
How to use the resource 4
Project learning objectives 4
Soundtrack your story: activities 5
GO ALL IN 5
The playlist 6
Taken from the lyrics 8
A story through song 9
Help them tell their story 11
Inspired by the music 13
Performance 15
At the end of National Storytelling Week 2026 15

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Supporting book recommendations 16
Appendix 2 – Extract from 'Musical Truth' 17
Appendix 3 – Extract from 'Musical Truth' 18
Appendix 4 – The playlist 21
Appendix 5 – 'Brimful of Asha' 22
Appendix 6 – Musical World 25
Appendix 7 – Supporting instrumental playlist 28
Appendix 8 – Curriculum links 29

To celebrate **National Storytelling Week 2026**, the **National Literacy Trust**, supported by **Amazon**, have created a variety of storytelling activities and a live storytelling workshop with author and broadcaster **Jeffrey Boakye**, for KS3/S1-S3 classrooms, to inspire a love of story creation and storytelling through music.



Project aims

To inspire a love of storytelling, reading and writing for pleasure.

National Storytelling Week celebrates the power of stories through oral storytelling, writing, and reading for pleasure. Through an interactive workshop led by Jeffrey Boakye, supported by engaging classroom resources, pupils will have the opportunity to explore and develop their storytelling and creative writing skills, culminating in writing a narrative piece.

Children and young people's enjoyment of reading and writing is currently at crisis point. Our latest research highlights a deepening disengagement from writing for pleasure - only 1 in 4 (26.6%) children and young people now say that they enjoy writing in their free time, a figure that has almost halved over the past 15 years. Yet, findings also indicate clear gateways into writing, particularly when young people have the freedom to choose their own topics, respond to inspiring prompts or draw from personal experiences.

Exploring stories through music and lyrics has emerged as an effective way to re-engage young people with reading and writing for pleasure. Our research shows that slightly more than 3 in 5 (60.7%) children and young people aged 8-18 regularly read song lyrics digitally. Interestingly, even among those who say they don't enjoy reading, many still choose to engage with lyrics, with the same percentage (60.7%) reporting that they read song lyrics on a screen in their free time. Similarly, writing can attract children and young people when it aligns with their interests in music or personal storytelling. Writing song lyrics is especially popular, with slightly less than 1 in 5 (17.8%) reporting that they write lyrics on a screen at least once a month.

At a time when young people's enjoyment of reading and writing is at its lowest, National Storytelling Week offers a powerful opportunity to reconnect them with the creative spark that transforms writing into a pleasurable act. Pupils are supported to experience writing as a fun and imaginative process. By working with a professional author like Jeffrey Boakye, they gain insight into the author's own craft and are encouraged to see storytelling as a meaningful form of self-expression and creativity.

How to use the resource

Each activity has been created for ease and flexibility, allowing you to adapt them to suit your timetable and class needs.

Depending on how much time you want to dedicate, you could choose to:

- Utilise **all** activities as a complete learning sequence.
- Choose **a few** sessions only to deliver during lesson time throughout National Storytelling Week.
- Use **one** activity as a short writing task in tutor time to inspire engagement with a new writing style.
- Share activities with students to encourage independent writing in their free time beyond the classroom.

All activities are designed to encourage students to bring their own voice and perspective into their writing.

Activity	Writing Outcome	Insight
GO ALL IN	Inspiration mood board	Supporting students to recognise where they are currently and generating ideas to inspire the writing of stories.
The playlist	A story through songs/song analysis	Replicate Jeffrey Boakye's storytelling process from *Musical Truth*. Build a story from a playlist of songs and explain how they emphasise moments in a story.
Taken from the lyrics	Non-fiction writing/ personal reflection	Analysing song lyrics and examining and identifying the message and call to action they share.
A story through song	Lyric writing	Building a song that reflects who you are. Forming lyrics around key parts of identity and self.
Help them tell their story	Lyric writing	Using a well-known story and finding its power again, in the form of lyrics.
Inspired by music	Fictional story	Discovering the stories hidden in music and creating a story inspired by the music.

Project learning objectives

By the end of this learning sequence, pupils will:

- Experience the joy of story creation and storytelling with a professional writer
- Use music and lyrics to learn how to tell stories that matter
- Create a story through the medium of lyric-writing, short story writing or a non-fiction narrative piece

This resource is designed to align with National Curriculum across the four nations.
See *Appendix 8* for more details.

Soundtrack your story: activities



Preparation

Prepare a selection of fiction and non-fiction books which focus on the themes of identity, belonging and music *(Appendix 1)* for pupils to read independently.

GO ALL IN

Story writing can be hard, and sometimes staring at a blank page can be the biggest killer of inspiration. Encourage your students to make something exciting and visual that they can refer back to, throughout the writing process.

You will need: A large sheet of plain paper per student, colouring pencils and felt tips.

Invite students to start with a word in the middle of the page that is important to them. It could be their name, surname or their favourite word.

> ***Hint:*** *Encourage students to avoid current trends or well-known words, phrases, names or crazes. Choosing something less obvious or personal helps them move beyond simply describing the item and pushes their creativity further.*

From here, students can fill the page how they like, but encourage them to curate colours, words, emotions and doodles on some of the following topics:

- The word in the middle
- You – who are you?
- What do you care about?
- What troubles you?
- What do you see ahead?
- What are your favourite songs/lyrics?
- What colours are important to you?
- A selection of favourite words or phrases
- For each of the words and phrases you've added to your page, try to find a rhyming word or phrase for each.

Instruct students to fill the page with as much colour, shape and style as possible; it is as much about looking visually appealing as it is about answering all the questions.

Once complete, inform students that they have just written a story. It is a story of a moment, a story of now, but a story nonetheless, a cheat sheet for all future stories you might write.

The playlist

Jeffrey says:

"When writing non-fiction I start with making lists. Lists of songs, list of moments, lists of events. Whatever you are into, whatever you are interested in – make a list. This is like the spine of your non-fiction writing, and it could even be the contents page."

You will need: *Appendix 2 and 3*, paper and pens.

Students need access to a variety of songs (Bandcamp, Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube). They do not have to listen to the music, but they might want to use it as a prompt.

You might decide that the final task in Part 1 would be more suitable to be completed at home so students can research and explore a variety of songs that would work for their list.

Part 1

In his book '*Musical Truth*', Jeffrey chose 28 songs to tell the story about what it means to be Black and British, but also what it means to be him. Read *Appendix 2* to understand Jeffrey's inspiration.

Invite students to choose the topic they want to create their own playlist on. They may be inspired by Jeffrey and by their own story or heritage, or they might prefer to create a playlist inspired by a particular issue that is important to them, like climate change or inequality.

Once they have chosen their topic, encourage students to create a list of 5 statements about the topic. See *Appendix 4* for a worked example. Like Jeffrey, it could be a list of moments, questions, or facts that interest them.

For example:

My topic is climate change

1. **We are responsible for the Earth's well-being**
2. **Why do some people still not believe climate change is real?**
3. **We need to act now if we want a world for the future**
4. **There was flooding in my town and people lost their homes**
5. **I want more people to do their bit**

For each point on the list, invite students to identify the feeling or mood. They might want to ask themselves:

- **How does the statement make me feel?**
- **What action or energy does it suggest?**
- **What images or symbols come to mind?**

Once complete, invite students to find a song for each point on their list that best reflects the feeling or mood they identified.

Students have now created a story, told through this combination of songs.

Part 2

Once students are happy with their song choices, read through *Appendix 3* from *Musical Truth*, and identify how Jeffrey explains the impact of this song, at this moment in the story of Black Britain.

Invite pupils to choose one of the songs from their story playlist. Replicating Jeffrey's style, encourage students to explain what this song represents to them (essentially exploring the creative process from Part 1 in reverse). You may wish to use this structure to help get started:

- *What song did you choose, and what mood does it create?*
- *Identify one line of lyrics from the song that is important and explain why*
- *Explain what thought it inspires (i.e., the original point from the list you made)*



Taken from the lyrics

You will need: A copy/extract from the lyrics of **Brimful of Asha by Cornershop** (we recommend looking at the original song lyrics and version but the single release version will work just the same), *Appendix 5* from Musical World pages 165 - 169, paper and pens, highlighters.

As a class, read the lyrics in *Appendix 5*. Do not give context for the song and frame the work as poetry.

Invite students to think about each phrase in small groups/pairs:

- What is the line trying to do? (What reaction should you have?)
- How is it trying to say it?
- Is it being direct or descriptive?

Come back together to investigate the meaning of the song as a whole. Go through the lyrics from the start, inviting students to share their understanding of the line they looked at. As each new piece of evidence is shared, decide as a class if the meaning still makes sense. Encourage students to change their thoughts based on what has already been shared.

> A story doesn't have to be a fictional telling of events. A story is making sense of experience, whether imagined, lived or observed.

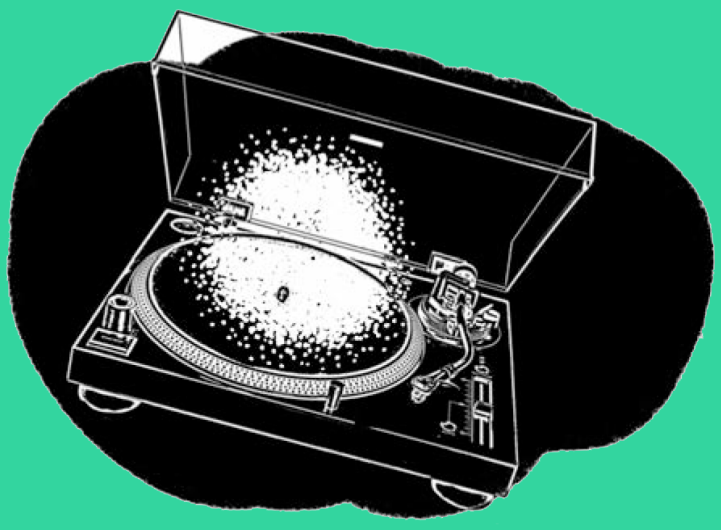
Ask your students to consider what experience is being shared through these words.

As a class, listen to the lyrics as part of the song and check back with the students to see if they still agree with the meaning being shared.

Read *Appendix 5* to see how Jeffrey investigates the story of this song in his writing. As a group, reflect on the meaning of the song now that they have read Jeffrey's insights.

Inspired by Jeffrey's insight into **Brimful of Asha**, invite pupils to share the experience found in the song in a different style:

- A news report
- An imagined interview with the artist as to why they wrote this song
- A letter to the artist or to the character in the song
- A personal reflection on the song and how you related to the experience shared



A story through song

You will need: GO ALL In mood board (if completed), paper and pens.

Part 1 of this activity reflects the style of Jeffrey Boakye's workshop on Wednesday 4 February. If your students attended the workshop and feel confident with the work created in it, you might decide to skip Part 1 and move straight on to Part 2. If your students did not attend or need more time to craft ideas and shape their work, continue with Part 1.



Part 1

Invite pupils to identify five words to describe who they are, and encourage them to stay positive, reflective and honest with themselves. If they have created GO ALL IN mood boards, this would be the perfect time to refer back to this.

Inform them that each of these five words will be the basis of each stanza/verse in their new song about themselves. This song can be telling the story of themselves, or it can be of something they have imagined, still using these words as inspiration.

Give students some time to arrange their words or 'verses' into a logical order. Stories usually start by contextualising, then building, have a climax and resolve. Invite students to consider what order these words would go in if they were to follow that structure.

For each of those five words, invite students to identify another five that rhyme with them. These will help to form the words included in each verse, and will be a starting point for storytelling through lyrics.

Bold
Creative
Woman
Empathetic
Joyful

Creative
Empathetic
Joyful
Bold
Woman

Creative
Narrative
Innovative
Relative
Appreciative
Alternative

Part 2

Jeffrey uses his hand to help analyse a song. When thinking about a song's importance, he thinks about:

1. **The thumb – a thumbs up** – what is the best thing about that song? What is the thing you want to shout to the world about that song?
2. **The index finger – the one that points** – what is the point of that song?
3. **The middle finger – the biggest finger** – what is the biggest thing about this song? What is the thing that is going to stand the test of time?
4. **The ring finger** – if you could give the artist a ring on the phone, what questions would you ask of them?
5. **The baby finger** – a pinkie promise – what do you promise to do going forward, because of that song?

Before students get started on writing their own lyrics, invite them to answer Jeffrey's questions for themselves, and consider what they want their song to do.

Now students are ready to begin crafting their own song. They may wish to find a beat or rhythm they want to fit their words to, or they might find that naturally as they craft their work.

At this point, students have:

- A light structure to their story (the 5 words to describe themselves in a chosen order)
- 30 words with groups of rhymes
- Five answers to help them identify the purpose and intention of their song.

Invite students to choose one of the 30 words that stand out to them and use this to start crafting their first verse. Build a phrase with a rhythm to lead to that word. From here, they can build the verse around this phrase. They can decide to add lines before or after the original line, and experiment with the construction of each phrase, based on which words they are drawn to. Encourage students not to limit themselves to the original 30 words they have available to them; they can always swap things out when they have a clearer picture of their story.

Repeat this process with each set of words.

Hint: *writing doesn't have to be perfect the first time around. It is the edits where things come alive. Get lines down on paper but give yourself at least the same amount of time or even more time to play around with the story you are telling and the phrases you are using to tell it.*



Help them tell their story

Throughout history, people have used songs to mark a moment in time and tell the story of now, or the journey to get there. The combination of stories, poetry, rhythm and melodies is powerful for conveying a message.



You will need: *Appendix 6*, paper and pens.

Take a moment to read *Appendix 6* before embarking on this task. This will give your students a sense of how a song tells a story. You might want to share **A Change is Gonna Come by Sam Cooke** to contextualise the extract.

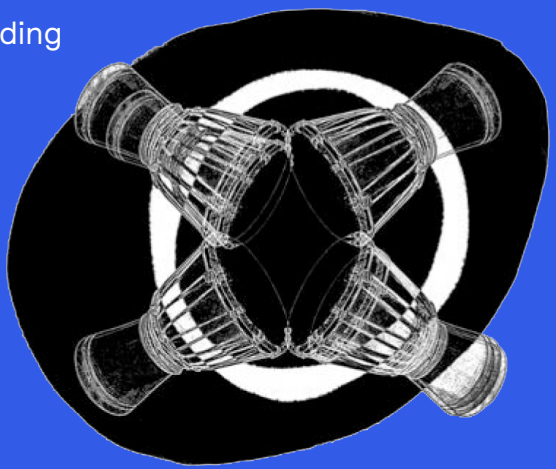
Invite pupils to identify a story that is important to them. This might be an established story from history, a lesser-known story from their own culture or even a personal story from their family or themselves.

You might want to use the following prompts with your students to help them decide which story to choose:

- What is a story you were told as a child?
- Is there a story someone in your family tells?
- Is there something you learnt in history that's stuck with you, or the story of a book that really meant something to you?
- Is there a story of a famous person whose action inspires change?
- Is it the story of a family member, or your own story?

Ask students to create a list inspired by that story, including people, places, challenges, growth, action and even moments where nothing happens. With each moment in the list, create a micro-mind map with details on:

- Emotions
- Colours
- Mood
- Metaphors
- Key words



Jeffrey says:

"When I write non-fiction, I think about archetypes: the different personality roles that a character or writer can take. Who am I being when I write about a particular topic? Often, I write as the Jester, joking and toying with the reader, playing tricks on them. I often become the Sage, sharing wisdom or deep truths. Always ask yourself: what persona are you taking on board to share this information?"



Jeffrey suggests thinking about the writer's persona when telling a story. Invite students to consider who they want to be when writing their lyrics and story. They can decide on their own persona, or follow Jeffrey's lead and look into archetypes (some ideas suggested below).

Sage – seeker of the truth, wanting to share their knowledge with others.

Rebel – rules are made to be broken, overturn what isn't working, to disrupt, destroy or shock.

Jester – playful, play jokes on the reader, humour as a part of your writing.

Everyman – desire to connect to others, be down to earth, can be real and empathise.

Ruler – a powerful leader, desire for success above all, no matter the cost.

Before they get started turning this story into lyrics, encourage them to consider what the rhythm of the story is. Ask them to consider if this story had a beat, what would it be? (fast, slow, syncopated, constant, rhythmic - just because the beat is slow doesn't mean the lyrics have to be, and vice versa).

Inspired by the music

Music can tell a story even without words. Often, the writer has hidden the story deep within the melodies and rhythm for the listener to discover for themselves.



You will need: A chosen instrumental track, paper and pens.

Choose a track, ideally an instrumental one, for your students to listen to. Try to ensure it is a track they are unfamiliar with. If you need some inspiration, take a look at the playlist we have created for you in *Appendix 7*.

Listen to the track together, with no interruptions or input.

Once you have finished a first listen, share the questions below with students to help them consider the story in the song:

- What emotion starts this piece?
- Where does it start? (location/mood)
- At what point does it change? How does it change? What happens?
- What is the mood after the change?
- Where does it end? (figuratively or literally)

Play the piece again and invite them to doodle along as they listen, being inspired by the music. Note keywords that spring to mind as the music continues. At the end of playing the song again, focus your students on the last three questions:

- **Whose song is it?**
  (Who is the protagonist?)
- **What do they want?**
  (What is their motivation?)
- **What challenge are they facing in the song?**
  (what is stopping them from getting what they want?)

Invite students to spend some time turning their doodles and notes into a 5/3 story plan inspired by the music.

Jeffrey says:

"When I write fiction, I always start with the question 'what does the protagonist want?' It's important to know the one big thing that they want more than anything else. And then I put them in scenarios that challenge them and get in the way of the thing that they want. It can feel quite cruel, but this is the basis for a great story."

A 5/3 plan is a way of condensing a story to its simplest form. The entire story is encapsulated in 5 bullet points, where each bullet point can only be 3 words.

After students have planned their story inspired by the music, invite them to elaborate on each of these bullet points whilst listening to the music.

5/3 plan example

Silence anticipates action.

She stands alone.

Bright lights blind.

Nothing. Alone again.

She breathes fast.





Performance

Writing is there to be received by an audience and songs are meant to be listened to. Support your students to share their stories with those who are ready to hear them. Their performances will provide the opportunity to give their words the power and purpose they intended them to have. Change will only come when work is shared, so share it. Here are some ideas on how!

Swap and share

Invite pupils to swap their writing with a peer for performance. Sharing someone else's work can be less intimidating, and the performer might feel more confident to share their friend's work rather than their own. You might decide to have pupils just share their work back to their partner (hearing their own work performed), or create an informal class share to hear what individuals have created.

Showcase

Carve out a time in the week for a performance showcase. Have students sign up to share the work they have created, either as individuals or small groups. This provides a great opportunity for students to take the work they have done through the activities, and expand and develop it in their own time.

Collaboration

Do you have a group of engaged student musicians? Or even an exam class that would like to collaborate on bringing these songs to life? Students could work with an older mentor who could support them in turning their lyrics into songs.

Rap Battle

Invite students to share with their peers the work they have created and encourage them to group with peers who have written on similar themes and topics. Allow students to craft a 'rap battle' style performance using their favourite verses from each song, jumping from verse to verse between people's pieces.

At the end of National Storytelling Week 2026

Share your work with us!

As part of this storytelling project, supported by Amazon, pupils can share their work with us and Amazon employees, for the chance to have it published in a specially curated anthology. The anthology will feature writing inspired by the theme Soundtrack you story, in celebration of National Storytelling Week 2026.

To submit your students' work, and to read the submission guidelines, please visit the National Storytelling Week KS3 resources page.

Appendix 1

Supporting book recommendations

Books written by Jeffrey Boakye

Musical Truth

Musical World

Kofi and the Rap Battle Summer

Kofi and the Secret Radio Station

Kofi and the Brand New Vibe

Books exploring identity

Fight Back
A.M Dassu

Can You See Me?
Libby Scott & Rebecca Westcott

Artichoke Hearts
Sita Brahmachari

Kick
Mitch Johnson

Role Model
Elle McNicoll

Green Rising
Lauren James

The Summer I Turned Pretty
Jenny Han

The Crossing
Manjeet Mann

A Different Sort of Normal
Abigail Balfe

Being Billy
Phil Earle

Books exploring music

Steady For This
Nathaniel Lessore

Gangsta Rap
Benjamin Zephaniah

Wild East
Ashley Hickson-Lovence

Remix
Non Pratt

Northern Soul
Phil Earle

Rise Up: The #Merky Story
Stormzy and Yude Yawson

Rhythm and Poetry
Karl Nova

Open Water
Caleb Azumah Nelson (appropriate for Year 9)

The Rap Lesson
Naomi Jones, Jérôme Masi

Non-fiction

You Are a Story: A Creative Writing Guide to Find Your Voice
Laura Dockrill

Rebel Sounds: Music as Resistance
Joe Mulhall

Where We Come From: Rap, Home & Hope in Modern Britain
Aniefiok Ekpoudom (appropriate for Years 8 and 9)

40 Inspiring Icons: Black Music Greats
Olivier Cachin

Appendix 2

Extract from *Musical Truth*

Hello.

Let me introduce myself.

My name is Jeffrey. I'm a teacher and a writer, and I was born in 1982, which might sound like a long time ago, even though it really isn't. It won't come as a surprise to you to hear that I haven't always been a teacher, or a writer. For much of my life, before I was an adult, I have been a kid growing up, exploring the world around me and trying to figure out what's going on.

Music has been a big part of this. Music opened my ears to a whole world beyond where I grew up, in a place called Brixton, in London. I've travelled the world through speakers and headphones, listening to sounds and stories from far and wide. I've always loved music and the way it can make your heart jump, or slow down, or skip a beat with excitement. I also love the way that you can be transported into the past, just by hearing songs that were made years before you were born.

I'm black. My parents were born in Ghana, west Africa, but they came over to the UK to have me after moving away from their home country. For me, being black means being Ghanaian and African, but it also means being part of a global family of other black people. Again, music is a key part of my identity as a black person. A lot of the music I listen to can be classified as 'black music' – made by black people and part of different black cultures.

I wrote this book because I feel deeply connected to black culture and black history, not just in Britain and Ghana, but all over the world and throughout history. Music has been my gateway to stories I have never lived through and people I have never met. I hope that this book will introduce songs that do the same thing for you.

Appendix 3

Extract from *Musical Truth*

'PASS THE DUTCHIE'

Musical Youth (1982)

Birmingham is a large city in the West Midlands of England that is usually cold and wet. Jamaica is the largest Caribbean island, the home of reggae music, and is usually sunny and warm. If these two places were people, they would probably not follow each other on Instagram. But in 1982, they crossed paths in a major way.

Finally, we've reached the year I was born. (Happy birthday to me.) 1982 was a big year, and not just because I came screaming into this world. It was the year that the *Voice* newspaper was launched, Britain's first and only black newspaper, which is still in circulation today. It was also the year that 'Pass the Dutchie' was

released by Musical Youth. But my musical history doesn't start with this song. I grew up hearing the songs we've already discussed, as well as highlife, Afrobeats, reggae, pop – all sorts. My sister was even named Marcia after one of the members of a disco pop group called Boney M. Music was always a huge part of my life and my family's life overall. To be honest, I think that music is influential in all of our lives, full stop. Just think about the year you were born, then google some of the songs you remember from when you were younger. I bet many of them are older than you. Our musical history pre-dates us.

A big way that any culture gets passed on from one generation to the next is through music. We can learn a lot about the world our parents grew up in from the music they listened to when they were young.

Because of this, young people are incredibly important when it comes to any culture's survival over time. If you don't teach children about culture, that culture will die, like a plant that isn't given water and sunlight.

'Pass the Dutchie' by Musical Youth is a great example of how culture can be led by young people. There's a big clue in the name: Musical Youth. Yep, a group of musicians who were young. Very young.

Children, to be specific. In 1982, the oldest member of the group was fifteen, while the youngest was only eleven. In fact, all five of them were still at school in Birmingham when the group was first put together by one of their dads, a reggae musician.

The song itself is a seriously upbeat and cheerful reggae classic. It sounds like sunshine and fresh coconut water on the beach. It sounds like that feeling you get when you step off the plane in a warm country. It sounds like Jamaica because it is very Jamaican. It's part of a tradition of West Indian music being popular in the UK. It also sounds joyful and innocent, with those happy, young voices tinkling over those deep reggae grooves.

But back in 1982, no one really expected children to be recording proper reggae songs, which makes 'Pass the Dutchie' special. When the song starts, telling us that 'this generation rules the nation', it's an announcement that the kids are in charge. And in lots of ways, they're right. Throughout history, black British culture has often been led by young black people (something that we shall see much more of as this book develops).

But not only that, in Britain, black culture is a big part of youth culture in general. This means that black culture (including music, style and fashion) has always

been popular among young people who aren't black. Remember – and I'll keep on saying this – black people represent only a *tiny* percentage of the UK population, at last count not much more than three per cent. So this level of creative influence is surprising and incredible.

'Pass the Dutchie' was a hit. It was so popular that it reached number one in the UK pop music charts. Then it became number one in six other countries in Europe, number two in two others. Two things happened next:

1. The song reached number ten in the USA.
2. Musical Youth had a great time travelling around America meeting lots of famous people.

'Pass the Dutchie' was the fastest-selling British single of 1982, selling over a hundred thousand copies in one day. And this was before downloading and streaming, meaning that people had to get up, put on their coats and go out to a record shop to buy the song on vinyl. That's how popular it was. Now, this would have been a big deal for any recording artist or group, but it was an even bigger deal for five black kids from Birmingham, at a time when kids from Birmingham, let alone black kids, didn't usually become international superstars.

Birmingham is often referred to as the UK's 'second city', after the capital city, London. Birmingham is the UK's second largest city by population and has been home to black communities for many decades. Some of the most successful black British celebrities in British history have come from Birmingham. These include the comedian Lenny Henry, whose work as a humanitarian has helped raise many millions of pounds for good causes all over the world. Another famous 'Brummie' is the writer Benjamin Zephaniah, a Rastafarian poet and novelist who once called the part of Birmingham he grew up in 'the Jamaican capital of Europe'. (Rastafarianism is a Jamaican religious movement that started in the 1930s.)

In the world of music, Birmingham didn't only give us Musical Youth. It's a city with a long musical history, having produced an impressive list of famous musicians across a whole range of genres. Highlights include:

- The Singing Stewarts – a family of brothers and sisters who made some of the first gospel music Britain ever heard, back in the 1960s.
- Joan Armatrading – a hugely influential musician renowned for her unique lyrics and skilful guitar playing.
- Jaki Graham – an R&B recording artist from the 1980s.
- Ruby Turner – a soul singer who racked up eight hit UK singles throughout the 1980s.
- Jamelia – a pop and soul singer whose first album was released in 2000 (when she was still only a teenager).
- Laura Mvula – a gospel-influenced soul singer who rose to prominence in the 2010s.

You might have noticed how many women are featured in the list above. This, I feel, is a very good thing for this book and our musical journey so far. Birmingham has given us the power of black British youth and it has also given us the power of black female voices. When talking about an industry that is dominated by men (like so many other sections of society), it is important to highlight women and how much they have contributed to black British history.

*

'Pass the Dutchie' showed everyone that black British music played by black British kids could be popular enough to cause major waves all across the globe. In this way, it stands proud as a celebration of reggae, a celebration of youth and a celebration of black Britain, all at the same time.

And this is still happening. Right now, almost forty years since the song was released, we are seeing a whole generation of young black musicians becoming popular not only in Britain, but all over the world, with music that has roots in the Caribbean and Africa.

Appendix 4

The playlist

Topic: Climate change		
Statement	**Feeling or mood**	**Song**
We are responsible for the Earth's well-being	Motivated but unsure of how to make it happen	**John Mayer –** Waiting For the World to Change
Why do some people still not believe climate change is real?	Frustration at the destruction and people still not realising	**Billie Eilish –** All the Good Girls Go to Hell
We need to act now if we want a world for the future	Purposeful with a need for change, wanting to share the message with others	**Joni Mitchell –** Big Yellow Taxi
There was flooding in my town and people lost their homes	Sad, urgent, full of despair	
I want more people to do their bit		

Appendix 5

‘Brimful of Asha’



‘Brimful of Asha’

Cornershop (1997)

Question: How does Indian music teach us about the world of power?

When ‘Brimful of Asha’ was first released, it was part of something called ‘Britpop’, a new type of music from young, cool, British bands in the 1990s.

Cornershop was a Britpop band, and their name let you know that they had strong Indian influences. One of the stereotypes about Indian people in Britain is that they often own convenience shops on the corner

of local streets, known as corner shops. So when two brothers with Indian heritage formed a new band with some friends, *Cornershop* was a good way of nodding to Indian culture.

British Indians have suffered from racist discrimination and prejudice for as long as Britain has had a relationship with India. It was only in 1947 that India became independent of British rule, after which there was an increase in Indian people travelling to live and work in Britain.

Despite the fact that the links between Britain and India go back hundreds of years (as we shall explore later), Indian communities in Britain were often met with anger, hatred and bigotry. Britain took direct control over India all the way back in the 1850s, creating a see-saw of power that was never fair or balanced. For modern people of Indian heritage, this comes with a history of exploitation, prejudice, discrimination and racism.

One way of responding to such treatment is to rise above it by asserting your cultural identity. Rather than hide, or try to change, you can be deliberately proud of your heritage. In 1991, when the band Cornershop was formed by the brothers Tjinder and Avtar Singh, along with friends Ben Ayres and David Chambers,

anti-Indian racism was commonplace. Since the end of the Second World War, non-white British people had been the target of racist groups (such as the National Front and the British National Party) who never wanted Britain to welcome ethnic minorities. For ordinary people in minority communities, this meant a life of fear and unwanted conflict. Growing up in the 1990s, I saw and heard racism against ethnic minority communities, including those from Indian and Pakistani heritage. There were cruel jokes repeated on TV, in homes, workplaces and playgrounds, and a general belief that it was OK to laugh at people who were 'different' from the majority.

In this environment, any music from a minority culture will automatically do two things:

- Celebrate the minority culture.
- Empower members of the minority community.

'Brimful of Asha' did exactly this. It was a song that made India seem cool, right at the cutting edge of modern Britpop music.

When I first heard 'Brimful of Asha', I sang along happily to the catchy tune but, like a lot of people, I

had no idea what most of it meant. I had no idea that 'Asha' was a reference to Asha Bhosle, a legendary singer in Indian cinema who has recorded more than 12,000 songs, a world record. At one point, Tjinder calls Asha Bhosle *sadi rani*, which means *our queen* in Punjabi (an Indian and Pakistani language). I didn't know that 'Asha' also translates as 'hope'. I didn't know anything about Lata Mangeshkar, another legendary film singer who is also Asha Bosle's sister. I didn't know about Mohammed Rafi, Solid State Radio, Jacques Dutronc, All India Radio, Non Public, or Trojan Records . . . But now, with a bit of research, I've discovered that these are all references to popular music in different parts of the world. This song is a celebration of music, modern music, and the ways that music can feel like a warm hug from a loving parent.

This is clearly a song with deep meanings and lots to learn about Indian culture and history. It challenges the Indian government and says that the love of singing and cinema is stronger than rules and regulations set out by the people who run the country. That's why there's a line about not caring about government warnings. But it's also full of nostalgia and fond memories of India's recent past, taking us into the world of Indian cinema known as *Bollywood* (which we're going to meet again in twelve

years and eleven pages' time, when a huge song from a hit movie will shed even more light on India's relationship with Britain).

Any song that allows you to see more of a particular culture, or the history of a particular group of people, is an important song. In 1997 'Brimful of Asha' did exactly this, in a country that has struggled to be inclusive towards its marginalised groups.

Appendix 6

Musical World



‘A Change Is Gonna Come’

Sam Cooke (1964)

Question: When does music become a force for change?

The history of the USA is full of conflict and struggles around race and racism. Going back as far as the birth of the country itself, the USA has wrestled with the fact that black, enslaved people have lived on the same soil as the white Americans who often owned them. It makes the name of the country itself quite ironic (the *United* States) when there has been so much division rather than unity.

Unlike slaveowners in the UK, whose slaves worked far away in Caribbean islands like Jamaica and Barbados, slaveowners in the US lived in the same country as their slaves. This meant that they felt the need to control black people who lived with them, even after the slave trade was abolished in the USA, in 1865, following a violent civil war within the country.

It was never going to be a simple transition into a racism-free world. After 1865, slavery continued illegally for many decades. Meanwhile, the laws of the land were violently racist against black Americans. In some southern states, laws were passed that made it illegal for black and white people to mix, or integrate. These laws of segregation meant that black Americans were denied rights enjoyed by white people, with serious restrictions on their freedom too. These laws became known as the ‘Jim Crow’ laws (referring to a song and dance used to poke fun at black people).

Discrimination against black people remained common across the USA. Efforts were made to prevent black Americans from voting, and the legal system was manipulated in a way that meant that black people could be made to work for free, like slaves. To this day, the USA has nearly five times more black people in prison compared to white people. This is a situation that

has been encouraged by a combination of economic poverty, unfair sentencing rules and a police force with a history of targeting black communities. These mainly black prisoners get paid very little for hours of physical labour, doing work that big companies make profit from. So, yes, in a sense, a type of slavery is still happening in modern America.

Let's go back a step. The Jim Crow era was met with protest from people who wanted equality. These kinds of protests had happened before, but as we moved into the twentieth century, a new civil rights movement began to grow. Efforts were being made by black Americans (or African Americans) to gain the rights they had been denied. There was also a need to push back against the threat of racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, a group formed in 1865, whose members believed in white supremacy and murdered black people in horrific acts of terrorism.

By the 1960s, there had been a number of highlight moments in civil rights history. 1954 saw the US Supreme Court rule that segregation could never be equal, following a huge case where a black man called Oliver Brown fought to send his child to a white school. A year later, a woman called Rosa Parks refused to give her seat on a bus to a white passenger, an act of protest that led to a boycott of buses in Montgomery, Alabama. Two years after that in 1957, nine black students attended a white school in a place called Little Rock. It was such a risky thing to do that they needed military protection. Soon, a whole series of civil rights marches and protests were taking place, giving fresh momentum to the cause. And then in 1963 a quarter of a million people marched to Washington, DC, the home of the US government, to hear Martin Luther King give his legendary 'I Have a Dream' speech. It felt like change was on the way.

The civil rights movement came with a soundtrack, and that sound was the sound of *soul*. Soul music came from the black experience. It was deep and serious and beautiful in its emotional honesty. It felt real, more real than flimsy pop music designed to only make you dance. Soul made you think, but even more, it made you feel. Soul music was about pride and pain. Since the 1950s, it had grown more and more popular, so much so that white audiences were listening. But it spoke to black Americans in a deeper way.

The song 'A Change Is Gonna Come' sounds like a cry of hope. Its long, yearning notes stretch into the future, calling for a change that black Americans had been waiting decades for. It has painful strings,

pounding drums and a sad-sounding French horn, every instrument adding to the reflective tone of the song. The singer, Sam Cooke, wrote the song about his experiences of discrimination and racism. He was partly inspired by a song from 1963 called 'Blowin' in the Wind' by a white folk artist called Bob Dylan. Bob's song asked simple, poetic questions about the world and how we treat each other. Then, when Sam heard Martin Luther King speak in 1963, he knew he had to write a protest song of his own.

A year after 'A Change Is Gonna Come' was released, white supremacists set off a bomb in a black church in the southern state of Alabama. Among those killed were four children. The bombers were part of the Ku Klux Klan and the attack was racially motivated. This is the reality of the civil rights struggle – lives were being lost while people were desperate for change.

Racism was never going to be solved by a single song, but big changes did eventually come. By the end of the 1960s, segregation had been made illegal and efforts were being made to legally stop racist discrimination in different parts of society, offering hope for a new, modern America.

'A Change Is Gonna Come' wasn't the first and won't be the last protest song in US history. As recently as 2015, a song called 'Alright' by a young rapper called Kendrick Lamar became an anthem for the Black Lives Matter movement, decades after Sam Cooke first sang for change in the 1960s.

Sam Cooke's song has become a permanent musical symbol of civil rights activism, and despite the many setbacks this fight has had, it remains as powerful now as it was then.



Appendix 7

Supporting instrumental playlist

To link to activity 'Inspired by Music'

My Queen Is Harriet Tubman – Sons of Kemet

This song is dedicated to the American abolitionist and political activist who was born into slavery. The track uses Afro-Caribbean rhythms and jazz to represent Tubman's struggle for freedom, including her role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, where she helped many other enslaved people gain freedom.

The Homeless Wanderer – Emahoy Tsegue-Maryam Guebrou

This song is both a story of displacement and hope. It follows a lonesome person finding courage and comfort through music. It is inspired by Emahoy's own experiences, being forced into exile when Mussolini's Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1936. She returned to Ethiopia and became a nun, where she lived a solitary and humble life. In Ethiopia she is often referred to as 'the Piano Queen'.

Peace Piece – Bill Evans

A peaceful, reflective piece of music, with discordant notes in the second half. Evans aimed to create the feeling of being alone in this piece. He had many requests to play the piece live but refused, as he believed the composition would lose its value and meaning.

Love Theme From The Robe – Yusef Lateef

In an interview with Yusef Lateef for the National Endowment for the Arts in 2009, he said how he believes one should "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave. With that kind of inquisitiveness, one discovers things that were unknown before." In his album 'Eastern Sounds', Lateef explored Middle Eastern and Asian music and the reed instruments used in those cultures, taking his sound beyond the standard parameters of Western jazz.

Wood – Duval Timothy, Yu Su

In this album, Duval Timothy wanted to explore the feeling of being in nature, and what the environment means to people. Duval Timothy made field recordings of everyday strolls in south London, as well as the hills in Ghana and nature sanctuaries in Sierra Leone. He recorded on his phone or Zoom recorder, documenting various birds, insects, monkeys, bats, plants, trees and stones.

Appendix 8

Curriculum links

England

Taken from the English Programmes of Study: Key Stage 3, National Curriculum in England

Writing

Pupils should be taught to:

- write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
  - writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including:
    - stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing
  - plan, draft, edit and proof-read through:
    - considering how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended

Notes and guidance for key stage 3 (non-statutory)

Pupils should continue to develop their knowledge of, and skills in, writing, refining their drafting skills and developing resilience to write at length. They should be taught to write formal and academic essays as well as writing imaginatively. They should be taught to write for a variety of purposes and audiences across a range of contexts. This requires an increasingly wide knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

Wales

Taken from the Area of Learning and Experience – Languages, Literacy and Communication in Curriculum for Wales

Progression step four

Expressing ourselves through language is key to communication

- I can select and adapt the appropriate language for a range of audiences and purposes, conveying meaning effectively to the audience.
- I can share my thoughts, feelings and opinions with others using a range of techniques for different effect and showing empathy and respect.

Literature fires imagination and inspires creativity

- I can use my imagination and experiment with different creative forms and techniques to create my own literature.

Scotland

Taken from Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English – Experience and Outcomes

Third level (S1 and S2)

Writing

- I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I am developing my own style. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience. **LIT 3-20a**
- Throughout the writing process, I can review and edit my writing to ensure that it meets its purpose and communicates meaning at first reading. **LIT 3-23a**
- I can use notes and other types of writing to generate and develop ideas, retain and recall information, explore problems, make decisions, generate and develop ideas or create original text. **LIT 3-25a**
- Having explored the elements which writers use, I can create texts in different genres by:
  - integrating the conventions of my chosen genre successfully and/or
  - using convincing and appropriate structures **ENG 3-31a**

Fourth level (S3)

Writing

- I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I am developing my own style. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience. **LIT 4-20a**
- Throughout the writing process, I can review and edit my writing independently to ensure that it meets its purpose and communicates meaning clearly at first reading. **LIT 4-23a**
- I can use notes and other types of writing to generate and develop ideas, retain and recall information, explore problems, make decisions or create original text. I can make appropriate and responsible use of sources and acknowledge these appropriately. **LIT 4-25a**
- Having explored and experimented with the narrative structures which writers use to create texts in different genres, I can:
  - use the conventions of my chosen genre successfully and/or
  - create an appropriate mood or atmosphere **ENG 4-31a**

Northern Ireland

Taken from Language and Literacy: English with Media Education

Key stage 3

Language and literacy

- Through engagement with a range of stimuli including peers, poetry, prose, drama, non-fiction, media and multimedia which enhance creativity and stimulate curiosity and imagination, pupils should have opportunities to become critical, creative and effective communicators by:
  - writing and presenting in different media and for different audiences and purposes;
  - developing an understanding of different forms, genres and methods of communication and an understanding of how meaning is created;
  - analysing critically their own and other texts;
  - using a range of techniques, forms and media to convey information creatively and appropriately



National Literacy Trust

Change your story

About the National Literacy Trust

Literacy changes everything. It opens the door to the life you want. It's the key to knowledge, confidence and inspiration. It's better results at school, and better jobs. If you grow up without the tools to communicate, without books to read or opportunities to write, it's harder to get where you want to go.

We're a charity helping people overcome these challenges and change their life chances through the power of words – reading, writing, speaking and listening. From first words, through school days to training, jobs and beyond.

Together, we're helping people change their stories.

literacytrust.org.uk

/nationalliteracytrust

@Literacy_Trust

@Literacy_Trust

Sign up to our newsletter:
literacytrust.org.uk/newsletter

© 2026 National Literacy Trust. All rights reserved. This work and all its contents are protected under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and other applicable UK intellectual property laws. No part of this material may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means—including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods—without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except where permitted under statutory exceptions such as fair dealing for the purposes of non-commercial research, private study, criticism, review, or quotation, as provided under UK copyright law.

The National Literacy Trust is a registered charity no. 1116260 and a company limited by guarantee no. 5836486 registered in England and Wales and a registered charity in Scotland no. SC042944. Registered address: 68 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL.