

OUR STORIES

A conference celebrating LGBTQ+ inclusive children's & YA books & publishing



Dublin
Manchester
Nottingham

11th November 2023
18th November 2023
25th November 2023

pop-up.org.uk/events

About Our Stories

Over the last three years, with funding from arts councils in four nations, Pop Up Projects - a London-based children's literature agency - produced an ambitious LGBTQ+ literature creation project called The Rainbow Library. The Rainbow Library involved 80 young people in seven cities (Manchester, Nottingham, Basildon, Glasgow, Inverness, Belfast and Cork) taking part in workshops with 11 children's writers and illustrators. While developing their own work, which was published in five digital anthologies, the young people were also directly involved in inspiring and shaping new LGBTQ+ inclusive stories, which the writers and illustrators went on to develop into manuscripts.

The point of the project was to connect professional book creators with contemporary, lived experiences of being young and LGBTQ+. In an age of rapidly shifting language to describe and define more fluid notions of sexuality and gender, we felt it important that books for young people begin to reflect the realities on the ground.

From the Rainbow Library work, Our Stories champions the bold steps children's publishers are making to advance equality, amplifies the stories of LGBTQ+ writers and illustrators, explores routes into publishing for aspiring authors, and considers the future possibilities for representation in books for all ages.

Dylan Calder - Pop-Up CIC



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Manchester City of Literature

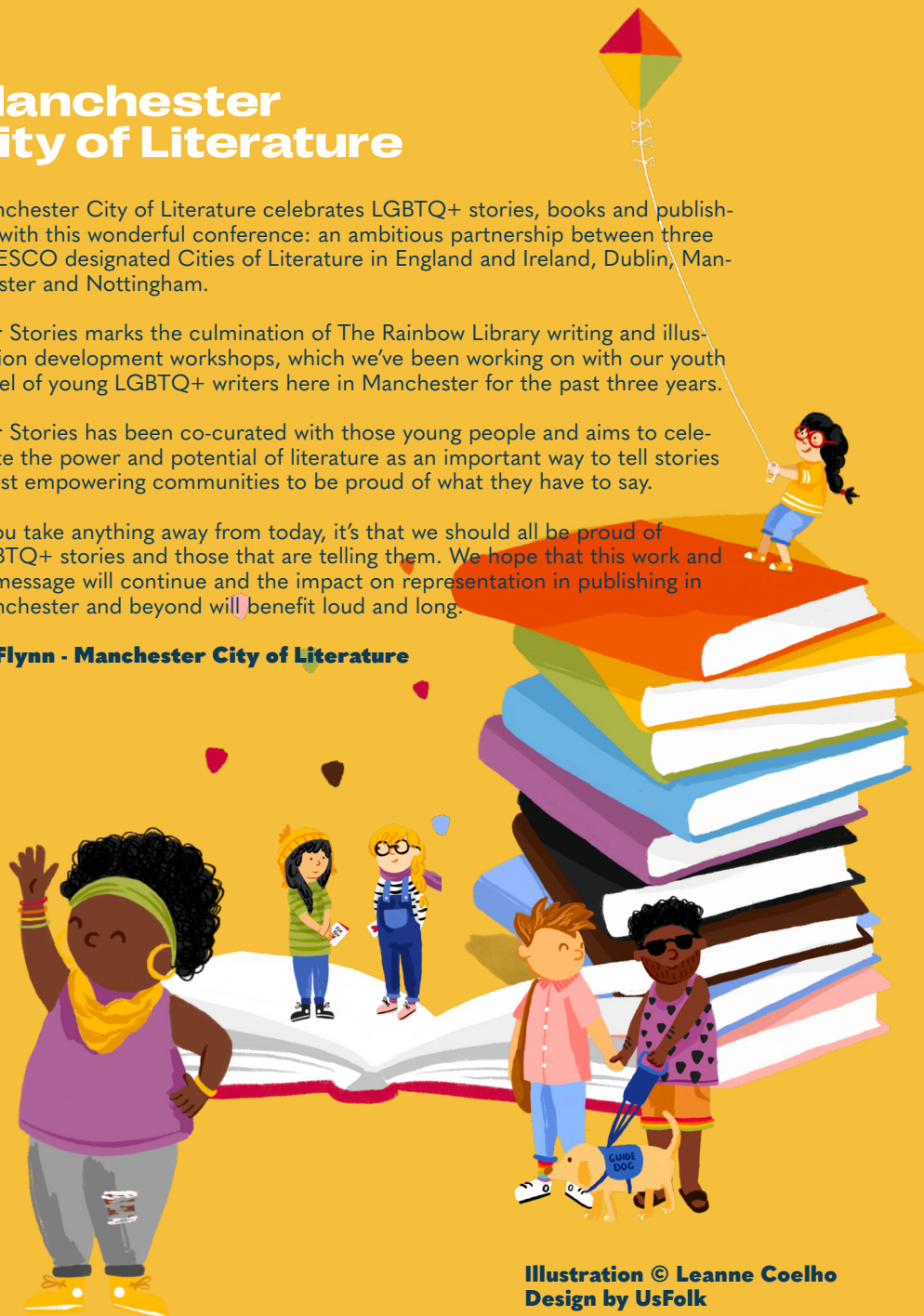
Manchester City of Literature celebrates LGBTQ+ stories, books and publishing with this wonderful conference: an ambitious partnership between three UNESCO designated Cities of Literature in England and Ireland, Dublin, Manchester and Nottingham.

Our Stories marks the culmination of The Rainbow Library writing and illustration development workshops, which we've been working on with our youth panel of young LGBTQ+ writers here in Manchester for the past three years.

Our Stories has been co-curated with those young people and aims to celebrate the power and potential of literature as an important way to tell stories whilst empowering communities to be proud of what they have to say.

If you take anything away from today, it's that we should all be proud of LGBTQ+ stories and those that are telling them. We hope that this work and its message will continue and the impact on representation in publishing in Manchester and beyond will benefit loud and long.

Jo Flynn - Manchester City of Literature



**Illustration © Leanne Coelho
Design by UsFolk**



LGBTQ+ Publishing Trends

Andrew James, Nia Thomas

Join us for our opening panel discussion of the conference. We will hear from experts in the publishing field on what the challenges and successes of the publishing industry have been for LGBTQ+ representation over the last few years. This discussion aims to be a celebration of the progress that's been made, as well as a space to acknowledge the work that is still left to do.

11.00-11.45 / GF11 / Manchester Poetry Library

Keynote speech with Mendez

Writer, Mendez

We will hear from author of Rainbow Milk, Mendez, for an insight into their journey navigating the writing industry as they work on their second novel and adapt Rainbow Milk for television. Mendez will be discussing the openness and celebration of queer representation in publishing that they have experienced in their own career.



12.00 - 12.45 / GF11 / Manchester Poetry Library



The Rainbow Library Discussion

Bria Cotton, Finch Murphy, Nikita Lawal, Weng-U Pun
hosted by Libby Williamson

Join participants from The Rainbow Library Manchester who will read from their writing, share insight into their creative process and hold a discussion with Libby on how programmes like The Rainbow Library can benefit young LGBTQ+ writers.

The Rainbow Library Exhibition will be on display for Our Stories.

13.45-14.45 / GF11 / Manchester Poetry Library

Workshop: Drag Doodles

Artist, Gabriel Evans

Join Gabriel for a creative and fun session on illustration, turning your most-loved literary characters into drag queens. Gabriel's work is prolific on Instagram @dragdoogledude and his work explores themes of sexuality, gender, and the body.



14.00-14.45 / Seminar Room / Manchester Poetry



Workshop: Zine making

Artist, Hal Shoab

Join artist and creative facilitator Hal for this therapeutic zine-making session on creating for the benefit of your mental health. Hal's session is centred around creative play, community and queerness. During the conference there will be materials stationed around the Poetry Library to facilitate zine-making throughout the day.

14.00-14.45 / Seminar Room / Manchester Poetry

Workshop: Meet the Agent

Andrew James from Frog Literary Consultancy

Andrew is a Literary Agent and Founder of Frog Literary Agency. Frog is the UK's first literary agency and publishing consultancy dedicated to LGBTQIA+ writers. Join Andrew for a relaxed Q&A session to inform young queer writers about the process of working with an agent, demystify the publishing industry and what being a working writer really entails.



14.00-14.45/Seminar Room/Manchester Poetry Library



The role of bookshops and libraries

Matthew Cornford, Abbi Parcell and Sylvia Kölling



Join Manchester's most loved queer bookshop owner Matthew from Queer Lit, The Portico Library's Queer Writer in Residence Abbi and Engagement Delivery Manager Sylvia from Moss Side Powerhouse Library as they discuss how their work in bookshops and libraries plays a vital supporting role to queer identifying writers and the wider industry.

15.00-15.45 / GF11 / Manchester Poetry Library

Keynote speech with Jane Claire Bradley

Writer, Jane Claire Bradley

Join Jane, an award-winning queer, working-class writer, performer, therapist and educator for this insightful session on navigating the publishing industry. Jane will talk about championing your queerness, the importance of community and the power of self-acceptance after the release of her debut novel Dear Neighbour earlier this year.



16.00-16.45 / GF11 / Manchester Poetry Library

Meet the speakers



Mendez

Writer

authormendez.com

Mendez is a London-based Jamaican-British writer currently working on their second novel. Raised within the Jehovah's Witness faith, Mendez left the organisation while still a teenager.

RAINBOW MILK was named in the Observer's Top Ten Best Debuts for 2020. It was shortlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize, the Jhalak Prize, the Polari Prize, in the Fiction Debut category of the British Book Awards, and for the LAMBDA Literary Award in Gay Fiction. Mendez is currently adapting the novel for a TV series.



Jane Claire Bradley

Writer

janeclairebradley.com

Jane Claire Bradley is an award-winning queer, working-class writer, performer, therapist and educator. She is the author of a chapbook, Truth or Dare (2021), a novel, Dear Neighbour (2023), and the winner of a Northern Debut Award from New Writing North.



Matthew Cornford

Bookseller

queerlit.co.uk

Matthew Cornford is the owner and founder of Queer Lit & Social Refuge, a stunning bookshop, coffee house and bar located in the vibrant Ancoats area of Manchester. Driven by an unwavering passion for literature and a deep commitment to promoting inclusivity, Matthew created Queer Lit, a now renowned bookshop dedicated to fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among LGBTQ+ individuals through the exploration of Queer literature. With a keen sense of purpose and a dedication to promoting diversity and representation, Matthew continues to shape the landscape of LGBTQ+ literature and community engagement, ensuring that Queer Lit & Social Refuge remains a cherished sanctuary for all.



Bria Cotton

Writer

Bria is a fledgling worker in the museum sector, seemingly everywhere and nowhere at once. Bria is currently Writer in Residence at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria with Melbourne City of Literature.

Writing for her is a way to make sense of the nonsense, or to make nonsense of the sense, so she is always hopping between creative writing and non-fiction in her spare time.



Ellen DF

Musician

www.feelgoodclub.co/pages/events

Host of the only queer open mic night in Manchester, Queer as F*ck, Ellen DF is a lesbian singer-songwriter often performing acoustic versions of pop songs alongside originals based on her life experiences.



Gabriel Evans

Illustrator and writer

gabrielevanssite.wordpress.com

When he isn't working as a Research and Content Manager in the Education sector, Gabriel Evans is a poet, fiction writer, and illustrator. His work explores themes of sexuality, gender, and the body, taking inspiration from the worlds of drag and horror. Check out his illustrations on Instagram: @dragdoodledude.

Meet the speakers



Jo Flynn

Writer and Producer

flynx.co.uk

As a writer Jo has just won a 2023 Northern Writers' Award for her current Work in Progress and been awarded funding from Arts Council England. The rest of the time Jo is a no-nonsense Manc who likes no-nonsense comms; she has several years of Marketing experience on the Manchester arts and culture scene. Currently Partnerships and Communications Manager for Manchester City of Literature facilitating wonderful events such as this one; Jo is also Director of For Books' Sake, a CIC who champion queer writers and those of marginalised genders. For Books' Sake run a regular non-binary writers group They//Us as well as retreats, workshops and guided writing support.



Andrew James

Literary Agent

www.frogliterary.agency

Andrew James is a Literary Agent and the Founder of Frog Literary Agency - a queer literary agency solely dedicated to representing LGBTQIA+ writers. He has worked in publishing for over a decade and was formerly Editorial Director at Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Andrew was selected as a Rising Star by The Bookseller in 2018.



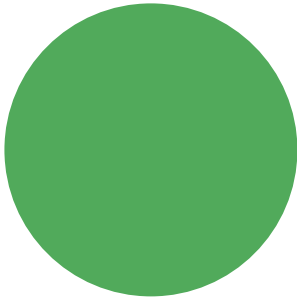
Sylvia Kölling

Librarian

www.manchester.gov.uk/libraries

Sylvia has been working for Manchester Libraries since 2017 and in Moss Side Powerhouse Library since 2019. They believe in the transformative powers of reading and empathy, especially in children's literature. Sylvia's current favourite read for adults is *The Lacuna* by Barbara Kingsolver, and for children *Nevertell* by Katharine Orton.





Nikita Lawal

Writer

Nikita is a Nigerian-Irish writer who often writes poems, short stories and essays while trying to finish her novel. She's currently developing a collection of short stories and a fantasy novel that takes place in pre-colonial Nigeria. Pairing nature and her Yoruba culture in my work is something that she's dedicated to doing as she always seem to be drawn to both topics. Nikita hopes to also complete a Masters in Gender Studies to shine a light on forgotten Yoruba history and how it interacts with queer black women within the diaspora.



Finch Murphy

Artist, Performer, Writer

Finch Murphy (They/It) otherwise known as the drag artist PHOBIA is a neuroqueer artist, writer and performer working and performing around the north of Manchester. Their work focuses on the intersections between autism and queer identity.



Weng-U Pun

Writer

Weng-U Pun is a writer from Macau. She is the founder of Wrice, a creative writing project for East and Southeast Asians. Weng-U is longlisted for the 2023 4th Write Prize and she is a published poet. She loves crocheting, going to rock gigs, and thrifting gems in charity shops!

Meet the speakers



Abbi Parcell

Poet in Residence at The Portico Library

Abbi Parcell, a dedicated poet and writer, is currently working towards a PhD from Salford University. Their creative talents shine in their explorations of butchness and queerness, skillfully blending poetry with hybrid autofiction. Abbi is not only an academic but also serves as the esteemed Writer in Residence at the Portico Library, where their literary contributions enrich the cultural landscape and further their engagement with these vital themes.



Hal Shoaib

Creative facilitator and Zine-maker

Hal is an artist and creative facilitator based in Manchester whose work explores identity and mental health. They've worked with AKT, Manchester Metropolitan University and The Horsfall facilitating zine-making sessions centred around creative play, community and queerness.



Nia Thomas

Writer and Curator

Nia draws upon queer archives, literature and politics in their work and has worked for various organisations across the North. They co-founded Salt Magazine, an independent online publication showcasing art and culture from across Greater Manchester. Nia worked for Comma Press, an independent publisher, leading the programming of three national writing and translation conferences annually. Nia has represented Comma on panels at the London Book Fair, Hay Festival and San Jordi Festival in New Jersey. Nia also works at FACT as Assistant Curator where they are working on research and developing their curatorial practice. They recently joined Manchester Central Library Development Trust as an Associate Trustee where they hope to further explore the interrelations of art, community and literature.





Samuel Whitehouse/Cake Boi

Performer

Birmingham's fruitiest and finest, Cake Boi is a disco dancing, Oscar Wilde reading, Streisand ticket holding, friend of Dorothy! Unhitch your belts and gorge as this drag clown serves nothing but chaotic cabaret and lustrous lip-syncs. Having previously lived and studied in Manchester, Cake Boi is super excited to be back in this culturally rich city to be a part of Our Stories Conference.



Libby Williamson

Writer and Producer

Libby is a playwright and freelancer based in Manchester. Her latest play *Far Out*, a queer sci-fi comedy, was nominated for the VAULT Origins Award. She is also the Coordinator for The Writing Squad, and works as a workshop facilitator with organisations including DIY Theatre Company, The Royal Exchange and George House Trust.



With special thanks to...

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**Manchester
Poetry
Library**



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