

REFLECTION ON AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Mark Ecob, MAGCD2

Where's That Really From? is for children aged 9-12 and their parents. This enquiry is about colonial legacy and education, therefore the most relevant path is through a school. Oakfield Academy in Frome, Somerset, has agreed to assist with testing through their English and History Subject Leads. This requires permissions from parents and checks by the school, making Projections² appropriate for formal testing of a final iteration, and the possibility of developing a workshop. Ethically, this pathway mitigates my unconscious bias as designer-author in *who* tests the publication, beyond age group and location.

The current iteration was informally tested with five families that include twelve-year-old children (see Appendix A). Engagement with the work was offline and a shared experience between child and parent. The feedback system mirrored this with a joint paper questionnaire. They covered emotional response, usability, suggestions for improvement and one specifically for the adult on how well their child engaged with a tricky subject. The language of these qualitative questions encouraged collective reflective thought, which in itself is a deeper engagement with the subject of the publication.

Other sources that have assisted via online or in-person interview include (see Appendix B):

- Esther Waller, Publishing Manager, Chicken House Books, Frome
- Tina Gaisford-Waller, Manager and Bookeller, Hunting Raven Books, Frome
- Samantha Williams, Founder of BookLove, Multicultural Book Carnival, London.



(1) REFLECTIONS

There was broad understanding in both children and parents of the purpose of the publication. Words like 'guilty', 'important', 'shocked', 'surprised', 'upset' and 'impact' were shared by the children, showing engagement with the historic weight of the subject. They also said that the stamping was 'fun', they wanted more activities and in greater depth. One child stamped the passport, knowing that the objects were in their home without finding them. Parental responses included 'it created that special time and space to read and discuss these tricky subjects'. These prove efficacy of the object hunt as a gateway to shared learning space in which the child can to engage as if it were homework. All participants have learned about slavery across two schools, but one responded '..but not Empire', which may mean lack of curriculum provision. In the next test, Oakfield Academy History Lead Adam Reynolds could provide insight.

**'The uniform section was very eye-opening for Betty as she loves shopping!
So having these facts to back up our parenting on trying to encourage second-hand
clothing when we can, was very helpful!'**
Polly, Betty's mum

**'I like the questions, which help you to think and question the world today.
The older images are really hard-hitting and make you think.'**
Rosey, Ella's mum

Connecting social issues from Empire and today, or legacy issues such as deforestation was clear to all readers. There is a common thread of wanting to go deeper, increase the number of objects or broaden the range of activities. The publication's explicit positions on environment and consumer responsibility made one parent suggest that further investigation of the objects' labels could encourage deeper engagement and more ethical buying habits. The split between 'then' and 'now' in how the text is structured was clear, but could be reinforced.

In conclusion, the testing proves that the publication facilitates shared learning as a way to approach a difficult subject.

(2) FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

After receiving informal, written feedback from parents and children on *Where's That Really From?* and contextual thoughts from various professional sources on previous iterations, I believe the structure is sound and the age range is appropriate. A 'then and now' approach that links issues as a result of Empire, is viable. Taking an explicit position of ethical engagement for both parents and kids, particularly as consumers, is valid also.

The next iteration should engage the readers more, with further investigation of the objects' labels and/or an additional activity. My sense is that it needs more substance to sustain engagement. At the same time, the design and styling could be simplified to allow for these inclusions.

The production, specifically print quality and clarity of type was an issue. These publications were home made because of issues accessing UAL's facilities versus the timetable of Projections¹. Having tested Risograph printing in earlier iterations, I don't believe that it is a wise choice. Reassessing paper stock for the insides and cover will be an advantage.

Other questions from the testing include:

- Text corrections x 2
- Size of blue text at the base of spreads is too small
- Is a serif still a good choice?
- Could the introductory letter be involved within the publication?
- Production led enhancements like foiling for the cover, a hidden perforated message, commissioning the stamps can be considered after the form and visual language are resolved further.

Looking further ahead, an interview with author Darren Chetty for feedback is scheduled for Friday 27th March and showing a new iteration to childrens' book industry sources will provide insight on already solid foundation. Advice direct from Oakfield Academy will shed light on this publications path to efficacy with a group. Should this remain a homework exercise, or can we abandon parental learning and make this a workshop or classroom activity where children link colonialism to familiar objects?

REFERENCES

Sanghera, S. (2023) *Stolen History*. 1st Edition. Puffin.



APPENDIX A

Summaries of family responses

The following questions were asked in a single page A4 questionnaire:

- *What is the British Empire?*
- *Did you learn about any of this stuff at school?*
- *What do you think this book does?*
- *How does it make you feel?*
- *Is it clear how to use the stamp with the book?*
- *Was the hunt good?*
- *Name one fact that you learned (no peeking):*
- *Was the text easy to read?*
- *Were the pictures clear?*
- *Would you like to look for more stuff?*
- *Would you like to write in the book itself, maybe have more stuff to do in there?*
- *What do you think this book's message is?*
- *What do you think of Empire now?*
- *JUST THE GROWN-UP: This book is intended to engage both you and a child in a shared space for learning about a tricky subject. Please write on the back whether you think it achieved this goal and any other thoughts you have. All feedback welcome!*

Feedback highlights



Sam and Hazel

- 'A little guilty'
- Hunt was good
- 'Liked how the second page was set up to describe the negative history but also what can be done – fairtrade etc.'
- More stuff to do 'write down the ingredients of your soap, or look at where your tea is from'

Carly and Ruby

- 'It makes me feel quite shocked'
- More objects: 'maybe a couple more'
- More stuff to do in there

Rosey and Ella

- Taught slavery but not the Empire
- Text 'could be bigger'
- 'Not sure' on how she feels 'happened before I was born'
- No more stuff
- More stuff to DO in the book
- What do you think of Empire now? 'Never really thought of it. Old fashioned, out-dated'
- Rosey (parent) 'like the language used – informal – for a serious subject'
- 'Length is good for the age'
- 'Consider larger type, Ella found it a bit word-heavy and wanted more pictures/stamping'. Can you use the space more? 'The smaller type is too small to read'
- 'Would it help to break each section into past and present section to emphasise the similarities/differences? Maybe also the facts in sections?'
- 'I like the questions, which help you to think and question the world today. The older images are really hard-hitting and make you think'
- 'Can you use more terms used in schools e.g. globalisation, to get kids to relate?'
- 'Couple of typos highlighted in pencil'

Polly and Betty

- 'It makes me feel surprised and also a bit upset'
- Hunt 'Yes it was fun'
- 'The main text was easy to read but the small foot notes were hard to read'
- 'I think if I were to do it again, I would prefer it to be more of a challenge'

- Would you like to write in the book itself, have more stuff to do in there? 'Maybe some more questions about the subject e.g. if you were a soap maker, how would you advertise your soap'
- What do you think the book's message is? 'To learn about important histories that are hidden but should be known'
- Parent 'really great book for approaching difficult subjects... It created that special time and space to read and discuss these tricky subjects'
- 'The stamping was a nice touch for interactivity'
- 'The uniform section was very eye-opening for Betty as she loves shopping! So having these facts to back up our parenting on trying to encourage second-hand clothing when we can, was very helpful!'
- 'The facts in this book really help the kids understand the extremes of these subjects but in a gentle way'
- 'Betty just stamped some objects knowing we have them! Which is a bit lazy!'
- 'Small subheading could be a bit bigger'
- 'Maybe you could get some drawing activities within the book... Betty said maybe designing a poster for the soap etc'
- '...getting them to look at the labels of the products we have to see if they are fairtrade and where they are made etc.'

Beth and Bella

- Did you learn about this stuff at school? 'Yes – slave trade, sugar, cotton'
- Would like more stuff to do in there? 'Yes'
- What do you think of Empire now? 'They did not consider other people and rude'
- Parent 'Thought this was a great exercise and just made us think about where we as a country are from'

APPENDIX B

Professional feedback on earlier iterations

Esther Waller, Publishing Manager, Chicken House Books, Frome. Interview 4/2/26

- Focus groups aren't really a thing in British children's publishing. Ask a school or a community group
 - 9-12 feels right.
 - *akidsco* feels like 'a schooly moment' where kids are being preached to but don't want to learn. Show me a kid who would read this alone! Woke for woke's sake?
 - This will be quite 'schooly' by nature, no kid will seek this unless prompted. So travel or airport moment, or branded as learning together is a very good way of placing this. We get few teachable moments, this could be one of them.
 - Object approach good, makes it universal by accident! Very British though, this could not work abroad.
 - This could work commercially. Point of sale, low price point, activity book.
 - Illustration feels child friendly and appropriate, why not go further with the humour, be confident?
 - treasure hunt around the house. what is in your house? what else can you find?
 - kids attention spans are decreasing, writing shorter chapters, making narrative "gamified"
 - modernise the text a bit – if we're talking about clothes, ask the reader about fast fashion, for example. Link it to everyday stuff they can relate to.
 - Is there a more radical tone here?
- Not being afraid of the subject. could be disruptive, but that doesn't guarantee child and parent dual learning

Tina Gaisford-Waller, Manager and Bookseller, Hunting Raven Books, Frome. Interview 16/2/26

Key Points

- Gamified passport format is promising — collecting, rewards, and shared adult-child discovery are strong engagement tools.
- Rooted in the home (e.g., "10 objects from your house") will help children connect to bigger global themes like empire, supply chains, and power.
- Linking past to present (e.g., microchips, resources, ownership) makes the concept more relevant and compelling. Direct references to real products or companies are fine if fact-checked and provable; accuracy reduces legal risk even when tackling sensitive topics.
- Zine outside traditional publishing (zine/protest-adjacent object), especially in travel contexts.

- Local testing opportunities exist with community groups and markets in Frome, plus potential travel-related distribution (e.g., activity packs via travel agents).

Samantha Williams, Founder of BookLove, Multicultural Book Carnival, London. Email exchange 26/2/26

Do you think the UK education system provides a broad and balanced education which adequately examines British imperialism as well as histories and cultures from around the world?

Statutorily no. At primary school level, it's a lottery. If you have a teacher or a Head teacher who wants to explore more diverse histories and cultures they will encourage it, but its not mandatory.

What age group do you think is the most appropriate and effective for discussion and learning around colonialism?

It should be happening from nursery. The problem is not th content, its who is teaching it. Most White teachers would never want to go there because they don't feel comfortable, haven't been taught themselves and certainly have not been given the tools.

Can you recommend any good books that address Empire and colonial legacy for kids?

The Story of Afro hair



What is the best way to encourage colonial acknowledgment with kids? What is working and what isn't from your perspective?

More conversations. Not shying away from it. Having th right resources

Should parents be engaged in that acknowledgment and learning as well? If so, could a workshop environment where kids and their parents learn together work?

Yes

Various campaigns, petitions, consultations and government strategies have come and gone in recent years. If kids in the UK aren't learning broadly enough about this subject, what in your opinion could disrupt and highlight the discussion? If it time to be more radical, what could that look like?

I am not sure that being "radical" is the answer. Collaborating with the parent community would help. More school trips to museums and not being scared to talk about it. Also highlighting more inventions and contributions made by Black inventors and leaders during he last four hundred years that don't ONLY revolve around colonialism and slavery,

BETH + BELLA

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer these questions *together*, it shouldn't take long. Thank you so much for your help!

What is the British Empire?

Different ~~countries~~ countries ruled by Britain

Was the text easy to read?

Yes

Did you learn about any of this stuff at school?

Yes - Slave trade - sugar - cotton

Were the pictures clear?

Yes

What do you think this book does?

educates you

Would you like to look for *more* stuff?

Yes

How does it make you feel?

more educated

Would you like to write in the book itself, maybe have more stuff to do in there?

Yes

Is it clear how to use the stamp *with* the book?

Yes

What do you think this book's message is?

Everything has a story and educates you about British history

Was the hunt good?

Yes

What do you think of Empire now?

They did not consider other people and rule.

Name one fact that you learned (no peeking):

Each year in the UK people eat 30-3kg each year

JUST THE GROWN-UP: This book is intended to engage both you and a child in a shared space for learning about a tricky subject. Please write on the back whether you think it achieved this goal and any other thoughts you have. All feedback welcome!

thought was a great exercise ad just
made us think about where we as a
country care from.

Thank you.

Beth
Bella

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer these questions *together*, it shouldn't take long. Thank you so much for your help!

What is the British Empire?

Territories that Britain ruled
traditions & products that
they got others to make

Did you learn about any of this stuff at school?

Yes I have.
- fairtrade
- enslaved african
- trading

What do you think this book does?

It teaches you about
secret history that
lies behind different
subjects / objects.

How does it make you feel?

It makes me feel surprised
and also a bit upset
about the deforestation
and slavery.

Is it clear how to use the stamp *with* the book?

Yes it is.

Was the hunt good?

Yes it was fun.

Name one fact that you learned (no peeking):

The longest cricket
game was 14 days
and that they
chopped 11 footfalls
per minute.

Was the text easy to read?

The main text was
easy to read but
the small foot notes
were hard to read
as well as the writing
at the bottom of the cricket page

Were the picture clear? (in the green)

Yes they were.



Would you like to look for *more* stuff?

I think if I ~~could~~^{was}
do it again
I would prefer it to be
more of a ~~challenge~~
challenge.

Would you like to write in the book itself,
maybe have more stuff to do in there?

Maybe some more
questions about the
subject. eg. If you were
a soap maker how would
you advertise your soap?

What do you think this book's message is?

To learn about
important history
that are hidden
but should be known.

What do you think of Empire now?

I think that the Empire
can be cruel towards
the environment like
deforestation and also people
like slavery but we are
getting better.

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to engage both you and a child in a shared space for
learning about a tricky subject. Please write on the
back whether you think it achieved this goal and
any other thoughts you have. All feedback welcome!

I thought this was a really great book for approaching difficult subjects. I have missed sitting and reading books with the children (as Betty 13 now is hard to do). It created that special time and space to read and discuss these tricky subjects. The stamping was a nice touch for interactivity. I thought the design & illustration was brilliant, clear & fun.

Thinking more about the content I think the 'uniform' section was very eye opening for Betty as she loves shopping! So having these facts to back up our parenting on trying to encourage second hand clothing when we can was very helpful! I think when they hear parents saying such things they may become a bit dispondant!

The facts in this book therefore really help the kids understand the extremes of these subjects but in a gentle way.

I don't have many things to say for improvement! Just that the small sub headings could be a bit bigger.

Betty just stamped some objects knowing we had them! Which is a bit lazy! Not sure how you could make this harder! * Maybe you could get some drawing activities within the book? at the end with the quiz or on the pages themselves? (I know this gets harder as they get older) but as Betty said maybe designing a poster for the Soap etc.....

I think this is great mark, I love it as it is but wanted to give you some more feedback to add if you wanted to!

Good luck with it all! X

* Maybe talk about getting them to look at the labels of the products we have to see if they are fair trade and where they are made etc.

ROSEY + ELLA

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer these questions *together*, it shouldn't take long. Thank you so much for your help!

What is the British Empire?

A group of countrys
controlled by one.

Did you learn about any of this stuff at school?

Yes and no ^{and the} ^{triangle} ^{trade!}
'slaves' but not
the Empire.

What do you think this book does?

To teach and show
the impact of the
B Empire.

How does it make you feel?

~~Good~~
not sure
happened before I
was born.

Is it clear how to use the stamp *with* the book?

Yes

Was the hunt good?

Nice idea
Yes.

Name one fact that you learned (no peeking):

How much Palm oil
is used. 11 football feilds
Per min!

Was the text easy to read?

~~Yes~~
it could be
bigger.

Were the picture clear?

Yes

Would you like to look for *more* stuff?

NO

Would you like to write in the book itself,
maybe have more stuff to do in there?

Yes

What do you think this book's message is?

To tell people
about the
empire.

What do you think of Empire now?

Neaver really thought
of it

old fashioned / out of dated
JUST THE GROWN-UP: This book is intended
to engage both you and a child in a shared space for
learning about a tricky subject. Please write on the
back whether you think it achieved this goal and
any other thoughts you have. All feedback welcome!



Very well designed & informative. I like the language used - informal - for a serious subject. The length is good for the age, but consider slightly larger type - Ella found it a bit word heavy and wanted more pictures / stamping. Can you use the space more? The smaller type is too small to read.

Would it help to break each section into a 'past' and 'present' section to emphasise the similarities / differences? Maybe also the facts in ~~one~~ sections. These sections might help it flow?

I like the questions, which help you to think & question the world today. The older images are really hard-hitting & make you think.

I love the passport look - it is of high quality. Can you use more terms used in schools eg. globalisation, to get kids to relate?

What's the key message? Can this be repeated through the book to make it clear.

Couple of typos highlighted in pencil.

Rx

CARLY + PUEY

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer these questions *together*, it shouldn't take long. Thank you so much for your help!

What is the British Empire?

Was the text easy to read?



Yes.

Did you learn about any of this stuff at school?

Were the picture clear?

~~No~~ Yes.

Yes.

What do you think this book does?

Would you like to look for *more* stuff?

This book tells you more about everyday items.

Maybe a couple more.

How does it make you feel?

Would you like to write in the book itself, maybe have more stuff to do in there?

It makes me feel quite shocked about how things used to be.

Yes.

Is it clear how to use the stamp *with* the book?

What do you think this book's message is?

Yes its very clear.

Teach us about history.

Was the hunt good?

Yeah.

What do you think of Empire now?

Name one fact that you learned (no peeking):

We drink 160 million cups of tea.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer these questions *together*, it shouldn't take long. Thank you so much for your help!

What is the British Empire?

Collection of countries ruled by Britain.

Did you learn about any of this stuff at school?

Hazel learnt about the slave trade.

What do you think this book does?

Makes you think, ask questions, be curious.

How does it make you feel?

A little guilty!

Is it clear how to use the stamp *with* the book?

Yes!

Was the hunt good?

Yes!

Name one fact that you learned (no peeking):

How much deforestation occurs for palm oil production. Crazy.

Was the text easy to read?

Yes! Good amount of focus on each topic. Liked how the second page was set up to describe the regale history but also what can be done → fairtrade etc.

Were the picture clear?

We enjoyed the pictures!
Think the design as a passport is great.

Would you like to look for *more* stuff?

That would be good... e.g. write down the ingredients of your soap, or look at where your tea is from.

Would you like to write in the book itself, maybe have more stuff to do in there?

As above.

What do you think this book's message is?

That its important to understand the history of objects.

What do you think of Empire now?

JUST THE GROWN-UP: This book is intended to engage both you and a child in a shared space for learning about a tricky subject. Please write on the back whether you think it achieved this goal and any other thoughts you have. All feedback welcome!