

## POoR Collective designs British Library's 'Malorie Blackman: the Power of Stories' exhibition



Photo by Tobi Sobowale.

Until 25 February 2024, the British Library celebrates the work of one of Britain's most pioneering and influential living authors, Malorie Blackman OBE, with a landmark exhibition. Blackman has been writing books for children and young adults for over 30 years and across multiple genres. She often explores issues such as social division, power imbalances and oppression, as well as writing about family life, relationships and joy.

*"Through her writing, Malorie has not only entertained and engaged readers but also educated and inspired them to think critically about race, inequality and social justice."*

– Larry Botchway, co-founder, POoR Collective

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Power of Stories exhibition designed by POoR Collective. Photography by Andy Stagg.



Image courtesy of the British Library.

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Designed by socially minded organisation Power Out of Restriction (POoR Collective), who have a host of creative and engaging exhibitions under their belt, the show is a thought-provoking and visually captivating experience that spans the full breadth of Blackman's career, and explores the broader social context of her writing.

Winners of London Design Festival's Emerging Design Medal in September this year, POoR Collective were selected by the British Library to deliver the exhibition design as they have a track record of working with young people, platforming their voices and educating the younger generation – things that Malorie Blackman has been doing in her work for decades.

*"Malorie Blackman's impactful contributions to children's and young adult literature make her a powerful source of inspiration for us at PooR. Her work is widely 3ecognized for its exploration of race, inequality, and social justice."*  
– Ben Spry, co-founder, PooR Collective



Photos of Blackman on display at the British Library. Images courtesy of Malorie Blackman.

Developed in close collaboration with Blackman, POoR's design draws inspiration from the themes and ideas expressed throughout her body of work, exploring the subversion of divisions, barriers, and entrances by manipulating form, material, and

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function. For this project, POoR and the British Library worked with a group of students from Regent High School in Camden, asking them about their relationship with books, reading and stories.

*“At POoR, we strongly believe in engaging young people in the design process. As Malorie is so well known for her children’s books and contribution to children’s literature, this was the perfect project to involve them in.”*

– Larry Botchway, co-founder, PooR Collective



Image courtesy of the British Library.

The students took part in drawing and collaging exercises which allowed them to think about how young people would experience the exhibition, as well as how they engage with media in the modern world. The ideas and discussions brought up in the session went on to inform parts of the design, including the central area where a snug bench and feedback area have been positioned, along with a bespoke game based on Blackman’s life and career.

In addition, the British Library’s Learning Team worked with the students to develop poetry, artworks and responses which feature throughout the exhibition, as well as in a zine titled *The Power of Diversity*.

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The colour palette of the exhibition pays tribute to a unique print run of Blackman's renowned series, Noughts & Crosses, which is characterised by striking monochromatic illustrations interrupted by bold and vivid splashes of colour. Europa designed the 2D elements of the exhibition using the typeface 'Martin', named after Civil Rights leader Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Charged with a powerful message of unity, equality and justice, the font is frequently used in protest signs, banners and publications, serving as a visual symbol of this important cause while helping to reinforce the principles of nonviolence and peaceful resistance that Dr King represented.

*"Malorie Blackman's work has provided a platform for 5arginalized voices and encouraged empathy and understanding among readers. Her books are an essential part of the literary landscape, addressing important societal topics and influencing the way we view and discuss them."*

– Ben Spry, co-founder, PooR Collective



The four founders of POoR Collective. Photography by Andy Stagg.

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## Exhibition overview

*Malorie Blackman: The Power of Stories* is a free British Library exhibition running from 24 November 2023 to 25 February 2024. Each of its four sections includes an introductory film narrated by Blackman, as well as material from her own archive.



Images courtesy of the British Library.

## Representation

Entering the exhibition, visitors step into a deep blue space, where they are invited to learn about the importance of representation in media and take an in-depth look

at Black activism from the 1960s to the '80s. Iconic figures such as Jamaican artist Errol Lloyd, Guyanese educator and novelist Beryl Gilroy, Surinamese British author Petronella Breinburg, and Guyanese poet and writer John Agard can all be seen in this area. Featuring both comics and novels, 'Representation' also gives insight into Blackman's early life, allowing visitors to discover the books that left a lasting impact on her life and work.

### **Claiming a Voice**

Dominated by shades of red, the second section covers Blackman's journey as a writer from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. Along the way, visitors encounter other Black authors bringing Black stories to life, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Focusing on Blackman's novels including *Pig-Heart Boy* and *Hacker*, this part of the exhibition outlines the real-world inspirations and personal experiences that shaped her fictional world. 'Claiming a Voice' also shines a spotlight on influential individuals such as writer and publisher Verna Wilkins, founder of Tamarind Books.

### **Noughts & Crosses**

Occupying a vivid orange space, the third section centres on some of Blackman's most iconic works – the *Noughts & Crosses* series. The eponymous novel was Blackman's 50th, where she sought to address racism as a fundamental theme within the story. This section offers insights into the events that inspired the author, in particular the brutal murder of aspiring Black architect Stephen Lawrence. Visitors are also able to see a copy of the initial synopsis of 'Noughts & Crosses' that Blackman submitted to her publisher in 1999.

### **Legacies**

Lastly, the exhibition features the creative work and perspectives of a group of local school students that the British Library's Learning Team and POoR engaged in the project, offering reflections on Blackman's achievements, novels and characters. The final section of the exhibition looks at Blackman's growing legacies, such as the Young Adult Literature Convention at London Comic Con which she established as Children's Laureate in 2014, and highlights books and zines written by contemporary writers of colour.

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Power of Stories exhibition designed by POoR Collective. Photography by Andy Stagg.



Blackman's medallion from being Children's Laureate from 2013-15. Image courtesy of the British Library.



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The Malorie Blackman exhibition opens at the British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB, on 24 November 2023, and runs until 25 February 2024.

It is free to visit.

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## Notes to editors

### **Power Out of Restriction (POoR)**

Power Out of Restriction is a socially minded design practice that works with young people to design tangible pieces of art and architecture in their local environment. POoR sees the power of the younger generation and seeks to get their voices heard through design. Founded in 2019 by Shawn Adams, Ben Spry, Matt Harvey and Larry Botchway, the firm won the London Design Festival's Emerging Design Medal in 2023. POoR has worked with organisations such as The Office Group, the Royal College of Art, and the RIBA, and designed exhibitions for the likes of the National Museum of Liverpool, Brompton Design District and Beyond the Box's People's Pavilion.

[POoRcollective.com](http://POoRcollective.com)

### **The British Library**

The national library holds more than 170 million items – a living collection that gets bigger every day. Although its roots extend back centuries, it aims to collect everything published in the UK today, tomorrow and far into the future. Its team of trusted experts care for this collection and open it up for everyone to spark new discoveries, ideas and to help people do incredible things.

The British Library's London and Yorkshire sites hold collections ranging from newspapers and maps to sound recordings, patents, academic journals, as well as a copy of every UK domain website and blog. Its public spaces are a place to research, meet friends, start up a new business or simply get inspired by visiting the galleries and events. The library works with partners and libraries across the UK and around the world to make sure that as many people as possible have the chance to use and explore its collections, events and expertise.

[Bl.uk](http://Bl.uk)