

DOROTHY KUYA ARCHIVE BLOG:

DOROTHY AND THE DRAGONS TEETH

By Vicki Caren, Archivist.

THE DOROTHY KUYA ARCHIVE



In early January 2023, I started planning the archive sessions for the volunteer participants. I wanted them to feel a connection to the material and enthusiastic about creating descriptions for the catalogue. Start local, I thought and chose material relating to the Liverpool Community Relations Council.

Dorothy Kuya was employed as the first Senior Community Relations Officer here in Liverpool in September 1970. The organisation began in the Rialto building, but soon moved to 64 Mount Pleasant. From this base, a number of initiatives were set up, from monitoring discrimination in employment to the creation of the Liverpool 8 Writer's Workshop.

Around this time, Dorothy was also a governor at Arundel Comprehensive School. She worked with headteacher Olive Cope and a voluntary group of teachers, including Ibrahim Brian Thompson from the Liverpool Anti Racist Community Arts Association (LARCAA) to look at racial bias in schoolbooks. Shortly after this, a Liverpool branch of the recently established Teachers Against Racism was formed and Dorothy became an active participant. The Community Relations Council (CRC) set up their own working party to monitor children's books, which evolved into *'Sowing the Dragon's Teeth - Racial Bias in Books We Teach,'* a report and a collection of book reviews and recommendations published in 1973.

Exhibitions of the children's books quickly followed. Awareness and momentum from the campaign grew and letters and articles from both sides of the argument began to appear in local and national newspapers.

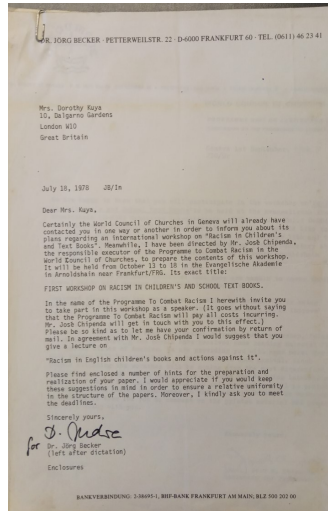
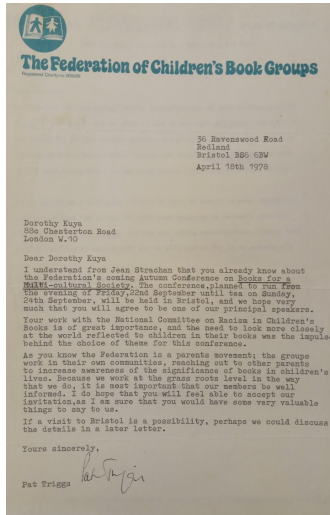


News cutting from *The Daily Mail* dated 14th November 1975 (D/KUYA/5)

In 1976 the National Committee on Racism in Children's Books (NCRCB) was founded and a quarterly bulletin *'Dragon's Teeth,'* was published, featuring articles, reviews, and book lists. Dorothy would go on to chair this national committee. She was subsequently invited to speak at a number of conferences around the country and in 1978 was contacted by the World Council of Churches to contribute to a workshop on 'Racism in Children's and School's Textbooks', held in conjunction with Frankfurt Book Fair.

"It is not enough that local libraries and schools buy good books. They must also get rid of those racist and sexist books which distort our children's view of the world in which they are growing up."

- Dorothy Kuya (Quoted in the above article)



Letters addressed to Dorothy asking her to speak at different conferences (D/KUYA/5)

Dorothy's interest in children's literature did not seem that surprising to me. I had read an account of her going to the library regularly as a child. This love of reading had clearly stayed with her throughout her life. The hundreds of books that make up her own personal library is testament to that.

Additionally, the archive also contained papers relating to teacher training at Philippa Fawcett College of Education, part of the university of London Institute for Education, and Dorothy's brief career teaching juniors in Camden, London. The post Dorothy held before she returned to Liverpool to work with the CRC.

"Your work with the National Committee on Racism in Children's Books is of great importance and the need to look more closely at the world reflected to children in their books was the impulse behind the choice of theme for this conference."

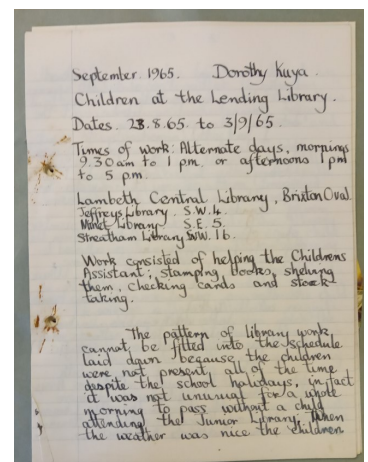
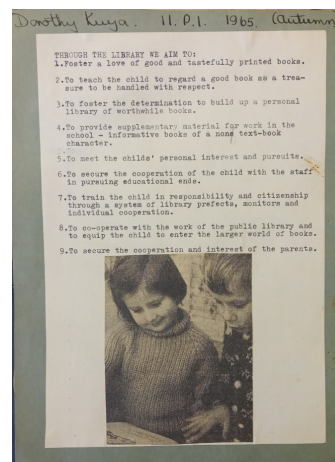
- Pat Triggs (Extract from the above letter)

At a following Thursday evening archive session, I took along material related to training and teaching. One of the participants found a folder concerning a placement as part of her course. In 1965, Dorothy spent two weeks with Lambeth Central Library, working with the children's assistant in the junior library.

Dorothy wrote a report on her observations, noting that there was no specialist training for children's librarians and that training is only in books, not an

"understanding of children and their special needs."

There was also an opportunity to see Book Week celebrations.



Notes from Dorothy's teaching practice placement (D/KUYA/4)

Reading these observations and reports, I can see how this placement and her teaching experience, combined with her own interests, came to inform her later work in Liverpool with Dragon's Teeth as part of the CRC project and nationally with NCRCB. Dorothy also made contact with the American organisation Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) who published the Interracial Books for Children Bulletin from 1966 to 1989. The archive features a number of these bulletins.

While some of this material may be years, even decades old, it is still relevant today. This was brought home to me with a chance conversation with a museum colleague, Adam, from the Learning and Participation team. He was putting together a series of workshops on the legacies of transatlantic slavery for schools on racism in children's books and asked if there was anything in the Dorothy Kuya archive on this subject. I was able to show him some of the material Dorothy collected and used in her campaigning. Adam thought it would be a great resource for his upcoming workshops.

"One of the sources that is used in the workshop is the Enid Blyton book *The Three Golliwogs* which perpetuates racist stereotypes in visuals and in story/character content. In our workshops when we highlight oppression, we try to contrast with a source that is an empowering example of activism, resistance and/or achievement. The children's book campaigns that Dorothy connects to and potentially other activism that she was involved in could really enhance this. Especially as we are looking to have a differentiated version for college and university students."

- Adam, Engagement Producer (Young People)

I was able to provide scans of articles, leaflets, and news cuttings which will be useful sources for the staff team and for the sessions themselves. For more information about the workshops, click [here](#).

Over the past few weeks, I have seen how different threads from this archive collection can be woven together to show a bigger picture, and how ideas are formed and shaped over time. In 1965, Dorothy was studying at teacher training college and five years later she was still using those skills and knowledge even though she was not working in the education sector. Working at the Community Relations Council, Dorothy was able to build links with likeminded individuals and organisations to affect change both locally and nationally. This was what Dorothy took to her next post when she left Liverpool and headed to London.

As I continue to work on sorting and cataloguing the archive, I am uncovering more information, more detail and am able to make more connections. Analysing the content of children's books would remain important to Dorothy for many years to come. In subsequent roles, she would arrange book fairs, speak at conferences and events, and also write on the subject in national press and publications. This is just one issue that has a continuous thread throughout the archive.

I believe that Dorothy Kuya's archive collection is just as pertinent today as it was when Dorothy first started gathering a rich variety of sources for her own education, career, and activism. This wealth of material will surely continue to inspire and inform people for many years to come and I'm proud to be a small part of that.