

# Earlsdon Literary Magazine 161

The newsletter of the AVID Readers Group, based at Earlsdon Library

**Next meeting:** Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February 8pm  
**Venue:** Earlsdon Library  
**Book for discussion:** *Oh Dear, Silvia!* – Dawn French

## Divided Discussion

### January's Book

#### *Noughts and Crosses* – Malorie Blackman

Gathering in January to discuss Malorie Blackman's young adult book *Noughts and Crosses*, the Avid Readers Group was somewhat polarised, much like the characters being reflected upon in fact. While some really enjoyed the book others considered it a bit clunky and contrived.

*Noughts and Crosses* was chosen as this month's book as a tie in to the movie *12 Years a Slave* and with last month's book, also aimed at young adults, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

Much discussion centred around the main characters of Callum and Sephy, two teenagers from seemingly different worlds. While Callum, a Nought, watches his family implode as a result of their perceived lesser status, Sephy, a privileged Cross, rails against the status quo. With heavy overtones of Romeo and Juliet, Callum and Sephy fall in love, much to the disapproval of both of their families. While it is clear they love each other, their romance is marred by circumstance and often their own flaws. Sephy came in for some sharp criticism with some readers feeling she was a spoilt princess, not quite understanding how hard her antics made things for Callum, his family and other Noughts around her. Callum was

liked a little more, with many commenting on the powerful feelings displayed by him, both loving and hating Sephy at the same time, never really able to separate her from what she represented.

The writing style was praised, with many seeing how it would appeal to younger readers, a powerful tool to introduce the subject of race and racism in the National Curriculum. It would seem the same effect was felt by others as a few people commented on how some of the incidents experienced by Callum in the book had never even occurred to them. Some background on these issues was provided by Malorie Blackman on a recent episode of *Desert Island Discs*, where she discussed how the scene on the train and the issue of plasters were things that happened to her personally.

In conclusion, thoughts on *Noughts and Crosses* were mixed but interestingly enough long after we'd finished discussing the book itself we continued to have an open and interesting discussion about race, racism and how it affects modern day society still, which is perhaps exactly what this book aims to inspire.

**Melissa Johnson**

### Next month we will be reading:

*A Tale of Two Cities* – Charles Dickens

The date for discussion of this book is Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March.

## Ideas for further reading

I had intended to give some suggestions for more recent Young Adult novels this month – ignoring vampires, dystopian futures and chick-lit primers – but our discussion in January took us in a slightly different direction, so I shall save my friends' championing of John Green for another time.

In January, we inevitably compared *Noughts and Crosses* to earlier books exploring some of the same issues. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is, of course, the most well-known and Scout, although she is much younger, is an interesting contrast to Sephy – both are daughters of the privileged group and share their bewilderment at the way things are, but behave in very different ways. For a real-world parallel to Callum's experience, try Cassie Logan in Mildred T White's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Cassie is a wonderful character and her narration, like Scout's, shows her developing understanding of how the world works and her decisions about how to live in it. I wasn't aware until recently there are more books about this family (see, for example, information about the [Logans series on Goodreads](#)), but haven't yet got round to reading them. I also had a look on Goodreads for other books that people have shelved under the same themes and found the American South in the early twentieth century heavily represented, but little from the UK or more modern settings. One that did appear was *Londonstani* by Gautam Malkani (not a book for those of delicate sensibilities, and the twist at the end may infuriate those who can cope with the language) which deals, as the title suggests, with the experience of a different group of communities. It would be comforting to think this is because Britain has always been more tolerant, but, as Malorie Blackman's experience attests, this ain't necessarily so.

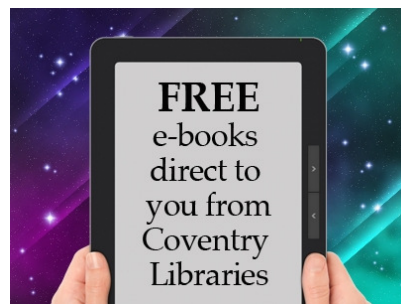
We also talked about issue-led teen fiction in general but, missing the English teachers from the group, found ourselves reminiscing about books by Judy Blume, banned when those of us of a certain age were at school.

*Are there any novels which opened your eyes to how other people live, how they are treated by society, or how their way of life might make them feel about themselves?*

*What books influenced you most as a teenager? Why?*

*Have you just read a fantastic book that you are itching to talk about?*

**Contributions for ELM are always welcome** and can be sent to Catherine Fitzsimons [cathfitz5317@yahoo.com](mailto:cathfitz5317@yahoo.com).



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## Coventry Inspiration Book Awards

The first eliminations have already been made. Don't forget to keep voting for your favourites at

[http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/2000655/coventry\\_inspiration\\_book\\_awards](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/2000655/coventry_inspiration_book_awards)

## What's On

Lots of Poetry! Much of it is listed on the flyer that is being sent out with this edition of ELM, but there is also a new **Poetry Club** at **Arena Park Library** on **Thursdays** from **2-3pm**, starting on **6<sup>th</sup> February**. Go along to talk about your favourite poem or poet; share and read your poem and discuss why you like it. (It doesn't have to be Wordsworth!) There are refreshments too.

**Did You Know?** Back-copies of ELM are available online at

[http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/2291/avid\\_readers\\_newsletter](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/2291/avid_readers_newsletter)