

# ∞ READING ROUND ∞

## My Reading Habits

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I'VE LOVED READING SINCE I came to this country as a child, from poetry to science fiction. I was first introduced to poetry in my last year at primary school by our teacher, Mr Lawrence, who used to share poems such as 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes and 'Matilda' by Hilaire Belloc with the class at the end of the day. He noticed how much I enjoyed listening to them and used to lend me his books to take home and read. Mr Lawrence awakened my interest in reading and writing. It was my distraction from a difficult life of racism which was nothing unusual for ethnically diverse people in the 1960s.

Reading awakened my overactive imagination which motivated me to begin writing in my teenage years. To date, I've had seven books published: two volumes of short humorous stories about my Jamaican culture, called *Pardner Money Stories*, a huge science-fiction novel called *The Mandari Chronicles* and four volumes of poetry called *Contemplation*. The last two volumes of my poems are *Contemplation — The Covid Era*.

I have a houseful of books of all kinds. Many of the ones which I've bought in recent years are about Black history and mental health because as a Person-Centred Counsellor and Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, I am very aware of the difficulties most people, across the ages, regardless of ethnicity, are going through at the moment, from stress, anxiety, depression to dementia and fully blown mental health issues. I haven't read many of my books yet, but I am slowly working my way through them. I read and learn many new things, new, which enable me to share and help others to find coping skills to help themselves.

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For many years, I used to read a book each week. Today I feel as if I write a book each week. I do daily journalling which I call my therapeutic poetic processing, helping me to make sense of our current confusing times. I belong to a reading club which makes me read at least one book each month about equality and diversity then share what I got from the book with group members in a Zoom meeting.

I love Black history. What I call true history because as far as I am concerned, history has no colour. I have many books on the subject because prior to Covid-19 setting in, I went into local schools and colleges for Black History Month to do presentations.

I am often invited to events to read my poems on general wellbeing and the importance of maintaining good mental health. I also do storytelling/story-writing workshops in old people's homes, encouraging them to tell their stories, which is good for their mental health. I read excerpts of my short stories at these events, which I love doing.

I use reading of poetry and prose, and my writing as my personal therapy. It's my hobby and first love which gives me vital information to share with others.