An introduction to...
Beverley Naidoo

“I wanted a home for my work that would accommodate its different ‘legs’ - creative, activist, academic. The work forms an integral whole”
Beverley Naidoo

Beverley Naidoo donated her archive to Seven Stories in 2015. The collection offers a perfect snapshot into her research and involvement in anti-apartheid and education, her writing process and into the impact of her novels on her global readership.

Growing up in apartheid South Africa
Born in 1943 Beverley Naidoo grew up in South Africa under apartheid law. Beverley acknowledges that because of her upbringing in a white household she was blinkered from the situation in South Africa and that a lot of her childhood reading reinforced colonial racist stereotyping. She credits her early reading experiences as an influence on her mission to encourage teachers, librarians and young people to think about questions of representation, stereotyping and underlying messages in books for children:

“I remember my shock - and anger - at discovering that so many ‘non-fiction’ books about South Africa, in British schools and libraries, displayed the same narrow viewpoints and racist attitudes that I had experienced as a white child growing up under apartheid. Where were writers who showed what it might be like to be a black child in that society? I began closely examining these books and writing reviews.”

The anti-apartheid movement
It wasn’t until Beverley became a student at the University of Witwatersrand that she began to challenge this misinformation and blinkered perspective. She became involved in anti-apartheid. After leaving the University of Witwatersrand Beverley was detained without trial for her part in the resistance movement. Later, she went into exile in Britain where she studied at the University of York, and worked as a teacher, education adviser and writer.

Beverley married another South Africa exile and, while bringing up a family, received her Ph.D from the University of Southampton. The title of her Ph.D thesis was ‘Exploring issues of racism with white students through a literature-based course’ which looked into white teenagers’ responses to literature and racism.
Children’s books
Beverley’s first children’s book ‘Journey to Jo’burg’ (Longman, 1985) was another challenge to apartheid and the book was banned in South Africa until 1991.

Many of Beverley’s works challenge apartheid and racist stereotyping particularly her novels ‘Chain of Fire’ (Collins, 1989) and ‘No Turning Back’ (Viking, 1995), the short story collection ‘Out of Bounds’ (Puffin, 2000) and stage play ‘The Playground’ (New South African Plays’, Aurora Metro Press, 2004), all of which explore challenges for young people in South Africa.

Throughout her career Beverley has written for both adults and children and her work includes novels, picture books, short stories, plays and non-fiction. She has also edited collected editions of stories and poems and has contributed articles to many publications.

Awards
With over twenty published works Beverley has been shortlisted for and has received many awards for her contribution to children’s literature in both the UK and USA. Her first novel ‘Journey to Jo’burg’ won the Other Award in 1985. Her later novel ‘The Other Side of Truth’ (Puffin, 2000) won the Carnegie Medal and Smarties Book Prize Silver Medal in 2000 and in 2003 it also won the Sankei Children's Book Award in Japan.

Archive
Beverley’s collection covers almost her entire career and includes her PhD thesis, drafts of novels, short stories and picture books, as well as professional and personal correspondence. The collection contains a vast amount of information with great potential for researchers wishing to explore Beverley’s works or wider issues such as race and conflict in children’s books.