

# Book review: Natives

Anti-racist religious education



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# Natives: Race and Class in the ruins of Empire by Akala

Review by: Fiona Moss

## What is this book about?

It tells the story of Akala's life whilst also sharing a history of racism and giving an education of how colonialism affects society today.

## What did you love about it?

Difficult to say I loved things in a book that rightly is an uncomfortable read. The chapter on education is essential reading for all teachers. The injustice, the vile treatment that Akala and his friends received need to be read and acted upon. Also, the teachers who made a positive difference show that nothing is irredeemable.

The book unpacks what we know and are taught and that should make us want to reconstruct the whole curriculum including RE.

## How did this book have an impact on you as a teacher of RE? Does it imply new ways of doing your job?

It brings home the structural oppression encountered by people of colour in a way nothing else I have read before does. It shows the urgency of the de colonisation of the whole curriculum but more than anything else it is a reminder that for every pupil I taught (who were almost all people of colour) that I had no idea of what they had to endure to do well in school. I know I did not understand enough the intersectionality of the exclusion gap and the attainment gap.

As an educator I need to do so much more both to raise up voices who will always understand this better than me but also be more aware of the curricula that we are creating and the story it tells, the representation that it gives.

## I would recommend this book to other teachers of RE because...

All teachers need to see education through the eyes of another; bringing us closer to understanding the life experience of the pupils that you teach. This book explains why our pupils will have particular forced worldviews due to how they have been treated by society, the education system and the law and should cause us to think carefully about the curriculum we deliver and the support we give to pupils.

## Could the book be used for teacher development and / or for and with pupils themselves? How?

Teachers could read these biographies to help them understand the lives of these black For teacher development it is a reminder that injustices against Black British people need to be studied rather than going abroad for examples.



**Can you give an example of a key quote from the book (keep to about 50 words), and why you chose it?**

*Warwick University investigated teacher bias by observing the proportion of black Caribbean pupils were entered for higher tier maths and science tests at age 14...*

*...They found that, at the same level of previous academic attainment, For every three white British pupils entered for higher tier only two black Caribbean pupils were entered. These figures hold even when we account for gender, free school meals, maternal education, home ownership and single-parent households, in addition to their prior academic attainment. Once again, teachers' assessments underestimated the academic potential of black students. (Page 243)*

I knew that this was true, but I need to remember that people who have no intention of being racist do this - we need to be constantly reminded of our unconscious bias. Choosing this was hard - in all honesty I wanted to put something from the education chapter, but we all need to read that chapter as a whole.

