

'If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway. It's easy to tell when a question is coming from a good place. Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here's to possibilities of friendship and connection and understanding.'

**From *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

## **Founder and Chair Co-Statement: The Reader's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commitment**

The Reader believes that everyone should have the opportunity to experience Shared Reading of great literature. From our twenty-year history, we know that the power of Shared Reading can help build connection between people from diverse backgrounds and grow our ability to think in different ways and better understand different experiences and perspectives.

Whilst inclusion is integral to our work, we know that we can do more to make our belief that Shared Reading can be for everyone a reality.

Over the last year, The Reader's conscious commitment to diversity and inclusion has grown. In particular, we want to help ensure that racism is eliminated from the world and we feel we have a small but vital part to play in that great change.

Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work covers all aspects of our organisation, focused on how we ensure that:

- Our ways of working treat people fairly and enable everyone to participate.
- We can be more representative of our communities – considering our Board, staff, volunteers and participants in our work.
- Everyone coming to the Reader feels that they 'belong'.
- Great literature from writers with diverse backgrounds and experiences is enjoyed across our settings.

In 2020/21, we took immediate action towards achieving these goals by:

- Consulting with our staff and volunteers on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and ways to strengthen our approach across all aspects of our delivery, reach and how The Reader is run.
- Appointing Geetha Rabindrakumar as Director of Special Projects to work with The Reader's Founder on developing the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy.
- Exploring how Shared Reading of literature by black writers could help us to better understand our own and others' experience and understanding of racism, and in the process to help spark conversations that could lead to change, with the aim of launching an organisation-wide reading project in 2021/22.
- Commissioning an external review of our recruitment literature and a session on supporting 'diversity in recruitment' for senior staff and our People team.
- Publishing our [EDI employment statement](#).
- Engaging with a leading black third sector figure on the best way to build our EDI thinking, and engaged a Director-level coach to help with EDI thought leadership, and to advise on EDI / literary practicalities.
- Setting up a Diversity and Inclusion Advocates staff group, including a Diversity Advocate from our Board of Trustees, to support the organisation's thinking around EDI.

- Ran an open trustee recruitment process with an emphasis on attracting a greater diversity of trustees, adding to the depth and diversity of background, experience and thinking on our Board.
- Ensuring that the Reader Bookshelf is as diverse as we can make it. More suggestions always welcome.

We are now working on embedding Equity, Diversity and Inclusion into our next strategic plan (to be completed in 2022).

We recognise that creating meaningful and lasting change is complex work, which requires us to have conversations that feel difficult for many of us and to raise questions that we might not yet know the answers to. But this will not deter us from our commitment to ensuring that all our employees, volunteers and participants feel welcome and safe, and are treated with fairness and respect regardless of race, age, sex or gender, disability, sexual orientation, social class, religion and belief.