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*Finding the beat:* Akala was born in Kentish Town in London in 1983.

## Is TV too White? The rapper Akala’s childhood was “materially poor but culturally rich”. Now he wants to make sure that Black and working class children see themselves in the media.

By the age of 12 he had met **Angela Davis** and jazz musician Hugh Masekala — and witnessed a stabbing. In his own words, he says “When you experience violence growing up, it changes something inside you.”

Akala was born Kingslee James McLean Daley to a Scottish mother and Jamaican father. He grew up in a working-class London neighbourhood and experienced poverty and violence firsthand.

Daley began rapping in his early teens, taking on the stage name of Akala. In 2005, he released his debut album *The Journey*, which was critically acclaimed.

Akala’s songs often feature the themes of race and class, referencing people such as **Malcolm X**, **Patrice Lumumba** and **Marcus Garvey**. Through his music and his writing Akala hopes to raise awareness and understand the challenges that young, Black people face in society.

In 2018, he published his first book, *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of an Empire* — a **memoir** and essay on race, class and **inequality** in Britain. It quickly became a bestseller.

Akala describes his own upbringing as being “**materially** poor but culturally rich”. His stepfather was the stage manager of a theatre, and introduced him to Black musicians and thinkers, including Davis.

Today, he is fascinated by **Shakespeare**, and he is using his passion to inspire others. In 2009, he founded The Hip-hop Shakespeare Company, which translates Shakespeare into modern-rap.

Meanwhile, his first novel, *The Dark Lady*, tells the story of Henry, a 15-year-old Black, working class boy — living in Shakespearean times. He wants to change a trend he has noticed in British media. “Most of the **period drama** we get is usually focused on elites. Kings and queens and ‘great men’ — so to speak.”

“I want people to be able to imagine a Black experience, specifically a Black working class experience, and hopefully relate to that.”

## Is TV too White?

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### Some people say

*“Most people hate poor people more than they hate poverty”*

**Akala (1983 – ) British rapper, author and activist**

*“Representation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonisation of the mind.”*

**bell hooks (1952 – 2021) American author, theorist, educator, and social critic**

### What do you think?

### Six steps to discovery

#### 1. Connect

**How do you feel about this story?** - Do you feel that TV represents you?

#### 2. Wonder

**What questions do you have?** - For example: How does hip-hop compare to Shakespeare?

#### 3. Investigate

**What are the facts?** - Is TV inclusive? Explore the statistics around representation in different jobs.

#### 4. Construct

**What is your point of view?** - You have been asked to pitch a new TV show that will appeal to a diverse audience. What would be your main points?

#### 5. Express

**What do others believe?** - “The world has become more accepting.” Split into small groups and debate this statement.

#### 6. Reflect

**What might happen next?** - Akala likes to link hip-hop and Shakespeare. Either write a hip-hop track based on Shakespeare or turn a hip-hop track into a short Shakespeare play.

## TV diversity

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**Yes:** Television has long been criticised for its lack of diversity, which reinforces stereotypes and deprives viewers of the opportunity to see themselves and their experiences reflected on screen.

**No:** Television has become more diverse in recent years, with popular shows with diverse casts and storylines. Streaming services also offer a wide variety of diverse programming.

**Or...** Perhaps the question is the wrong one to ask. Instead, we should be asking whether TV is representative of the world we live in, which is becoming increasingly diverse but still has a lot of inequality and injustice.

### Glossary

**Angela Davis** - An American Marxist and feminist activist, philosopher, academic and author, born in 1944.

**Malcolm X** - A contemporary of Martin Luther King Jr, he believed that African Americans must be willing to use violence in order to achieve their political ends. He was murdered in 1965.

**Patrice Lumumba** - An independence leader and the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1960.

**Marcus Garvey** - A Jamaican political activist who died in 1940. He was a leader of the Pan-Africanism movement.

**Memoir** - Non-fiction writing based on the author's memories.

**Inequality** - When money and opportunities are not shared equally between different groups in society.

**Materially** - Relating to material possessions, such as money and other things you can own.

**Shakespeare** - An English playwright and poet who is often called the greatest writer in the English language.

**Period drama** - A television show or film set in a particular historical time period.