



5 Must-Read Books by Black Autistic Authors



BY ADRIANA WHITE

Representation matters.

Seeing ourselves in stories is a critical part of our identity development. It's how we learn norms – a gauge by which we measure ourselves and our life experiences. It shows us who we are and who we could be. Without genuine representation, we are left in the dark – unsure of what to do or how to be. Stories assure and comfort us, and they let us know that it's okay to be who we really are. A lack of representation can cut us off from our culture and our history, and it denies us that ever-so-important shared sense of belonging. This, in turn, can severely impact our mental health, and may help to explain why autistics have a suicide rate that is 10 times higher than the rate for neurotypical people.

For all of these reasons and more, BIPOC autistic stories are essential. Black, Indigenous, People of Color, or BIPOC, already lack representation across most forms of art and media. BIPOC autistic stories are, unsurprisingly, even rarer. For most people, the default image of autism is one that is still predominantly white, young, and male. Because of this stereotype, individuals in marginalized groups are diagnosed with autism at much lower rates than their white counterparts. Additionally, Black and indigenous autistics face additional, intersectional struggles that their light-skinned counterparts often do not face – from potentially violent misunderstandings with law enforcement to systemic racism and oppression. Young Black autistics especially are more likely to be labeled as having “behavior problems.”

The Authors



(Left to right) Top: Rivers Solomon, Illustration ofAWN Editors: Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, Lydia Brown and E. Ashkenazy – Bottom: Anand Prahlad, Dr. Lamar Hardwick, Talia Hibbert

The Books

The following books, with the exception of the AWN anthology, were all written by Black autistic authors. Their stories show us that autism does not consist of one homogenous story. The lives of Black autistics are not monolithic either, as the diversity of this collection illustrates. There are stories of Black autistic men and women, stories of Black LGBTQ+ autistics, and so much more.

All the Weight of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism

by Autism Women's Network

This fantastic collection of essays was published by AWN, the Autism Women's Network (now known as the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network). Editors Lydia X. Z. Brown, Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, and E. Ashkenazy put together an essential piece of literature that features the work of over 60 autistic writers and artists. Finn Gardiner, N.I. Nicholson, Timotheus Gordon Jr., and other Black autistic creators explore tough topics like race, oppression, violence, abuse, and more through the mediums of prose, art, and poetry. This anthology is a must read for anyone interested in autism.

I Am Strong: The Life and Journey of an Autistic Pastor

by Dr. Lamar Hardwick

The back of this book states, in bold letters, that “what the world really needs are stories of hope.” With this book, Dr. Lamar Hardwick (also known as the Autism Pastor) shares his own personal story of hope, in an effort to inspire and guide others who may be feeling lost and alone. Dr. Hardwick writes honestly and openly about feeling different as a child, and details his struggle to figure out why he just couldn't understand people. By sharing his story, Dr. Hardwick gives other autistic Black men and boys a chance to see themselves, to know that they too can find success and happiness. With its emphasis on faith as a theme throughout the book, this title is especially recommended for Christian readers.

Get a Life, Chloe Brown

by Talia Hibbert

British author Talia Hibbert is known for writing a very specific brand of romance novels. Her stories feature exceptionally diverse casts of characters – including many who typically don't get to be the stars of their own love stories. After self-publishing several books on her own, Hibbert made her traditional publishing debut with *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* – a title that centers on a protagonist who experiences chronic pain caused by fibromyalgia. One of her earlier books, *A Girl Like Her*, has a Black autistic woman as its main character. By writing wonderful representations of Black women who are neurodivergent, depressed, plus-size, and more, Hibbert is reaching new readers and changing the romance genre for the better.

The Secret Life of a Black Aspie

by Anand Prahlad

I may not have the words to adequately express the beauty and magic of this memoir. Prahlad has written a breathtaking, wondrous, and insightful book about his autistic life. A professor, a poet, a musician, and so much more, Prahlad writes pages that flow and inspire, taking readers on a unique and captivating journey. Prahlad's book, like the others on this list, gives readers an intersectional view of autism that is incredibly important but all too often unseen. Readers of all races owe it to themselves to read this beautiful book. Prahlad has also written two books of poems, *Hear My Story and Other Poems* and *As Good As Mango*, and he has edited college textbooks on African-American folklore.

An Unkindness of Ghosts

by Rivers Solomon

Solomon is known for writing stunning and astonishing speculative fiction. Their debut novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, takes readers to a science-fiction starship, but the issues faced by its passengers are strikingly familiar. Solomon expertly weaves race, class, slavery, gender variance, neurodivergence, mental illness, and generational trauma into a gripping and powerful narrative. The queer autistic main character at the heart of this story is extraordinary and beautifully written. Fans of Afrofuturistic authors like Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor will adore this title. Solomon has written two other books – *The Deep* (a novella) and *Sorrowland* (scheduled to be published in 2021).

The Need for More BIPOC Autistic Stories

Books by autistic BIPOC are incredibly rare, and they often do not get the same amount of publicity and promotion that white autistic stories receive. The books on this list are only the tip of an iceberg. We desperately need to bring more BIPOC stories to the surface. As we celebrate the fact that these wonderful stories exist, it's important for us to keep pushing for even more. This list focuses solely on Black autistic writers, but there are great autistic authors from other marginalized groups, including Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay (an Indian writer), and Asian authors like Helen Hoang, Naoki Higashida, Yoon Ha Lee, and Mike Jung. The vast majority of published autistic authors of color are Black or Asian. There is a striking lack of autistic stories by Latinx and indigenous authors – an issue that I sincerely hope is resolved very soon. These stories have the potential to change lives.

I also hope that the books on this list help shine a light on the diversity of autism. For autistic BIPOC, I hope these stories give you hope, and show you that you are not alone.

Your life matters.



By **Adriana White**

Adriana White is an autistic school librarian and former special education teacher. Since being diagnosed with autism in her 30s, she has set out to create more autism-friendly schools and libraries. She is also passionate about supporting #OwnVoices books by autistic authors, and thinks that every library collection should include them. Adriana has earned Master's degrees in Education and Information Science, with specializations in Special Education and Storytelling, respectively. She can be found on Twitter at @Adriana_Edu, where she tweets about autism, libraries, and diverse books – especially books by #AutisticAuthors!