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To: **Robbie**Subject: **My dilemma**From: **Mark**

Hi Robbie

How were your holidays and how are things back home in Trinidad? I'm glad you're back because I could do with some advice. You never know when a dilemma is going to creep up on you and I've got one now.

The thing is that the school I'm teaching at has announced a book day.

All the staff and pupils are asked to dress up as a character from children's fiction. I wanted to choose a Black character. I am a Black Caribbean man after all. The thing is, I couldn't think of any that the children would recognise -- nobody as well known as Max from 'Where the Wild things are', Bernard from 'Not Now Bernard', Charlie from 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' or Tin-Tin. The more I tried to come up with something, the more frustrated I got. You know some of the kids I teach are West Indian, African and Asian but the central characters in the stories they write are all White. There is something wrong there don't you think? ☹️

At least back in Trinidad there were lots of Black and Indian people on TV and in the news. It seemed people like us could be at the centre of things. Kids over here don't seem to get that. Anyway I asked a few colleagues.

One White guy said other things were as important to identity as colour or ethnic background -- things like whether the characters were good people. He is coming as Harry Potter.

A fellow Trinidadian has chosen a character. He wouldn't tell me who it was though, in case I nicked his idea. He'd spent the whole day in a library looking through the children's section. He said is going to suggest that non-fiction be allowed next year.

I did find a story-book with a minor character, a father, who is quite like me. A colleague thought that might be a bit 'boring'. She's Black and from Trinidad too but she's coming as Snow White because she says folk tales are exciting and 'universal'. She wants to be the fairest of them all I guess. 😊

A Muslim teacher is coming as a character called Birbal. That's pretty interesting actually. It turns out he was the hero of many Indian folk tales and really existed in the sixteenth century. In the stories, the Moghul ruler turns to him for advice and Birbal is very clever. The stories are pretty funny but I don't think the kids know them very well.

What do you think? Can you suggest anything? I'd like my kids to be able to see themselves and people like them as being significant in school.

Cheers
Your friend
Mark