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# FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE OF COLOUR WRITERS COUNT

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First Year College

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Version 1.0

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# Acknowledgement

The project team would like to thank the funders who supported this project, especially the Australian Cultural Fund and all who donated via this site and directly to Victoria University. This research has only been made possible through your generosity.

## Summary

The *First Nations and People of Colour Writers Count* (henceforth FNPOC Writers Count) sought to identify the publication rate of books in 2018 that were by Australian authors who were First Nations people or People of Colour. The purpose of the project was to develop the first large-scale numerical dataset that illustrated the inequity in Australia's publishing industry that has been anecdotally observed for many years. The project was led by Chief Investigator, Dr Natalie Kon-yu, of Victoria University. As the Chief Investigator, Kon-yu recruited two advisory committees, comprised First Nations and People of Colour writers, academics, editors and advocates within Australia, which contributed to the project at various times. 2018 was chosen as the sample year because the project was announced and began seeking funding in 2019. Then-UTS PhD student Emily Booth was contracted as the Research Assistant for the FNPOC Writers Count project by the Executive Committee in January 2020. She also donated the picture book data from her past project with *Voices from the Intersection* to the FNPOC Writers Count.

This count is an Australian first, and so is of enormous significance. It found that in Australia in 2018, of the published books surveyed (picture books, children's books, young adult books, poetry books, non-fiction and fiction) only 3% of all books were published by Australian First Nations authors, and only 7% were published by writers who identified as People of Colour.

## Method

The FNPOC Writers Count focused on the following categories of books: non-fiction, fiction<sup>1</sup>, poetry, Young Adult books, children's literature, and picture books. This project sourced a definition for Person of Colour from the OECD<sup>2</sup>, which was interpreted by the Executive Committee as a person of non-European ancestry. Author information was sought from professional, published public materials, such as author bios, interviews, and publisher marketing resources. Data was de-identified, and analysed by Chief Investigator Dr Kon-yu with consultation with the advisory committees.

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<sup>1</sup> "Fiction" refers to any fiction books published for adult readers, rather than teenagers or children.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC\(2018\)9&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC(2018)9&docLanguage=En)

# Parameters

Data was collected by counting the number of authors in each author and book category. There were two main book categories:

- ◆ the number of books by author demographic, and
- ◆ the number of books by author demographic in each category of literature (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, Young Adult books, children’s literature, and picture books).

Data for fiction and non-fiction books was further disaggregated according to form.

# Results

The total number of books in the 2018 sample used in this project was 1531.

The numbers in this report reflect the number of **books (not authors)** per category presented in its de-identified state. As a result of co-authoring and anthologies, many sections of numbers do not add up to an even total, because these books may be counted in multiple categories based on their authors.

The following abbreviations are used in Figures:

- FN First Nations
- POC People of Colour
- I FN International First Nations

## 1. Number of books by author demographic

Out of the 1531 books in the project sample, just 40 were by First Nations authors (3%). There were 111 books by People of Colour (7%), and two books by International First Nations authors (<1%). The total number of books with Other authors—those who could not be identified as First Nations, a Person of Colour, or an International First Nations person—was 1397 (90%). This data is depicted in Figure 1.

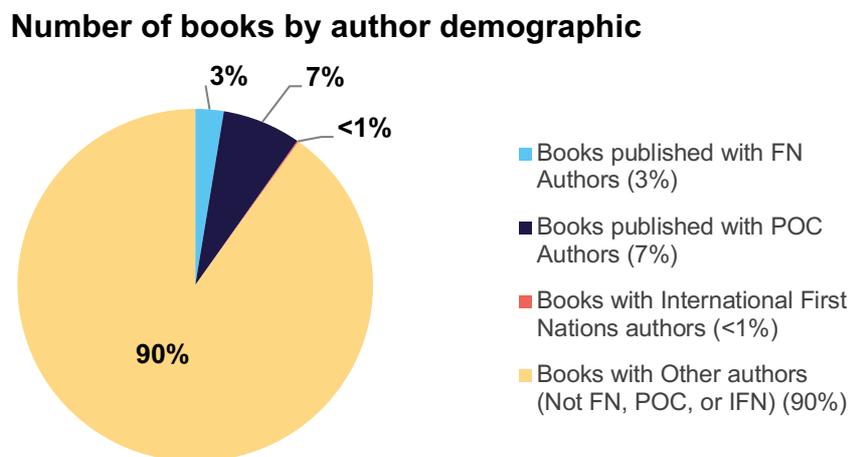


Figure 1.

## 2. Number of books by author demographic in each category of literature

### Fiction

The total number of fiction books in the project was 481. Within this, just 5 were by First Nations authors, 32 were by People of Colour, one was by an International First Nations author, and 445 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 2.

**Number of fiction books by author demographic**

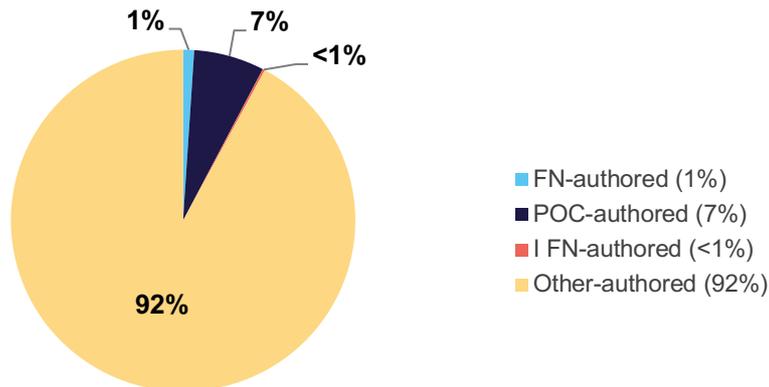


Figure 2.

Within the 481 fiction books, 410 of these were prose novels. Within this, there were 3 novels by First Nations authors, 24 by People of Colour, one by an International First Nations author, and 382 by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 3.

**Number of fiction novels by author demographic**

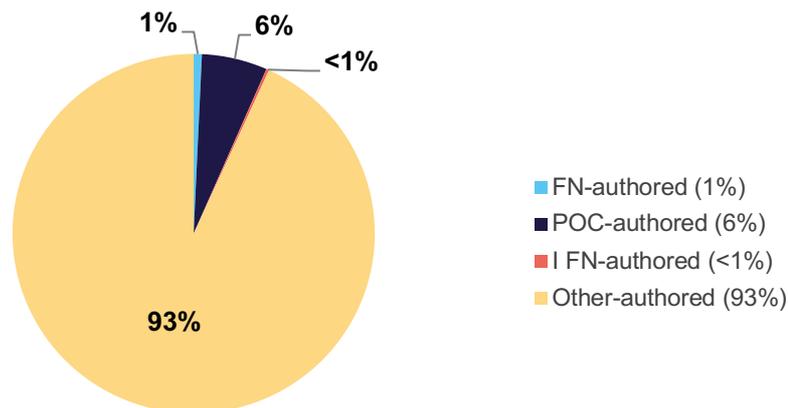


Figure 3.

There were 71 fiction books that were not prose novels, including graphic novels, novellas, satire/comedy books, and short stories. Of these books, two were by First Nations authors, eight were by People of Colour, none were by International First Nations authors, and 63 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 4.

### Number of fiction – other books by author demographic

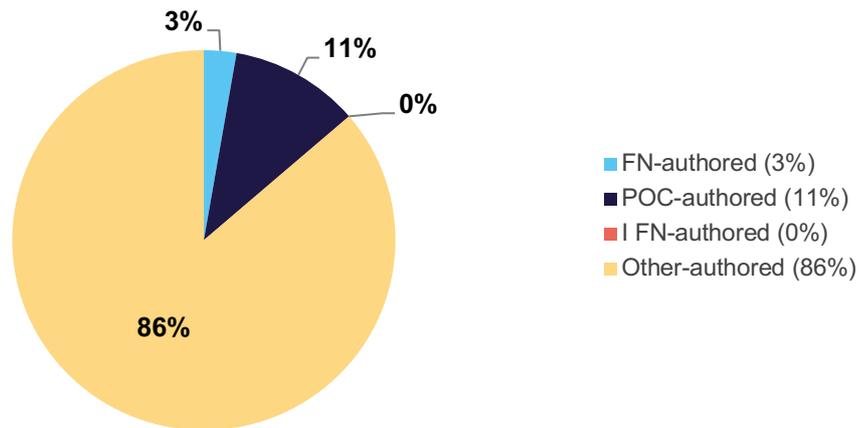


Figure 4.

### Non-Fiction

The total number of non-fiction books in the project sample was 237. Within this, 14 were by First Nations authors, 18 were by People of Colour, one was by an International First Nations author, and 212 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 5.

### Number of non-fiction books by author demographic

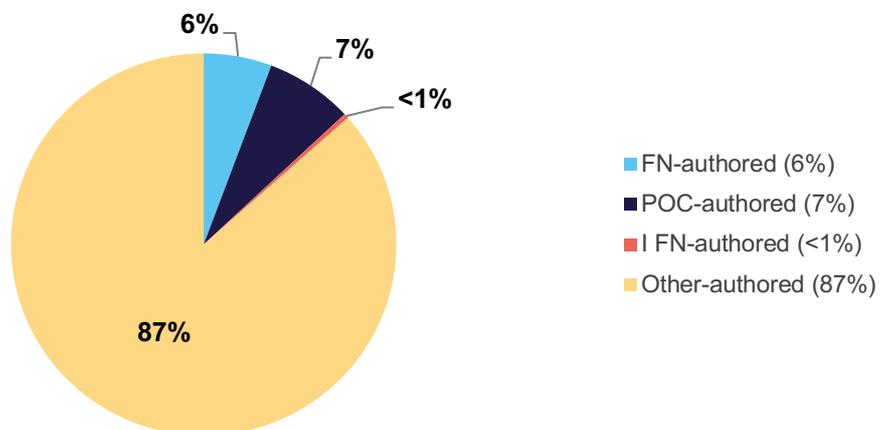


Figure 5.

### Poetry

The total number of poetry books in the project sample was 208. Within this, three had First Nations authors, 23 were by People of Colour, none were by International First Nations authors, and 184 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 6.

### Number of poetry books by author demographic

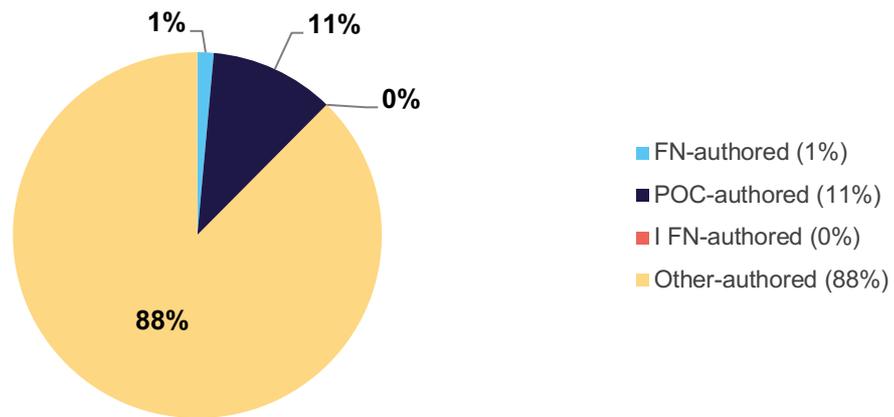


Figure 6.

### Young Adult books

The total number of young adult books in the sample was 76. Within this, two were by First Nations authors, two were by People of Colour, none were by International First Nations authors, and 72 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 7.

### Number of young adult books by author demographic

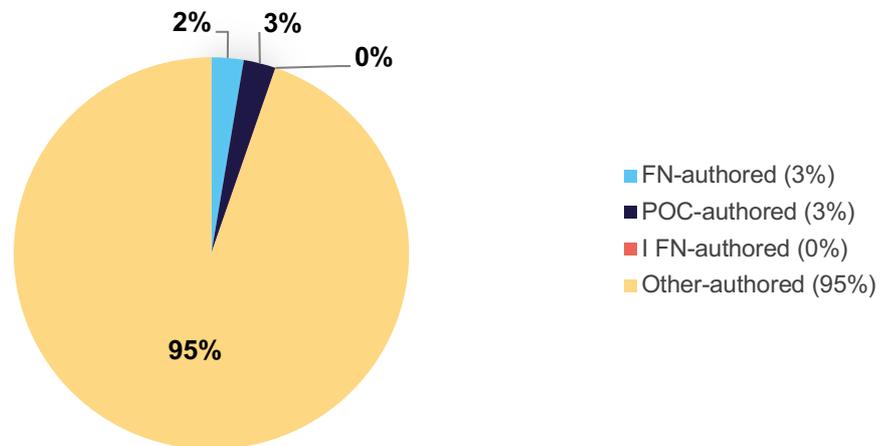


Figure 7.

### Children's Literature

The total number of children's books in the sample was 245. Within this, eight were by First Nations authors, 28 were by People of Colour, none were by International First Nations authors, and 212 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 8.

### Number of children's books by author demographic

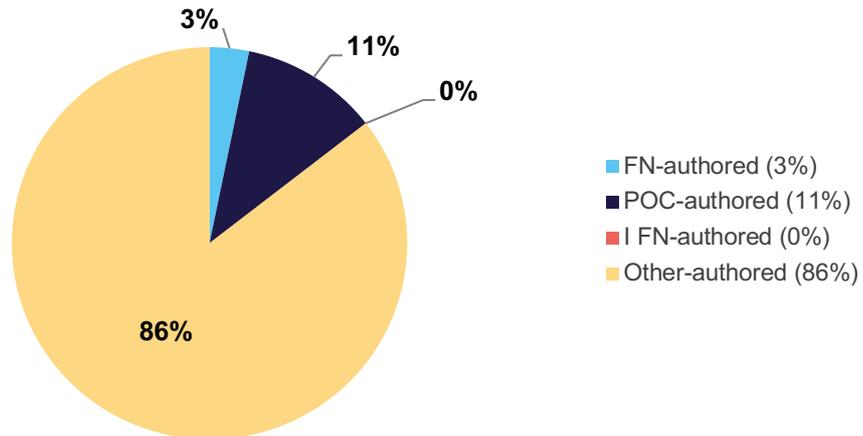


Figure 8.

### Picture books

The total number of picture books in the sample was 284. Within this, eight were by First Nations authors, eight were by People of Colour, none were by International First Nations authors, and 268 were by Other authors. This data is depicted in Figure 9.

### Number of picture books by author demographic

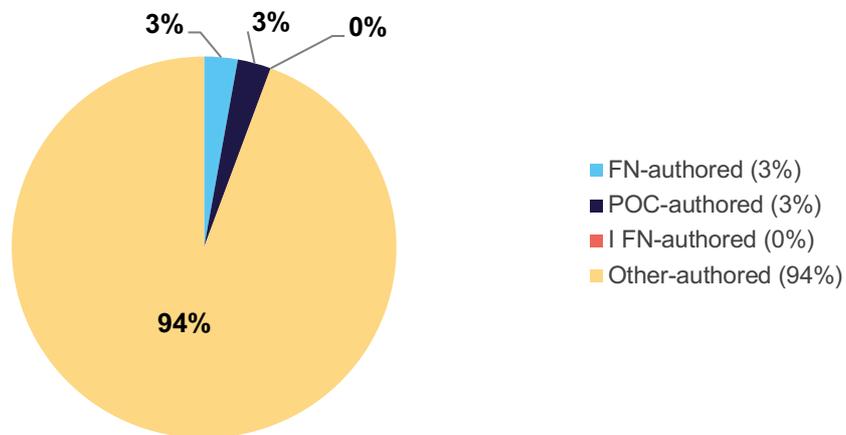


Figure 9.

## Conclusions

The findings of the inaugural FNPOC Writers Count reveal a stark disparity between the number of books published by First Nations people, People of Colour, and International First Nations people traditionally published in Australia in 2018, and those by Other authors who could not be identified as belonging to any of these aforementioned demographics. Importantly, this disparity is further highlighted when considered against these groups' proportion of the population in Australia.

This disparity also stands despite any potential for minor inaccuracies in our count arising from some authors being counted as 'Other' who simply have not (freely and clearly in a professional context) disclosed their membership of any of the groups focussed on in this project. While we acknowledge the potential for some inexactness to arise, the FNPOC Writers Count's focus was only on authors who publicly and freely identified themselves as First Nations, a Person of Colour, or an International First Nations person in their professional context, fully respecting the right of authors to not disclose this information. It is also for this reason that the 'Other' author category should not be considered synonymous with 'white' or 'European'; it is an aggregated category of those who did not fit the other three criteria *and* those about whom information could not be sourced.

The publication of books by First Nations authors requires no justification: as the traditional owners of the land now called Australia, they are inherently deserving of the space at the forefront of the publishing industry. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported based on the 2016 Census, 21% of Australians speak a language other than English at home, such as Mandarin, Arabic, Cantonese, and Vietnamese<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, on the basis of the inaugural FNPOC Writers Count, the total number of books published in 2018 authored by Australian First Nations authors was only 3% and by People of Colour was only 7%. Writers from communities such as these are therefore significantly underrepresented in the publishing industry.

This project provides reliable data about the level of under-representation to support efforts for greater inclusion in Australia's publishing industry. Increasing equity in the Australian publishing industry by publishing more books by First Nations authors, People of Colour, and International First Nations authors is not just for the benefit of readers from these communities—it is for all Australians whose lives will be enriched by the stories, perspectives and understanding these writers can share.

## References

"Snapshot of Australia, 2016." *Australian Bureau of Statistics*. Australian Government, 23 Oct. 2017, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Snapshot%20of%20Australia,%202016~2](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Snapshot%20of%20Australia,%202016~2). (Archived by WebCite® at [www.webcitation.org/6xpjxVQ1y](http://www.webcitation.org/6xpjxVQ1y)).

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<sup>3</sup> These statistics do not take into account First Nations languages spoken in the home.

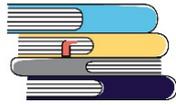
# FIRST NATIONS AND PEOPLE OF COLOUR COUNT

(FNPOC Count)

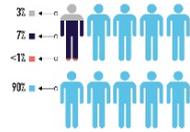
First large-scale numerical dataset that illustrated the inequity in Australia's publishing industry

**1531**

books<sup>1</sup> published in Australia in the 2018 sample used in this project



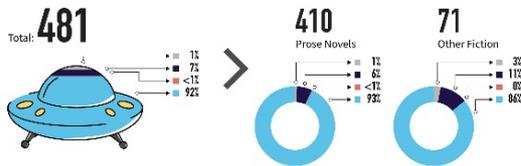
Books by author demographic



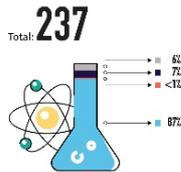
**KEY** ■ First Nations authors ■ People of Colour authors ■ International First Nations authors<sup>1</sup> ■ Other authors

## Books by author demographic in each category of literature

### FICTION



### NON-FICTION



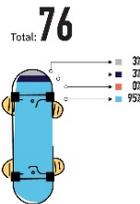
### POETRY



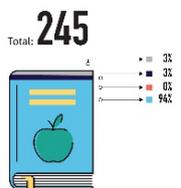
### CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



### YOUNG ADULT BOOKS



### PICTURE BOOKS



#### The findings reveal a stark disparity.

This disparity is further highlighted when considered against these groups' proportion of the population in Australia.

The publication of books by First Nations authors requires no justification: as the Traditional Owners of the land now called Australia, they are inherently deserving of the space at the forefront of the publishing industry.

Increasing equity in the Australian publishing industry by publishing more books by First Nations authors, People of Colour, and International First Nations authors is not just for the benefit of readers from these communities—it is for all Australians whose lives will be enriched by the stories, perspectives and understanding these writers can share.

<sup>1</sup> Includes December 2022

<sup>2</sup> Proportion of Pacific peoples in the population of Australia (2021) | Australian Bureau of Statistics

<sup>3</sup> Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The number in this report refers to the number of books published per category and book, not the number of titles.

<sup>2</sup> As noted in our previous report, the proportion of First Nations authors in the publishing industry is significantly lower than the proportion of First Nations people in the population.

<sup>3</sup> This report is based on the FNPOC Count 2018 dataset.

<sup>4</sup> Further details on the methodology used to collect the data are available in the report.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the methodology used to collect the data, see the report.

<sup>6</sup> See the report for more information on the methodology used to collect the data.