

# Shadows & Soot

**ERIF Brand  
& Product  
Study  
2024**



PIET BOEK ORNAMENT  
GLAS HARS  
2700000

# Shadows and Soot

## ERIF Brand & Product Study 2024

**Cover art:**

Photograph of Sinterklaas merchandise  
at a Xenos store in Meppel, the Netherlands,  
taken during ERIF's *Brand and Product study*  
2023 in-store data collection.

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## Acknowledgements

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To organisations Kick Out Zwarte Piet, Bij1, Nederland Wordt Beter, New Urban Collective, The Black Archives, One World, Afrispectives, Ocan and so many more—thank you for your continuing, tireless and courageous efforts to make the Netherlands safe for everyone, especially during these trying times. We will continue to follow, valorise and archive the important work that you're doing. We stand with you!

# Introduction

This year, 2024, the UN International Decade for People of African Descent comes to an end (United Nations, n.d.). This ending coincides with the forming of a far right-wing cabinet in the Dutch government, helmed by the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid/Party for Freedom). Indeed, European politics continues to move ever-rightward, putting the safety of all racially minoritised peoples even more at risk, and the xenophobic and polarising ideologies of Geert Wilders' PVV cast a long and palpable shadow in the Netherlands. For example, following the PVV's clear win at the November 2023 Dutch general elections, Wilders voiced his support for the return of Zwarte Piet in the Sinterklaas parades. In typical nativist-nationalist fashion, the pro-Piet camp feel that any alterations to their beloved festival, including the removal of racial mimicry and derision, is an insult to their culture and a sign that their position in Dutch society is being displaced. Wilders' statement implies not mere political support, but explicit political encouragement for white people to dress up in blackface to jeer at people of African descent, while mockingly performing as the enslaved caricature.

Therefore, we publish our ninth annual *Sinterklaas Brand and Product* report on the same day as *Keti Koti*, which means "broken chains" in Sranantongo. *Keti Koti* is held each year across the European Netherlands, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles on July 1st to commemorate the nominal end of the enslavement of Africans by the Dutch in 1863. Our year-on-year research chronicles how the sustained criticism of Zwarte Piet impacts the festival by influencing stores and brands, who in turn shape "Sinterklaas" with how they market the festival's mythology, as well as with the very products they sell. This research has always been a longitudinal study on how marketing relates to (racialised) belonging on one hand, and an archival testament to the effectiveness of anti-racist campaign work on the other. In just over a decade, activists and concerned citizens across the Netherlands have strived tirelessly and begun to reform one of the biggest holidays in the country, so that every family can participate and be included with dignity. We know that whatever the new Dutch government brings, these activists' work will continue and ERIF will also persevere by recording the ebbs and flows of their triumphs.

This year's report features quantitative and qualitative data collected during the 2023 Sinterklaas season (October to December) by fieldworkers across the country. In this year's report, we explore the shifts emerging around grade 2 Sinterklaas products (items and decorations featuring a silhouette or partially hidden Piet character), which continue to squeeze the overall share. We will show how this contributes to the ongoing shrinkage of grade 1 (merchandise with no reference to the Piet character whatsoever), which used to be a dominant category of products in our research. The so-called "sooty Piet" presence (grade 5 and 5a) continues to fluctuate as various brands, stores and other platforms play with this narrative instead of using all out blackface. At the other end of the spectrum, derogatory cartoon imagery meant to depict people of African descent (grades 7 and 8) continues to decline. However, this year's report investigates if (Zwarte) Piet is any less racist when he's shrouded in soot and shadows.

## 2023 to 2024 Dutch Sociopolitical Developments

As we mentioned briefly in our previous report (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2023), at the time we were collecting the data for this report, the PVV effectively won the Dutch general elections. While it has now been definitively ruled out that Geert Wilders will be the next Prime Minister of the Netherlands, at that time it was considered a distinct possibility, as his party won 23,5% of the votes, resulting in 37 seats in parliament for the party (Kiesraad, 2023). Since then, a largely right-wing coalition of (liberal-conservative VVD, centrist-conservative NSC and the right-wing farmers movement BBB) has been formed (Dutch News, 2024), leading social justice advocates in the Netherlands to consider what the future holds for our campaign work, especially regarding national cultural moments such as Sinterklaas. Immediately following the election results, Wilders and his supporters descended on Rijswijk to proclaim that with him their Sinterklaas parade would once again feature blackface performances (Rijswijk Dagblad, 2023).

In the meantime, PVV candidate minister for International Trade and Development Aid, Reinette Klever, has in the past been seen on national television supporting the blackface performance of Zwarte Piet, and has been vocal about this version of the figure “belonging to the Sinterklaas festivities” in the Netherlands (NOS Nieuws, 2024). Moreover, Klever has recently reiterated her support for the continued use of blackface during the festival (Nederlands Dagblad, 2024). As if this was not already bad enough, the parliament President Martin Bosma (also of the PVV) planned to take up the government representative role of attending *Keti Koti* to lay a wreath. While last year, King Willem-Alexander attended the annual commemoration to the nominal end of the Dutch enslavement of African in Suriname, thousands signed a petition against Bosma’s attendance to such a precious and sacred event for Dutch people of Afro-Surinamese descent, because of his known and overt racist ideologies (Afro Magazine, 2024)<sup>1</sup>. Such assertions and invasions evoke white nativist narratives that have abounded in the last decade throughout Europe and North America, evoking an imaginary “good old days” rooted in very real racial violence and domination. Furthermore, the 2024 European election results mirrored Wilders’ victory in the Netherlands, with a widespread surge of radical right and right-wing extremist parties (Henley, 2023; Augusteijn, 2024; Sanaullah, 2024). In short, Wilders, his followers and similar parties across Europe are pledging to put non-white people in the Netherlands and elsewhere (back) in their rightful place(s) (Holligan, 2023). In the Dutch context, what better way to do this than to reinstate the most emblematic depiction of white Dutch supremacy: Zwarte Piet.

Indeed, this scandalous spectacle has always been illustrative of Dutch racism, rather than defining it in its own right. For years now, we have witnessed a more encouraging shift in perspectives on the depiction of Zwarte Piet. EenVandaag’s annual poll measuring public opinions on whether or not the Zwarte Piet character should be reimagined showed in 2023 how for four years in a row, just over 50% of respondents think the Zwarte Piet character should remain the same (i.e., in blackface), compared to just over 30% who believe the caricature should change (EenVandaag, 2023). In terms of how this denial for change manifests itself, it extends beyond the realm of Sinterklaas. One can consider the Dutch football fan Bart van de Ven in Poland who dressed up in blackface to depict Dutch football legend Ruud Gullit (Dutch News, 2024c). It is shameful that Van de Ven thought he could obscure his obscene behaviour by being in Poland (rather than the Netherlands) on one hand, and by dressing up as a football player instead of as a Piet on the other. The football fan

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<sup>1</sup> Eventually, due to the backlash, the 2024 *Keti Koti* organising committee rescinded Bosma’s invitation. At the time of writing, there will be no government representative at this year’s official *Keti Koti* celebrations (Dutch News, 2024b).



seemed to think his actions were less racist because he was not depicting Zwarte Piet, as though that's the only form of blackface that is racist. However, to view Zwarte Piet as the be all and end all of Dutch racism whole-heartedly and quite conveniently in this case misses the point that the caricature is in fact little more than an example of Dutch racism. This recalls the observations we will go on to analyse later in this year's report, as we see an increasing number of brands and stores attempt to obscure their various depictions of Pieten.

EenVandaag's research indicated more than half (54%) of respondents find the "sooty" Piet acceptable (Lubbe, 2023). Our own research of the commercial sector has also been able to demonstrate that the most racist depictions of the Piet character are displayed less than 10% of the time in Sinterklaas marketing and advertising. Anti-racist scholars and campaigns have hoped that in spite of very real racism, such results might nonetheless indicate that in general the Netherlands is slowly becoming a more inclusive country, open to the possibility of true belonging for all. On the other hand, a recent report discussed in *Trouw* shows that even Black Dutch children believe you're not *really* Dutch unless you're white (Van Nuland, 2024), demonstrating the devastating impact of othering and white supremacist imagery and narratives on how children see themselves.

Moreover, even while major institutions such as the European Commission recognise the importance of uplifting and valourising Black histories, presents and futures (e.g., the EC's first commemoration to slavery in December 2023<sup>2</sup> and their recent funding call—European Commission, 2024), anti-Black racism continues all across the continent (FRA, 2023; ENAR, 2024). The so-called increased institutional inclusivity being promoted around us does not necessarily converse with the realities faced by racially minoritised individuals and communities. We cannot simply pretend things are getting better just because we wish them so—this is tantamount to a colonial amnesia where we don't take proper accountability for, or face the true nature of our histories and their resulting challenges (Nourhussen, 2023; Fatah-Black, 2024). The fact that *Keti Koti* is still not recognised as an official, national commemoration day in the Netherlands—evidenced by the 2024 petition launched by leading members of the Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) campaign, among others<sup>3</sup>—illustrates how little Black narratives of resistance, liberation and belonging matter within the mainstream (read: white) Dutch collective mind (Nederland Wordt Beter, 2024; Nwanazia, 2024). In turn, the fact that *Keti Koti* is not valorised in this way leads to its importance being somewhat diminished in the collective Dutch consciousness, especially outside of the *Randstad*. Thus, these two factors are in a cyclical relation to each other, and their interplay reinforces the Dutch wilful ignorance surrounding its colonial past(s).

Therefore, as the Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) coalition prepares to bring its longstanding campaign work to a close in December 2025 (Heyblom, 2024), we must acknowledge that this important work of making the Netherlands safer and fairer for all (especially in this case the racially minoritised) is far from finished. For example, research such as that conducted by the FRA (2023) demonstrates that the lives of people of African descent are under siege across Europe, including in the Netherlands. The threat of KOZP demonstrations in 2023 caused the towns of Zwijndrecht, Rijswijk, Drunen and Koudekerk aan den Rijn to each change their Sinterklaas arrival parade plans (NOS Nieuws, 2023a). Thus, this shows that the sustained and long-term anti-racism work of these activists are not only applying pressure to stores and brands, but to public celebrations of Sinterklaas as well (NOS Nieuws, 2023b). At the same time, however, events in De Lier—where anti-Piet demonstrators were attacked by racist thugs with fireworks—shows the risks of visibly standing up against racism in the Netherlands, especially when it concerns a topic as contentious as Sinterklaas (NOS Nieuws, 2023c).

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<sup>2</sup> Incidentally (although most likely coincidentally), the EC's commemorative conference at the European Parliament, to the legacies of the trafficking and enslavement of people of African descent by European powers was held on the 5th December, when many Dutch households celebrated Sinterklaas.

<sup>3</sup> Other organisations supporting this campaign include Nederland Wordt Beter, The Black Archives, De Goede Zaak, FUNX, as well as internationally-known Dutch brands Tony's Chocolonely and LUSH (Nederland Wordt Beter, 2024).



Who should be responsible for picking up the mantle that KOZP will leave behind next year? With the waves of right-wing political support, how will brands stand up and continue to roll back the image of Zwarte Piet in the face of such fierce backlash? Will they stand up at all?

# Methodology

## Data Collection

The methodological approach for this longitudinal project consists of both online categorisation and analysis, and in-store observations techniques, which were conducted between October and December 2023 for this report. While most of the results presented below are based on analyses of products and advertisements from the specific stores this project usually follows year-on-year, some results also come from more general “neighbourhood” observations, which helps to add a social context to the research. Currently our study routinely assesses the products and advertisements from the following stores: Albert Heijn, Jumbo, Plus, HEMA, Blokker, Jamin, Ekoplaza, Intertoys, Kruidvat, Etos and Xenos (both in-store and online), and Bol.com (online only).

The online phase of the research takes place over three sessions, where the team collects Sinterklaas-specific products to review and grade via the given store’s website (see Table 1 for the grades used and the Analysis section for more details on this process). This part of the research is completed by an internal ERIF study team. For Bol.com analyses, unlike with other stores (such as Albert Heijn or Blokker, where all Sinterklaas items available are reviewed), only the first 15 items that come up on a “Sinterklaas” search, per category, are reviewed for the study. The categories used for the Bol.com selection are: music, DVDs, books, toys, puzzles and games, decorations, costumes and, lastly, babies and toddlers. Where historically, we have entered only “Sinterklaas” as a search term in each of the respective store websites, we noticed during the research for the report published in 2022 that in the case of certain stores, only using the “Sinterklaas” search term meant that some Piet-specific products (specifically costumes) were not appearing in the results, showing that certain stores have begun tagging specific Sinterklaas products (i.e., Piet-related merchandise) differently so that it does not appear alongside the rest of their Sinterklaas assortment. Therefore, since 2021, we systematically include the “Piet” search term as well as “Sinterklaas” in order to get a more accurate and reliable data collection. For Bol.com we limit the data collection to the first 10 items that come up following a “Piet” search; with the other stores we continue to review and grade all items. In all cases, we control for duplicates (i.e., items that come up for both the “Sinterklaas” and “Piet” search terms). Accordingly, we statistically analyse all of the results (from both “Sinterklaas” and “Piet” search terms) together (as you can review in the Results chapter below), as we consider this to be a more complete way to understand this data.

Generally, in-store observational fieldwork takes place more continuously over two months (rather than in only three individual sessions), and includes a broader fieldwork team who are active throughout the Netherlands (see Figure 1) to carry out the observations. In addition to reviewing Sinterklaas-specific products, the observation team also pays attention to how a store is decorated and how promotional displays are used within the building to showcase seasonal products (both third-party and/or home-brand). Based on what is viewed in-store, a comparison with what has been found via the shop’s website can be made. At times, the sale of certain products is the result of a specific franchise using up old stock, or store decorations can also be based on the cultural views of shop managers. In-store and neighbourhood fieldwork also allow us to witness Sinterklaas-specific products and window displays for smaller, non-franchised local stores, such as gift shops, book dealers and bakeries, to give an insight into racist imagery being used outside of the chain stores we focus this research on.

The in-store fieldwork teams usually capture anything that is easily viewable without disturbing other shoppers and/or staff, as well as refraining from drawing too much attention, which may cause harm to or result in expressions of hostility towards the fieldworker.

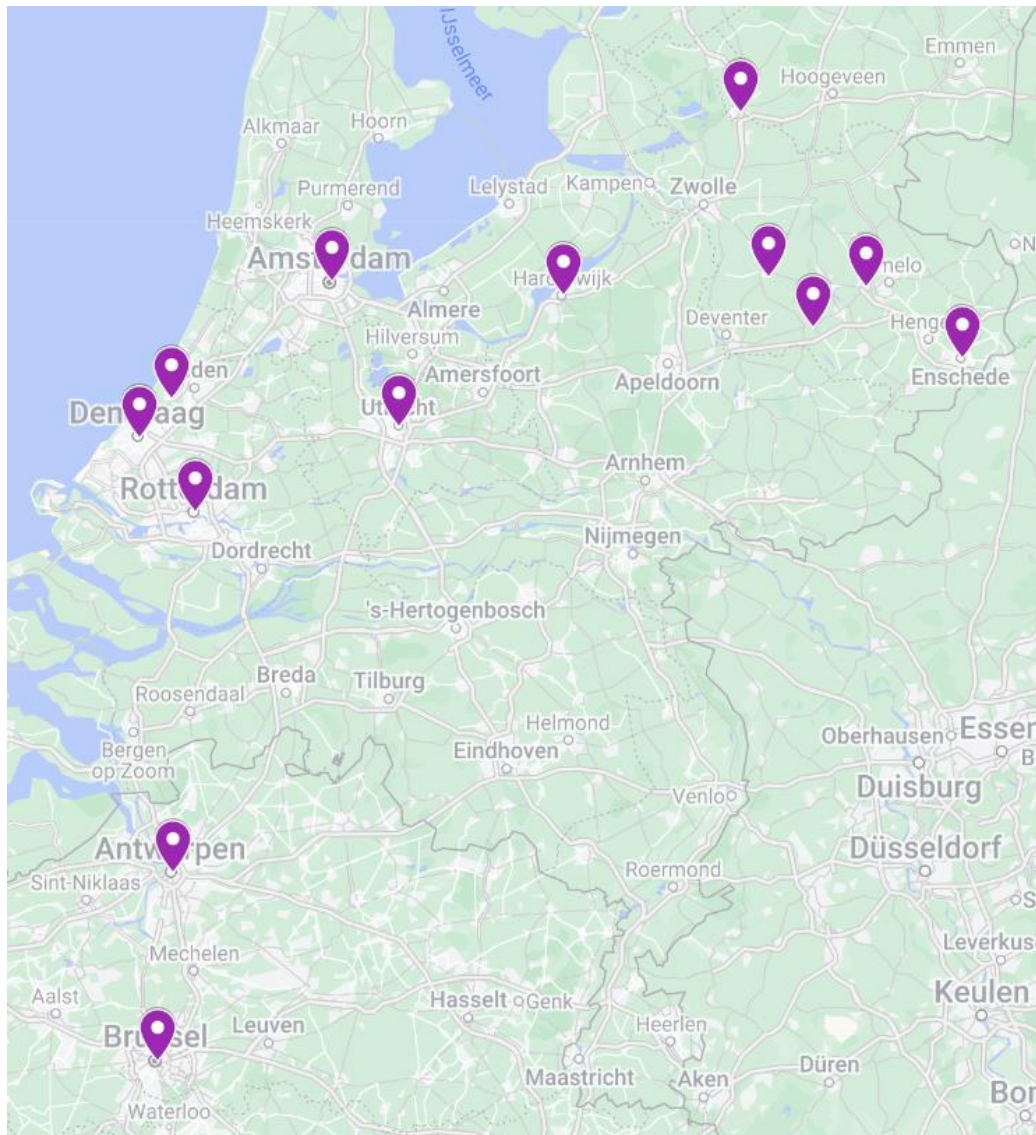


Figure 1. Map of in-store data collection locations (2023).

## Analysis

ERIF currently uses 11 grades (see Table 1) to categorise the various products and displays collected by the research team during online research, as well as the imagery captured in stores. The grades range from grade 1 (no visible references to the Piet character) to grade 8 (usage of imagery featuring a real, white person in blackface). When a product or ad using images that could be analysed using more than one grade, we record the highest grade. The grades between 1 and 8 show a general movement towards more anti-Black versions of the Piet character, culminating in the use of explicit racial stereotypes and blackface. However, this is not to say the grades at the top of the table are entirely unproblematic.

Grade Code	Grade Description
1	No Piet character visible on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
2	Silhouette/shadow of a Piet-like figure on Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
2a	Piets presented as (cartoon and/or stuffed) animals and/or other non-human creatures, on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
3	White Piet (either real person or cartoon) with no face-paint of any kind on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
4	Multiple Piets portrayed by or as having (cartoon or real) any racialised identity (incl. white!), with no face paint of any kind, on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
4a	Women (and/or girl-gendered children), or men (or boy-gendered children) of colour (i.e., non-white) dressed up as Sint (real or cartoon). These depictions can be accompanied by Piets portrayed by/as having any racialised identity .
5	White Piets (real or cartoon) with “sooty” faces on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
5a	Non-white Piets (real or cartoon) with “sooty” faces on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
6	Multi-coloured (with the use of face-paint) Piets (real or cartoon) on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
7	Real or cartoon Piets (exclusively and explicitly) portrayed as having African features or by Black people, with a traditional Piet costume, with no white Piets presented. Only when analysing cartoons, includes caricature references.
8	Real white people only (i.e., in photographs) wearing blackface to portray Zwarte Piet, with exaggerated stereotypical, racist features on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.

Table 1: Analysis grades and explanations.

## Changes and challenges in 2023-2024 research cycle

Unlike as was shown in the last report (with 2022 data), we were unable to collect much in-store data from the north and south of the Netherlands in 2023. As has often been the case in previous research cycles, this brings the risk that the qualitative data analysed is focused on the *Ranstad*. However, in 2023 (as Figure 1 shows) our team made additional efforts to reach the eastern parts of the country to off-set the possibility that the results and conclusions would be too *Ranstad*-centred.

The Jamin website no longer features a search function, which means shoppers must browse the products more generally after filling in a Dutch postcode. We checked postcodes for Den Haag and Almelo. After a full review of the Jamin website in 2023, we were only able to find

chocolate letters in terms of Sinterklaas-specific produce. The Den Haag search offered more products than Almelo, but the latter location didn't give any new or different products. Our in-store fieldworkers based in Den Haag visited the Jamin store in the city centre to verify what we found online. Additionally, both Bol.com and Blokker adapted the lay outs of their websites so that it is necessary to specify category as well as either "Sinterklaas" and/or "Piet" when searching. Previously it was possible to simply select a product category and search from there. More generally, when analysing the collections of stores offering books, we have made increased use of "look inside" functions where available, as often imagery inside books can be analysed as a higher grade than that which is used on the cover.

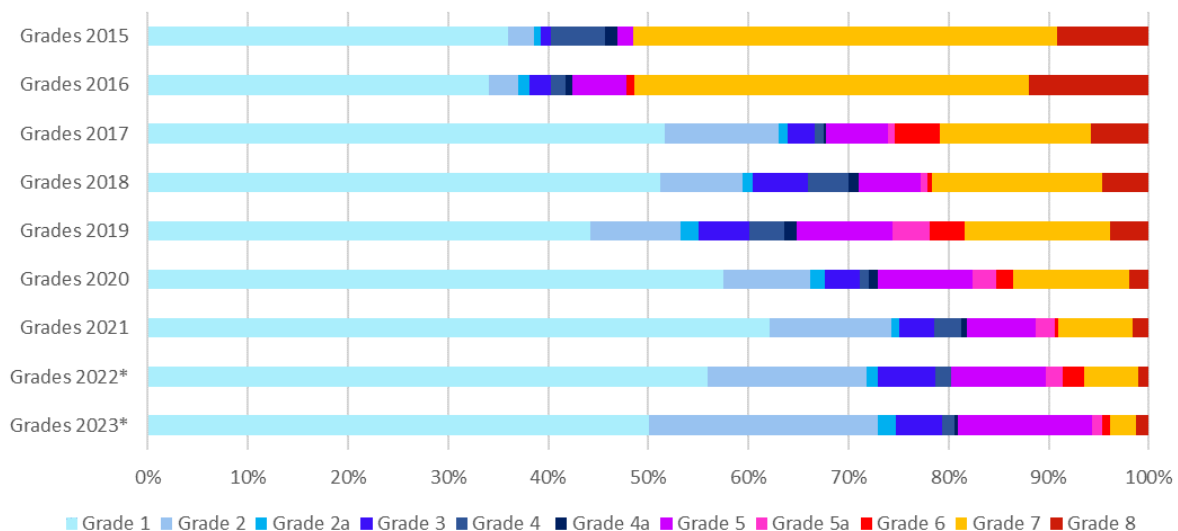
**NB: ERIF would like to issue a TRIGGER WARNING for the remaining chapters of this report, with regards to their imagery, which some readers may find distressing.**

# Results of the 2023 Online and In-store Data Collection

## Results overview

As explained in the previous *Methodology* chapter, we have fully integrated an additional, specific “Piet” search into our online data collection and results analysis, which provides additional products for certain stores. Nonetheless, when we applied this additional search to the stores Ekoplaza and Plus, we did not see new products. Meanwhile, due to structural changes on both Jamin, Blokker and Bol.com’s websites, we had to adjust the manner in which we reviewed the Sinterklaas and (Zwarte) Piet content. At the moment, this has not prevented us from finding comparable results to our previous search cycles and reports. However, this does have implications for our methodological approaches, which we will need to review going forward in our research.

Grades 2 and 5 continue to grow in their share of the results, as well as grade 2a; collectively these grades amount to 39% of the total share, demonstrating sneaky, shadowy, animal and sooty Pieten are becoming more popular (see Graph 1). At the same time, the grade 1 share is decreasing for the second year in a row, now dropping just below the 50% mark. This therefore implies that more ambiguous depictions of the Piet figure are considered more palatable and sellable by brands.



Graph 1. Overall grade share per year 2015-2023 (%). \*Includes results for 'Piet' search term.

As shown by our previous reports, multiple brands and stores continue to offer a wide variety of flavours of chocolate letters and *kruidnoten*, two key Sinterklaas products. In general, the online Sinterklaas assortment for Ekoplaza remains significantly lower than other stores, as we will explore further below. Intertoys and Etos also don't have many Sinterklaas-specific products this year.

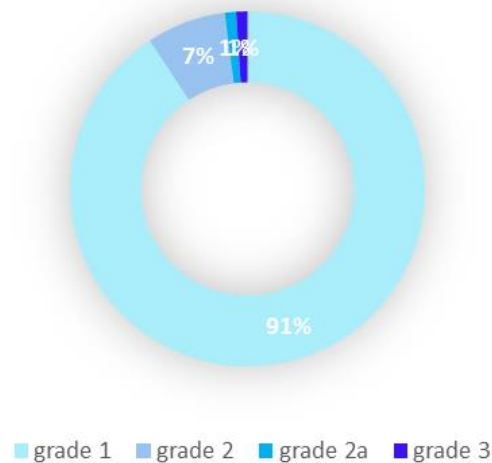
## Supermarket and department store overview

### Albert Heijn

At Albert Heijn the grade 1 share actually increases slightly (from 86% in 2022 to 91% in 2023). This goes against the more general trend of the research, which has seen grade 1 shrink. The



products assessed through data collection were analysed with four different grades this year instead of three, but no grade 7 products were found online for the first time since 2018, making grade 3 the highest grade found online this year (see Graph 2).



Graph 2. Albert Heijn grade share (2023).

In-store observations did, however, result in grade 7 observations of decorations in Albert Heijn stores in the eastern part of the country, namely Raalte and Wierden (see Figures 2 and 3).

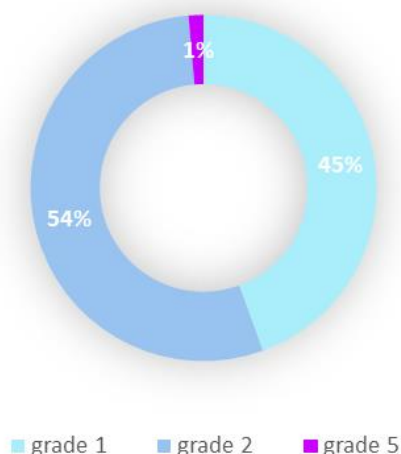


L: Figure 2. Grade 7 puppet at Albert Heijn, Raalte, 2023. R: Figure 3. Grade 7 puppet at Albert Heijn, Wierden, 2023.

Of the many different kinds of *kruidnoten* available at Albert Heijn (online, we counted 32 varieties), most of those are of the Albert Heijn home brand, with the brands Bolletje and Van Delft coming second and third, all of which were graded 1. Chocolate letters were dominated by Albert Heijn's home brand too, followed closely by Dutch "slavery free" chocolate brand Tony's Chocolonely. Both the Albert Heijn home brand and Tony's were graded 1 in 2023, showing that the latter brand has turned a significant corner in terms of its branding; as late as 2021 Tony's still had grade 2 packaging for its chocolate letters. There were very few Sinterklaas-related products for sale online at the Albert Heijn that were not food products, which is consistent with what we generally observe in our research of supermarkets.

## Jumbo

The confusing and varying branding we observed and analysed at supermarket Jumbo, which we especially remarked upon in the two previous reports, seems to have come to a sudden halt in 2023 in large part as a result of Jumbo's home branding being much more consistent. The products graded in 2023 consist mostly of grade 2 branding and to a lesser extent grade 1. The result is a doubling of the grade 2 share (from 26% to 54%, see Graph 3), to the detriment of grade 1 and all other grades we have seen at Jumbo previously, most notably grades 4, 5a, 6 and 7, which have disappeared completely according to the online data collection.



Graph 3. Jumbo grade share (2023).

On the other hand, in-store observations, like with Albert Heijn, resulted in some grade 3 and 7 products being recorded in Utrecht (see Figure 4) and in Wierden (see Figure 5), respectively.



L: Figure 4. Grade 3 hand puppet at Jumbo in Utrecht.



R: Figure 5. Grade 7 doll at Jumbo in Wierden.

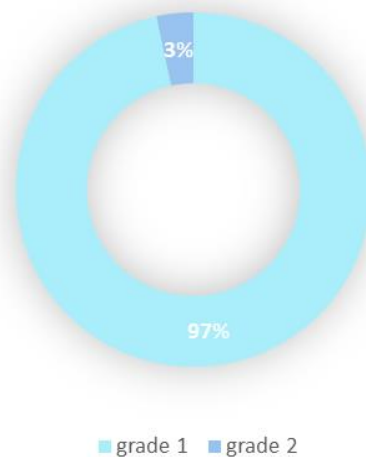
As with Albert Heijn, by far the largest share of Jumbo's products are its home brand (41% of all products found). Here, Bolletje and Tony's Choclonely make up the next largest, albeit comparatively small, shares. All these products are analysed as grades 1 and 2. The only two grade 5 products we found were actually non-food items: a booklet and an arts-and-craft Sinterklaas' steamboat set (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Grade 5 Jumbo Sinterklaas arts and crafts steamboat set.

## Plus

Plus (unlike most stores in this study) continues its growth of grade 1 products, from 89% to 97% of its total share. Like Albert Heijn (in 2023 at least) this goes against the general trend in the research. Moreover, our data collection and analysis of Plus Sinterklaas items in 2023 sees a drop in the grade 2 share (3%, see Graph 4, down from 8% in last year's report). The only grade 2 product we observed online was a *taai taai* product (see Figure 7); at the bottom of the packaging it's possible to just about see the top of a Piet hat. It should be noted that *taai taai* products have historically been grade 7 due to their usage of "African" featured Piets (see HEMA below). It is therefore possible, given all the movement with imagery we witnessed in 2023, that grade 7 *taai taai* products and packagings may make a comeback in the future.



Graph 4. Plus grade share (2023).



Figure 7. Screenshot of grade 2 Plus taai taai product from online data collection.

An in-store observation at a Plus store in Rotterdam, however, yielded a different grade 7 Plus home brand product that was—interestingly—not available for sale online (Figure 8). Plus seems especially keen on selling different varieties of *kruidnoten*, since they accounted for 72% of all products found online in 2023. The supermarket seems to sell almost exclusively Plus home brand and Bolletje Sinterklaas products online, though observations have shown this is not the case in-store.



Figure 8. Grade 7 Plus chocolate Piet figurines, Rotterdam, 2023.

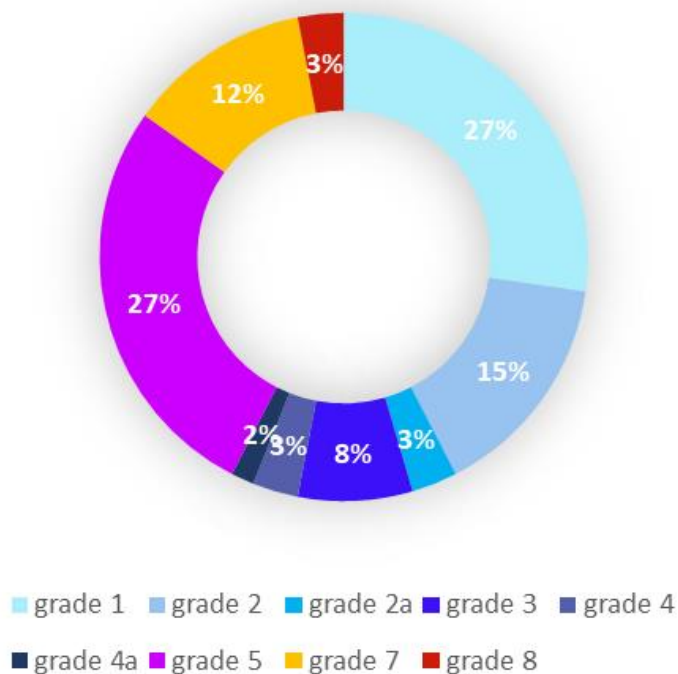
## Blokker

Blokker traditionally offers up a whole range of different grades: eight different grades in 2021 and 2022, and as many as nine this year. This is a result of the nature of the store, which offers many third-party products. It unfortunately (as we've consistently shown across our reports) remains the only store besides Bol.com to sell grade 8 products. This year sees two such products, both of which are Piet-costumes which are being depicted by models in sooty make-up. While with the use of the soot make up, the imagery here is clearly moving away from a full blackface depiction of a person of African descent, because of the use of curly wigs this is still a grade 8 product. The use of curly hair (usually associated with racially minoritised people in the Netherlands) as part of a costume still recalls the white supremacist racial mimicry that grade 8 refers to, hence our application in this instance (see Figure 9). Ultimately, this resulted in a slightly higher share for grade 8 at Blokker in this year's report (up from 2% in 2022 and 3% in 2023).



Figure 9. Screenshot of grade 8 modelling of Piet costumes sold by Blokker.

Apart from grade 8, the rest of Blokker's grades seem very much on trend as we also reported in our last report. Grade 1 drops from 38% in 2022 to 27% in 2023, and grade 7 drops from 15% to 12%, while grade 5 increases significantly from 13% to 27%, becoming as large as grade 1 for Blokker this year. Grade 5 has grown especially in the decorations, toys and books categories at Blokker, showing the continued importance of the sooty Piet narrative for specific brandings of Sinterklaas.



Graph 5. Blokker grade share (2023).

Grade 2 remains stable at a 15% share, as shown in the last report and has a clear presence across all product categories. The presence of grades 2a and 4a in the book category is evidence of a real variety of Piet depictions in (children's) books (see Figure 10 for an example of a 2a depiction).

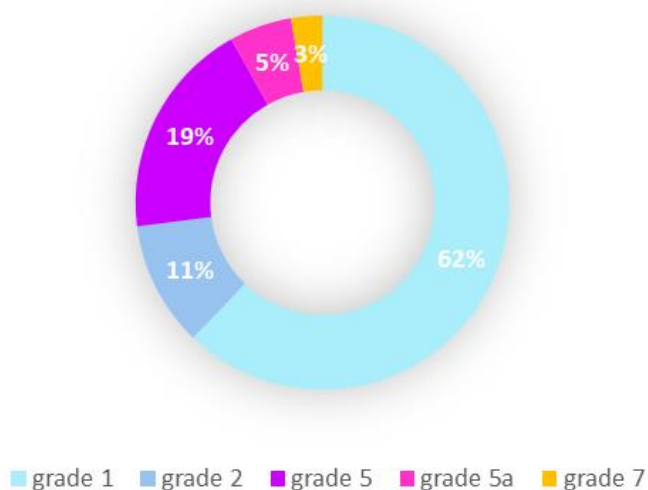




Figure 10. Screenshot of a grade 2a children's book sold online by Blokker.

## HEMA

HEMA stays relatively consistent with its strong brand identity. The changes here from last year are growth in both grades 1 and 2, to the detriment of its grades 5 and 5a (the combined share of these dropping from 38% to 24%, see Graph 6). While the sooty Piets still have a strong presence in HEMA's branding across a wide variety of products, the decrease in share of these grades illustrates a potential pivot by the department store towards more obscure Piet depictions.



Graph 6. HEMA grade share (2023).

Another interesting observation is the re-emergence of one grade 7 product via the HEMA website in 2023: a lone speculaaspop (see Figure 11) that was previously not available online, but had been spotted before at HEMA stores.



Figure 11. Screenshot of grade 7 speculaas pop via HEMA.

In-store observations did not yield any other products and/or grades than those observed online, apart from this interesting “Pepernoten beer” (see Figure 12), *pepernoten* being a popular treat consumed during Sinterklaas.

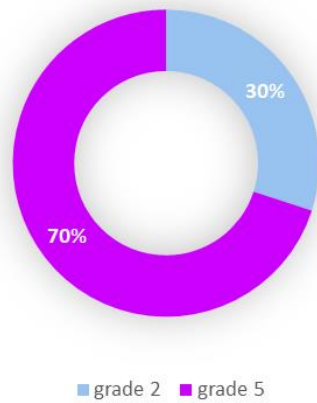


Figure 12. Grade 1 Pepernoten Bier captured in HEMA, Den Haag, 2023.

### Kruidvat

Kruidvat still has no grade 1 products on offer online. When analysing its products we found grade 2, which is all Kruidvat’s home brand and food items (*kruidnoten*, chocolate letters and *taai taai*), and grade 5, consisting only of third-party non-food products like toys, costumes and decorations. This makes grade 5 dominant this year at Kruidvat (see Graph 7).





Graph 7. Kruidvat grade share (2023).

2023 in-store observations, however, show a lot more variety in terms of how items can be graded, for example Kruidvat's food products witnessed in Raalte (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. Several shelves of various Sinterklaas products at Kruidvat, Raalte, 2023.

## Ekoplaza

The products we found and analysed via the Ekoplaza website are once again found to be 100% grade 1. On the other hand, it is worth noticing that we only found one Sinterklaas product online this year (see Figure 14), compared to nine available products in 2022 and eight in 2021. This suggests that Ekoplaza seems to have put even less emphasis on the festival in 2023, at least online.

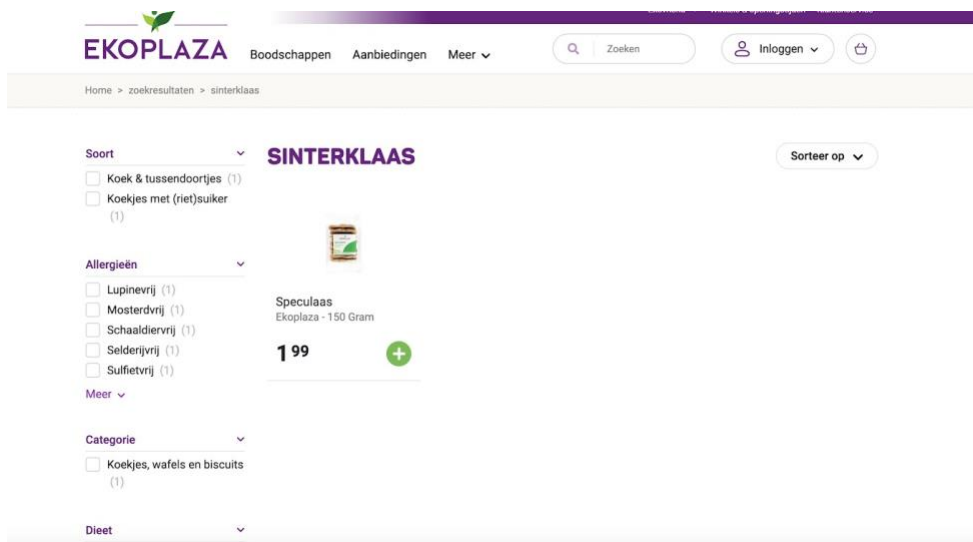


Figure 14. Screenshot of Ekoplaza search results during 2023 online data collection.

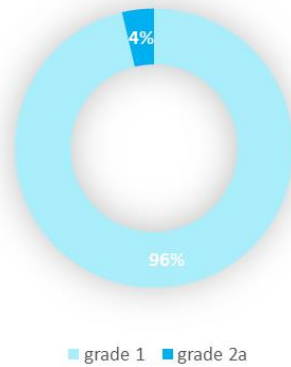
It is also notable that in-store observations for Ekoplaza yielded more results, as evidenced by grade 2 product packaging of *pepernoten*, found in Den Haag (see Figure 15).



Figure 15. Pepernoten captured at a Ekoplaza, Den Haag, 2023.

## Jamin

As we noted in the *Methodology* chapter, Jamin's website is postcode dependent and does not allow search functions. You can only click on a special Sinterklaas-themed banner in order to be directed toward Jamin's Sinterklaas products, which were essentially a wide variety of chocolate letters. As shown in our last report, these are almost all grade 1.



Graph 8. Jamin grade share (2023).

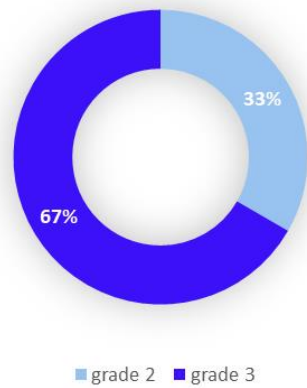
However, we did find one chocolate letter decorated by monkey heads (see Figure 16). Given the racist nature and history of this festival, and how Black people have been depicted as apes and monkeys, we decided to grade this chocolate as 2a; a Piet as an animal.



Figure 16. Screenshot of grade 2a Jamin chocolate letter decorated with monkey heads.

## Etos

On Etos' website, we only found three Sinterklaas-related products this year (compared to 12 in 2022), all three of which were costumes. Two of the costumes were modelled and depicted by grade 3 imagery, making this the most prominent grade for Etos in this year's report. Observations in-store showed significant use of grade 7 decorations at an Etos store in Wierden. Grade 7 Zwarte Piet dolls were hung throughout the store along the ceiling (see Figure 17), demonstrating a continued enthusiasm for this depiction in certain parts of the country.



Graph 9. Etos grade share (2023).

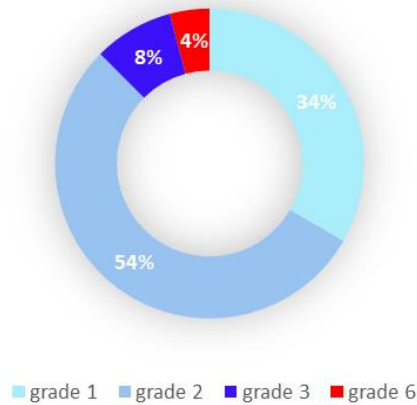


Figure 17. Grade 7 Zwarte Piet dolls as decorations at an Etos, Wierden, 2023.

## Xenos

Xenos offers a wide variety of products, from gifts and toys to decorations and confectionery. Both our analyses of Xenos' online sales and in-store observations show that the store is doubling down again on their "sneaky" Piet (grade 2) home branding. Online, the grade 2 share is up from 42% in 2022 to 54% in 2023. At the same time, grade 1 has gained ground again in 2023 with a share of 34% (up from 21%). Together, these grades diminish the share of grades 3 and 6, and squeeze out grade 7 entirely (from 11% in 2022 to 0% in 2023, see Graph 10).





Graph 10. Xenos grade share (2023).

In-store observations continue the more recent trend (as observed in our 2023 report) of the “silly” hidden Piets, as shown in the Xenos’ home brand mugs, lights, decorations and other products (see Figures 18a and 18b). In these sorts of depictions, Piet is either hidden behind instruments and objects like books, musical instruments and stacks of gifts, or found to be stuck with their heads caught in chimneys. The latter depiction recalls the traditional Sinterklaas narrative of Piets entering homes through chimneys, but also alludes strongly to the newer “soot” narrative. Furthermore, these depictions drawing attention to the Piet as a clumsy character with their bums in the air, providing comic relief to the Sinterklaas tale and season (see Figure 19). In these instances, Piet, quite literally, is the butt of the joke.



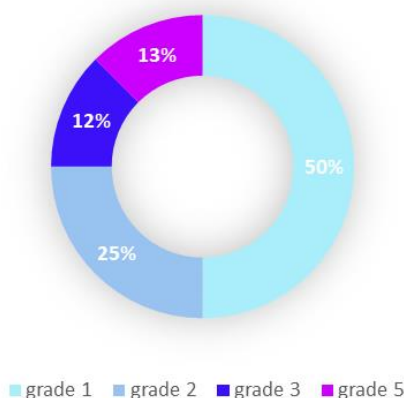
Figures 18a and 18b. In-store photos of grade 2 ornaments found in a Xenos in Enschede, 2023.



Figure 19. Screenshot of a grade 2 Sinterklaas giftbag via Xenos' website.

## Intertoys

The search for Sinterklaas products on the Intertoys website resulted in only eight products, compared to 2022's 13. In 2023, we analysed half of the collected products as grade 1, and another quarter as grade 2. Here too, like at Xenos, the increase in grades 1 and 2 together results in the decrease of other grades and the elimination of grade 7 (and grade 2a in this case) entirely.

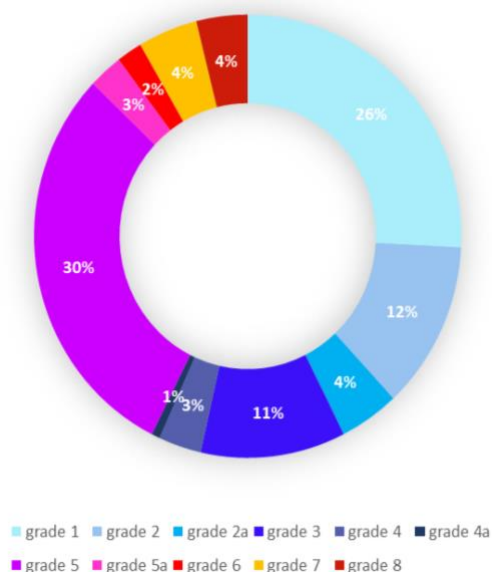


Graph 11. Intertoys grade share (2023).

Regarding the decreasing number of Sinterklaas-related products online, it is necessary to take into account that Intertoys is selling the actual gifts (toys, books, games, etc.) that would be given during the Sinterklaas festival as their regular assortment. Thus, as families are able to find Sinterklaas merchandise at a wide variety of stores, there is little need for Intertoys to produce Sinterklaas-specific items; their existing selection is already sufficient. In-store observations for Intertoys, such as advertisements and/or decorations, did not yield any other noteworthy results for this year's report.

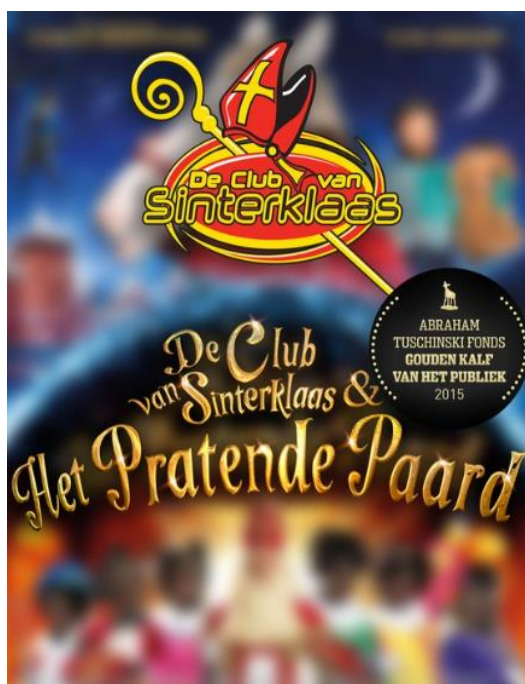
## Bol.com webshop overview

Once again, the share of grade 8 imagery found on Bol.com drops; from 5,7% in 2022 to 3,8% in 2023 (see Graph 12). All blackface products were found exclusively in the music and DVD categories, as we have seen in previous reports.



Graph 12. Bol.com grade share (2023).

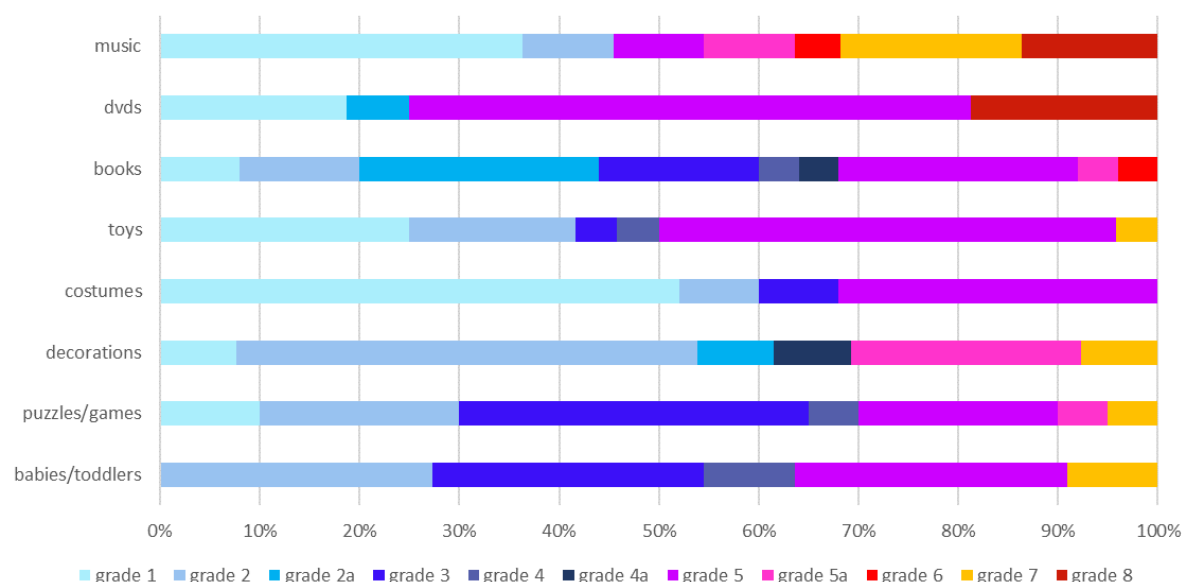
In last year's report, we noted the many different ways Bol.com tries to hide its Zwarte Piet products (grades 7 and 8), such as cutting out faces, covering faces with emojis and blurring images. This year we noticed more of this tactic, like showing only the back of a "Coole Piet Diego" CD cover, the front of which we know to contain blackface from previous research. Also, there seems to be some inconsistency in this method. Other CDs by Piet Diego do show the grade 8 front, for instance, but also with the *Club van Sinterklaas* DVDs where the DVD cover of one of their films is blurred and the other is not (see Figures 20 and 21).



Figures 20 and 21. Grade 8 Club van Sinterklaas DVDs showing blurring techniques used on one product (L) but not the other (R).



Further important results from the 2023 Bol.com data collection are the rather large decrease of the grade 1 share (from 39% in 2022 to 26% in 2023), and a clear decrease of the grade 7 share (from 11% to 4%), in both cases across nearly all categories. Then there is the significant increase in the sooty grades 5 and (to a lesser extent) 5a. The total share of both grades is almost 33%, up from 14% in 2022. This is by far the largest this share has ever been for Bol.com. Interestingly, the uptick in grades 5 and 5a can be seen across all of Bol.com's categories (see Graph 13). There is no discernable pattern in the historic share of the sooty grades at Bol.com, other than a slightly higher share on average since 2020, compared to the period before (from 2015 to 2019), so it remains to be seen whether this phenomenon will hold in the future, or give way to grade 2 as we are seeing at other stores.



Graph 13. Bol.com grade share per category (%), 2023),

The babies and toddlers category at Bol.com caused some slight changes to the methodology (as noted above) in order to be able to analyse relevant Sinterklaas products. In 2022 we found no results for the Sinterklaas nor Piet search term in the babies/toddler category. This year we found 11 products. This might be a consequence of the second noteworthy observation, namely that Bol.com has changed its search function on these categories. Where before we could fill out the “Sinterklaas” and “Piet” search terms in the search bar at each individual category, we now need to specifically enter “Sinterklaas” and/or “Piet” as well as the category. For instance, “Piet decorations”. In the case of the baby and toddler category, this became even more interesting as ‘Sinterklaas baby and toddler’ brought up no Sinterklaas-specific results at all. In fact, Christmas, Easter and St. Patrick’s Day items were part of the search results. However, “Sinterklaas baby en peuter” (Sinterklaas baby and toddler in Dutch) gave us the 11 results recorded and analysed. The same products came up again when we used “Piet baby peuter”. It has to be noted that all 11 products were aimed at toddlers, older children and parents (such as picture and parenting books or costumes); i.e., there were no products meant specifically for babies.

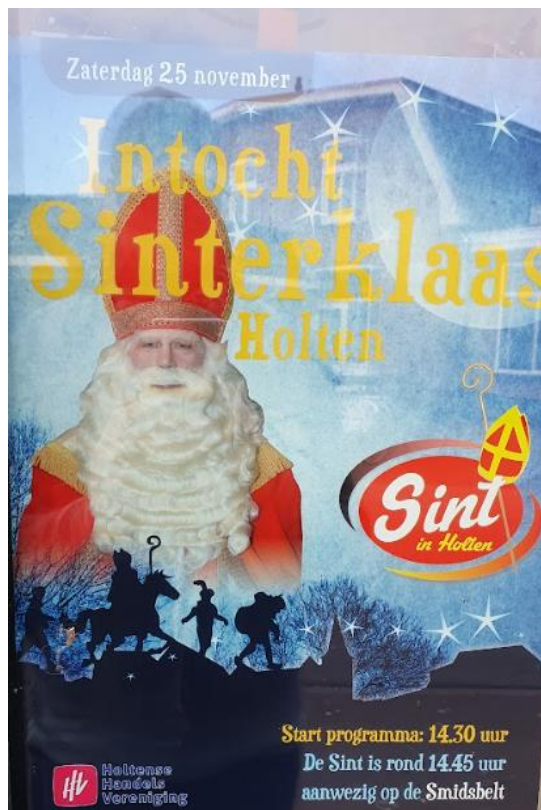
Finally, two additional noteworthy observations on Bol.com from the puzzles and games category. First, a puzzle for adults labelled ‘ethnic girl’ came up under the ‘Sinterklaas’ search. The imagery depicts a woman wearing an Indigenous North American-style head-dress and face paint<sup>4</sup>. Although we did not include this product in our overall statistical analysis, this is an interesting finding in the context of considering the strong implications Sinterklaas has for

<sup>4</sup> You can view this product here: [https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/unidragon-ethnic-girl/9300000109187025/?bltgh=h0WIHoYTX7D-lcPZwYIGaA.iXLTlyxrT6z3egbwHY9M6Q\\_0\\_12.30.ProductTitle](https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/unidragon-ethnic-girl/9300000109187025/?bltgh=h0WIHoYTX7D-lcPZwYIGaA.iXLTlyxrT6z3egbwHY9M6Q_0_12.30.ProductTitle)

racial mimicry in the Netherlands. Moreover, this German card game “Schwarzer Peter” (black Peter in German) came up during the puzzle and games “Piet” search<sup>5</sup>. Although this ‘Peter’ does not resemble the Dutch Piet that accompanies Sinterklaas, the packaging depicts a child painting the Peter character’s face with a black pen. Given the various depictions of the (Zwarte) Piet character our research has collected over the years, we found this striking and connected, albeit loosely.

## Beyond the stores

In the 2023 report (based on 2022 data), we noted the continued importance and centrality to the Sinterklaas festival in the Netherlands of the Zwarte Piet character, be it in the form of decorations in shop windows, their presence in marketing campaigns and education or in parades throughout the country (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2023: 39-44). Though we do not have observations throughout the country as extensive as we were able to provide last year, it comes as no surprise that 2023 was not much different than 2022. We spotted grade 2 “shadow” Piets again, like on a poster announcing the arrival parade of Sinterklaas in Holten (in the east of the country, see Figure 22). Additionally, the silly, “hide and seek” Piet was observed in a luggage store in Meppel (in the north of the country), where they put what actually seemed to be grade 7 Piet dolls facedown to obscure their features (see Figure 23).



L: Figure 22. Grade 2 “shadow” Piets on a poster, Holten, 2023. R: Figure 23. Grade 7 dolls displayed face down in a luggage store, Meppel, 2023.

Nonetheless, as in 2022, there were many more examples to be found of grade 7 imagery displayed more prominently in a wide variety of different kinds of stores. See, for example, at a hairdresser’s in Eschede, Zwarte Piet decorative dolls in the image of 19th century blackface minstrelsy (resembling for instance the British *golliwog*) were on full display (see Figure 24), More traditionally Dutch Zwarte Piet dolls were used also as decorations at a bookstore (again

<sup>5</sup> You can view this product here: <https://www.bol.com/nl/nl/p/piet-spel/9200000033522305/>

in Enschede, see Figure 25), a perfumery in Meppel (see Figure 26) and in Wierden, of course, a bakery (see Figure 27). Although in Figures 25 and 26, the dolls appear to have more of a gold or shimmery colour (rather than black), we still grade as 7 as these items continue to remind onlookers of the older Zwarte Piet imagery. Thus, the opportunity to avoid racial mimicry and racist harm is missed in these cases.



*From left to right: Figure 24, grade 7 dolls in a window display at a hairdresser's, Enschede 2023; Figure 25, grade 7 dolls hanging from a bookstore ceiling, Enschede, 2023; Figure 26, grade 7 dolls in a window display at a perfumery, Meppel, 2023; Figure 27, grade 7 dolls at a bakery, Wierden, 2023.*

Grade 8 imagery is rarer, but has been observed by our in-store fieldwork team in a Harderwijk thrift shop (see Figure 28), as well as Holten in 2023, where an entire Sinterklaas house was created (see Figures 29a, 29b and 29c). Both featured old Sinterklaas music records with grade 8 imagery on the covers.



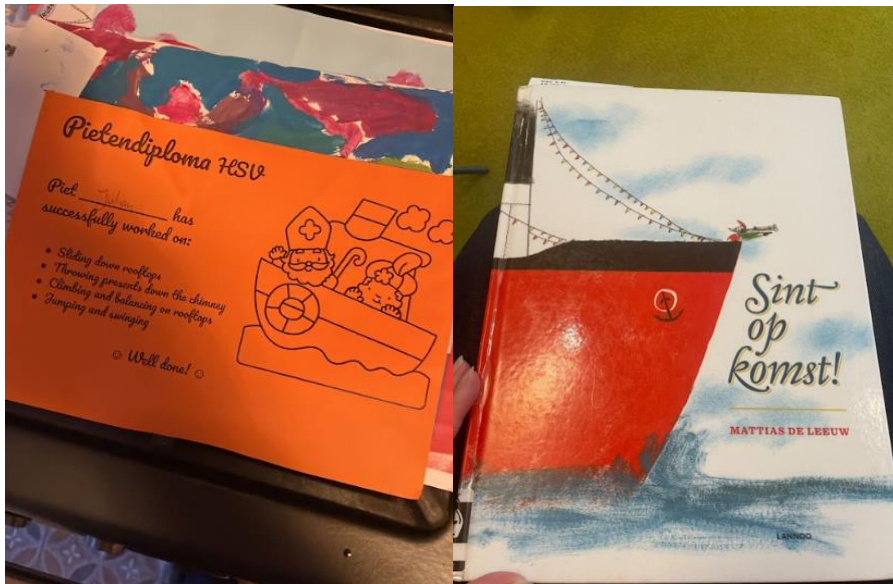
*Figure 28. Grade 8 DVD covers in a thrift store, Harderwijk, 2023.*





Figures 29a, b, c. House of Sinterklaas, where grade 8 records were observed, Holten, 2023.

The “House of Sinterklaas”, and the many parades we ran into during our fieldwork and day-to-day at the start of the Sinterklaas period show the unabated popularity of the festival and the Piet character’s role in it in the Netherlands. This is also evidenced by the pervasiveness of the festival in primary education (for instance “Piet gym” activities as shown in Figure 30 at a school in Den Haag), as well as Sinterklaas-themed books available at the library (see Figure 31, also in Den Haag).



L: Figure 30. A “Pietendiploma”, given out to children at a primary school in Den Haag, 2023. R: Figure 31. A library book observed at a public library, Den Haag, 2023

Finally, because some of the in-store research team were in Belgium during the November to early December period in 2023, we were able to do a little fieldwork in that country, where the festival of Sinterklaas is also celebrated. We spotted grade 7 Piet chocolate figurines at the chain chocolatier store Leonidas in Brussels (see Figure 32), and grade 7 *speculaas* cookies at a bakery in Antwerp (see Figure 33), but nothing more was observed. This could be because the Sinterklaas festival, while celebrated in Belgium, does not seem to be as (commercially) hyped there as it is in the Netherlands.



L.: Figure 32. Grade 7 chocolate Piet figurine at a Leonidas, Brussels, 2023. R: Figure 33. Grade 7 *speculaas* Piet figure at a bakery, Antwerp, 2023.

# Conclusions

We have shown this year that certain stores in general appear to carry less Sinterklaas-specific material online than what our fieldworkers were able to find in-store; this is both in terms of variety of product and/or grade variation. Incidental in-store observational data collection, as well as random results that we pick up during the online fieldwork show the encroaching presence and increased importance of other festivals during the Sinterklaas season, such as merchandise for Christmas, St. Patrick's Day as well as Easter, especially when we use the "Piet" search term. This trend is not new to this research cycle; rather it is an ongoing and increasing trend that we have already noted in earlier reports. Indeed, we continue to see that Halloween and Christmas items in particular crowd out Sinterklaas produce throughout the season, especially in stores like HEMA and Xenos. Further research will continue to show whether or not this will eventually impact the popularity and marketability of Sinterklaas, overall (NOS Nieuws, 2023d).

Even though the incoming Dutch government seem to be promising a return to the "old" Sinterklaas imagery (i.e., the incorporation of blackfaced Zwarte Piets), all of the products we graded 8 in this year's report (based on 2023 in-store and online data collection) came from 2014 at the earliest, or even further back in time. Thus, it seems no (commercial) grade 8 imagery is being produced at this time, but we will need to continue to monitor this in the context of the emerging political climate. For instance, as mentioned in the introduction, the candidate Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Aid is supportive of the "traditional" Zwarte Piet, claiming that it "belongs to Sinterklaas festivities" (Nederlands Dagblad, 2024), despite the hard fight for progress to make the holiday more inclusive for all. Additionally, one can consider the recent scandal over the Dutch football fans wearing blackface at a match in Poland, where one of the fans responded to the backlash by stating he wouldn't do it again "because it's not fun anymore" (Dutch News, 2024c). Both cases show how to a certain extent willful ignorance about racism in the Netherlands persists, as does the continued uphill battle against it.

Our findings show the steady, continuous growth of the shares of grades 2 and 5. Arguably, stores and brands are turning to grade 2 and 5 products using imagery with more palatable Piets (i.e., without blackface), and in this way they can continue to include the character in their depictions of the Sinterklaas story and/or festival. Additionally, the quantitative results show how grade 5 (sooty) products are beginning to lose some ground to grade 2 (shadow and hidden) products. This is even the case at HEMA, the department store that was initially promoting the most coherent "sooty" Piet in their marketing as far back as 2018. On the other hand, the 2023 data illustrates how Xenos is instead emerging as a more influential player with their sneakier grade 2 products. Tony's Chocoloney's more classical grade 2 Piet (a simple outline of the character, shown gallivanting on rooftops, on their chocolate letter packagings) has been removed from their products<sup>6</sup>, which could mean a gap is left the kinds of "sneaky" Piets we now see.

As the newer iterations of this "sneaky" Piet continue to expand, we can observe a slight departure from the shadows and silhouettes that have been typically graded as 2 in our research. This brings up the question of whether or not we should start to grade these sneaky Piets differently if they continue to be present in the data, so that grade 2 doesn't become inflated with various products and ways of imagining Piet. Meanwhile, even though grade 7 products (featuring imagery of Piets portrayed exclusively as being of African descent, often in a derogatory manner) appear to be at an all-time low based on the online data collection,

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<sup>6</sup> The removal of any reference to the Piet character in Tony's marketing is more in step with their explicit anti-slavery rhetoric, and their recent support of the campaign to make *Keti Koti* an official national day of remembrance (2024).

we still found products that can be graded this way during in-store fieldwork. For example, stores such as Jumbo, Albert Heijn and Etos all made use of grade 7 decorations and Plus sold grade 7 products in-store.

Furthermore, as shown in a store in Meppel (see Figure 23), dolls that we know from previous research are grade 7 are still used decoratively; they are just displayed face down to hide the blackface imagery. It's unclear if this is to avoid offending certain customers and potentially suffering financial consequences from boycotts and petitions; if it's in the Dutch spirit of frugality in terms of the rather economical re-usage of existing decorations instead of newer, less offensive ones; or if it is instead to make some kind of statement of support for Zwarte Piet, in spite of the "official" national narrative of the sooty Piet (as embraced by many municipalities and businesses). It could indeed be a combination of all three factors, regardless, they each individually and together speak to the continued importance and popularity of Zwarte Piet with the public. We have noted in previous reports how franchise holders of specific stores choose in what manner to decorate shops during the Sinterklaas season. Therefore, even when a given company's headquarters might be distancing the store's brand (which becomes clear when analysing the online marketing) from Zwarte Piet, individual local managers may continue to put out the older style dolls.

As we have discussed across multiple reports, it is increasingly difficult to find any Piet products (blackface or otherwise) when doing a typical "Sinterklaas" search on many stores. Nonetheless, when using the "Piet" search term, Piet-related products do appear, showing how rather than moving away from the Piet character entirely, many stores and brands are finding creative ways to bury those products in the website. Moreover, as we have shown with our analysis of the Blokker website (see Figure 9), the use of curly "afro" wigs is still in use for non-Black adults modelling Piet costumes with just soot marks (rather than full blackface). This further indicates that not only does the Piet character remain an essential part of the Sinterklaas festival, but that certain elements of racial mimicry are also still considered key as well. After all, as we see in multiple examples above, there are more and more instances where rather than actually removing or altering the blackface characteristics, certain elements simply remain or are instead clumsily blurred and/or obscured, as we see in the case of Bol.com but also with the sneaky grade 2 imagery. In this sense, brands are pushing the boundaries to see how far they can go before they're called out as racist, since they do continue to make use of images and products that allude to derogatory, anti-Black representations.

This begs the question: if the racism is simply covered up, either by an emoji or by turning a product on its head, does this mean that it is gone?



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## Glossary

### *Chocoladeletter*

Chocolate letters of the alphabet, traditionally given to people as a present during the Sinterklaas festival. Commonly, one receives the first letter of their first name. Chocolate letters can be of all types of chocolate and may also include almonds, raisins, etc.

### *Golliwog*

The golliwog is a doll-like character, created by cartoonist and author Florence Kate Upton in her children's books in the late 19th century. It was reproduced as a children's soft toy and was very popular especially into the 1970s in the southern US, the UK, South Africa and Australia. The golliwog is widely considered a racist caricature of Black people, alongside such characters as "pickaninnies", minstrels and "mammy" figures. The doll is characterised by jet black skin, eyes rimmed in white, exaggerated red lips and frizzy hair, based on the blackface minstrel tradition. The word "golliwog" is also a racial slur towards Black people in the UK and Australia.

### *Intocht*

Annual parade in November, typically attended by several thousand people, at which Sinterklaas and his many Zwarte Pieten enter the Netherlands by steamboat. The intocht is the official start of the Sinterklaas festival, culminating on the 5th of December.

### *Jute zak*

A burlap bag, which traditionally contains the gifts and sweets Sinterklaas hands out to children and which is carried for him by his Piets. Children used to be told that if they had misbehaved, the Piets would take them back to Spain (Sinterklaas headquarters) with them in the same burlap bag. This last part of the story has gone out of favour recently however, since it is thought not to be educationally correct to threaten children with abduction.

### *Keti Koti*

This is the name of the annual commemoration of the formal end of slavery in the Kingdom of The Netherlands, on the 1 July 1863, in the former colonies of Surinam and Curaçao. Originally it is a Surinamese day of commemoration. The name is from Sranantongo and means "broken chains".

### *Kick Out Zwarte Piet*

Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) is a collective of activist groups and platforms in the Netherlands (Nederland Wordt Beter, Zwarte Piet Niet and Stop Blackface), who - by means of peaceful protest - aim to end the existence of the racist figure of Zwarte Piet. The group has announced they will cease to exist as of 2025 as they believe they have done their part in the struggle.

### *Kruidnoten*

A type of cookie, small, crunchy and dark brown, prepared with speculaas spices (see under Speculaas), traditionally eaten during the Sinterklaas festival. Commonly, Zwarte Piet has sacks of these cookies from which he hands them out to children and/or throws them into the crowd.

### *Nederland Wordt Beter*

A Dutch foundation (founded 2011) focused on education and awareness about the influence of colonialism and slavery on current Dutch society, to create a future without racism and exclusion. Before 2025 the foundation aims to have structural education on the colonial and slavery past, a Sinterklaas festival without racist stereotypes and a national slavery commemoration.

### *Pakjesavond*

An evening of celebrations held on or around St. Nicholas Day on December 5, celebrated with family and/or friends. During the evening, gifts are exchanged along with personalised poems and “surprises”: fun and dedicated wrappings around the gift, often reflective of the receiver's hobby, interest or passion.

### *Pepernoten*

A type of cookie, small, brown and pellet shaped, prepared with aniseed or speculaas, traditionally eaten during the Sinterklaas festival. Commonly, Zwarte Piet has sacks of these cookies from which he hands them out to children and/or throws them into the crowd.

### *Randstad*

A term formally denoting a “ring” of bigger cities and urbanised municipalities that runs from Utrecht via Amsterdam and Den Haag to Rotterdam and Dordrecht. However, increasingly it has come to denote the entire urbanised area in the western part of the Netherlands.

### *Roetveegpiet*

Piet Character who, instead of full blackface with big red lips and gold hoop earrings, has smudges of soot on his face on account of the story that Piet enters houses to deliver presents through the chimney. Since about 2017 in a limited number of Dutch municipalities (mostly in the West of the country), the roetveegpiet has come to replace the traditional Zwarte Piet due to protest against this character.

### *Sinterklaas*

Also known as Saint Nicholas, based on the historical figure of the bishop of Myra who lived in the 3rd century AD in Asia Minor. For unknown reasons - but most likely due to Dutch history in which the Spanish played an important part - it is sometimes (mistakenly) claimed that Sinterklaas hails from Spain. Sinterklaas is the main protagonist of a festival in his name on the 5th of December (in the Netherlands and some of its former colonies) and the 6th of December (in Belgium). The character is most commonly portrayed as an old white man with a beard, red mitre and cloak, riding a white horse. In this report, Sinterklaas refers to both the character and the festival.

### *Sinterklaasjournaal*

The *Sinterklaasjournaal* is an annual fictional news programme in the context of the Sinterklaas celebration. It is broadcast on Dutch television channel NTR, and depicts the Sinterklaas and (Zwarte) Piet experience. The format of “real” television news is imitated, with storylines presented during each episode as reports, following the arrival and antics of Sinterklaas and his Piets, which means it can be seen as a scripted reality programme. The target audience is primary school age children, who often are shown the programme during school hours. As such, the storylines of the show form the basis of the most dominant and widely-accepted Sinterklaas narrative(s).

### *Speculaas*

A type of cookie, usually hard, flat and rectangular but sometimes also soft, round and filled with almond paste. The cookies are made with speculaas herbs. Commonly these are cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger powder, cardamom and white pepper, all of which were first obtained by the Dutch in the East Indies. Speculaas is traditionally eaten during the festival of Sinterklaas, but can be found in shops year-round.

### *Speculaaspop*

A large gingerbread cookie, baked into the shape of a figure. This gingerbread man is traditionally given at Sinterklaas. In the past, a boy would decorate a gingerbread doll with, for example, icing and nuts. He brought this to a girl to show his affection. If the doll was accepted, the feelings were mutual. In the 19th century, gingerbread men were also popular

with a thin gold-colored layer made of copper, tin and zinc. The custom may go back to the function of Saint Nicholas as 'marriage maker', in the legend in which he gives three girls their dowry.

#### *Taaitaai*

A type of soft (or tough = taai) cookie, traditionally eaten during the festival of Sinterklaas. Its taste resembles that of speculaas but includes aniseed. Taaitaai are usually baked in the shape of characters from the Sinterklaas festival, such as Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet.

#### *Zwarte Piet*

Character portrayed as the helper of Sinterklaas. Traditionally, Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) arrives with Sinterklaas and helps to deliver presents through the chimney to 'good' children and/or punish 'bad' children on behalf of Sinterklaas. The current shape of Zwarte Piet was designed by Jan Schenkman, an author of a children's book on Sinterklaas from 1850. Historically, Zwarte Piet was commonly portrayed as a white person in blackface, with an Afro wig, big red lips and/or gold hoop earrings. While this has predominantly changed in recent years (see *roetveegpiet* above), this traditional, racist caricature can still be seen today in some parts of the Netherlands.