**Under embargo until 19.00 on Tuesday 25 January 2022**

**BOOKTRUST’S PUBLIC LIBRARY PILOT KICKSTARTING EARLY READING AWARDS PRESTIGIOUS PRIZE TO BEST NEW BOOK FOR SHARING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN**

[***booktrust.org.uk***](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/booktrust-storytime/) ***| #BookTrustStorytime | Information & Images available***

**Tuesday 25 January, London:** BookTrust, the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, has recognised the best new book for sharing with babies and young children – as voted for by the librarians and families who took part in their ambitious new national library experience: BookTrust Storytime.

Through [BookTrust Storytime](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/booktrust-storytime/), the charity has been working in close partnership with libraries and local authorities to pilot new ways to support families with young children – especially those who are disadvantaged – engage with their local public library, helping kick-start their reading journey so that sharing stories becomes a regular and long-lasting part of family life.

For the first time, the shortlisted titles for the annual prestigious BookTrust Storytime Prize were incorporated into a new library experience. All libraries in England were offered copies of the six, shortlisted books to share with their local families. Over 300 libraries held storytime activities for local families. These included sessions where librarians would read one of the shortlisted books and shared accompanying resources and activities for the families attending to take part in together. With a different book and activity to enjoy each week, the pilot was designed to encourage families to get into the habit of making repeat visits to their local library, building their confidence and enjoyment of sharing books with their children.

The winning title – ***The Whales on the Bus* written by Katrina Charman and illustrated by Nick Sharratt** (Bloomsbury Children’s) – was voted for based on how families and young children who took part in the experience responded to and enjoyed the shortlisted titles during the sessions. Families and librarians praised the interactive reimagining of this familiar nursery rhyme as a ‘winning formula’, enjoying the playful way the story encouraged all the family to join in with a singalong, how the inventive tongue twisters and rhymes introduced new words, the appealing character cast of animals and vehicles, and the fantastically bright and bold illustrations.

Cressida Cowell MBE, Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2019-2022, revealed the winning book at a virtual event on Tuesday 25 January celebrating the pilot.

BookTrust Storytime forms part of the charity’s strategy to reach the families who need more help developing a reading habit, and was created in response to BookTrust research which shows only 49% of families in poverty with children 0-5 are registered with a public library[[1]](#footnote-2). The pilot was designed and delivered with the support of libraries, local authorities, the wider library sector including ASCEL, CILIP and Libraries Connected and families to ensure it reflected their needs and requirements to enable more children to enjoy the life-changing and transformative benefits of reading.

Through the pilot, BookTrust aims to learn more about how to best work with libraries to engage families on their reading journey. An evaluation of the experience and impact on families, libraries and local authorities will inform future developments and next steps.

**Diana Gerald, CEO of BookTrust** said:

*“BookTrust Storytime is part of our ambition to bring the benefits of reading to children in the greatest need. Sharing stories is invaluable for children in their early years and creates a lifelong positive impact on their health, wellbeing, creativity and education. We are incredibly grateful to all the local authorities, library services and shortlisted authors and illustrators who have embraced the pilot, using their experience and expertise to engage local families and bring stories to life and inspiring families to pick up their next book. There is much we can learn from the pilot about how best to support children and families to make reading a regular and long-lasting part of family life and it’s a great pleasure to congratulate Katrina and Nick on their charming winning book. The Whales on the Bus is a very worthy winner of this year’s BookTrust Storytime Prize.”*

**Dhurata Loku, Development Officer, Brent Libraries, Brent Council** who was part of the team who piloted BookTrust Storytime in Willesden Green Library and Ealing Road Library said:

*“We wanted to get involved because we love to introduce young families to the joy of sharing stories. Libraries are community hubs where families can share stories and develop a love for reading. When families first came for the Storytime sessions, we would introduce them to the library and tell them what we have to offer here. We would say, you can come sit in the library, sing songs with us, share stories with us and take the books home and share it with your own family. Children are engaged when they are here, they are moving around the library, engaging with others and borrowing books as well. BookTrust Storytime was a good incentive for young families to come into the library.”*

**Beth Southard, Early Years Community Librarian, Norfolk Libraries, Norfolk Council** who was part of the team who piloted BookTrust Storytime in Fakenham and North Walsham Libraries said:

*“Norfolk Libraries were really excited to take part in BookTrust’s Storytime pilot. What we're really hoping we'll achieve is to increase our accessibility for some of the families that have been a bit harder to reach. We're particularly interested in the idea of creating reading as a habit. This is a really good programme for helping to build that habit and it's something we've not been able to offer as a service yet. We've gotten really good feedback from families who have taken part in the pilot so far. They've really enjoyed the content and the fact it's a whole package. It's not just that they are coming for stories and then going home. It feels like there's a whole thing to unlock with it. I think that it’s something that's had people coming back each week.”*

**Savanah, mum to Elvis (9 months)**, who attends BookTrust Storytime sessions at Fakenham Library, said:

*“We've really enjoyed BookTrust Storytime. It’s opened our eyes a little bit too. It doesn't have to be a big, long, boring book. It can be short and sweet, but a lot of interaction with colours and pictures and things. We're all encouraged to get involved and demonstrate to the children as we go through it. It's a really positive environment. The library team have been great, so as I think we've got to know them, we come to a place where it's really comfortable and everyone is happy.”*

**Katrina Charman, author of *The Whales on the Bus,*** commented:

*“Growing up, I owned few books as they were seen as a luxury item, but each week my mum would take my sister and I to our local library where I would gather as many books as I was allowed to borrow, and devour them as soon as I got home. Our local library is where I developed my own love of books and reading, and I am so grateful to librarians who continue to enable those who may not otherwise get a chance to have access to books, the opportunity to do so. BookTrust is such an important organization, and having mine and Nick’s book play a small part in encouraging more families into libraries and making sure that children have access to wonderful books is very humbling.”*

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

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**About BookTrust**

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school. We are the UK’s largest children’s reading charity; each year we reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives. We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health services, libraries, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. [booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

**About BookTrust Storytime**

BookTrust Storytime is a new library experience piloted by BookTrust to learn how the UK’s largest children’s reading charity can best support families, especially those who are disadvantaged, engage with their local public library and develop an ongoing reading habit. The pilot activities were designed in collaboration with librarians and families across the UK to test new ways of inspiring families with children aged 0-5 to engage in shared story experiences through their local library and to celebrate the best books to make sharing stories a regular part of family life.

**About the BookTrust Storytime Prize**

The prize – which celebrates the very best books for sharing with babies and children under five and is run in association with the CILIP Youth Libraries Group has this year been incorporated into the new national pilot – BookTrust Storytime.

*The Whales on the Bus* by Katrina Charman & Nick Sharratt (Bloomsbury Children’s) was voted as the winner of the £5,000 prize. The other titles shortlisted for the 2021 Prize were: *I Really, Really Need a Wee!* by Karl Newson & Duncan Beedie (Little Tiger Press); *Octopus Shocktopus!* by Peter Bently & Steven Lenton (Nosy Crow); *No! Said Rabbit* by Marjoke Henrichs (Scallywag Press); *Lenny and Wilbur* by Ken Wilson-Max (Alanna Max) and *Arlo The Lion Who Couldn't Sleep* by Catherine Rayner (Macmillan Children’s Books).

1. A BookTrust survey of 1,000 families in poverty with a child under 5 across England, NI and Wales revealed that less than half (49%) of these families are registered with a public library [↑](#footnote-ref-2)