

# Booktrust newsletter

for Northern Ireland

## Education Minister launches Bookstart Treasure programme



**Reading is not just a vital skill; it can open up a world of fun, imagination and learning for children and young people.**

That was the message from Education Minister John O'Dowd as he helped distribute Bookstart Treasure Packs to nursery school children and their parents at Monkstown Nursery School in October 2013.

The Department of Education has been providing funding to the Bookstart programme for ten years. And this year £250,000 was allocated to enable Bookstart Baby and Bookstart Treasure packs to be gifted to over 50,000 children and their families via nursery schools, nursery units and pre-school providers.

Speaking at the launch of this year's programme in Monkstown Nursery School, the Education Minister said:

*'I often talk about how important reading and writing skills are for our young people – for learning, future*

*job prospects and in our everyday lives. But reading is something children should enjoy and want to do. It has been shown that children who read for pleasure perform better than those who don't. Reading can be great fun. Books, nursery rhymes, whatever it happens to be, are great ways of fuelling a young child's imagination.*

*'The Treasure pack...is an excellent resource that parents, or perhaps grandparents or other family members, can use to read with the children in their care.'*

Viv Bird, CEO of Booktrust was also in attendance at the event. She said:

*'In the last ten years Bookstart in Northern Ireland has gone from strength to strength. I would like to thank our funders the Department of Education and all our partners in health, education and libraries whose continued support has enabled children here to receive fabulous book parcels to take home as they start on their reading journey.'*

If your pre-school setting has not received information about Treasure Packs, please contact Kathryn Anderson at [Kathryn.Anderson@booktrust.org.uk](mailto:Kathryn.Anderson@booktrust.org.uk) for more details.

## Welcome

Welcome to the 2014 Booktrust NI Newsletter. We hope that you enjoy reading about our programmes, prizes and author events and how they have benefited children and families across Northern Ireland.



The Department of Education in Northern Ireland has provided Bookstart funding for ten years and we marked this exciting milestone at Monkstown Nursery School. John O'Dowd, Minister for Education attended a special story session and helped the Bookstart Bear gift Treasure packs to the children.

This year's Bookstart Treasure pack included *One Mole Digging a Hole* by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Nick Sharratt, so we were delighted to add value to the Bookstart programme by asking Nick to be our early years author on the

Booktrust StoryTour which was funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. For the past primary pupils, we welcomed UK Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman on her first visit to Northern Ireland. We hope that you enjoy reading about Malorie's visit and the 'In Conversation' event at Stormont with Laureate na nOg, Niamh Sharkey.

Booktrust believes that reading changes lives, whether this is through increased educational attainment and the subsequent life benefits that this brings, or through the sheer pleasure of reading a good book. We would like to thank all the professionals and partners that we work with for their enthusiasm and support. We look forward to working with you in the coming year to inspire many more children and families to enjoy sharing stories and rhymes together.

*Liz Canning.*

Liz Canning, Manager  
Booktrust Northern Ireland

## Bookstart Baby!

The Bookstart programme continues to be a very popular initiative with health professionals who gift the Bookstart Baby packs within a child's first year. From a health visitor's point of view, the colourful books and guidance material is often a welcome way to open up conversations on routines and bonding.

*'What could be nicer than snuggling up with your baby and sharing a book at bedtime?'* (Health Visitor).

Last year over 23,000 Bookstart Baby packs were given out across the five health trusts and, through our regular meetings with health visiting teams, we know how much they are valued. Booktrust NI would like to thank all health professionals for carrying out this valuable work which gives babies and families the best start on their reading journey.



## Star Babies – the Northern Trust's exciting new pilot programme for first time parents



**Star Babies is a new home visiting programme which is offered to first time parents as part of their normal health visiting service.**

Health visitors, public health staff nurses and child health assistants meet parents just before baby is born and every month after that until baby is 12 months old.

Star Babies' themes include everyday interactions for healthy growth and development such as helping baby feel comfortable, safe and secure; building your relationship with your baby; reading your baby's cues and feelings; talking, listening and responding; play and baby moves; and curiosity and learning.

A newborn baby's brain is wired to respond to love, care and interaction. What babies experience and how their parents respond to them shapes their development. Most parents want to do their best to ensure their baby's healthy development. So it is good to know that everyday moments such as talking, singing, holding, and comforting a baby sparks

connections that shape and grow the emotional and social parts of a baby's brain. This kind of positive early communication between infants and their parents also helps to strengthen relationships and establish health patterns for life.

Bookstart is an important and active part of the Star Babies programme. At the 1–2 month visit the Bookstart black and white contrast books are used, and at the five month visit the Bookstart Baby packs are gifted. These packs are used as part of a guided discussion and then link to a themed visit which focuses on cognitive development and booksharing.

Susan Gault, Head of Public Health Nursing in the NHSCT, says: *'We know that emotional development begins early in life and can impact on healthy development in the long term. The emotional and social world of babies is often overlooked with the immediate needs of a new baby. Parents told us that they wanted more focus on nurturing and emotional support with a first baby. Star Babies was a way for the health visiting team to share messages about the importance of baby brain development. It is vital that parents' perspective is listened to. Uptake of this programme has been very encouraging.'*

For more information about Star Babies contact your local Health Visitor.

## The Brilliant Booktrust Bedtime Bonanza!

**Blue Peter Book Award winning illustrator Paul Howard led the Booktrust Bedtime Bonanza event held in The MAC for Culture Night Belfast on 20 September 2013.**

Book lovers of all ages came along and added their own characters to our special Culture Night Frieze. Characters included bears and bugs, snakes and smurfs, popcorn-loving elephants and jealous monkeys! Everyone had a great time creating characters and stories to go along with them.

Paul also led two interactive Story Session Workshops where families imagined what happened to the owl Plop from *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark* after he overcame his fear of the dark – from a luxurious life in the Hollywood Hills to a rather gruesome career in dentistry, our imaginations ran wild!



This was a new venture for Booktrust but we had such a brilliant time and met so many children and families that we hope this can become a regular event in our Booktrust calendar!

## Duchess of Cornwall visits for National Bookstart Week



**Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cornwall visited Broughshane Library in County Antrim, Northern Ireland to celebrate National Bookstart Week in June 2013.**

Each year Libraries NI and Booktrust organise an event to celebrate and promote National Bookstart Week in Northern Ireland. The theme for 2013 was 'fairy tales' and families, libraries and early years settings were encouraged to share lots of fairy tales together.

Booktrust provided a range of resources to support this including *The Ugly Duckling* storybooks, posters, stickers and activity sheets. We chose the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* for our event, and

encouraged healthy eating alongside the sharing of books and stories with children from an early age.

Her Royal Highness was invited by Jenny Bristow, Ireland's Good Food Ambassador, to join children from Broughshane Primary School in making healthy muffins. Her Royal Highness then read *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* to children and told them that 'reading is the best fun in the world'. The Duchess also gave each child a goodie bag containing National Bookstart Week activities and *The Ugly Duckling* storybook.

National Bookstart Week 2014 will run from 9-15 June and the theme is 'my hero'. The chosen book is *Super Duck* by Jez Alborough.

## The Rhyme Challenge celebration event at Ulster Museum

**Over 300 early years settings completed the 2013 Rhyme Challenge in Northern Ireland and to celebrate we held an event at the Ulster Museum in Belfast.**

Polly Poppet entertained children from Fleming Fulton School, Glenbrook Sure Start and other guests. Children had great fun at the event as they joined in singing and acting out the rhymes they learnt through the Challenge.

The Rhyme Challenge, funded by the Arts Council Northern Ireland, encourages a love of rhymes and early poetry from a young age. Children learn up to ten rhymes with their friends at nursery or playgroup and then share them with family at home.

*'Rhymes are an integral part of the work that we do from one-to-one sessions with parents through to our song, rhyme and storytimes in Ardoyne library. We believe rhymes are key in supporting children's language development, social interactions and future learning. Best of all it is a fun activity that the whole family can participate in and enjoy.'*

(Caroline Milligan, Coordinator, Glenbrook Sure Start)

Damian Smyth, Head of Literature and Drama at Arts Council Northern Ireland said:

*'We are delighted to be able to partner with Booktrust NI in this wonderful initiative. Rhyme is one of the*



*building blocks of creativity and the record shows The Rhyme Challenge is a great way for children to share the joy of words among themselves - and with their parents too!*

Liz Canning from Booktrust commented: *'Using The Rhyme Challenge can help facilitate a love of nursery rhymes and early poetry and we are grateful to the Arts Council of NI for recognising this and funding the project. We know that great rhymers make great readers, and encouraging parents and carers to share stories, books and rhymes can radically improve a child's language and communication skills.'*



### What's in The Rhyme Challenge?

Each setting is given the following with The Rhyme Challenge pack:

- Ten rhyme sheets to copy and send home with children
- One double-sided Rhymetime sheet which includes all 10 rhymes for reference
- One A2 Rhymetime poster for display
- 35 beautifully illustrated certificates to give out to children who complete the Challenge, plus a certificate for the setting
- A fantastic new CD featuring all the rhymes from the Challenge
- Guidance, tips, letters to invite parents to take part and more!



The pack is purchasable for £20 – if you would like to order a pack, please contact Kathryn Anderson at [Kathryn.Anderson@booktrust.org.uk](mailto:Kathryn.Anderson@booktrust.org.uk) or call 028 9070 8782.

# Booktrust Northern

The Northern Ireland Stories Tour, organised by Booktrust NI with support from the Arts Council, saw two major players in the world of children's literature – Malorie Blackman and Nick Sharratt – visit Northern Ireland in March and April 2014. The project aimed to bring well known authors directly to a range of communities and children who might not normally have access to such opportunities.



## Malorie Blackman

**Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman OBE, toured Northern Ireland in March as part of her work to promote literacy and inspire a new generation of readers.**

Malorie is primarily known for writing for teenagers and is keen to get 'more young people reading more' and to 'make reading irresistible' for children and teenagers. She aims to promote a wide range of genres – not just novels, but other forms including graphic novels, comics and short stories.

Malorie hosted a series of talks – working closely with small groups of young people to share her story – and promoted literacy and access to books as part of her visit to Northern Ireland. During Wednesday 19 March and Thursday 20 March, she met with young people from the Fighting Words Project at the Verbal Arts Centre in Derry, year 9 pupils from Hazelwood Integrated College, year 10 groups from Grosvenor High School and Aquinas

Grammar at Cregagh Library, and Key Stage 3 pupils from Fleming Fulton.

Commenting on her visit she said: *'As a lover of poems, graphic novels and all kinds of stories, I'm so thrilled to be taking part in The Northern Ireland Stories Tour. I'm looking forward to sharing my love of books and reading for pleasure with as many children and young adults as possible.'*

Welcoming her to Northern Ireland, Damian Smyth, Head of Literature at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, commented: *'Malorie Blackman is undoubtedly one of the most inspirational and popular writers of our generation. It has been a pleasure working with Booktrust NI to bring a writer of this quality to meet with young readers across Northern Ireland.'*

*Malorie's books challenge her readers to think, question the society we live in, and perhaps most importantly, introduce them to the joy of books and the marvelous world of creativity and imagination to be found there.'*



# Ireland Stories Tour

## Nick Sharratt

**Nick Sharratt, one of the UK's most celebrated children's writers and illustrators, delighted young children across Northern Ireland when he hosted a series of intimate talks and workshops. He also marked International Children's Book Day by sharing his passion for books and illustration.**

During his visit Nick worked closely with small groups of young children, sharing his stories, illustrations and books with children from Jordanstown School for children who are deaf or visually impaired, pre-school children at Portrush Library, and foster children and their families at the Verbal Arts Centre and Carrickfergus Library.

After the first day of his visit Nick said: *'I'm delighted to be taking part in the NI Stories Tour, helping to spread the message that reading is wonderful and books are brilliant. I've spent a day with the terrific pupils and staff at Jordanstown School for children who are deaf or visually impaired as well as meeting and working with pre-schoolers,*

*primary school pupils and foster children and their families over the next couple of days. [So far] we have spent time reading and drawing together, sharing ideas, stretching our imaginations and having lots of fun!'*

Having illustrated close to 250 books, ranging from board books for babies to novels for young teenagers, Nick's multi-award winning books and the characters he creates are a familiar sight on most family's book shelves. He has worked with authors including Julia Donaldson, Jeremy Strong, Michael Rosen, Giles Andreae, Kaye Umansky, Kes Gray and Dame Jacqueline Wilson.

Damian Smyth, Head of Literature at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, commented: *'Nick's stories and the wonderful characters he draws will be well-known and much-loved by children of all ages across Northern Ireland. It is often the books like this which we discover as young children that for many stay with us for a lifetime. They provide our first introduction to reading and the marvelous world of creativity and imagination to be found there.'*



## Adopted children in Northern Ireland join the Letterbox Club

The Department of Education has funded the Letterbox Club programme for the last five years. During this time Booktrust and The Fostering Network have delivered thousands of colourful parcels of books and maths games to children in foster care.

Building on this success, the Department of Education has agreed to extend funding until March 2015 to pilot the programme with adopted children in Northern Ireland.

A recent study undertaken by the Institute of Child Care Research at Queens University, *Comparing Long term Placement for Young Children in Care: the Care Pathways and Outcomes Study* (British Association for Adoption and Fostering, 2013), showed that adopted children experience the same challenges in the education system as children in foster care.

Adoption UK and BAAF will be working with The Fostering Network and Booktrust to deliver Letterbox Club parcels to adopted as well as fostered children.

The Letterbox Club has a proven track record of increasing literacy and numeracy levels among children who receive the parcels. The evaluation of the NI Letterbox Club programme by Queen's University Belfast showed that the 348 fostered children in the study:

- made an average gain of 2.9 points on reading accuracy
- gained 3.9 points for reading comprehension
- over a third of children increased a key stage maths level.

An independent randomised control study is being carried out by Queen's University Belfast and the results will be published in October 2014.

The Department of Education's consultation on 'Putting Pupils First, Reforming the Common Funding Scheme' in June 2013 proposed that extra funding should be attached to children who are looked after. This positive development is welcomed in principle and we are pleased that the Letterbox Club has played a part in influencing this change in policy.

the fostering network  
the voice of foster care



### What is the Letterbox Club?

The Letterbox Club sends personally addressed parcels of books and maths games directly to looked after children to help improve their educational outlook. These educational materials encourage the whole family to enjoy reading and number games together which also supports the Department of Education's 'Valuing Education' campaign.

*'I came across the Letterbox Club a few years ago and was really impressed by the impact it had on young readers. The excitement the books generated was palpable and the children I spoke to couldn't wait for the next parcel to arrive. Letterbox Club also influenced my thinking during the recent Funding Review and alerted me to the need for a funding allocation in schools to help all 'looked after' children'*

(Sir Bob Salisbury,  
Chair of Common  
Funding Review  
for Education in NI)



## Children's Laureates 'In Conversation' at Parliament Buildings

On Friday 21 March a joint 'In-Conversation' event between UK Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman and Laureate na nÓg Niamh Sharkey took place in The Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings Stormont (sponsored by Basil McCrea MLA).

The two laureates discussed their roles as ambassadors for children and children's literature. The audience of post primary pupils, school librarians and representatives from the arts enjoyed the 'conversation' led by Marie-Louise Muir of BBC Arts Extra.

The children's enthusiasm and the fact that they had so many questions to ask Malorie and Niamh,

was a testament to the success of the event. Many books were signed, photos taken and memorable conversations took place between the students and the laureates by the end of the morning.

We are proud to have been part of this event and to have worked in partnership with Children's Books Ireland to bring the two laureates together to discuss the big issues surrounding children's books and reading – from digital publishing to library cuts and the challenges the laureates face.

You can watch a short video of the event here  
[www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-blogs](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-blogs)

### Letterbox Club Fun Day!

On Saturday 15 March, the Letterbox Club Fun Day was held in W5, Belfast. The event was attended by 33 young people and 15 adults and, in line with the new pilot programme, both fostering and adoptive families participated.

Throughout the year families are invited to attend Letterbox Club Fun Days alongside receiving monthly parcels. The events are organised by The Fostering Network as part of

the Fostering Achievement programme to add value and a social element to the Letterbox Club programme.

During the event, children took part in W5 puzzle solvers and created their own story with Deery Me! (local author, Trisha Deery) before having the opportunity to go around galleries in the local area.

Paul, aged 10, said: *'I had a lot of fun and my favourite part was when I got to write my own book.'*

# Northern Ireland schools

Booktrust runs a range of prizes and awards including the Blue Peter Book Award and the Roald Dahl Funny Prize. Each year Booktrust NI asks a local school to be part of the judging panel for each award to vote for their favourite books.

Liz Canning, Booktrust NI Manager said: 'It is really important to involve Northern Ireland schools in these high profile prizes and awards for children's books. The pupils really take their roles seriously as they read and review the books, vote for their favourites and eagerly await the announcement of the winning titles. The school also benefits as they receive six copies of each shortlisted book which they can keep for their school library.'



## Blue Peter Book Award 2014

More than 400 pupils aged 9-11 from ten dedicated schools across the UK judged this year's Blue Peter Book Awards including Kilkeel Primary School from Northern Ireland. The pupils read and discussed the four shortlisted books before voting for their favourite title. The winners were announced



on 6 March 2014 during a special World Book Day Newsround bulletin and Kilkeel pupils watched the authors receive their awards on *Blue Peter*.

The winners were:

**Blue Peter Best Book Award of Facts**  
**Weird World of Wonders – World War II**  
by Tony Robinson

**Blue Peter Best Story – Rooftoppers**  
by Katherine Rundell

# judge national awards



## Roald Dahl Funny Prize 2013

Now in its 6th year, the Roald Dahl Funny Prize aims to promote laughter and humour as a feel-good factor when reading. Launched in 2008 in association with Michael Rosen (Children's Laureate 2007-2009), the prize draws attention to funny books as readable and enjoyable, and rewards authors and illustrators who write and illustrate books using humour.

The winners were announced on 10 December 2013 at an awards ceremony at the Cambridge Theatre in London, home to the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Roald Dahl's *Matilda The Musical*.

At least 200 children from across the UK, including pupils from Christ the Redeemer Primary School in Belfast, played



a part in the judging process this year. Pupils read and discussed the shortlisted books with their classmates before voting for the funniest book in their age category. Their votes were combined with those of the official judging panel to find the two winning books for 2013.

The winners were:

**Funniest book for children aged six and under – *Monkey Nut* by Simon Rickerty**

**Funniest book for children aged seven to fourteen – *I Am Still Not a Loser* by Jim Smith**

Paddy McCabe, VP and Literacy Coordinator said: 'The pupils really got involved and had great fun voting for the funniest books in each category. Any initiative which engages children in reading for pleasure in this way has to be commended. Thank you Booktrust for asking us to take part.'

## Hoorah for the Humdinger! Children's Book Festival 2014



**Humdinger! celebrates words, stories and imagination. And this year featured some of the biggest and best-loved names in children's books, including: Oliver Jeffers, Tony Ross, Ian Whybrow, Tony De Saulles and Adam Stower, among other talent.**

Once again Humdinger!'s programme featured fun, family-friendly and innovative events over six days and in a range of venues. Children had a chance to meet their favourite authors and illustrators, listen to stories, take part in workshops, develop new skills, get their favourite books signed and have their imaginations sparked.

Booktrust NI was delighted to be working once again with media and events company Dog Ears on the Humdinger! Children's Book Festival. As part of our exciting programme of events, we held a 'Tiger who



came to Tea Day' for Sure Start groups across Derry on Thursday 27 March. One hundred young children and their families had lots of fun with the tiger including music, stories, rhyme, craft and of course a tea party!



### Keep in Touch!

#### New Website

We've got a shiny new website that has everything you need to know about Booktrust in Northern Ireland – visit [www.booktrust.org.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/northern-ireland) to have a look and keep an eye on our blog for interviews, author tours and more!

#### Booktrust on Twitter

Northern Ireland Coordinator Kathryn Anderson regularly tweets about what we're up to – follow us [@booktrust](https://twitter.com/booktrust) and use [#BooktrustNI](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BooktrustNI)



#### National Bookstart Week 2014

Will run from 9-13 June, and this year's theme is 'my hero'. Libraries NI will once again be hosting lots of fun activities in libraries throughout Northern Ireland. Keep an eye on our website for more information, and be sure to tweet us with what you get up to!