

## **Strictly's Carlos Gu waltzes back to Blackpool to launch CBeebies Bedtime Stories and BookTrust partnership**

Making a grand return to Blackpool, Strictly Come Dancing Star Carlos Gu swaps the glittering Tower Ballroom for the cosy confines of Blackpool Central Library, to perform a live reading and launch a new partnership between CBeebies Bedtime Stories and BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity.

BAFTA-nominated CBeebies Bedtime Stories and BookTrust, have joined forces in an exciting new partnership to deliver unique reading corners in libraries across the UK. The partnership launches with a celebratory family story time event at Blackpool Central Library today, marking the beginning of a joint mission to inspire and engage young readers.

Joining Carlos, the renowned illustrator Ruth Hearson brought one of her heart-warming picture books to life with a live rendition, and poet Mike Garry gave audiences an exclusive poetry performance. Ensuring inclusivity, all readings were supported by a BSL interpreter and adding to the excitement for young guests, popular CBeebies favourites, Ben Cajee, Dodge the Dog and iconic CBeebies characters Bluey and Supertato joined in the fun!

The partnership with BookTrust underscores CBeebies Bedtime Stories' mission to get the nation reading together. It is also a key part of BookTrust's broader mission to support more experiences for families to enjoy reading, and to share the long-term impact reading can have on children's development, wellbeing, progress at school and life chances.

Families were invited to take a seat on the iconic CBeebies Bedtime Stories yellow chair, which is now being permanently donated to Blackpool Central Library, along with CBeebies books, stickers and merchandise to create a legacy CBeebies Bedtime Stories reading corner. This will be available along with BookTrust Storytime, an interactive programme designed to encourage families to make library visits a regular part of family life, which brought 50,000 children into 2,400 libraries across England, Wales and Northern Ireland last year.

**Patricia Hidalgo, Director of BBC Children's and Education, says:** "Collaborating with BookTrust to extend the magic of the iconic yellow chair into library corners nationwide is a true delight. We are thrilled to join forces in our mission to cultivate a passion for reading within families. CBeebies Bedtime Stories holds a special place in households. It's more than just storytelling, it's become a cherished tradition that fosters lasting memories and sparks imagination through shared reading experiences."

Across the UK, the partnership will introduce more CBeebies Bedtime Stories legacy reading corners and BookTrust Storytime engagement at libraries in Leeds, Hartlepool, Sandwell, Leicester, Brent and Somerset. The locations were selected as part of BookTrust's work with Arts Council England to test and develop new ways to inspire parents and children with a love of reading together and focuses on underserved areas.

**Diana Gerald, CEO of BookTrust, says:** "We're thrilled to team up with CBeebies and our partners at Blackpool Council to create this unforgettable library story time experience for families. Experiencing the fun first-hand at a library story time can be a crucial first step on encouraging more people to feel the library is a place they belong. Exploring new ways to engage families with the free reading support on offer at their local library is a key pillar of our charity's work to help more children get the wide-ranging benefits that come from a love of reading."

**Councillor Jo Farrell, Blackpool Council’s Cabinet Member for Levelling Up – People, says:** “It was an absolute pleasure to attend the spectacular CBeebies Bedtime Story and BookTrust event, alongside some of our local families at Blackpool Central Library. Everyone had buckets of fun - the guest readers and special characters really enthralled our early years audience. The British Sign Language interpreter brought the stories to life with passion – a truly great event enjoyed with many happy faces. We know reading from a young age is key. Research shows that reading with a child has a lasting effect on language, vocabulary and literacy skills and is hugely beneficial to their development. This collaborative project is helping children to discover the gift of reading. It has also allowed us an additional opportunity to highlight the incredible programme of activities and events our libraries host for children and adults of all ages.”

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