

Under embargo until 00.01 on 28 June 2023

BookTrust to share new interactive Axel Scheffler book chosen by early years experts to encourage families to start reading with their babies

BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity, has today announced the new book that will be shared with up to 580,000 babies across England and Wales as part of its flagship Bookstart Baby programme.

Designed to encourage families to start reading with their children early so they can enjoy the lifechanging benefits of reading, BookTrust gives every family a Bookstart Baby pack in their first year of life. This includes an age-appropriate book, finger puppet and a useful information leaflet that explains the benefits of sharing stories and rhymes with babies.

A new book is chosen every year by an expert panel that includes families, Bookstart Coordinators, librarians and other early years professionals to ensure it meets their needs. At a time when families are facing significant pressures due to the cost of living, this programme is particularly important for low-income families, the majority (72% of those surveyed) who say that Bookstart Baby packs are some of the first books they own for their child*.

Families will soon be able to enjoy ***Who's hiding on the farm?*** by iconic illustrator and children's book creator **Axel Scheffler**, published by Campbell Books, an imprint of Macmillan Children's Books. A bilingual English and Welsh version of this book will be offered to families in Wales.

It offers an easy-to-read hide and seek story that babies will enjoy hearing time and time again, contributing to the development of their early sounds and speech patterns. With differently coloured and shaped felt flaps to lift and explore, this sturdy board book is durable for the most curious of babies, providing a tactile and interactive experience which can also support their sensory and fine motor skills development.

Using books, stories and rhymes as a basis for playing, talking, singing and exploring in their early years provides the biggest boost to children developmentally, enhancing cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth and development during a period of significant brain growth. Shared reading also supports bonding between children and their family members, boosting parental positivity and improving children's sleep.

The Bookstart Baby programme is proven to impact on families' reading habits. 72% of parents and carers surveyed said the Bookstart Baby packs helped them to know more about the benefits of sharing stories early on with their child and 68% said the packs prompted them to read and share stories more with their child than they may otherwise have done*.

In addition to Bookstart Baby, the charity further promotes the development of early reading habits by offering an extensive range of extra resources, books and support to children from low-income family backgrounds to help close the disadvantage gap. This includes offering Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler packs and BookTrust Storytime resources which are delivered through local public libraries.

This year, and in collaboration with families and partners, the Bookstart Baby pack itself has been refreshed so it is more environmentally friendly and offers a greater visual relationship

between other Bookstart packs, enabling families to see these as trusted resources that will delight their children and inspire them to continue reading together throughout childhood.

Families receive their packs thanks to funding from Arts Council England and the Welsh Government. BookTrust works in partnership with every local authority across England and Wales who determine how best to ensure the packs reach families in their local area. This could be via registrars, health visitors, librarians or other early years professionals.

Diana Gerald, Chief Executive of BookTrust said: *“It’s never too early to start sharing books and stories with children and by gifting Bookstart Baby we hope to get every child reading regularly and by choice so they can enjoy the lifelong benefits of reading. We’re delighted that all babies will be able to enjoy Axel’s fabulous book. With a narrative-led adventure story, it’s easily accessible meaning anyone can pick it up and start reading to their children, even those who might be less confident or less used to reading aloud. Babies and families alike will enjoy the bonding opportunities that come with snuggling up together repeatedly with this brilliant book and we know Bookstart Baby makes a difference to their reading habits. As well as supporting babies’ development and progress, we hope to demonstrate to families how much their children enjoy exploring books and stories together and hope that this kickstarts an early love of reading that will continue throughout childhood.”*

Axel Scheffler, creator of *Who’s hiding on the farm?* said:

“I feel very honoured that my book has been chosen as the Bookstart Baby book and it makes me feel slightly dizzy thinking of all these babies growing up with this book! I hope they will love the surprises in the book when they first lift the flaps and then that they will start to recognise the animals and remember who is hiding behind them. You can show any book to a child, and they can take something in. I read a lot to my own daughter when she was little and I really enjoyed the experience. Books are so important for children. You can really see how much it means to them and how they develop and learn to love stories. I know that it’s very hard to find time to read but any free minute you have, you can use.”

Belinda Ioni Rasmussen, MD of Macmillan Children's Books added: *“We are delighted that BookTrust have selected *Who’s Hiding on the Farm?* by Axel Scheffler from our specialist baby and toddler imprint, Campbell Books, to be their BookStart Baby title this year. This unique initiative crucially enables families to introduce babies to their first book at a time where it feels more critical than ever to reach those most in need. Axel’s distinctive and welcoming artwork, with his surprise animal reveals behind every flap, makes for the perfect book to engage the youngest children in what we hope is the beginning of their reading journey.”*

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Media Contact

For further information please contact press@booktrust.org.uk

*** Research methodology**

BookTrust conducted an online survey of 2,148 parents and carers of children aged 0-7 living in low-income households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between April and June 2022. Results shown are from 1,083 parents/carers who recalled using a Bookstart

Baby pack for their child. The term low-income families indicates those living in relative poverty as defined by Department for Work and Pensions.

About BookTrust

As the UK's largest children's reading charity, we want every child to read regularly and by choice. We reach millions of children and families every year, inspiring them with books and resources to get them started on their reading journey. We provide a wide range of carefully curated and designed books, resources and support to help families start sharing stories and to continue reading throughout childhood. We offer more targeted support to families from low-income and vulnerable backgrounds because we know these children stand to benefit the most from the benefits of reading. Our support is based on robust evidence, designed to deliver reading behaviour change. It is developed in partnership with families and expert practitioners to create inspiring and enjoyable shared reading experiences for children and families. Thanks to an extraordinary network of partners including local authorities, early years settings, schools, libraries and more across England, Wales and Northern Ireland we're able to reach families where they are, in their local communities.

www.booktrust.org.uk

Bookstart Baby in Northern Ireland

Earlier this year the Department of Education in Northern Ireland announced it had to cut funding for Bookstart Baby due to budget issues. BookTrust is exploring all avenues to ensure children in Northern Ireland do not miss out on these important early opportunities to establish their reading habits.

About Axel Scheffler

Axel Scheffler was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1957. He studied history of art in Hamburg, before moving to the United Kingdom to study illustration at Bath Academy of Art in 1982. Since then, he has worked as a freelance illustrator in London. He is best known for the children's books he has illustrated through his partnership with author, Julia Donaldson. Together they created *The Gruffalo*, which has sold over 17 million copies, in 105 countries throughout the world. He lives in London.

<http://www.panmacmillan.com>