

*****Photos available on request*****

“Every child can be a reader”: SF Said will champion making reading more inclusive as BookTrust’s new Writer in Residence

Award-winning author SF Said has today (Monday 20th February) been announced as the new Writer in Residence at BookTrust, the UK’s largest children’s reading charity and will be taking up the role from 1st March 2023. He follows in the footsteps of some of the best loved children’s authors and illustrators in the country including Michael Rosen, Cressida Cowell and Nick Sharratt.

Said will use his residency to champion the importance of encouraging children to read whichever books they most enjoy - be that graphic novels, picture books, short stories, poems, novels or non-fiction - and to follow any route into reading that makes them feel excited and inspired. He will challenge the idea of there being a “right and wrong” way for children to engage with books and literature. Instead, his message is that every child can be a reader.

SF Said is the author of award-winning children’s books including *Tyger*, *Phoenix* and *Varjak Paw* – which featured in BookTrust’s list of 100 Best Children’s Books from the last 100 Years, and has been adapted for stage as well as studied as part of the national Key Stage 2 curriculum. He has also previously acted as a judge for BookTrust’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

Said is a powerful advocate for making reading a more inclusive experience for more children and shares BookTrust’s ambitions to improve representation in children’s books. His books immerse children in worlds where characters explore their identity within systems of social injustice, inequity and prejudice. His latest novel, *Tyger*, draws upon his own experience of growing up as a British Muslim of Middle Eastern origin, and readers may draw parallels between the novel’s themes and systemic racism in our society.

The themes of Said’s work align with BookTrust’s commitment to the future of representation in children’s books. The charity’s recent [BookTrust Represents](#) research found the need for strong, continued efforts to further improve representation in UK children’s literature; both in terms of the diversity of published creators, and in the diversity of stories, characters and experiences represented children’s books, given the critical impact this has on their desire and motivations to read.

With a new strategy that has a strong focus on supporting the most disadvantaged children to build a reading habit, the BookTrust residency provides a platform for writers and illustrators to explore issues that they are passionate about and use their creativity to inspire more children to discover the joy of reading, so they can enjoy all the benefits this brings.

SF Said says: "I am delighted to be the new BookTrust Writer In Residence! I want to use my time in this role to celebrate the life-changing power of reading for pleasure, and to make the case that every single child can be a reader. We know from research that reading for pleasure has the greatest positive impact of any single factor on children's life chances. I think this means we have to do everything possible to enable every child to find the books that will unlock reading for them; the ones that will light the spark of literacy, and give them a space in which they feel included and inspired. I will be advocating for all different kinds of books and different ways into reading. I will be talking to some brilliant teachers and

librarians about reading for pleasure, and getting their top tips on how to help every child become a reader."

Diana Gerald, CEO of BookTrust, continues: "SF's commitment to making reading feel accessible to all children makes him a fantastic force for change and we are honoured to have him on board as our new Writer in Residence. For children to experience the life-changing benefits of reading regularly, it's vital they are encouraged to choose and enjoy whichever books appeal to them most. We need to get the message out there that no book or approach to reading is "right" or "better". As long as children feel motivated and inspired to read, and are supported along that path, that's what matters. We're so pleased SF will use his residency to amplify this message and we're looking forward to this being a positive legacy of his residency."

The BookTrust Writer in Residence project has been running since March 2009 and has featured several authors and illustrators including Cressida Cowell, Sita Brahmachari, Patrick Ness, Polly Dunbar, Bali Rai, Matt Haig, Laura Dockrill, Chris Riddell, Nicola Davies, Cerrie Burnell, Sarah McIntyre, Philip Ardagh, Taran Matharu, Nadia Shireen, Candy Gourlay, Phil Earle, Ed Vere, Smriti Halls, Onjali Q Raúf, Dapo Adeola, Michael Rosen and Nick Sharratt.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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About SF Said

Author SF Said's first book, *Varjak Paw*, was listed by BookTrust as one of the 100 best children's books of the past 100 years. The sequel, *The Outlaw Varjak Paw*, won the BBC Blue Peter Book Of The Year, while *Phoenix* represented the UK on the IBBY International Honour Book List, and was shortlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Award. His new book *Tyger* won the Foyles Children's Book Of The Year Award, and like his other books is illustrated by Dave McKean and published by DFB. Said's books are all currently being read and studied in classrooms around the UK. A passionate campaigner for literacy, libraries and reading for pleasure, Said has written about children's literature for both *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. Visit sfsaid.com and [@whatSFSaid](https://twitter.com/whatSFSaid) on Twitter.

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 more than 2 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