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Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024-2026, to host 'The Reading Rights Summit' as part of his campaign to address the 'invisible privilege and inequality' within children's books and reading

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- Children's Laureate to open Summit with a speech calling on Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and his Labour Government to *'stand up and give a visible sign that this country values its children'*
- Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza, Liverpool City Region Mayor Steve Rotheram, and former Laureates Cressida Cowell and Michael Rosen amongst high-profile speakers
- Summit to recommend policy action that will address the *'recession in happiness'* and *'make sure the transformative gift of reading is shared with every single child'*

Liverpool, 22 January 2025: On 22 January 2025, the multi award-winning children's book author and screenwriter, **Frank Cottrell-Boyce**, will host *'The Reading Rights Summit'* at Liverpool's iconic St George's Hall as part of his tenure as the current **Waterstones Children's Laureate (2024-2026)**.

Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024–2026, said:

"Working with BookTrust in these first six months of my Laureateship I've visited lots of early years settings and seen astonishingly brilliant practice. I understand now – more than ever – just how urgent it is that we re-set the conversation about reading. To use a government phrase: 'de-silo reading'. Yes, it's important for educational attainment. Yes, DCMS, it's the most crucial – and most democratic – part of our cultural heritage. Shared reading is an effective, economic health intervention, so yes, it's essential, Wes Streeting, to mental health, to bonding, to attachment, to creating a situation where parents and carers can give the best, the most joyous start in life to our children.

"New research from BookTrust demonstrates this urgent need for support: 6 in 10 parents and carers of 0–7-year-olds wish they had known earlier just how important it is to read and share stories regularly with their children, and wish they had started doing so sooner¹. Our children are near the top of the global leagues when it comes to the mechanical skill of reading but near the bottom when it comes to 'reading for pleasure'. We've taught them all the steps and the names of all the tunes. But they're not dancing. That our children seem to be experiencing some kind of happiness recession at the moment is not surprising, and I believe that the decline in reading too has played its part in this.

¹ BookTrust question included in Nielsen BookData's Understanding the UK Children's Book Consumer 2024 survey. Sample: 873 parents/carers of children aged 0–7.

“That’s why, as Children’s Laureate, I’ve worked with BookTrust to create this summit – together, we are going to discuss, share, challenge and develop our expertise and experiences. Together, we will develop a report that will help ensure the transformative gift of reading is shared with every single child. Because this is so, so doable but the longer we wait to address invisible privilege and inequality, the worse this becomes – more and more children fall further behind.”

About ‘The Reading Rights Summit’

‘The Reading Rights Summit’ – which is organised in partnership with the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, **BookTrust**, who manage the Laureateship – forms a key part of Cottrell-Boyce’s ‘*Reading Rights: Books Build a Brighter Future*’ campaign, which he launched on appointment as Children’s Laureate in July 2024.

Cottrell-Boyce aims to address ‘*invisible privilege and inequality*’ within books and reading, so that every child – from their earliest years – has access to the transformative ways in which they improve long-term life chances.

The day-long summit – the first of its kind led by a Children’s Laureate – will bring together high-profile, expert voices in the political, education, literacy, early years, arts and health sectors with a view to recommending an urgent course of action to policymakers that will help ensure that the ‘*life-changing benefits of children’s reading are taken seriously*’.

‘*The Reading Rights Summit*’ programme is divided into three key areas for improvement, identified by Cottrell-Boyce and BookTrust following a learning tour to early learning centres, nurseries, schools and family hubs across the UK. Summit speakers will call on the UK government to deliver on the following policy asks:

- 1. The best start in life:** *“We want to normalise sharing stories as part of the best start in life for every child, with midwives, health visitors and other early years professionals introducing reading to all families.”*

This will be opened by a provocation from **Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region**, followed by a panel chaired by **Julie Hayward, Director of Partnerships, BookTrust** with speakers including:

- **Anna Hartley, Executive Director of Public Health, Barnsley Council**
- **Dr Sam Wass, Director, Institute for the Science of Early Years, University of East London**
- **Cressida Cowell, best-selling author and illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* series and former Children’s Laureate (2019-2022)**

- 2. Nurseries and schools:** *“We want nurseries and schools to be equipped and supported so that sharing books and stories is at the heart of early education for every child.”*

This will be opened by a provocation from **Michael Rosen, best-selling author, Professor of Children’s Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London, and former Children’s Laureate (2007-2009)**, followed by a panel chaired by **Ruthann Hughes, Director of Research and Impact, BookTrust** with speakers including:

- **Neil Leitch, Chief Executive, Early Years Alliance**
- **Dr Julian Grenier, Senior Content & Engagement Manager, Education Endowment Foundation**
- **Sonia Thompson, Headteacher, St. Matthew’s C.E. Primary Research and Support School**

- 3. Families and communities:** *“We want all families and communities, including those experiencing vulnerability, to be supported to make reading and storytelling part of daily life.”*

This will be opened by a provocation from **Alex McCormick, Spellow Library fundraiser**, followed by a panel chaired by **Annie Crombie, Deputy CEO, BookTrust**, with speakers including:

- **Sarah Thomas, CEO, Fostering Network**
- **Lucy Peake, CEO, Kinship**
- **Ruth Terry, Executive Director, Social Care & Practise, Bradford Children and Families Trust**
- **Sally Pearse, Strategic Lead for Early Years and Director, Sheffield Hallam University**

Rachel De Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, will close the summit with a keynote speech, and former Children's Laureate **Chris Riddell (2015-2017)** will commemorate the day with special 'behind the scenes' live illustrations.

Diana Gerald MBE, CEO of BookTrust, said: "Sadly, too many children from low-income families don't get the start in life they deserve. However, we know that early years experiences that include shared reading can change this and are critical to giving children the best start in life. Reading regularly with a child from the earliest moments in childhood has a measurable impact on their development and wellbeing and helps children overcome disadvantages caused by inequalities. That's why BookTrust partnered with over 4,700 early years settings last year to provide high-quality shared reading support for families.

"But there is much more to be done. There must now be urgent investment in quality provision that places child development at the heart of the early years system so that the benefits of early reading and the magic of sharing stories can be experienced by every family, in every community. There has never been a more urgent time for us to inspire a new generation of children on their reading journeys."

A report summarising key learnings and policy recommendations from *'The Reading Rights Summit'* will be published by BookTrust in spring 2025.

Further information on Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024-2026, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, is [here](#).

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About the Waterstones Children's Laureate

The Waterstones Children's Laureate is the foremost representative of children's literature, awarded biannually to a renowned writer or illustrator in recognition of exceptional talent. Managed by BookTrust – the UK's largest children's reading charity – and sponsored by Waterstones, this prestigious role celebrates creativity and storytelling, promotes the vital importance of reading and children's literature, and champions the right of every child to enjoy a lifetime enriched with books and stories. The Children's Laureate role was originally created by Poet Laureate Ted Hughes and author Michael Morpurgo, and each Laureate brings their own passion and themes to create a unique legacy.

The current Waterstones Children's Laureate is Frank Cottrell-Boyce, the multi-award-winning author and screenwriter. The previous twelve Laureates are: Quentin Blake (1999-2001), Anne Fine (2001-2003), Michael Morpurgo (2003-2005), Jacqueline Wilson (2005-2007), Michael Rosen (2007-2009), Anthony Browne (2009-2011), Julia Donaldson (2011-2013), Malorie Blackman (2013-2015), Chris Riddell (2015-2017), Lauren Child (2017-2019), Cressida Cowell (2019-2022), Joseph Coelho (2022-2024)

About Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Frank Cottrell-Boyce is a multi award-winning children's book author and screenwriter. *Millions*, his debut children's novel, won the prestigious CILIP Carnegie Medal. His other books include *Cosmic*, *Framed*, *The Astounding Broccoli Boy*, *Sputnik's Guide to Life on Earth*, *Runaway Robot*, *Noah's Gold* and *The Wonder*

Brothers. He has enjoyed a long-time collaboration with award-winning illustrator Steven Lenton. His books have been shortlisted for a multitude of prizes, including the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Whitbread Children's Fiction Award, The Roald Dahl Funny Prize and the Blue Peter Book Award.

Frank is also a highly successful screenwriter. He has written for the hit TV series *Doctor Who* and his script for Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* won a British Animation Award. Along with Danny Boyle, he devised the Opening Ceremony for the London 2012 Olympics. Frank has been the judge for the 500 Words competition and the BBC's *One Show As You Write It* competition. Frank is a lifelong champion of children's books. In 2023 he launched a successful podcast with Nadia Shireen, *The Island of Brilliant!*, celebrating writing and illustration for children of all ages. He lives in Merseyside with his family.

About BookTrust

We get millions of children reading, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. Children who choose to read and who read regularly are happier and healthier. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school and are more creative. They enjoy more success in life. This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age and throughout their early years. Our carefully selected books and well-researched programmes are delivered by thousands of local partners, bringing the magic of reading to children in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

About Waterstones

Waterstones is the UK and Ireland's leading high street bookseller with over 300 bookshops, including Foyles, Hatchards, Hodges Figgis, Blackwell's and branches in Ireland, Brussels and Amsterdam. It is the only national specialist book retailer of scale in the UK, with the average sized shop carrying a range of around 30,000 individual books and with over 200,000 titles in the largest shop. [Waterstones.com](https://www.waterstones.com) | [@Waterstones](https://twitter.com/Waterstones)