

Patrice Lawrence MBE to shine a light on how books can support vulnerable children as BookTrust's new Writer in Residence

The UK's largest children's reading charity, BookTrust, has announced that award-winning author Patrice Lawrence will take up post as the new Writer in Residence this September. Lawrence, a British writer and journalist, who has published fiction both for adults and children, 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.

The Writer in Residence programme provides a platform for writers and illustrators to explore societal issues that they are passionate about, while also encouraging parents and children alike to experience the benefits of reading. During her residency, Lawrence aims to encourage children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage to discover the magic of reading as well as promoting the benefits reading can bring to a child's life such as better mental health, empathy and creativity.

Reflecting on her upcoming residency, Lawrence said: *"I believe that every child deserves books that make them gasp with laughter, thrill with adventure and widen their horizons so they can gaze at the world from new perspectives. Books take us out of ourselves; books can be our buffer during tough times. We live in a world that isn't just and children often bear the brunt of that inequality. 4.3 million children in the UK are living in poverty, an all-time high. Some children, such as Black, Asian/British Asian and Gypsy and Traveller-heritage children, are disproportionately affected. Around 120,000 children are young carers, and many children are recovering from traumatic experiences, including bereavement and family separation.*

"Children's books should reflect the world we live in. Why not immerse ourselves in the hopes, fears and ambitions of children who are refugees, or care-experienced or affected by family imprisonment? They will feel like their stories matter. And others will be able to empathise, understand and advocate for change.

"Lastly, there is the pure joy of children and adults reading books together. Shared book-reading has proven positive benefits on children's social, cognitive and emotional well-being. The children that are trying to strive despite the challenges in their lives need these benefits even more."

Lawrence's writing has won awards including the Waterstones Children's Book Prize for Older Children and The Bookseller YA Book Prize. Her first book for young adults, *Orangeboy*, was shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award and won the Bookseller YA Prize and Waterstone's Prize for Older Children's Fiction. *Indigo Donut*, her second book for teenagers, won the Crimefest YA Prize. Both books have been nominated for the Carnegie Medal. She has also worked for more than 20 years for charities supporting equality and social justice.

Diana Gerald MBE, CEO of BookTrust, said: *"We're delighted that much-loved author Patrice Lawrence MBE is lending her voice as BookTrust's latest Writer in Residence – each author brings a new and interesting perspective, and we look forward to seeing what her tenure brings.*

"At BookTrust, we know the transformative power of reading on children's lives and in helping them to overcome disadvantages. Long-term investment is needed more than ever to tackle child poverty in our country, however, simple activities like shared reading can be a source of joy in the here and now and the skills learned can help break cycles of disadvantage. Each year, we get millions of children reading, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. We do this because research shows that children who read regularly are happier and healthier, they form stronger bonds and relationships, they do better at school, are more creative and enjoy more success in life."

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, Carrie Burnell, Sarah McIntyre, Philip Ardagh, Taran Matharu, Nadia Shireen, Candy Gourlay, Phil Earle, Ed Vere, Smriti Halls, Onjali Q Raúf, Dapo Adeola, Michael Rosen, Nick Sharratt, SF Said, Michelle Robinson and Rashmi Sirdeshpande.

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About BookTrust

We are the UK's largest children's reading charity. We get millions of children reading, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. We do this because research shows that children who read regularly are happier and healthier. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school, are more creative and 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.

About Patrice Lawrence

Patrice Lawrence is a writer for children and young people who is passionate about social justice. Before becoming a full-time writer, she worked for charities that promoted the rights of children, families and adults that often go unheard. Her books have been shortlisted for and won a number of major prizes including the YA Prize, the Waterstones Prize for Older Children's Fiction, the Jhalak Prize for Children and Young People and the Little Rebels Children's Award. She has been awarded an MBE for Literature and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Some of our key activities include:

BookStart programmes for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers which provides families with books and resources to help foster a love of shared reading from the earliest age.

Our writer-in-residence programme which gives a platform to some of the best children's writers and illustrators in the country to champion the power of books. Past writers in residence include Michael Rosen, Nick Sharratt, Onjali Q. Raúf and Dapo Adeola. Supporting the work of the Children's Laureate (currently Frank Cottrell-Boyce). Former Laureates include Jacqueline Wilson, Malorie Blackman, Anthony Browne and Quentin Blake.

BookTrust has long-term partnerships in place with every local authority in England and with the national government in Wales and works with thousands of local partners.