

John Agard

Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2019

UK Writer Nomination

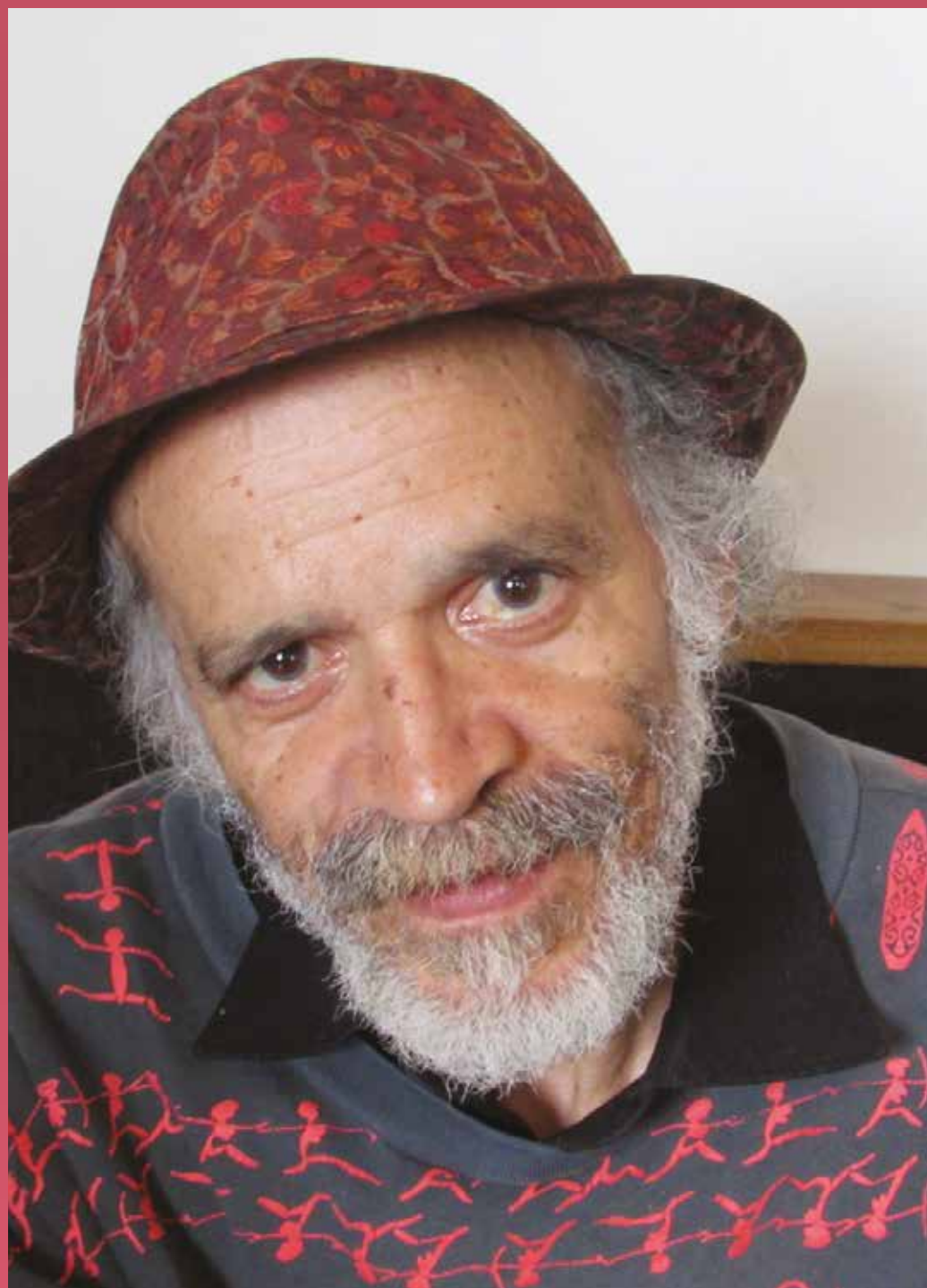


PHOTO: ZELMA PLAYER

John Agard Biography

John Agard is described as “a unique and energetic force in contemporary British poetry”¹. He is also a playwright and short story writer. He was born in 1949 in Guyana; and he credits his passion for words to the childhood inspirations of the Latin Mass, Calypso, and BBC radio cricket commentary. He began writing poetry in his teens and worked as a teacher, a librarian and a newspaper sub-editor and feature writer before arriving in Britain in 1977 with his partner, the poet Grace Nichols. By then he had already published two books.

In Britain he became a touring lecturer for the British Commonwealth Institute, working there from 1978-1985 and he visited nearly two thousand schools across the UK talking about the Caribbean and giving readings and workshops. His first adult collection of poems *Man to Pan* (1982) was the winner of the Casa de las Américas Prize. In 1983 he published his first collection of children’s poems, *I Din Do Nuttin* a collection for younger children illustrated by Susanna Gretz. Since then he has published poems for adults and for children of all ages, sometimes working with his wife, Grace Nichols, and also enjoying a fruitful association with the illustrator Satoshi Kitamura. He has earned awards both for his own work and as an editor of collections. He and Grace were awarded the inaugural CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) Award for *Under the Moon and Over the Sea* (2002) and John was awarded the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry in 2012 and the Eleanor Farjeon Award for services to children’s literature in 2016.

John is a tireless performer of his poetry. In 1975 in Guyana, he worked with All-ah-We, a group of actors and performers which he credits with helping him to create characters, tell stories, use Creole effectively, and to work with audiences. All of which has made him a mesmeric performer of his work. “Poetry lives in the breath,” he says, and of performing live: “It’s almost like going back to that collective thing, around the fire.”² He says you must always read a poem aloud “so you can feel its music in your mouth.”³

His abilities as a performer are part of his enthusiasm for the promotion of poetry and are coupled with an ability to inspire others in a variety of collaborations and initiatives. In 1989 he became the first Writer in Residence at London’s South Bank Centre. This was

followed by Poet in Residence at the BBC in London in 1998, an appointment created as part of a scheme run by the Poetry Society. At the BBC he worked in association with the Windrush project, which included a season of TV programmes on Afro-Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom. As part of the project he appeared on the long running children’s programme *Blue Peter*, one of his poems was quoted by Prince Charles, and another was engraved on a plaque commemorating the arrival of the ship *Windrush* at the London docks. He said of his time at the BBC: “poetry sensitises us to language and to human connectedness, so it should have a role to play in an organisation whose motto is ‘And nation shall speak peace unto nation’.”⁴ In 2007 he was writer in residence at the National Maritime Museum. His latest association is with GCSE Poetry Live, in which some of the best of British poets, including John and Grace, perform their poems in a series of readings across the UK for students preparing for their GCSE examinations.

John says of the importance of poetry to children: “We are surrounded by words and language can control our thoughts. When world leaders speak, for example, of ‘limited collateral damage’ to describe the bombing of people, it’s a way of speaking that you could call cosmetic and deceptive. That’s why it’s important for children to be in touch with the language of poetry which not only tunes their ear to the music of words but keeps alive their sense of wonder.”⁵

¹ <https://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/john-agard>

² Alice O’Keeffe, *The Bookseller*, October 6, 2011
<https://www.thebookseller.com/profile/john-agard>

³ <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/october/john-agard-on-the-importance-of-poetry-language-can-control-our-thoughts/>

⁴ John Agard Making Waves at the BBC
<http://archive.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/archives/places/bbcagard/>

⁵ <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/october/john-agard-on-the-importance-of-poetry-language-can-control-our-thoughts/>

John Agard A Critical Appreciation

John Agard has lived in Britain since 1977, but it was his Guyanese childhood which strongly shaped the writer and electrifying performer he was to become. Agard worked for the Commonwealth Institute for several years, travelling all over the UK to many different schools, festivals and libraries, educating, entertaining and learning what appealed to his youthful audience. Best known and loved for his poetry, his range spans picturebooks, new versions of nursery rhymes, Caribbean proverbs, well-chosen anthologies as well as highly praised poetry collections for adult and juvenile readers. His poetry for children, written both in nation language and standard English, is rhythmic and playful, bursting with energy and fun.

John Agard is a key figure in bringing Caribbean poetry for both children and for adults into wider consciousness in the UK and internationally. He became a published poet at a time in Britain when there was a growing recognition of the need for greater diversity in the books being offered to children and was at the forefront of this movement. His first popular collection, *I Din Do Nuttin and other poems* (1983), draws on universal experience of little children in the UK and the Caribbean but also talks specifically about black experience. This is exemplified in a poem, 'Happy Birthday, Dilroy', where the protagonist asks his mother '...tell me why/they don't put a little boy/that looks a bit like me' on his cards. 'Why the boy on the card so white?' Other collections for young readers include *Say it again, Granny!* (1986) a vibrant collection of poems based on Caribbean proverbs.

Agard's ability to probe conventions and, indeed, tackle racism, is done with a light touch for younger readers and with irony and humour for older readers. Poems such as 'Limbo Dancer at Immigration', 'Cowboy Movies' and 'Half-caste' in *Get Back Pimple* (1996) ask powerful questions about race as well as making readers roar with laughter. '...explain yu self/wha yu mean/when yu say half-caste/yu mean when light an shadow/mix in de sky/ is a half-caste weather/ well in dat case/England weather/nearly always half-caste....' Agard often pushes at the boundaries of how experience can be constituted in language. Tackling racial prejudice in his poetry, he tends to shame the reader through irony rather than anger.

As well as drawing on nursery rhymes and the oral tradition in his own poetry, John Agard has always been an avid collector of traditional verse from the Caribbean and from around the wider world, editing several anthologies with his

wife Grace Nichols, also a significant poet with Guyanese heritage. In *No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock* (1991) traditional rhymes are interspersed with the editors' own poems which play with these verses. For example, in the title poem, a mouse humorously protests that, although it did all sorts of other things, it 'didn't run up no clock' as described in the original nursery rhyme. From *Mouth to Mouth* (2004) collects together oral poems from around the world, encouraging awareness of 'a time when poems weren't written down but said out loud like praise-songs in public places or sung like lullabies in private places.' Agard and Nichols were inspired by nonsense poems from around the world to compile *Pumpkin Grumpkin* (2011). They gathered James Berry's Jamaican 'Gobble-Gobble Rap', odes to fruit and vegetables translated from Polish and Icelandic, animal sounds from Asia collected by a Japanese poet and placed them alongside Edward Lear's limericks, Spike Milligan and Lewis Carroll to create a wondrous world of wordplay.

John Agard has also edited several international anthologies such as *Hello New!* (2000), a collection of specially commissioned poems to greet the 21st century, all linked by the word 'new', and *Why is the Sky?* (1996) full of poetry reflecting his own questioning attitude to the world and his encouragement to young people to do the same.

Agard and Nichols have edited several full colour anthologies based on their knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the poetry of the Caribbean which have drawn particular praise. *A Caribbean Dozen* (1994) provides a rich selection of the work of thirteen poets from the Caribbean including themselves. This volume was beautifully illustrated by Cathie Felstead and she was one of five artists to illustrate a further handsomely produced volume edited by Agard and Nichols in 2002. *Under the Moon and Over the Sea* won the first CLPE Poetry Award (now known as the CLIPPA). This anthology encompasses poems from poets living in the Caribbean and those from the Caribbean diaspora and also includes traditional rhyme and song.

One of the illustrators of *Under the Moon and Over the Sea* is Satoshi Kitamura, a Japanese artist whose work has become much associated with John Agard's poetry as the illustrator of many of his collections, their humorous collaboration adding a further dimension to the poems. In *We Animals Would Like a Word with You* (1996) animals give their own forthright views about the world as they see it and their relationships with humans. *Einstein the Girl Who Hated Maths* (2002)

begins with a poem about a girl whose mother makes mathematics meaningful for her and goes on to explore many aspects of the world of numbers. A subsequent collection *Hello H2O* (2003) probes scientific ideas and concepts.

In *Goldilocks on CCTV* (2011) Agard blends modern media with familiar tales to invite considerations of contemporary culture and modern life. 'It's no good being streetwise when you're lost in enchanted woods.' Characters familiar from European fairy tales – including Cinderella, Goldilocks, Rumpelstiltskin and Sleeping Beauty – inhabit the urban jungle rather than the fairy tale forest.

In CLiPPA winner *The Young Inferno* (2008) John Agard re-invented and re-interpreted Dante's *Inferno* for today's young people, retaining the use of terza rima in cantos, while using contemporary language and allusions – 'leaders, like new world orders, come and go.' He uses classical literary references more widely known in modern times – Aesop replaces Virgil as the storyteller who is the narrator's guide on his journey into Hell. When our hero re-emerges at last into the Upper World, he finds himself in a library where he meets his Beatrice. Satoshi Kitamura's black and white illustrations evoking shadows, bones and howling crowds of humanity in hell add impact to this powerful poem.

Throughout his career John Agard has written successfully for the full age range from picturebooks for young children to collections for teenagers and adults.

His picturebooks include *Dig Away Two-Hole Tim* (1981), illustrated by Jennifer Northway, about a small Guyanese boy and his fascination for holes: keyholes, crabholes, tunnels and hidey holes, the action rhyme for babies *Wriggle Piggy Toes* (2005) illustrated by Jenny Bent and, most recently, *Come All You Little Persons* (2017) illustrated by Jessica Courtney-Tickle which calls on the children of Earth's life forms to join in nature's dance. He has also published fiction for children, such as *Shona, the Word Detective* (2018) in which the central character displays an infectious love of language.

Almost uncategorisable among his work is *Book: My Autobiography* (2014) – published in paperback as *My Name is Book* (2016). Here he has personified the book in prose which is lyrical, chatty and informative. Book speaks to us across the ages describing its own history from the birth of writing on clay tablets to a modern day meeting with a young eBook 'showing off what he called his hyper-text'. At the heart of Book is its love affair with the codex form, describing 'my pages being flipped, a tingle of excitement runs down my spine. Is this person about to read me? I'm thinking. Or are they just flipping and dipping into me?' The personalised approach allows for eclecticism in what is

emphasised, drawing out aspects that appeal such as the aroma of printed books 'a hint of mature wood pulp tinged with vanilla, as if the forest itself had stamped me with the smell of ancient wisdom.' As befits the subject matter, this is a compact beautifully designed volume with quotations, poetry and pictures permeating the prose.

Prolific as ever, recent collections, *The Rainmaker Danced* (2017), shortlisted for the CLiPPA, and *The Coming of the Little Green Men* (2018) display his trademark originality, wit and integrity, never talking down to younger readers from 5 – young adult, encouraging them to question, while being playful in tone, amusing or satirical. They focus on an impressive range of topics dealing with social justice, knowledge of mythology and traditional tales, as well as considering new developments in technology and reflecting on nature and humanity and their interaction. Agard is both irreverent about poetry and pays homage to it. A recent poem, 'Give the Ball to the Poet', provided the title of a new anthology of Caribbean poetry for young readers which was shortlisted for the CLiPPA Award.

John Agard's poems have been regularly included in the English national curriculum on the examination syllabus for 16 year olds and for many years he has taken part in an annual tour bringing poetry alive for young people. Here he displayed to hugely enthusiastic audiences his flamboyant and inimitable performance style which has helped to make his work extremely popular among schoolchildren.

Overall, Agard's work has been immensely influential with young people, bringing many to enjoy poetry through its vitality, wit, wisdom and charm. He has been publishing outstanding poetry and fiction for the young for over thirty-five years and shows no sign of letting up. Acclaimed for his adult work by gaining the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 2012, he is even more deserving of the Hans Christian Andersen Award, having dedicated so much of his life's work and creative output on writing and performing brilliantly for children.

John Agard can be seen performing his own poems and talking about poetry here: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/agard-john>

Morag Styles, Emeritus Professor of Children's Poetry, Homerton College, University of Cambridge.

Ann Lazim, Librarian, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (incorporating the National Poetry Centre for Primary Schools), London

January 2019

John Agard Interviews

1. John Agard: 'I feel an empathy with the bad characters'

Ahead of receiving the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry, the poet John Agard tells Felicity Capon about his poetry, growing up in Guyana and what he thinks of British society today.

By Felicity Capon 12 Mar 2013

Raucous laughter emerges from the studio where the poet John Agard is being photographed. The photographer asks him to leave his coat on, and Agard cheerfully agrees, telling us in his deep Caribbean voice that it will "make him look like he just arrived from the tropics". Dressed in a jaunty hat and jazzy shirt, casually rolling a cigarette as he talks, Agard is warm and thoughtful. I am told that his favourite place to write is in a pub with a pint of Guinness and I get the impression, as we speak, that he is pretty down to earth.

One of the most highly regarded poets in the UK, Agard has won many awards. Today his poetry will be recognised by the Queen, when he is awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. The award was first instituted in 1933 by King George V, and the recipient is chosen by a committee chaired by the Poet Laureate. Past winners include Stevie Smith, Ted Hughes, Norman MacCaig and Derek Walcott – a cross-section of poets that Agard describes as "good company".

Though he is touched by the honour, for Agard a medal from the Queen means as much as, for example, the letter of congratulations he recently received from his old sixth-form teacher, or the support of friends in Lewes, Sussex where he now lives.

"I was browsing in a local bookshop," he tells me, "and an elderly lady approached me and said: 'I heard you got some award. It's going to cost me to talk to you now.'" Agard laughs loudly.

"But you're just grateful for the blessing of poems still coming," he says. "You don't live your life as a poet thinking, 'what's my next prize?' It's a different kind of mindset from say, athletics."

It is for his two works – his children's book *Goldilocks on CCTV* and his anthology *Alternative Anthem* – that he is receiving the award. *Goldilocks on CCTV* takes the fairytale characters and gives them a modern, subversive twist. There is a feisty damsel in distress, a Cinderella who wants a motorbike and a host of "bad" characters, like the ugly sisters, the wolf and the beast, who tell their side of the story.

"I was conscious that our perception of fairytales is coloured by the cosmetic, Walt Disney version", Agard explains. "Through poetry you make people reflect and you name and un-name things, such as the absurdity of an expression, like the poem *Half-Caste*. Through humour and satire you get children to think about quite relevant and serious things."

Half-Caste is a poem particularly well-known by young people, as it featured on the GCSE syllabus for many years. The poem cleverly challenges the reader to consider the term "half-caste" and its associations with inferiority: "Consequently when I dream / I dream half-a-dream / an when moon begin to glow / I half-caste human being / cast half-a-shadow".

The theme of identity is a powerful presence in Agard's poetry. In one poem from *Goldilocks on CCTV* Agard empathises with Rumpelstiltskin, "this strange Goblin-like fellow" because the queen reveals his secret name.

This story made an impression on Agard as a child, because as he explains, historically, slaves in the Caribbean had their names replaced by those of their slave masters. The uncovering of secret names in many cultures is also a severe trauma. "In many cultures, your name is linked to your soul and spirit. I think that's why I was drawn to Rumpelstiltskin", he says. The anguish is evident in the poem: "For they have spilt / the beans of me / unlit / the spark of me / unsung / the lark of me."

I put it to Agard that there is a tendency in his poems to delve beneath the conventional view. Whether it is his collection *From the Devil's Pulpit*, where Agard writes humorously, often sympathetically, from the devil's viewpoint, his poems about identity such as 'Half-Caste' and 'Palm Tree King' or assuming the voice of fairytale villains.

"I feel an empathy with the bad characters", he says with a smile. "I think that's part of the excitement of writing,

how you can give a voice to certain characters, or people that are usually voiceless.”

Agard grew up in Georgetown, in what was then British Guiana. He recalls reading fairytales, Enid Blyton and The Hardy Boys as a child, before discovering the humour of PG Wodehouse, and the liberating influence of the Mersey Sound poets: Adrian Henri, Roger McGough and Brian Patten. He fondly recalls his time spent as an altar boy, his Roman Catholic upbringing evident in his poems.

Another key influence that affected his love of words was BBC cricket commentary. “In the same way that a young teenager today may dream about becoming a rapper, I used to love pretending to be a cricket commentator, like John Arlott. That’s when it all came together,” he laughs. I ask him whether he ever dreamed of going on Test Match Special: “Well as a Caribbean boy you fancy yourself as more than a commentator, you fancy yourself as the batsman or the bowler!”

Agard moved to Britain in 1977, with his wife, the poet Grace Nichols, to pursue their dream of becoming writers. He describes feeling the pull of the mother country as a result of a childhood spent studying Chaucer and Shakespeare. It was a strong connection he says, “despite the conflicts and brutalities of the past”. He has spent more time living in Britain than his native homeland, yet he is still heavily influenced by his upbringing in Guyana. As a result, he says continents fill his head space and inspire his creativity.

I ask him if he has had to contend with racial prejudice in Britain. “Well let’s put it this way, I’ve never been arrested by the police, or experienced any physical confrontations, as such”, he says. “But any black person living in England would be deceiving themselves if they said they’d never experienced even just subtle racism – a changing in the tone of someone’s voice, for instance. The sooner we can face the fact that Western education is entrenched with preconceived notions of other societies, the better. It’s healthy and liberating to question those perceptions.”

Has British society made progress in its attitudes, I ask? “Yes, but there’s still a long way to go.” Agard replies. “I don’t think we realise that there is a great possibility here for a genuine enrichment of diversity, despite whatever conflicts exist.

“It’s an auspicious time, particularly for Caribbean poetry in this country, and teachers are embracing different voices, so we now hear Indian and Pakistani poets speak. That would never happen in France or Spain. You’ve only got to consider the football situation in Eastern Europe. So we have a lot to do. But then again, that’s the fascinating thing about Britain.”

THE HOSANNA OF SMALL MERCIES

Blink of green to greet the day.

What more can one ask of a leaf?

Blessing of a bird’s octaves.

What more can one ask of a beak?

Breath of morning’s first coffee.

What more can one ask of a bean?

Embrace of musk from old books.

What more can one ask of a shelf?

The hosanna of small mercies.

The salutation of self to self.

John Agard, taken from his forthcoming collection *Travel Light Travel Dark* (Bloodaxe Books, June 2013)

<https://felicitycaapon.com/2013/03/20/john-agard-i-feel-an-empathy-with-the-bad-characters-interview>

2. Financial Times Magazine May 4 2018

“Britain Doesn’t Know How Blessed it is”

By William Wallis

The award-winning Guyanese-born poet John Agard talks to William Wallis about race, globalisation and falling under the spell of the ‘fairy of language’

If xenophobia is the poisonous by-product of globalisation resurgent in the UK’s political mainstream, then the poet John Agard is the perfect antidote for our times. Born in pre-independence British Guyana, part African-Caribbean, part Portuguese, he hails from what he calls a “cook-up” culture. His very existence — and that of his Queen’s Medal-winning work — thumbs a nose at notions of racial and geographical purity.

Cook-up rice is a dish from Guyana. You take oxtail, a chicken leg or tripe — whatever happens to be in the fridge, says Agard. You throw in black-eyed beans and spring onions, add thyme and red chillies. The mixture beds down on rice simmered in the milk of a freshly cracked coconut. The result is a rich risotto (richer still if left a day). Each ingredient makes its dynamic contribution, however trampled on by history. It is, he says, the culinary embodiment of the Caribbean.

I have tracked Agard down in Lewes, East Sussex, where — at one point as my neighbour — he has lived for the past 30 years. I am intrigued to hear what he makes of the latest convulsions in Westminster. The prime minister, Theresa May, has come under fire (along with home secretary Amber Rudd, who resigned last Sunday) for creating a “hostile environment” for immigrants — both legal and illegal — in order to meet deportation targets. This has resulted in heartless treatment (chronicled first by Amelia Gentleman in *The Guardian*) of some of the West Indians who began arriving at Tilbury Docks in 1948 on the Empire Windrush, answering a call to fill the labour shortage in postwar Britain.

Despite having lived legally in the UK, many of the Windrush pioneers do not have the required paperwork to meet stringent new conditions to prove they are legal citizens. Harried by rules set by May when she was home

secretary, they have lost jobs, been denied medical treatment and been evicted from their homes. In some cases they have been incarcerated prior to deportation to islands they barely know.

Agard hates to boil things down to formula, so he avoids clichés about the rich contribution that the West Indian diaspora has made to British society. He personally did not travel to the UK to drive a bus, work on the Underground or nurse the NHS; he was already a poet when he flew in from Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, in 1977 with his wife, the equally accomplished poet Grace Nichols, and their daughter Leslie. They were visiting his father who had come to London in Windrush times, working for years at the central post office off Trafalgar Square.

WINDRUSH POSTSCRIPT

Call them Windrush pilgrims, pioneers,
or simply the followers of a leap of faith
when dreams were coloured red white and blue
and Tilbury Docks signalled hope renewed.
But Red rewinds the mind to forgotten colonies
that once bled for a sceptered isle overseas.
White points to the page that fiddled a continent.
Blue for the sky that surveys all without judgment.
These mostly trilbyed Windrush newcomers
were supposed to survive only one winter.
Seventy winters later, that Windrush word
returns to haunt Britain’s tribal corridors.
Which leads one to ask by way of postscript:
have they forgotten the ship in citizenship?

The scandal has inflicted a sense of injury in Britain’s wider West Indian community, whose place in the fabric of contemporary Britain has been unravelled by the state. But Agard turns the injury on its head. “I call no names. The stone cast will be wrapped in velvet,” he says, in a typically elliptical phrase delivered in his still pronounced West Indian accent. “The point is that Albion has mutilated its own limb by questioning citizenship that was already lovingly earned.”

He is still more lyrical in response to another Windrush question, producing a sonnet he has penned specially for the occasion (printed below). It echoes verses he voiced during a BBC residency in the late 1990s when, at a televised reunion on Tilbury Docks, he met a man called Vince Reid who, at 13, had been the youngest passenger on the original Windrush journey. The older Reid bent down to kiss the concrete.

Agard, 68, has used alchemy in a melting pot of language for more than 40 years now. In his published poetry he is as comfortable in the guise of the 12th-century Jewish physician and philosopher Maimonides — or indeed the Devil — as he is bending low like a limbo dancer. In person, too, he leaps from one persona to another across centuries, speaking in a dialogue of riddle and rhyme.

One minute he is impersonating Christopher Columbus, the next Alexander Pushkin (using lines from a one-man show he is developing about the Russian poet, whose great-grandfather was a freed African slave brought up in the household of Tsar Peter the Great). “I love entering another persona, distancing myself from myself,” he says.

On cue, he takes on the voice of a chorus of microbes from a poem he wrote for the BBC some years ago, inspired by news of research into the weakened immune systems of young generations sheltered from bacterial storms:

“We’ll catch you and catch you soon.

You there in your squeaky clean zone

We’re nestling in your mobile phone.”

In a jibe at politicians, and perhaps journalists too, Agard then makes a bigger point about how language is used and abused. This may partly explain a longstanding reluctance to be interviewed. “Poetry isn’t distorting language with a perfidious agenda, appropriating or misappropriating words such that ‘carnage’ becomes ‘collateral damage’. Poetry dares to enter the complex core of the human being,” he says, underlining the point with a quote from the 19th-century American poet Emily Dickinson: “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.”

Telling it slant is what he does in answer to my next question about globalisation. Instead of killing the moment with talk of Brexit, he declaims another poem from a new collection he has written, which looks askance at

multiracial London through the eyes of a “Little Green Man” who arrives at Heathrow in a uniquely green minority of one.

Encountering a supermarket for the first time, the Little Green Man is entranced by “European Iceberg lettuces chilling in diasporic proximity to lady fingers of sub-continental pedigree”. He encounters “a jet-lagged Kenyan runner bean, catching up in a wordless long distance one to one with a local, shire-born British spring onion”.

Assembled on the shelves, this multitude of vegetables from all over the planet is comfortable sharing the same patch. With theatrical gravitas, Agard calls them “much-travelled, recumbent ambassadors that can bridge millennia as well as distance”, mute testament to the thrill of diversity. Then he whips me across to the other side of Lewes high street to sink a lunchtime pint of Guinness at a pub called The Rights of Man. “Bless the leprechauns!” he chuckles, with a nod to a different kind of little green man.

The Rights of Man is named after the radical 1791 treatise written in defence of the French revolution by an illustrious former resident of Lewes: Tom Paine. Agard himself ended up in this town in the Sussex Downs as a result of the kindness of strangers, he says. An introduction at a poetry reading at the London home of John La Rose, the Trinidadian poet and activist, found him on the train south, flitting past East Croydon, Gatwick, the town of Haywards Heath and on towards the coast — he remembers that first journey well.

At first he, Grace and Leslie (then a toddler) were guests in an attic room in the house of a German professor of Caribbean literature, Reinhard Sander. They liked Lewes so much they never left. “We never knew Lewes existed. The town found us,” he says, calling it a place that “bubbles with creative and subversive talent... Under its scenic and sedate surface, the ghost of Tom Paine is alive and well.”

Half-pint in hand, he zooms back further to tell the story of his first published poem. He was sitting an English literature exam at the Jesuit boys school he attended in Georgetown. The subject was Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”, which the rebellious 16-year-old Agard had not yet read.

“If you haven’t read the text, you can’t bluff,” he says. Instead he wrote a poem on the back of the exam paper about being imprisoned in a classroom. His teacher, freshly graduated from Oxford and doing voluntary service overseas, ticked him off. But he liked the poem so much he published it in a new Xeroxed magazine, *Expression*, that became home to the first writing of aspiring Georgetown poets.

Five of the teenagers who filled its pages are now published writers. Another is a linguistics professor in the US. “It’s amazing how people went on to shine,” says Agard, enthusing about how life-changing imaginative teachers can be.

His fascination with language was, he says, first encouraged when he was 13 by a Jesuit Scottish monk, who taught him Chaucer and Shakespeare, played dictionary games and made transistor radios in soap dishes. “The fairy of language cast her spell,” he says.

That love of wordplay evolved while listening to the cricket commentary of John Arlott, a presenter on *Test Match Special* with a poetic gift for encapsulating the moment. In 1975, Arlott described a shot by the legendary West Indies captain Clive Lloyd as “the stroke of a man knocking a thistle top off with a walking stick”.

Agard’s sense of rhythm was drummed in by the hip-twisting, word-bending calypso culture around him. He calls calypso “the people’s newspaper”, where calypsonians “employ devices of poetry crafted on a page, whether that device is innuendo, ambiguity or a straight-for-the-jugular rhyme”. Another influence was theatre. For a junior troupe, he played Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and the white rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*. (Something of all three roles still inhabits him.)

After playing these characters, he wanted to be an actor, to the disapproval of his mother, who pointed out that he would make more money in a bank. “Acting is a hobby,” she said. So Agard replied that he would be a poet instead. “Poetry is a hobby too,” she replied.

She was wrong about the latter. To this day, both Agard’s and his wife Grace’s poetry are included on GCSE syllabus. Tens of thousands of UK teenagers have encountered their verse, and the performances they give as part of the school touring programme Poetry Live!

“Sometimes they get coached in, in their hundreds, looking a bit iffy about it all. It lifts your heart to see them leave all excited,” he says of the pupils.

Agard lives poetry — and lives from it. In turn his poems come most alive emerging from his own throat — with breaths syncopated to the words, rolling eyes and dancing hands. Even his beard, now wispy and white, plays a moving part.

His award-winning first collection, *Man to Pan* (1982) has anger in it, as well as recipes:

First rape a people
simmer for centuries
bring memories to boil
foil voice of drum
add pinch of pain
to rain of rage . . .

In later poetry, that sense of anger is overcome by sharpening wit. We end, however, on a more sober, sombre note. “Britain doesn’t know how blessed it is. In being a fine example of a cook-up culture, it takes a leaf out of the Caribbean cookbook that has transcended historical trauma” he says. “But Britain has still to develop a cook-up psyche. We are not there yet. You wouldn’t have this Windrush thing if we were.”

I ask him how he thinks attitudes to race have changed since Windrush days, and in the 31 years since he settled in the UK. “At that time, the other could be perceived as exotic, the breezy newcomer from far-flung colonies,” he says, adding with a hint of comic menace: “Now with genetic probing you might find the ‘other’ has taken up residence in your bloodstream.”

On that note, he slips off to a play rehearsal. I am left thinking: if Agard had not already been forged in the roller-coaster aftermath of empire, there would be an urgent need for society to invent someone like him.

William Wallis is an FT leader writer

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[https://www.ft.com/
content/5099c5bc-4d98-11e8-97e4-13afc22d86d4](https://www.ft.com/content/5099c5bc-4d98-11e8-97e4-13afc22d86d4)

3. Booktrust 2017

The Rainmaker Danced features a collection of the award-winning poet's latest verses and is beautifully illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura.

To celebrate, we spoke to John about what influences his work, why children need poetry and which books he loved when he was young.

What inspires you to write a poem?

It can happen right out of the blue. Maybe you see a line in a book you're reading, let's say on a train - a great place for writing poems, by the way! Or you hear something on the telly, or an odd story in the newspaper grabs you, or an old memory comes back to you, perhaps through a photograph or a song. Then suddenly, something clicks, and you coax the seed of the idea into flower, using the building blocks of words.

But even after you've crafted the poem onto the page, you need some time and distance away from the poem, in order to go back to it with a fresh eye. That's when you're likely to spot words that aren't quite right or lines that aren't necessary. Don't be afraid to cut. Remember the old proverb: 'Any fool could write, it takes a genius to erase'. Say the poem aloud to yourself so you can feel its music in your mouth.

The Rainmaker Danced

What's the animal you enjoyed writing about best in The Rainmaker Danced?

I enjoyed writing about all the animals, but I especially enjoyed writing about the meeting of a dinosaur and an electronic mouse as it gave me the chance to bring together an extinct creature and a modern hi-tech gadget.

Why is poetry important for children?

We are surrounded by words and language can control our thoughts. When world leaders speak, for example, of 'limited collateral damage' to describe the bombing of people, it's a way of speaking that you could call cosmetic and deceptive. That's why it's important for children to be in touch with the language of poetry which not only tunes their ear to the music of words but keeps alive their sense of wonder.

Which is your favourite children's book?

I can't think of one specific book, but as child I loved going to the library and borrowing The Hardy Boys Mystery Stories by Franklin W. Dixon and the Famous Five and Secret Seven series by Enid Blyton. When I got to secondary school in Georgetown, Guyana and was in sixth form, I also liked reading about that famous butler Jeeves by P.G.Wodehouse. As an adolescent, I liked Jeeves' use of rather grand speech. Like commenting on his employer, Mr Bertie Wooster's tie, and describing it as, 'a trifle too bizarre, Sir'...

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/october/john-agard-on-the-importance-of-poetry-language-can-control-our-thoughts/>

John Agard Book Awards

- 1982 *Man and Pan*
Casa de las Américas Prize (Cuba)
- 1987 *Lend me Your Wings*
Nestlé Smarties Book Prize
- 1997 *We Animals Would Like a Word with You*
Nestlé Smarties Book Prize (Bronze Award)
- 1997 *From the Devil's Pulpit*
Guyana Prize
- 2000 *Weblines*
Guyana Prize
- 2003 (as editor with Grace Nichols)
Under the Moon and Over the Sea
Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
Poetry Prize
- 2007 *We Brits*
shortlisted for British Book Awards Decibel
Writer of the Year
- 2009 *The Young Inferno*
Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
Poetry Prize

Other Awards

- 1997 *Paul Hamlyn Award for Poetry*
- 2003 *Cholmondeley Award*
- 2012 *Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry*
- 2016 *Eleanor Farjeon Award* for his contribution
to children's literature

Honours

- 2007 *Fellow of Royal Society of Literature*

Books for consideration by the Jury : First five

Einstein The Girl Who Hated Maths (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

Hodder

Goldilocks On CCTV (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

Frances Lincoln

The Young Inferno (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

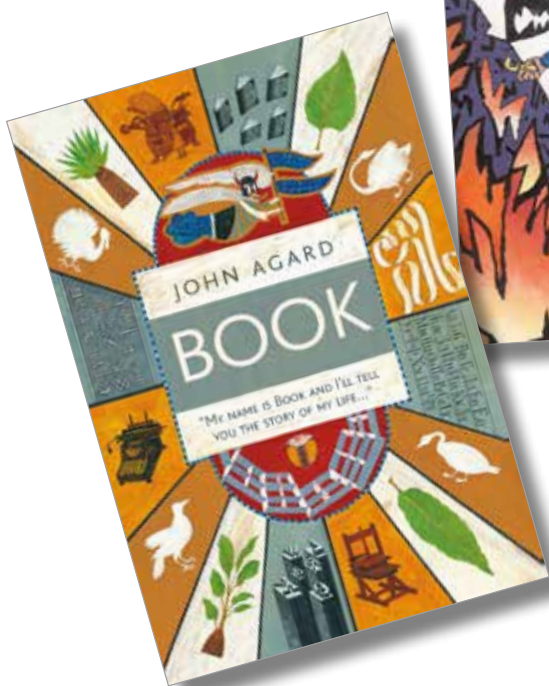
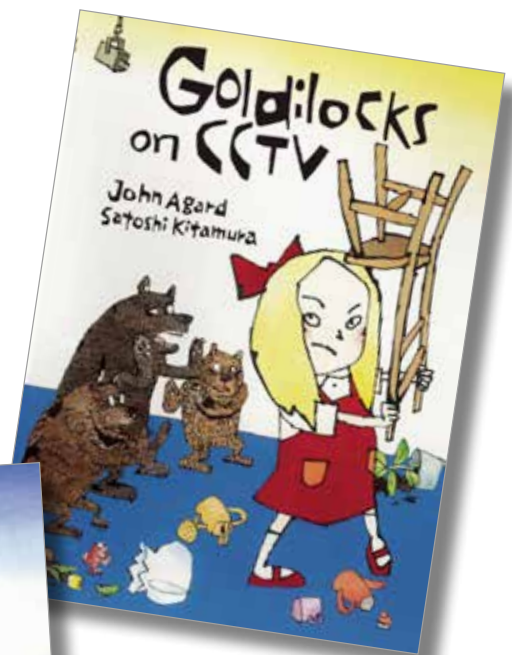
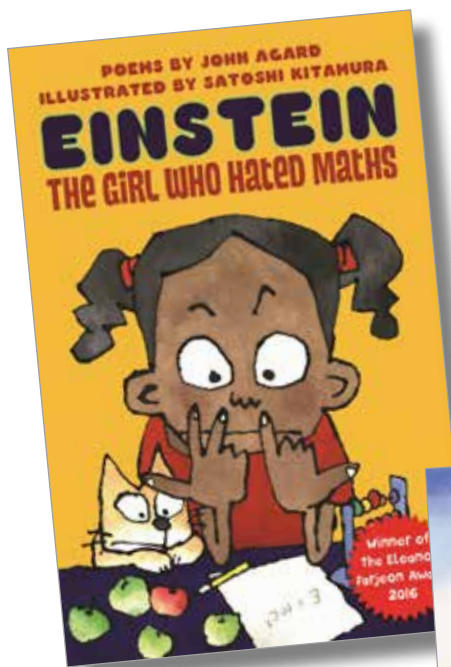
Frances Lincoln

Book (illustrated by Neil Packer)

Walker

The Rainmaker Danced (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

Hodder



Five more titles reflecting Agard's work

I Din Do Nuttin and Other Poems (illustrated by Susanna Gretz)

Bodley Head

Laughter Is an Egg (illustrated by Alan Rowe)

Viking

Half-caste and Other Poems

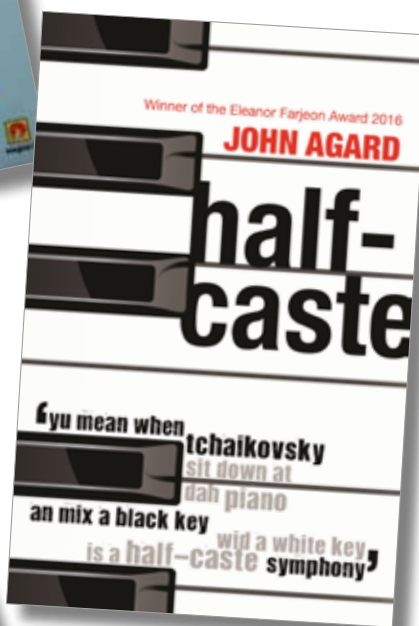
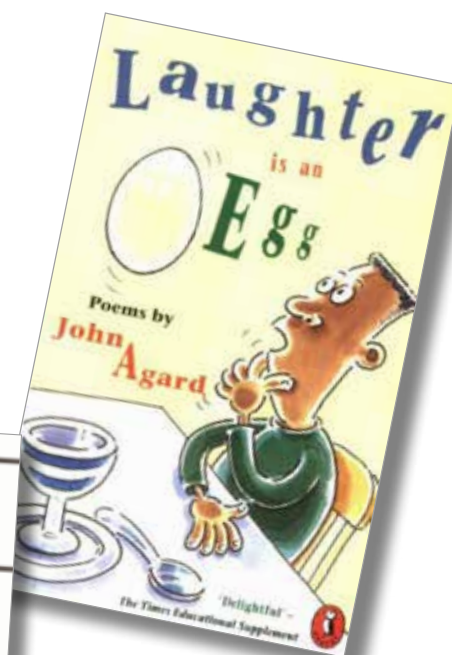
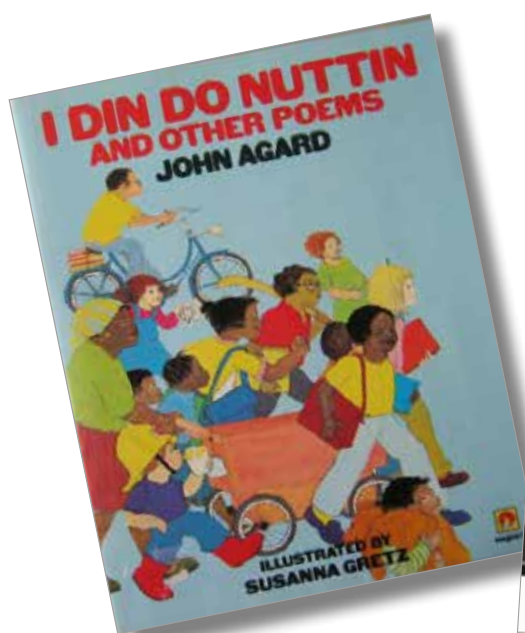
Hodder,

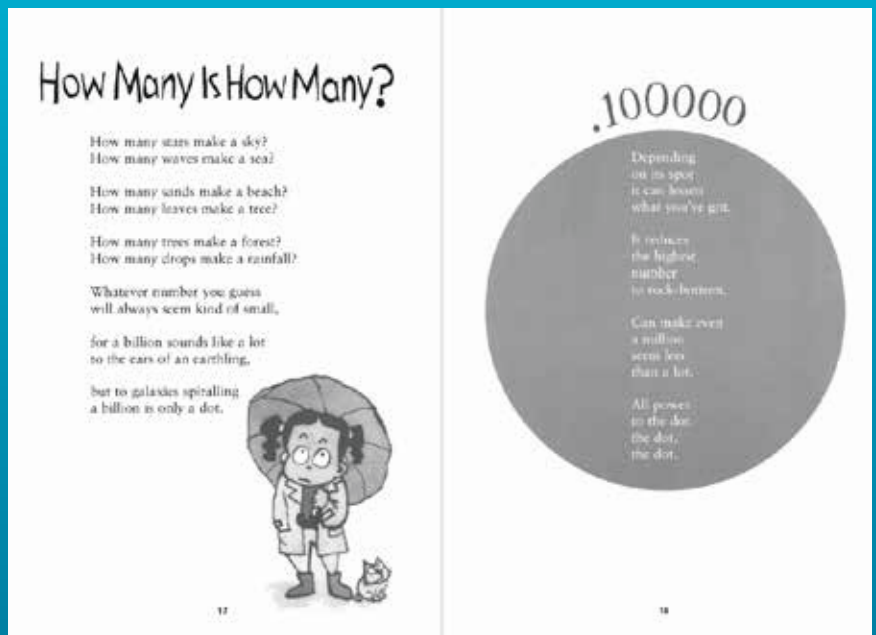
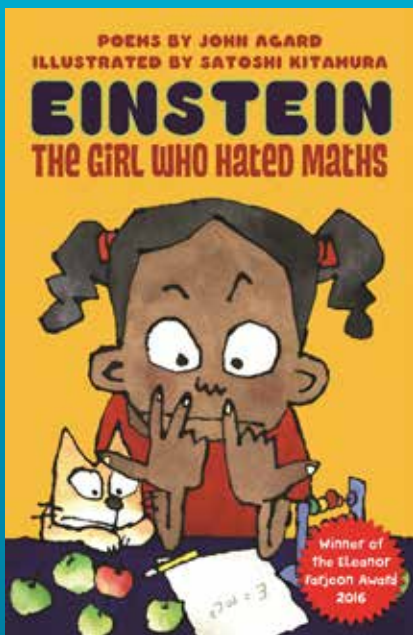
Under the Moon and Over the Sea [Editor, with Grace Nichols]

Walker Books

Come all you little persons (illustrated by Jessica Courtney Tickle)

Faber & Faber





Einstein, The Girl Who Hated Maths

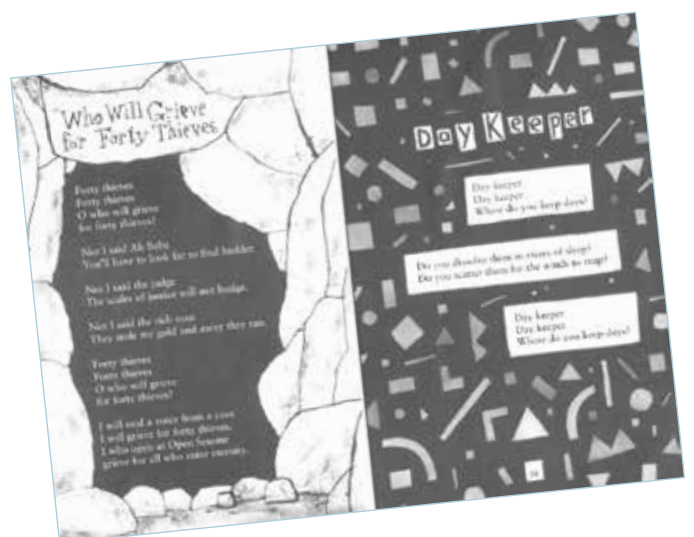
In *Universal Verse, Poetry for Children*, Ed. Deborah Hallford and Edgardo Zaghini, Barn Owl, 2006, p. 51

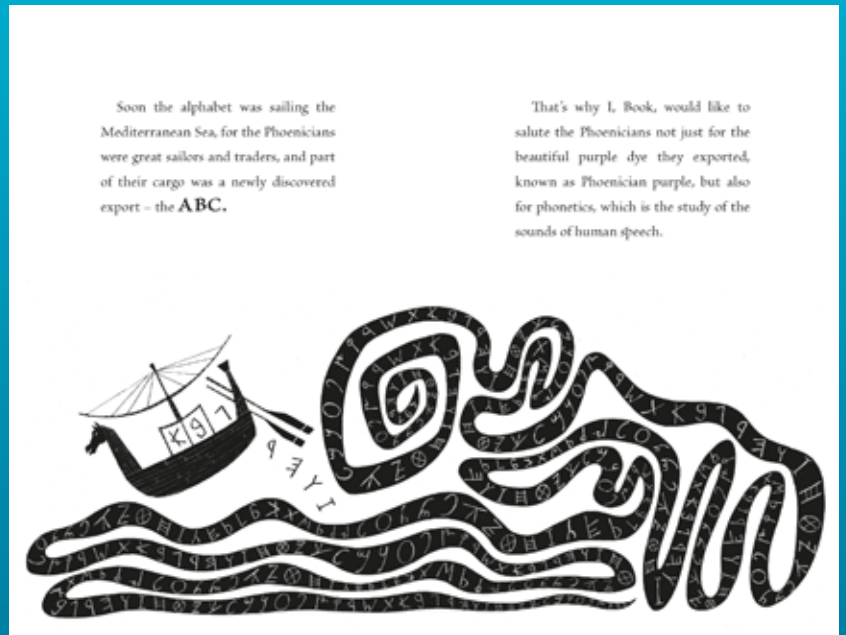
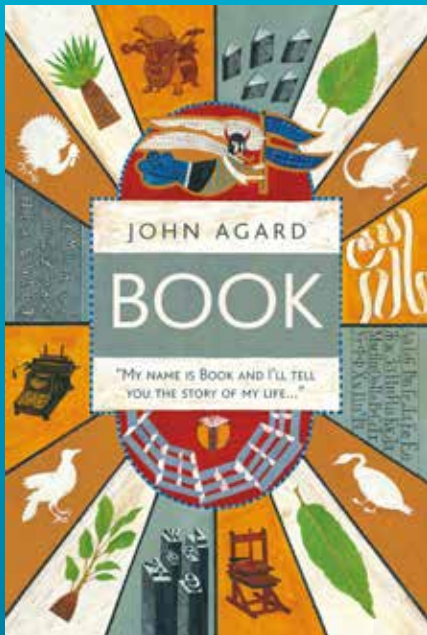
If you have ever fought with fractions or dived with decimals, this extraordinary collection of unique poems about numbers is intended to engage and inspire. Acclaimed poet, John Agard uses rhyme to explore the world of Einstein, a girl who hates maths and loves cats: “Her parents like the name / so they called her Einstein / And how she hated maths. / She’d rather play with cats / or do a drawing of the sunshine”. As Einstein’s cats begin to multiply, her number-loving parents gently encourage her conversion to mathematics. During this, the writer celebrates the beauty of bisectors and perfection of pi in poetry that amuses and informs. Here we discover why the number nine is special and how to travel the shortest distance between two points. Superbly illustrated with Kitamura’s bold drawings and geometric shapes, this collection of humorous and thoughtful verse will appeal to both the numerically fascinated and the fearful.

Children’s Books Ireland: Jane O’Hanlon
<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/review/einstein-girl-hated-maths/>

The continued pairing of John Agard and Satoshi Kitamura, following *Points of View with Professor Peekaboo*, works brilliantly in this collection of forty

poems with a mathematical theme. Through the story of a little girl who hated maths, the authors introduce the very young reader to basic mathematical concepts and some of the world’s greatest mathematicians. Funny and informative poems, coupled with imaginative illustrations, make this an inviting book for any young reader of 7 or 8 upwards, and it can be read to younger children as an introduction to word games and maths. The rich black and white illustrations yield up new treasures with each viewing. Alongside the funny and informational aspects of the text, we find that ‘a heart weighs as much as love lets it’ (‘A Mountain of a Heart’) and ‘We odd numbers/like to think we’re/the handiwork of God’ (‘Odd’). Through the medium of poetry and illustration, this book conveys the excitement of mathematics to young (and not so young) readers and reluctant mathematicians.





Book

From Deborah Stevenson, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 69, Number 5, January 2016, pp. 240-241*

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<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/604284>

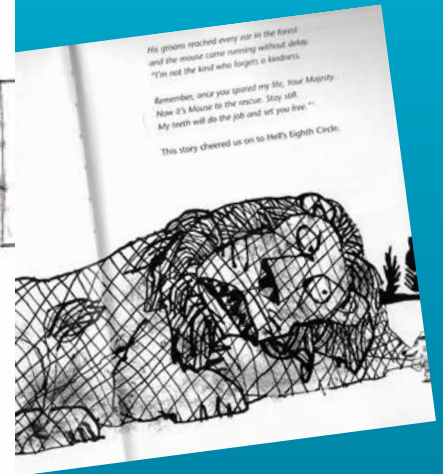
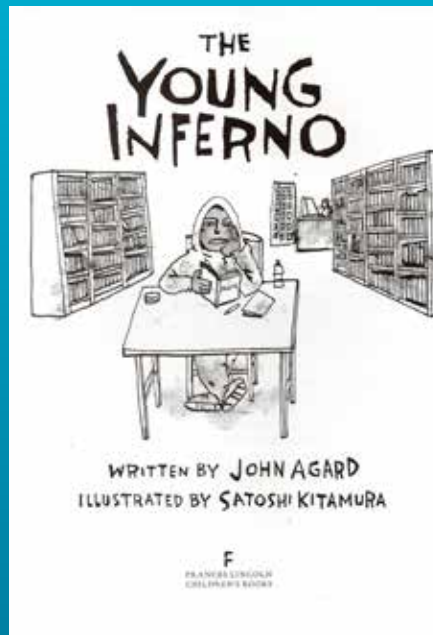
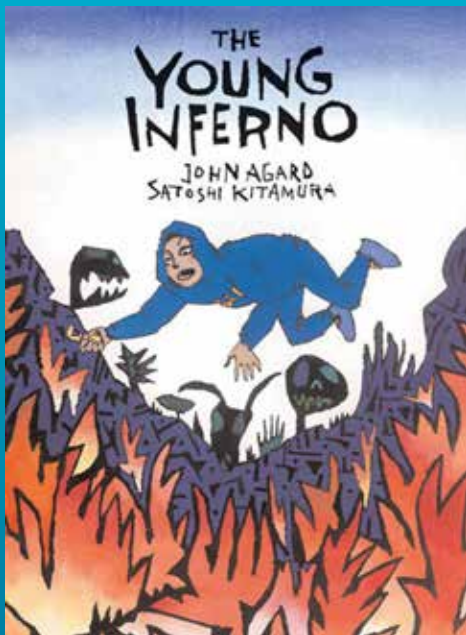
Guyanese-born British poet Agard tells the history of the book by taking on the storytelling persona of Book itself. The narrator begins the slim chronicle with the origins of writing, then discusses early texts on papyrus and parchment, then notes the development of paper and printing up through mechanization and paperbacks. Concluding chapters celebrate the library, discuss the history of burning books, and acknowledge the contribution of e-books to the great tradition of reading. First published in the U.K., this is a genial social history rather than an encyclopedic chronicle: Agard describes epochs without mentioning their dates, but he conjures a vivid, intriguingly detailed picture of the way the book and its social and economic meaning have transformed over the millennia. It's an approach that's got an old-fashioned charm but a contemporary appreciation of narrative voice, and the book covers a surprising amount of technical, economic, and cultural change in a highly accessible format. Brief chapters and airy layout add to the appeal, while the tone and rhythm make the text suitable for reading aloud. Packer's clever monochromatic [end Page 240] art includes decorative spot art, ornamental borders, and informative multi-step diagrams (the exploration of how sheepskin becomes parchment is particularly compact) that remains a spare and supportive partner to the text.

From Sister Spooky Blog, 10/10/2014

<http://www.sisterspooky.co.uk/2014/10/review-book-by-john-agard-and-nei.html>

Quirky and humorous, part poetry, part reflection, this is the story of the book told by none other than Book himself! This extraordinary character begins by reminding us of his origins in oral story and clay tablets, then ponders on papyrus, parchment and paper, and on being a scroll who finally gets a spine. We see him lovingly illuminated by monks in medieval monasteries, then witness the massive changes brought about by the invention of the printing press, and the coming of paperbacks and e-books in the 20th century. But Book's not a straightforwardly chronological chap; he can't help musing – and his musings, whether they're on the evolution of the alphabet, libraries, book-burning or blurbs, are delightful and thought-provoking. Years of reflection and observation have gone into this charming title – John Agard signed the contract with Walker 16 years ago!





The Young Inferno

From Helen Taylor, Books for Keeps November 2008

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/173/childrens-books/reviews/the-young-inferno>

The partnership of poet John Agard and illustrator Satoshi Kitamura goes from strength to strength in this ambitious re-take on a 13th-century classic. Instead of the poet Virgil as a guide, Agard has chosen Aesop as the hooded teenager's guide through the nine circles of hell. There are echoes of Dante's original language and his passion and humour, and like Dante, Agard and Kitamura have made the journey relevant to contemporary life and to world issues.

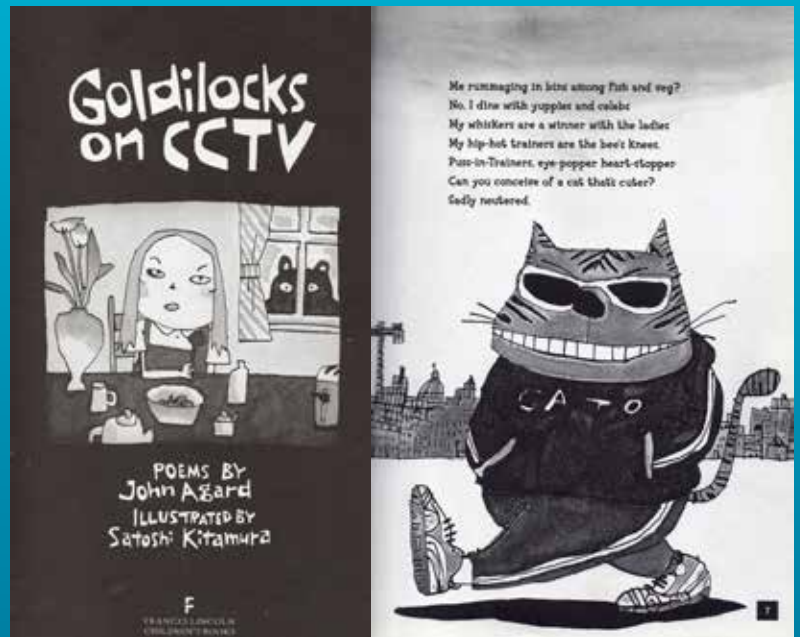
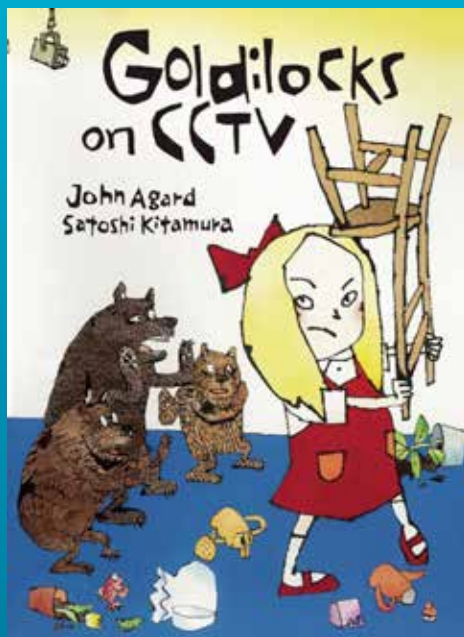
On first entering hell the boy hears thousands of people wailing. Aesop tells him 'These are the people who sat on the fence/they cared neither for good nor for evil/Theirs was the sin of indifference'. As he journeys through the circles of hell he meets many familiar figures. Frankenstein is the bouncer at one of the doors of hell. Einstein, Homer and Hitler make appearances along the way. The sins that Dante wrote about are intertwined with Aesop's fables and our own issues such as famine, war, fraudsters, drink driving and pollution. Kitamura's illustrations (sometimes reminiscent of Leonard Baskin's powerful illustrations for Ted Hughes' poems) beautifully and darkly match the journey with bold almost geometric images, silhouettes and scenes which bring an extra intensity and relevance to the words.

From "Publishers' Weekly"

Not Attributed Publishers Weekly July 2009

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-84507-769-3>

British poet Agard pulls off the formidable task of modernizing Dante's 14th-century *Inferno* for a teenage audience. This heavily illustrated version features a young black protagonist (wearing a hoodie emblazoned with the word Hell) who travels to the underworld with fable master Aesop as his guide. He encounters sinners of a contemporary variety, as the streetwise narrative echoes the format and rhyme scheme of the original "He caused a child's death in a stolen car./ But did he stop? No. And that's because/ he had drunk himself over the limit by far." Agard also offers commentary critical of modern politicians and events. In Hell's Seventh Circle, readers find "that smooth duo who caused much blood to flow/ between the Tigris and Euphrates" (unmistakable are the silhouettes of President Bush and Prime Minister Blair). Kitamura's edgy illustrations, rendered in black, white and grays, jump from the page. Cutouts, geometric motifs and cartoon-styling create a youth-friendly yet still-haunting effect. While this fresh take will be most appreciated by those familiar with Dante's work, its potential to ignite curiosity about the original should not be underestimated. Ages 11–13.



Goldilocks on CCTV

Fiona Waters in Books for Keeps September 2012

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/196/childrens-books/articles/clpe-poetry-prize-2012>

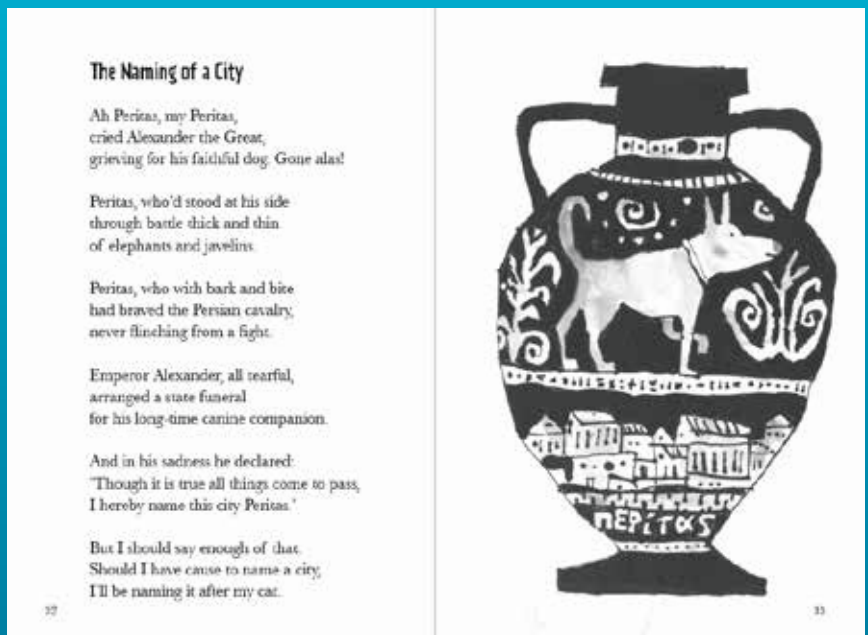
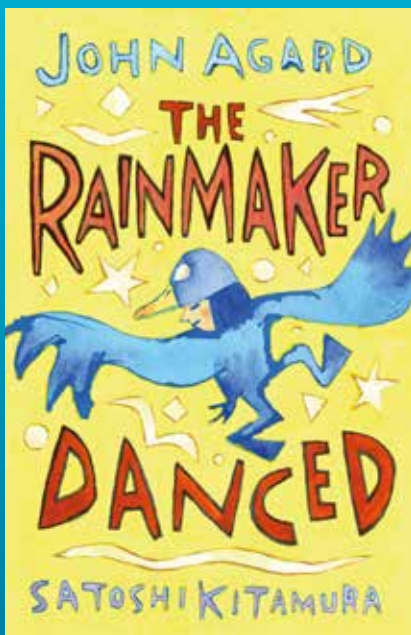
Goldilocks on CCTV is another rich collaboration between John Agard and illustrator Satoshi Kitamura where the illustrations humorously mirror and extend the verbal text. As poetry, it is witty, ironic, bold, sometimes lyrical – all the hallmarks for which Agard is rightly celebrated. But *Goldilocks* offers more than just playful and pleasing humour. Agard invites the reader to think again about aspects of contemporary culture which he blends skilfully with iconic fairy tale characters, breathing new life into this familiar genre. Like *Sleeping Beauty* whose nightdress was auctioned at Sotheby's with paparazzi at her door when the prince came to 'snip the threads of her slumber/and return her to a place called the future'. This inventive collection is bang up-to-date, on the money, using vernacular language teenagers will instantly recognise yet turning it into Auden's famous definition of poetry – 'memorable speech'.

Deborah Stevenson, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* Volume 66, Number 4, December 2012, p.184, Copyright © 2012 The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/490475>

This collection by noted British poet Agard draws together nearly thirty poems that bring a contemporary slant to folkloric themes. Entries feature an updated Puss

in Boots ("Puss-in-Trainers"), a bitter Rumpelstiltskin ("What's in a Name?"), and a Beast resisting transformation ("A Beast and a Beauty"), among others; verse style ranges from casually metered rap-style lyrics to quirkily patterned rhymes to crystal-line free verse, often relying on cheeky British slang. Success levels vary somewhat, but all of the poems are enjoyable and some are truly stellar. Readers will relish entries such as the lyrical "Wolf" ("Touch my legendary pelt/ and be lost in wonder./ Why would I want to put on/ sheep's clothing?"), the raucous "Hag Chant" ("Who cares if your kind call us hags./ Our kind won't grace your glossy mags"), and the poignant "Not My Uncle Bluebeard" ("It was all over the newspapers./ I thought there must be some mistake"). Additionally, recitation/performance opportunities abound in lively pieces such as "Did You Say Two Ugly Sisters?" and "Pumpkin Biker Cinderella." The design varies throughout, with each spread mirroring the featured poem's tone, and Kitamura's monochromatic art is impressively versatile, featuring not only his familiar scrawled linework but also vivid silhouettes and fluidly patterned graphics. The visual and poetic style makes this inviting even to usually poetry-shy readers, and it would be a lively complement to Koertge's recent *Lies, Knives and Girls in Red Dresses* (BCCB 9/12). A table of contents helps with finding particular entries.



The Rainmaker Danced

Clive Barnes in Books for Keeps January 2018

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/228/childrens-books/reviews/the-rainmaker-danced>

John Agard is one of our best poets for children and adults, whose eye for a subject is unerring and whose joy in language is palpable. Here, sometimes he's musing on our relationship with nature and on environmental threats in ways that are accessible to quite young children: "Goldfish / goldfish / which glass do you/prefer? A bowl of glass / or a pond that ripples / when the winds pass?" is a poem under the heading More Pointless Questions. Or he's thinking about death (well, he is getting on a bit) quite cheerfully as a contribution to the earth's continuing natural cycle: "pushing up daisies to the sky. / What's that, lad, did you say die?" Or he's coining appropriate names for giants like Gozzlemorebum the Gozzler. Or he's imagining the moon transforming herself into a pig (where could he have got that idea from?). It's a collection, as ever, full of strange connections, wit and wisdom, humanity and hilarity, timeliness and teasing. And, once more, it's matched with Satoshi Kitamura's matchless illustrations.

In CLIPPA Poetry Award: 2018 Shortlisted Titles

<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/resources/teaching-sequences/rainmaker-danced>

John Agard's poems display an intense integrity, never talking down to children, encouraging them to question, while being playful in tone, witty or satirical. They focus on social observations, play with ideas from mythology and traditional tales, consider new developments in technology and reflect on nature and humanity and their interaction. The bold black and white illustrations complement and counterpoint the ideas in the poems.

Jill Bennett Red Reading Hub

<https://redreadinghub.blog/2018/02/25/the-rainmaker-danced/>

There's always plenty to delight and to contemplate in any book of poetry from John Agard and so it is here in this new offering of some forty poems, beautifully illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura. Embracing a wide variety of themes and topics from Mosquito ... to maths and marriage, the poet offers something to suit all moods. Some such as Line really bring you up short with its final: 'Then they sent him / to the frontline / where he learnt /of a thin line / between breathing / and not breathing.' As does Progress which concludes thus: 'it takes a second / (maybe less) / to press / a button.' There are humorous offerings too. Take Homo Ambi-thumb-trous with its prod at mobile phone-obsessives; and Government Warning! wherein the powers that be issue notice of a tickle-free zone. Like all Agard's poetry books, this one has something for everyone and deserves to be shared and discussed in all upper primary and secondary classrooms, as well as being for all lovers of contemporary poetry.

John Agard : Bibliography (Each section is Chronological)

Poetry For Children

I Din Do Nuttin and Other Poems, illustrated by Susanna Gretz	London, Bodley Head	1983
Say It Again, Granny! : Twenty Poems from Caribbean Proverbs, illustrated by Susanna Gretz	London, Bodley Head	1986
Lend Me Your Wings, illustrated by Adrienne Kennaway	London, Hodder & Stoughton	1987
The Calypso Alphabet, illustrated by Jennifer Bent	New York, Holt	1989
Go Noah, Go!, illustrated by Judy Brown	London, Hodder & Stoughton	1990
Laughter Is an Egg, illustrated by Alan Rowe	London, Viking	1990
The Emperor's Dan-Dan, illustrated by Alison Forsythe	London, Hodder & Stoughton	1992
Grandfather's Old Bruk-a-down Car, illustrated by Kevin Dean	London, Bodley Head	1994
Eat a Poem, Wear a Poem	London, Heinemann	1995
We Animals Would Like a Word with You, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Bodley Head	1996
Get Back Pimple!	London, Puffin Books	1997
Points of view with Professor Peekaboo, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Bodley Head	2000
Come Back to Me, My Boomerang	London, Orchard Books	2001
Einstein, the Girl who Hated Maths, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Hodder Wayland	2002
[With others] Number Parade: Number Poems from 0-100	Hyde, Cheshire, LDA	2002
Hello, H2O, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Hodder Wayland	2003
Half-caste and Other Poems	London, Hodder	2004
Wriggle Piggy Toes, illustrated by Jenny Bent	London, Frances Lincoln	2005
The Young Inferno, (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)	London, Frances Lincoln	2008
[With Grace Nichols] Twinkle Twinkle Firefly, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Collins	2010
Goldilocks on CCTV, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Frances Lincoln	2011
The Rainmaker Danced, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Hodder	2017
Come all you little persons, illustrated by Jessica Courtney Tickle	London, Faber & Faber	2017

John Agard : Bibliography (Each section is Chronological)

Prose and Plays for Children

Letters for Lettie and Other Stories, illustrated by Errol Lloyd	London, Bodley Head	1979
Dig Away Two-Hole Tim, illustrated by Jennifer Northway	London, Bodley Head	1981
The Great Snakeskin	London, Ginn	1993
The Monster Who Loved Toothbrushes, illustrated by Jenny Stow	Harlow, Longman	1994
The Monster Who Loved Telephones	Harlow, Longman	1994
The Monster Who Loved Cameras	Harlow, Longman	1994
Oriki and the Monster Who Hated Balloons	Harlow, Longman	1994
Brer Rabbit: the Great Tug of War, illustrated by Korky Paul	London, Red Fox	1998
[With Bob Cattell] Butter-finger, illustrated by Pam Smy	London, Frances Lincoln	2006
[With Bob Cattell] Shine On, Butter-finger, illustrated by Pam Smy	London, Frances Lincoln	2007
[With Grace Nichols] Tiger Dead! Tiger Dead! Stories from the Caribbean, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Collins	2009
Book, illustrated by Neil Packer	London, Walker	2014
(paperback edition My name is Book, illustrated by Neil Packer	London, Walker,	2016
All sorts to make a world	Edinburgh, Barrington Stoke	2014
[With Grace Nichols] Full Moon Night in Silk Cotton Tree Village: a Collection of Caribbean Folk Tales	London, Collins	2016
Going Batty	Edinburgh, Barrington Stoke	2016
Shona, Word Detective, illustrated by Michael Broad	Edinburgh, Barrington Stoke,	2018

Anthologies

[Editor, with Grace Nichols] No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock: A Collection of Nursery Rhymes, illustrated by Cynthia Jabar	Cambridge, Massachusetts, Candlewick Press	1985
[Contributor] Wake Up, Stir About: Songs for Assembly	Cambridge, Massachusetts, Unwin Hyman	1989

John Agard : Bibliography (Each section is Chronological)

[Editor] Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All: Poems (Selected for teenagers)	New York, Holt	1990
[Editor, with Grace Nichols], A Caribbean Dozen, illustrated by Cathie Felstead. Cambridge, Massachusetts	Candlewick Press	1994
[Collector] Poems in My Earphone	Harlow, Longman	1995
[Editor, with others] Another Day on Your Foot and I Would Have Died, illustrated by Colin McNaughton	London, Macmillan	1996
[Editor] Why is the sky?, illustrated by Andrzej Klimowski	London, Faber	1996
[Editor] Hello, New: Poems for a New Century, illustrated by Lydia Monks	London, Orchard	2000
[Editor, with Michael Rosen] A Child's Year of Stories and Poems	London, Viking Children's Books	2000
[Editor, with Grace Nichols] Under the Moon and Over the Sea	Walker Books,	2002
[Editor, with Grace Nichols] From Mouth to Mouth: Oral Poetry from around the World, illustrated by Annabel Wright	London, Walker	2004
[Editor, with Grace Nichols] Pumpkin Grumpkin: Nonsense Poems from around the World, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura	London, Walker	2011
Adult / Other		
Shoot Me with Flowers	Privately printed, Guyana	1973
Man to Pan: A Cycle of Poems to Be Performed with Drums and Steelpans	Havana, Cuba, Casa de las Américas	1982
Limbo Dancer in Dark Glasses	London, Islington Community Press (for Greenheart)	1983
Livingroom	London, Black Ink Collective	1983
A Stone's Throw from Embankment: The South Bank Collection	Royal Festival Hall,	1993
Mangoes and Bullets: Selected and New Poems 1972–84	London, Pluto Press	1985
Lovelines for a Goat-Born Lady	London, Serpent's Tail	1991
From the Devil's Pulpit	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	1997
Weblines	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2000

John Agard : Bibliography (Each section is Chronological)

We Brits!	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2006
Clever Backbone	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2009
Alternative Anthem: Selected Poems	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2009
Travel Light, Travel Dark	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2013
Playing the Ghost of Maimonides	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2016
The Coming of the Little Green Man	Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books	2018

Recordings and Performance

British Library – www.bl.uk

Collection of sound recordings of Agard performing.

English & Media Centre - <http://poetrystation.org.uk/poets/john-agard/>

Collection of video recordings of Agard performing, with animation for Poetry Jump Up

The Guardian podcast - www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/audio/2014/oct/13/john-agard-poetry-podcast-half-caste-diversity-race

Agard reads and discusses his poem Half-caste.

Poetry Archive - www.poetryarchive.org/poet/john-agard

Collection of sound recordings and related material.

Translated editions (with language, publisher and country)

Come All You Little Persons, illustrated by Jessica Courtney Tickle.
London, Faber & Faber, 2017.

Korean (Sowonnamu Publishing, Korea)

Einstein, the Girl who Hated Maths, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura.
London, Hodder Wayland, 2002.

Korean (Gimm-Young Pub, South Korea)

Hello, H2O, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura. London, Hodder
Wayland, 2003.

Korean (BIR Pub, South Korea)

My Name is Book, illustrated by Neil Packer. London, Walker, 2014.

Chinese (Beijing Dandelion Children's, China)

French (Editions Nathan, France)

German (Knesebeck Verlag, Germany)

Greek (Patakis Publishers, Greece)

Japanese (Filmart-Sha, Japan)

Portuguese (Editora Rovele, Portugal)

Spanish (Comanegra, Spain)

Spanish (Editorial Santillana, Latin America)

Turkish (Kultur Yayinlari, Turkey)

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www.thomsendesign.uk