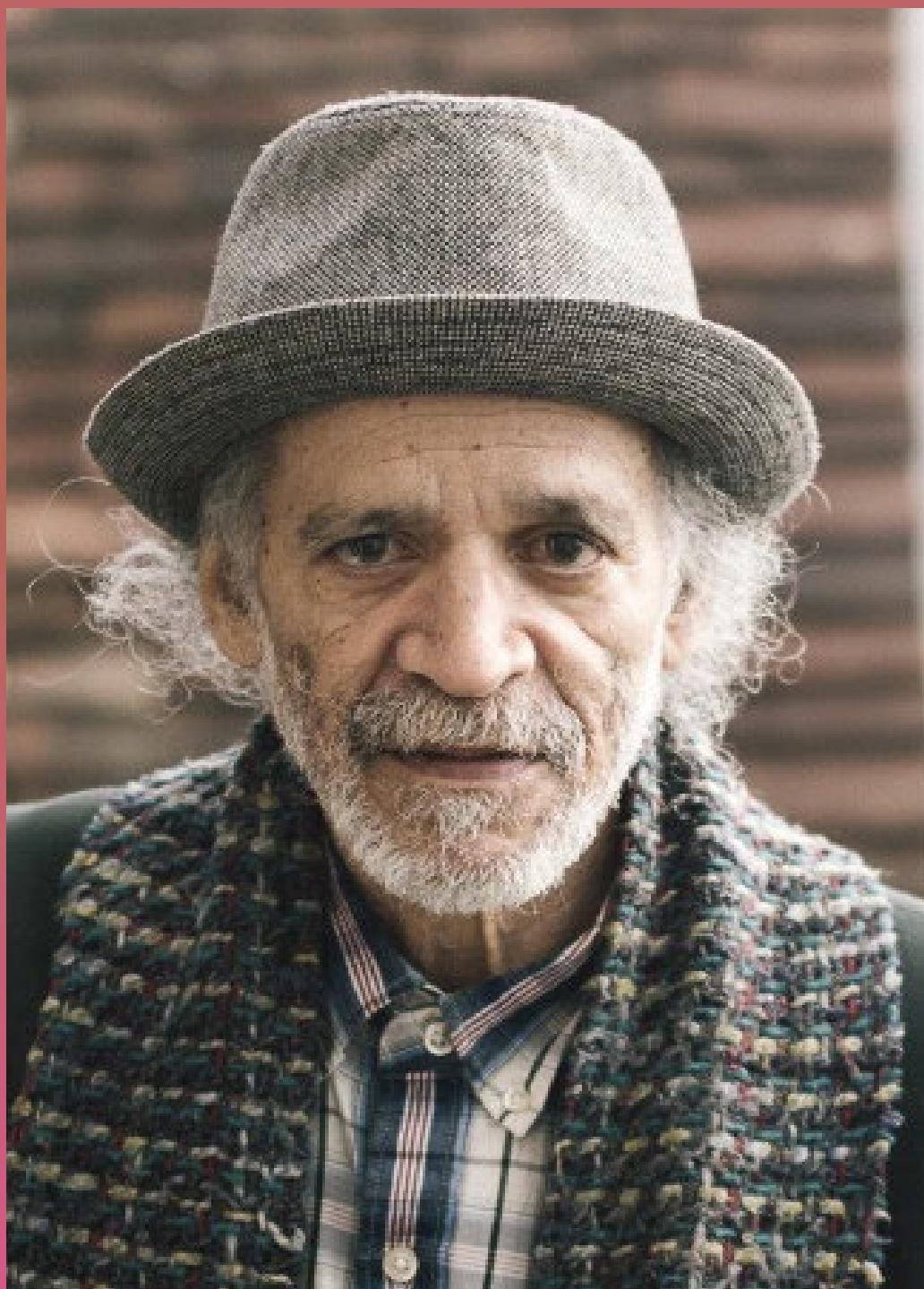


John Agard

Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2024

UK Writer Nomination



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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. ‘The utterance of words in the right order can excite, be thought-provoking,’ he declares. He says you must always read a poem aloud “so you can feel its music in your mouth.”²

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’.”³ 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 examinations⁴. John continues to publish and perform poetry. His most recent collection for children, *Follow That Word* came out in 2022. His importance continues to be recognised and in 2021 he became the first poet to receive the Booktrust Lifetime Achievement Award.⁵

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.”⁶

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

² <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2021/november/we-are-all-creatures-of-language-lifetime-achievement-award-winner-john-agard-on-his-incredible-life/>

³ John Agard on the connectedness of language
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0168rn6>

⁴ <https://poetrylive.net/about-the-events/>

⁵ <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/booklists/j/john-agard/>

⁶ <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/october/john-agard-on-the-importance-of-poetry-language-can-control-our-thoughts/bio>

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 yusef/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 *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. Recently these have been joined by *Coyote's Soundbite* (2021) illustrated by Piet Grobler, in which trickster Coyote in disguise attends a conference on the environment called by the earth-goddesses. His collaboration with Satoshi Kitamura continues with *When Creature Met Creature* (2022), his poem *Windrush Child* is freshly illustrated by Sophie Bass (2022), and the written and spoken word are respectively celebrated in the picturebook *Books Make Good Pets* (2021) and the collection *Follow That Word* (2022), both illustrated by Momoko Abe.

Agard has also published fiction for children, such as *Shona, the Word Detective* (2018) in which the central character displays an infectious love of language. His poetry collections for adults were joined in 2022 by his first collection of short stories for adults *Inspector Dreadlock Holmes and other stories*, demonstrating that he continues to explore new ideas and genres.

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, *Follow That Word* (2022) 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. The 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 forty years and shows no sign of letting up. Acclaimed for his adult work by gaining the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 2012, in 2021 he received the BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of how much of his life's work and creative output has focused 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 former Librarian, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (incorporating the National Poetry Centre for Primary Schools), London

January 2023

John Agard Interviews

1. We are all creatures of language': Lifetime Achievement Award winner John Agard on his incredible life and career

Published on: 09 November
2021 Author: Emily Drabble

John Agard has been crowned the winner of our 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award! Here, he talks to Emily Drabble about the power of poetry and how it feels to receive the Award...

John Agard was born in 1949 in Georgetown, Guyana (then called British Guiana). He moved to England in 1977 when he became a touring lecturer for the Commonwealth Institute to promote a better understanding of Caribbean culture.

Over the course of the next eight years he visited 2,500 schools and started writing poetry for children. Since then, he has published more than 50 books of poetry, stories and non-fiction, and has co-edited anthologies with his wife Grace Nichols. He won the Queen's Award for poetry in 2012 and his poems 'Half Caste' and 'Checking Out Me History' have been on the GCSE curriculum since 2002.

First of all, John takes us on a trip down memory lane back to his very beginnings as a poet...

Looking back to my childhood, I didn't tell myself I would be a poet but anything that pertained to language interested me. Don't forget, Guyana was a British colony, so I had all these influences.

Whereas now a young teenager may pretend to be a rapper and strut their stuff in front of the mirror, I would pretend I was a cricket commentator and create a fictitious commentary using words such as 'majestic' or 'magnificent' in the style of the legendary cricket commentator John Arlott.

I'd read Enid Blyton - it might be *Five go Down to the Sea*. Blyton might use the word 'flabbergasted', or the word 'consternation'. I'd say words out loud - 'preposterous' - it just sounds good in my mouth! I'd read *The Hardy Boys*. And then I'd go to the market and get in Calypso and vibrant Caribbean Creole, which can be so spicy and so bawdy.

We would shift gear, shift registers of speech, but speaking English all the time. There were all these different strains of language emerging in me. But I didn't know I would be a poet yet.

What were your school days like?

I went to a Roman Catholic Jesuit secondary school in Georgetown called St Stanislaus College, and was taught mainly by priests. My favourite teacher was my English teacher Father Maxwell, who made the dictionary an adventure. I became an altar boy, so I had to reply to the priest in Latin, and that had a magical liturgical song about it.

The school had a fascinating tradition of inviting one of the boys to read to the priests from a book every day. So imagine me standing there as a 13-year-old reading P. G. Wodehouse, putting on an imaginary flamboyant tie as Bertie Wooster! Of course, I wasn't conscious of class in the English sense. Friends of mine now with a working class background would dislike that type of thing but to me, I'm just seeing the language.

At the age of 14, I joined the Junior Dramatic Theatre Guild. I got the part of Captain Hook, and went on to become the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* and Feste in *Twelfth Night*.

I got excited by anything to do with language. We had a tradition of elocution - you had to recite a poem in front of your class. I was in love with this. I had an obsession with being an actor but my mother said, 'Acting is a hobby.' She pointed to a friend who was working in the bank with a decent job.

When did you write your first serious poem?

I wrote my first poem in the Sixth Form during my exam. Picture me aged 16 writing this on my exam paper:

'Sitting in my classroom cell.

I chew my pen as words come tumbling down on printed lines before my eye.

Oh, Wordsworth, why were you born to wrack my brain with songs of praise to lifelong nature?'

I failed the exam, but a teacher, a white teacher called Michael Gilkes, fresh out of Oxford, said, 'John, well, you wouldn't pass your exams by scribbling poems at the back of the exam paper. Having said that, I like this poem'. And

one thing led to the next - he spoke to colleagues at neighbouring schools and got other teachers involved. This shows how a teacher can give you that sort of desire and feed you!

And this poem was published in a magazine called Expression 1, printed on this dinosaur machine called a Xerox. Then Expression 2 was published and later when we were around 18 years old, we young poets would meet, and Expression 3, 4, 5, 6, were published and so on. I have some old copies of these and I treasure them. That humble situation was the springboard for many of us to go on to pursue wonderful academic careers, become novelists and published poets.

After leaving school at the age of 19 after his A Levels, John taught French and Latin at O Level for a year and then got a job as a librarian, in the same library where he had borrowed his copies of Enid Blyton and The Hardy Boys when he was a child. He was commissioned to manage the mobile library, going to the outer districts of Georgetown and says now, 'That was a wonderful time in the Book Mobile, it was the best job ever. It was like a holiday!'

What is it about poetry to reach parts and people that other art forms might not reach?

We are all creatures of language, so whether you live in a deserted desert and have never seen a movie, or live in the far reaches of the Amazon and have never heard of an opera, or are a Yoruba farmer, gathering yams in West Africa - you have heard your mother speak to you. You heard your dad speak to you. You've heard a lullaby.

Bear in mind that before books were written, poetry was part of a day to day ritual. So, with due respect to the magic of opera or the brilliance of a movie, we are creatures of language. We all have a diversity of languages. And before poems were written down, they were sung. There were Irish charms for milking a cow. Poems by the Inuit for caribou hunting.

A lot of oral poetry is keyed into our heartbeat. The words you hear at your mother's lap. The utterance of words in the right order can excite, be thought-provoking. We are so surrounded by language if you get tuned in. And I would like to think in my biased way that poets return us to the complexity and the fragility of language and by the same leap, the complexity of us as human beings and our fragility.

Poetry liberates you to the musicality of language, to which we were born with that heartbeat, but also the joy of words which we all have.

You write poems for everyone, but what has drawn you to focusing on writing poems for children?

I came to England on 4 November 1977, and in 1978 I got a job at the Commonwealth Institute as a travelling lecturer visiting ten schools a week for eight years - eventually I visited 2,500 schools. I was the Man from Guyana. I started to realise that a little poem could make the talk exciting, so I started writing poems for them. So that's where it started.

Why are libraries important?

Libraries are crucial because a school librarian or a public librarian, simply by directing an eager mind in the right direction of a book, could change your life. Librarians get the books to the children who read them.

You might be a librarian who is simply an employee of a library, or you might be one who is a bit eager and sees a mixed race child and says, 'Have you read this book by Jackie Kay, she has a Nigerian dad, I think you might like that, come with me.'

And if that child never experienced a book outside of white writers, well, the librarian can change lives. Librarians, book-sellers, teachers, they're all part of the magical linking from utterance to something life-affirming and even life-changing: the book.

How big is the impact of meeting an author and poet on a child?

I would only have realised that by coming to England because in our school days, we couldn't meet the writers we loved. They were dead.

But much later when I was standing outside a pub in Nottingham a young woman in her early 20s came up and said, 'Are you that bloke that wrote Half Caste? I heard you and because of that day I wanted to do creative writing.'

She had attended one of the GCSE poetry live gigs which have allowed thousands of teenagers from Coventry to Nottingham to Dubai to meet the poets they study. So I can't deny the fact that the live performances and visits are exciting and impactful.

From 2002, John's poems have been on the national curriculum and widely studied in schools, and he's been doing GCSE Poetry Live shows, meeting thousands of pupils across the country.

John, what do you think about the latest statistics that show only 1% of GCSE students in the UK study a text by a writer of colour?

Let's put it this way, the British superstructure may not be as aggressively racist as America and United States. But there are subtleties, maybe even subconscious perceptions, that make them feel more at ease with racism.

Bearing in mind that many colonialists felt Africa had produced no literature, it was all about the West - a jump from Homer to Jane Austen. If you are potentially tribally blind, and some of these guys who might be Ministers of Education might have come from a rugby college and Oxford aristocratic background, whether they like it or not they have absorbed within their DNA a paternalistic, condescending attitude towards so-called, in inverted commas, 'exotic natives'.

So the brilliant boxer, he knows his place. You celebrated it. Attitudes get more ambivalent when the mind enters the arena. Don't get me wrong, you will have many who are humble enough to say, 'I never knew this existed. I must re-educate myself. I must re-condition myself.' But it's very perfidious and it's very insidious.

How does it feel to win the Book Trust Lifetime Achievement Award?

This has come out of the blue from BookTrust, an organisation that takes books to heart and is very, very knowledgeable about the tremendous wealth of writers, thinking about those who have won before: Judith Kerr, Shirley Hughes, Raymond Briggs, Helen Oxenbury, John Burningham and David McKee. Apart from being the spring chicken of the group, it excites me that they have chosen poetry as I'm the first poet to win.

I got the good news about the Award at a time when I needed the good news. How could I not be excited? Because when you write a book you write in solitude. And then to think of somewhere like the BookTrust, who treasure books and who try to make books part of a life-enhancing experience for a child...

To hear the judges were saying these fancy things about me... I feel happy that I've stuck with this craft from that 16-year-old boy writing in a classroom in a Caribbean ex-colony. What goes through my mind is that it's not just me, but all the people that inspired me. If only my teachers could be there... I'm thinking about who published my first books, who contributed to my journey way back in the Caribbean, my head is back to John Arlott, the legendary cricket commentator!

This thing called poetry has power and I stuck with it and I still get excitement from language. Just finding that joy in standing in front of people and saying a poem. I know this thing connects. This thing could touch a soul. This thing doesn't have to be didactic, I don't have to preach to people. So my whole brain is on a tidal wave of delight.

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. 'He lights up the world with his words
and his love': Top authors and illustrators
on John Agard's Lifetime Achievement
Award win**

**Authors and illustrators on why they love
John Agard**

[https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-
and-features/features/2021/november/
he-lights-up-the-world-with-his-words-
and-his-love-top-authors-and-illustrators-
on-john-agards-lifetime-achievement-
award-win/](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2021/november/he-lights-up-the-world-with-his-words-and-his-love-top-authors-and-illustrators-on-john-agards-lifetime-achievement-award-win/)

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
- 2021 *BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award*

Honours

- 2007 *Fellow of Royal Society of Literature*

Books for consideration by the Jury : First five

The Young Inferno (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

Frances Lincoln

Book (illustrated by Neil Packer)

Walker

The Rainmaker Danced (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

Hodder

Coyote's Soundbite (illustrated by Piet Grobler)

Lantana

Follow That Word (illustrated by Momoko Abe)

Hachette



Five more titles reflecting Agard's work

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

Bodley Head

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

Hodder

Goldilocks On CCTV (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

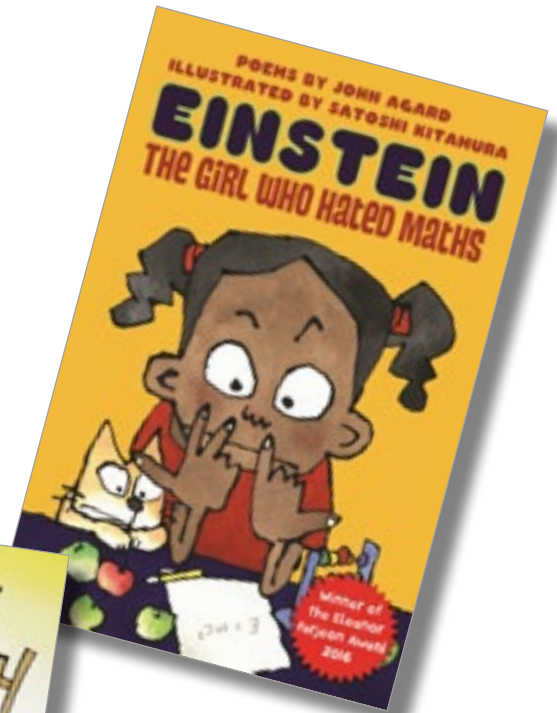
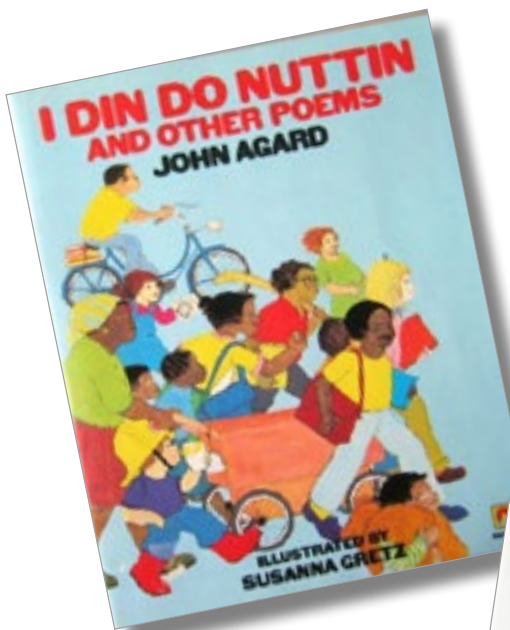
Frances Lincoln

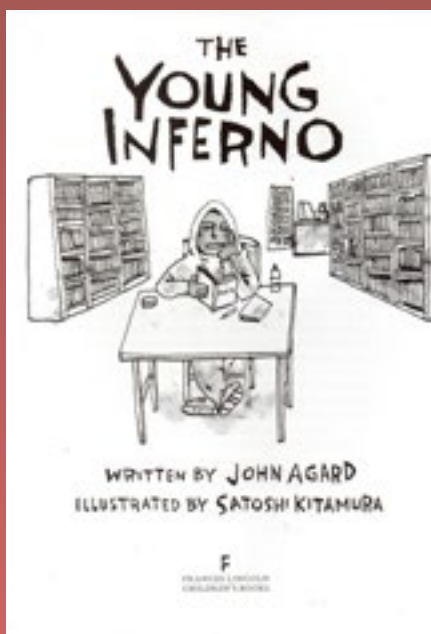
When Creature Meets Creature (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura)

Scallywag

Windrush Child (illustrated by Sophie Bass)

Walker





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. Dante's opening lines 'Midway through the journey of my life I woke to find myself in a dark wood, Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.' translate to: 'In the middle of my childhood wonder/I woke to find myself in a forest/that was – how shall I put it – wild and sombre.'

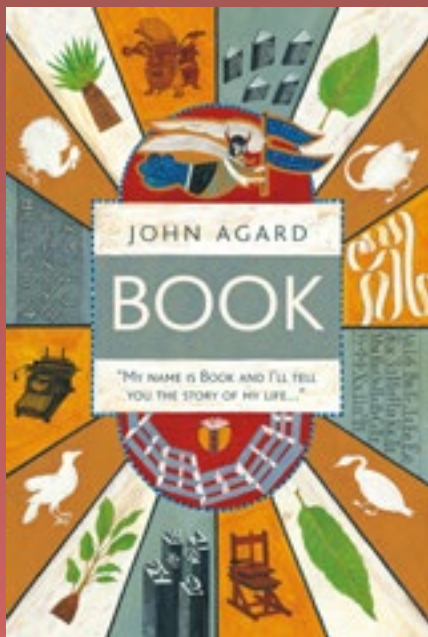
On first entering hell the boy hears thousands of people wailing. Aesop tells him 'These are the people who sat on the fence/they cared neither for good nor for evil/Theirs was the sin of indifference'. As he journeys through the circles of hell he meets many familiar figures. Frankenstein is the bouncer 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. The journey ends with the teenager meeting his Beatrice in the local library and the final image is of a mobile phone with Aesop as the screensaver.

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. (July)



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

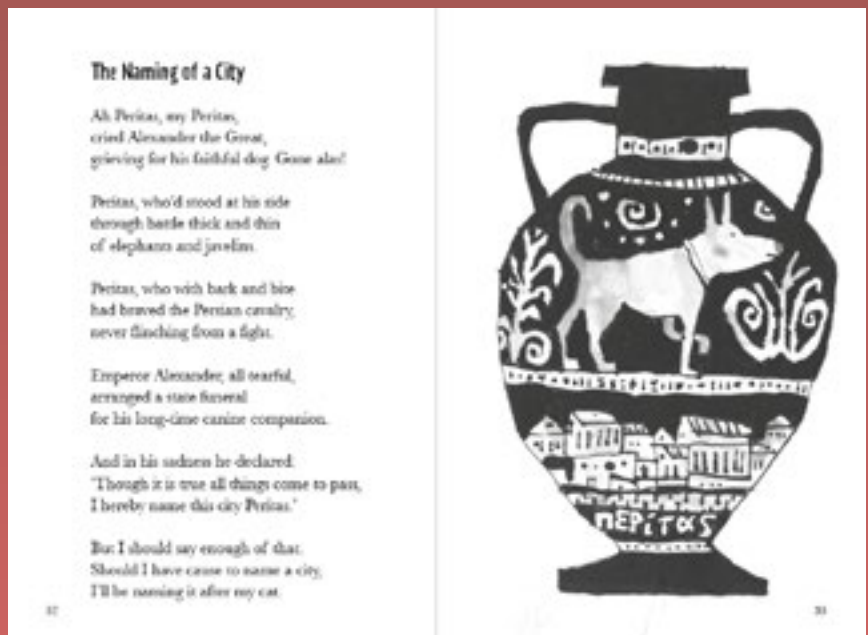
informative multi-step diagrams (the exploration of how sheepskin becomes parchment is particularly compact) that remains a spare and supportive partner to the text.

From Kirkus Reviews : Issue: Aug. 15, 2015

Review posted online July 22 2015 unattributed

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/john-agard/book-agard/>

From oral storytelling to e-books, Book provides a succinct overview of the past 5,000 years of its development. Referring to itself alternately in the third person and the first, it covers cuneiform, hieroglyphics, and the rise of alphabets, along with tracing the technological advances that took it from clay tablets through papyrus and parchment to paper and through scrolls to the codex. Though Book waxes lyrical about Western innovations ("I was flying on the wings of Gutenberg's movable type"), it takes pains to give credit to the many other cultures of the book, including the Aztecs, the Kashmiri, and the Chinese: "from Cai Lun's mushy mash, presto, paper was born." Packer's witty, black-and-white graphics complement Book's story, offering images that range widely, including botanical drawings of plants used in the making of paper and delicate towers of type. Occasional book-related quotations punctuate Book's account: from Emily Dickinson, Bertolt Brecht, Malorie Blackman, and others. It's a highly idiosyncratic account, and it's not a little twee – Book is not beyond self-aggrandizement – but for all its brevity, it covers a lot of territory accurately and with verve.



The Rainmaker Danced

Clive Barnes in Books for Keeps January 2018

<https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/review/the-rainmaker-danced/>

Perhaps the only thing I need to say about this new collection from John Agard is that it is of exactly of the quality you would expect from him. He 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.

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.

In CLIPPA Poetry Award 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.



Coyote's Soundbite

Sue McGonigle in Books for Keeps 248 May 2018

<https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/review/coyotes-soundbite-a-poem-for-our-planet/>

The rainforest is buzzing with news that the Earth goddesses are having a conference to discuss what should be done to save the planet and stop humans destroying it. Coyote is keen to attend and is undeterred by the fact this is a female only event. He decides to go in disguise and wearing his wife's blue dress, with matching shoes and handbag, he arrives undetected. The conference begins and one by one, the Earth goddesses make their speeches relating creation stories from cultures around the world. As he listens an idea occurs to Coyote and he decides to interject to make his point. He tells the speakers and delegates that what the Earth goddesses need is a soundbite to get their message across. Coyote's suggestion is enthusiastically received. On returning home, after successfully infiltrating the conference Coyote is surprised to discover that he is not the only one who has been playing tricks, his wife has too.

Inspired by Earth Day, award winning poet John Agard's narrative poem is full of humour and perfectly matched by acclaimed illustrator Piet Grobler's striking, quirky and detailed illustrations. Steeped in creation mythology from around world, this is a trickster tale with an important theme – human responsibility for the state of the Earth.

From review by Rebecca Simpson-Hargreaves

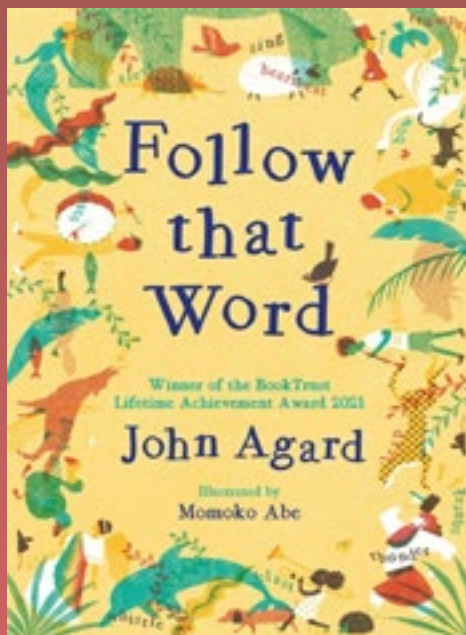
<https://justimagine.co.uk/review/coyotes-soundbite/>

Coyote's Soundbite: A planetary call to arms for our time from John Agard and Piet Grobler.

The goddesses of Earth are getting ready for an important conference and the curious coyote wants to know why he cannot go because he is a male. After thinking through his options, he decides to put on his wife's dress and tricks his way in to discover their important messages.

This may sound like a humorous poetry storybook, and that would be right, however, it addresses the very real issue of environmental destruction of our planet. Piet Grobler's illustrations are well suited to John Agard's poem, lively and interesting as they tell each of the goddess's stories. We get to see creatures from around the world in vibrant colours, with details that could keep any child entranced.

This is truly a multi-layered text and it is a rich resource on many levels. The underlying story is told through a poem rich in imagery, introducing specific vocabulary from around the globe. It draws from creation mother tales from the Andes to Australia to the Celtic water goddess Brigid. These characters alone could inspire a themed topic in history or RE. Add to this the key message of environmental awareness and issues, it could also support a science or geography focus. It can be easy for books on the subject to feel oppressive and overwhelming, yet this text approaches the subject in a way that offers hope and is joyous. *Coyote's Soundbite* certainly would inspire children to answer the Coyote's message of 'Earth-lovers of the world unite! Mother Nature is always right!



Follow that Word

From <https://bookwagon.co.uk/product/follow-that-word/>

John Agard takes us into a forest of words, through history and stories, in *Follow that Word*. Thereafter, he breaks down a selection that we might contemplate their construction, understanding and impact.

For example, we join Hercules Senior retelling his achievements to Hercules Junior. Despite the lesser's yawning, the older hero continues. We realise anew the might of his battles, alongside his feeling of victory. Then again, we learn of Junior's pondering as he goes to sleep, of the 'gentle thoughts of monstrous beings'. Thor, Ceres and Atlas are also met in works within this wonderful collection.

Thereafter, we dance within the 'circles/ of a cosmos' that is an iris, in a glorious paean to this flower of myth. What's more, we encounter items of classic stories, from 'mirror, mirror' to mermaid, to the pomegranate. Then there are creatures, from the platypus, to Jumbo, Swan, Lady Mosquito or Mr and Mrs Rattus. We recognise the poet's deep attention and considerations.

Then we contemplate phrases from the Bible, for example, 'The Last Shall Be First and the First Shall Be Last' alongside words and phrases from other cultures, like Ottoman and Juggernaut.

It seems that in each delve within *Follow that Word* there is something further to discover, share, reread and think upon. Despite it being a subtle book of poetry, with finger tip perfect illustrations from Momoko Abe, *Follow that Word* is a powerful beast

Follow that Word

<https://toppsta.com/books/details/380996/follow-that-word>

The father of performance poetry, John Agard, brings you a collection of riotously funny poems. *Follow that Word* is a celebration of imagination and demonstrates the true diversity of language.

A dazzling collection of over sixty poems, *Follow That Word* delivers John Agard's musings on people and places from the modern and historical world, this wonderful collection that can be rediscovered over and over again. With gorgeous black-and-white illustrations from Momoko Abe, *Follow That Word* takes you on a thought-provoking journey into the wonderful world of words, and this collection belongs on every bookshelf.

'It's been around from Creation dawn,
And it only takes two to catch on,
Try it people, and you'll soon see,
This is a dance that can set you free,
It's called the dance of diversity.'

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 | 1990 |
| 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 Hello, H2O, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura | 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 |
| Coyote's Soundbite, illustrated by Piet Grobler | Newbury, Berkshire, Lantana Publishing | 2021 |
| Books Make Good Pets, illustrated by Momoko Abe | London, Orchard | 2021 |
| Follow That Word, illustrated by Momoko Abe | London, Hodder | 2022 |
| John Agard's Windrush Child, illustrated by Sophie Bass | London, Walker | 2022 |
| When Creature Met Creature, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura | London, Scallywag Press | 2022 |

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

| | | |
|--|---------------------|------|
| [Contributor] Wake Up, Stir About: Songs for Assembly | London, Unwin Hyman | 1989 |
| [Editor] Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All: Poems (Selected for teenagers) | London, Heinemann | 1989 |
| [Editor, with Grace Nichols] No Hickory, No Dickory, No Dock: A Collection of Nursery Rhymes, illustrated by Cynthia Jabar | London, Viking | 1991 |
| [Editor, with Grace Nichols], A Caribbean Dozen, illustrated by Cathie Felstead | London, Walker | 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 |

John Agard : Bibliography (Each section is Chronological)

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|--|-----------------------|------|
| [Editor] Why is the sky?, illustrated by Andrzej Klimowski | London, Faber & Faber | 1996 |
| [Editor, with Michael Rosen] A Child's Year of Stories and Poems | London, Viking | 2000 |
| [Editor] Hello, New: Poems for a New Century, illustrated by Lydia Monks | London, Orchard | 2000 |
| [Editor, with Grace Nichols] Under the Moon and Over the Sea, illustrated by Cathie Felstead, Christopher Corr, Jane Ray, Satoshi Kitamura, Sara Fanelli | 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 |
| 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 |
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| Border Zone | Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books | 2022 |
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John Agard : Bibliography (Each section is Chronological)

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)

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