

Benjamin Zephaniah

Dr Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah was born on the 15th April 1958 in the Handsworth district of Birmingham, England. His mother was a nurse and originally from Jamaica. His father was a postal worker and originally from Barbados. Benjamin is famous for his performance poetry. When he was 22 he moved to London so he could share his poetry with more people.

Poems

Benjamin attended school until he was 13 years old, he initially found it difficult to read and write. Unhappy with the popular opinion that poetry was only for people who were in school or at university, he started performing his poems so that they were accessible to everyone. The type of poetry that Benjamin performs is 'dub' poetry. Dub poetry uses the performer's voice as a musical instrument. The performer changes the speed and pitch of the poem to give it more a musical sound. Benjamin's performances became really popular and many people enjoyed his poetry.

Causes

Many of Benjamin's poems are about causes that he has strong beliefs about. He has written, performed and published many poems with messages against racism and slavery. Alongside this, he also writes poems about what he calls 'street politics'. In the early 1980's he performed some of his poems at demonstrations and outside police stations; this was to argue against homelessness and rising unemployment at the time. As a supporter of animal rights, Benjamin also writes poems which discuss and question the way we treat animals.

Books

As well as performing his poetry around the world, Benjamin has published his work in several books for both adults and children. His first book of poetry 'Talking Turkeys', was a huge success. In fact, the book, which encouraged people to be nice to turkeys at Christmas, was so popular that there had to be an emergency reprint after only six weeks!

Today

Benjamin, is still writing songs, poems, books, plays and much more! Although he travels around the world giving performances, he now spends most of his time in Beijing China. Young writers and singers are still inspired by his work to create their own pieces of writing about something they feel passionate about.

Suitable clip of Benjamin performing <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/clips/zcftsbk>