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**WATERSTONES CHILDREN’S LAUREATE CRESSIDA COWELL MBE RELEASES TRANSFORMATIVE ‘LIFE-CHANGING LIBRARIES’ RESEARCH MARKING END OF TENURE IN PRESTIGIOUS ROLE**

*“On my appointment as Children’s Laureate, I spoke about the urgent necessity of ensuring every child in this country has access to books. Approaching my role with practical magic, action and hope, little did I imagine quite what challenges we would face – but it is when times are hardest that we need the transformative magic of books and reading the most.*

*The report for my flagship ‘Life-changing Libraries’ project publishes today, highlighting the transformational impact that a gold standard library provision and reading for pleasure culture has on children’s lives: the initiative has sparked a passion for books and a joy for reading; it has boosted motivation and attention in the classroom; and there are significant improvements in well-being, alongside increased empathy, confidence and self-worth. A great library positively affects an entire school community, children, teachers and parents.*

*Reading for pleasure unlocks a world of new possibilities for children – with educational, economic and health benefits all irrespective of their background – and primary school libraries are a key part of this story. Yet millions of children are falling further behind because one in four primary schools in disadvantaged communities still has no library space at all: a staggering and shameful statistic.*

*Teachers have met unprecedented challenges over the pandemic, and now are facing yet further struggles with the cost-of-living crisis also impacting schools. But we cannot afford to let their library provision become a casualty as the chronic problem of underfunding, already left unsolved for too many years, is now a crisis. And we must take action now.*

*Whilst my tenure as Laureate now comes to a close, my quest goes on: books and reading are magic and this magic MUST be available to absolutely everyone – every single child has the right to this life-changing opportunity.”*

***Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2019-2022, Cressida Cowell MBE***

[**booktrust.org.uk/lifechanginglibraries**](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-laureate/lifechanginglibraries/#!?q=&sortOption=MostRecent&pageNo=1) **| #LifeChangingLibraries |** [**Report**](https://www.dropbox.com/s/y7z9x6a6c9yuv9l/Embargoed%20until%208%20June%202022_Life-changing%20Libraries%20report.pdf?dl=0) **|** [**Images**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/bfzlqahstz8okdr/AADUNK7v-4Nc2dxBlc8A4ox4a?dl=0)

**London, Wednesday 8 June 2022:** Waterstones Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell MBE has revealed the transformative impact on the pilot primary schools taking part in her ‘[Life-changing Libraries](file:///%5C%5CUXENSVR%5C%7BFD34A37F%7D%5CEXT%5CK7%5Cbooktrust.org.uk%5Clifechanginglibraries)’ initiative, with an increase in a love of reading, motivation towards learning, well-being and feelings of self-worth.

The key findings in the ‘Life-changing Libraries’ report, published today, describe a transformation in attitudes towards reading, with an enthusiasm and passion for books ignited amongst the students of the six pilot schools and a considerable uptake in the time spent engaged in reading for pleasure both at school and at home. Teachers have reported increased attention, engagement and motivation to within in the classroom, alongside a significant improvement in both children and staff wellbeing, as well as a boosted sense of pride, confidence and self-worth.

***“It’s changed the feeling of the school, the attitudes of children and staff, it has changed everything.”***

*English Lead at Benwick Primary School (Benwick, Cambridgeshire)*

***“For years we have been looking for interventions to boost attainment to help close the gap between disadvantaged and SEN children and their peers. The library was the only intervention they needed.”***

*Headteacher at Woodchurch of England Primary School (Woodchurch Estate, The Wirral)*

The ‘Life-changing Libraries’ initiative, delivered in partnership with BookTrust, showcased the transformative impact a well-resourced primary school library has on a child’s opportunities in life, as well as the shocking inequality currently facing children across England. Over the course of a year, six different primary schools across England were helped to develop a reading for pleasure culture, focused on the four pillars of a successful ‘gold standard’ school library: space, book provision, expertise, and whole-school and parent involvement. The activity forms part of a campaign by the internationally bestselling author-illustrator calling for the Prime Minister to put primary school libraries at the heart of our long-term response to the pandemic with a ring fenced, yearly investment of £100m.

The full report can be found [here](https://www.dropbox.com/s/zfc0w2euogjd5hy/Embargoed%20until%208%20June%202022_Life-changing%20Libraries%20report.pdf?dl=0), further information about ‘Life-changing Libraries’ can be found below, and here.

**Cressida Cowell’s Laureate Legacy**

Alongside the 'Life-changing Libraries report’, Cowell has reflected on her time as Children’s Laureate during the pandemic, and bringing to life her magical to-do list – the [Laureate Reading Charter](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2019/july/every-child-has-the-right-to-read-cressida-cowells-giant-to-do-list-as-the-new-waterstones-childrens-laureate/) – to ensure all children have access to books.

During the pandemic, Cressida helped launch the digital hub [BookTrust HomeTime](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/have-some-fun/#!?q=&sortOption=AtoZ&pageNo=1) to entertain children and families at home, packed with free online books, videos, activities, competitions, quizzes and much more. She also curated a week of ‘[Summer Camp](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/news/news-2020/creativity-has-never-been-more-important-childrens-laureate-cressida-cowell-launches-creative-summer-camp/)’ activity featuring leading authors and illustrators to inspire families to embrace books, reading and creativity at home over the summer holidays for entertainment, learning, as well as to support mental well-being. Since the pandemic began, Cressida has read a weekly chapter from her best-selling *How to Train Your Dragon* and *The Wizards of Once* books from her garden shed, streaming the videos on her YouTube [channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCe01xn13M8q2dsIw0mvW9lg).

Cowell also worked with BookTrust Represents to create [#PassThePen](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/news/news-2020/booktrust-represents-and-waterstones-childrens-laureate-cressida-cowell-team-up-to-promote-authors-and-illustrators-of-colour-with-passthepen/), a social media campaign designed to help create visibility and generate book sales for emerging authors and illustrators of colour in the children’s books world by pairing fresh talent with established, high-profile authors and illustrators, for a takeover of their partners’ Instagram platform for a day to share information about themselves and their work. The second edition of #PassThePen formed part of the World Book Day 2022 celebrations.

‘Life-changing Libraries’ has been Cressida Cowell’s flagship campaign as Waterstones Children’s Laureate, and the culmination of this project marks the end of her tenure in this prestigious role. Whilst Cressida’s time as Laureate now comes to a close, she will continue to fight until every child has access to a great library. She will be working with [The Primary School Library Alliance](https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/libraryalliance/), as well as supporting the Great School Libraries Campaign.

Cressida’s new series [*Which Way to Anywhere*](https://www.cressidacowell.co.uk/) has just been announced, and the first instalment will be published by Hachette Children’s Group on 15 September 2022. *Which Way to Anywhere* is an out-of-this-world new adventure series about a thoroughly modern magic, unlikely heroes, the meaning of family and how those who seem like they’re worlds apart might just be more similar than they think… Cressida began writing *Which Way to Anywhere* twenty-five years ago, but took it out of drawer during the pandemic, partly inspired by reading giving children other worlds to visit during lockdown.

**ABOUT ‘LIFE-CHANGING LIBRARIES’**

Waterstones Children’s Laureate, Cressida Cowell MBE, the internationally bestselling author-illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* series, launched **‘**[**Life-changing Libraries**](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-laureate/lifechanginglibraries/#!?q=&sortOption=MostRecent&pageNo=1)**’** in April 2021 with an [**open letter**](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2021/april/libraries-change-lives-read-cressida-cowells-open-letter-to-prime-minister-boris-johnson/)to the Prime Minister – supported by former Laureates, literacy organisations, and publishing industry leaders – asking the Government to demonstrate their commitment to levelling up the country by improving primary school library provision.

*“Millions of children, particularly those from the poorest communities worst hit by the pandemic, are missing out on opportunities to discover the life-changing magic of reading – one that OECD research suggests is a key indicator in a child’s future success. How can a child become a reader for pleasure if their parents or carers cannot afford books, and their primary school has no library, or that library is woefully insufficient? I am writing – with the support of former Laureates, literacy organisations, and publishing industry leaders – to ask the Government to help reverse the spiralling inequality in education by putting primary school libraries at the heart of our long-term response to the pandemic with a ring fenced, yearly investment of £100m.”*

The Children’s Laureate highlighted the shocking reality – and severe long-term underfunding – of England’s primary school libraries with evidence showing a lack of the key ingredients: space, resource and expertise. Whilst every prison has a statutory library, research shows one in eight primary schools has no library space at all – a statistic that doubles in schools with a higher proportion of children on free school meals.

Cowell stressed that this lack of provision means millions of children – particularly those from the poorest communities worst hit by the pandemic and whose parents cannot afford books at home – are missing out on the opportunity to become a reader for pleasure and the vital benefits this chance brings. Alongside public libraries, school libraries are vital to giving all children access to books and reading. Decades of research shows the importance this has on a child’s educational development, health and well-being, personal growth and future prospects no matter their starting point in life, and how pivotal this is in not only determining a child’s later economic success, but also the economy.

Cressida Cowell outlined how a ring fenced, yearly investment of £100m could help ensure that all schools have access to the key ingredients required to create and sustain a library space and develop a culture of reading for pleasure.

The project spotlighted the four pillars of a successful ‘gold standard’ school library – space, book provision, expertise, and whole-school and parent involvement. It was inspired by Cressida’s twenty-year experience visiting schools and grounded in the most recent research into the benefits of reading for pleasure and the challenging financial reality facing primary school libraries.

A bespoke, dedicated library space was created by BookTrust in six very different primary schools and stocked with a specially curated book list of approximately 1000 titles, selected by BookTrust’s expert book selection team with guidance from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), to inspire and engage children. Staff have been provided with professional training and mentoring from specialists at the School Library Association as part of a two year-membership, and teachers have access to the CLPE’s Power of Reading Training and Membership.

**“It’s changed the feeling of the school, the attitudes of children and staff, it has changed everything.”**

*English Lead at Benwick Primary School (Benwick, Cambridgeshire)*

**“Many of our children are in their emotional overdraft but every time they pick up a book it is making an emotional deposit.”** *Head of School at Dinnington Community Primary School (Dinnington, near Sheffield)*

**“Before the library was here the books weren’t interesting to me. Now reading makes me feel like everyone has a place in the world and you can always achieve your dreams. It has expanded my love of books forever.”**

*Pupil at Griffin Primary School (Wandsworth, London)*

**“The biggest impact on our school has been the change in attitudes. Staff and children are now avid readers. They’re making choices about books and exploring different titles and texts. The impact has been amazing.”**

*Headteacher at Saviour Church of England Primary School (Collyhurst, Manchester)*

**“We are improving the life chances of our children. This is the thread that pulls everything together for them... It’s such a quiet and warm, safe space. Homes aren’t always like that.”**

*Community Governor at Skerne Park Academy (Darlington)*

**“For years we have been looking for interventions to boost attainment to help close the gap between disadvantaged and SEN children and their peers. The library was the only intervention they needed.”**

*Headteacher at Woodchurch of England Primary School (Woodchurch Estate, The Wirral)*

Full information about the Life-Changing Libraries project [HERE](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-laureate/lifechanginglibraries/).

**ENDS**

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**About the Waterstones Children’s Laureate**

The Waterstones Children’s Laureate is managed by BookTrust, the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, and sponsored by Waterstones. It is awarded once every two years to an eminent writer or illustrator of children’s books to celebrate outstanding achievement in their field, and celebrates children’s literature as an art form, recognising its contribution to culture and bringing it to the attention of a wider audience.

This prestigious role was originally created by Poet Laureate Ted Hughes and author Michael Morpurgo. The ‘League of Laureates’ are the foremost representatives of children’s literature, showcasing the extraordinary and dynamic art form and its rich contribution to culture in the UK. Each Laureate brings their own passion to the prestigious role and focuses on their own particular themes to create a unique legacy.

The current Waterstones Children’s Laureate is Cressida Cowell, the international bestselling author and illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* and *The Wizards of Once* series and author of the *Emily Brown* picture books. The previous ten Laureates are: Quentin Blake (1999-2001), Anne Fine (2001-2003), Michael Morpurgo (2003-2005), Jacqueline Wilson (2005-2007), Michael Rosen (2007-2009), Anthony Browne (2009-2011), Julia Donaldson (2011-2013), Malorie Blackman (2013-2015), Chris Riddell (2015-2017), Lauren Child (2017-2019).

**About Cressida Cowell**

Current Waterstones Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell is the number one bestselling author-illustrator of the How to Train Your Dragon and The Wizards of Once book series, and the author of the Emily Brown picture books, illustrated by Neal Layton. She has sold over 11 million books worldwide in 38 languages. How to Train Your Dragon is also an award-winning billion-dollar DreamWorks film series, and a TV series shown on Netflix and CBBC; The Wizards of Once has also been optioned for film by DreamWorks.

Cressida is an ambassador for the National Literacy Trust, a trustee for World Book Day, founder patron of the Children’s Media Foundation and is on the Council of the Society of Authors. She has won numerous prizes for her books, including the Blue Peter Book Award and the Ruth Rendell Award for Championing Literacy. She is an honorary fellow of Keble College Oxford, and has a honorary doctorate from the University of Brighton. She grew up in London and on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland and she now lives in Hammersmith with her husband, three children and two dogs called Pigeon and Zero.

**About BookTrust**

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school. We are the UK’s largest children’s reading charity; each year we reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives. We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health services, libraries, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. [booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

**About Waterstones**

Waterstones is the UK and Ireland’s leading high street bookseller with 293 bookshops, including Foyles, Hatchards, Hodges Figgis and branches in Ireland, Brussels and Amsterdam. It is the only national specialist book retailer of scale in the UK, with the average sized shop carrying a range of around 30,000 individual books and with over 200,000 titles in the largest shop. Waterstones.com | @Waterstones

**About Hachette Children’s Group**

Hachette Children's Group is one of the largest children's publishers in the UK, with an excellent track record in creating bestselling and award-winning books for children.

The Group aims to cater for every child, with baby and pre-school books, picture books, gift, fiction, non-fiction, series fiction, books for the school and library market and licensed publishing and comprises the imprints Hodder Children’s Books, Orchard Books, Orion Children’s Books, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, Quercus Children’s Books, Laurence King Children’s Books, Pat-a-Cake, Wren & Rook, Franklin Watts and Wayland Books.

The Group publishes a wide range of authors, illustrators, series and licences including: Cressida Cowell, Kes Gray, Jim Field, Jessica Townsend, Onjali Q. Raúf, Kiran Millwood Hargrave, Matthew Syed, David Almond, Lauren Child, Sinead Burke, Rachel Bright, Marion Deuchars, Dermot O’Leary, Nick East, Dean Atta, Francesca Simon, Alex T. Smith, Zanib Mian, J.K. Rowling, Giles Andreae, Guy Parker-Rees, Benjamin Zephaniah, Piers Torday, Alice Oseman, Juno Dawson, Pippa Curnick, Dr Ranj Singh, Simon Farnaby, Leigh Bardugo, Rainbow Magic, Beast Quest and Pokémon.

Hachette Children’s Group is also the publisher of author Enid Blyton, and the owner of Enid Blyton Entertainment.

hachettechildrens.co.uk @hachettekids