

Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah is a British writer. He has written lots of books, poems and plays for children and adults. His first book of poetry for children, *Talking Turkeys*, was so popular that it sold out in only six weeks!

Early Life

Benjamin Zephaniah was born on the 15th April 1958 in Birmingham. His father was a postal worker and his mother was a nurse. He left school when he was 13 years old. At this time, he started writing and performing poetry. His poems were based on events that he saw happening both locally and around the world.



Moving to London

Benjamin did not like the idea that poetry was only for people who were still in school or at university. He thought that poetry should be something that everybody could enjoy. Because of this, he began performing his poems in a style called dub poetry. Dub poetry does not use musical instruments; instead, the poet reads with rhythm and changes the pitch of their voice to make the poem sound musical. Benjamin performed poetry for the first time when he was just 10 years old. By the time he was 15 years old, he was well known for his poetry around his home town. However, Benjamin wanted a bigger audience to hear his poems so he moved to London when he was 22 years old. This was where he had his first book of poetry published.



Books and Poetry

Benjamin has written lots of different books, poems and plays. To begin with, he did not want to write a book aimed just at children. This is because he believed that poetry shouldn't be given an age limit. In 1999, Benjamin published his first fictional book for teenagers.



Causes

When creating poems, Benjamin writes about things that he has strong beliefs about. In the early 1980s, he created poetry which argued against issues he saw in Britain. During this time, his poems were performed at protests and outside police stations. Benjamin still supports a number of animal rights groups and human rights groups, using their messages to create even more poetry.



Achievements

During his time as an author and poet, Benjamin has won lots of awards. In 2009, one poll named him as the nation's third favourite poet. He was the only living poet to make it into the top ten! So far, 16 universities have awarded him with an honorary doctorate. This means that he is a doctor of letters, literature and arts. It also means that he can use a title before his name, making him Dr Benjamin Zephaniah. In 2008, Benjamin won an award for creating the best original song; this shows that he is a successful musician as well as a poet.

Benjamin is still writing poetry and creating music to this day. He spends most of his time at his home in China although he still likes to travel to different countries. Many young writers and singers say that they have been inspired by Benjamin because he writes music and poetry that everyone can enjoy.



Questions

1. Who does Benjamin think should get to enjoy poetry? Tick one.

- people at school
- adults
- children
- everyone

2. Number the facts from 1-4 to show the order that appear in the text.

- Benjamin's poems could be heard outside police stations.
- Benjamin won an award for the best original song.
- Benjamin moved to London.
- Benjamin was named as the nation's third favourite poet.

3. How long did it take for all of the copies of 'Talking Turkeys' to sell out?

4. Fill in the missing words in this sentence.

Dub poetry doesn't require musical _____;
instead, it uses the poet's _____.

5. Look at the last paragraph.

Find and copy one word which shows that young musicians look up to Benjamin

6. Would you like to meet Benjamin Zephaniah? Explain your answer.

7. **So far, 16 universities have awarded him with an honorary doctorate.**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to use the words 'so far'?

8. What do you think Benjamin's most recent poem could be about? Explain your answer.

Answers

1. Who does Benjamin think should get to enjoy poetry? Tick one.

- people at school
- adults
- children
- everyone**

2. Number the facts from 1-4 to show the order that appear in the text.

- 2** Benjamin's poems could be heard outside police stations.
- 4** Benjamin won an award for the best original song.
- 1** Benjamin moved to London.
- 3** Benjamin was named as the nation's third favourite poet.

3. How long did it take for all of the copies of 'Talking Turkeys' to sell out?

It only took six weeks for all of the copies of 'Talking Turkeys' to sell out.

4. Fill in the missing words in this sentence.

Dub poetry doesn't require musical **instruments**; instead, it uses the poet's **voice**.

5. Look at the last paragraph.

Find and copy one word which shows that young musicians look up to Benjamin Zephaniah.

inspired

6. Would you like to meet Benjamin Zephaniah? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I would like to meet Benjamin Zephaniah because I think that he sounds really interesting. I would enjoy listening to him talk about all of the different places he's visited and I would like to hear him perform dub poetry.

7. **So far, 16 universities have awarded him with an honorary doctorate.**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to use the words 'so far'?

Pupils' own responses provided that a reference has been made to Benjamin still being alive/still writing poems, such as: I think that the author has chosen to use the words 'so far' because Benjamin is still writing poems. This means that he can still be awarded with a doctorate from another university.

8. What do you think Benjamin's most recent poem could be about? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Benjamin's most recent poem might be about the amount of plastic we use. This is because he writes about causes that he has strong beliefs about and plastic use is a current problem.

Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah is a British poet, writer and performer. He has written and performed many books and poems for both children and adults. His first book of poetry for children, 'Talking Turkeys', was so popular that it sold out in only six weeks!

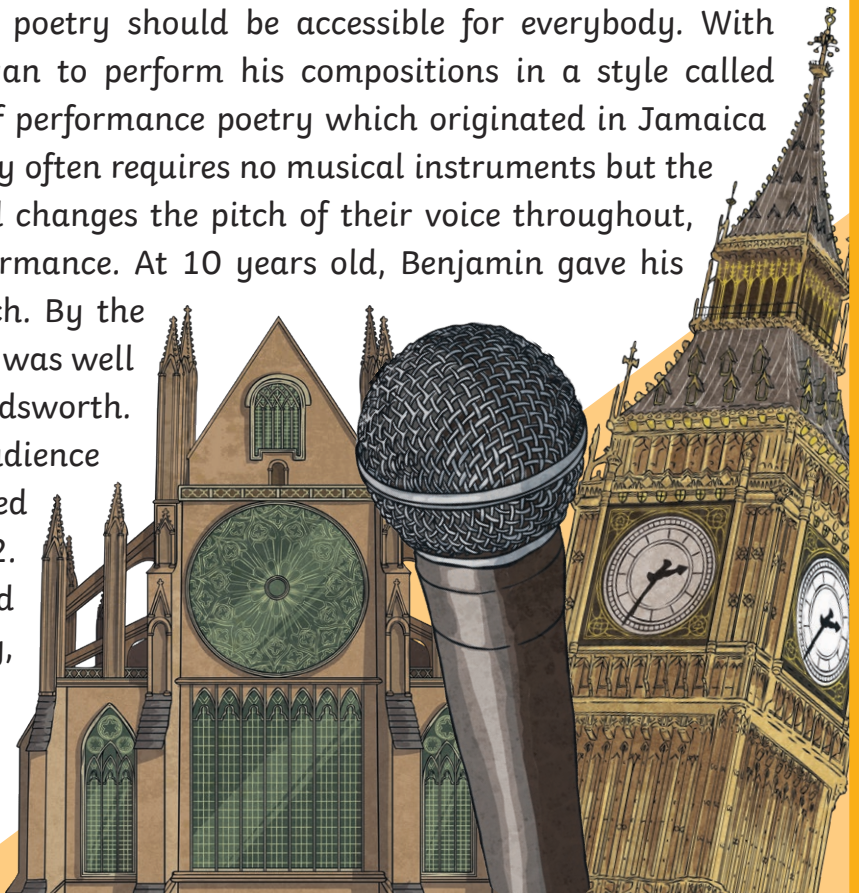
Early Life

Benjamin Zephaniah was born on the 15th April 1958 in the Handsworth district of Birmingham. His father was a postal worker who was originally from Barbados and his mother was a nurse who was originally from Jamaica. Benjamin found it difficult to read and write when he was young and left school at the age of 13. Around this time, he started writing and performing his own poetry which was based on current events in both Jamaica and his home town of Birmingham.



Moving to London

Benjamin strongly opposes the idea that poetry is only for people in school and university. He believes that poetry should be accessible for everybody. With this in mind, Benjamin began to perform his compositions in a style called dub poetry. This is a form of performance poetry which originated in Jamaica during the 1970s. Dub poetry often requires no musical instruments but the poet reads with rhythm and changes the pitch of their voice throughout, resulting in a musical performance. At 10 years old, Benjamin gave his first performance in a church. By the time he was 15 years old, he was well known for his poetry in Handsworth. Wanting to find a larger audience for his poetry, Benjamin moved to London at the age of 22. This was where he published his first book of poetry, 'Pen Rhythms'.



Books and Poetry

Benjamin has written a variety of books, poems and plays for different audiences. To begin with, he was reluctant to publish a poetry book aimed just at children as he believed that poetry shouldn't be given an age limit. In 1999, Benjamin published his first novel aimed at teenagers which was called 'Face'.

Causes

When creating poetry, Benjamin writes about causes that he has strong beliefs about. In the early 1980s, he created poetry which protested the issues that he saw in Britain. During this time, his poetry could be heard at demonstrations and outside police stations. To this day, Benjamin still supports a number of groups which fight for the rights of both humans and animals. These groups still influence the poetry that he writes.



Achievements

Alongside publishing a number of books, poems, albums and plays, Benjamin has won a variety of awards. In 2009, Benjamin came third in a poll to find the nation's favourite poet. Interestingly, he was the only living poet to make it into the top ten. Since he began writing, 16 universities have awarded Benjamin with an honorary doctorate. This means that he is a doctor of letters, literature and arts and he can use a title before his name, making him Dr Benjamin Zephaniah. In 2008, Benjamin won an award for creating the best original song, highlighting his talent as a musician as well as a poet.

Benjamin is still writing poetry and creating music to this day. Although he still travels to places such as South America and Africa, he now spends most of his time at his home in China. Many young writers and singers say that they have been inspired by Benjamin's ability to write pieces that everyone can enjoy.



Questions

1. Where was Benjamin living when his first book of poetry was published? Tick one.

- South America
- Birmingham
- London
- China

2. Draw four lines to match each event with the year that it happened in.

Benjamin published his first novel
for teenagers.

1958

Benjamin won an award for the best
original song.

1999

Benjamin was born in Handsworth.

2008

Benjamin was listed in the top ten of
the nation's favourite poets.

2009

3. Look at the section called **Moving to London**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'against'.

4. Who does Benjamin believe that poetry should be for?

5. Name one place that you could have gone to in the early 1980s if you had wanted to hear Benjamin's poetry.

6. How do you think that Benjamin's life might have changed had he not moved to London?
Explain your answer.

7. What impression of Benjamin does this text give you? Explain your answer.

8. Do you think that Benjamin enjoys writing poetry? Explain your answer.

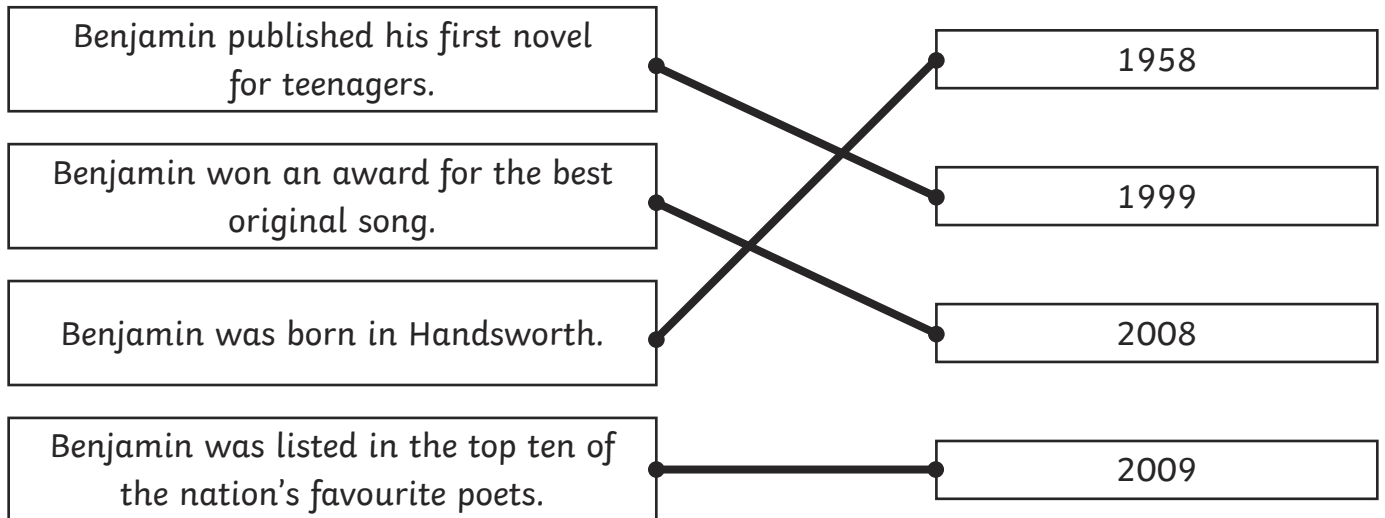
9. After reading this text, what part of Benjamin's life would you like to discover more about? Explain your answer.

Answers

1. Where was Benjamin living when his first book of poetry was published? Tick one.

- South America
- Birmingham
- London**
- China

2. Draw four lines to match each event with the year that it happened in.



3. Look at the section called **Moving to London**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'against'.

opposes

4. Who does Benjamin believe that poetry should be for?

Benjamin believes that poetry should be for everyone.

5. Name one place that you could have gone to in the early 1980s if you had wanted to hear Benjamin's poetry.

Accept any one of the following: a demonstration; outside a police station; London.

6. How do you think that Benjamin's life might have changed had he not moved to London? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Benjamin might have struggled to be as successful had he chosen not to go to London. This is because he found a larger audience and published his first book in London and that likely helped him to become famous.

7. What impression of Benjamin does this text give you? Explain your answer.
Pupils' own responses, such as: This text gives me the impression that Benjamin works really hard and is passionate about the things he believes in. This is because it talks about all of the different awards he has won for his poetry and that he has written lots of things about causes he believes in.
8. Do you think that Benjamin enjoys writing poetry? Explain your answer.
Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Benjamin does enjoy writing poetry because he started when he was 15 and is still writing poetry today. He has spent his whole life writing poetry and that is not something you would do if you didn't enjoy it.
9. After reading this text, what part of Benjamin's life would you like to discover more about? Explain your answer.
Pupils' own responses, such as: I would like to discover more about the different countries that Benjamin has visited and I would like to know whether his poems are popular in different countries. The text mentions that he has visited other countries but it doesn't give you very much information.

Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah is a British poet, writer and performer. He has written, published and performed many poems, children's books and plays. His first book of poetry for children, 'Talking Turkeys', was so popular that it sold out within six weeks and had to be reprinted.

Early Life

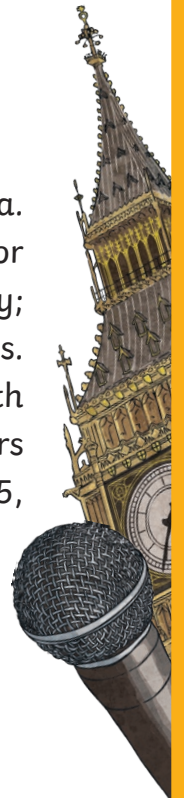
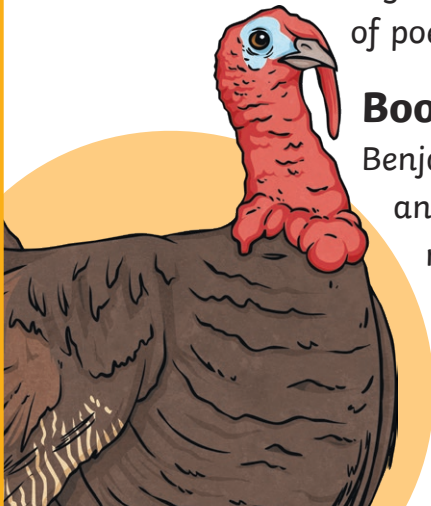
Benjamin Zephaniah was born in the Handsworth district of Birmingham, England, on 15th April 1958. His father was a postal worker who was originally from Barbados and his mother was a nurse who was originally from Jamaica. When he was young, Benjamin found it difficult to read and write and left school when he was just 13 years old. Inspired by Jamaica and what he has nicknamed 'street politics', Benjamin began creating poetry.

Moving to London

Benjamin strongly opposes the idea that poetry is only for people in academia. He believes that poetry should be for everyone, regardless of their age, race or ability to read and write. Therefore, Benjamin began performing dub poetry; a form of performance poetry which originated in Jamaica in the 1970s. Dub poetry often requires no musical instruments but the poet reads with rhythm and intonation which results in a musical performance. At 10 years old, Benjamin gave his first performance in a church. By the time he was 15, he was well known in Handsworth for his poetry. Wanting to increase the number of people that his poetry reached, Benjamin moved to London at the age of 22. It was here that he published his first book of poetry, 'Pen Rhythms'.

Books and Poetry

Benjamin has published a large number of poems, books and plays for both adults and children. Initially, he was reluctant to publish a poetry book aimed just at children on the basis that he believes that poetry shouldn't be given an age limit. In addition to writing poetry, Benjamin published his first novel aimed at teenagers in 1999; it was called 'Face'.



Causes

When creating poetry, Benjamin gains inspiration from a number of different causes that he has strong beliefs about. In the early 1980s, he composed poetry which discussed issues that he saw in Britain at the time, including a rise in homelessness and unemployment. During this time, his poetry could be heard at demonstrations, outside police stations and at youth gatherings. To this day, Benjamin still supports a number of groups which advocate for the rights of both humans and animals. It is this work which influences the poetry that he continues to write.



Achievements

Alongside publishing a number of books, poems, albums and plays, Benjamin has won a multitude of prestigious awards. In 2009, he came third in a poll to find the nation's favourite poet. Interestingly, he was the only living poet to make it into the top ten. An astounding 16 universities have recognised his work by awarding him with an honorary doctorate. This means that he is a doctor of letters, literature and arts and he can use a title before his name, making him Dr Benjamin Zephaniah. It is not only Benjamin's poetry that has led to his success; in 2008, he received an award for creating the best original song.

Benjamin is still writing poetry and composing music to this day. Although he still travels to places such as South America and Africa, he now spends most of his time at his home in Beijing, China. Many young writers and singers attribute their passion for writing to Benjamin and his ability to write music and poetry that everyone can relate to.



Questions

1. Why did Benjamin Zephaniah move to London?

- he didn't like Birmingham
- to publish his first book.
- so that more people could hear his poetry
- to get inspiration for more poems

2. **Many young writers and singers attribute their passion for writing to Benjamin...**

Tick the one word which is closest in meaning to the word attribute.

- credit
- get
- copy
- blame

3. How does dub poetry manage to sound musical without using any musical instruments?

4. Look at the section called **Achievements**.

Find and copy one word which means 'highly regarded'.

5. What happened to 'Talking Turkeys' after six weeks?

6. Argue that moving to London was essential for Benjamin's success.

7. **Inspired by Jamaica and what he has nicknamed 'street politics'...**

What do you think Benjamin means by the term 'street politics'? Explain your answer.

8. Benjamin believed that poetry shouldn't be given an age limit. Do you agree? Tick one.

yes no

Fully explain your answer.

9. What factors do you think have made Benjamin's poetry so popular? Explain your answer.

10. Explain why Benjamin started to perform dub poetry.

Answers

1. Why did Benjamin Zephaniah move to London?
 - he didn't like Birmingham
 - to publish his first book.
 - so that more people could hear his poetry**
 - to get inspiration for more poems
2. **Many young writers and singers attribute their passion for writing to Benjamin...**
Tick the one word which is closest in meaning to the word attribute.
 - credit**
 - get
 - copy
 - blame
3. How does dub poetry manage to sound musical without using any musical instruments?
Dub poetry uses changes in the poet's voice to create a musical effect.
4. Look at the section called **Achievements**.
Find and copy one word which means 'highly regarded'.
prestigious
5. What happened to 'Talking Turkeys' after six weeks?
Talking Turkeys' had sold out after six weeks and had to be reprinted.
6. Argue that moving to London was essential for Benjamin's success.
Pupils' own responses, such as: Moving to London was essential for Benjamin's success because this is where he published his first book. He also ensured that lots of people could hear his poetry. This would have impacted his success because, if they liked him, they would have gone to tell more people about him and that would have helped him to become even more popular.
7. **Inspired by Jamaica and what he has nicknamed 'street politics'...**
What do you think Benjamin means by the term 'street politics'? Explain your answer.
Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that, when Benjamin says 'street politics', he is referring to important issues which are happening near him and around the streets that he lives on rather than the politics of the entire country.

8. Benjamin believed that poetry shouldn't be given an age limit. Do you agree? Tick one.
Fully explain your answer.
Accept either 'yes' or 'no' provided that an explanation is also given, such as: No, I don't agree because there are some things which are not appropriate for children to read so I think that some poems should be just for adults.
9. What factors do you think have made Benjamin's poetry so popular? Explain your answer.
Pupils' own responses, such as: I think the factors that make Benjamin so popular are his determination to work hard and the fact that he writes poetry that everyone can enjoy. He moved to London when he was 22 so that he could reach more people. He also writes about things which are relevant so that more people can relate to them.
10. Explain why Benjamin started to perform dub poetry.
Pupils' own responses, such as: Benjamin started to perform dub poetry because he wanted everyone to be able to enjoy poetry even if they couldn't read it or if they weren't at school. Dub poetry is a performance so you just need to listen instead of having to read it.