

Poems by Benjamin Zephaniah

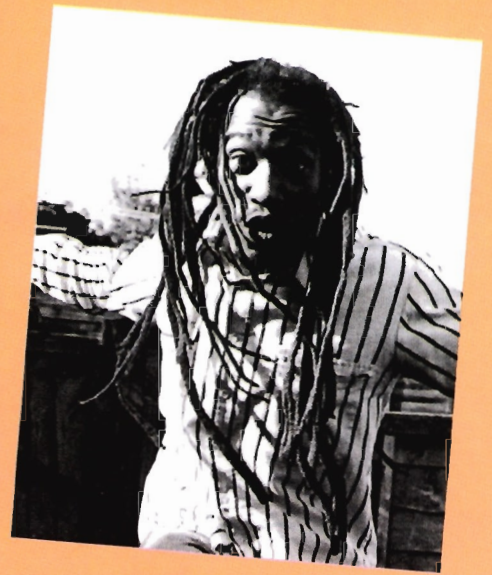
We are Britain!



Photographs by Prodeeptha Das



Benjamin Zephaniah



Who are the British?

Ask us, and you will find that we dance to music from America, Africa and Asia; we eat food from Ireland, Italy and Jamaica; we speak more than three-hundred languages and we know over four-hundred different ways to cook a potato. We look Celtic, Arab and Bengali; we wear kilts, saris and football shorts; and if you get very close to us and look right into our eyes, you can almost see the history of the whole world.

This book takes a poetic look at thirteen young British people as they work, rest and play. None of these children want to live in a world where everybody looks like them; they are all ready to embrace a multicultural, multicoloured land where every child is equal and all children have a poem to call their own.

If Britain is going to be great in the future, it will be because these kids want curry and chips, mangoes and strawberries and banana crumble, and they think of all these as British.

The British are not a single tribe, or a single religion, and we don't come from a single place. But we are building a home where we are all able to be who we want to be, yet still be British.

That is what we do: we take, we adapt, and we move forward.

We are the British. We are Britain!

Benjamin Zephaniah

Sam lives in Norwich



Sam lives in Norwich and his favourite places are Four Stairs, the Law Courts and the Sainsbury Bridge. Why? Because they're all fantastic for skateboarding. Four Stairs is best because it's good for doing ollies (jumps).

As soon as he turns 16, Sam wants to work in a skateboarding shop. His other hobby is going up the climbing wall at his local sports centre.

His mum is French and his dad is Melanesian, from the Solomon Islands.



You will need a good plan
If you want to catch Sam –
He's the skateboarding man.

Watch him as he flies by,
Getting busy so high,
Skateboarding through the sky.

It doesn't matter where,
He will take to the air,
People will stand and stare.

Yes he moves with the times,
Every now and then he climbs
And he likes to rap rhymes.

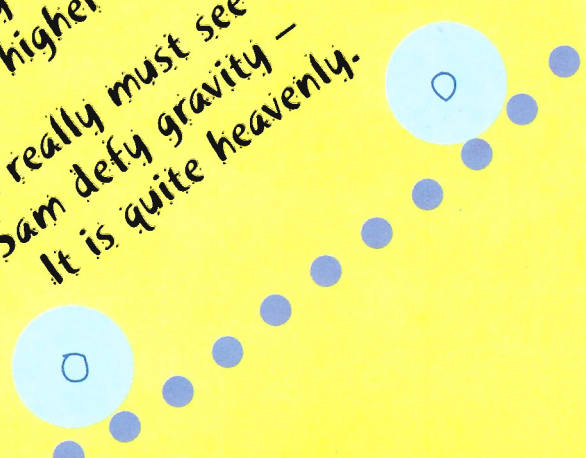
He flies through the scene
Like a flying machine,
He is so quick and keen.

He just cannot conceal
How exciting it feels
When he's speeding on wheels.

He will never retire –
This economy flyer
Just gets higher and higher.

You really must see
Sam defy gravity –
It is quite heavenly.

The Economy Flyer



Trees Please

Prita likes climbing trees
She does;
Prita likes climbing trees.

Up sycamores and English oaks,
You can find Prita telling jokes.
Upon the chestnut tree's big roots,
You can find Prita eating fruits.

Up apple trees where apples grow,
Prita and friends are known to go.
She likes to climb a big hawthorn
That lives next to a big acorn.
Prita likes climbing trees
She does;
Prita likes climbing trees.

One night Prita had a dream
About a tree that grew ice - cream,
But when she woke up the next day
The ice - cream tree melted away.
Now what she really wants to see
Is an orange - flavoured chocolate tree.
Meanwhile she will always climb

When school is over and she has time,
Because
Prita likes climbing trees
She does;
Prita likes climbing trees.

Prita lives in East London



Prita lives with her elder sister Amrita and her mother and father, in Wanstead on London's eastern fringe. Prita's parents come from eastern India and she was born in London.

She follows the teaching of Ramakrishna, a Hindu saint, and does *japa* (meditation) every morning and evening.

Prita enjoys feeding a squirrel called Chestnut who visits her garden from Epping Forest. She also likes cooking, riding on buses and winding her sister up. She wishes milk and bananas had not been invented as her mum is always insisting that they are good for her!



Jialu lives in Leeds



Jialu wants to be a pop star, but will she ever find the time? She's always so busy drawing, doing origami, swimming and playing. She loves jelly, chips, and *jiaozi* (dumplings), sometimes all at the same time!

Her family comes from China and that's where she was born, but she now lives in Leeds. Her best friends Lucy and Yilin are also her neighbours.

As well as playing lots, Jialu never stops smiling. It has been said that she even smiles when she's sleeping.



A Reason For Seasons

In the spring Jialu loves playing
When the flowers start to bloom,
In the park and in the playground,
In the kitchen and her room.

She talks to passing butterflies
And if a bird's in song,
She knows just how to harmonise
And so she sings along.

In the summer Jialu loves playing —
She loves summer a lot.
She plays tennis and goes swimming
When the sun shines very hot.
She runs up hills, she runs down hills,
Sometimes she runs round and round.
When she gets too hot she eats jelly —
It helps to cool her down!

In the autumn Jialu loves playing
As the leaves begin to fall.
When smart squirrels start to store food
She's out playing with her ball.
When the days start to get shorter
And the weather's not so kind,
Jialu finds it hard to keep still —
She's got good times on her mind.

In the winter when it's freezing
And there's bright white snow and ice,
Jialu simply starts believing
That the weather's very nice.
She thinks seasons are amazing,
She plays each day of the year.
She thinks life is meant for playing,
She thinks that is why she's here.



Sevda Has a Brother

Sevda has a brother –
She thinks he's a delight.
She woke up to discover
That he was born one night.
Her father thinks he's pretty,
Her mother thinks he's smart,
And Sevda thinks he's witty
And quite a work of art.

Sevda's celebrating –
She thinks her brother's great,
So Sevda is creating
A large, sweet Kurdish cake.

But mother's telling Sevda
That it is her belief
That if she's really clever
She'll wait till he has teeth.

Sevda has a brother –
Her family has grown,
And how they love each other
In their North London home.
This lovely brand new baby boy –
Bilal is his name –
Has filled young Sevda's eyes with joy,
Life just won't be the same.

Sevda lives in North London



Sevda and her family are refugees from Kurdistan. Her family is Muslim and her mum teaches her the *Koran* – the sacred book of their religion. Sevda enjoys playing board games with her little brother and sister and her best friend, who is also from Kurdistan.

Like nearly all children, Sevda loves watching TV. She especially likes Turkish films and the Teletubbies! Her favourite food is *dolma* – meat, rice, tomato and yoghurt wrapped in vine leaves.

Liam lives in Blaina, South Wales



Liam lives in Blaina, South Wales. At the back of the house lies the 'jungle', a wooded area where only children are allowed. He plays games there after school with his friends.

Liam lives in an old mining area – all the coal mines have closed down now. He goes fishing in the local pond which used to be used for washing coal. He also likes strumming his toy guitar and playing rugby with his Dad.



King of the Jungle

Liam is king of the jungle -
The jungle in South Wales.
The one at the back of his yard -
And life in the jungle is hard.

Liam is king of the jungle,
This is no fairytale.
The jungle can be very rough,
But Liam and his friend are tough.

Liam is king of the jungle,
King over all that he sees.
He was going to be a coal miner,
But now he's the greatest tree climber.

Liam is king of the jungle,
He talks to the birds and the bees.
Adults say, "The jungle is wild,"
But he's an intelligent child.

Liam is king of the jungle,
He's kingly but very polite.
Liam don't care if it's raining,
You'll never find this kid complaining.

Liam is king of the jungle,
But when it gets dark and it's night,
Liam goes home to get fed,
And sleep in his nice cosy bed.



Hannah and Rebecca Rhyme



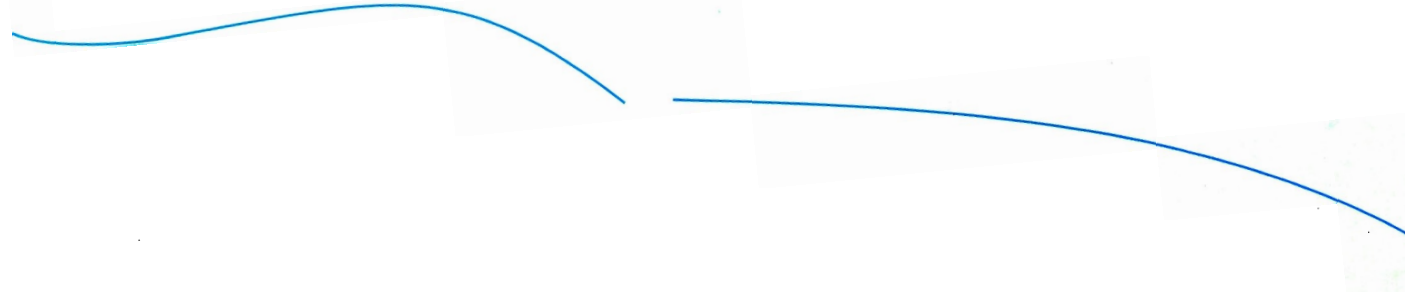
Hannah and Rebecca
Were growing up together,
When Hannah and Rebecca
Discovered poetry.
So Hannah wrote a letter
To her sister Rebecca
Which said,
"Hey my big sister
Why don't you rhyme with me?"

Rebecca wrote to Hannah
In a quite poetic manner.
She studied English grammar
So she knew just how to rhyme.

She said,

"We must stick together
No matter what the weather.
Have no doubt whatsoever,
I'll rhyme with you anytime."

So they're now writing a poem
That just will not stop growing,
And wherever they are going
That poem goes there too.
Now their rhymes just keep on flowing
And their love just keeps on showing,
So it's really worthwhile knowing
If somebody rhymes with you.



Hannah and Rebecca live in Twickenham



Hannah and Rebecca both like playing the piano, reading and wrestling! They are the founders of a magazine for children called *SMART*, which they write and edit themselves.

Their mother came to Britain from Croatia, and their father came from Hungary.

This is a vegan family, which means they eat no meat, fish or dairy products. They really enjoy having big family meals together, which are followed by Hannah and Rebecca playing their favourite reggae records and doing some rather crazy dancing!

Zachary lives in Nottingham



Every Sunday, Zachary goes to Hebrew classes at the Progressive Jewish Synagogue. There he learns about Jewish religion, culture and traditions.

In his spare time he enjoys riding his bike along the riverside, going to basketball club and learning the drums.

But most of all Zachary likes practising magic. When he grows up, he wants to be a famous escapologist so his parents will have to spend a lot of time looking for him.



Zachary is happy
When he's doing magic,
His dad said he can make a rope
Float in the air.

When he's doing magic
There's no need to panic,
Even when he makes his dad's coat
Disappear.

Visit him
You won't leave –
He has tricks
Up his sleeve.
He can make time wait,
Tie his hands
And he'll escape.
Even when he's in bed
He does tricks in his head.
With a playing card or two,
This kid will
Amaze you.

Zachary is happy
When he's doing magic,
Every time he does a show
People wonder how.
When he's doing magic
He's defying logic;
The ladies and the gentlemen
who see him
All go, "Wow!"

Magical is He

The Legend

The legend of the Isle of Harris
Has spread throughout Bangkok and Paris.
The legend has spread low and high –
The legend of Kenny MacKay.

He grows from seeds and ploughs the land,
The girl next door thinks he is grand.
The neighbours and birds in the sky
Wave to him when he passes by.

This Gaelic boy is brave and bold.
He doesn't seem to fear the cold.
The weather causes no delay –
He loves to go to school each day.

And even when he has exams,
He's quickly home to feed his lambs.
The legend says he's full of power
That he obtained from cauliflowers.

He's hard working and doesn't fear.
He's happy when he does his share.
He sure knows how to use a pen,
He has the strength of many men.

The people say there is no malice
Upon the bonny Isle of Harris.
They say they are protected by
The legend of Kenny MacKay.



Kenny lives on the Isle of Harris in Scotland



Kenny lives on the Isle of Harris off the north-west coast of Scotland, with his mum and dad, two big brothers and little sister.

Kenny's dad's family have been crofters on the island since the 19th Century. It's very difficult to grow things there because of the harsh weather conditions.

Kenny has five pet lambs and a sheep dog. He feeds the lambs milk every morning before school, and then again when he comes home. He also helps out by driving the family's tractor to prepare the fields for cultivation.

Kenny loves football – he supports Glasgow Rangers – and he also likes riding his bike around the island in his spare time.

