

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 12.30 BST TUESDAY 7 JULY 2026

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR PATRICE LAWRENCE MBE ANNOUNCED AS WATERSTONES CHILDREN'S LAUREATE 2026-2028

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Waterstones Children's Laureate 2026-2028 Patrice Lawrence © David Bebbler

- Revealed at Barbican ceremony hosted by poet, author and broadcast Lemn Sissay
- Takes on role as 'foremost representative of children's literature' during National Year of Reading
- Marks a decade since Lawrence's award-winning debut *Orangeboy* was published

"I believe that we, as humans, are changed by stories. They connect us to different worlds, and they connect us to each other. People who feel this connection – who feel heard and believe in each other's humanity – are the foundation of stronger, safer and more inclusive communities.

I have written for children and young people of all ages, and I know that stories help children – particularly vulnerable children – feel seen, understood and, most importantly, valued. Stories help readers explore unfamiliar subjects safely with space to pause and reflect on complex emotions. And, just as importantly, reading helps us understand each other's stories.

During my tenure as Waterstones Children's Laureate, I will champion the power of books to make us feel like we belong, and shared stories as a tool for bringing people together. We are living in a divided world where many people feel isolated, we need this now, more than ever."

Patrice Lawrence, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2026-2028

London, Tuesday 7 July 2026: Patrice Lawrence, the award-winning author, has been named as the Waterstones Children's Laureate 2026-2028 – the foremost representative of children's literature, which is awarded biannually to a renowned writer or illustrator in recognition of exceptional talent.

Managed by BookTrust – the UK's largest children's reading charity – and sponsored by Waterstones, this prestigious role celebrates creativity and storytelling, promotes the vital importance of reading and children's literature, and champions the right of every child to enjoy a lifetime enriched with books and stories. Each Laureate brings their own passion and creativity to their tenure.

Lawrence was presented with the bespoke silver Laureate medal by outgoing Waterstones Children's Laureate, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, at a ceremony hosted by poet, author and broadcaster Lemn Sissay at the Barbican Centre in London on Tuesday 7 July 2026, during the National Year of Reading.

Patrice Lawrence is an award-winning writer for children of all ages and genres, whose work often centres on the experiences of young people today, encompassing inclusivity and representing diverse family structures. Her debut YA novel, *Orangeboy*, was published in 2016 and went on to win The Bookseller's YA Book Prize, the Waterstones Children's Book Prize for Older Children's Fiction and was shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award. Lawrence has since published 16 much-acclaimed books – including *Needle*, *People Like Stars*, *Is That Your Mama?*, *Granny Came Here on the Empire Windrush*, *Our Story Starts in Africa* and *The Elemental Detectives* – which have been frequent visitors to prize lists including the Yoto Carnegie Medal for Writing, Nero Book Awards, Jhalak Children's, Little Rebels Award and the Young Adult Prize.

In 2021, Patrice was awarded an MBE for Services to Literature, and in 2023 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Patrice was born in Brighton, raised in an Italian-Trinidadian family in mid-Sussex, and now lives on the South Coast.

At today's ceremony, Lawrence – who is passionate about social justice, and before becoming a full-time writer worked for charities promoting the rights of children, families and adults who often go unheard – launched her Laureateship with a speech championing shared stories as a tool for building stronger, safer and more inclusive communities. Lawrence spoke about how books and reading can help vulnerable children feel heard – particularly in our 'divided' world – with her tenure set to focus on the power of books to create connection, belonging and voice.

Patrice Lawrence, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2026-2028, added:

"My aim is to create a national conversation that champions the benefits of shared reading and sociable reading experiences. Alongside BookTrust, I'll explore how books and reading together help communities connect and cohere, especially in times of fragmentation. I'll work with children and adults with diverse experiences and from diverse backgrounds, children and adults who may feel undervalued in our society, to tell their stories. And, I want to celebrate the unsung heroes who bring joy and nurture reading communities through their work."

Diana Gerald, Co-CEO at BookTrust, said:

"All our work and research at BookTrust shows that books can open conversations and deepen understanding for children, and that shared reading experiences create a sense of belonging and safety. When children, families and communities don't see themselves reflected in books, they can struggle to find their place in the world."

"In this National Year of Reading, the appointment of Patrice Lawrence as Children's Laureate gives a much-needed voice to the vulnerable children pushed to the edge of our society. We're looking forward to supporting her work with communities across the country to explore how sharing stories can strengthen wellbeing, build relationships and nurture meaningful community connection."

Kate Edwards, Chair of the Waterstones Children's Laureate Steering Group and Chair of the Waterstones Children's Laureate 2026-28 Judging Panel, said:

"On behalf of the Waterstones Children's Laureate Judging Panel – which invites nominations from a range of organisations across the UK representing librarians, critics, writers, literature development workers and booksellers – I am absolutely thrilled to welcome Patrice into the 'League of Laureates'. We extend our heartfelt congratulations on this exciting day. Patrice's remarkable writing for children of all ages draws upon topics

that are relevant to many young people's everyday lives, creating a safe space for them to explore complex, sometimes difficult, issues. In the challenging world we find ourselves, the connections that books and reading offer are more important than ever. The Steering Group is very much looking forward to working with Patrice on what we know will be an impactful Laureateship."

Nick Campbell, Children's Campaign Manager at Waterstones, said:

"It's so exciting to welcome Patrice Lawrence as the new Waterstones Children's Laureate. A decade after winning the Older Readers category of the Waterstones Children's Book Prize, Patrice is recognised as an essential voice in children's literature, and booksellers love to recommend her work. Her irresistibly compelling novels illuminate the lives of today's young people, and we can't wait to see her bring the same energy and compassion to her Laureateship. We're proud to support her in this vital role, championing the life-changing power of stories."

The fourteenth Waterstones Children's Laureate – who will be appointed during the National Year of Reading 2026 – will follow in the footsteps of: 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), Cressida Cowell (2019-2022), Joseph Coelho (2022-2024), and Frank Cottrell-Boyce (2024-2026).

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Media enquiries

Images and additional information on the winners can be found [here](#).

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About the Waterstones Children's Laureate

The Waterstones Children's Laureate is the foremost representative of children's literature, awarded biannually to a renowned writer or illustrator in recognition of exceptional talent. Managed by BookTrust – the UK's largest children's reading charity – and sponsored by Waterstones, this prestigious role celebrates creativity and storytelling, promotes the vital importance of reading and children's literature, and champions the right of every child to enjoy a lifetime enriched with books and stories. The Children's Laureate role was originally created by Poet Laureate Ted Hughes and author Michael Morpurgo, and each Laureate brings their own passion and themes to create a unique legacy.

The current Waterstones Children's Laureate is Frank Cottrell-Boyce, the multi-award-winning author and screenwriter. The previous twelve 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), Cressida Cowell (2019-2022), Joseph Coelho (2022-2024) and Frank Cottrell-Boyce (2024-2026).

About Patrice Lawrence

Patrice Lawrence is an award-winning writer. Her debut YA novel, *Orangeboy* (Hachette), won the Bookseller YA Book Prize and the Waterstones Prize for Older Children's Fiction and was shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award. Her subsequent novels have been much acclaimed and frequent visitors to prize lists including the Jhalak Children's and Young Adult Prize and the YA Book Prize. *Needle* (Barrington Stoke) was

shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal for Writing and winner of the 2023 Little Rebels Award. Her most recent book, *People Like Stars* (Scholastic) was shortlisted for the Nero Book Awards.

Patrice writes for children of all ages and her work often centres on the experiences of young people today, encompassing inclusivity, representing diverse family structures and spanning various genres. In 2021 Patrice was awarded an MBE for Services to Literature and in 2023 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Patrice was born in Brighton, raised in an Italian-Trinidadian family in mid-Sussex, and now lives on the South Coast.

About BookTrust

We get children reading from their earliest days, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. As the UK's largest children's reading charity, we know that children who read regularly experience better mental well-being. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school and are more creative. This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age. We work in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland through over 30,000 local partners to reach 1.4 million children every year.

About Waterstones

Waterstones is the UK and Ireland's leading high street bookseller with over 300 bookshops, including Foyles, Hatchards, Hodges Figgis, Blackwell's 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](https://www.waterstones.com) | [@Waterstones](https://twitter.com/Waterstones)