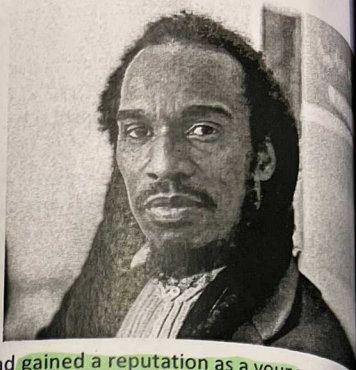


Context

Benjamin Zephaniah

Young Benjamin Zephaniah was born and raised in Birmingham, England. He cannot remember a time when he was not creating poetry but this had nothing to do with school where poetry meant very little to him, in fact he had finished full time education at the age of 13. His poetry is strongly influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica and what he calls 'street politics'. His first real public performance was in church when he was 10 years old, by the time he was 15 he had developed a strong following in his home town of Handsworth where he had gained a reputation as a young poet who was capable of speaking on local and international issues. He loved Handsworth, he called it the Jamaican capital of Europe but although his work had become popular within the African-Caribbean and Asian community he thought the town was too small, he was not satisfied preaching about the sufferings of Black people to Black people, so he sought a wider mainstream audience.



When he was young and finished school at 13 he wanted a wider audience so he decided to go to a bigger city

He published his first book which sold well and many publishers took an interest in him.

First success - revolutionary success

At the age of 22 he headed south to London where his first book Pen Rhythm was published by Page One Books. This was a small, East London based publishing co-operative that were keen on publishing poets who were rooted in their communities. They published Zephaniah when others failed to tune into the new poetry that was about to emerge. The book sold well going into 3 editions but it was in performance that the Dub (Reggae) Poet would cause a revolution, a revolution that injected new life into the British poetry scene and attracted the interest of many mainstream publishers, many of whom had sent refusal letters to him only 12 months earlier.

Poetry/Writing for young children

His children's book sold well which he was reluctant to publish since he thought kids wouldn't be interested but was proven wrong

His first book of poetry for children called Talking Turkeys had to go into an emergency reprint after just 6 weeks, no one could foresee how popular the book would be, it went to the top of the children's book list and stayed there for months. At first, he was not keen on publishing a book for children believing that there was just poetry, not children's poetry or adult's poetry, but he was soon convinced that young people did appreciate the fact that he was not afraid to write about the real world where there are bullies, guns, racism and war. Being a passionate vegan, he writes a lot about animals but these animals are not all smiley, happy creatures, some may just be waiting for slaughter or losing their habitat, and of course some may be having fun.

Inspirations and achievements.

He influenced many young people and was awarded with many things, but now he spends time in China

Young writers have said that the accessibility of his work has inspired them to take up writing, many record sleeves bear witness to the fact that he has inspired many of the new generation of rappers, and of all the performance poets that emerged in the late seventies and early eighties he is one of the few that is still going strong. He has sixteen honorary doctorates and the Ealing Hospital in west London has named a wing after him in recognition of his work. Zephaniah believes that working with human rights groups, animal rights groups and other political organisations means that he will never lack subject matter. He now spends much of his time in China, but he continues working throughout Asia, South America and Africa, and is as passionate about politics and poetry now as he has ever been.

1. Give each paragraph a subheading
2. Summarise each paragraph in 30 words or less
3. Pick out 3 key pieces of information from each paragraph



The poem we will be looking at is called 'The British.' What do you think the poem will be about? How will Zephaniah's life and experiences have shaped this poem?

I think the poem will be about the mistreatment of ~~the~~ different people who are black, ~~again~~ asian ect and ~~the~~ colonisation/racism. I think Zephaniah's life and experience will shape the poem as being used to rejection from being put down by many publishers and he will be realistic/blunt as he was not afraid to tell people about the real world.