

Benjamin Zephaniah

Fact File

Full Name: Dr Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah

Date of Birth: 15th April 1958

Place of Birth: Birmingham, England

Famous For: Writing and performing many poems, books, songs and plays.

Benjamin's dad was originally from Barbados and was a postman. His mum was originally from Jamaica and worked as a nurse. At the age of 22, Benjamin moved to London to find a larger audience for his poems.



Poems

Benjamin is perhaps most famous for his performance poetry. He didn't like the idea that poems were only for people who were studying at school or university and believed that everybody should be able to enjoy poetry. Because of this, he started performing his poems in a style called 'dub poetry'. Dub poetry uses the reader's voice like a musical instrument. The reader does this by changing the speed and pitch of their voice throughout the performance. Benjamin's performances meant that his poems were able to reach a larger audience.

Causes

Many of Benjamin's poems are about things he has strong beliefs about. He has written many poems with messages against racism and slavery. Alongside this, he writes poems about what he calls 'street politics'. In the early 1980s, Benjamin argued against homelessness and unemployment in Britain through his poems. He performed these at demonstrations and outside police stations. As a supporter of animal rights, Benjamin also writes poems which talk about the way that we treat animals.



Did You Know...?

In London, Ealing Hospital have named part of their building after Benjamin.

Books

As well as performing his poetry, Benjamin has published many books of poetry for both adults and children. He has also written several novels for teenagers. His first book of poetry for children was called 'Talking Turkeys'; it encouraged people to be nice to turkeys at Christmastime and to befriend them instead of eating them. This book was so popular that it sold out within six weeks and there had to be an emergency reprint!



Did You Know...?

Benjamin has performed his poetry all over the world. In 1991, he performed on every continent in only 22 days!

Today

Benjamin is still writing and performing poems to this day. Although he now spends most of his time at his home in Beijing, China, he still travels around the world to perform his poetry and music. Many young writers and singers say that they have been inspired by his work to write about the things that they believe in.

Questions

1. What are many of Benjamin Zephaniah's poems about? Tick one.

- issues he has strong beliefs about
- being nice to turkeys at Christmas
- inspiring young people
- unemployment in Britain

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- Benjamin continues to inspire young writers.
- Benjamin was born in Birmingham.
- Benjamin moved to London.
- Benjamin performed in every continent.

3. Why did Benjamin choose to move to London? Tick one.

- he didn't like Birmingham any more
- he wanted to find a publisher
- it was his favourite city
- to find a larger audience for his poems

4. Draw four lines to complete the sentences.

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'street politics'.

Benjamin still

sold out in six weeks.

Benjamin says he
writes about

many young writers
and singers.

'Talking Turkeys'

travels around the world.

5. Fill in the missing words in this sentence.

Dub poets make the poem sound like a song by changing the _____ and _____ of their voice.

6. How long did it take Benjamin to perform in every continent?

7. Benjamin has had a long and successful career as a poet. What do you think has made him so successful? Explain your answer.

8. Benjamin is still writing and performing poems today. What could his most recent poems be about? Explain your answer.

Answers

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- issues he has strong beliefs about**
- being nice to turkeys at Christmas
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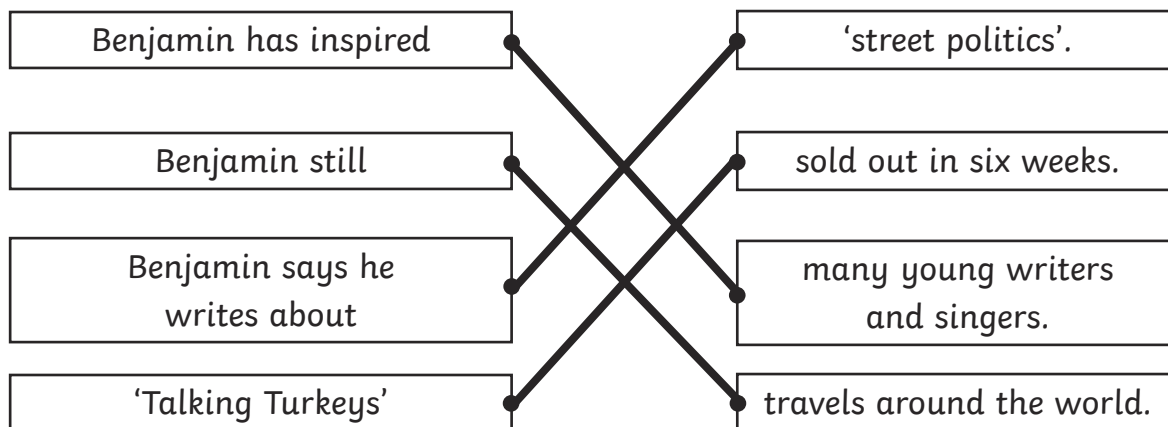
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5. Fill in the missing words in this sentence.

Dub poets make the poem sound like a song by changing the **speed** and **pitch** of their voice.

6. How long did it take Benjamin to perform in every continent?

It took Benjamin 22 days to perform in every continent.

7. Benjamin has had a long and successful career as a poet. What do you think has made him so successful? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Benjamin has been so successful because he wanted to have a big audience for his poetry so he moved to London and started performing his poetry for everyone. He also writes about issues that people are interested in.

8. Benjamin is still writing and performing poems today. What could his most recent poems be about? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that one of his most recent poems might be about how much plastic we are throwing away because that is a really big problem at the moment and he writes poems about current issues.