



# JOHN AGARD'S WINDRUSH CHILD

John Agard

illustrated by  
Sophie Bass

ISBN: 9781529501124 • HARDBACK • £12.99  
FOR AGES 5-7

## TEACHERS' NOTES



WALKER  
BOOKS

walker.co.uk   @WalkerBooksUK

# JOHN AGARD'S WINDRUSH CHILD

illustrated by  
Sophie Bass

*These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.*

These teaching notes have been written with children in Years 5 & 6 in mind but you will need to differentiate them as appropriate to the needs and experience of your own children.

## BEFORE YOU START:

- *John Agard's Windrush Child* can be shared as a starting point for the topic of the Windrush Generation or could also be used once pupils have already completed some history sessions related to the topic. If *John Agard's Windrush Child* is being read as a spring-board to begin discussion, some of the following points will be relevant and supportive...
- Before starting work on the book, create a class 'reading journal' using large pieces of sugar paper and use the pages of the journal to capture responses, reflections, notes and language generated.
- Collate props and photographs specific to this historical era in the UK and the Caribbean and create a display table of these items that encourage historical enquiry and reflection as you share *John Agard's Windrush Child*. Refer to the following links to provide wider context and to assist you with preparing the display:
  - <https://artsandculture.google.com/project/black-cultural-archives>
  - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/50047709>
  - <https://www.windrushportraitofageneration.com/>
  - <https://www.theguardian.com/global/gallery/2018/apr/17/windrush-arrivals-new-life-in-uk-archive-photos>
  - <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/stories/incredible-windrush-generation-images-brought-to-life/>
  - <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/staying-power-photographs-of-black-british-experience>
  - <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/black-british-photography-charlie-phillips>
  - <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/black-british-photography-neil-kenlock-and-armet>
  - <https://stylebham.com/snapshots-from-a-photography-icon>



- As the Caribbean setting and culture are central to this book, it would be effective to provide access to books which support children’s knowledge and interest in these islands. This might also include maps and atlases; fiction and non-fiction choices – see linked texts. You might introduce these texts and resources during the first few sessions in which the Caribbean setting is discussed and investigated. If any children in the class originate from a country in the Caribbean, or have family who lived/live there, or if children have been on holiday there, draw on their knowledge and expertise to start to build a deeper and increasingly multi-dimensional picture of life on the islands.

## READING ALOUD AND KEY TALKING POINTS:

- Display the illustration of the front cover of the book for the pupils to reflect on, **without revealing the title yet**. Invite the children’s immediate responses, offering prompts to support thinking:
  - How does this image make you feel? Why?* The children might be influenced by the colours chosen by the illustrator, Sophie Bass – *what effect does this colour palette have on them? How does she want you to feel about this place? What mood is the illustrator trying to create and how do you know?*
  - Now ask the children to take in the details in the scene. *What is happening in the foreground and the background? What and who do you notice first?*
  - Look at the family on the boat, what do you know about them? How do you think they are feeling? Are they leaving or arriving? How do you know? Where do you think this book will be set? Do you think it will be in one place or more? What tells you this?*
  - Encourage the children to draw on their personal experiences as well as that of the world and of other texts. *Does this remind you of anything in stories or real life?*
- Now reveal and read aloud the title *John Agard’s Windrush Child*. *What does this reveal about this scene?* Pupils’ answers and perspectives will depend upon their prior knowledge of the Windrush Generation. Give the children time to share their ideas and knowledge as well as stories that are personal to them, noting these early responses.
- Ask the children to share what they know about John Agard. They may know that he is a poet. *What does it lead them to expect from this book?* Read the notes about the author and illustrator (at the back of the book) to further this discussion. This could provide an opportunity for some further research into the life of John Agard and to immerse the children in his poetry through a dedicated book display as well as watching him perform his own poems on [CLPE’s website](#).
- Explain to the pupils that John Agard first wrote the poem ‘Windrush Child’ in 1998 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the ship, the *Empire Windrush*, which was a landmark moment in Post-war Caribbean British history, and this book is an illustrated version of his poem. Play the [film](#) of John Agard talking about his inspiration for the poem, pausing to discuss what you have learned about this moment in history, about Vince Reid, about the Windrush Generation and about the Black British experience more widely. *What do you learn about the relationship between John Agard and Vince Reid? What do you expect from the poem to follow? What might the poet include in it? How do you think it will make you feel?* Now watch John Agard perform his poem. Invite the children to share their immediate responses. *How did it make you feel? Why? What did it make you think about? Was there anything about this poem that you found particularly memorable, interesting, enjoyable?* The children may be drawn to the nature of Agard’s performance and how they feel he brought it to life. *How do you think he wants you to feel? How do you know?*



- Revisit the performance several times, allowing space for the children to respond to it creatively. *Are there any words and phrases that are particularly memorable or vivid? What do they see in their mind's eye as they hear this language?* Children could talk about what they visualise or quickly sketch their ideas as they listen to the poem being read. *Which scenes do they empathise with most keenly? Which scenes evoke imagery? Which do they find interesting or even hard to visualise?*
- Give the pupils a copy of the poem to share. Read and perform the poem together in different ways:
  - Everybody could read together as a choral reading
  - An adult/pupil could read a line and the rest of the pupils repeat
  - A pupil could read a line and another pupil read the next line (in pairs or around a small group)

- Think about how the poet has achieved this imagery or evoked our emotions or interest as readers. The children may notice the **patterns** and **repetition** used; the **assonance** in words like *child, goodbye, why, right, fly, kite* and *sky* and the effect of this repeated “igh” sound throughout; or they might pick up on the patterns in the **pace, rhythm and tunes** of the poem and how it resonates with the moments in the story being told, including the emotional goodbye and the sway of a sailing ship. Show the children the poem on the page which is in the book as well as on CLPE’s website. *How does the way the poem is presented on the page add to children’s initial ideas?* If the children haven’t already noticed it, draw attention to the way the lines continue without punctuation, a poetic device called **enjambement**. *Why has Agard chosen to use this device for this poem? What effect does this have on us as readers? How does it relate to the way it sounds when it is read aloud?* Encourage the children to revisit and re-read the poem aloud for themselves. *Why has Agard chosen not to include a full stop at the end when the ship has docked and Vince observes snow and sun co-existing? What might this suggest? What do you think happens next for Vince once he has docked at Tilbury Docks? Where will his journey lead him next?*



- Return to the book *John Agard’s Windrush Child* and share the dedications from John Agard and Sophie Bass. John Agard dedicates this book to Vince Reid – one of the youngest passengers who made that Windrush journey. According to the British Library, Vince Reid was 13 years old and accompanied by his adoptive parents when he made the Windrush journey. He went on to become a senior lecturer and pioneering teacher of Caribbean and African history at Brixton College of Further Education. You could research more about Vince Reid to support pupils’ understanding of the experiences of the Windrush Generation and this book.
- Give all pupils a copy of the section from the back of the book, ‘A Note from the Author’. Display a table on sugar paper with the headings ‘Questions’ and ‘Wonderings’. Explain to the pupils that as you read, they may have questions or wonderings to share. After reading ‘A Note from the Author’, encourage pupils to share their questions or wonderings with their peers initially and then feed back to the class. Scribe some of the pupils’ responses in the displayed table and consider some for discussion. Spend time summarising the main points from this text so that all pupils have some background information about the Windrush Generation.
- Return to the printed poem and ask the children to imagine how the poem ‘Windrush Child’ will be organised across the pages of an illustrated book. Draw on the pupil’s responses to the poem as they heard it and saw it on the page as well as the children’s experiences of picturebooks and illustrated poems, such as *A Story about Afiya* by poet James Berry, illustrated by Anna Cunha (Lantana), or *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander, illustrated by Kadir Nelson (Walker). *What does this suggest about how it might be presented in this book? How would you organise the poem so that it is read the way John Agard intends? What illustrations would you expect to see? Are there any key moments that you*

*feel are important to include?* As the pupils discuss their ideas together, ask them to work in groups to annotate the original poem with notes referencing the illustrations they are expecting to see across the picture book. Children might like to copy out and illustrate the poem themselves either presented as one page or across a series of pages in a handmade book.

- Now share the end papers with the pupils. *Whose footprints are in the sand? Where are these footprints heading? Are these feet leaving somewhere or arriving somewhere? How many people do you think there are? Where is the setting for this page? Why has the illustrator included shells?* Allow pupils time to share their ideas. Prompt pupils to consider that these footprints might be those of a child heading towards boarding the ship. Allow pupils time to talk in pairs or small groups about how the child would be feeling as they headed towards the ship and what they might be saying. Give all pupils a speech bubble/thinking bubble template. Provide pupils with enough time to record some of their thoughts in role as the child heading towards the ship. Display these speech/thinking bubbles on a board or in a journal (these will be referred to after reading the book).
- Share the title page of the book and display the illustration of the Grandmother and the child. *Who do you think this is? What else can you notice or see?* Pupils may identify mangos growing. *Why do you think the author and illustrator chose to include this illustration before the book begins? What might this suggest about the relationship between the two characters in the illustration?*
- Share the first double-spread with the pupils and provide time for them to reflect. Comment on the similarities between the front cover and this spread. Explain that we know now that the family are leaving on the ship as the ‘palm trees wave goodbye’. Ask the pupils to consider the mood of this page. *How are the people feeling who are saying goodbye?* Look at the palm trees and the sea – *what is their mood?* Explore the idea that the sea and trees look calm and relaxed – *how does this compare with how the family may be feeling as they begin a journey to a new life?* Look at how the family on the ship are dressed and compare this with how the people on the island are dressed. *What does this tell us about the family? Who is the Windrush child? Are they wearing clothes that will match the climate in England? Have they dressed in their best clothes because this is a huge step in their lives?*
- Share the next two double-spreads together with the pupils:
  - *What do we notice about the setting in both pictures?* Look at the sun setting in the background. *How are the people feeling?* Focus on the family from the front cover and look at their body language. *How are they feeling?*
  - Look at the seabirds circling the ship. *Are they protecting the ship or circling for another reason? Why are the seabirds asking why?* Give the pupils some time to talk in pairs as if they are the seabirds. *What questions might the seabirds ask?* Note the children’s suggestions which might include: *Why are you leaving? Why are you moving to England? Will you miss your home? Who will you miss? What do you think it will be like in England? Will it be worth it? What will you do there?*
  - Look at the blue water rolling by double-spread. *What mood has the illustrator created through colour and choice of imagery? How do the stars and the clouds surrounding the ship contribute to the sense of magic and wonder?* Discuss how the family are tiny and the fish are the main focus in the illustration. *Why has the illustrator chosen to depict the family so small? What does this tell us? Are the family now part of a bigger scene? Or are they safe and secure in the grand ocean?*



- Share the next double-spread and point out a page of two halves depicting two scenes. Read the text and ask pupils to summarise what is happening. The left-hand side of the page is the family on the ship and the right-hand side is their homeland that they have left. Prompt pupils to suggest what the parents could be thinking about, perhaps what would be happening at home whilst they are on the ship. *How has the illustrator used colour to create feeling?* Find the mangos in the image and discuss why they have such a focus. Some pupils may refer back to the image with the grandmother on the title page with the mangos. *How has the magical feeling continued on this page?* Encourage pupils to reflect on the window of the ship sharing the sea's journey. Whilst sharing this double-spread, pupils could consider what the parents are feeling and thinking about whilst their child sleep. *Are they excited or doubting their decision to leave?* They could also consider the opinions of those at home – *are they excited for the family; sad because they miss them; jealous that they have left or perhaps feeling betrayed because they have left their homeland?* Draw on children's personal experiences with sensitivity and as appropriate to your knowledge of their life experiences. *How do the children think they would feel? Have they ever experienced emotions like these?*
- Share the next three double-spreads together side-by-side. If possible, provide pupils with copies of these three pages. Challenge pupils to read this section of the poem together and discuss what is happening across the three pages and the meaning being created by both text and illustration, both together and separately. *How does the presentation of the poem relate to their hopes or expectations?*

<i>and new beginnings</i>	<i>and you Windrush child</i>	<i>walk good walk good</i>
<i>doors closing and opening</i>	<i>think of Grandmother</i>	<i>and the sea's wheel carries on spinning...</i>
<i>will things turn out right?</i>	<i>telling you don't forget to write</i>	
<i>at least the ship will arrive</i>	<i>and with one last hug</i>	
<i>in midsummer light</i>		

- Encourage pupils to summarise the main events and feelings using the poem and the illustration, offering prompts to support thinking:
  - What does doors closing and opening refer to? When we say another door opens, what do we mean? Is this a physical door opening or a door of opportunity? How much of a risk is this for the family? What if it does not turn out right? Would do they anticipate might happen?*
  - Knowing what we know about the background of the family, why does John Agard say 'at least the ship will arrive in midsummer light'?*
  - Why has the illustrator chosen to use birds across many pages? Are these black and white birds representing something? Notice the black and white seagulls above the Windrush child's head compared with the more colourful bird above the grandmother.*
  - Focus on the name of the ship imprinted on the front – 'EMPIRE WINDRUSH LONDON'. *What is happening in this scene as the people leave the ship? Who is holding the microphone and why are people being interviewed? Remind the pupils that it is 1948. What differences do you notice?*
  - Zoom in on the Windrush child who we have been tracking with the teddy bear. *How has the illustrator singled him out with her art? What does she want to achieve? How do you think he is feeling? Does anyone else look like they are feeling the same as him?* Encourage pupils to step back and consider this double-spread of the ship. Look at the number of people leaving the ship. *What does this tell you about how many people came to England?*



- Share the next two double-page spreads together. *What do we learn about the Windrush child's relationship with his Grandmother from these two pages? How has the Windrush child's life changed already? Consider recording these changes on a table, with headings:*

Appearance/personality	Home life/lifestyle

- Using the two double-spreads encourage pupils to retrieve information from the illustrations – commenting on his clothes and facial expressions for appearance. Use the evidence from the illustrations to comment on the family living in the house: the view through the window; the photograph on the fire place; the typical English three birds on the wall, yet the family have also put pictures of palm trees and mangos to remind them of home; a photograph of Grandmother on the table; Windrush child has been making a kite on the floor: and bright colours to decorate the home. Focus on the child's drawings for his grandmother. *What do his drawings tell us about his experiences so far?* Discuss how the Windrush child is combining his old life and new life on the same page. Point out the mango trees and his new plate of food; his trip on the ship and his new school life and his old friends and a new school scene. *What does the illustration tell us about his mood/view on his new life (bright colours; happy faces; sunshine etc...)? How has the Windrush child brought his Caribbean eye to another horizon?*
- Pause to compare the experiences of the poem so far. *How does our reading experience in this book reinforce what we know from reading the whole poem in one go? How does the illustration and layout add to our understanding?*
- Look at the next double-spread where the Windrush child is flying his kite and read the stanza:

*learning how to fly  
the kite of your dreams  
in an English sky*

- The boy is literally flying his kite, but what does John Agard really mean? What is he suggesting about the future for this Windrush child? Why does the poet associate kites with dreams?* You might want to create or draw a simple paper kite on the board and invite children to suggest words that they associate with a kite, starting with 'dreams'. *How are the parents each feeling in this illustration? What hopes and dreams might they have?*
- Share the final double-spread of the book and read the closing lines of the poem. *What is happening in this illustration? Does the Windrush child look settled and happy? How do you know? Encourage pupils to summarise what they can see and how it makes them feel. Why is the Windrush child's shadow so long? What is the illustrator suggesting here? What is the "meeting of snow and sun"? Why do you think it is a "mind-opening meeting of snow and sun"?*

## REVISITING THE POEM AS A WHOLE:

- Display the line "or that you're stepping into history" for the pupils to see. *What does this mean for the Windrush child? What does John Agard mean?*
- The Windrush child writes to his grandmother and draws pictures for her. Remind pupils that it is 1948. *Thinking about technology, how can we communicate with people across the world now? How has technology affected our global outlook or sense of place in the world compared to then? Do you agree that the world might feel smaller now?* Encourage children to relate this discussion to their personal and recent experiences of social distancing and lockdowns caused by the pandemic. *How did technology support us to bridge the distance between ourselves and our loved ones? How did it not help?*
- Throughout the poem John Agard refers to Windrush child as though he is talking to Windrush child, Vince Reid. Re-read this poem and ask the pupils to do something each time John Agard mentions "Windrush child" – pupils could raise their hands or join in with the words. Emphasise the number of



times 'Windrush child' is mentioned (six times). *Why do you think John Agard does this? Does this make the poem seem more personal? How do you think Vince Reid felt when John Agard wrote this poem for him? Vince Reid was the youngest child on board the Empire Windrush but there were other Windrush children. How does Agard make the poem universal to them too? We know that John Agard wrote this poem for Vince Reid. Why else do you think he wrote this poem? What are the main messages within this poem?*

- John Agard refers to 'your Windrush adventure' in his poem. Explain what this means to a partner.
- Display the two-double spread pages that reference 'walk good walk good' and 'walking good walking good'. Explore the subtle differences in tense – *why has John Agard chosen to do this? What does he want to achieve?* Provide pupils with copies of the pages and invite them to suggest why. *Is the subtle tense change because 'walk good' is advice for the Windrush child as he arrives in England yet the 'walking good' is what the Windrush child is doing now he is settled?*
- Share the end papers with the pupils of the footprints in the snow. *What can you see? Why have snowdrops been included?* Remind the pupils of the end papers from the beginning of the book where the footprints were in the sand. Share the speech/thinking bubbles from the footprints in the sand activity and provide pupils with some more speech/thought bubbles to record the thoughts of the Windrush child or Windrush family again. Compare and contrast what pupils have written. Explore the idea of the 'mind-opening meeting of snow and sun' and consider how the end papers have illustrated exactly that. Pupils could create their own endpapers for the beginning and the end of the book.

## AFTER READING, YOU COULD ALSO:

- In art, observe the illustrations and provide an opportunity for pupils to draw in the style of Sophie Bass. Pupils could replicate one of the illustrations from the text or create their own scene in the same style.
- Listen to the poem performed by John Agard again and challenge pupils to bring the poem to life in their own way. Suggest that they may choose to use some of John Agard's stylistic features for performance or they could choose their own style. Pupils could work independently; in pairs or in small groups to do this. They could use musical instruments or dance to explore how to perform the poem. You could record these performances to share with the school community or invite another class to be the audience. Pupils may want to share their performances in an assembly or film them for a wider audience.
- Revisit John Agard's performance and the words in his poem 'Windrush Child.' Discuss how we can see how a poet chose to write a poem about an issue very close to his heart. Explain to the pupils that they too can do the same. As writers, we can choose our own context and write to impact on our readers. Encourage pupils to write a poem about something they value or feel is important to write about. Remind pupils that they could choose to replicate some of John Agard's stylistic features – for example his references as if he was talking to 'Windrush child' throughout.
- In music, listen and respond to musical styles which originated and developed in the Caribbean, including reggae, salsa and calypso.
- Give children the opportunity to learn how to play instruments which are specific to these musical styles, including bongos, conga, claves, guiro and timbale. Learning to play, combine and layer rhythmic patterns and melodies generated from these musical styles can support children in generating and arranging their own compositions which can be used to accompany storytelling activities and class performances. If you read music, the following [web page](#) includes a few bars of sheet music which summarise some of the main rhythmic and melodic patterns associated with salsa music.
- Children could learn simple traditional songs to add to their repertoire such as 'Tingalayo' (sheet music and CD recordings can be found in the *Junior Voiceworks* collection published by Oxford University Press). A wide range of traditional folk songs and nursery rhymes organised by country of origin can be found [here](#).



### Other titles by John Agard or to support exploration of themes from the book:

- *Caribbean Dozen: Poems from Thirteen Caribbean Poets* edited by John Agard and Grace Nichols. Illustrated by Cathie Felstead (Walker Books 2020)
- You can find a booklist of John Agard and Grace Nichols titles on CLPE's [website](#).
- *The Rainmaker Danced*, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura (Hodder 2017)
- *Books Make Good Pets*, illustrated by Momoko Abe (Orchard Books 2021)
- *Shona, Word detective*, illustrated by Michael Broad (Barrington Stoke 2018)
- *Come all You Little Persons*, illustrated by Jessica Courtney Tickle (Faber and Faber 2017)
- *Coming to England: An Inspiring True Story Celebrating the Windrush Generation* by Floella Benjamin, illustrated by Joelle Avalino (MacMillan 2021)
- *A Place for Me: Stories about the Windrush Generation* by Floella Benjamin, illustrated by K.M. Chjimbiri (Scholastic 2021)
- *Windrush Child* by Benjamin Zephaniah (Scholastic 2020)
- *Black and British: A Short Essential History* by David Olusoga (MacMillan 2020)
- *All Aboard the Empire Windrush*, Jillian Powell (Rising Stars 2019)
- *The Empire Windrush*, Clive Gifford (Collins Big Cat 2014)
- *J is for Jamaica*, Benjamin Zephaniah and Prodecepta Das (Frances Lincoln 2011)
- *Tale of the Caribbean* by Trish Cooke (Puffin 2017)

The Windrush Foundation website has resources to support study at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. These can be accessed freely here: [www.windrushfoundation.com/articles/](http://www.windrushfoundation.com/articles/)



These Notes may contain links to third party websites. Walker Books does not endorse such website(s) or their contents and is not responsible for such contents and makes no representations or warranties regarding the contents, accuracy or functionality of such website(s).