

Significant Person: Malorie Blackman

Reading Comprehension

Who is she?

Malorie Blackman is a famous British children's author, whose efforts and craft was celebrated when she was the Children's Laureate for two years from 2013 to 2015. She is best known from her children's and young adult fiction, but she has also written lots of television scripts for various UK TV channels. On top of this, some of her books have been turned into television dramas.



Portrait of Malorie Blackman

What was her early life like?

Malorie was born on 8th February 1962 in Clapham, London. Her parents were from Barbados. Throughout her childhood, she dreamed about using her creative skills to become an English teacher. However, she became more interested in computer science as she got older. She graduated from the National Film and Television School in Buckinghamshire and went on to be a system programmer before deciding to change careers.

What books has she released?

Malorie left her job and began writing - she was determined to become an author. At the age of 28, she had her first work 'Not So Stupid!' (a book of short stories) published in 1990. From then until now, she has had over sixty books published.

Other books she has published include:

'Trust Me' (1992)

'Hacker' (1992) – which is about a girl called Vicky, who hacks into a bank's computer to find evidence that substantiates her father's innocence in a bank robbery that he has been accused of. Blackman's computer science background played an instrumental role in her creation of interesting plots for her books.

A.N.T.I.D.O.T.E (1997)

In one of her most well-known books, called 'Pig-Heart Boy' (1997) a teen is in need of heart transplant. This book was adapted for TV, and this drama series won a BAFTA award in 2000.



What work is Malorie Blackman most renowned for?

Blackman is most famous for her highly acclaimed young adult novel series called 'Noughts & Crosses'. There are five books in the dystopian series, which investigate the themes and dilemmas of racism, ethnicity and violence. In this series, Malorie Blackman reverses the status quo of British society – Black people are the ruling class (the Noughts) and white people are the oppressed minority (the Crosses). The books explore the issue of identity within one's ethnicity. The story pivots around a relationship between two teenagers, Sephy (a Nought) and Callum (a Cross). In 2020, the BBC adapted the first novel and created a much-acclaimed TV series, which has been very popular.

What TV programs has Malorie produced?

Throughout her career, Malorie has created several famous children's TV dramas for CITV and BBC, including: 'Doctor Who', 'Byker Grove', 'Whizzwig' and 'Pig Heart Boy'. Malorie helped to adapt 'Noughts and Crosses' into a 2020 BBC short series, which introduced her most famous novels to a wider audience.

What are her greatest achievements?

In 2008, Malorie Blackman was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by the Queen in her Birthday Honours. She was awarded the 'Children's Book Circle's Eleanor Farjeon Award' in 2005 and 'The Kitschies Black Tentacle' for "outstanding achievement in encouraging and elevating the conversation around genre literature" in 2013, among many other prestigious accolades.

How did she end up being referenced by famous rappers?

Stormzy mentions Malorie Blackman in his song, 'Superheroes'. Stormzy has described Blackman's children's book series 'Noughts and Crosses' as his favourite books of all time, which he credits as showing him the great power and skill of storytelling. His publishing imprint, #MerkyBooks, have bought the rights to publish Malorie Blackman's autobiography in the future.

Not only has she been name checked by Stormzy, she is also mentioned in Tinie Tempah's song 'Written In The Stars', released in 2010. This demonstrates the lasting impact her writing has had on many young Black British musicians, and their desire to open up her writing to a wider audience. It cements her as one of the important, influential authors in our popular culture today.



QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following is the 'craft' of an author?

to draw ☐

to write ☐

to paint ☐

2. According to the text, who does Malorie Blackman write for? Tick all that apply

young adults ☐

toddlers ☐

toddlers ☐

adults ☐

3. Where was Malorie born?

4. What was Malorie's first job when she graduated from college?

5. Why do you think Malorie left her job to follow her dream?

6. What story plot shows evidence that Malorie used her former career as inspiration to create interesting stories?



7. Which word is closest in meaning to 'oppressed'?

pressure ☐

weak ☐

persecuted ☐

8. Find and copy one word which means a thing that plays a central part in a story or situation.

9. Name two TV shows Malorie helped to write.

1.

2.

10. What does OBE stand for?

11. How has Stormzy been inspired by Malorie?

12. Why do you think two young Black British musicians have written her name into their lyrics? (3 marks)



ANSWERS

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3. Where was Malorie born?

Clapham, London

4. What was Malorie's first job when she graduated from college?

system programmer

5. Why do you think Malorie left her job to follow her dream?

She had always wanted to be a writer, so she probably did not want to give up on her life's dream. Perhaps she found her job boring and it didn't allow her to be creative enough.

6. What story plot shows evidence that Malorie used her former career as inspiration to create interesting stories?

She writes a story about a girl who hacks into a bank's computer to find evidence to help clear her father of a crime.

7. Which word is closest in meaning to 'oppressed'?

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8. Find and copy one word which means a thing that plays a central part in a story or situation.

pivots

9. Name two TV shows Malorie helped to write.

Pick two from - Doctor Who', 'Byker Grove', 'Whizzwig' and 'Pig Heart Boy'.

10. What does OBE stand for?

Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

11. How has Stormzy been inspired by Malorie?

He is inspired by her ability to write amazing stories, which address racism.
He says she inspired him through her skill of storytelling.

12. Why do you think two young Black British musicians have written her name into their lyrics? (3 marks)

Children's response contains relevant points, such as:

Her powerful writing opened up their minds when they were younger and they were inspired by her characterisation. They probably identified with some of her characters, which made them enjoy her work. She wasn't afraid to address poignant issues around race in society, and this strong message empowered them to write in a similar fashion. She is a famous Black children's literature author, which means she's a minority within this field, so they identify with how she was strong, resilience and pushed an alternative message and storytelling ability onto the children's fiction market.