

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 postal worker. His mum was originally from Jamaica and worked as a nurse. Benjamin spent a lot of time living in London but he now lives in China.



Poems

Benjamin is famous for his poems and the way that he reads them out. Benjamin performs in a way that is called 'dub poetry'. Dub poets change the speed and sound of their voice so that it sounds like music when they read poems out loud. Benjamin didn't like the idea that poems were only for people who went to school or university. He thought that poems should be for everyone to enjoy. Because of this, he performed his poetry so that everyone could hear and enjoy it.



Causes

Benjamin writes poems about things that he believes in. He has written many poems against racism and slavery. In the early 1980s, he argued against homelessness and other problems that he saw in Britain through his poems. He performed these poems outside police stations and during demonstrations. He also writes lots about the way that we treat animals and he works with lots of groups who help animals.



Books

Benjamin has written many books of poetry for adults and children. He has also written several fiction books for teenagers. His first book of poetry for children was called 'Talking Turkeys' and told people that they should be nice to their turkeys at Christmas. This book was so popular that all of the copies sold out in only six weeks and more had to be printed!



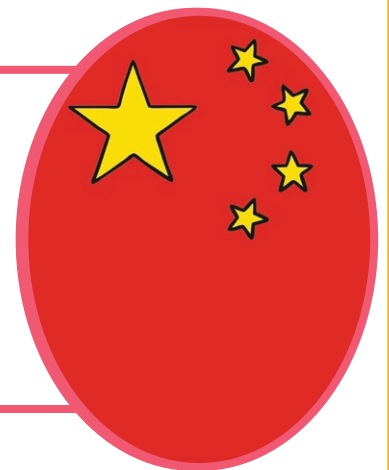
Fun Facts



- In 1991, Benjamin performed his poetry on every continent in only 22 days!
- Benjamin loves to watch football.
- Ealing Hospital in London have named part of their building after Benjamin.

Today

Benjamin is still writing and performing poems today. He spends lots of his time living in China but still travels to lots of different countries. He is still inspiring young writers and singers to create poetry and music about things they believe in.



Questions

1. What is Benjamin Zephaniah famous for? Tick one.

- playing football
- writing and performing poems
- having a pet turkey
- travelling all over the world

2. Number the sub-headings from 1-4 to show the order that they appear in the text.

- Poems
- Fact File
- Causes
- Books

3. Which building has part of it named after Benjamin Zephaniah?

- a football ground
- a swimming pool in Birmingham
- his house in China
- Ealing Hospital in London

4. Draw four lines to complete the sentences.

Benjamin enjoys

dub poetry.

Benjamin performs

'Talking Turkeys'.

Benjamin wrote a book called

watching football.

Benjamin now lives in

China.

5. Look at the section with the sub-heading **Books**.

Why has the author included a picture of a turkey?

6. Who does Benjamin think should be able to enjoy poems?

7. Benjamin writes his poems about topics he has strong beliefs about. If you had to write a poem about something you have strong beliefs about, what would your poem be about? Explain your answer.

Answers

1. What is Benjamin Zephaniah famous for? Tick one.

- playing football
- writing and performing poems**
- having a pet turkey
- travelling all over the world

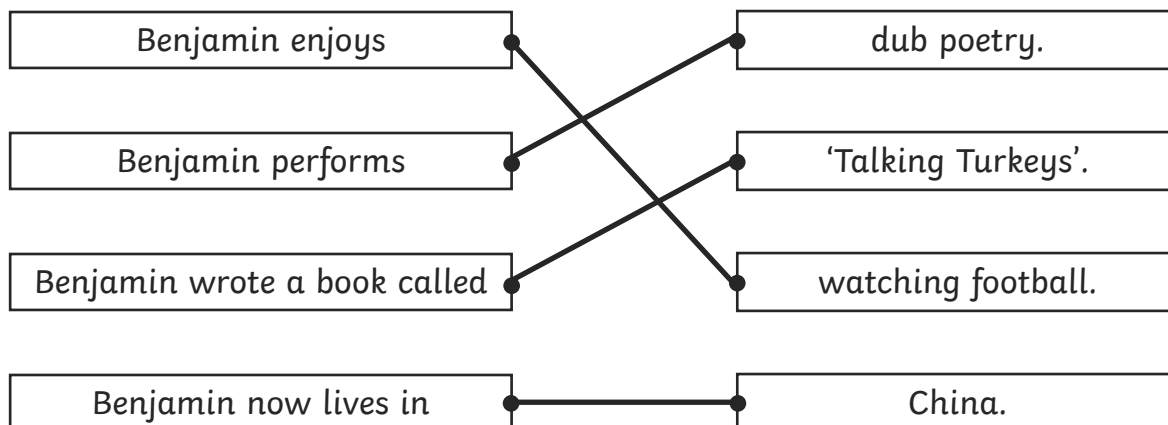
2. Number the sub-headings from 1-4 to show the order that they appear in the text.

- 2** Poems
- 1** Fact File
- 3** Causes
- 4** Books

3. Which building has part of it named after Benjamin Zephaniah?

- a football ground
- a swimming pool in Birmingham
- his house in China
- Ealing Hospital in London**

4. Draw four lines to complete the sentences.



5. Look at the section with the sub-heading **Books**.

Why has the author included a picture of a turkey?

The author has included a picture of a turkey because Benjamin’s first book of poetry for children was called ‘Talking Turkeys’.

6. Who does Benjamin think should be able to enjoy poems?

Benjamin thinks that poems should be for everyone to enjoy.

7. Benjamin writes his poems about topics he has strong beliefs about. If you had to write a poem about something you have strong beliefs about, what would your poem be about? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I would write my poem about testing products on animals because I don't think that it's fair for humans to test things on animals without their permission.

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.

Benjamin has inspired

'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

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

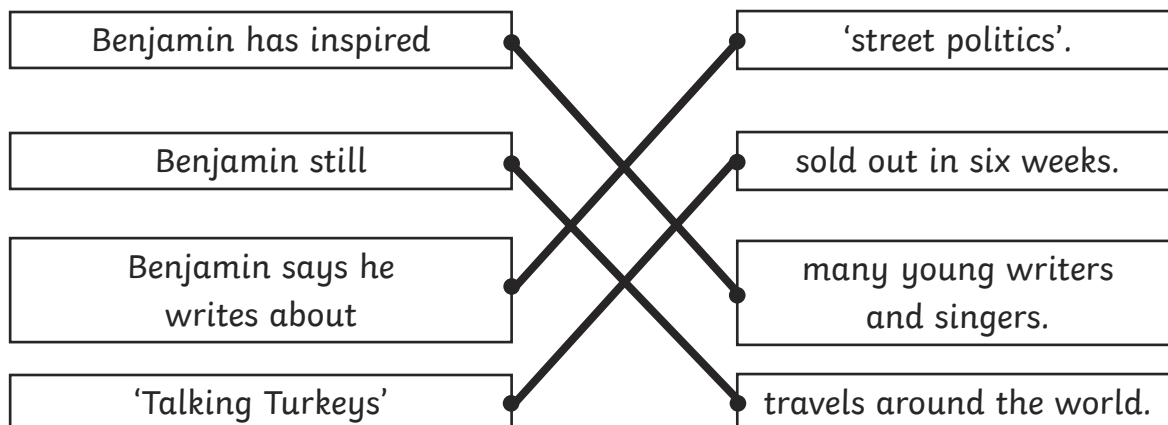
2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- 4** Benjamin continues to inspire young writers.
- 1** Benjamin was born in Birmingham.
- 2** Benjamin moved to London.
- 3** 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.



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.

Benjamin Zephaniah

Dr Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah was born on the 15th April 1958 in the Handsworth district of Birmingham, England. His mother was a nurse and was originally from Jamaica. His father was a postal worker and was originally from Barbados. Benjamin is famous for his performance poetry. When he was 22 years old, Benjamin moved to London so that he could share his poetry with more people.



Poems

Benjamin attended school until he was 13 years old and he initially found it difficult to read and write. Unhappy with the popular opinion that poetry was only for people who were still in school or at university, he started performing his poems so that they were accessible to everyone. The type of poetry that Benjamin performs is known as 'dub poetry'. Dub poetry uses the performer's voice as a musical instrument. The performer changes the speed and pitch of the poem to give it more of a musical sound. Benjamin's performances became really popular and many people enjoyed his poetry.



Causes

Many of Benjamin's poems are about causes that he has strong beliefs about. He has written, performed and published many poems with messages against racism and slavery. Alongside this, he also writes poems about what he calls 'street politics'. In the early 1980s, he performed some of his poems at demonstrations and outside police stations; this was to argue against the rise in homelessness and unemployment in Britain at the time. As a supporter of animal rights, Benjamin also writes poems which discuss and question the way that we treat animals.



Books

As well as performing his poetry around the world, Benjamin has published his work in several books for both adults and children. His first book of poetry for children, 'Talking Turkeys', was a huge success. In fact, the book, which encouraged people to be nice to turkeys at Christmas, was so popular that there had to be an emergency reprint after it sold out in only six weeks!



Did You Know...?

In 1991, over the space of only 22 days, Benjamin was able to perform in every continent in the world!

Today

To this day, Benjamin is still writing songs, poems, books, plays and much more! Although he still travels around the world giving performances, he now spends most of his time living in Beijing, China. Young writers and singers are still being inspired by his work to create their own pieces of writing about something they feel passionate about.



Questions

1. Why did Benjamin start performing his poems? Tick one.

- he wanted them to sound like music
- he wanted everyone to be able to enjoy them
- he enjoyed performing
- he didn't like writing them down

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

- Benjamin left school.
- Benjamin performed in every continent in 22 days.
- Benjamin is living in China.
- Benjamin moved to London.

3. Look at the section titled **Poems**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'available'.

4. Why did Benjamin write the book 'Talking Turkeys'?

5. Who did Benjamin want the audience for his poems to be?

6. Discuss how Benjamin's success might have changed if he had chosen not to perform his poetry.

7. How does the organisation of the text help you to understand the information? Explain your answer.

8. Imagine that you are going to meet Benjamin. Write down one question you would like to ask him. Explain why you have chosen that question.

Answers

1. Why did Benjamin start performing his poems? Tick one.

- he wanted them to sound like music
- he wanted everyone to be able to enjoy them**
- he enjoyed performing
- he didn't like writing them down

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

- 1** Benjamin left school.
- 3** Benjamin performed in every continent in 22 days.
- 4** Benjamin is living in China.
- 2** Benjamin moved to London.

3. Look at the section titled **Poems**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'available'.

accessible

4. Why did Benjamin write the book 'Talking Turkeys'?

Benjamin wrote the book 'Talking Turkeys' to encourage people to be nice to turkeys at Christmastime and to befriend them instead of eating them

5. Who did Benjamin want the audience for his poems to be?

Benjamin wanted everyone to be the audience for his poems.

6. Discuss how Benjamin's success might have changed if he had chosen not to perform his poetry.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I do not think that Benjamin would be as famous and successful as he is now if he hadn't performed his poems. This is because his performances were really popular and meant that everyone could enjoy his poetry.

7. How does the organisation of the text help you to understand the information? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses provided that a reference to the layout of the text has been made, such as: The text is split into different sections so that you can easily find the different information. The text is also written in chronological order so it is easy to see a timeline of his life.

8. Imagine that you are going to meet Benjamin. Write down one question you would like to ask him. Explain why you have chosen that question.

Pupils' own responses provided that an explanation is given, such as: What issues are you writing about at the moment? I would ask Benjamin this because I know that he writes about issues and 'street politics' and I would be interested in what he was writing about today.