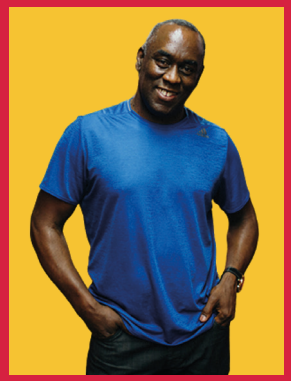
Alex Wheatle MBE

BOOK CLUBS IN SCHOOLS

About Alex



Alex was born on January 3rd 1963 in London to Jamaican parents from the Windrush generation, but spent most of his childhood in a children's home just outside Croydon. Here he looked up to role models such as footballer Pelé, boxer Muhammad Ali, cricketer Viv Richards and martial artist/filmmaker Bruce Lee. It was a lonely time for him, made slightly more tolerable by reading comics such as The Beano, and occasionally, discarded football annuals.

He was a massive fan of reggae and in his mid teens was a founder member of the Crucial Rocker sound system where he wrote lyrics for performances in community halls, youth clubs, house parties and blues dances.

By 1980, Alex had moved to Brixton, in South London. At that time, racial tensions were high between a young black community and a predominantly white Police force. Extensive use of Stop and Search by the police to stop young black men and rumours of police brutality sparked violent confrontations and Alex found himself taking part in the Brixton Uprising alongside many other, mostly black, young people. Sent to prison because of this, Alex's life changed forever when he was encouraged to read and to start to take his education seriously there by his cellmate, Simeon – an experience that inspired some of his writing, including his debut novel Brixton Rock, which was published in 1999 for an adult audience.

Alex went on to write many other books and in 2008 was awarded the MBE for his services to literature. In 2016 Crongton Knights won the 50th Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, with several of his other titles also nominated for prizes. His Crongton series has been adapted for television, there is a dance production of Cane Warriors, and Crongton Knights and Home Girl and have been adapted for the stage.

The story of young Alex's life was brought to the TV screen in 2020 by director Steve McQueen, when a dramatised account of his youth up until just after the Brixton Uprising was broadcast on BBC1 in an episode of the series Small Axe, five films about the experiences of the UK's West Indian community during the 1970s and 1980s.

Alex was passionate about getting young people reading and his experiences meant he understood both how difficult some students find engaging with reading and the part reading can play in promoting empathy, compassion and understanding of other people.

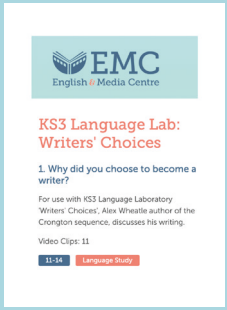
Very sadly, Alex died on 16th March 2025 from cancer, leaving behind an incredible legacy of stories that will be read and enjoyed for many years to come. More details about his books for children and young adults are on the next page.

More about Alex's Life

Alex recorded a film with the BBC about his life aimed at GSCE History students. He talks about his experience growing up in a children's home and moving to Brixton in the 80s and how this shaped his identity.

https://tinyurl.com/kwvmwwws

Listen to Alex talk about Writing



Alex talked to the English and Media Centre about why he chose to be a writer and about writing his Crongton series of books. These videos include a reading from Crongton Knights.

You can view them here: https://tinyurl.com/aaw3wcn6

Watch Crongton

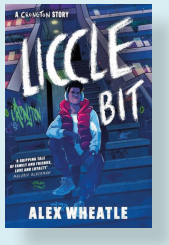
Alex's Crongton books have now been adapted for television - a comedy drama, with friendships and loyalties tested by the growing darkness of the world around them.

You can can view the first series on BBC iPlayer https://tinyurl.com/36fabcxc

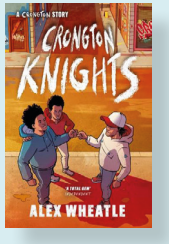
Copyright © 2025 Book Clubs in Schools Charity number 1185409

Alex's Books for Children and Young Adults

BOOK CLUBS IN SCHOOLS

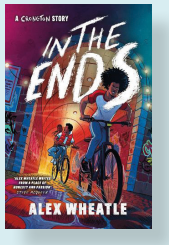


Liccle Bit
His mum is permanently hassled, his sister a frustrated single mum and his dad moved out years ago. Liccle Bit wishes he could do something to make life better.



Crongton Knights
Life for McKay has been even tougher since his mum died. And now, on a 'heroic' (if misguided) mission to help out a girl, he faces a friend's crazy ex-boyfriend.

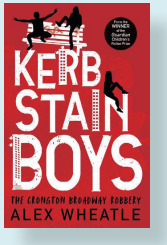
Straight Outta Crongton
Life's a constant hustle for Mo and when things turn ugly and a life is left hanging in the balance, Mo has to face her hot urge for revenge... and she might end up losing more than she wins.



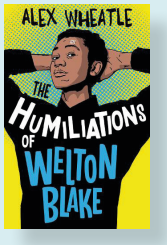
In the Ends
Jonah is the fastest sprinter in South Crong, and has his sights set on an Olympic Medal one day. So when he gets kidnapped and taken to Manjaro's secret hideout, it's the last thing Jonah needs.

A Crongton Christmas Party
Just before the party, Boy from the Hills runs into school bullies, Vincent and Donald, and when they find out about the party, they do everything they can to get in.

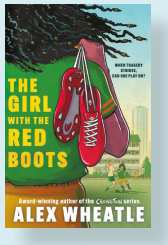
Home Girl
Naomi has bounced around the care system for far too long. When she's placed with an emergency foster home, her expectations are already on the floor.



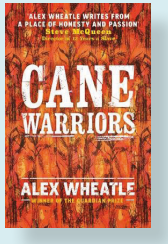
Kerb Stain Boys
Never having had it easy, and with trouble at home, Briggy hopes this latest plan might be his chance to shine. Robbing the Post Office ... what could go wrong?



The Humiliations of Welton Blake
Welton Blake has done it – he's asked out Carmella McKenzie, the best looking girl in school, and she's only gone and said yes! But can his good luck hold...

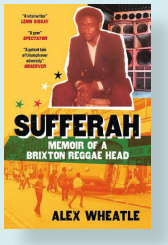


The Girl with the Red Boots
Kadeen is forced to flee Jamaica as a witness in her brother's shooting. Playing football is her dream but can she do it and stay under the radar...



Cane Warriors
Moa is fourteen. The only life he has ever known is enslaved on the Frontier sugar cane plantation. Then one night he learns of an uprising and his life changes.

Kemosha of the Caribbean
Kemosha and her brother have lived their young lives in slavery. An adventure on the high seas could be her one chance to free her brother...



Sufferah
How reggae music became Alex's salvation through a childhood marred by abuse and his imprisonment as a young man protesting against systemic racism and police brutality.

Copyright © 2025 Book Clubs in Schools Charity number 1185409