

**What's So Good About...?** is a series of programmes focusing on contemporary popular children's writers: Malorie Blackman, Roald Dahl, Jacqueline Wilson, JK Rowling and Jamila Gavin. Two of the programmes explore Malorie Blackman's success as a children's writer.

Each programme is set on location in Malorie's home, her old school in Lewisham, working with children, or in venues she is using for ideas and research. Over the two programmes, Malorie talks about her own childhood and the importance of family life, what influences her writing and how she writes.

Viewers are taken into Malorie's world of work: in her study we see draft ideas for plots, as she works at the computer she narrates her story and the camera cuts to a dramatisation of the same excerpt, and then cuts again to her readers' responses to that particular book. This concise presentation of the stages of writing, publication, dramatisation and audience response effectively demonstrates the significance and power of writing. Malorie's enthusiasm encourages children to have a go at writing themselves!

### Programme 1: We Have The Technology

In this programme, we learn about Malorie as a writer and mother, and see how she makes the time to enjoy both.

Malorie's first career was working with computers. Computers still play a vital role in her life, she loves playing games on them, surfs the net to research information for her books and always writes her plans and stories directly onto her computer. As she was growing up, Malorie thought she would be an English teacher. Although she enjoyed writing, she envisaged it to be the profession of an elderly white man living in the country! Her spare time from work and family is now given to sharing her success with her readers, making school visits and giving talks about her books and the writing process.

#### Books Featured:

##### *Pig-Heart Boy*

The idea for this novel came from a newspaper report. Malorie's level of research is particularly apparent in this book, where the

main character Cameron is suffering from heart disease. The story develops as he and his family decide with the surgeon whether he should undergo xenotransplantation (the transplantation of living cells, tissues and organs from one species to another) and to be given the heart of a pig.

Malorie likes the central character of Cameron because although faced with traumas, dilemmas and disappointments, he learns to get on with his life as best he can.

#### *Hacker*

In this exciting thriller, Malorie uses her computer literacy to inform the plot as she reveals how technology can be used and abused. Vicky and Gib's dad is accused of stealing over £100,000 from the bank where he works. Vicky is determined to find the real thief, but that means she must hack into the computer system herself and start trying to solve the puzzle.

#### Malorie Blackman on getting ideas

- ideas can come from anywhere and everywhere
- read newspapers
- read books for pleasure and to gather ideas
- be a good observer – watch people: what they look like, what they say and how they behave
- eavesdrop on people's conversations – they might give you ideas for a plot or character
- keep a notebook or diary and jot down ideas as well as your personal feelings to use in the future

#### Researching a story

- use the internet – a brilliant source of information at your fingertips
- talk to people who know about the subject
- visit people and places to give you first-hand experiences which inform and give credibility to characters, settings and plot

#### Malorie's top tips for writers

- you can't write if you don't read!
- read as much as you can each week
- keep a diary
- end chapters on cliffhangers to make your readers keep reading
- don't give up!

#### Activities

- Play Malorie's game. Imagine the doctor has just told you that you haven't got a skeleton like other people; that inside you is a metal frame and that you are really a robot! Write down your immediate response to this news. Are you happy and excited about all the things you'll now be able to do, or upset and frightened?
- Keep a journal and jot down things that you hear people say or see them do.
- Read some of Malorie's stories and identify some of the cliffhangers. How do they make the reader want to read on?
- Work with a partner as a 'critical friend' to help them draft and re-draft a short story until it's ready for publication.
- Make a class book containing each pupil's detailed description of their favourite Malorie Blackman character, without stating his or her name. Can the others guess who has been written about?

### Programme 2: Friends and Family

In this programme, we see Malorie visit Greenwich with her young daughter Lizzie. She explains how important family is for her and notes that all her books are dedicated to members of her family. The significance of family and relationships is often the central theme to her books, and however unconventional that family may be, her characters struggle to make it work in the best way they know how.

#### Books Featured:

##### *Thief*

*Thief* starts out as a contemporary school story about friendship, rivalry and accusation, which cleverly leads into an exciting science fiction drama. Malorie reads extracts from this story focusing on the central character, Lydia, who is wrongly accused of a theft. Malorie explains that at some point in all our lives, especially as children, we are wrongly accused of something. Malorie wanted to use this book to explore the lengths that people will go to prove their innocence.

## Whizzwig

For younger, less experienced readers, *Whizzwig* is a simply told tale of a friendly furry alien, who has crash-landed on Ben's roof. In order to mend the spacecraft, 'she' must grant 23 wishes, which people wish for someone else. The humour of the story lies in the fact that the recipient does not always appreciate the wishes she grants!

## Malorie's childhood

Malorie shows us around her old primary school in Lewisham and as she remembers the past, we see the young Malorie in the classroom and playground of almost thirty years ago. She tells us that she was good at English and relatively good at maths and always being told off for laughing and chattering; one school report said that 'Malorie's prone to unnecessary outbursts of laughter'! Malorie doesn't think she's changed much since then because she still talks and laughs a lot!

## How Malorie starts writing

1. Start with a simple idea for the plot
2. Make characters believable
  - (a) write a biography for each character (this could be up to two pages long including their appearance, their likes and dislikes and so on, to make them 'real people')
  - (b) make sure the characters define the plot
3. First draft chapter breakdown
4. Know where the plot is going by working out the beginning, middle and end

## Activities

- After watching the programme, brainstorm children's responses to and descriptions of Malorie's personality. Use these descriptions to inform a display of her books and to discuss how they think Malorie's attitude and personality have influenced her stories and her success.
- Without mentioning any names, children describe the relationship they have with another person, friend, family teacher and so on.

- As a shared writing activity, model how children might develop a character in a similar way to Malorie. Decide on a story idea/genre together and create a central character that will determine essential outcomes of the plot. Consider: character, appearance, relationships with family and friends, hobbies, home and so on. Children then work independently to develop other characters and plan their story.
- Children write a further chapter or sequel to *Whizzwig*, describing the effects and consequences of a wish that *Whizzwig* grants.
- Working in pairs, children tell each other memorable stories from earlier days in school, and then record each other's stories as diary entries.

## Support material for Book Box: Popular Writers

Resource Book: 206849 £6.95

Bookbox website: [www.channel4.com/bookbox](http://www.channel4.com/bookbox)

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English for 7–11 year olds



## Book Box: Popular Writers

## What's So Good About ... Malorie Blackman?



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