

A visit from the author...

ALEX WHEATLE MBE



Author Alex Wheatle gives an animated talk to Bevin pupils about his life and work and new book *Liccle Bit*

On Friday 17th April, boys in Y7 and Y9 had the opportunity to meet local author Alex Wheatle MBE. We invited Alex to visit us at Bevin, as boys in 9MJH in particular had been reading books by Alex Wheatle during the reading period, and had really enjoyed them. They wanted to find out more about the author and what inspired the books that they had enjoyed so much.



Alex Wheatle is an award-winning black British novelist of Jamaican

heritage, sentenced to a term of imprisonment after the Brixton uprising in

1981. He has a really tough life behind him but has still turned his life around and become an author. He has written great books such as *The Dirty South*, *Liccle Bit*, *Brixton Rock*, *East of Acre Lane* and *Brenton Brown*.

This year, Alex's books have been the most popular books; not just in our class but across the years in our school. Our class 9MJH in particular have read more than 3 of his books together: *The Dirty South*, *Liccle Bit*, and *East of Acre Lane*. Since we started to read Alex's books we have been longing to meet him.

Mr Hughes has taken us out of reading time in little groups to talk about what we enjoyed in the novels we were reading. This has helped us to understand the books more. Most of Alex's books are based in South London and include everyday obstacles and problems which a lot of us can relate to, and some have faced ourselves. Reading and analysing them has had a positive influence on what we are doing in life, showing us what not to do.

When Alex came into Bevin he went through his journey to becoming an author. He spoke about how he faced challenges with other children

and racist conflict with the police, and told us other parts of his shocking and humorous life story which led him to write his first novel *Brixton Rock*. He was a really good storyteller and everybody loved his story. We went on to asking him questions and we found out loads of things that we didn't know before.

His life story taught us something: anything can happen because he had nobody to support him when he was younger. He had no role models to learn from, and the world was racist to black people. Visiting our school and talking to us was his way of telling us that he changed his life.

It also made us appreciate what we have more, and taught us that no matter how bad life gets it can get better and you can be anything you want to be, if you set your mind to it.

By Yusuf Umar, Umair Farooq & Shiloh Francis 9MJH



His life story taught me that if life knocks you down, such as going to prison or getting a criminal record, you can still get up and move forward and change into a great, purposeful person.

Joel Siaw 9MJH



One thing I like about his books is the way I can relate to them due to the fact that they are set in local areas and they speak like people would in our area. It feels more realistic.

Cory Shillingford 9MJH



One thing I have learned from Alex Wheatle's books is that you should treat your oppressors as motivators. They motivate you to do better than them.

Joshua Preddie 9MJH



I like the constant theme of how important family is. It gives you a slap in the face and makes you think how important your family members are to you: family should be cherished, not taken for granted.

Barzan Mohamed 9MJH



Before meeting Alex Wheatle I thought he made up his stories, but after meeting him I found out that the books were based on him. I like that he makes his characters face similar situations.

Zain Ahmed 9MJH



I like how he puts parts of his life story into his books. Listening to him speak I learnt how determination will lead you to success.

Mazin Mohamed 9MJH

BELOW IS AN EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEX WHEATLE AND 9MJH

What inspired you to write books about protagonists taking the wrong path in life?

Real life. My inspiration for the characters I'm writing about are the people I walked the street with, went to dances with, hung out with – and so when I sat down and thought I'm going to write a book, I thought, well, none of the books out there really reflect me or the lives that my friends have lived. I thought "there's a gap," because I felt that my story and my friends' stories were just as worthy as any other story out there. And so that's what really inspired me to write about those characters.

I believe that if you're going to be a writer, you have to start off with what you know, because writing about what you don't know is a lot more difficult. So that's what I stuck to. I've had a very eventful life, and known some interesting people so I thought maybe I could use that to inform my fiction. Sometimes I see an old face from the past and they say "Alex, is that me in the book?" and I say "Nah" - but there is a bit of them in there.

In the chapter called 'Brixtonia' at the end of *East of Acre Lane*, what I did was I got my friends together, and I left the tape recorder running, and I asked them "What do you remember about the Brixton riots?" And all this stuff came out, and I just wrote a small fraction of that – because I could have written a whole book about the Brixton riots on those

2 days. And so I'm using real life people, real life situations – I call it 'social realism' – real situations that I kind of blow up into fiction.

How do you feel when you finish writing your books and get them published?

Brilliant! It's a relief because writing a book takes so long – it can take a year. And so when I've finished and done the last dot, I— (*breathes a deep sigh of relief*). Because it's a big, big effort and commitment – and I am filled with a big sense of pride when I see a finished copy. I've written eight books now, but when *Liccle Bit* was published in 2015 I felt the same sense of pride as when *Brixton Rock* was published in 1999.

