



# Children's Book Week

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**Bob Cattell** with the latest news.

## Ready to Roll

On 3rd October two strikingly distinctive double decker buses will each start a journey which will take them all over the country. With a precious payload of authors, illustrators, costume characters, quizzes and competitions, the two bus tours will take in all the winning events in Children's Book Week's `Book Cover UK' competition. The CBW Roadshow will cover over 3,000 miles and involve about 50 authors and illustrators. But, as **Bob Cattell**, CBW Administrator, explains, that's only the tip of the iceberg of author involvement in the Week.

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What is it that has Bernard Ashley and Chris Powling flying off to Northern Ireland? Why are Pat Hutchins and Andrew Taylor rushing from Millom in Cumbria to Blyth in Northumberland? What's so special about Mold, Birmingham and Blackburn for David Wood?

It's certainly not the fee that has got so many authors and illustrators on the move during Children's Book Week. There simply isn't one. We asked them all to waive their fees for the Grand Tour and everyone of them agreed. So why? In most cases simply because they were invited. It always amazes me you only have to ask these people and all things being equal they'll say `Yes'.

We certainly put exceptional demands on children's authors and illustrators. I've talked to many of them about how they handle continuous requests to visit schools and libraries and manage to write and illustrate and in many cases (no most) hold down a full-time job, too. Finding it hard to say no is definitely one of the occupational hazards of being a successful writer for children. I'm not saying for one minute, of course, that they find school visits and book events a chore. It's obviously a two-way thing: meeting their audiences, getting reactions, gauging feedback on new ideas and characters. But it is time-consuming. Rarely does a school visit take up less than a full day of their time and for that the `official' fee is a mere £50.

Their readiness to take part in these events, I think, places a big responsibility on the organisers to get it right. Mostly authors aren't performers, they're writers. There are exceptions as anyone who has seen John Agard in front of an audience of 250 children will have to agree. But normally you can't just plonk an author on the school stage and leave them to get on with it.

The rule we've tried to follow with the tours is to give authors the opportunity to do what they enjoy doing with groups of children. So, we've written to them and simply asked them and then arranged the events on the spot to suit them.

At each of the 14 events the visiting authors will be time-tabled for a session with a group of children, as big or as small a group, as formal or informal as they wish. There'll then be a meet-the-author session in a nearby bookshop or at the event's bookstall and finally they will meet children on the bus and have an opportunity to talk to local journalists, teachers, librarians and booksellers.

The promise is for 14 busy and exciting afternoons. In a few weeks we'll know whether it has worked or not.

I will make one safe prediction about this year's Book Week, though. You'll be wasting your time if you try and ring a children's writer any time between 3rd and 10th October. They'll all be out. If they are not on the roadshow, then they will have been picked off by one of the thousands of events around the country.

I can't even begin to list the authors who are taking part in just the regional book weeks that we are visiting on the tour. Clwyd Libraries have notched a total of 23 authors and illustrators including Michelle Magorian, Christopher Awdry, Martin Waddell and Vivien Alcock. In Greenwich visiting authors who will be entertaining children in the hold of the **Cutty Sark** include Grace Hallworth, Mary Dickinson and Nigel Hinton; some of the events will be filmed for TV AM's **Wide Awake Club**. The Books amazing Dinosaurs and Dragons event in Avon spans three weeks and five different locations in the county. Dick King-Smith, Diana Wynne Jones, Althea and Tony Robinson are just a few of the authors who are taking part and 25,000 children are already booked in to visit.

It's an impossible task to give more than a flavour of the excitement which is building up for October. We launch on 1st October with a special train adventure on London Underground's Circle Line. 150 children will be joined by writers, illustrators and other enthusiastic book people to get the `week' off to a rousing start.

To all the authors and illustrators who are taking part (on and off the roadshow buses) in what will surely be the biggest and noisiest Children's Book Week, I'd like to say a quiet and sincere `Thank you'. To everyone else I'd say: Good Luck if you are involved; and if you are not, find an event (you can't possibly be far away from one of the thousands that are planned), join in and enjoy it.

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