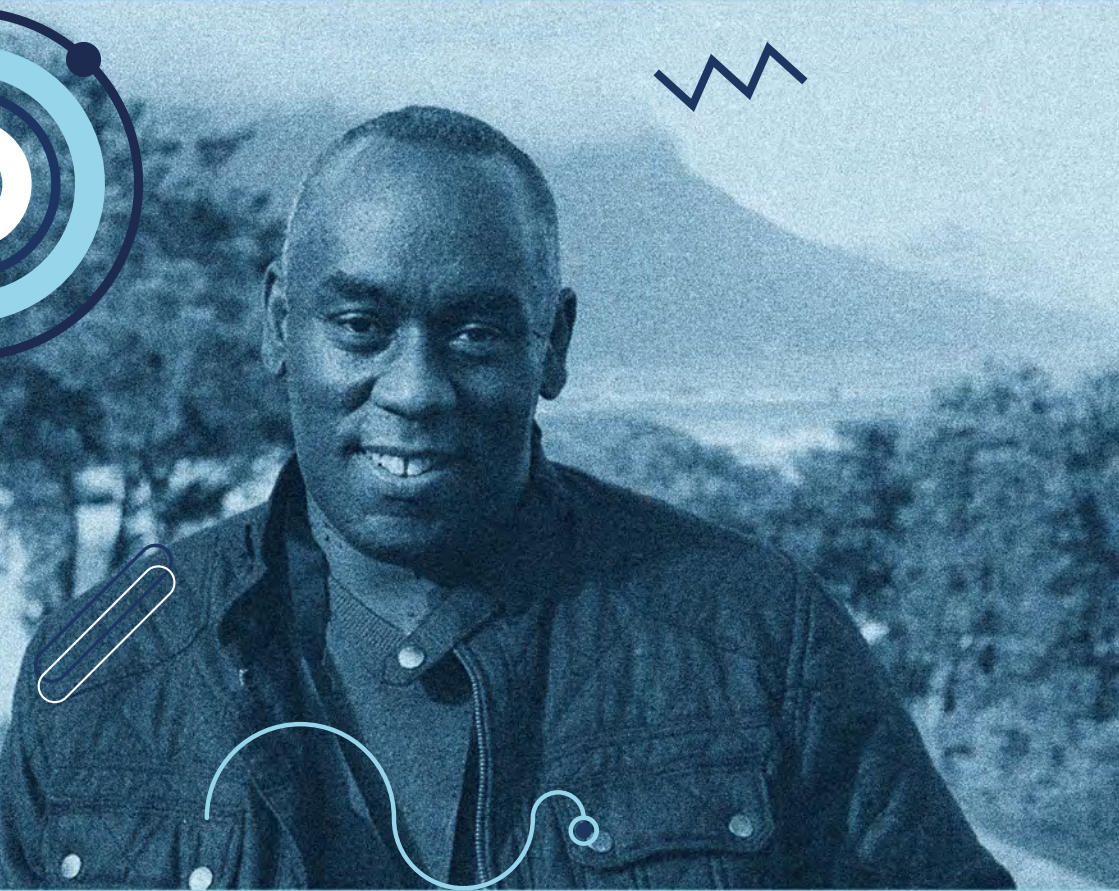




**Manchester
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Alex Wheatle: a teaching resource

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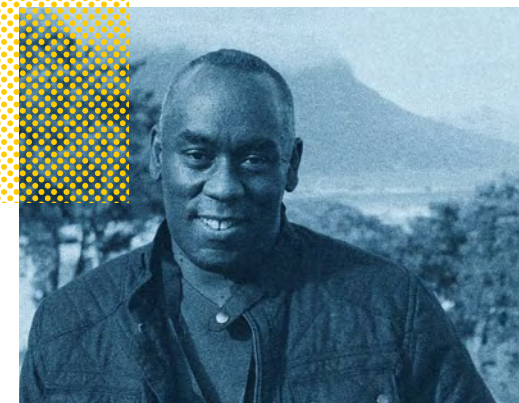
Manchester
Children's
Book Festival



The Manchester
Centre for Youth
Studies

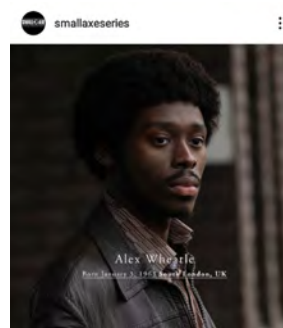
“Small Axe is an incredible anthology of films. They tell stories of British history, not just Black British history. This resource celebrates Alex Wheatle’s involvement in the series and aims to support classroom engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement, using Alex’s writing and the films as stimulus.”

| Kaye Tew (Manchester Children’s Book Festival)



Alex Wheatle MBE

Alex Wheatle MBE is an award-winning Young Adult (YA) author. He also teaches creative writing at Manchester Metropolitan University in the Department of English and is based within the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies as a researcher.



‘SMALL AXE’ is a series of films made for the BBC by Oscar-winning director Steve McQueen. Alex worked as a Special Consultant to the Writers’ Room on the series and

his own story was the subject of the fourth film ‘Alex Wheatle’. All five of the BBC ‘Small Axe’ films are available on the BBC iPlayer.

Each film covers a different aspect of the West Indian community’s life in Britain in the 1960s-1980s. The films contain racist language and some adult themes but are suitable for more mature teenagers (age 16+). Teachers will know their own pupils and their levels of maturity.

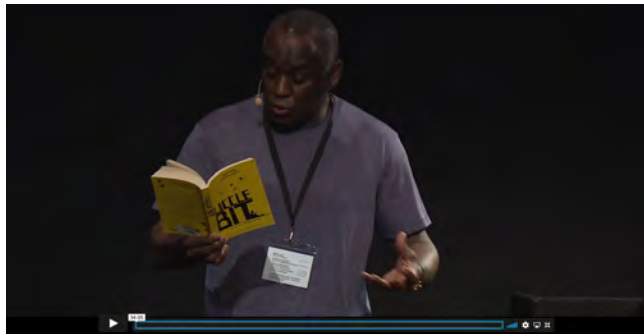
Alex’s YA novels and the exercises in this resource are suitable for Y7+ (KS3,4 & 5).

The BBC have also produced an excellent History schools resource, including videos suitable for screening in class. www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/history-ks3-gcse-small-axe/zwsq8hv

INTRODUCING ALEX WHEATLE

A video of Alex performing to an audience of teenagers at the Auckland Writers' Festival, discussing the origins of his award-winning Crongton Knights series of YA novels and a little bit about his own life, can be seen here:

<https://vimeo.com/297833466>



The video is entertaining and gives a good insight into Alex's life and the inspiration behind his writing.

SUGGESTION:

Play the video in class and use extracts from any of the three books mentioned in Alex's video as the basis for discussion.

Chapter 1 and 2 of 'Liccle Bit', for example, is a good starting point to discuss the situation the main character is in, his home life and the problems he is facing. Before reading, discussion could start with questions about the book, such as 'Have you read anything by this author before?' or 'What do you think of the cover?', 'What sort of story do you think this is going to be?'

After reading the first couple of chapters together, to tease out the pupils own thoughts further, try asking open ended questions such as: 'What do you think of the character at this point?' 'What kind of issues/problems is the character facing?' 'Do you relate to any of the characters?' 'Where do you think this story is going next?' 'Why do you think this will happen?' 'What themes or ideas is the writer interested in, or trying to develop?'

| RESEARCH

Information about Alex Wheatle MBE is freely available on the internet. A good place to start is the writer's own website:

www.alexwheatle.com - contains information about Alex's books, his life, his work and also links to articles, videos and interviews that young people can use to begin their research.

SUGGESTION:

Set pupils a research task to find out about Alex Wheatle and his work.

Once pupils have undertaken individual research, they could share this in small groups, mind-mapping their findings, themes, ideas and thoughts and creating a presentation to be shared with the rest of the class.

Invite pupils to respond to the presentations by suggesting topics for class discussion.

| ANALYSE

An essay written by Alex appears on the Brixton Blog. 'Fear of a Black Man' explores the experience of being a black man in contemporary England and looks at the history that informs attitudes prevalent today.

<https://brixtonblog.com/2020/06/fear-of-a-black-man/>

SUGGESTION:

Print copies of this, or other articles found by the pupils and use them as stimulus for practising analysis of non-fiction texts. This could be done as an individual or group exercise.

Questions to consider might include:

- What is the purpose of the text?
- Who is the audience?
- How does the writer use language to convey meaning to the audience?
- What are the writer's attitudes and values towards their subject matter?
- How does the structure of the text enable the writer to build their argument and sustain their readers' interest?
- In each answer, students should be asked to provide evidence from the text to support their analysis

| REVIEW

Reviews of Alex's award-winning novels are also freely available on the internet.

SUGGESTION:

Ask pupils to write a review or a blog about one of Alex's books, or one of the films from the 'Small Axe' series.

This should be short, max 500 words, or 2-3 paragraphs.

Electronic links to supporting resources are provided below. Most can be googled, or email k.tew@mmu.ac.uk for the links if you don't have access to the pdf copy of this resource.

[A list of Child-Authored Book Review Blogs](#)

[Booktrust's Tips for Writing a Book Blog](#)

[Book Review Sentence Starters and Vocab Sheet \(printable PDF\)](#)

[A printable Book Report Poster template](#)

[More generic sentence starters for different kinds of writing \(printable sheets\)](#)

[A list of alternative teaching activities from Scholastic](#)

| CREATIVE WRITING

As well as writing novels and scripts, Alex has written and performed poetry during his career and is also known as 'The Brixton Bard'.

Creating poetry from non-fiction texts is an interesting way to explore issues. We have created a short video to demonstrate this process.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxcseylc>

Using the method described in the video, take some of the non-fiction texts and use them to create 'found' poetry.

SUGGESTIONS:

Responding creatively to discussion allows pupils to 'own' the topic, adding their own experience and ideas to the story. Alex's YA novels can be a great source of inspiration, here are some suggestions:

- Choose a character from one of Alex's books, or from one of the Small Axe films and write a diary entry or letter in the first person.
- Re-imagine something that happens in a book or film to one character from the point of view of a different character. Write this as a chapter or scene.
- Take the beginning or ending of the book and write a poem about it.



ALEX WHEATLE: Schools Q&A Event

Alex has worked with English Department colleague Dr Chloe Germaine Buckley on outreach projects, including a Diverse YA Book Club project. He also worked with Dr Marie Molloy from the Department of History, Politics and Philosophy on celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the Pan African Congress.

In March 2021, Alex invited Chloe and Marie to join him in recording a Schools Q&A event. Questions submitted by local schools dictated the topics discussed, which were far ranging and included Alex's YA fiction, his writing, his early life, the importance of telling diverse stories, especially when it comes to our history. Alex shared stories about his own experience of racism and the effect that that has had on him. This interesting, inspirational and ultimately hopeful and uplifting film, suitable for pupils aged 12-18+ can be downloaded from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPZWWqGgJSk>

If this, or any of the other links included in this resource spark questions or responses from your pupils, we would love to hear from you.

Email k.tew@mmu.ac.uk or tag us in on Twitter @MCBFestival @BrixtonBard #BlackLivesMatter

www.mcbf.org.uk

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