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Author/Interview subject: Kwame Alexander (KA)
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)
Other speakers: Audience (Aud), (Boy), (Girl), Calum (C), Fatima (F)

JF Well, hello there. I'm Janice Forsyth. A huge warm welcome to Authors Live, thank you so much for joining us. With me today in the studio are pupils from Boclair Academy in East Dunbartonshire. They're really excited, you can see that on their smiling faces. No, truly, they are. I am too, because we have a very, very special guest with us today, he's done so much. He is poet and educator, Kwame Alexander. He's one of the USA's best-loved writers for young adults. His novel and verse, *The Crossover*, won a really prestigious, a really important award for children's literature, called the Newbery Medal. And listen to this, it sold over one million copies. I think that deserves a whoo, from Boclair, yeah.

Aud [Applause].

JF For goodness sake. Right now, Kwame is in the middle of something, I think quite unusual, I've never met an author who's on such an epic trip with his family, he's actually in the UK for three years. And the weather is fabulous for him, which is great. So we're really delighted that he can join us while he is here. Now, wherever you're watching, we're delighted you are here and we would love to hear from you. So if your school has a Twitter account, you use the hashtag, #bbcauthorlive. Get in touch with all sorts of questions. Kwame hears all sorts of questions from people of all ages. Why don't you surprise him with something really interesting and original, or just something dead normal, I don't mind. Get in touch, use the hashtag, #bbcauthorlive. Everybody, wherever you are, and right here, a huge warm welcome, for Kwame Alexander.

Aud [Applause].

JF They're a lovely bunch, aren't they?

KA They are, they are indeed.

- JF They are. It's really good to see you. And we actually met, briefly, in August of last year, when you were in Scotland for the Festival. And I wonder, have you seen much of Scotland, or indeed the rest of the UK, on this epic trip?
- KA I spent about a week in Edinburgh, and so that was lovely, a lot of walking.
- JF Edinburgh is different at Festival time, it's so busy.
- KA The Festival was incredible. And of course, I've been in London. I have thoroughly enjoyed the past eight months there, and I'm looking forward to the next couple of years.
- JF Yeah. This is really unusual, isn't it, for an author to make the trip to another country for three years?
- KA Yeah, well we intended to come for one year, but we loved it so much. And I think I've written my best book, in London. Like, so there's a muse happening, there's a creativity that has inspired me. And my kid, she wants to stay, so we're going to stay for three years.
- JF What an adventure for her, and you.
- KA Yeah.
- JF So let's talk about your work. And we're beginning with Kwame's most recent book called, *The Undefeated*, which is an astonishing piece of work. It's a beautiful, illustrated poem, celebrating black history. So, what led you to write it?
- KA *The Undefeated*, I wrote it in 2008, when my second daughter was born. That was also the year that Barack Obama was elected President of the United States. And I wanted to write her a history of the journey of African Americans in our country. How we came from being kidnapped, and brought to America, and, as enslaved Africans, to having the first black President, what that journey looked like. And so, I wrote her a poem. And that poem was to show her the tragedy, and the triumph, and that poem became this book.
- JF Amazing. And actually it's, let's not dwell on it, but that was an extraordinary celebratory moment, when Barack Obama was elected.
- KA It was.
- JF And things have changed. But that makes the book, actually, continue to be very important.

KA Absolutely. It's important to sort of know what's possible, to know that even though we may be going through some serious challenges in our country, that we have a history of overcoming those challenges. And that we can be better, we have been better. And hopefully, that will, you know, manifest itself.

JF Great. Would you mind giving us a little flavour of the book, by reading from it?

KA I get to read it?

JF You do. Would you like him to read it?

KA You all want to hear it?

Aud Yes.

JF Yeah.

KA Great. I'm going to stand up for this.

JF That's great.

KA This is *The Undefeated*. Oh, we have it up here, yes. Hello, out there, glad you all could join us. If you have the book, you can follow along in your text, or you can see it on the screen.

This is for the unforgettable, the swift and sweet ones who hurdled history and opened a world of possible. The ones who survived America by any means necessary, and the ones who didn't. This is for the undeniable, the ones who scored with chains on one hand, and faith in the other. This is for the unflappable, the sophisticated ones, who box adversity and tackle vision. Who shine their light for the world to see, and don't stop 'till the break of dawn. This is for the unafraid, the audacious ones, who carried the red, white, and weary blues on the battlefield, to save an imperfect union. The righteous marching ones who sang, we shall not be moved, because black lives matter.

This is for the unspeakable. This is for the unspeakable. This is for the unspeakable. This is for the unlimited, unstoppable ones, the dreamers and the doers, who swim across the big sea of our imagination, and show us, and show us the majestic shores of the Promised Land. The Wilma Rudolphs, the Muhammad Alis, the Althea Gibsons, the Jesse Owenses, the Jordans and the LeBrons, the Serenas, and the Sheryls, the Reece Whitleys, and the undiscovered. This is for the unbelievable, the real cool ones. This is for the unbending, the black as the night is beautiful ones. This is for the underdogs, and the uncertain, the unspoken, but no longer untitled.

This is for the undefeated. This is for the undefeated. This is for you, and you, and you, Jamie, and you, Imogen, this is for you. This is for us.

Aud [Applause].

JF Wow. I mean, it's blindingly obvious, that is powerful stuff, isn't it? It's really powerful, and beautifully, not so much read, but kind of lived by you, Kwame. Thank you very much indeed. And I think, just looking at that, and it was interesting just to hear you doing it, as opposed to us reading it, and those pauses. Because the pause can be as powerful as the words, too.

KA Right.

JF It really can be, we were like, whoa, on the edge of our seats. But I imagine, particularly as this is a largely school audience watching this, this is an example of a book that you've got the written word on the page, but actually beyond that, there's endless conversation and discussion that can go on, in the classroom.

KA Absolutely. I think, number one, each spread, each picture in the book, is an entire history, it's an entire story. This is Jesse Owens, who won the Olympics in 1936, track and field star. There's a whole history, a whole story of his journey, of his challenge. And I think each of these spreads, sort of showcases a particular journey, and these illustrations...

JF Oh.

KA ...the illustrations really make the words come off the page, and sort of put them on the stage, as it were. It makes the story come alive. Kadir Nelson is the illustrator, and he just did a pretty fabulous job.

JF They're magnificent. When I looked at the book, I just thought, each page, almost, you want to frame, and put on the wall.

KA Right, right.

JF They're so beautiful, they leap off the page. Can you tell us what that's like, actually, working with an illustrator, so closely? Because I know that it can vary, sometimes there's not much of a relationship between writer and illustrator.

KA Right.

JF But I imagine with this, you would need to?

KA Well it's a really interesting story. He had done the sketches for the book, and you know, publisher sent me the sketches. And I loved all of them, except one. I

was not, I wasn't feeling it that well. And so I sent Kadir Nelson, the illustrator, I sent him a note, I said, the book is great, but there's one page I think you need to work on. Now, if you know anything about artists and illustrators, they have egos, you all, yeah.

Aud [Laughing].

KA And so, because I know, I have an ego.

JF I was about to say that, yeah, writers do as well, yeah.

KA Writers do, too. And so I sent him a note, I said, can you work on that page, and here's what I need you to do. So, Kadir sent me an email back, and he said the following. Dear Kwame, your poem is excellent, I didn't give you any notes on that.

Aud [Laughing].

JF That's fantastic.

KA So I don't really expect any notes from you on, or...I had to sort of shut up, then. And it turns out that, he knew best. He was right, I didn't have anybody over my shoulder when I wrote the poem for my kid, and he didn't need that when he did the artwork. And apparently, he was so correct that, we just found out two days ago, that his illustrations won the Caldecott Medal, for the most distinguished artwork for a children's book, in the United States.

JF Wow, that's fantastic news.

KA Which is pretty major.

JF That is amazing.

KA Yeah.

JF And as I said, provoking lots of discussion. And this is, I guess, yeah, as I say, the resonances go on and on, because I mean, you actually mentioned, and we heard it there, black lives matter.

KA Sure.

JF And that, sadly, is still so important, that that message is out there.

KA Yeah.

- JF Do you feel that, with a younger generation, there's quite spirited debate and discussion about this? I just wonder how much you feel, oh here we are again, you know, with things, are we making progress or not?
- KA I think the kids are smarter than we are. I think the young people are not as obsessed and concerned with this idea of race, as we are. I think the children aren't the problem, I think we're the problem.
- JF Yeah, right.
- KA I think the adults have sort of screwed up this world. And, like my daughter is 11 years old, and she and her friends are from five or six different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. But they view each other as human beings.
- JF Yeah.
- KA They have sleepovers, they go to the movies, they laugh, they text, they TikTok, they do whatever, you know. And we as the adults see things through the lens of black, and white, and other. And I believe that young people are more interested in, (a) respecting each other's cultures and backgrounds, and (b) treating each other as human beings. And we as the adults in their life have to continue to encourage that, and support that, and not make them into who we were.
- JF Yeah. And just quickly, thinking about that, though, so thinking about the future, the present day and the future, and you're hopeful about that, but dipping into the past, as you do here...
- KA Sure.
- JF ...that's really important for these young people to be aware of.
- KA Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, well you have to know your history.
- JF Yeah.
- KA You have to understand your entire history. Who makes up that history. I think it's really sort of, you know, apropos that we're here talking about the undefeated, in Glasgow, where I recently read that Glasgow University, sort of, not only apologised for their role in the transatlantic slave trade, but actually made reparations, £20 million. And I think that is pretty amazing.
- JF Yeah, that was a major step forward. Well, we want to speak to you about your phenomenally successful, The Crossover series. But before we do that, BBC Scotland's lab team have been working with these lovely people from Boclair

Academy, who are going, oh no, we're going to be on the telly, now. To make a short film about what sport means to them. So, let's have a look.

Girl I do sport to express myself and forget all my problems. Because when I'm dancing, it's my main priority to get the routine right.

Girl Sport is a hope, a dream, a hobby. It can be a way of release and communication. Sport is unexpected.

Boy Sport is a way of relaxing with friends, and escaping the pressures of everyday life, while experiencing new things.

Girl Sport is something you can do with friends, or something you can do to meet new people.

Girl I feel that sport is a good way to express yourself, and connect with others, as it is international.

Boy I think sport is an outlet for me, to socialise and connect with my friends, in a way I couldn't otherwise.

Girl It is an opportunity for leadership and teamwork, allowing me to constantly challenge myself, and destress.

Boy Sport is a great way to bring people of all ages together.

Boy Sport is a universal language, which relates with everyone, and brings people from any background together.

Girl I like how sport unites a lot of people around the world.

Boy Sport makes me feel confident and good about myself, and helps me to achieve what I want to achieve.

Boy Not everyone can speak English, but everyone can speak sports.

Aud [Applause].

JF There you go, the Boclair Academy pupils have heard from you, and now you've heard from them. What do you think? What do you think of some of the messages coming through there?

KA I think they got it. I think sports are a great metaphor for our lives. I think this idea that sports can bring us together, is so true. I think, like music, like food, sports is that great unifier. I think that we can learn a lot, as we've seen from these young people in the video, from teamwork, and grit, and resilience, and all

the things we learn on the court, on the field, and off. Dribble, fake, shoot, miss dribble, fake, shoot, miss, dribble, fake, shoot, miss, dribble, fake, shoot, swish. Like, we learn a lot from sports. And I think, you know, it's really gratifying to see that, you know, young people get it.

JF And we learned a lot from what you just said. Because you think, wait a minute, a novel in verse, what the heck are you thinking about, Kwame, that's never going to be popular. And it is. But what led you to do that, I mean, is it an illustration there, or an explanation, of what you just did?

KA Well I think that you're, you know, you're on it. I think that, I wrote the book in 2008, *The Crossover*, and it took me five years to get it published. Because all the publishers said, no student is going to read a book about sports, a novel about sports, especially girls, girls won't read it.

JF Feel free to boo, girls.

KA Yeah.

Aud [Booing].

KA Where were you all, like, when I needed you?

Aud [Laughing].

KA And also, the publisher said, no boy is going to read a book about sports just told in verse. Boys don't read poetry.

JF Feel free to boo, boys.

Aud [Booing].

KA And so, it took me five years, because 22 publishers rejected it, they said, no. But I knew what most young people know, (a) we like language and text that is sparse, not a whole lot of words on a page. The fewer words, the better. Number two, the rhythm, the language, the figurative language, the rhyme, it speaks to us. And number three, all the white space, the fact that we can talk about so much in so few words, is appealing to most of us.

JF Yeah. And that's you talking about the words on the page, but actually with that illustration, when you took those pauses, when you were telling us about *The Undefeated*, it's powerful...

KA Exactly.

JF ...and it gives us space to think.

KA Exactly.

JF In terms of basketball, you have the height for it.

KA Right.

JF Are you a good basketball player?

KA I was not a very good basketball player.

JF No?

KA I mean, I played with my friends. But I was a really good tennis player. I played tennis in high school and college. And even though I couldn't play basketball, I talked a lot of trash, like basketball players do – in your face. So when I was on the tennis court, I would talk trash. I was the only tennis player who talked trash. It was a really interesting sight to see, but it worked.

JF You wouldn't get on well at Wimbledon with that, you'd be sent off immediately, Mr Alexander.

KA Exactly.

JF Leave the court.

KA Exactly.

JF Now, sadly of course, we can't think and talk about basketball without, you know, talking about the shock news of the death of the American basketball superstar, in a helicopter crash, Kobe Bryant. And also, another recent death of Scots born basketball player, Robert Archibald. Real losses. I mean, somebody like Kobe, the ripple effect is over here, too, but just how big a star, what was his influence?

KA Well, I think, you know, we all know about Kobe's, sort of, domination on the court, like, that's, we know about that, and that's why we loved him. But I think, why we will remember him, and the tragic and sad death of he and his daughter, is because of his commitment to family. And we know celebrities, and icons, and our heroes, are amazing, and dynamic for what they do, but it's about who they are, and they are human beings, just like us. Who laugh, love, dance, walk, think, hope, dream, cry, and die, just like us. And we remember him for, for being a human being who was flawed, and who was dynamic, and who had a family. In *The Crossover*, there's, the father gives basketball rules for life. Rules that apply

on the court, and in your life. And this is basketball rule number one, that I think applies to Kobe, and how we remember him.

In this game of life, your family is the court, and the ball is your heart. No matter how good you are, no matter how down you get, always leave your heart on the court.

JF That's amazing. And actually, I'm thinking about, you know, when I was a teenager, you know, you kind of go through a whole phase when you want to reject all of that. Reject, or some people do – I did – it's kind of like, it's not cool, you know, loving your mum and dad, all that stuff. But this is interesting, it's a powerful message coming through, not just about sport, and teamwork, and everything, but about family.

KA About family.

JF Yeah. Clearly, very important to you. And very interesting to hear about you being, getting the knock-backs from the publishers, over and over again. Because I guess, again, there's a parallel with sport, you know, if you don't succeed, get up, do it again. But did you ever think, I'm giving up, the publishers are right, I'm daft?

KA Every day.

JF Did you?

KA I thought about giving up every day. I thought that, you know, I had written 14 books before I wrote, *The Crossover*. I got 22 rejections, it took me, you know, it was five years. My wife said, get a job, you know.

JF Please.

KA I thought that, perhaps, the book wasn't that good. And so, I wanted to give up a lot. But ultimately, if you stop shooting, you're never going to make the shot. I don't care how many times you miss it, if you stop shooting, you're never going to make the shot. I have this belief in myself, that eventually I'm going to make the shot. So no matter whether I wanted to give up or not, I still woke up the next day and got back to it. And it was hard.

JF Uh-huh.

KA But I believe in this habit of pursuing, I believe in this habit of persistence, developing a habit of persistence. Doing it over, and over, and over again. And

even if you don't believe it's going to happen, eventually if you do it enough, your heart will catch up, and you will believe it's going to happen. And it happened.

JF Wow, that's inspiring, isn't it? I wish somebody had told me that when I was at school. Because it is so easy to give up and think you're a bit rubbish at something.

KA Oh, yeah.

JF Yeah, well that's good. And it's also good to hear about the success, but also, all the kind of failure that came before it, if you like.

KA Yeah.

JF So, will you give us a reading from *The Crossover*...

KA Sure, sure.

JF ...which has these twin boys at the heart of it, doesn't it?

KA Yeah. This is, I'm going to read from *The Crossover* graphic novel, which is, it comes out, it's available in March, I believe. It's a new edition of the book, with a lot of cool illustrations. So I'll read about Josh and JB, twin brothers. You can tell them apart, because Josh has long hair, and JB has no hair. And one day, this happens.

The Bet Part One. We're down by seven at half time, trouble owns our faces, but my coach isn't worried, says, we haven't found our rhythm yet. And then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, my best friend, Vondy, starts dancing the snake. Only, he looks like a seal. And then, Coach blasts his favourite dance music, and before you know it, we're all doing the cha-cha slide. JB high-fives me with a familiar look, you want to bet, don't you, I ask – yep, he says, and then he touches my hair. If my hair were a tree, I'd climb it, I'd kneel down beneath and enshrine it, I'd treat it like gold, and then mine it. Each day before school, I unwind it. And right before games, I entwine it. These locks on my head, I designed it. And one last thing, if you don't mind it, that bet you just made, I decline it.

The Bet Part Two. If I lose the bet, you want to, what? If the score gets tied, he says, if it comes down to the last shot, he says, if I get the ball, he says, I get to cut off all your hair. Sure, I say, you can cut my locks off, but if I win the bet, you have to walk around with no pants, no underwear tomorrow, during lunch. Okay, okay, okay, how about if you lose, I'll cut one lock, and if you win, I will moon that group of six-graders that sit near our table at lunch. And even though I used to

be one of those nerdy six-graders, and even though I love my hair the way my dad loves Krispy-Kreme donuts, and even though I don't want us to lose this game, odds are, this is one of my brother's legendary bets that I'll win. Because that's a lot of ifs. The game is tied, when JB's soft jumper sails, tick through the air, tock, the crowd steals tick, mouths drop, tock. And when his last second shot, tick, hits on net, tock, the clock stops, the gym explodes. It's hard bleachers empty, and my head aches. After the game, JB cackles like a crow, he walks up to me, holds his hands out, so I can see the scissors from Coach's desk smiling at me, their steel blades sharp and ready. I love this game like winter loves snow, even though I spent the final quarter in foul trouble, JB was on fire, and we won, and I lost the bet.

Time to pay up, Filthy, JB says, waving the scissors in the air like a flag. My team-mates gather around to salute. Filthy, Filthy, Filthy.

Aud Filthy, Filthy, Filthy

KA He opens the scissors, grabs my hair to slash a strand. I don't hear my golden lock hit the floor, but I do hear the sound of calamity, when Vondy hollers, oh, snap. Calamity. An unexpected, undesirable, often physically injurious event. As in, if my brother hadn't been acting so silly, and playing around, he would have cut lock instead of five, and avoided this calamity. As in the huge bald patch on the side of my head, is a dreadful calamity. As in, after the game, my mother almost has a fit when she sees my hair. What a calamity, she says, shaking her head, and telling my dad to take me to the barbershop on Saturday to have the rest of it cut off.

Aud [Applause].

JF I think that's the first time, we've heard of mike drops, but that's the first time we've heard a book drop on Authors Live. Kwame Alexander, that was superb.

KA Thank you.

JF We've talked about your relationship with the illustrator with The Undefeated, Kadir Nelson. What's it been like with the graphic novel, what's the process been like?

KA The graphic novel, I had a lot of input with it.

JF Poor illustrator.

KA The illustrator, his name was...

JF Sorry.

KA ...he's dynamic. His name is Dawud, he lives in Atlanta, Georgia. And he just did a bang-up job, I mean, just the illustrations just really bring it to life. But we worked hand-in-hand, yeah.

JF Yeah, no, it's superb. And also, just the whole idea of, you know, the kind of verse novel seeming alien to publishers earlier on. But actually, it's the hearing it, it zings, it comes alive when you're reading it aloud. And I can imagine readers, reading it aloud. What's the writing process like for you? Because although we talked about it being, you know, maybe, it's less densely packed with words than other novels. That doesn't necessarily mean it's easier for you, does it?

KA It's harder. Because here's the thing, you're trying to say the same amount, you're trying to give the same amount of information, the same amount of inspiration. You're trying to sort of talk about, you're trying to give a beginning, a middle, and an end. I still have to paint a picture for you as the reader, I still have to engage you, I still want you to, like, turn the page and can't wait.

JF Yeah.

KA So you have to do the same amount of work as a novelist would do, you just can't do it with as many words. I like to say, novelists use a whole lot of words to say very little.

JF I love it.

KA And we poets say a whole lot in very few words. You can quote me on that.

Aud [Laughing].

KA Kwame Alexander said it.

JF Tell us more about the boys, then, the twins. Because we heard that name, Filthy, tell us about the nickname that Josh has?

KA Josh Bell is my name, but Filthy McNasty is my claim to fame. Folks call me that because my game's the claim, so downright dirty it'll put you to...

Aud Shame.

- KA My hair is long, my height is tall, see, I'm the next Kev Durant, LeBron, and Chris Paul. Remember the greats, my dad likes to gloat: I balled with Magic and the Goat. But tricks are for kids, I reply. Don't need your pets my game's so...
- Aud Fly.
- KA Mom says, Your dad's old school, like an ol' Chevette. You're fresh and new, like a red Corvette. Your game so sweet, it's a crêpes suzette. Each time you play it's all...
- Aud Net.
- KA If anyone else called me fresh and sweet, I'd burn mad as a flame. But I know she's only talking about my game. See, when I play ball, I'm on fire. When I shoot, I inspire. The hoop's for sale, and I'm the...buyer. There you go.
- JF I think that deserves another round of applause, go on, go on.
- Aud [Applause].
- JF This is becoming like the Oprah Winfrey show...
- KA Yeah.
- JF ...lots of applause. But again, so interesting to hear you actually, the rhythm of that. Because again, I'm wondering, just give us a little insight into the process of writing. Because, you know, you're not just writing words, but there's the whole, the rhythm. So does that, though, I'm not asking if it makes it easier, but it's just an intrinsic part of the process, I guess, for you?
- KA Well I've been doing it, this is, The Undefeated is my 33rd book, so I've been doing it for a while. But, no, it's not easier. Imagine that, you have to...poetry is the right words, in the right order. So you're not just putting down words, you're choosing the right words that are going to work, and then those words have to be in the correct order. And then you're getting rid of the words that don't need to be there. And then in addition to that, you've got to have your sima...similes, right? And you got to have your meta...
- Aud ...phors.
- KA Say it like you mean it, meta...
- Aud ...phors.
- KA You got to have your metaphors, and you got to have your alliter...

Aud ...ations.

KA And you got to have your hyper...

Aud ...boles.

KA I mean, you got to have all these things...

JF They're good.

KA ...that you're thinking about. And it's still a novel, so you're still trying to tell a sto...

Aud ...ry.

KA ...with a beginning, middle, and...

Aud ...end.

KA So you're still doing all this stuff, and you're only using a very few words to do that. It's the hardest thing to do, but it's easy for me because I'm a genius.

JF Yeah.

Aud [Laughing].

JF And the whole idea of poetry, you said, earlier on, the publishers saying, boys aren't interested in poetry. But certainly in Scotland, and I know, clearly in America, there's a really vibrant spoken word scene, and it's very cool. And you can explore all sorts of issues.

KA Sure.

JF When you perform, I have a smile on my face, but you go to dark places, you're dealing with real-life issues.

KA Absolutely. I mean, there's some really incredible poets that are writing amazing novels. Elizabeth Acevedo, in the UK, Dean Atta. There's just, I think, here's a thing, I think poetry is a way that is, it's unintimidating to the reader, because it's so much white space on the page.

JF Yeah.

KA And it's a language that we're already sort of speaking in, it's short, it's concise, it's rhythmic. I think, ultimately, poetry can be, sort of, a bridge, to get young people to appreciate literature, and become engaged with it, in a really profound way.

- JF Yeah. And also, engage with your own language, whether that's slang, or words to do with sport. But also in Scotland, and in fact at our last event, we were talking about Scots and Gaelic. We've got such rich words.
- KA Yes.
- JF And they sound so good.
- KA Absolutely.
- JF So that's another way to explore that language, through rhythm, yes.
- KA Are we about to write a poem together, right now?
- JF Are we? I'm too scared of that challenge.
- KA Uh-oh, don't put me on the...
- JF I'm too scared of that challenge.
- KA You can do it.
- JF Right now, what we're going to do is hear from a couple of our audience members from Boclair Academy, who have a couple of questions for you, Kwame.
- KA Alright.
- JF And I think the first one we're going to hear from is from the smiling Calum. Hi, Calum.
- C Have you found visiting UK schools different to American schools?
- KA Absolutely, oh my gosh. So, I did a one-week tour of the UK. I want to say, my publishers, Anderson, and my awesome publicist, Paul Black, we did London, and then we...where else did we go, it wasn't Manchester. Oh my gosh, what was it? Anyway, I did a tour of the UK for a week. And I must've visited about ten schools, and Calum, every school I went to, the students were so, like, disciplined, and they pretty much sat like that. Which you, you all are probably doing out there. And so, as you can tell, I'm kind of an in your face sort of person, and when I go to schools in the US, I'm like, really just out there doing my thing, and the kids are just like, yeah, whoa. It was completely different in the UK, because everybody was like...
- Aud [Laughing].

KA And I was like, no, I need you all to...so let's do an experiment, okay. Let's pretend like your teachers didn't tell you to just...you know, alright, just go for it, alright, I need you all to be a part of this. A quick shoulder shake, a flick I fake, number 28 is way past late. He's reading me like a book, but I turn the page and watch him look, which can only mean I got him shook. His feet are the bank, and I'm the...

Aud Crook.

KA ...crook. Breaking, breaking, breaking, take him to the left, now he's took. Number 14 joins in, how he's on the...

Aud Hook.

KA ...hook. I got two in my kitchen I'm fixing to...

Aud Cook.

KA ...cook. Prepping my meal, ready for glass, nobody expecting Kwame to pass. I see Kwame under the hoof, so I serve him up my Ali...

Aud Hook.

KA ...hook. Yeah, you just got to work on it.

Aud [Applause].

JF We have another...that was great...have another rest while Fatima...hi Fatima...gives us her question for you, Kwame.

F Can you recommend some other poets that you admire?

KA Yeah. Elizabeth Acevedo, Dean Atta, Nicky Grimes. One of my favourite authors, and favourite poems, and she's amazing. And I'm sure you all have read her book, Sarah Crossan. Sarah Crossan, read some Sarah Crossan. Say her name.

Aud Sarah Crossan.

KA Say it like you mean it.

Aud Sarah Crossan.

KA Read some Sarah Crossan, people.

JF You're quite bossy, aren't you?

- KA Well, I'm kind of bossy, yeah, I guess I am.
- JF No, it's good, it's good. And I know that we have, certainly in the room with us, we have a teacher, and a librarian.
- KA Yes.
- JF So they'll be making notes of those names, I'm sure.
- KA Speaking of bossy, we have teachers and librarians, here.
- JF No, I didn't mean that.
- Aud [Laughing].
- JF I'm the bossiest of the lot.
- KA I'll never be invited back, sorry.
- Aud [Laughing].
- JF Can we wave to the camera, and wave to Hazelhead Academy in Aberdeen, hi.
- KA Hazelhead, shout out.
- JF Hazelhead. I've just shouted out, 'cause I'm now just obeying you literally, I obey Kwame. They're watching with almost one hundred S1 pupils.
- KA Lovely.
- JF Round of applause for Hazelhead.
- Aud [Applause].
- JF Thank you very much indeed. We have a question from Smithycroft Secondary on Twitter. Hi, Smithycroft, thanks for watching, hi Smithycroft. How do sports influence your own life?
- KA How do sports influence my own life? Again, I think sports are a great metaphor, for our lives. My daughter plays basketball, she's really tall.
- JF I was going to say, she'll be much taller than me.
- KA She's the tallest person in the League.
- JF Wow.

KA And so I told her, I said, when you're out there, just put your hands up. Nobody can get a shot over you, and you can shoot over everybody. So, she, so I'm very much involved in her basketball life, on a personal level, that's really important to me.

JF Yeah. We don't have too much time, because I can't believe, we're hurtling towards the end of our event.

KA That quick, it's over?

JF I know, not quite, another question...

KA No.

JF ...from Smithycroft, but you'll have to be quite brief.

KA Alright.

JF It's a biggy, though. What message would you give to aspiring writers?

KA I'd give you three things. Number one, read. Read everything you get your hands on. The way we become better writers, is by reading. Number two, you've probably never heard this before, I'd say read.

Aud [Laughing].

KA Read as many books as you can, read all kinds of genres. And number three, your teachers are probably not going to want to hear this – read.

JF There you go, thank you. And I also just wanted to say, hi, to Hannah on Twitter, who got in touch with a question very similar to Fatima's, so I hope you got a great answer, there. That's it, we're almost at the end, Kwame.

KA Yes, yes.

JF It's been fantastic.

KA It's been grand.

JF Can we have a massive round of applause. Be unrestrained, don't be British and Scottish, go for it, cheering.

KA Can you do it?

JF After three, one, two, three.

Aud [Applause].

KA Thank you.

JF Love it, love it. Kwame, thank you so much.

KA Thank you so much.

JF It's been great having you here in Glasgow, and I hope you have time to explore the city.

KA Yes, indeed.

JF Today's event will be available to watch again, so if you're from Boclair Academy, and like, I'd like to see myself now, you can do that very soon. And indeed, you might want to tell friends and family to watch. And wherever you are watching again, you can see it again, and just tell other people. And not only that, and we have so many other Authors Live events that you can watch, it's an incredible archive, really good, to dip into.

You can go to that at scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive. And we have lots, because we've been doing it for ten years, how is that possible. So we'll be celebrating ten years of Authors Live with writers, Michael Rosen, and Tanya Roberts, for our next event. Now, that is for primary schools, but here's the thing, especially Michael Rosen's poetry, it's so good, so powerful, and very funny, that actually, I think it appeals to all ages, so don't miss that. So we'll see you again soon for more Authors Live, keep an eye on the Scottish Book Trust website for event announcements. But from all of us here, from Boclair Academy, me, Janice Forsyth, and most importantly, Kwame Alexander, bye, bye, thank you very much.

Aud [Applause].