

# BritLit Update

## Iberian Coast to Coast WordFest

February was a veritable feast of word-borne pleasures for schools in Portugal and Spain, thanks to the efforts of dub poet Levi Tafari, who was in Portugal in the middle of the month, and author Louise Cooper, who was in Catalonia at the end of it.

Starting in the middle of the Atlantic, and ending on the shores of the Mediterranean, the two tours between them engaged over two thousand teenagers in hours of educational activity, which the students found both fun and inspirational. So did the performers!

Levi started his tour on the island of Madeira, visiting two secondary schools in Funchal, before flying off to the mainland and making his first visit to Beja. The tour took him on to Torres Novas and then to Porto, Barcelos, Castelo de Maia and Braga. At every stop Levi was impressed by the involvement of the youngsters in his poetry performances and, as usual, they were hypnotised by his words and rhythms, and endorsed his messages of racial tolerance and environmental concern enthusiastically.



Levi was very moved by a young lad who came up to him after one performance and wanted to shake his hand and apologise for what he, the lad, said he had been thinking. Levi never knew what the secret thoughts of the young man had been, but clearly this encounter with a dub poet had had a dramatic and positive effect and the student went away after a hug from Levi, dazed, happy and inspired.

This was Louise Cooper's first BritLit tour, and the Barcelona based BritLit team led by Jo Dossetor and Lesley Denham were thrilled with having persuaded her onto a plane to get there – a form of transport she usually goes out of her way to avoid. The tour was planned to wrap around the annual Catalan teachers' association (APAC) convention and took in a series of schools and two sessions at the conference.

Right from the start Louise proved to be a huge hit with the students and teachers. In every case the students had been well prepared and they performed for Louise as much as she performed for them. The students had clearly got inside some of her stories, and some had even rewritten some of her characters into stories of their own, challenging Louise to identify her own creations! In an unexpected turn of events Louise, who was accompanied by husband Cas for the tour, found they were teaching the students English sea shanties, and were soon exchanging sea-farers songs with the Catalans – a project which looks as if it will continue to develop. Another fine example of the non-linear nature of the BritLit project!



Louise worked with Fitch O'Connell at the APAC Convention, where they placed her work within the project and demonstrated a number of ways of encouraging students to 'own' some of her stories.

# New Kit Launched

There's a new kid on the block, "grazing the alleys downtown, not doing badly." He's a bit of strange one, really, clearly homeless and a bit suspicious of everyone around him. But he finds an old man he quite likes so he "stayed with the old guy for a while and we got along. I'd root a bit, he'd root a bit. And we'd move elsewhere." Of course, nothing is quite as it seems, and high drama leads to an act of cunning revenge.

The new kit, the third and last of the NILE kits started last summer in Norwich will shortly be available on the web page. It was written by **Luísa Pinho, Maria Teresa Maurichi, Marina Dias Cristobal, Serena**

**Fuitem** and **Teresa Maria Garcia**, teachers from Portugal, Spain and Italy, under the tutelage of Alan Pulverness and Claudia Ferradas, and edited by Fitch O'Connell.

It contains the complete text, of course, with an audio recording of the author reading the story (for the purists amongst you, the version we use is the earliest one, not the one published in *'Rover's Tales'*). It also contains the obligatory 'pre-reading' section, together with 'context', 'word work' and 'after reading' sections plus, naturally, a comprehensive set of teacher's notes and key.

# Two More in the Pipeline

Melvin Burgess is the author of the stories upon which the final two BritLit kits are based. They are likely to be ready some time after the project has officially finished at the end of March, with our first kit based on a full length novel planned to be first.

'Billy Elliot' was a successful film, upon which Melvin Burgess based his popular novel. The challenge of creating a kit based on such a large work has been quite taxing, and teacher Kristin Campainha has been working on this project for some six months. The plan is for Kristin and Fitch O'Connell to launch the new kit at the APPI conference at the end of April in Lisbon.

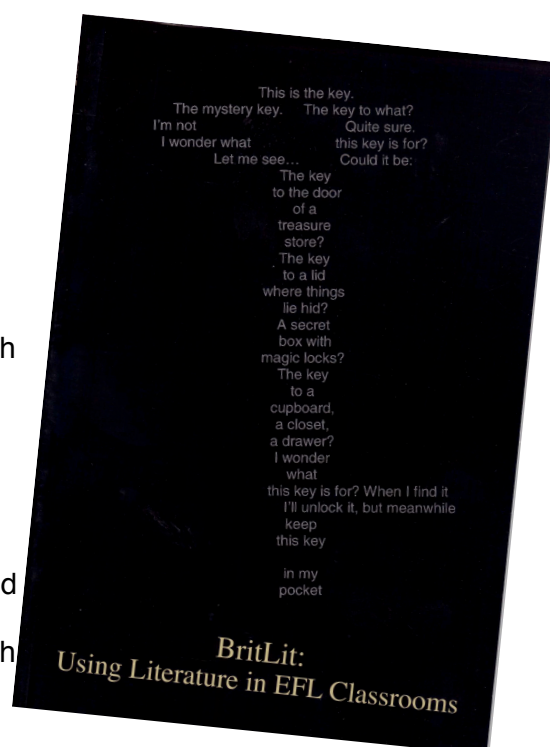
The other Burgess-based kit is 'Coming Home', a short story concerning some troubling information that a 14 year old obtains about his mother, and how he handles – or mishandles – the responsibility. This, too, is a challenging new approach, not because of the length of the story, but because of the mixed media approach that is adopted to present it. BritLit commissioned Melvin Burgess to rewrite parts of the original story so that they could be presented as video and audio clips, interwoven into the narrative text. The result will be one of the most exciting offerings that BritLit has created, and will probably be the last of the current project.

# Coming Soon

- British born writer with Punjabi roots, Bali Rai, will be visiting Italy between March 9 and 13 (Naples, Trento and Milan). See the programme here: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/italy-english-britlit-balirai.htm>
- Ron Butlin, BritLit author who was made 'Makar' or poet laureate for Edinburgh last year, is to be made an Honorary Fellow of Edinburgh University in March.
- Looking further ahead, sublime poet Patience Agbabi has agreed to take part in the APPI teachers' conference in Lisbon at the end of April, as has top BritLit trainer Claudia Ferradas.

# APAC 'Black Book' Published

The APAC Convention in Barcelona also saw the publication of what has become known as the 'Black Book' – a monograph compiled from articles by three BritLit authors (Louise Cooper, Ron Butlin and Romesh Gunesequera), two Catalan BritLit teachers (Isabel Monte and Laura Nogués), essays on using literature and books in ELT classrooms by Sandie Mourão and Claudia Ferradas, and brief overview of the project by Fitch O'Connell plus extracts from three BritLit kits. The book was edited by Neus Figueras and Lesley Denham. Copies were sent to all APAC members, and were made available at the convention and further copies might be available, depending on stock, through [brit.lit@pt.britishcouncil.org](mailto:brit.lit@pt.britishcouncil.org).



## The End of the Road?

Some readers will already have heard that the bid by the BritLit team to take the project to the next stage – something we called 'World Voices' – has not been successful in obtaining support from the British Council in London. This, combined with the effective end of funding for the original BritLit project at the end of this March, means that it is hard to predict what the future holds in store. Could it be that we are looking at the end of the road as far as the project goes?

You might think that we are downhearted at the prospect of no funding or support for continuing our work, but you would be wrong. Instead we see this as an opportunity to explore new directions and form new partnerships and alliances. We know that the work of the project has been enthusiastically received by thousands of teachers, and has been used by (literally) millions of students. From our

point of view we are just at the beginning of our work: we have found a voice, we have worked out the pedagogy and we have developed a training programme. Now is the time to launch the project big time and resolve some of the important issues that the project has identified that still require work: an effective assessment process, inter-cultural dialogue, inclusion in CLIL programmes and transference of skills to other language learning arenas.

So, rather than see us sit down quietly in the corner and surrender, you should expect us to spend the next few months taking up the challenge and reorganising ourselves to explore new directions and new ways of working.

There will be one more edition of 'Update' before the project ends. This will appear on April 1<sup>st</sup>, not as a joke, but because that is when we will explain how only fools will think we are finished!

**Final CDROM available soon containing all the BritLit kits up to March 2009: get your copy sent to you, free, by sending us your postal address: it really is that simple.**

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