The Speakers: Bios

John Agard, acclaimed poet, playwright, performer and children’s writer, is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry (2012). Born in Guyana, he later moved to Britain where he has lived since 1977 with his wife, Grace Nichols. His poems cover a wide range of subjects that include ancient mythology, history, Caribbean folktales, politics and environmental issues. He is known to children all across the UK for poems like “Half Caste” and “Checking Out Me History”, which have been featured in the AQA English GCSE anthology since 2002.

Grace Nichols, born and educated in Guyana, has written many books for both adults and children. Her first collection of poetry, 'I Is A Long-Memoried Woman' won the 1983 Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Among her other books are the popular, 'The Fat Black Woman’s Poems' and 'Sunris', which won the 1996 Guyana Poetry Prize. She is among the poets on the current GCSE syllabus and received the Cholmondeley Award in 2001. She has also written a novel, 'Whole of a Morning Sky' published by Virago. Her latest book is, 'The Insomnia Poems'.


Joyce Trotman was born in Georgetown in 1927. In 1955, after working as a primary school teacher, she travelled to England where she obtained a degree in Arts from London University and a Certificate in Education at the University of Durham. Returning to Guyana in 1958, she was appointed a Senior Lecturer in English at the Government Training College and went on to become a Research Fellow for the University of Guyana. She returned to England in 1972 and taught at the Scott Lidgett Boys’ Comprehensive School. She obtained a M. Litt (Linguistics) from the University of Lancaster and was called to the Bar in 1984 on completion of part-time studies in law. Joyce is the author of Proverbs of Guyana Explained.

Tiffany Sweeney presented the first ever BBC World News report from Guyana in 2018 and is as confident on camera as she is in her reporting. Tiffany is a master of explaining why stories matter to you. Her reports have featured on the BBC’s News at Six and Ten and cover topics such as suicide. She’s extremely proud of her Guyanese roots and presented a radio documentary called ‘Grandma, Guyana and Me’ for BBC World Service. The documentary featured Tiffany, her mother, Maureen, and her grandma, Habula. It looked at three generations of women and how migration changed their lives forever.

Alan Christopher Cooper, born in Guyana, moved to the UK in 1981. His passion for the performing arts led him to the stage of the Theatre Guild of Guyana and on tours throughout the Caribbean. In the UK, he has performed in the West End and in the Barbican with the RSC. He played an Elder/preacher in an episode of Casualty on the BBC and obtained parts in Radio plays in Guyana and the UK. He is today renown for his voice and is presently lead singer with the reformed Platters. He enjoys singing various genres from opera to R&B and gospel, a small selection of which will be shared on Mother’s Day. He is the recipient of a number of awards including the Guyana Folk Festival Award for contribution to the Arts in Guyana. Multi-talented, he holds a master’s degree in Engineering, and is currently a Maths Teacher in an Outstanding Girls School in London.