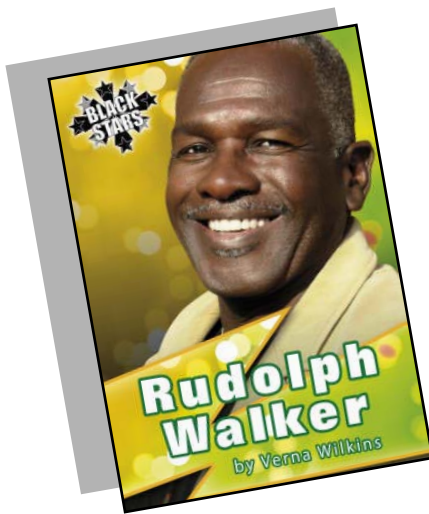
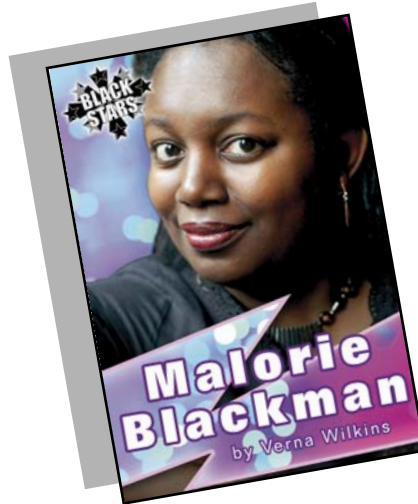
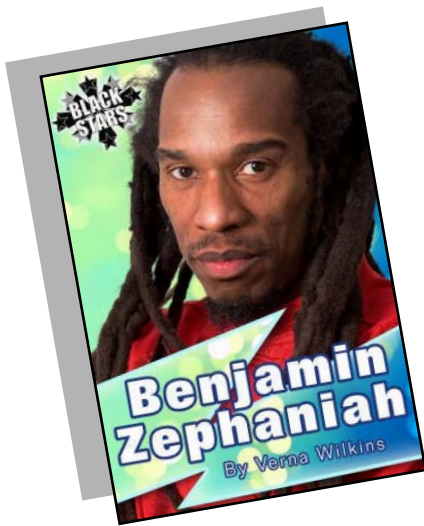


TEACHING GUIDE by NIKKI GAMBLE

**Benjamin Zephaniah  
Malorie Blackman  
Rudolph Walker**



*by Verna Wilkins*

**Tamarind**

ISBN: 978-1848530027

ISBN: 978-1848530010

ISBN: 978-1870516891

**CURRICULUM CONTEXT**

Black Stars is a biographical series featuring prominent black achievers. As such, this series lends itself to a literacy unit on biographical writing. Though, it is possible to include this within Black History month, reading these books should not be restricted to one month in a year. As Verna Wilkins herself says, 'multiculturalism is a way of life not a curriculum subject.'

**THE BOOKS**

These notes are based on three titles from the Tamarind Black Stars series. They are:

Benjamin Zephaniah

Malorie Blackman

Rudolph Walker

The books comprise a range of written form in addition to

**Verna Wilkins** is the founder of Tamarind Books. She is the author of 30 picturebooks and biographies for young people. Her books have featured on National Curriculum and BBC children's television, and been chosen among the Children's Books of the Year. She was born in Grenada and lives in London.



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biographical narrative. For example, the Rudolph Walker title includes extracts from an interview written in question and answer format as well as photographs and captions; the Benjamin Zephaniah title includes examples of his poetry; the Malorie Blackman title includes illustrations and an interview extract.

### TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

#### Display

Prior to teaching set up a stimulus display to engage the children's interest. Some suggestions:

- Black Stars display featuring the three profiled figures, copies of their books, photographs etc
- Biography and autobiography display featuring these books in the context of a wider study of biographical writing
- Black History Month – (note that although this intervention plays an important role in raising the profile of black achievers, this should not be in place of a continuous and sustained approach.
- Favourite writers – featuring the Malorie Blackman and Benjamin Zephaniah titles

#### Something to Talk About

- How have each of the people profiled in this series achieved? Have they had to overcome particular obstacles in order to achieve? Do they share any characteristics?
- What would you most like to achieve? What will you need to do to reach your goals?
- Do you think it is true that you can do anything you want to, providing you work hard at it? Why do you think that?
- Verna Wilkins has called these books a 'profile'. What is a profile? Introduce the term biography. Explain that bio means life and graph means write so biography is literally life story. Ask the children, 'If auto means self, what is an autobiography.'

#### Ideas for Autobiographical and Biographical Writing

What is your earliest memory? How much do you remember? Focus on it for a while in your mind and then write about it in as much detail as you can.

Memories of school are recounted in all of the Black Stars books. Do you remember your first day at school or have you ever had to change school?

What was it like? Write your memories for a chapter in your autobiography.

Pastimes and talents. Rudolph Walker enjoyed flying kites and playing cricket when he was younger. Write a chapter about your favourite pastimes for your autobiography.

What is your most frightening/sad/embarrassing moment? Have you ever told a lie and been found out? How did you feel? Have you ever been told off and didn't think it was justified? How did it feel? Choose one of these and tell a partner your story. After you have shared stories, write your story down.

Look around your home and find a few objects that have a special meaning for you. Write a piece which is divided into sections in which you talk about each of these objects as touchstones for your memories.

Make a 'timeline' of interesting/important events for each year/decade of your life.

The book about Benjamin Zephaniah partially tells his story through poetry. Think about an important event from each year of your life. Write a free verse poem. Each line begins:

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When I was one.....

When I was two.....

'The first time' – try to recall the first time you did something. The first time you went to school; the first time you went to stay somewhere without your parents; the first time you read a book by yourself; the first time you ride a bicycle. Try to remember it as vividly as you can and then write about it.

Imagine a photograph album in which there is a picture of each member of your family. Begin with a description of each imaginary photograph and then write about that person and their role in your life.

Write a biography of your favourite writer. Use the internet and other sources to find out as much as you can.

Write a biography of a member of your family. Interview them

and make notes. Look at the chapter titles in each of the Black Stars books and then write your own chapter plan for your biography.

You might want to include extracts of the interviews as Verna Wilkins has done in the Rudolph Walker book and Malorie Blackman books. Decide whether you want to include illustrations, photographs of a combination of the two.

**Nikki Gamble** is lecturer, writer and education consultant specialising in children's literature, drama and arts education. She taught undergraduate and postgraduate students on primary teacher training programmes for eleven years.

Nikki is Director of Write Away, an organisation that seeks to promote literature and the arts in education. She is currently Associate Consultant at the University Of London, Institute Of Education. Nikki is Congress Director for the IBBY World Congress 2012 and recently elected member of the IBBY Executive Committee.

Recent Publications include Family Fictions (2001) (with Nick Tucker); Exploring Children's Literature (2008) (2nd edit) Writers' Secrets (2008).