

17–25 OCT 2026

Hastings Storytelling Festival

Axel Scheffler

Bev Lee Harling

Dorothy Koomson

Sarah Jane
Morris Trio

Deaf Rave

Children's
Day



FREE
Events for
Under-10s



Bev Lee
Harling



Dorothy
Koomson

Stories
for Adults &
Children



hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

PROGRAMME SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Welcome to Hastings Storytelling Festival 2026

Storytelling for Adults

Experience original tales told through spoken word, music, talks and performance at this year's Hastings Storytelling Festival with an inspiring programme for adults. Highlights include multitalented artist **Bev Lee Harling** with her show 'Things I Know and Things I Don't', a moving blend of story and song. Bestselling author **Dorothy Koomson** appears in conversation to discuss her gripping new thriller *The Quiet Girls*.

At Hastings Museum, poet and performer **Zena Edwards** explores storytelling and environmental

poetics, whilst **Kate Corkery** brings Irish folklore and stories from the other side.

An event at the White Rock Theatre invites audiences to try haptic vests as they listen and dance to an uplifting session from **Sarah Jane Morris and Trio**, before **Deaf Rave** take over with a high-energy drum and bass set transforming vibration into a whole new way of feeling sound.

With thanks to our sponsors, supporters and partners who help to keep the festival thriving and accessible for our community.



Storytelling for Children and Families

Celebrate the theme of Fishing for Stories this October as Hastings Storytelling Festival

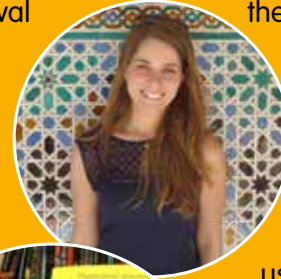
brings imaginative tales to life in schools and public events across our town.

Families can enjoy **Piers Torday's** new story 'Books According to Dog and Owl', meet award winning Syrian author **Nadine Kaadan**, and hear live readings from author **Thomas Taylor**.

Festival Patron Axel Scheffler returns with *Gruffalo Stories* with *Gruffalo Granny* at the White Rock Theatre,

where families can hear him read three much loved *Gruffalo* stories, watch live illustration on stage and meet him at a book signing.

Be sure to join us in the *Gruffalo* themed parade at **Children's Day**, then explore puppetry, music, walkabout performers and not to be missed shows from *CBeebies Pirate Gem* and *Long Nose Puppets*.



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hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

PROGRAMME SUBJECT TO CHANGE

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The Hastings Storytelling Festival, established in 2011, has since become a registered charity and maintains a year-round presence at various events.

Many festival events are free, and all are free for children under the age of 10 to attend.

Each October, the festival also delivers a vibrant schools programme, bringing authors, artists and storytellers directly into classrooms. Working in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, these sessions inspire creativity, confidence and a love of reading through engaging workshops, performances and cultural experiences.

All venues are fully accessible unless otherwise stated.

Volunteer!

Would you like to volunteer at one of our events?

Contact us at:
office@hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

MEET THE PATRONS

Founding Patron, author and illustrator Sir Quentin Blake, has supported the festival since it began. We also have three active Patrons:



Inua Ellams – multi-award-winning poet, playwright, performer and graphic artist. Born in Nigeria and based in London, his work explores themes of displacement, identity and destiny.



Axel Scheffler – internationally acclaimed illustrator of some of the world's best-loved children's books, including *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. Axel supports the festival through events. He illustrated the programme cover.



Thomas Taylor – author of the Eerie-on-Sea mysteries, inspired by a town that bears an uncanny resemblance to Hastings. Thomas regularly works with local schools during the festival.

SATURDAY 17 OCTOBER

The magic of stories with **Piers Torday**, featuring Books According to Dog and Owl

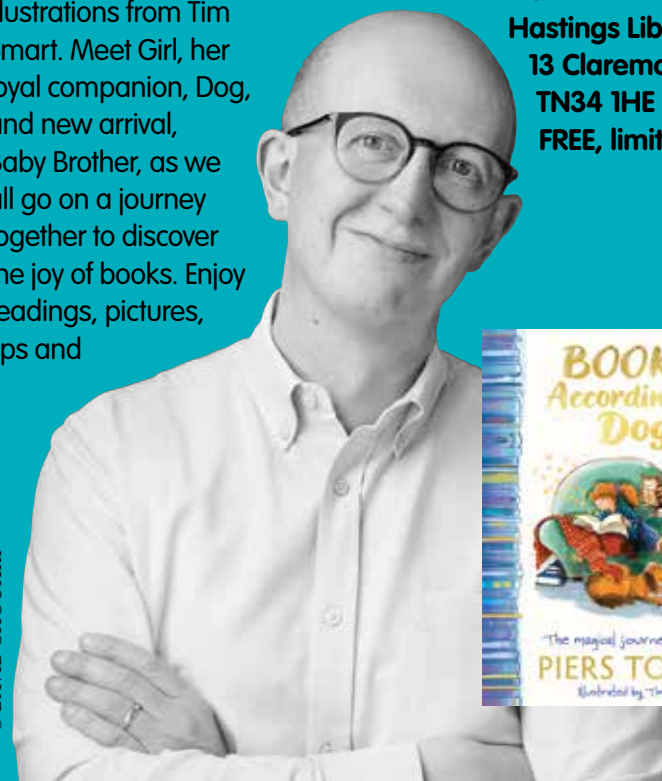


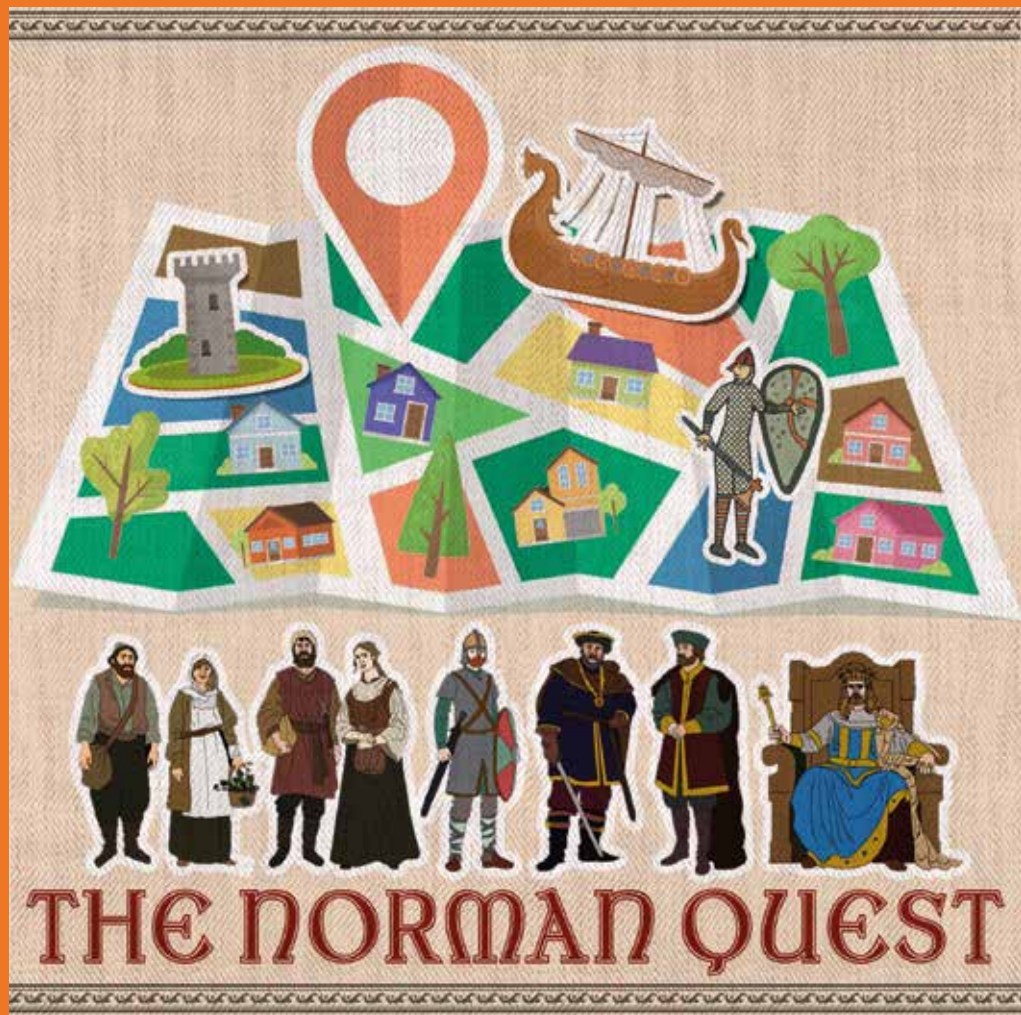
To celebrate the National Year of Reading, award-winning children's author Piers Torday (*The Last Wild*) will be sharing his latest story, *Books According to Dog and Owl*, with stunning illustrations from Tim Smart. Meet Girl, her loyal companion, Dog, and new arrival, Baby Brother, as we all go on a journey together to discover the joy of books. Enjoy readings, pictures, tips and

games to help make reading a magical, special part of your home life. For younger readers and those introducing them to stories!

11am
Hastings Library
13 Claremont
TN34 1HE
FREE, limited space – arrive early

© DAVID SHOUKRY





SUNDAY 18 OCTOBER

Kester Sheridan

The Norman Quest

Step into a digital adventure inspired by the Bayeux Tapestry and the world of the Normans. Developed by artist Kester Sheridan, The Norman Quest is a web-based treasure hunt that invites children and families to explore either the Robsack or Downs Farm neighbourhoods with a smartphone.

Using a simple online map, players follow clues and walk to marked points around the route to search for Norman themed virtual items hidden in the landscape such as shields, helmets, banners and characters. When you arrive at each spot, your phone reveals a virtual item to collect along with questions that bring Norman history to life.

All you need is a smartphone with internet access.

Scan the QR code here to open thenormanquest.co.uk



On the day, you will have a set time to collect as many virtual items as possible before returning to the 18 Hours desk near your community centre to claim your prize.

You can take part at either location and at either of the scheduled start times.

11.30am: outside Downs Farm Community Centre, Crowborough Road TN35 5EE

2.30pm: outside Robsack Centre, Bodiam Drive TN38 9TW

FREE – access to a smartphone is needed to take part

Accessibility: The Norman Quest is all outside.

FAMILY
EVENT



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has a story.
We help discover
what it's worth.**

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2nd "Peacock" edition (1895).
Sold for £700

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unexpected, every object that
comes through our salerooms
has a story to tell

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burstowandhewett.co.uk
Battle, East Sussex

MONDAY 19 OCTOBER DOROTHY KOOMSON – THE QUIET GIRLS



Join bestselling author Dorothy Koomson for an evening exploring her gripping new thriller *The Quiet Girls*, a story of secrets, danger and a prestigious boarding school where a teacher is dead and a pupil is missing. Dorothy is the author of twenty three novels, including the Sunday Times bestseller *The Ice Cream Girls*, which became a hit television drama. In conversation with Festival Trustee Rounaq Uddin, she will discuss the inspiration behind her latest book, her writing process and the themes that shape her work.

7pm
White Rock Studio,
White Rock Theatre,
TN34 1JX
£12
Book online:
hastingsstoryfest.org.uk



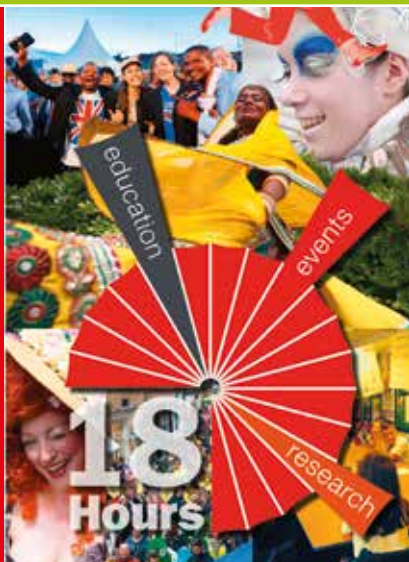


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TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER

KATE CORKERY: STORIES FROM THE OTHER SIDE

As the nights draw in and the season of Samhain approaches, Kate Corkery invites you to gather for an evening of spellbinding stories from Irish folklore. At this time of year, the veil between the human world and the Otherworld is said to be thin, and strange encounters become possible.

Come and let Kate entertain and thrill you with atmospheric tales from the other side.

Kate Corkery is an internationally acclaimed storyteller who has delighted audiences worldwide with Irish myths, legends and folk tales. She has received a Fringe First Award and an Outstanding Performance of the Year award for her work. Born and raised in Cork and now based in London, she brings a rich tradition of Irish storytelling to every performance.



7pm
Horse & Groom,
4 Mercatoria
TN38 0EB
Tickets: £7
Book online:
hastingsstoryfest.org.uk
Limited access:
the entrance to the
Horse & Groom has a
step and very limited
turning space for
wheelchairs.

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER

ZENA EDWARDS

It's been ten years since we last welcomed Zena to Hastings Storytelling Festival – she is a writer, poet performer and educator whose 30 year career explores storytelling, environmental poetics and urban resilience.

Founder of Poets Built It and the Nature Persists Poetry Project, she is a leading EcoPoet whose advocacy includes work with Culture Declares and Julie's Bicycle.



An interdisciplinary artist, she has collaborated with creatives including Theaster Gates, Ackroyd and Harvey and Akram Khan, and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem Performed in 2023.

7pm

**Hastings Museum & Art
Gallery, Bohemia Road
TN34 1ET**

Tickets: £7

**Book online:
hastingsstoryfest.org.uk**



THURSDAY 22 OCTOBER

Thomas Taylor: Eerie-on-Sea

Join festival Patron Thomas Taylor as he reveals the inspiration for Malamander, and his acclaimed seaside mystery series set in Eerie-on-Sea, where monsters lurk beneath the pier, child detectives Herbert Lemon and Violet Parma are on the case, and adventure is never far away. Bring your imagination! And prepare for a magical glimpse into his next book too...

4:30pm

**Sacred Heart Primary School,
Old London Road
Hastings TN35 5NA**

**FREE, limited space
– arrive early**



CHILDREN'S
EVENT



THURSDAY 22 OCTOBER

SARAH JANE MORRIS & TRIO AND DEAF RAVE

This event introduces haptic vests, wearable devices that translate music into vibration, offering audiences an alternative sensory experience and expanding access for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent attendees.

The performances are relaxed to enable audiences to try the haptic vests, move freely, and come and go during the music. A breakout

space will be available throughout for anyone who would like a quieter moment or a creative activity away from the main space.

The night opens with an upbeat set from Sarah Jane Morris known for her powerful voice and dynamic performance style with The Communards, together with her trio Tony Remy, Marcus Bonfanti and Henry Thomas.



EXPLORE HAPTIC TECHNOLOGY WITH DEAF RAVE

After a short interval, Deaf Rave takeover with a high-energy drum and bass set from Deaf DJs including DJ Jeffo

Audiences can dance, explore the technology or simply enjoy the atmosphere.

Recommended for ages 14+, this event welcomes d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent audiences as well as the wider community, offering a rare chance to discover how vibration, rhythm and movement can transform the way we experience sound.

7pm
White Rock Studio,
White Rock Theatre TN34 1JX
£12
Book online:
hastingsstoryfest.org.uk



FRIDAY 23 & SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

BEV LEE HARLING

‘THINGS I KNOW & THINGS I DON’T’

As her father's dementia progressed, Bev Lee Harling gathered tales from his vivid memories of working life in the family foundry in Elephant and Castle. As his words grew less reliable, those stories became more precious, but music held on longer than anything else. He could still remember every word of a Hank Williams song long after he had forgotten what he had eaten for dinner. In his final years, nature kept him grounded, walking each day and finding in the landscape a stillness that nothing else could give him.

Weaving together captured stories, songs and the local landscape of Fairlight, *Things I Know and Things I Don't* asks what we pass down, what we hold onto and what matters when language falls away. At its centre stands a wood and steel tree, part stage set, part playable instrument, part artwork, created with sculptor Leigh Dyer. Funny, intimate and deeply human, it celebrates a person at their most unguarded and finds joy there.

Two nights: Friday & Saturday

7.30pm

Stables Theatre,

The Bourne TN34 3BD

£15

Book online:

hastingsstoryfest.org.uk



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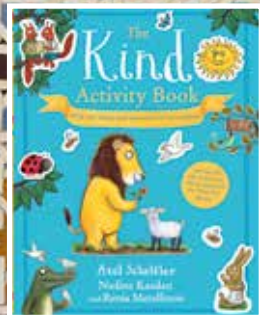
SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

Nadine Kaadan

Join award winning Syrian author and illustrator Nadine Kaadan as she reads her wonderfully funny book 'The Jasmine Sneeze', a magical tale about Haroun the cat, his love of sunny Damascus courtyards and his battle with the jasmine flowers he can't stop sneezing at. After the story, get creative with a drawing activity inspired by her Kind Activity Book,

illustrated by Nadine, Axel Scheffler and Renia Metallinou, exploring how art can help us spread kindness, celebrate our differences and brighten the world.

11am
Hastings Library
13 Claremont
TN34 1HE
FREE, limited space – arrive early



SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

Carnival Arts Family Workshop

Join us for a colourful, family friendly workshop where you can create something bright and imaginative to bring along and show the crowds at our Children's Day parade. All ages are welcome to drop in, make, play and explore materials with our expert guidance. The Isabel Blackman Centre café will be open throughout the session.

10.30am–12.30pm
Isabel Blackman Centre,
Hastings TN34 3AT
FREE, limited space – arrive early



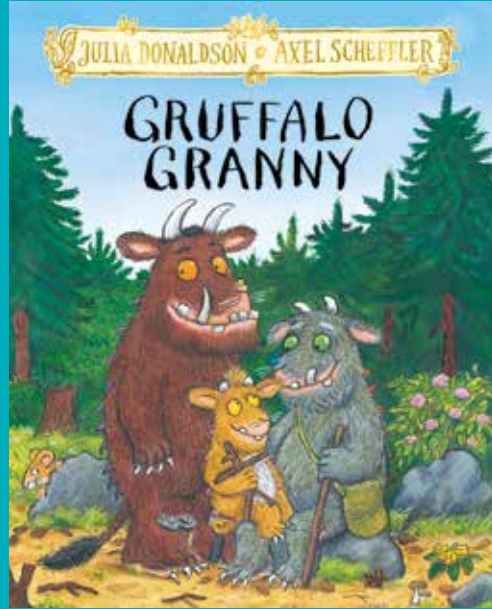
SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

Axel Scheffler



Patron of Hastings Storytelling Festival, Axel Scheffler returns to the White Rock Theatre with a special family event celebrating the world

of *The Gruffalo*. Axel will read ***The Gruffalo***, ***The Gruffalo's Child***, and the brand new ***Gruffalo Granny***, published in 2026.



This warm and joyful session features live illustration and behind the scenes insights into Axel's creative process. Children and families will see the characters come to life on stage as Axel draws them in real time, offering a rare chance to watch one of the world's most celebrated illustrators at work.

GRUFFALO GRANNY © JULIA DONALDSON AND AXEL SCHEFFLER 2026 – MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A perfect afternoon for families and Gruffalo fans of all ages.



The event concludes with a book signing, with titles available to purchase. Axel will be signing books purchased on the day. To help keep the queue moving and make sure everyone has a chance to meet him, he can sign one previously owned book per person. We kindly ask visitors not to bring large numbers of older copies for signing.

2pm – doors open at 1:30pm
White Rock Theatre
Hastings TN34 1JX

Tickets:

ADULT aged 17+: £15
(incl. £4.45 booking fee)

(comes with one free child ticket for children aged 0-10, on request)

CHILDREN aged 11-16: £6 (incl. £3.30 booking fee)

and/or additional children aged 0-10

Book online: hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

12-4pm
The Stade
FREE

SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER 12-4PM

Children's Day & Carnival

The Stade, Rock-a-Nore Road TN34 3DW

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CHILDREN'S
EVENT



Pirate
Gem



Children's Day returns with stories, puppets, music and a Gruffalo themed parade including a special guest invited by Axel Scheffler, alongside Pirate Gem from CBeebies with her Swashbuckling Adventure show.

Long Nose Puppets – 'Penguin', a colourful and musical puppet adventure inspired by Polly Dunbar's book, full of surprises and perfect for families with young children.



Drop in workshop where children can create colourful Gruffalo themed pieces to wear in the parade.

See Donna Fox's costumes in the parade

Look out for Mermaid Tales – magical mermaids on giant seahorses



Axel Scheffler's guest – Tor Freeman – author and illustrator



Alliouagana Pearl – Caribbean storytelling with music, rhymes & activities



Xanthe Gresham Knight – Listen to a swirl of stories and a whirl of tune



Sambalanco and Raven Drummers join us in the carnival parade



Nightingale Music – gentle immersive musical storytelling



If it's wet, don't fret!
Most of our stories are under cover.

Join the Gruffalo-themed Parade at 3pm!



PROGRAMME SUBJECT TO CHANGE

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

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Sat 17 Oct
Piers Torday 11am
featuring Books
according to Dog & Owl
 Hastings Library
 13 Claremont TN34 1HE
 FREE
 arrive early limited space

Sun 18 Oct
The Norman Quest
11.30am: outside
 Downs Farm Community
 Centre TN35 5EE
2.30pm: outside Robsack
 Centre TN38 9TW FREE

Mon 19 Oct
Dorothy Koomson: 7pm
The Quiet Girls
 White Rock Studio, White
 Rock Theatre TN34 1JX £12
 Book: hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

Tue 20 Oct
Kate Corkery: Stories 7pm
from the Other Side
 Horse & Groom,
 4 Mercatoria TN38 0EB £7
 Book: hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

Wed 21 Oct
Zena Edwards 7pm
 Hastings Museum and
 Art Gallery, Bohemia Rd,
 Hastings TN34 1ET
 Book: £7
hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

Thu 22 Oct
Thomas Taylor 4.30pm
 Sacred Heart Catholic
 Primary School,
 Old London Rd, TN35 5NA
 FREE
 arrive early limited space

Thu 22 Oct
Sarah Jane Morris 7pm
& Deaf Rave
 White Rock Studio, White
 Rock Theatre TN34 1JX £12
 Book: hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

Fri 23 & Sat 24 Oct
Bev Lee Harling: 7pm
'Things I know
and things I don't'
 Stables Theatre,
 The Bourne TN34 3BD £15
 Book: hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

Sat 24 Oct
Nadine Kaadan 11am
 Hastings Library
 13 Claremont TN34 1HE
 FREE
 arrive early limited space

Sat 24 Oct
Carnival Arts 10.30am to
Family Workshop 12.30pm
 Isabel Blackman Centre,
 Hastings TN34 3AT
 FREE – arrive early
 limited space

Sat 24 Oct
Axel Scheffler 2pm
 White Rock
 Theatre TN34 1JX
 Ticket prices: see online
hastingsstoryfest.org.uk

Sun 25 Oct
Children's Day 12–4pm
 The Stade, Rock-A-Nore Rd
 TN34 3DW FREE



 Children's event

