



# Willesden Bookshop

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[Steve Adams](#) [1]

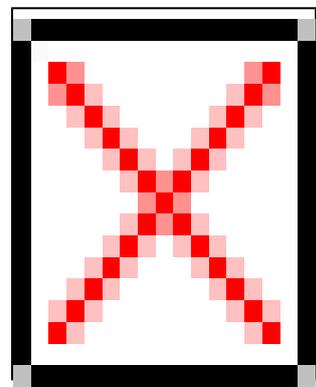
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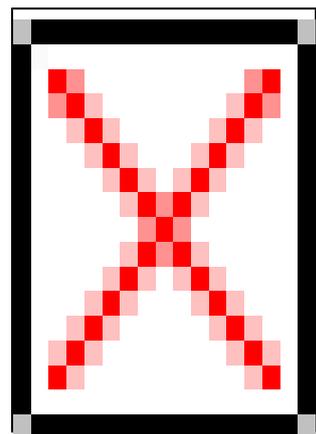
**BfK's Brilliant Children's Bookshops** Willesden Bookshop, London

## BfK's Brilliant Children's Bookshops

### Willesden Bookshop, London N6



The Willesden Bookshop has been in the strange position of reading its own obituaries of late. For the last year the shop in the Willesden Green Library Centre has been operating under threat of closure, its lease having been terminated by Brent Council as part of controversial plans to demolish the building and redevelop the site. But if the Willesden Bookshop has left its old premises, it has not closed. Owner Steve Adams explains.



A steady stream of news items in the local press has charted a growing opposition to our removal: campaign groups, petitions, local meetings and demonstrations from a local community already displaying widespread dismay at the closure of libraries in the borough. An elegiac piece in **The New York Review of Books** by Zadie Smith was followed by a feature in **The Guardian** with the subheading: "Heartbreaking" final chapter for independent bookseller **White Teeth** author praised for its service to its community. This long good-bye to 23 years of bookselling within the Willesden Green Library Centre has been a painful one. My colleague, Cally, walking past the emptied windows last week was drawn to examine various posters stuck to the outside: children's drawings with the message: "We miss our bookshop". Well, we miss our customers, too!

### Expertise in multicultural books

The Willesden Bookshop has left its old home, but has not closed. Realising it might take time to find suitable new

premises, for an interim period we will run our school supply and website business from offices attached to our sister shop in Highgate. Children's books and school supply have always been the heart of our business and over the years we have developed a particular expertise in multicultural books which we showcase on our website at [www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk/](http://www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk/) [3]">[www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk](http://www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk) [4]

'Inclusion' and 'diversity' are buzz words in education and social policy, but have always had resonance for us as booksellers in a part of London which truly lives up to the notion of 'world city' and where parents are quick to ask for books that reflect the identity of their children. Twenty-three years ago it was more of a challenge to meet this need and we imported titles from the USA where publishers had a broader view of their audience. It was satisfying to discover illustrators like Jerry Pinkney or Brian Pinkney and picture books like **Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt** and its sequel **Under the Quilt of Night** by Deborah Hopkinson with their stunning paintings by James Ransome. There has always been a strong local demand for books reflecting children of an African or Caribbean heritage, but for us it was never a question of finding books with images of any one specific ethnicity: 130 different languages are spoken in Brent schools, so finding books that celebrate diversity and engender respect for difference was equally important.

Too many abstractions: what this means in practice is that we delight in finding and promoting unusual books like: **My Librarian is a Camel** ? author Margriet Ruess ? a lovely photographic essay celebrating books, readers and the many curious ways in which the two are brought together by the dedication of librarians in remote parts of the world; camels, donkeys, boats ? even wheelbarrows ? are sometimes the means of uniting child and book! We have tried to put together collections of books that show the inter-connection of cultures: for example, there are currently 25 versions of Cinderella on our website, ranging from the scary **Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave**, a Russian folktale, to **Gift of the Crocodile**, an Indonesian story. We have collections of Anansi and Trickster Tales; cultural variants of traditional tales, or the examples of Quilt Stories from different parts of the world. We have sections on Black History and Heroic Lives, but also on Eastern Europe and Poland, in particular.

In recent years British publishers have been more adventurous in the promotion of multicultural titles and we import fewer titles from the USA. Publishers such as Frances Lincoln and Tamarind are always of interest (but we remain puzzled by the absence of contemporary images of children of British Asian background in picture book fiction from mainstream publishers). Of new authors, a recent favourite is Atinuke, whose chapter books for younger children are published by Walker. Her latest two story collections featuring Oluwalase Babtunde Benson ? or No. 1 Car-Spotter, as the young boy is known to all in his small African village ? make us laugh out loud and deserve to be better known.

Of course we have also catered for devotees of popular series such as **Diary of a Wimpy Kid** or Lemony Snicket's **Series of Unfortunate Events** and well-known authors such as Jacqueline Wilson and Michael Morpurgo are well represented, but one of the advantages of having a strong school supply business has been that we have had the confidence to stock a much wider range of titles. So many requests from teachers for books around particular themes or places have helped us build up a wide knowledge: we regularly send off collections on topics ranging from the Olympics to Alternative Families, Big Books, Wordless Books or Picture Books for Older Readers (in this last category, Shaun Tan and Chris Van Allsburg are huge favourites with children and teachers!)

So, reports of our demise are premature. We are busily transforming our spacious office attached to the Highgate Bookshop into an outpost of Willesden, a temporary showroom for our multicultural stock and base to process our school orders ? until such time as we can return to home territory, perhaps even to a space in the rebuilt Library Centre.

Willesden Bookshop c/o 9 Highgate High Street, London N6 5JR; tel: 020 8348 0579

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