

The bestselling author who faced 82 rejections

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Prolific: Malorie Blackman has written more than 70 books.

Is hope our greatest need? Malorie Blackman overcame life-threatening illness, homelessness and rejection to become a beloved novelist. She believes that hope is the spark to success.

Malorie Blackman is one of Britain's greatest writers for children and young adults. Yet her path to glory was long and hard.

Blackman was born in South London. Her parents had moved from **Barbados**.

As a child she faced racist abuse at school. She remembers being told to "go back to where you came from".

Her family was **evicted** when she was 13. They lived in a rat-infested homeless shelter. Books were her escape.

She wanted to become an English teacher. Yet a careers advisor told her "Black people don't become English teachers".

Blackman also had to overcome illness. She suffers from **sickle cell disease**. After it caused her to collapse, she overheard a doctor say: "She's going to be dead before she's 30".¹

Blackman decided to make every day count. She began writing. It was not easy: she received 82 rejection letters. But she kept trying. "If you hope things can be better," she says, "that's when you try and make things better."

Her hope paid off. Throughout the 90s she released a string of bestselling novels. *Hackers* (1992) explored computer hacking. *Whizzwig* (1995) starred a wish-granting alien. And *Pig-Heart Boy* (1997) tracked the prejudice faced by a teenager saved by an organ transplant.

As a child Blackman found almost no stories featuring Black heroes. She wanted to change this. In 2001 she published *Noughts & Crosses*. It imagined a society where the powerful Black Crosses rule over the White Noughts.

Blackman has won numerous honours, including a **Bafta** and an **OBE**. And she has some famous fans. **Stormzy** once rapped: "I'm Malorie Blackman the way I sell books".

Inspiring children is Blackman's passion. "If I have served any purpose on this planet, I think — I hope — it's been to switch a few people on to reading and maybe even turn a few people into writers as well".

Is hope our greatest need?

Positive thinking

1. She is now 61, having lived over twice as long as the doctor predicted.

Some people say

"Three grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for."

Joseph Addison (1672 – 1719), English essayist, playwright and politician

"Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man."

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), German philosopher and cultural critic

Empty heading

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Has a book ever impacted how you think about the world? What was it and how did it affect you?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: What is the children's laureate and who else has held the role? How many books has Blackman sold?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - The article calls Blackman "one of Britain's greatest writers for children and young adults." Can you find evidence to back up this claim?

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You have the chance to interview Blackman. What five questions would you ask her?

5. Express

What do others believe? - Split into pairs. Try to convince your partner to read one of your favourite books.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Write a blurb for a novel that combines a modern-day issue with fantasy elements.

Yes: Hope can have a powerful effect on our lives. Look at the placebo effect, where people recover from sickness despite being given a fake pill or treatment. Living without hope can lead us to despair.

No: A need is something that is essential for our lives. And although hope is very important for our happiness, we can live without it. Our greatest needs are physical ones: food, water and shelter.

Or... Hope is a very powerful thing. But it must be backed up with real possibility of change. It can lead to unrealistic expectations. A hope defeated can be more devastating than no hope at all.

Glossary

Barbados - An island nation in the Caribbean. Most of its inhabitants are the descendants of slaves who were traded under British rule.

Evicted - Forced to leave a property, usually your home.

Sickle cell disease - A group of inherent disorders that cause unusually shaped red blood cells in sufferers.

BAFTA - An award given at the British Academy Film Awards ceremony.

OBE - The Order of the British Empire, a lesser honour than a CBE.

Stormzy - A British rapper and songwriter.