

Catherine Waithe

■ Biography

Place of birth: Dominica

Date of arrival in Bristol: 1962

Catherine Waithe was born on the island of Dominica in the Caribbean. She was three years old when her parents came to England, leaving her and her sister to live with their Aunt Caroline, who was half Carib. Caroline was very active in the community and committed to helping others, such as lepers and elderly people. She was a baker and would give food to Carib people in the market. She was a good role model and Catherine said that she saw through the class and colour barriers.



Catherine Waithe
Photo courtesy of Paul Bullivant & Tony Gill

Catherine came to England in 1962 and lived in City Road in St.Pauls. Her father was the Chair of the Dominican Association, and people came to him for help and advice with letters etc. Catherine experienced racism at school where, for example, one teacher called her a “darkie pet”. Later she applied to work in a bank in Corn Street but she remembers that the interviewer was surprised when a Black person turned up, and she didn’t get the job.

Education was always very important to her family and she was encouraged to take her ‘A’ levels at South Bristol College and Brunel College as a part time student. She applied to Bristol Polytechnic, which is now the University of the West of England (UWE) and did a degree. She also trained to be a student counsellor at Bristol University gaining an advanced diploma in Social Administration and a Master’s Degree in Gender and Social Policy and worked with adults and young people.

She felt that education was the key to change, and became a voluntary tutor. She taught a Carib group at St. Werburgh’s Community Centre and some Vietnamese Boat people in 1981 when they came to Bristol. This made her think about her own language, as her parents spoke French Creole at home, around her she heard Bristolian English and Jamaican Creole but at school she had to write standard English.

When she got a paid job, the first thing she did was set up a study skills course at St. Paul's Parish Centre. Her commitment to education has meant she has also been a governor at St. Werburgh's Nursery School, Fairfield School and at the University of the West of England and now she is a member of the council who run Bristol University.

In 1981, Catherine and her friends started a Black Women's Group and they set up one of the first supplementary schools for children in Bristol called Buktu (a special Saturday school for children to learn about their heritage). This was very well known in the community.

In 1985, Catherine and her husband Frank set up a book shop to allow people to read positive things about Black people and their achievements. They chose the name Hummingbird for the shop because it represented something from nature that was recognised throughout the Caribbean. This was opened in Grosvenor Road in St. Paul's and lasted ten years. Catherine's most influential books were by Maya Angelou and Eric Williams.

In 1986, she helped to set up the Newfoundland Employment Centre for local people who needed to find education, training and employment. It is now part of Centre for Employment and Enterprise Development (CEED) in Wilder Street, St. Paul's, which helps Black and minority ethnic people into work and training.



Catherine with her daughter, Nadia
Photo courtesy of Paul Bullivant & Tony Gill

In 2000 she was given a Member of the British Empire Award (MBE). This was given to her by the Queen for her work in education.

Catherine's message comes from her aunt who said:

“ Never allow skin colour to get in the way. Our status in life was not ordained by God. It's an incident of history. ”

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■ Teachers' Background Notes

Catherine Waithe was three when her parents moved from Dominica to England, leaving her and her sister with their Aunt Caroline. Catherine felt she belonged in this community and was cared for and loved. Catherine's father and aunt were half Carib. Europeans took the island from the Caribs in the 15th Century and the Caribs now live on a reservation there. Her aunt was a baker and would give food to Carib people in the market and Catherine remembers her as always helping people.

Her aunt visited lepers and encouraged children to help old people and was Catherine's role model and she learnt from her that people should not live just for themselves. Her aunt saw through the class and colour barriers so when Catherine was upset about leaving Dominica she told her "Never allow skin colour to get in the way. Our status in life was not ordained by God. It's an incident of history".

Catherine became political as a result of incidents she remembers in school in Redfield, Bristol. When children in the playground stared at a Black man crossing the road, a teacher said to them, "Why are you staring at that darkie when we have our own darkie pet here?" She asked another teacher why England had no Black players in their football team. He told her Black people's physiology made them unsuitable for football. However, two famous Black football players, Pele and Eusebio, were considered to be the world's best players. Although exposed to negative images about Black people, Catherine knew they were not true.

Her father was the chair of the Dominican Association. They had parties at their house in City Road and people came to him for help and advice with official letters. As a teenager, remembering the lessons learnt from her aunt, she joined Olive Osborne at St. Werburgh's Community Centre to help elderly people. Uncertain of which career to choose, her father advised her against nursing, as Black women were often pushed into this. The career guidance teacher suggested banking, which pleased her father and she applied to a bank in Corn Street. She remembers that the interviewer was surprised when a Black person turned up and she didn't get the job.

Encouraged to do 'A' levels, she went to South Bristol College and Brunel College as a part time student. She worked at Lamberts in Wilder Street where she managed to change the rule that women were not allowed to wear trousers. When one of the directors said that "West Indian people were only suitable for manual work", Catherine challenged him, and decided to go to college to prove him wrong.

She applied to Bristol Polytechnic and did a Social Science degree. When one of the librarians asked why there were so few Black British students this made Catherine think. While at Bristol Polytechnic she struggled with her written Standard English and went to the Student Counsellor for help. Later she was told, "Because of you we now have a Study Skills Department at the University of the West of England". At Bristol

University, however, she did receive study skills support and trained there to be a student counsellor. This experience made her realise how little Study Skills support children in state schools received. She also did an advanced diploma in Social Administration and a Master's Degree in Gender and Social Policy at Bristol University.

Catherine felt that education was the key to change and became a volunteer tutor. In 1981 the Vietnamese boat people came to Bristol and she helped teach this group and a Caribbean group at St. Werburgh's Community Centre. This made her reflect on her own language experience. At home her parents had spoken French Creole, around her in the community was a working class English dialect and Jamaican Caribbean Creole, and at school she had to be competent in Standard English.

When she got a paid job, the first thing she did was set up a study skills course at St. Paul's Parish Centre. She eventually became a Positive Action Trainer working with women and Black people from 1991. Her commitment to education led her to becoming a governor at St. Werburgh's Nursery, Fairfield School and the University of the West of England, and now she is a member of the council at Bristol University.

In 1986 she read an article, "Careers Don't Just Happen", which inspired her. She was instrumental in initiating the Newfoundland Employment Centre to provide education, training and employment under one roof for local people. Community Education was based there and Richard Branson visited to see a model set-up. It is now incorporated into Centre for Employment and Enterprise Development in Wilder Street St. Paul's.

When Catherine was at university, she and some friends formed the Bristol Black Women's Group, which included Rose Pearson, Deborah John-Wilson, Reena Bahavani, Lola Thompson, Adjoa Andoh, Cam, Lilleith Morrison and others. This group started the Saturday School called Buktu, which continued for ten years.

In 1985, Catherine and her husband, Frank, went to a Black book fair in Lambeth Hall. This sparked something in Catherine and Frank and they set up a bookshop, which allowed people to read positive things about Black people and their achievements. They chose the name Hummingbird for the shop because it represented something from nature that was recognised throughout the Caribbean. It lasted ten years; the last two as a mail order company. The books that most influenced Catherine are *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou and *Columbus to Castro* by Eric Williams. These books informed and politicised her and Frank about issues that were important to them.

In 1992 she trained as a neighbourhood conflict resolution mediator. A year later she did the Alternative to Violence Programme training to work in prisons with inmates with life sentences to help them find alternative ways of working with anger and aggression. In 2000, she was given an MBE for her work in education.

Catherine's message came from her aunt:
"Never allow skin colour to get in the way. Our status in life was not ordained by God. It's an incident of history."

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■ Suggested Activities

These are suggested activities based on Catherine Waithe's biography. The activities in bold print have a detailed lesson plan on following pages. Watch the DVD to see Bristol pupils from Glenfrome Primary and the City Academy interview Black Bristolian Catherine Waithe.

Foundation Stage/ KS1 Activities	KS2 Activities	KS3 Activities
<p>Hummingbird bookshop The hummingbird is a well known bird in the Caribbean. Look at birds, animals and plants of the Caribbean.</p>	<p>Books audit Do books in our classroom reflect diversity? Design and use an audit tool. Discussion on the outcome of audit.</p>	<p>Research work Islands of the Caribbean e.g. Dominica and or early people of the Caribbean e.g. the Caribs. Link with local associations e.g. Dominican Association. (Hist, Geog).</p>
<p>Drama Explore the vocabulary of emotions. Use hall space to express feelings in face, body and movement.</p>	<p>Heroes and Heroines Catherine's most influential books were by Maya Angelou and Eric Williams. Talk about influences and people who have inspired us e.g. Role models, heroes of past/present, local heroes and heroes in books.</p>	<p>Proverbs Read Catherine's aunt's advice. Discussion Collect idioms and family sayings. Patois proverbs – Louise Bennett, John Agard etc. EMAS Patois Pack* <i>Things Mama Used to Say*</i> (English).</p>
<p>Elderly people in the community Family time line – to include grandparents. Collect pictures of grandparents. Compare their lifestyles with ours. Visit an older people's residential home e.g. at harvest or Christmas time.</p>	<p>Poetry Read and write poems on feelings and/or name calling. Use poem – Names by Jackie Kay and discuss rhyme Sticks and Stones*.</p>	<p>Jackie Kay's poetry Watch the interview with Jackie Kay and listen to her read her poem Old Tongue about losing her language. Discuss issues about being bilingual and losing your language. www.poetryarchive.org* EMAS Poetry pack* (English).</p>

*See the resource list for details

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■ Lesson Plan: Feelings (PSED, K&U, CLL, PD, CD)

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2:17

Catherine Waithe Lesson Plan

Learning objectives

- Pupils have opportunity to express feelings in different ways.
- Pupils understand and use vocabulary associated with emotions.
- Pupils develop empathy skills.
- Pupils know about Catherine Waithe's life and her contribution to Bristol.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Feelings and emotions words	Biography and pictures of Catherine Waithe Pictures of faces showing varying emotions (ensure diversity in faces) SEAL photos	Whole class Small group Individual

Suggested activities

- Share Catherine's biography and pictures with pupils drawing out the emotions she would have felt.
- Read some books/stories about different emotions.
- Use hall space to express feelings in face, body and movement.
- Discuss with pupils how we can look out for each other and read emotions. Play a matching game showing pupils' faces with different expressions and discuss why they might be feeling like that.
- Make a film about different emotions.

Opportunities for child initiated experiences

- Pupils can draw emotions on blank faces in different mediums – ICT, paper, paint etc
- Pupils to talk about own emotions and record for a display. I am happy/sad/angry when...
- Take photos of other pupils showing emotions.

Recall – Times when we were sad/happy and times when others were sad/happy etc.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils have experienced the language of emotions and how we express them.
- Pupils have started to develop empathy skills.
- Pupils know about Catherine Waithe's contribution to Bristol.

Parent/Carer involvement

Encourage parents/carers to talk with pupils about their emotions.

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■ Lesson Plan: Books audit (Literacy, DT, ICT)

Learning objectives

- To raise pupils' awareness of diversity issues in books and literature.
- To encourage pupils to design and develop an audit tool.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people contributed to life in Bristol.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Diversity	Biography/picture of Catherine Waithe.	Whole class
Ethnicity	Letterbox Library leaflets.*	Group
Gender		
Disability		
Audit tool		

Suggested activities

- Read Catherine's biography. Discuss why she felt it necessary to open a book shop.
 - Pupils to use ICT to design and make an audit tool which they can use on the books in the class or school library to answer the question, 'Do our school's books reflect diversity? (Audit could look at a certain number of books and collect data on diversity issues – e.g. ethnicity, age, language, gender of the characters, and range of the settings.)
 - Carry out audit and share findings with school head and staff.
 - Consider what needs to happen next.
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Plenary

- Pupils to consider whether the audit tool that they created was successful. Would they make any changes if they did it again?
 - Discuss the findings and consider what needs to happen next.
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Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils know that books can reflect diversity.
 - Pupils have developed and evaluated an audit tool.
 - Pupils know about Catherine Waithe's life and her contribution to Bristol.
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Assessment opportunities

Evaluate effectiveness of an audit tool.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Consider the diversity of books at home.

*See the resource list for details

■ Lesson Plan: Proverbs (English)

Learning objectives

- To know that idioms and proverbs are used as ways of expressing ourselves in different languages.
- To be familiar with Patois proverbs.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people contributed to life in Bristol

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Idioms	Biography/picture of Catherine Waithe	Pairs
Proverbs	English proverbs	Small groups
Patois	Patois proverbs – Louise Bennett,	
Creole	<i>Things Mama Used to Say*</i> by John Agard	

Suggested activities

- Read/share biography of Catherine Waithe.
- Share family sayings. Discuss meaning of terms – idioms and proverbs. Talk about some well known idioms and proverbs in English and other languages used by the class. Compare and contrast idioms/proverbs with the same themes e.g. raining cats and dogs (English)/raining mortars and pestles (Urdu).
- Paired work. Select some Patois proverbs. Talk about them and try to work out what they mean. Write the proverbs in Standard English. What does the proverb lose? Repeat activity starting with well known English proverbs. What do we learn about translating from one language to another?
- Small groups to develop drama of a situation where one of the Patois proverbs might be said.
- Make a class display of the work covered including proverbs written in first languages and then translated into English.

Plenary

- Share drama activity with whole class.
- Talk about the status of languages.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils are familiar with Patois proverbs.
- Pupils can show the meaning of idioms and proverbs by using them in a role play situation.
- Pupils know about Catherine Waithe's life and her contribution to Bristol.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Collect family sayings.

*See the resource list for details

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■ Resources

- EMAS Patois Pack (Contact EMAS 0117 903 1365).
- EMAS Poetry Pack (Contact EMAS 0117 903 1365).
- *Things Mama Used to Say*. Caribbean proverb cards. ISBN 0-09547478-0-1.
- *Names* by Jackie Kay (EMAS Poetry Pack).
- *Say it again Granny* by John Agard. ISBN 0-416043720.
- *I Din Do Nuttin* by John Agard. ISBN 0 370 30459 4.
- *Mango Spice* (Songs). ISBN 0 7136 2107 9.
- Letterbox Library <http://www.letterboxlibrary.com/acatalog/index.html>
- Sticks and stones
Will break my bones
But names will never hurt me
www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive

Some themes/subjects covered during her interview featured on the DVD are: influences/role models, racism, the work she has done in the community.

Contact details

Name: Catherine Waithe

Tel: 0117 955 8654

Willing to be contacted by teachers for further questions? Yes

Willing to come into school to talk to pupils? Yes, if school will pay expenses
