



Ambassadors

'We are delighted to welcome our new ambassadors to the Give a Book family. Together, we will continue to ensure that books—those wonderful 'magic carpets'—reach the hands of those who need them most, opening up a world of possibility and change.' *Lady Antonia Fraser, Patron*

Akin Alleyne



My name is Akin Alleyne, and I serve as an Operational Governor at a prison, where I've proudly worked for the past seven years. My journey in the prison service has been shaped by a deep commitment to rehabilitation and meaningful engagement, particularly through the power of reading.

During my time as a Custodial Manager at a different prison, I founded a reading group called *The Leviathans* amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The group became a beacon of hope and joy for many prisoners on E-Wing, offering a space for reflection, connection, and inspiration. We welcomed guest speakers and bestselling authors—my personal favourite being Robert Peston, the author of *The Whistleblower*, a gripping and thought-provoking read I've returned to twice.

I continue to champion literacy in custody by ensuring that every prisoner I encounter has access to books and reading materials. I believe that reading not only nurtures the mind but also opens doors to personal growth and transformation.

Give a Book has been fortunate to work with Akin, our first reading champion, for many years.

Simon Callow



Simon Callow is an actor, author and director. He studied at Queen's University, Belfast, and then trained as an actor at the Drama Centre in London. He joined the National Theatre in 1979, where he created the role of Mozart in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*. His many one-man shows include *The Importance of Being Oscar*, *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*, *Being Shakespeare*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Inside Wagner's Head*, *Juvenalia*, *The Man Jesus*, *Tuesday at Tesco's* and, most recently, Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* in the adaptation by Frank McGuinness. His films include *A Room with a View*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Phantom of*

the Opera and then title role in *The Amazing Mr Blunden*. He recently played The Duke of Sandringham in the television series *Outlander*. He directed *Shirley Valentine* in the West End and on Broadway, *Single Spies* at the NT, *Les Enfants du Paradis* at the RSC, *Carmen Jones* at the Old Vic, as well as the film of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

He has written biographies of Oscar Wilde, Charles Laughton, and Charles Dickens and three autobiographical books: *Being an Actor*, *Love Is Where It Falls*, and *My Life in Pieces*. The third volume of his massive Orson Welles biography, *One Man Band*, appeared in 2016; *Inside Wagner's Head*, a short biography of Wagner, was published in 2018, and his most recent book, with the photographer Derry Moore, was *London's Great Theatres* (2020). Music is his great passion. He has directed a number of operas and has made many appearances with the LPO, the LSO and the London Mozart Players. He has recently completed a six-month run in *Anything Goes*, on tour and at the Barbican Theatre. He is a Freeman of the City of London, and last year was delighted to be made an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple. *Simon adapted and directed the legendary Scrooge in the Scrubs in 2017, and has been spreading Christmas cheer in prisons ever since.*

Kit de Waal



Kit de Waal, born to an Irish mother and Caribbean father, was brought up among the Irish community of Birmingham in the '60s and '70s. Her debut novel *My Name Is Leon* was an international bestseller, shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award, longlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize and won the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year Award for 2017. In 2022 it was adapted for television by the BBC. It is now on the GCSE curriculum for schools. Her second novel, *The Trick to Time*, was longlisted for the Women's Prize and her young adult novel *Becoming Dinah* was shortlisted for the Carnegie CLIP Award 2020. A collection of short stories, *Supporting Cast*, was

published in 2020. An anthology of working-class memoir, *Common People*, was crowdfunded and edited by Kit in 2019. Her memoir *Without Warning and Only Sometimes* was published in August 2022.

Kit founded the Big Book Weekend, a free digital literary festival in 2020 and has written for theatre and television. She was named the FutureBook Person of the Year 2019 and is patron of Prisoners Abroad, The Bridport Prize and Writing West Midlands. She is also an ambassador for Wellbeing in the Arts and the Listening Books, on the Advisory Board of Dead Ink Books and a trustee of The Reading Agency. Kit is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and Professor and Jean Humphreys Writer in Residence at Leicester University. Her new novel *The Best of Everything* was released in April 2025.

Kit's first book, My Name is Leon, is the book that features in our short film [Solace and Connection Through Reading](#).

Freddie Fox



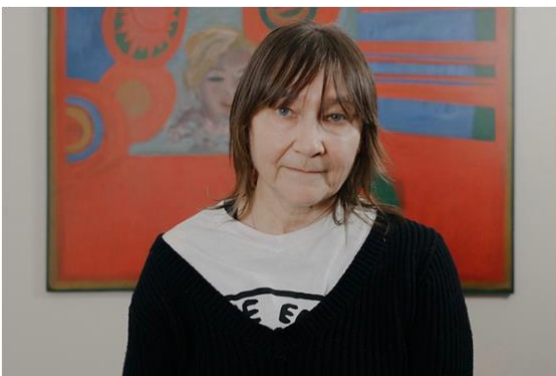
Freddie Fox has been a leading British actor & director in theatre, film and TV for over a decade. As a director/writer, he won the Directorial Discovery Award at The Rhode Island International Film Festival for his first short film *Hero*. In 2025, he won Best International Short at HollyShorts for his second short film *The Painting & The Statue*, which he made in conjunction with his production company Brandy Bay Productions. The film qualified for The Academy Awards in 2025. Brandy Bay is also currently working in co-production with The Kenneth Branagh Company on a documentary about British Theatre in the 20th Century that Fox is directing & producing.

Fox was nominated for an Olivier Award for his performance in Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* (2017), and an Ian Charleson Award for playing Romeo at the Sheffield Crucible (2015); this was a role he later reprised for Kenneth Branagh in the West End to critical acclaim. Fox has also performed in *Hamlet*, *She Stoops To Conquer*, *An Ideal Husband*, *A Flea In Her Ear* and *The Judas Kiss*.

On TV, Fox starred in *White House Farm*, and has garnered critical acclaim for his work in series like *Slow Horses*, *The Great*, *The Crown*, *The Gentleman*, *The Pursuit Of Love*, *The Shadow Line*, *The Year Of The Rabbit*, and *Cucumber/Banana*. He is currently appearing in HBO's *House Of The Dragon* and Netflix's *The Sandman*, and will soon be seen in and Amazon's *Blade Runner 2099*. On film, his credits include *Black 47*, *The Riot Club*, *Pride*, *Fanny Lye Deliver'd*, *Victor Frankenstein*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Guy Ritchie's The Ministry Of Ungentlemanly Warfare*, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, and *La Terra Delle Donne*.

Freddie is a good friend to Give a Book.

Ali Smith



Ali Smith CBE FRSL is a Scottish author, playwright, academic and journalist. Sebastian Barry described her in 2016 as "Scotland's Nobel laureate-in-waiting".

In 2024, she was awarded the Bodley Medal for contributions to literature, the highest honour of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. She was born in Inverness and is the author of several novels and short story collections

including, *The Accidental*, *Hotel World*, *How to Be Both*, *the Seasonal Quartet* and *Glyph*. She has been four times shortlisted for the Booker Prize, has won the Goldsmiths Prize, Orwell Prize, Costa Best Novel Award and the Women's Prize. Ali Smith lives in Cambridge.

Ali Smith loves books. She reckons that if everyone were to give books to everyone the world would transform for the better pretty fast.

Her own books have been translated into more than 40 languages.

Ali was the first winner of the Pleasure of Reading Prize in 2021. She was keynote speaker at our biennial Reading in Prison Day in 2022.

Toby Stephens



Toby Stephens is a distinguished English actor of stage and screen, known for roles such as Bond villain Gustav Graves in *Die Another Day* (2002) and Edward Fairfax Rochester in the BBC's *Jane Eyre* (2006). From 2014 to 2017, he starred as Captain Flint in *Black Sails*, followed by a lead role in Netflix's *Lost in Space*. He also portrays Poseidon in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*.

Stephens began his film career in 1992 as Othello in Sally Potter's *Orlando*. Shortly after graduating from LAMDA, he joined the RSC, playing Coriolanus in the title role and

Claudio in *Measure for Measure*. His stage work has included West End productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Hamlet*. He appeared on Broadway in *Ring Round the Moon*, starred in *Photographing Fairies*, played Orsino in Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* (1996), and portrayed Kim Philby in *Cambridge Spies*.

In 2007 he appeared as Jerry in Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, followed by Horner in Jonathan Kent's revival of *The Country Wife*. In 2008 he played James Bond in a BBC Radio 4 adaptation of *Dr. No*, later reprising Bond for a stage tribute to Ian Fleming. He also read from Simon Gray's final book *Coda*, having starred in Gray's *Japes* and *Missing Dates*.

Stephens returned to the stage in 2009 in the Donmar Warehouse production of *A Doll's House*, and in 2010 earned acclaim for *The Real Thing* at the Old Vic. He also debuted at the National Theatre *Danton's Death*. In 2011 he contributed to BBC Radio 4's *King James Bible* project and later played Philip Marlowe on radio. In 2025, he played Captain Hook and Mr. Darling in the RSC's revival of *Wendy & Peter Pan*.

Toby is a longtime friend to Give a Book, amongst other things he recorded poems for prisoners during lock down.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is a British-Iranian activist who was detained in Iran in April 2016 and was held hostage there for 6 years. She was released and returned back to the UK in March 2022. She is currently living in London with her daughter and husband, writing her book *A Yard of Sky*.

Nazanin was our keynote speaker at the 25th Anniversary Reading in Prison Day in 2024.