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the reading agency

**The
Vital
Link**



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NOVELIST MIKE GAYLE ANNOUNCED AS PATRON OF NEW NATIONAL SIX BOOK CHALLENGE™ INITIATIVE

The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to get more reading to more people, is delighted to announce the appointment of best-selling author Mike Gayle as Patron of its new national Six Book Challenge™ initiative.

The Six Book Challenge, run in association with the Costa Book Awards, is targeted at adults who want to improve their literacy skills and forms part of the Vital Link programme for libraries and literacy run by The Reading Agency.

The Six Book Challenge, which launches nationally this month to coincide with the Government's National Year of Reading for 2008, invites adult literacy learners to read six books whilst supporting them with incentives and creative reading activities.

Over 60 per cent of public library services across the UK are offering the Challenge (over 70 per cent in England) in partnership with organisations such as colleges, community adult education and trade unions. Over 40 prisons are also running the Challenge.

Previously an agony uncle, Mike Gayle is a freelance journalist and author of seven bestselling novels. Commenting on his Patronage of the Six Book Challenge, Mike Gayle said: ***“Ever since my first visit to my local library when I was three, books have played a major role in my life, so I am absolutely thrilled to have been asked to be Patron of the national Six Book Challenge.”***

He continues: ***“Anything that encourages adult learners to get stuck into a good read has got to be a good thing in my book! It's great that The Reading Agency and the Costa Book Awards have teamed up to make this happen and I look forward to the initiative making a real difference to those who have felt excluded from the world of books.”***

The Costa Book Awards is supporting the Challenge by giving all participants a free Costa coffee card and the chance to win an all-expenses paid trip to London for two. Costa are also supporting a trailblazing experiment in three cities - Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool - where Costa staff will work closely with the local library services to run Challenge activities.

The Six Book Challenge was piloted successfully by libraries across Yorkshire in 2007 with around 1000 participants. The new national Challenge provides an ideal way for thousands of less confident adult readers across the UK to get involved in reading for pleasure with the support of local public libraries and learning providers.

Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency, commented: ***“It’s fantastic to have Mike’s support for the Six Book Challenge! We all need to find new ways to tackle the nation’s literacy problems. It’s great to see a dawning realisation that the way libraries’ can help adult learners read for pleasure must be factored in.”***

The Six Book Challenge is supported by a website at www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk created by The Reading Agency. Promotional materials for the Six Book Challenge, including a registration card, reading diary and certificate, can be purchased from The Reading Agency. For more information, visit: www.readingagency.org.uk or contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

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Notes to editors:

- Founded in 2002, The Reading Agency is an independent charity and reading development agency. We work with public libraries, running national programmes like the Summer Reading Challenge, Fulfilling their Potential (changing library services for teenagers), and The Vital Link programme. For more general information, please visit: www.readingagency.org.uk
- The Vital Link, run by The Reading Agency, is a national programme designed to build and promote libraries’ capacity to support the adult literacy agenda. It encourages partnership working and has a special focus on using reading for pleasure to inspire and support existing students and engage potential new learners. The Vital Link forms part of the Government’s Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being taken forward by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and has had support from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills for its reading and libraries campaign.
- The Reading Agency also sets up and runs national partnerships, linking libraries to broadcasters, the book trade, youth services and the basic skills sector. Partners include the BBC, major publishers, Orange, the National Youth Agency and the National Literacy Trust.
- The Reading Agency engages in research, policy and advocacy, exploring the benefits of reading and libraries. We also develop practical resources to support people working with readers: training, toolkits and promotional materials.
- The Costa Book Awards, formerly the Whitbread Book Awards, were established in 1971 to encourage, promote and celebrate the best contemporary British writing. The announcement of the 2007 Costa Book of the Year will take place on 22 January 2008.