

## Usborne pre-empt thought-provoking middle grade debut ahead of Bologna Book Fair

Usborne Fiction Editorial Director Rebecca Hill has acquired **World Rights** (excluding US and Canada) to **Ticks and Stripes** (title tbc) by Waterstones bookseller and debut author Mitch Johnson. Rights were secured from Felicity Trew at the Caroline Sheldon Literary Agency, on pre-empt.

**Ticks and Stripes** is a story about what happens when two worlds collide: a twelve-year-old boy working in a sweatshop in Jakarta, and his idol – a superstar footballer at Real Madrid who earns Budi’s monthly earnings in just 100 seconds. Mitch was inspired to write **Ticks and Stripes** while working in a sports shop where he discovered a discarded, crumpled drinks sachet left in a shoebox between a brand-new pair of football boots.

With all the heart of Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, echoes of Mal Peet and the thought-provoking nature of Andy Mulligan’s *Trash*, **Ticks and Stripes** has all the ingredients of an extraordinary middle-grade debut with huge commercial appeal. It is a story of compassion, of finding hope in unexpected places and of football crossing borders, countries and divides told in an unforgettable voice.

Rebecca Hill comments on the acquisition: *“This book is quite simply brilliant. Original, thought-provoking and important, sensitively balanced with warmth and humour, the writing is pitch-perfect. I couldn’t be more thrilled to welcome Mitch to the Usborne list, and can’t wait to share this story with everyone.”*

*Budi is twelve years old and lives in the dusty, desolate slums of Jakarta. He works for ten hours a day in the backstreet sweatshop making football boots – and these are the boots he sees his idols, the Real Madrid footballers, wearing. The boots he dreams of one day wearing himself. The only thing standing in his way is everything... And when the gang lord who owns and runs the town, gives Budi the ultimatum to steal a pair of shoes from the factory or lose his family, reality threatens to destroy Budi’s world of dreams.*

### The book to get everyone talking at Bologna Book Fair

*“This book is wonderfully written, exciting, involving, and above all different and new. We all loved it – especially the football.”* **Peter Usborne**

*“I’m thrilled that Usborne are to publish Mitch’s stunning debut. I was struck sideways by Mitch’s writing from the very first chapter, and Usborne’s immediate drive and passion was easily equal to my own.”*

**Felicity Trew, the Caroline Sheldon Literary Agency**

*“This is the one book I’d like my son to read when he is old enough, and I know he would enjoy reading it too. Mitch’s beautiful writing manages to combine commercial and ever popular topics of football and friendships with timely issues of ethical consumerism and child labor in a totally fresh and child centered way. I just know this stunning book will travel far and wide and cannot wait to introduce it to our foreign customers during the Fair.”*

**Paula Ziedna, Usborne Foreign Rights Director**

*“We’re seeing a huge and growing appetite for our fiction titles in overseas markets, especially in Asia, where readers take to social media to discuss their favourite reads. We’re delighted to have such a compelling story set there and with such a feisty protagonist as Budi. We feel the book is sure to get our readers talking and our booksellers excited.”* **Grant Hartley, Usborne Export Sales Director**

The novel will be launched in **Spring/Summer 2017** as Usborne's lead debut. The key campaign strategy will look to tie into International Literacy Day events, with Usborne continuing their strong and ongoing commitment to charity by selecting a football-based charity in Jakarta to support throughout 2017, alongside an exciting, highly engaging grassroots campaign in the UK.

**Mitch Johnson** studied English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, graduating with first-class honours and the prize for the Best Critical Dissertation (post-1789). Mitch now works as a bookseller at Waterstones, Norwich, and writes in his spare time. *Ticks and Stripes* is his first novel.

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