
PRESS RELEASE



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For immediate release

THE GRUFFALO & FRIENDS CLUBHOUSE: A NEW MULTI-MILLION POUND FAMILY ATTRACTION ON BLACKPOOL'S SEAFRONT

Beloved characters from the UK's number one bestselling children's author Julia Donaldson and illustrator Axel Scheffler are set to make a new home on Blackpool's famous seafront this May in a partnership with Merlin Entertainments and Magic Light Pictures that will create the world's first 'The Gruffalo & Friends Clubhouse'.

Merlin Entertainments ("Merlin" or "the Company"), a global leader in location-based entertainment, today announces that a brand-new world class attraction will launch on Blackpool's seafront this May, featuring favourite characters from creators Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler.

In a world first, The Gruffalo & Friends Clubhouse will bring together six of the best loved stories to create an indoor play adventure like no other. The £2.3 million investment has been 18 months in the making and is part of Merlin's aim to bring the very best stories and brands to life in their family friendly attractions.

Developed in partnership with Magic Light and Blackpool Council, the attraction is set to open next door to Sea Life Blackpool in May 2023. The new experience will join Merlin's seven other attractions in Blackpool including The Blackpool Tower, SEA LIFE Blackpool and Peter Rabbit™: Explore and Play, making it a key destination for families of all ages from both the UK and abroad.

Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler are the picture book partnership behind bestselling books such as *The Gruffalo*, *Room on the Broom* and *Zog*. Donaldson was the Children's Laureate between 2011 and 2013 and honoured with a CBE in 2018 for services to literature. Axel Scheffler is the award-winning illustrator whose artwork has even featured on 50p coins, and stamps from Royal Mail and Deutsche Post. Julia Donaldson is the #1 UK author across all publishing and Axel Scheffler is the #1 illustrator.

So far, ten books by Julia and Axel (published by Macmillan Children's Books and Scholastic) have been adapted by Magic Light to become Oscar nominated and BAFTA winning animated specials for BBC One.

In the new Blackpool experience, guests will burst through the pages of some of their favourite stories and into a magical 3D world. From *The Gruffalo*'s deep dark wood, to Princess Pearl's castle in Zog, guests will embark on an adventure of imagination, discovery and play as they join their favourite characters. Distinct play zones are inspired by *The Gruffalo*, *The Gruffalo's Child*, *Zog*, *The Snail and the Whale*, *Room on the Broom* and *The Highway Rat*. The attraction will include play suitable for children under 10, with a toddler play area specifically for those under 3.

Kate Shane, Regional Director for Merlin Entertainments, said:

"We are incredibly excited to bring some of the UK's best loved children's characters to Blackpool. Blackpool is the UK's number one family seaside resort and this latest partnership with a globally recognised brand will provide compelling new reasons for visitors to come to Blackpool. The Gruffalo and other characters from the world of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler will be amongst brilliant company alongside our already strong cluster of family attractions on the resort, delivered with Merlin's world-class guest experience.

This significant investment further supports Merlin's strategic growth plans, bringing further jobs and economic benefit to the local community and wider region."

Cllr Lynn Williams, Leader of Blackpool Council, said:

"Blackpool already has the biggest portfolio of branded attractions outside London and the addition of this world-class family attraction will strengthen that position.

"The family audience is key to Blackpool's tourism growth strategy and we are delighted to be working in partnership with Merlin Entertainments to deliver something that will truly resonate with that audience, as well as providing new jobs for local people and economic growth to our town."

Alex Sanson, Senior Brand Manager at Magic Light Pictures, said:

"The Gruffalo & Friends Clubhouse will be the first of its kind and we can't wait to see this amazing space, full of play and adventure, come to life. Merlin Entertainments have done brilliant work with The Gruffalo and Room on the Broom at Chessington; as well as with Zog at Warwick Castle. We can't wait to see what the Clubhouse will bring to Blackpool, and to the stories that we love."

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Notes to Editors

About The Gruffalo

The Gruffalo is the bestselling picture book from the brilliant partnership of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler. *The Gruffalo* story has sold over 17 million copies worldwide since it was published in 1999 and it has been translated into over 100 languages. It was recognised immediately as a 'modern classic' by The Observer, and in 2020 teachers listed the book as one of the top five most useful titles to support reading for pleasure.

The Gruffalo Live! theatre show, produced by Tall Stories, has been running since 2001. The BAFTA award-nominated film *The Gruffalo*, produced by Magic Light Pictures, was released in 2009 followed by *The Gruffalo's Child* in 2011.

Find out more at www.Gruffalo.com.

About Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler

Julia Donaldson is the official No.1 bestselling author of 2022 and Axel Scheffler is the official No.1 bestselling illustrator of 2022 (across all books) and no story-time is complete without Julia's perfect read-aloud rhyme and Axel's unique artwork. Their most recently published book, *The Baddies*, was the UK's No.1 Bestselling Picture Book of 2022.

Their acclaimed partnership began when a song Julia had written for the BBC – 'A Squash and a Squeeze' – was turned into a book illustrated by Axel. The duo became picture book superstars with titles including *The Gruffalo*, *Room on the Broom*, *Stick Man*, *The Highway Rat*, *Zog* and *The Snail and the Whale* – all of which have been made into award-winning animated films by Magic Light Pictures. The most recent film was *Superworm* which premiered on BBC One on Christmas Day 2021.

Julia Donaldson is the author of some of the world's best-loved children's books, including the modern classic *The Gruffalo*, which has sold over 17 million copies worldwide. She also writes fiction, as well as poems, plays and songs - and her brilliant live shows are always in demand. Julia was the UK Children's Laureate 2011-13, is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and in 2019 was honoured with an CBE for services to Literature. Julia and her husband Malcolm divide their time between West Sussex and Edinburgh. www.juliadonaldson.co.uk

Axel Scheffler is a star illustrator whose instantly recognisable, warm and witty illustrations have achieved worldwide acclaim and numerous awards including the inaugural Illustrator of the Year Award at the British Book Awards 2018. Axel's artwork is exhibited internationally. He supports many charities, including Three Peas, which provides vital support for refugees and receives a £1 donation from every sale of his most recent book, *Kind*. Born in Hamburg, Axel now lives with his family in London.
www.axelscheffler.com

About Merlin Entertainments

Merlin Entertainments is a global leader in location-based, family entertainment. As Europe's Number 1 and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin operates over 140 attractions, 23 hotels and 6 holiday villages in 24 countries and across 4 continents. Merlin's purpose is to deliver memorable experiences to its millions of guests around the world, through its iconic brands and multiple attraction formats, and the commitment and passion of its employees. See www.merlinentertainments.biz for more information and follow on Twitter @MerlinEntsNews.

Merlin Entertainments attractions in Blackpool:

- The Blackpool Tower
- The Blackpool Tower Ballroom
- The Blackpool Tower Circus
- Madame Tussauds Blackpool
- The Blackpool Tower Dungeon
- SEA LIFE Blackpool
- Peter Rabbit™ : Explore and Play

About Magic Light Pictures

Magic Light Pictures is an award winning brand-building company with a strong background in production, creating rich and imaginative experiences for families worldwide.

The company, founded in 2003, directly manages film production, licensing, global distribution and marketing. The company balances its brand-building work with film making of the highest quality.

Magic Light's key brand is The Gruffalo, based on the best-selling picture books by co-creators Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler. Magic Light produced the Oscar and BAFTA-nominated half-hour animated films, The Gruffalo and The Gruffalo's Child, and has sold them to over 180 broadcasters worldwide. Magic Light also runs a cross-category international merchandising programme for The Gruffalo brand, with over 80 licensees and hundreds of products that capture the charm of the original books. Magic Light also produced Room on the Broom, Stick Man, The Highway Rat, Zog, The Snail and the Whale, Zog and the Flying Doctors, Superworm and The Smeds and The Smoos films – all have premiered on BBC One, Christmas Day.

In 2016 Magic Light produced two half-hours based on Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes. They were watched by 9.3million viewers and have won numerous awards including a BAFTA for Best Animation.

In 2021 Magic Light released its first children's series based on the collection of books by Axel Scheffler and Camilla Reid, Pip and Posy. The show premiered on Milkshake and is also available on Sky Kids and NickJr.

www.magiclightpictures.com

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