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Cressida Cowell [00:00:14] Hello there, I'm Cressida Cowell, author and illustrator of How to Train your Dragon, Wizards of Once and Which Way to Anywhere, my new book series and I'm so glad you've joined me for the Reading is Magic Festival. Sometimes things that you do or say have a way of turning into something bigger than you imagined and carrying on longer than you thought they would, like the Reading is Magic Festival, which started in 2020 when I was the Waterstones Children's Laureate. And was inspired by my belief that reading is magic, and magic is for everyone.

Cressida Cowell [00:00:57] All the events during the festival explore the themes of the charter I wrote when I was Laureate and celebrate all the things you have the right to, creativity. having a planet to read on, seeing yourselves in a book, reading for the joy of it, and getting brilliant advice about books and about reading from people whose job it is to do that. I hope you enjoy this event.

Lauren Layfield [00:01:32] Welcome back to the Reading is Magic Festival. It's Lauren here. I'm wearing an orange top. I've got brown straight hair and I'm in front of my brilliant Reading is Magic bunting. And right now we are off to Nigeria. How exciting. We're going to be meeting Lola Shoneyin and K.R. Onimole from the Ake Arts and Books Festival. They can be reading from the book and also explaining how they bring the book to life as well. So let's go to Nigeria.

Lola Shoneyin [00:02:07] Hello. My name is Lola Shoneyin and I am the Nigerian author of a book titled *Iyaji The House Girl*, which was beautifully illustrated by my friend and collaborator Kayode Onimole. I am a black woman wearing some funky black and white glasses with very little hair and nice chubby cheeks. And I am sitting in front of a wall of books. And the reason I am sitting in front of a wall of very, very colourful books is because I am speaking to you from a bookstore, specifically from the children's section of that bookstore in Lagos, Nigeria. So here I am with the fantastic illustrator Kayode Onimole, and we're going to talk you through the five steps that we take when we are collaborating to create a picture book. The first step is to decide on a setting. So the first thing we do is we get together and we think, where should we go next? Okay, step two.

K. R. Onimole [00:03:29] Research the environments, the people, the cultures of the people. Well, the environment. So the kind of trees that grow there, the kind of plants are grew there, the kind of animals that live there, kind of people that live there, the kind of, the way they dress. And then we table down all this information.

Lola Shoneyin [00:03:47] Three, we create a really fun story, and that's kind of what I do. So I sit down and I start thinking, What would children find fun or interesting?

K. R. Onimole [00:03:59] Step four We do a rough sketch of the characters, and then we go back and forth on how they look.

Lola Shoneyin [00:04:06] And of course, that's a very exciting step for me because it's one thing to write the story, but it's so exciting when you actually see the stories come to life through the drawings. And then step five.

K. R. Onimole [00:04:22] We agree on the colours, and then we put them into the story.

Lola Shoneyin [00:04:26] So this is exciting as well because we get to decide what the characters wear, how they look. Who wears make up? Who doesn't? Who's got lovely long eyelashes? Who doesn't? We just look at all the little details and it's just so much fun. So that's how we create our books.

Lola Shoneyin [00:04:45] So I'm now going to be reading to you my book called *Iyaji The House Girl*. This book is set in Nigeria in a state called A Bane Way in the northern parts of Nigeria. Iyaji lives in a village called Igede with her mother, her father and her two brothers. Early in the morning, Iyaji's mother heads to the market. She lights a fire and fries yam. Everybody loves her fried yam. Iyaji and her brothers walk to school. Iyaji's father is at home alone. His knees hurt, so he cannot go to his farm. Iyaji loves to learn in school. She loves to read and she loves to write. But when Iyaji gets home, her father calls her name. Iyaji. I have not been able to work for three months. I don't have the money to pay your school fees. Tomorrow morning you are going to Lagos to work as a house girl. Iyaji waves goodbye. She will miss her mother, her father and her brothers. She will miss going to school. The car grinds to a stop in front of a very big house. Good morning. My name is Iyaji. Iyaji whispers. You are the new house girl. You better work hard, the woman in green says. The next morning the woman in green shouts: Iyaji, sweep the floor. Iyaji, cook some food. Iyaji, wash the dishes. Iyaji scrub the floor. That night. Iyaji is so tired, she quickly falls asleep on the cold, hard floor. The next day, the woman in green sends Iyaji to the market. Iyaji sees children on their way to school. The day after, the policewoman stops Iyaji by the roadside. Why are you not in school? She asks. I work in that big house. Iyaji replies. That evening, the policewoman pays them a visit. She wants to know why Iyaji is not going to school. What did you tell the policewoman? Asks the woman in green. She is very angry. Iyaji is frightened. That night, Iyaji wonders if she will ever sit in a classroom again. The policewoman returns one week later. Iyaji is a child. She should be in school. The policeman warns. The policewoman warns. The woman in green sends Iyaji back to Igede in Benue State. Iyaji sees her father playing football with her brothers. Iyaji's mother is very happy to see her daughter again. Iyaji's father brings her a special present. It is a box full of books. I am so happy to see you. I will never send you away again. Her father says. Does this mean I can go back to school? Iyaji asks. Her father nods. Iyaji loves her books. I want to be a policewoman when I grow up she says to herself. This book is dedicated to Agnes Iyaji Omua and all the out of school children in Benue State, Nigeria.

Lauren Layfield [00:09:40] How lucky to be able to find out about different cultures and find out about how other people live their lives. We love that so, so much that every single day this week we've got an event that's been programmed by a festival in a totally different country. So if you want to see more of that, head over to the Reading is Magic Festival website.