

14 March 2014

Dear Mr Blayney

I am sorry that you feel provoked and offended by John Agard's poem and our use of it. I hope that, once you understand when it was written and the love with which it is loaded for all that is alternative and new on the South Bank, you will no longer feel offended.

Both the poem and Word Search honour the skaters and their place on the site. They were created before current controversies at a time when Southbank Centre had a good relationship with the skateboarders.

John Agard is one of Britain's best-loved poets. He wrote the poem which features this line when he was writer in residence here in 1993. The collection is called A Stone's Throw From Embankment and is a love story about the site. As for Word Search, this tour of the site has been used with children ever since the re-opening celebrations for Royal Festival Hall in 2007. The poetry is used to encourage children to engage imaginatively with the site. We included the skatepark as one of only five locations as a loved and honoured part of our family, not the reverse as you suggest.

Poets often use familiar words in ways which suggest new meaning, even an opposite meaning. John is not using the word 'delinquent' in its dictionary definition, any more than he is calling the concrete a 'lake' literally. He is using it to imply abandon and freedom from convention.

You will also note that the imagery on Word Search celebrates skateboarding, embedding the words kick flip, ollie, nosegrind and switch on a huge, colourful skateboard. We did this to celebrate skateboarding – not the opposite.

In this spirit, I hope that members of your community will continue to welcome school groups who are touring the site using Word Search and interested in what you do in the undercroft.

In turn, I would also welcome any of the skateboarders or their families to do the Word Search with one of our poets, and I am happy to arrange a group tour. Please let me know if this is of interest.

Yours sincerely,



Shân MacLennan
Creative Director, Learning & Participation