

# The Branford Boase Award



Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020

## LOCKDOWN INSPIRES YOUNG WRITERS: WINNERS OF THE HENRIETTA BRANFORD WRITING COMPETITION ANNOUNCED

### RECORD NUMBER OF ENTRIES IN 2020

**The Henrietta Branford Writing Competition** is an annual writing competition for young people and runs in conjunction with the prestigious **Branford Boase Award**, awarded to the author and the editor of the year's outstanding debut novel for children. The **Branford Boase Award** was set up in memory of award-winning children's writer Henrietta Branford and her editor, Wendy Boase, Editorial Director of Walker Books and the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition** aims to encourage writers of the future, something Henrietta Branford was always keen to do.

The competition is open to anyone under the age of 19 and entrants were asked to complete a story begun by last year's **Branford Boase Award** winner, author of **I Am Thunder**, Muhammad Khan.

A recent survey found that children are reading more during lockdown<sup>1</sup>; the record number of entries to the **Henrietta Branford competition** proves that they are writing more too. This year there were twice the number of entries as in past years, and they were of a very high standard.

Six young people have been selected as this year's winners.

'Short stories are hard to write, however experienced you are,' says judge, lecturer in literacy and children's books **Prue Goodwin**, 'So much is about the getting of ideas and expressing them in ways that keep the reader wanting to read. Above all, we look for stories that show imagination, originality and a strong voice, and our six winners really stood out.'

Announcing the winners, **Muhammad Khan** said: 'I'm delighted that my story starter inspired so many excellent stories and it's made me really happy to hear about young writers turning their hands to writing during lockdown'.

The young winners are:

**Aarush Choudhary** aged 10 years from Isleworth, for *A Suspicious Day at School*

Aarush's story - a school-based horror adventure – involves escaping an unknown danger; hypnotised school children; strange occurrences in the science lab: and the daring hero toiling away to save the day. Clearly, Aarush is an imaginative and able author.

**Jenny Gillon** aged 16 years from Cockermouth, for *Death's Journey*

At the beginning of Jenny's story, we have no idea of the identity of the narrator. What we do have is a distinct internal image of the setting and a desire to read on. An engrossing read.

**Eleanor Hetherington** aged 14 years from London, for *The Fear*

Eleanor's story asks what will happen if, and when, the pandemic is finally under control. Will life just return to 'normal'? Written in a mature, considered style, this story hints at possible changes to come in many aspects of our lives. A very well constructed story which is both prescient and chilling.

**Isabelle Nichols** aged 10 years from Hull for *The Undercover Fairy*

We can 'hear' the narrator throughout this story as strange, exciting and nerve-wracking events take place. A really enjoyable read.

**Theo Wild** aged 11 years from Ealing, London for *Stitched Up*

A school-based tale with elements of mystery as well as dread. The final line is particularly scary, leaving readers with a terrifying, lingering image.

**Millie Wilson** aged 11 years from Welling, Kent for *May the 4th*.

With an irresistible opening line, Millie's story takes us straight into a family trip to the cinema. But in a trice, we are in another place, in another time with the alarming prospect of living in a workhouse. A thoroughly ingenious time-slip tale.

'The experience of being in the midst of a pandemic provided the basis for powerful, moving and unsettling pieces of writing, many with references to the loss of life and scary comparisons to the atrocities of war.' says **Goodwin**, 'But thank goodness, a few stories were light-hearted, even about the lockdown and celebrated having more time to do the things their authors wanted to do. Not all the crying was sad either and indeed, one story we particularly liked highlighted some happy tears, because "boys can cry". It's remarkable to see how the same opening paragraph can lead to such a variety of responses.'

The winning stories have all been published on the **Branford Boase Award** website. A further fourteen young writers were Highly Commended.

The winners will receive signed copies of the seven books on the shortlist for the 2020 **Branford Boase Award**.

**For further information please contact**

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<sup>1</sup>A survey commissioned by **The Reading Agency** (conducted by **Beano Brain Omnibus 2020**) to mark the launch of the **Summer Reading Challenge 2020** reveals that 89% of 7-11-year-olds surveyed have been reading during lockdown, with 37% of them reading more than before schools closed.

**Notes to Editors:**

The annual **Branford Boase Award** celebrates the most promising book for seven year-olds and upwards written by a first-time novelist and also highlights the importance of the editor in the development of new authors. The shortlisted authors may have published other books in another genre – for example, poetry or a picture book – but eligibility for the prize requires that this is their first children’s novel.

The books on the 2020 shortlist are:

**Little Badman and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties** by Humza Arshad and Henry White, edited by Holly Harris and Sharan Matharu, illus Aleksei Bitskoff (Puffin)

**The Space We’re In** by Katya Balen, edited by Lucy Mackay-Sim, illus Laura Carlin (Bloomsbury)

**A Pocketful of Stars** by Aisha Bushby, edited by Liz Bankes and Sarah Levison (Egmont)

**Bearmouth** by Liz Hyder, edited by Sarah Odedina (Pushkin Press)

**A Good Girl’s Guide to Murder** by Holly Jackson, edited by Lindsey Heaven (Electric Monkey)

**Frostheart** by Jamie Littler, edited by Naomi Colthurst (Puffin)

**The Million Pieces of Neena Gill** by Emma Smith-Barton, edited by Naomi Colthurst (Penguin)

Now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, the **Branford Boase Award** is funded by Walker Books and was set up in memory of the prize-winning author **Henrietta Branford** and **Wendy Boase**, editorial director and one of the founders of Walker Books. They worked together on a number of Henrietta’s novels, a partnership they greatly enjoyed. Both Henrietta and Wendy died of cancer in 1999.

The Award is the joint idea of **Julia Eccleshare MBE** and **Anne Marley MBE**. Julia is the children’s director of the Hay Festival. Anne was Head of Children’s, Youth & Schools Services for Hampshire Library & Information Service for many years and helped to found Authors Aloud UK, the author booking agency. She has served on many children’s book award panels, including the **CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Awards**.

**Prue Goodwin** is a lecturer in literacy and children’s books. Her work includes speaking at conferences; consultancy to publishers of children’s books; and, supporting literacy education in schools. She has spent over forty years teaching literacy, especially helping youngsters to write with originality, imagination and confidence.

**For more information about the award and the Henrietta Branford Writing Competition visit [www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk/](http://www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk/).**

**Images are available from Andrea Reece on 07807893369 or [andrea.reece@zen.co.uk](mailto:andrea.reece@zen.co.uk)**

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