

The Branford Boase Award



BRANFORD BOASE AWARD

Shortlist 2023

Judges' Comments

The Bones of Me

Kel Duckhouse, edited by Harriet Birkinshaw

Flying Eye Books YA

Growing up on an East London council estate, boxing is an escape for 15-year-old Molly. Her brother Denny is her trainer, but when he's accused of assault and disappears, her dreams of making something of herself are shattered. Can she find Denny and clear his name? This powerful coming-of-age novel is written in a mix of prose and verse.

'a thrilling read, well structured, it feels fluid'; 'the working-class background is very strong'; 'I want to see what the author does next'; 'a brave book'.

The Eternal Return of Clara Hart

Louise Finch, edited by Siobhàn Parkinson

Little Island Books YA

Spence is at a party hosted by his best friend Anthony and witnesses classmate Clara Hart running from the house, barefoot and clearly upset. As he watches, she is hit by a car and killed. The next day, Spence wakes up to find it is the previous morning; he is stuck in a time loop and must live the same 24 hours again. Can he prevent the terrible events of the party?

'fresh, extremely readable and cleverly done'; 'very relevant to what is happening in schools'; 'skilfully told'; 'I couldn't predict how it would end'.

Seed

Caryl Lewis, edited by Sarah Hughes, illustrated by George Ermos

Macmillan Children's Books 7+

Marty's mother struggles with her mental health and doesn't leave the house, and he is bullied at school, so he values the evenings he spends with his grandad on his

allotment. A birthday present of a seed from his grandad changes everything. Magic-bean like, it grows and grows, a thing of wonder and possibility.

'a book full of wonders, it casts its spell on you'; 'absolutely on point for a children's book'; 'the mental health storyline and the magical elements are carefully balanced, it's very accomplished'; 'hugely enjoyable, funny and affecting'.

Rebel Skies

Ann Sei Lin, edited by Gráinne Clear

Walker Books, 12+

Kurara is a Crafter: she can manipulate paper with her mind, creating creatures that can walk and fly as if they're alive. When a rogue paper creation attacks the castle where she works, Kurara is saved by another Crafter but in the process learns a devastating secret about her brother, Haru. To save him, she must join the crew of an airship dedicated to hunting down such creatures, even as her doubts about their activities grow.

'Inventive, slick, cinematic'; 'superb world-building'; 'highly original'; 'poses interesting psychological questions about knowing who you are'.

The Cats We Meet Along the Way

Nadia Mikail, edited by Bella Pearson

Guppy Books YA

After the catastrophic news that the end of the world is approaching, Aisha and her mother, Esah, are forced to reassess their lives. Esah wants to go and find her older estranged daughter, June and eventually they set off, accompanied by Aisha's boyfriend, Walter, his parents, and a mangy stray cat they meet on the way.

'the writing is so distinct'; 'fresh, uncontrived, and with its mix of hope and dread, puts a new perspective on an well-explored scenario'; 'brilliant and very different'.

Ellie Pillai is Brown

Christine Pillainayagam, edited by Leah Thaxton

Faber 13+

Teenager Ellie is trying to work out who she is, while standing out as a brown girl in a predominantly white school. She loves music and, unbeknown to her parents, who definitely wouldn't approve, is doing drama GCSE. Add first love into the mix, and things get very complicated indeed.

'humorous, authentic, with well-developed characters'; 'I loved it!'; 'the sub-plot explores the trauma of second generation Asians with real sensitivity'; 'cleverly plotted and written'.

The Haunting of Tyrese Walker

J P Rose, edited by Chloe Sackur

Andersen Press 13+

Visiting relatives with his mum in Jamaica, after the tragic loss of his father, Tyrese finds it extremely difficult to overcome his negative thoughts and low mood, despite the care and love of his family. When unusual and inexplicable things start happening to him, is it his grief causing him to lose his grip on reality, or is he genuinely being haunted?

'setting, theme, character and plot are woven together seamlessly'; 'lots of books use folklore to explore grief, but this does it very cleverly'; 'the writing is very good, descriptive but never overly lyrical'; 'the story has stayed with me, and teens will really get a lot from this'.

The Map of Leave

Yarrow Townsend, edited by Rachel Leyshon

Chicken House 10+

Orla's mother was a healer and Orla too has a gift – she can talk to plants. But now her world is threatened by a sickness, and it is claimed that nature itself is to blame. There is a poison in the water, infecting plants and people alike. Orla is sure that her mother knew this and had a cure. But with her mother dead, can Orla discover it in time?

'mesmerising'; 'a great approach to green issues but it is full of themes that will work for readers of different ages'; 'Orla is rude and disparaging, she feels like a character we haven't met before'; 'this is an author who will do something really unusual again'.

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For more information about the **Branford Boase Award**, including a full list of past winners, and the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition** visit www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk .

This year's judges are Maisie Chan, author and winner of the **2022 Branford Boase Award**; critic Joanne Owen; Darren Matthews, Primary Advisory Teacher at the **Centre for Literacy in Primary Education**; and Sajeda Amir, English teacher and KS3 coordinator at Levenshulme High School, Manchester. The judging panel is chaired by Julia Eccleshare, children's director of the Hay Festival.

The Branford Boase Award is delivered in partnership with the [Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society \(ALCS\)](http://www.alcs.org.uk) and supported by Walker Books.

The **shortlist** for the Award will be announced on Thursday 27 April 2023. The winner will be announced on 13 July 2023 at an award ceremony in London.