

The Branford Boase Award



**** EMBARGOED UNTIL 08.30 HRS THURSDAY 25 APRIL 2024 ****

'Own voice' stories dominate the shortlist for the award that identifies future stars of children's books

2024 BRANFORD BOASE AWARD SHORTLIST

The year's outstanding debut writers for children

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Thursday 25 April 2024: The shortlist for the **2024 Branford Boase Award**, given annually to the author and editor of the year's outstanding debut novel for children is announced today.

- **Judges inspired by stories with authentic voices and real life settings**
- **A golden year for debut writers as the Award celebrates its 25th anniversary: two of the shortlisted authors are also in contention for the CILIP Carnegies Medal for Writing, another for the Children's Book Award, while another received the Nero Children's Book Award**
- **Shortlist of six selected from longest longlist (25 titles) in award's history**

Founded in 2000 to commemorate prize-winning author **Henrietta Branford** and influential Walker Books editor **Wendy Boase**, the **Branford Boase Award** is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Over the last quarter-century, the **Branford Boase Award** has constantly picked out future stars at the start of their careers. Previous winners and shortlisted authors include **Meg Rosoff, Katya Balen, Philip Reeve, Frances Hardinge, Patrick Ness, M.G. Leonard, Maisie Chan** and **Marcus Sedgwick**. **Christine Pillainayagam** won in 2023 with **Ellie Pillai is Brown**.

The **Branford Boase Award** is the only award to honour the editor of the winning title and highlights the importance of editors in nurturing new talent.

From an exceptionally strong longlist of 25 books, the judges have chosen six to shortlist. These include a much-praised verse novel; a will-they-wont-they romance, starring a character living with a disability; two very different stories both with courageous young Muslim women at their heart; and the comic travails of a wannabe rapper in southeast London. Beth Lincoln's Nero Book Prize-winning gender-playful murder mystery **The Swifts** also makes the list.

The six shortlisted books are:

The Final Year Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton, edited by Charlotte Hacking (Otter-Barry Books)

The First Move by Jenny Ireland, edited by Ruth Knowles with Sara Jafari (Penguin)

Safiyah's War by Hiba Noor Khan, edited by Eloise Wilson (Andersen Press)

Steady for This by Nathanael Lessore, edited by Ella Whiddett and Ruth Bennett (Hot Key Books)

The Swifts by Beth Lincoln, illustrated by Claire Powell, edited by Ben Horslen and Julie Strauss-Gabel (Puffin)

You Think You Know Me by Ayaan Mohamud, edited by Sarah Stewart (Usborne)



Julia Eccleshare, co-founder of the **Branford Boase Award** and chair of the judges says, “As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the **Branford Boase Award**, we are particularly excited to announce this shortlist. We have seen huge changes in the number of books submitted for the award, but more importantly in the range of stories being written. The development of own voice narratives is particularly exciting. The shortlisted authors are extremely talented, and there’s an authenticity and freshness to their books that we found exhilarating.”

This year’s judges are **Christine Pillainayagam**, author and winner of the **2023 Branford Boase Award**; **Emily Drabble**, Head of Children’s Books Promotion and Prizes at **BookTrust**; **Lucas Maxwell**, former School Librarian of the Year and winner of the **UK Literacy Association’s** Reading for Pleasure Teacher Champion Award 2022; and **Amy McKay**, also a past UK School Librarian of the Year and for ten years **Yoto Carnegies National Coordinator**. The judging panel is chaired by **Julia Eccleshare**, Director, Hay Children’s Festival.

THE SHORTLIST IN DETAIL:

The Final Year Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton, edited by Charlotte Hacking (Otter-Barry Books)

Also shortlisted for the **Children’s Book Award**

With illustrations by Joe Todd-Stanton, and loaded with references to David Almond’s 1998 classic **Skellig**, Matt Goodfellow’s verse novel tells the story of Nate as he navigates the final

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year of primary school, facing particular challenges at home. His life with his little brothers and single parent mother is one not often represented in children's books. The judges found this extremely accomplished, a perfect verse novel. It's harrowing, but has a playfulness to it too, and reads like a true story.

The First Move by Jenny Ireland, edited by Ruth Knowles with Sara Jafari (Penguin)

With the support of her family, almost-eighteen-year-old Juliet is getting to grips with her arthritis but when it comes to socialising, she generally opts to stay home to play chess online rather than be singled out at parties as the "girl with crutches". Like Juliet, Ronan takes solace in playing chess on an online forum. Little do they know that the flirtatious friendships they've struck up with online chess-mates could become a real-life romance... The judges were enthralled by this book and admire the quality of the writing, adding, "It's rare to see disability represented in romances and Juliet's unglamorous disease is described very well."

Safiyyah's War by Hiba Noor Khan, edited by Eloise Wilson (Andersen Press)

*Also shortlisted for the **CILIP Carnegie Medal for Writing***

Richly imagined and vividly drawn, **Safiyyah's War** is told by a young Muslim girl whose life is changed when she gets caught up in the French Resistance in Paris in World War Two. When Safiyyah discovers her father's bravery and compassion as he and colleagues in the French Resistance work to save the lives of Jewish neighbours, she decides to do all she can to help, too. The judges were very impressed by this illuminating story of compassion and courage, which is inspired by real events. "It's a story I didn't know, and one that feels really needed right now".

Steady for This by Nathanael Lessore, edited by Ella Whiddett and Ruth Bennett (Hot Key Books)

*Also shortlisted for the **CILIP Carnegie Medal for Writing***

MC Growls (Shaun to his mum) has his eyes set on fame and fortune, starting with the Raptology competition. But when he and his best friend accidentally go viral for all the wrong reasons, things go awry. Set in the Peckham estate where he grew up and written in lively, rap-infused language, Nathanael Lessore's bildungsroman is laugh-out-loud funny but tender and moving too, dealing with issues of peer pressure and social inequality. The judges described it as "close to perfect, with a loveable central character. The story is authentic, with real emotional depth."

The Swifts by Beth Lincoln, illustrated by Claire Powell, edited by Ben Horslen and Julie Strauss-Gabel (Puffin)

*Winner of the **Nero Book Awards, Children's Category***

Who caused Arch-Aunt Schadenfreude to fall down the stairs at the regular Swift family reunion? Is it linked to the family's periodic search for Vile Swift's missing treasure trove? The judges loved Beth Lincoln's clever, original reworking of the country house murder mystery, praising its comic inventiveness, and cast of colourfully named queer-friendly

characters. "It's hard to put down and keeps you guessing throughout. Brilliant use of etymology and full of ideas."

You Think You Know Me by Ayaan Mohamud, edited by Sarah Stewart (Usborne) Hanan is a clever, highly motivated student, keeping her head down at grammar school, all too aware of the Islamophobia visited on her. When the school's former caretaker is murdered, there's a predictable backlash against the Muslim community and Hanah decides to make a public stand at the school's conference on diversity. Mohamud, a Somalian, has written from her own experiences of Islamophobia, vividly creating a community with a rich and vibrant culture. Hanan's quiet courage moved all the judges, who admire the storytelling and the quality of the writing. 2023 winner **Christine Pillainayagam** says, "The way micro-aggressions faced by people of colour are described is powerful. This will be an important read for kids who don't find themselves in books and young Muslims will find it particularly relevant right now."

The winner will be announced at a ceremony at **CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education)** in central London on Wednesday 10 July 2024. The winning author receives a cheque for £1,000 and both author and editor receive an inscribed plaque.

The **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition**, the annual competition for young people which runs in conjunction with the **Branford Boase Award**, is open now.

[Author photos, book jackets and social media images available to download here.](#)

For further information please contact Andrea Reece on 07807893369 or andrea.reece@zen.co.uk

Notes to Editors:

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Former primary school teacher **Matt Goodfellow** is now a full-time poet who visits schools across the country to give high-energy performances and workshops. His first poetry collection for Otter-Barry Books, **Chicken on the Roof**, received wide acclaim. He is also the author of **Caterpillar Cake**, illustrated by Krina Patel-Sage and shortlisted for the CLIPPA award, **Shu-Lin's Grandpa**, illustrated by Yu Rong and shortlisted for the **CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal**, and a contributor to CLIPPA-shortlisted poetry collection **Being Me: Poems about Thoughts, Worries and Feelings**, all published by Otter-Barry Books. His latest poetry collection, **Let's Chase Stars Together**, was shortlisted for the **CLIPPA** award 2023. Matt lives in Stockport, UK.

Jenny Ireland is a Young Adult writer who lives outside Belfast with her husband, two children and border collie. She is a Law and French Law graduate and former paralegal. In 2019 she underwent emergency brain surgery. While this experience was relatively traumatic, the close encounter with death has given her the gift of seeing what truly matters in life.

Hiba Noor Khan is an England-based writer and activist, deeply engaged with issues in development, immigration and intercultural understanding. Her academic background is in Physics and Engineering and she completed postgraduate study in 2015 at the University of

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Oxford. Since then she has worked as a Refugee Advocacy Worker for The Children's Society, a Physics teacher and TV presenter. She also contributed to policy research carried out by the Government's Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life. Hiba has worked on various sustainable development projects in rural Tanzania, and delivered aid to Syrian refugees in Turkey. Hiba is studying an MA at SOAS.

Nathanael Lessore was born in Camberwell, South East London, as one of eight children to French and Madagascan parents. Although he has spent most of his life in Peckham, Nathanael has also lived in Paris, Strasbourg and Singapore. Nathanael became a marketing executive after graduating from the University of East London, believing at the time that a Creative Writing degree destined him for a career in marketing. His second book, **King of Nothing**, has just been published.

Beth Lincoln was raised in a former Victorian railway station in the North of England. When she isn't writing, Beth is woodcarving, or making a mess of her flat, or talking the nearest ear off about unexplained occurrences. Her favourite things include ghosts, crisps, and weird old words like bumbershoot and zounderkite. **The Swifts** grew out of her love of words, the gleeful gothic, and classic murder mysteries. She lives in Newcastle upon Tyne

Ayaan Mohamud wrote her first ever book in lockdown and during NaNoWriMo, while also studying as a medical student, and it became her debut novel. It was inspired by her own experiences of Islamophobia and a desire to write about Somali culture, which she hopes to shine more of a light on in YA. She lives in London and can usually be found either writing or complaining about writing.

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.

As well as encouraging publishers to find and promote new writers, the Award sets out to alert readers of all ages to the work of interesting newcomers.

The **Branford Boase Award** was set up in 2000 in memory of the outstanding and 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.

Running alongside the Branford Boase Award, the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition** encourages writing talent in under 18s.

The Award is the joint idea of **Julia Eccleshare** and **Anne Marley**. Julia is Director, Hay Children's Festival and a regular contributor to **Radio 4's Front Row** and **Open Book** programmes. Anne was Head of Children's, Youth & Schools Services for **Hampshire Library & Information Service** for many years. She has served on numerous children's book award panels, including the **CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Awards**.

About the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society

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The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) is a not-for-profit organisation started by writers for the benefit of all types of writers.

Owned by its members, ALCS collects money due for secondary uses of writers' work. It is designed to support authors and their creativity; ensure they receive fair payment and see their rights are respected. It promotes and teaches the principles of copyright and campaigns for a fair deal. It represents over 120,000 members, and since 1977 has paid over £700million to writers.

For more information visit alcs.co.uk

About Walker Books

The **Walker Books Group** is one of the world's leading independent publishers of books and content for children. This vibrant international group includes **Walker Books UK**, London; **Candlewick Press**, Somerville, Massachusetts; and **Walker Books Australia**, based in Sydney and Auckland.

Renowned for its truly original publishing and outstanding quality, the **Walker Books Group** is home to books for readers of all ages. Award-winning authors and illustrators for the group include National Ambassador for Children's Literature, Kate DiCamillo, M.T Anderson, Patrick Ness, and Jon Klassen, and major brands for the group are **Maisy**, **Guess How Much I Love You**, **Tilly and Friends**, the widely acclaimed **Judy Moody** and the bestselling **Where's Wally/Where's Waldo**.

The **2023 Branford Boase Award** was won by Christine Pillainayagam and her editor Leah Thaxton with **Ellie Pillai is Brown** (Faber).

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

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