



**PRESS RELEASE - STRICTLY UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01HRS BST,  
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***Katherine Woodfine, Stephen Dilley and Anjali Patel join Glasgow Boys author Margaret McDonald as judges for the 2026 Branford Boase Award***

(Tuesday 7 October): The judges for the 2026 **Branford Boase Award**, which recognises the author and, uniquely, the editor of the year's outstanding debut novel for children, are announced today. They include the winning author of the 2025 **Branford Boase Award** Margaret McDonald. She will be joined by children's book experts, Katherine Woodfine, author and reviewer for *The Week Junior*; Stephen Dilley, Head of English at Kendrick School, Reading and part of the **UKLA Book Awards** team; and Anjali Patel Lead Advisory Teacher, **CLPE**. The judging panel will be chaired by **Julia Eccleshare**, children's book consultant, the Hay Festival.

The **Branford Boase Award** was created in 2000 by Julia Eccleshare and Anne Marley in memory of award-winning author Henrietta Branford and her editor Wendy Boase and rewards the most promising new authors for young people and their editors. Now in its third decade, it remains the sole award to highlight the work of editors in supporting new authors and ensuring their work is the best it can be. With its emphasis on the craft of writing and the crucial role played by editors, the award showcases outstanding writing for children. Being shortlisted for the award is a sought-after accolade and winning authors and editors are recognised as setting standards in publishing excellence.

Previous winning authors include Meg Rosoff, Liz Hyder, M.G. Leonard, Maisie Chan and Nathanael Lessore; winning editors include Barry Cunningham, David Fickling and Fiona Kennedy.

Opening the 2025 **Branford Boase Award**, chair of judges Julia Eccleshare MBE says, "The **Branford Boase Award** is a singular barometer of developments in children's books. It is always exciting to open the Award and particularly so now. Recent shortlists have highlighted significant shifts of direction in writing for children. We look forward to finding fresh voices in the submissions, stories we haven't read before, and which connect directly with today's young readers."

Publishers are invited to make their submissions for the **2026 Branford Boase Award** now. The closing date is midnight **Friday 28 November 2025**.

The longlist will be announced on Wednesday 21 January 2026 and the shortlist will be revealed on Thursday 23 April and the winner on Wednesday 8 July.

The submission form and full criteria can be found at <https://branfordboaseaward.org.uk/>

The **Branford Boase Award** is delivered in partnership with the [Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society \(ALCS\)](#) and supported by Walker Books.

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

Founded in 2000, the **Branford Boase Award** was set up in memory of award-winning author Henrietta Branford and her editor Wendy Boase of Walker Books, who both died in 1999, and is unique in honouring editor as well as author.

Wendy Boase co-founded Walker Books in 1978 with Sebastian Walker and Amelia Edwards. Her role was to look after the words and she was instrumental in shaping the list, and especially in editing the fiction. Finding new authors was one of Wendy's talents and she nurtured many prize-winning writers. Her authors relished her passion for their writing and her obsessive eye for detail. Combined, these ensured that they were driven, though not against their will, to produce their best.

Henrietta Branford began writing when she was 40, starting with pieces for a local newspaper, and before long was writing books for children and winning prizes. Henrietta's books covered the whole range from picture books to teenage novels. *Dimanche Diller*, the first in a trilogy about the eponymous heroine, won the Smarties Prize and in 2002 was awarded the Prix Tam-Tam in France; *Dimanche* and *The Fated Sky* were both shortlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize which Henrietta subsequently won with *Fire, Bed and Bone*, a title that was also Highly Commended for the Carnegie Medal.

The Branford Boase Award is now regarded as one of the most important awards in children's books and has an impressive record in picking out star authors at the start of their careers.

The shortlisted authors may have published other books in another genre – e.g. 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 Award is the joint idea of Julia Eccleshare MBE and Anne Marley MBE. Julia is consultant for the Hay Festival children's programme. Anne was Head of Children's, Youth & Schools Services for Hampshire Library & Information Service for many years and helped to found Authors Aloud UK, an author booking agency.

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### **The 2026 judges**

**Margaret McDonald** is a Scottish author who lives in Glasgow. Her debut novel **Glasgow Boys** was published in May 2024 and won the **Branford Boase Award**, the **Carnegie Medal**, the **UKLA Award** and **UKLA Shadowers' Choice Award**. She has also been published in the poetry and prose magazines *The Manifest Station*, *In Parentheses*, *Breath and Shadow*, *Bandit Fiction* and *Bubble Lit Mag*. She is a first-generation student and holds an MLitt with Distinction in English Literature from Glasgow University and a First-Class B.A (Hons) in Creative Writing with English Literature from Strathclyde University. She writes about the working class experience, the student experience and the Scottish healthcare system as a former NHS employee and disabled author.

**Stephen Dilley** has been a secondary English teacher for the last 16 years and is currently Head of English at Kendrick School, Reading. He is part of the **UKLA Book Awards** team and is an avid reader and reviewer of children's and YA books for **Just Imagine**. He has also worked with the **English & Media Centre** as an Associate Teacher and is a frequent contributor to *Emagazine*.

**Anjali Patel** is CLPE's Lead Advisory Teacher and she is responsible for the development and delivery of their high-quality learning programme and book-based teaching materials. Through her three decades in education, she has been driven by the belief that all children have the right

to be literate, and this can be supported when they are given equal access to high-quality literature and book sharing experiences with interested adults.

**Katherine Woodfine** is the author of more than 15 books for children, including the *Sinclair's Mysteries* and *Taylor & Rose Secret Agents* series. Her first published novel, *The Clockwork Sparrow*, was a Sunday Times bestseller and was nominated for numerous awards. A champion of children's literature, she has previously worked on projects including the Children's Laureate, YALC (the UK's first young adult literature convention) and podcast *Down the Rabbit Hole*, and is now the book reviewer for *The Week Junior* magazine.

### About the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society



Authors'  
Licensing and  
Collecting  
Society

**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](http://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 **2024 Branford Boase Award** was won by Nathanael Lessore and his editors Ruth Bennett and Ella Whiddett with **Steady for This** (Hot Key Books).

For more information about the award, including a full list of past winners, and the Henrietta Branford Writing Competition visit [www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk](http://www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk) .

The Branford Boase Award gratefully acknowledges support from Walker Books and from ALCS