

Titles and Authors GRA 2020

Short Listed Titles: Junior

The Space We're In, by Katya Balen. Illustrated by Laura Carlin.

Frank finds it very hard navigating his relationship with his five-year-old brother Max who is autistic. It is sometimes difficult for the family to discern Max's needs and to communicate with him. In addition, the family struggles to adjust to big change when Max starts at a new school. Then tragedy strikes and Frank finds a way to help heal his broken family and learns to love Max for who he is. This is an honestly written, realistic portrayal of autism and family life. Particularly recommended for reluctant readers.

The Cantankerous Molly Darling, by Alvy Carragher

Molly lives in rural Ireland where all she wants is the simple life — wellies, porridge and her hens. But, her eccentric mother is living in the attic; her father has abandoned the family, leaving only a PowerPoint presentation to explain; her sister has just announced she's getting married; and her best friend is obsessed with becoming a successful blogger. To top it all, her mother has sold her hens. Molly is determined to steal them back but life is just not that simple. Lots of chaos, lots of humour and a range of colourful characters to enjoy.

Last Ones Left Alive, by Sarah Davis-Goff

In a ravaged, post-apocalyptic Ireland, Orphen sets out on foot across Ireland from her island home with her dog Danger, and pushing the now dead Maeve (her guardian), in a wheelbarrow. Her mission: to find a way to save Maeve who has been bitten and infected by the zombies that roam the countryside looking for prey. She heads for Phoenix City, repeatedly finding herself in a struggle for survival against the odds. Full of ghastly detail, this is a horror story in which Orphen's past and present come together in a journey towards self-discovery.

Becoming Dinah, by Kit de Waal

Dinah is running away from home and from the mess she thinks she has made of her life. She shaves off all her hair and stuffs her beautiful, long tresses into the bottom of her rucksack so that her mother won't find them. As she is leaving, her neighbour Ahab pounds on her door. His most precious campervan has been stolen and inside it his prosthetic leg. He wants Dinah to drive him in a second van in pursuit of the thieves. Dinah is only a learner driver but Ahab knows a great deal about campervans and will direct and advise her. And pay her! She sets off with Ahab whom she doesn't like very much on a road trip along which they meet a number of different people who are all part of Dinah's journey towards forgiveness and self-discovery. A clever, modern retelling of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Bearmouth, by Liz Hyder

Bearmouth is a dark, ominous, black underground pit where Newt and his fellow workers, boys and men, live and toil unceasingly for the seldom-seen Master. Their only weekly rest is on Mayker's Day when they gather in a huge hall to worship. Newt, like most of the workers, believes in not making trouble. Then Devlin, a new boy, joins the crew. His silent, rebellious nature unsettles and unnerves Newt, prompting him to question life in Bearmouth after his good friend Toby disappears. Written entirely in a phonetic register that is perhaps challenging at the outset, but well worth sticking with for the twist that comes in due course and the unfolding plot to free the workers from a repressive, authoritarian regime.

Short Listed Titles: Senior

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, by Holly Jackson

Under the guise of her end-of-year school project, Pippa investigates the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a student some years previously and the connected suicide of the person seen in the community as her murder. Written partly in a project log format, this is a gripping teenage crime novel set in the fictitious Little Kilton where, through a series of well-constructed episodes, anti-climaxes, threatening messages and just-in-time moments, and

with the help of the suspect's brother Ravi, sleuth Pippa methodically puts together a comprehensive investigation involving murder, kidnapping, prejudice, drugs, extortion and blackmail.

And the Stars Were Burning Brightly, by Danielle Jawando

Nathan discovers that his older brother has taken his own life and is driven to find out why. As he delves into Al's life he meets Megan, Al's former classmate, and he finds out that Al was terrorised by a social media campaign and a physical attack. A beautifully written book with challenging topics and strong characterisation that sees the main character grow and mature as he searches for answers.

The Million Pieces of Neena Gill, by Emma Smith-Barton

Neena, a young woman from a Pakistani background in England, battles with anxiety, substance abuse, grief and psychosis. The mystery of what happened to her brother Akash is at the heart of why her behaviour is spiralling out of control as well as allowing the reader to understand Neena's interpretations of the actions of other characters in the novel. As Neena falls apart she discovers a more free, more dangerous version of herself. What can help put the broken pieces together again?

Most Likely, by Sarah Watson

This story follows four strong-minded, teenage girls through their senior year of high school in Cleveland, USA. Four girls who have been friends since kindergarten; four friends who always have one another's backs — through love, obstacles, success, mental health issues, sexual misconduct and ableism, and other challenges. One of these girls is on her way to becoming a future president of the United States. But, which one will it be? A coming-of age, young adult political novel.

Nóinín, by Máire Zepf

Nóinín, a shy teenage girl, lacking in confidence, given a hard time by the cooler girls in her class, and looking for some excitement in life, falls for a boy she meets

online. As the relationship deepens she neglects her best friend and secretly arranges to meet up with her new boyfriend. Then disappears. This Irish language novel, written in free verse that is fast-moving and emotive, is quick and easy to read and does not hold back on the stark message it has for readers. An independent glossary for the book is available. Find it under Workbooks for Novels <https://jcsplibraries.com/jcsp-workbooks/>

Short Listed Authors: Junior

Katya Balen (author) and **Laura Carlin** (illustrator)

British author Katya Balen has many years' experience as a teaching assistant in special needs schools. She has completed an M. Phil for which she researched the impact of stories on the behaviour of autistic children. She is a co-founder, in 2015, of Mainspring Arts, an organisation that works across artistic disciplines to provide opportunities for neurodivergent people and to promote participants' work to all audiences.

Laura Carlin is an illustrator and ceramicist based in London who has won awards for her children's books.

Alvy Carragher grew up in rural Ireland and completed her M. A. in Writing at NUI Galway. She was living in Dublin when she started writing about Molly Darling but then gave up city life and moved to South Korea with her partner to teach English and save money for an eventual move to Canada. In South Korea the Irish countryside came alive for her and she found herself putting shape on her debut novel. Now based in Vancouver, she is currently working on a second novel. She is also a published poet and an award-winning blogger.

Sarah Davis-Goff was born in and lives in Dublin with her fiancé, writer Dave Rudden. In 2014, with Lisa Coen, she founded the independent Irish Tramp Press which has published such highly acclaimed writers as Belinda McKeon, Sara Baume and Mike McCormack. Due to ill health, Davis-Goff stayed at home a lot

as a child and passed the time reading. She says the seeds for her debut novel were sown by reading Stephen King and Margaret Atwood.

Birmingham-Irish writer **Kit de Waal** (daughter of an Irish mother and a Caribbean father) had a successful career in criminal and family law before becoming an award-winning author of fiction for adults with the publication of *My Name is Leon*. Her debut YA novel is the first in the new feminist Bellatrix series from Hachette Children's Group. She has two children and lives in the West Midlands in the UK.

Liz Hyder is a creative workshop leader and freelance arts P.R. consultant. As part of her work, she has run workshops everywhere, from schools and mosques to libraries, and has organised interviews with figures from the worlds of literature, politics and history among many others. Her original idea for *Bearmouth* came from a visit to a historic slate mine in Wales where she learned about the work conditions there in Victorian times.

Short Listed Authors: Senior

Holly Jackson made her first attempt at a novel when she was aged fifteen. She grew up in Buckinghamshire in the UK and studied literary linguistics and creative writing at the University of Nottingham. She wrote her debut novel in about eleven weeks but says she had carefully planned it before she started writing. She hopes the multi-media elements in the book help the readers become detectives alongside Pippa and hunt for clues themselves.

Manchester-born **Danielle Jawando** writes short stories and short plays and has worked as a storyline writer on "Coronation Street". She's been writing from a young age and her first novel is based on personal experience, dealing with several issues she feels strongly about. She teaches and facilitates creative writing classes and is already working on her next book which will also be contemporary YA fiction.

Emma Smith-Barton has a young family and juggles her writing with a hectic family life. She is a published writer for adults, under the pseudonym Amna Khokher. She was born in South Wales to Pakistani parents and her upbringing in mixed cultures strongly influences her writing. Her debut novel is informed by the experience of a good friend who suffered from psychosis and the stigma attached to it. With her novel, Smith-Barton wanted to add to the wider conversation around mental health which she believes to be very important.

US novelist **Sarah Watson**, a native of California, is also a successful television writer and producer but she doesn't think her television writing experience has influenced her novel writing. The seed for her first novel was in her disappointment with the outcome of the 2016 American presidential election which in turn lead her to thinking about who the first woman elected to the office *would* be. Watson lives in Santa Monica with her boyfriend and her dog Daisy.

Máire Zepf is the first ever Children's Writing Fellow for Northern Ireland, based at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University, Belfast. After studying history at Oxford (where she was inspired by the tutors, the old libraries and the atmosphere of learning) and then working for a period in London, she returned to her native County Down in 2001. She started writing when she became a stay-at-home parent and has published a number of books for younger readers. She has also translated books by Oliver Jeffers, Malachy Doyle and Torben Kuhlman into Irish. Apart from writing, she enjoys climbing and walking.

Compiled by: Breege O'Brien, August 2020