



# THE 2021 UKLA WINNERS

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The 2021 UKLA Awards, the only national awards judged by class teachers, will always be remembered as the year when the entire judging process had to be conducted online, with the judging panel only meeting and discussing the titles virtually. Yet despite this the impassioned discussions demonstrated yet again the impact that quality texts can have upon the teacher judges and the students in their classes.

For UKLA, giving classroom practitioners the opportunity to read high quality new children's books is as important as finding winning books. Research carried out by members of UKLA (Cremin et al 2008) clearly demonstrated the links between teachers' knowledge of children's books and the likelihood of pupils becoming successful readers. Despite this evidence, teachers are seldom given time to read new books or funding to purchase them when they do.

*I have found that being involved in the UKLA judging process has reignited my enthusiasm and I have been so impressed by the diversity and richness of what is being written for young people. I have found powerful texts which really resonate and encourage the students I teach to explore new texts, or perhaps to rediscover the joy of reading?.*

Ruth Kidman Teacher Judge

As Chris Lockwood, Chair of the Book Awards, said *'The UKLA is enormously proud of the commitment and resilience shown by our teacher judges for the 2021 Book Awards and of the stunningly diverse books which they have chosen as their winners. The quality of the judge's discussions were a privilege to witness?'*

The judging criteria call for the selection to be from a 'wide and inclusive range' of publishers and for books which 'recognise a broad range of perspectives, experiences and voices' and this is reflected in all four categories with themes of diversity, inclusion, empathy, inspiration and own voices all represented amongst books which have proved so effective in engaging readers.

The 3-6+ category has been won by Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola's debut title *Look Up!* (Puffin). This was praised by judges for its ambitious, intelligent and inspiring female lead and as a story which sparked recognition for its relatable message and prompted intense discussion amongst the children who selected it to be read on a daily basis in classrooms. The judges also wished to Highly Commend *Tibble and Grandpa* by Wendy Meddour and Daniel Egnéus (Oxford) to reflect how moved children and adults were by this touching intergenerational tale of loss and resilience.

The 7-10+ category winner is *Check Mates* by Stewart Foster (Simon & Schuster), which the judges praised as a beautifully crafted and empathetic tale, and one which showed deep perception of characters and relationships and gave a sensitive portrayal of ADHD. It made complex ideas accessible, challenged stereotypes and was entirely unsentimental. Once again in a tightly contested category the judges also wished to Highly Commend *Owen and the Soldier* by Lisa Williamson (Barrington Stoke), which deals so movingly with grief, remembrance and mental health in such a short and highly accessible format.

For the first time in the 11-14+ category the judges felt compelled to award Joint winners. Both *Run Rebel* by Manjeet Mann (Penguin) and *The Last Paper Crane* by Kerry Drewery (Hot Key) were considered so exceptional that both deserved the highest accolade. The extraordinary verse novel, *Run Rebel*, by debut British author Manjeet Mann, was praised for its complex representation, universal themes, and visceral emotional impact. The powerful Hiroshima survivor story, *The Last Paper Crane* by Kerry Drewery was praised for its sensitive and compassionate handling of history, the enriching discussion that it provoked and for the fact that it was so cleverly constructed with the use of

different text formats and with the illustration by Natsuo Seki enriching the emotional impact.

The judges were unanimous in their choice of winner for the category of Information Books 3- 14+. *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson ( Andersen) , uniquely could be creatively used across the whole age range and provide multiple impetus for further study. A book that is both beautiful and important, delivering universal messages with such powerful impact.

The fact that these shortlists are judged by class teachers and can be heartily recommended to their peers makes them particularly useful as co-sponsor Deborah McLaren, Director of Lovereading4kids said: *What a beautiful selection of winning books! Some of our absolute faves of the year; the UKLA committees and teacher judges have done a wonderful job of curating a stunning selection of quality texts and great reads to engage every age range. LoveReading4Kids and LoveReading4Schools are delighted to again partner with the UKLA to help encourage reading for pleasure and engender a lifelong love of reading in children?*

Once again teachers, student teachers and schools across the UK have been shadowing the final judging and are currently involved in voting for their favourites. Their winners will be announced live at the virtual awards ceremony on July 1st. This will be streamed via the UKLA YouTube Channel and the UKLA website. It is also hoped that restrictions will permit a live celebration and presentation of the trophies later in the year.

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