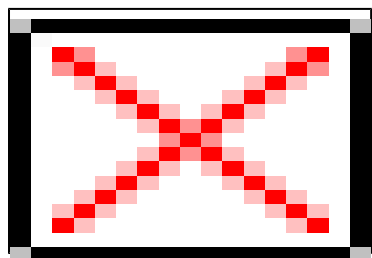




MUHAMMAD KHAN WINS 20TH BRANFORD BOASE AWARD

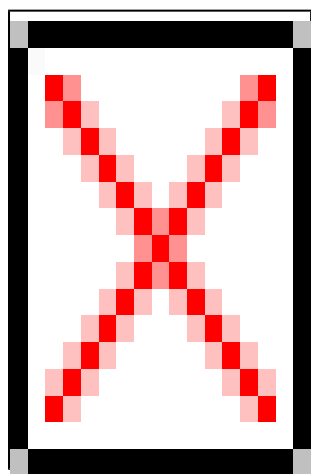
The winner of the **2019 Branford Boase Award** for outstanding debut novel for children is Muhammad Khan for his YA novel [I Am Thunder](#) [1]. Set up in memory of author Henrietta Branford and her editor Wendy Boase who both died in 1999, the award also recognizes his editor Lucy Pearse of Macmillan Children's Books.



I Am Thunder chronicles the radicalisation of a young Muslim girl growing up in London, the choices she is presented with, and how she develops the confidence to make her own decisions. Muhammad Khan was prompted to write the book by the news that three Bethnal Green schoolgirls had flown to Syria to join the Islamic State group.

Mitch Johnson, last year's **Branford Boase Award** winner described **I Am Thunder** as 'a brave, bold and brilliant book' and said: 'The sensitivity with which Khan handles such a volatile and emotive subject is astounding, and his ability to create a story that is both gripping and tender is hugely impressive.'

Like his character Muzna, Muhammad Khan grew up in South London, and his parents are first generation immigrants from Pakistan. Like her, he always knew he wanted to be a writer, though his family were determined he should be an engineer. But he says that Muzna is primarily based on his young students. In fact: 'virtually every character in the book has a real-life counterpart.'



On winning the award Khan said: 'I am absolutely thrilled and humbled by the news that **I am Thunder** has won the prestigious **Branford Boase Award**. It's a real pinch yourself moment! The competition was tremendous, each book magnificent in its own right. Lucy Pearse worked tirelessly and with passion to help me polish **I am Thunder** so it's especially nice to share this incredible accolade with her.'

Chair of the judges, **Julia Eccleshare**, children's director Hay Festival, said, '2019 is the 20th anniversary of the **Branford Boase Award**. It has celebrated wonderful books and authors over the years, and we are very proud of all that

it has achieved in highlighting new writers and the editors who help them develop their potential. We're delighted that **I Am Thunder** has won this year. Muhammad Khan is giving voice to those we haven't heard from enough and his story will ring true with readers of any background. As demonstrated so brilliantly in her book **Fire, Bed and Bone**, Henrietta Branford also gave voice to those whose stories need to be told and was happy to pose questions about politics and society in thrilling adventure stories. We look forward to reading more by Muhammad, and all the writers on this shortlist, and to twenty more years celebrating the exciting new talent in children's books.?

Winning editor **Lucy Pearse** said: 'It was a real honour to see [I Am Thunder](#) [1] included on this incredible shortlist, and a complete pinch-yourself moment for it to be selected as the winner. Muhammad deserves this award so much ? it is a brave and important book and he has worked enormously hard ? and I feel privileged to have been part of its publishing story. Each book on this shortlist is a spectacular achievement and I feel very lucky to be working among such talented authors and editors.'

The award ceremony was attended by previous winners including Marcus Sedgwick, Jenny Downham, Kevin Brooks and M.G. Leonard.

Young winners of the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition**, which runs alongside the **Branford Boase Award**, were also present at the award ceremony and presented with their certificates and prizes by Mitch Johnson.

The [Branford Boase Award](#) [2] is supported by **Walker Books**.

[Read an interview with Muhammad Khan](#) [3] by Darren Chetty.

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Links:

[1] <http://t.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/228/childrens-books/reviews/i-am-thunder>

[2] <http://www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk/index.html>

[3] <http://t.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/236/childrens-books/articles/a-qa-interview-with-muhammad-khan>