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**BookTrust announces judges line up for Blue Peter 20th Anniversary Book Awards**

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Wednesday 2nd October 2019 – TV Presenter and Actress Meryl Fernandes joins an impressive judging panel for the 2020 Blue Peter Book Awards.

Meryl, who has had roles in EastEnders and Ackley Bridge, will sit on an expert panel alongside the talented award-winning poet, performer and author Joseph Coelho, publishing booktuber expert Jean Menzies and Blue Peter editor and non-voting chair Ellen Evans.

**Meryl Fernandes, said:** “I am absolutely thrilled and honoured to be a judge this year for the Blue Peter book awards. I can't wait to crack on and start reading all these wonderful books. I currently read around four books every evening to my book obsessed toddler, so I'm excited to read some books that I can then pass down to her for when she is older. I've always loved reading from an early age - and watching Blue Peter so this is a double win for me!”

**Joseph Coelho, Poet, Playwright and Children’s Author, said** "It is a complete honour to be asked to judge the 2020 Blue Peter Book Awards - reading provides not only a means to broaden your world view and to imagine the lives of others but can also take us on quests of fantasy and into adventures of knowledge - I cannot wait to get reading."

**Jean Menzies, ancient historian and podcaster, said:** “It is an absolute honour to be one of this year’s Blue Peter Book Award judges. I grew up on Blue Peter and remember first-hand the joy that came with every new episode. As a grown-up it's extra exciting to be part of bringing a little bit of that joy into children’s hands and homes with these wonderful books.”

Managed by [BookTrust](http://www.booktrust.org.uk), the UK’s largest children’s reading charity, the immensely popular Blue Peter Book Awards, now in their 20th year, honour amazing authors, imaginative illustrators and the best books for children. The 2020 Awards champion children’s books published in the last 12 months in two categories: Best Story and Best Book with Facts. There will be three shortlisted books for each award chosen by the judging panel and announced on Blue Peter on Thursday 7th November.

The winning titles, voted for by over 200 children from 12 schools across the UK, will be revealed live on Blue Peter on World Book Day on Thursday 5th March 2020, with the winning authors and illustrators appearing on a special awards episode of the show.

**Blue Peter Editor Ellen Edwards** is an avid reader and before her career at the BBC she worked as a bookseller. Discussing the new judging panel, Ellen said: “I am really excited to work with our brilliant judges for the Blue Peter Book Awards, author and poet Joseph Coelho, blogger Jean Menzies and Meryl Fernandes from CBBC’s Dengineers, and I can’t wait to see which books get shortlisted to win.

“Once the judges make their selection, it’s kids who vote to decide which is the best book with facts and the best story. This year is the 20th anniversary, and our winners will be joining authors who are household names like Roald Dahl, Julia Donaldson, Michael Morpurgo, J.K.Rowling, Dame Jacqueline Wilson and Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell.”

The Blue Peter Book Awards have been celebrating children’s literature since 2000. BookTrust, the largest children’s reading charity in Britain, has managed the Blue Peter Book Awards since 2008. The 2019 winners were Onjali Q Raúf for The Boy at the Back of the Class and The Colours of History by Clive Gifford, illustrated by Marc-Etienne Peintre.

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Keep up-to-date with the Awards at [www.booktrust.org.uk/bluepeter](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/bluepeter) and on Twitter by following @Booktrust and #BPBA

**Notes to Editors**

**Ellen Evans** is Editor of Blue Peter, the world’s longest running children’s series, with weekly live shows, an amazing online fan club and Blue Peter badges. A life-long fan of Blue Peter, she has worked at the BBC on factual and entertainment output for over 20 years, making shows for BBC One, BBC Two and BBC Three, CBBC and CBeebies.

**Meryl Fernandes** is most notably known for playing Afia in Eastenders, Meryl was contracted for three weeks on the show, but her feisty character portrayal proved such a hit that she stayed in the award-winning soap for three years. After training at Millennium Performing Arts Academy in London for three years, Meryl landed her first West End show The Far Pavillions at the Shaftesbury Theatre. She went on to perform at The National Theatre in critically acclaimed plays such as The Man of Mode with Tom Hardy and A Matter of Life and Death. Her television credits followed in programmes such as BBC 1’s Doctor Who, ITV’s Demons and C5’s Minder staring in scenes alongside Rik Mayall.

Most recently Meryl completed filming as a presenter of CBBC’s The Dengineers which is due to air later this year.

**Joseph Coelho** is a poet and children’s author. His debut poetry collection *Werewolf Club Rules* was the winner of the 2015 CLiPPA Poetry Award and his next collection *Overheard in A Tower Block* was longlisted for the 2018 CILIP Carnegie Medal and shortlisted for the 2018 CLiPPA Poetry Award. As well as poetry, Joseph also writes picture books; *Luna Loves Library Day* illustrated by Fiona Lumbers, *If All the World Were* illustrated by Alison Collpoys, which has been longlisted for the 2019 CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal, and *No Longer Alone* illustrated by Robyn Wilson-Owen. His latest poetry collection *A Year in Nature Poems,* illustrated by Kelly Louise Judd, celebrates his childhood love of nature.

**Jean Menzies** is a YouTuber, podcaster, and video maker. Having previously worked at Pan Macmillan as Creative Producer on their Book Break channel, Jean is now working on her PhD research at the University of Roehampton whilst still reviewing on her YouTube channel Jean BookishThoughts, which has over 66,000 subscribers.

**Blue Peter** is the longest running children’s magazine programme in the world. As well as the Book Awards, the show’s family of presenters, live studio home, amazing competitions, incredible challenges, live music, interviews with celebrities, access behind the scenes, pets, makes and bakes, free games online and most importantly its commitment to the audience are all long standing elements of this iconic show. [www.bbc.co.uk/bluepeter](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bluepeter)

**About BookTrust**

BookTrust is the UK’s largest children’s reading charity. We work to inspire a love of reading in children because we know that reading can transform lives. Each year we reach **3.9 million children** across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading. Every parent receives a BookTrust book in their baby’s first year. Our books are delivered via health, library, schools and early year’s practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. Reading for pleasure has a dramatic impact on educational outcomes, well-being and social mobility, and is also a huge pleasure in itself. We are committed to starting children on their reading journey and supporting them throughout**.** [**booktrust.org.uk**](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)