



CLiPPA Poetry Award 2015

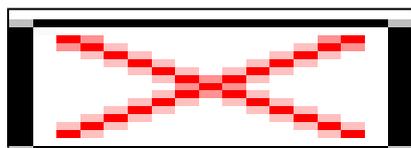
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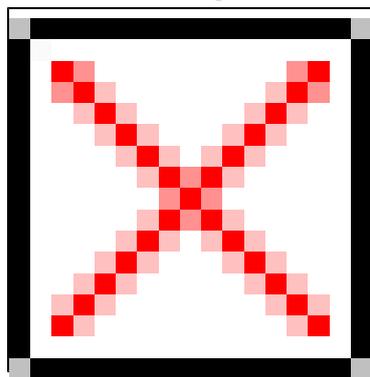
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The 2015 CLPE Poetry Award by Roger McGough



Roger McGough CBE, is a poet who is known both for his work for adults and for children. He is a keen supporter of new writing and in 2014 and 2015 has been chairing the judging panel for the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) Poetry Award. This is the only award for published children's poetry in the UK and it has been an annual award since 2003. Roger was the winner of the award in 2004 and 2005.

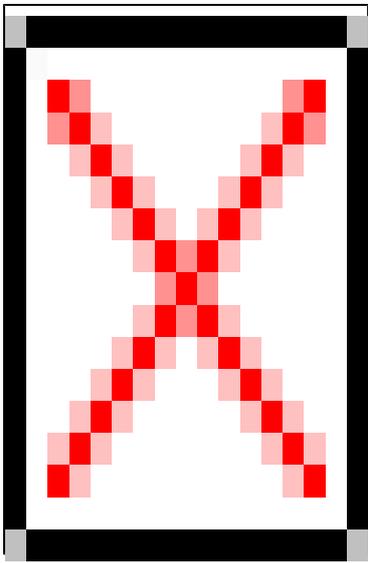
In this article Roger talks to **CLPE Chief Executive, Louise Johns-Shepherd** about the award, the judging



process and contemporary children's poetry.

We were delighted at CLPE when you decided to chair the judging panel for the award in 2014 and again this year. Why did you agree to become involved in the award?

Well, first of all, having been a previous winner, I was interested in the process. Over the years I have judged adult awards (I'm judging the Bridport Poetry Prize at the moment), a serious undertaking because I take sole responsibility, but the **CLIPPA**, although a labour of love, is much more fun. It is very satisfying to be able to share your thoughts with a group of judges, to discuss the entries and make a case for them. As well as this, judging the award keeps you in touch with what is going on and what is being published at the moment. You come across new voices and meet old friends and familiar voices. And if you read other poetry you expand your own experience, so I love it from that point of view as well.

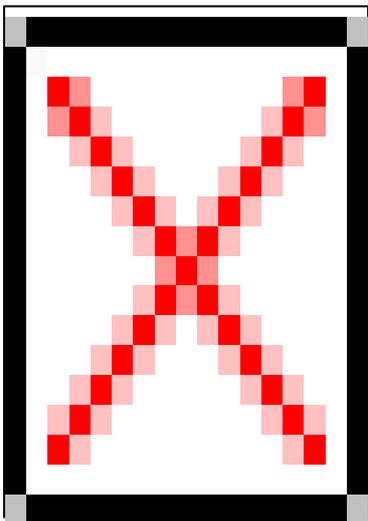


This year, the award has been re-named and we're calling it The CLiPPA (Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award). You invented that name didn't you?

I did, didn't I? I want this award to be memorable, and to have a memorable name. **The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Poetry Award** isn't exactly catchy. **CLiPPA** sounds appealing and popular. If we're going to highlight the importance of children's poetry then we need to have a name that people can remember ? and say!

And we love it, it has really taken off. Thank you. You've got some fantastic fellow judges this year (Allie Esiri, Tony Bradman, Charlotte Hacking and last year's winner [Tony Mitton](#) [3]). These are all smart and knowledgeable people. When the judges all come together what is your process as chair, how do you keep everyone in order and how do you come to a decision?

I start from the premise that all the judges have read all of the books and will come with their favourites already in



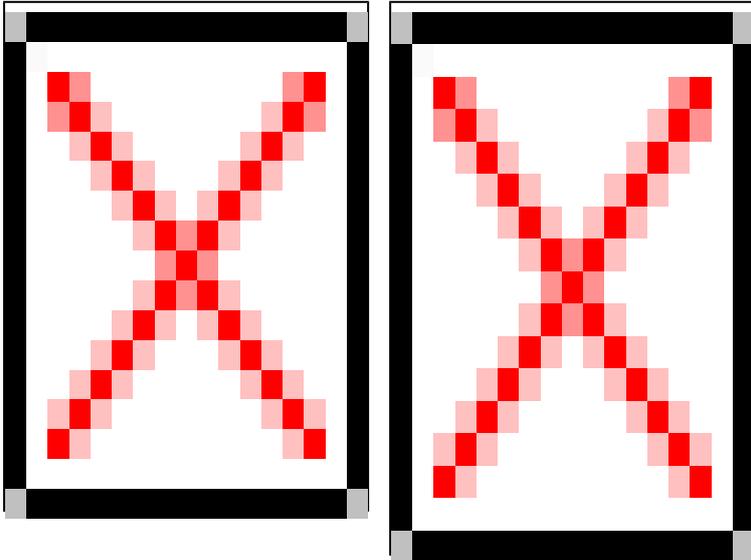
their heads. We have an in depth discussion about everyone's shortlist and take the time to really talk about the books that stood out to each person. I don't go in knowing what I think will win, but I go in knowing what I like. The Judges are never dogmatic and the art of persuasion can change minds. Debates are lively and well-informed with everyone having their say - we may disagree, but it is all very amicable in the end and everyone enjoys themselves.

What is the best thing about judging?

The best thing is that you get to read new poems ? from new poets that you may not have seen before ? or from poets on their third or fourth book. Poems that surprise you, or delight you. It's also great when you read things that are different, see a collection by a single poet or an anthology that is truly original or innovative or come across a book which is beautiful in its writing and production.

What is the worst thing?

That people will inevitably be disappointed. We discuss a book by a good friend which I know will not be a winner. Everyone who is nominated in this award has been published and every book will have a good poem in it but sometimes there are things in there that dissuade you. It may be that there are too many poems on a particular or tired theme (dragons or teachers stick in my mind) or illustrations that are drowned by the text.

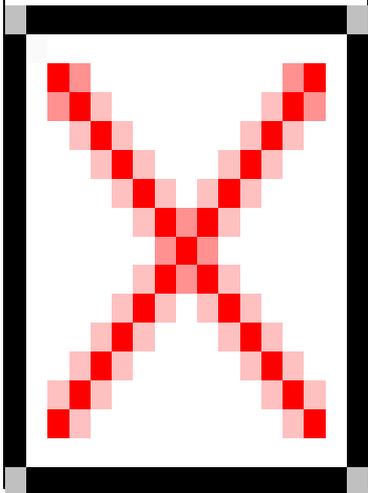


What do you think makes this an important award and why do you think publishing contemporary children's poetry is important?

My first poems I assumed, were adult poems ? I wrote for myself or my peers. It was not until later I realised that I was writing for younger people and children as well. Poetry develops imagination, we know it helps children learn to read and they love it. Children like familiarity, and a poem that you can remember breeds that familiarity. Reading a poem can be less taxing than a whole book, you get to the end quicker ? but it still stimulates the imagination and plays little films inside your head that make it memorable. Poetry can be mysterious, it can be funny and it fits my temperament ? and it fits the temperament of children as well. Good poetry is inspiring, engaging and mysterious it sparks imaginations and needs to be celebrated. That's why the **CLiPPA** is important. It shows how published poetry can be used in schools, and really raises the profile of the genre. It is also about making the whole shortlist really visible, there will be a winner but all the shortlisted works are really celebrated.

I think you're so right and with the schools shadowing scheme this year we will really be able to show how great poetry inspires children. The children performing alongside the poets at the award show will highlight how much enjoyment, inspiration and motivation studying poetry gives children. So, given all you've said, why do you think so little children's poetry is published?

I don't know why there aren't more people writing verse for children ? maybe they can't find the voice. There are



some fantastic young writers out there ? and spoken word poets ? maybe we are about to

hear from a new generation. Poetry is firmly on the curriculum and publishers are starting to notice, there are champions of poetry in the publishing world like Janetta Otter-Barry (Frances Lincoln) and Gabby Morgan (Macmillan) and there are some great new (and older) writers so maybe the tide will change and we will start to see more published poetry books. However, people are going to be put off if they know that they could slog away at their work and it isn't going to be noticed, reviewed or published. Nobody does it for the money, but it is important that the work gets to the people you have written it for and unless poetry lists get bigger there isn't going to be a bigger audience.

Will you be judging the CLiPPA next year?

I can't. I have a book out this year and as the award is for a book of children's poetry published in the previous year I will be eligible for the award ? but not for the judges!

The **CLiPPA** shortlist

[Let in the Stars](#) [4], by Mandy Coe (editor) illustrated by The Manchester School of Art, The Manchester Writing School, Manchester Metropolitan University, 978-1910029008

[Werewolf Club Rules](#) [5], by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by John O'Leary, Frances Lincoln, 978-1847804525, £6.99

[Give the Ball to the Poet](#) [6]. **A New Anthology of Caribbean Poetry**, Georgie Horrell, Aisha Spencer and Morag Styles (editors), illustrated by Jane Ray, Commonwealth Education Trust, 978-1909931008, £9.99

[Blue Balloons and Rabbit Ears](#) [7], Hilda Offen, Troika Books, 978-1909991033, £6.99

[My Life as a Goldfish and other poems](#), [8] by Rachel Rooney, illustrated by Ellie Jenkins, Frances Lincoln, 978-1847804822, £6.99

Teaching ideas for the shortlisted collections as well as videos from all the poets are available free on the [CLPE Poetryline](#) [9].

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[9] <http://www.poetryline.org.uk/about-clpe>