

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
12 JANUARY 2006

ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE
24 JANUARY 2006

ANGUS BOOK AWARD 2006

JOINT REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF LEISURE SERVICES

AND

THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This report details the launch of the Angus Book Award 2006 and the proposed arrangements for the Award ceremony.

1. RECOMMENDATION

The Committees are asked to note the contents of this report for their interest.

2. ANGUS BOOK AWARD 2006

The 2006 award was launched on Wednesday 7 December by current holder of the award, Terence Blacker, in front of more than 500 S3 pupils from all eight secondary schools. Pupils had gathered at Brechin High School and Carnoustie High School for the two events.

Following a positive evaluation of the impact of last year's launch on motivation and attitude towards the award, it was decided that similar events would be held this year. Whilst it would not always be appropriate to invite the previous winner, it was agreed that Terence Blacker would be an excellent speaker and the steering group was delighted that he agreed to attend.

Terence, who won the 2005 award for his novel *Boy2Girl*, said: "The Angus Book Award is one of the most respected awards for young people's fiction not only because of the way the final decision comes down to teenage democracy but also because pupils themselves run the final ceremony so impressively. It's a real privilege to be back in Angus to launch the new shortlist."

At the launch, Terence talked about the award, its importance to shortlisted authors and how much it meant to him to connect with his readers. Giving pupils the benefit of his own experience of being a judge on a book prize panel, he advised pupils to, "Go with your gut reaction – it's what you feel inside in response to reading that will help you decide which one to vote for."

Terence then announced and introduced the 2006 shortlisted titles giving pupils a taster of what they have to look forward to.

There were 88 books circulated for consideration for this year's shortlist. The shortlist features four novels by authors new to the Angus Book Award and one by an author previously shortlisted in 2001. *Looking for JJ* by Anne Cassidy is a chilling psychological thriller about what happened when three girls went out for the day and only two came back; *Skarrs* by Catherine Forde tells a disturbing and emotional tale linking the experience of prisoners of war in a Japanese WW2 camp with racism in the UK; *Icerefire* by Chris d'Lacey is an action packed fantasy in which the hero crosses the line between reality and legend to a time when dragons really did exist; Graham Joyce's *TWOC – Taking Without*

Owner's Consent is a fast paced hard-hitting novel dealing with the tragic consequences of joyriding. The fifth author on the shortlist is Beverley Naidoo, returning to Angus this year for her novel, *Web of Lies* in which themes of oppression, exile and gang-culture are deftly woven together.

Over the coming months, pupils will read their way through the shortlist, before voting for their favourite in a secret ballot.

In addition to the 2006 publicity poster and bookmarks for pupils, a general leaflet about the award will be distributed to parents and copies will also be available at local libraries; information is also available on the website www.angus.gov.uk/bookaward. As more and more regional book awards for teenagers are established, it is important to maintain the profile of the award. Greater publicity within the professional press and increased awareness of the award by professional organisations obviously enhance the reputation of the award and thereby increase the likelihood that big names authors will agree to attend and that publishers will continue to give their support. Therefore this year, together with the existing publicity, a postcard announcing the 2006 shortlist has been produced and will be sent to professional journals and groups as well as other school library services.

This year, the five authors, participating pupils, teachers, librarians and members of the wider school community as well as representatives of the Youth Congress and members and officers of the Council will gather to hear the name of the winner at the Award Ceremony in Brechin City Hall on Tuesday May 16th 2006.

A full outline of the books together with biographical information about the authors is attached in Appendix 1.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The net costs of the scheme are an estimated £6,500.

This year, local firm Blackadders Solicitors, and Micro Librarian Systems, producers of the Eclipse library management software used in Angus secondary schools have both agreed to become official sponsors to the Award by committing £500 per annum for the next three years. Their sponsorship, together with Scottish Executive Quality of Life funding, will help to consolidate the future of the Award.

The remainder of the costs are met from existing Leisure Services and Education Services budgets with a contribution towards the costs of books being made by participating schools. Publishers meet half the authors' travel and accommodation expenses.

Since 1996 all five shortlisted authors have received £50 for reaching the shortlist with the eventual winner receiving a further £250 plus the Angus Book Award trophy. In order to increase the attractiveness of the Award it was decided to increase the prize money for the winner to £500 with shortlisted authors receiving only a small miniature of the trophy in addition to the payments they all receive for visiting schools. This change increases the financial appeal of the award but maintains the net cost of the prize money within existing parameters.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no Human Rights Implications associated with this report

5. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Law & Administration, and Acting Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

JOHN ZIMNY
Director of Leisure Services

JIM ANDERSON
Director of Education

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

Appendix 1

Angus Book Award 2006

Full details of shortlisted authors and titles:

Anne Cassidy

Anne Cassidy was born in London and for the first six weeks of her life slept in a drawer. Despite being hopeless at her convent school she went on to be a teacher for 19 years before becoming a full-time author, concentrating on writing crime stories and thrillers for teenagers. Her favourite kind of books are those that have a mystery of some sort at their centre. Exploring why something happened, how a crime was committed, the effects of terrible events on ordinary people's lives is her passion. She has been shortlisted for many awards and won the Booktrust Teenage Prize for *Looking for J*, which is currently being adapted for the theatre. She is married and has one son.

***Looking for JJ* (Scholastic)**

Where was Jennifer Jones? That's what everyone was saying. There were only a handful of people in the country who knew. Alice Tully was one of them. Seventeen-year old Alice is trying to lead a normal life while waiting to go to university - a seemingly ordinary teenager working and seeing her boyfriend - but her past keeps catching up with her. Living with the constant fear that the tabloids will discover her despite the new identity she has been given, Alice faces up to the memory of what happened six years ago, when three girls went out for the day and only two came back. This disturbing, psychological thriller is a compulsive but often chilling read.

Catherine Forde

Catherine Forde always enjoyed English class at school and spent most of her time creating stories and poems. Before becoming an author, Catherine worked as a lexicographer and as a teacher. She didn't write her first book until her children had started school and she needed an excuse to get away from the housework. She writes all her books in a very cluttered room, on a very cluttered table by a window that lets in too much cold in the winter and too much sun in the summer but she is too superstitious to change anything. She lives in Glasgow with her husband and her two sons and enjoys swimming, jogging, walking and playing badminton and squash!

***Skarrs* (Egmont)**

Danny is trying very hard not to care that his life is disintegrating. His grandfather has just died, he has lost touch with his best friend Richard, his parents' relationship is strained to say the least and perhaps worst of all, he is being manipulated by the loathsome Jakey. Thankfully help is at hand in the shape of Richard and an extraordinary legacy from his grandfather. As he pieces together the details of Granpa Dan's past during World War II, Danny begins to put his own life back together. Scars come in all shapes and sizes, mental and physical, in this poignant and emotional story.

Chris d'Lacey

Chris d'Lacey was born in Malta but has lived most of his life in Britain. At school his English teacher told him that he 'didn't have a creative thought in his head' and his head teacher insisted that he study sciences instead of English and music. Chris himself wanted to be a rock star and songwriter. After taking a biology degree, Chris went to work at Leicester University, first as a histologist and then in charge of confocal microscopy. His first publications were short stories for adults but since his success with *A Hole at the Pole*, Chris has concentrated on writing for children, being shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal for *Fly Cherokee Fly*. Chris continues to work at the university and lives in Leicester with his wife, Jay.

***Icefire* (Orchard)**

David Rain, typical student, hard up, hard working, with girlfriend problems, or so you'd think, but it's hard to live an ordinary life when you live in the presence of dragons. Life gets more complicated still with the appearance at college of the mysterious Dr Bergstrom, and the tantalising allure of a research trip to the Arctic. Drawn into a mysterious past steeped in Polar exploration and Inuit legend, David soon discovers a forgotten world that holds the ancient secret of the Icefire. David's life will never be the same again as he crosses the line between reality and legend in this action-packed fantasy for all ages.

Graham Joyce

When it comes to doing research for a novel, nothing is too much trouble for Graham Joyce. He has lived with a colony of scorpions in a beach shack on the Greek Island of Lesbos for his novel *Dreamside*, and for *Smoking Poppy* he spent two weeks in a jungle in Thailand. It's maybe better not to ask what research he did for *TWOC!* As a four-time winner of The British Fantasy Society's Award, it's clear that his dedication pays off. Recently Guest of Honour at the World Fantasy Convention in Madison, Wisconsin, Graham returns home from his globe trotting lifestyle to Leicester where he lives with his family.

***TWOC* (Faber and Faber)**

As a tragic consequence of a 'joyriding' accident, Matt's brother is dead and his brother's girlfriend is horribly scarred. Matt survived with only minor injuries - but not all wounds can be seen! Set on a guilt-ridden path of self-destruction, Matt's only way to escape the aftermath of that disastrous day is to go back to the scene of the crime - the tunnel. TWOC – Taking Without Owner's Consent puts you in the passenger seat and takes you for the drive of your life. Buckle up for this fast paced hard-hitting novel.

Beverley Naidoo

Beverley grew up as a white child in apartheid South Africa. After taking part in the resistance against the government she was exiled in 1965 and came to live in Britain. Her first novel *Journey to Jo'burg*, published in 1985, won awards in the UK and the USA but was banned in South Africa until 1991. Beverley returned to her native country in 1993 during the first democratic elections, visiting again to run drama and writing workshops. Her books have won awards in many countries. In 2000 she won the Carnegie Medal for the *Other Side of Truth* which was also shortlisted for the Angus Book Award. She writes poetry and plays for radio and stage but much of her time is spent speaking to young people across the UK and abroad.

***Web of Lies* (Puffin)**

"Say anything boy, and you're dead meat." What should Femi do? It's difficult to resist the pressures of inner city street culture; after all Femi knows only too well the consequences of standing up to evil and injustice – his mother shot down in Nigeria by enemies of his journalist father. Two years later, Femi, his 14 year old sister Sade and their father are waiting for their claim for asylum to be approved. Femi finds himself being drawn into a violent, possibly drug-dealing, gang. Whether the danger is in Nigeria or London, choices have to be made. Set in 1997, themes of oppression, exile and gang-culture are deftly woven together in this insightful novel.

Appendix 2

Angus Book Award 2006

Background Information

The Angus Book Award is an Angus Council initiative, which aims to encourage pupils to read and enjoy quality teenage fiction. It is designed to create an environment in which teenagers are enthused about books and are encouraged to see reading for enjoyment as a stimulating and exciting activity. At its heart is the principle that pupils not only vote for the winner but actively participate in all aspects of the award from the selection of the shortlist to the award ceremony. This is the key factor in its success.

The Award involves 3rd year pupils from all eight secondary schools in Angus in reading five shortlisted titles. The titles are selected from books appropriate for the 13/15 year old age group, written by authors living in the UK and published in paperback in the preceding 12 months. The short list is drawn up by local teachers and librarians, based on reviews submitted by teachers, library staff and pupils. A growing number of participants from the previous year now contribute to this process. Titles are chosen which reflect the range of themes, which interest teenagers whilst challenging and interesting both committed and less enthusiastic readers.

The books are read and discussed in detail within each school between December and May. About a week before the ceremony, pupils cast their votes in a secret ballot using the official ballot boxes. The result is only made known on the evening of the Award ceremony.

During the day of the ceremony, the shortlisted authors visit schools to talk to the pupils involved in the scheme. The visits add to the considerable excitement and enthusiasm already generated within the schools and are an important part of the Award; meeting authors motivates pupils to read and helps them to develop their own potential as writers.

Each year the evening award ceremony is held in a different burgh within Angus. The ceremony gives pupils the chance to hear from all the authors and is staged to highlight the high profile status of the Award.

The role played by pupils during the ceremony has increased each year and this involvement has led to a real sense of ownership. Pupils from the host burgh act as "masters of ceremonies" for the evening and pupils from the other schools talk about each shortlisted title indicating why they favour it. Links have been made with the Angus Youth Congress and the winner is announced by the chairperson. The winner is presented with a miniature replica of the Aberlemno Serpent stone and will this year receive £500.

Each year the reaction of pupils to the announcement of the winner demonstrates the success of the Award. By involving them in an exciting initiative, which gives them responsibility and encourages them to express their views, the Angus Book Award helps pupils to see reading as both stimulating and fun and raises the profile of books, reading and writing. Schools recognise the contribution the Award makes to raising standards and the self-esteem of participating pupils and, in addition to the targeted classes, many pupils are now involved through reading clubs.