The Blue Peter Book Awards

The Blue Peter Book Awards are one of the UK's premier prizes for authors and illustrators of children's books. Managed by BookTrust, the awards honour the best books for children, published in the previous 12 months. Previous winners include J.K. Rowling, Michael Morpurgo, Tony Robinson and Terry Deary.

Clive Gifford

"Born in Northampton, educated in Southampton, holidayed as a child in Littlehampton, I have been Manchester-based for over 20 years, all that time working as a freelance author of books, mostly for children and young adults."

Further biographical details are available at www.clivegifford.co.uk or on request at: clivegiff@aol.com

Frequently Asked Questions

"How long have you been an author?"
Since I was sixteen. My first book was published close to my seventeenth birthday and by the time I was at university, I had written a dozen books on a variety of subjects – from computing and new technology to a published biography of prog rock band, Marillion."

"Why did you start writing books?"
I always loved communicating via the written word and, fortunately, it turned out that I was half-decent at it. No more than half decent but you learn, build on experience and continually strive to get better. I went into publishing with the precise aim of learning how the other side of the book process worked, so that I could return to my first love, becoming a freelance author as I turned 30.

"What have been your highlights?
"Plenty. Having the bestselling book in the country one month was pretty sweet as was winning the Royal Society Children's Book Prize in 2014 and selling out a large venue at the Hay Festival the following year. I think a two week tour of international schools in Japan was probably the pinnacle. I was treated like a rock star! I particularly enjoyed a visit to a school in Yokohama whose orchestra had composed a complete song in my honour."

You must have been delighted with the Blue Peter Book Award win?
"Of course! Blue Peter was the gold standard of children's TV when I was growing up. And it continues to be. You can almost guess the age of people by the presenters they name from the show from John Noakes to Janette Ellis or Radzi today. To win a national award like this just reinforces your desire to carry on and produce good books for children."

What is/was your favourite book or books during childhood?

“There were so many. Most of the Roald Dahl books. Stig of the Dump by another Clive – Clive King was brilliant. I enjoyed information books just as much, like some of the Ladybird and Tell Me Why books and a set of junior encyclopaedias my father bought – I remember poring through those.”

What do you like about the written book?
“It’s hard to pin down but there’s still just something magical about books. I guess it’s the look, the feel of turning a page instead of pressing a button – the ability to open a long text up at any page and dip or browse its contents. Books are a physical format that just work, they’re water resistant, far from fragile and they don’t need batteries or recharging.”

“What interested you about colour?”
I’m interested in any topic which most of us, for most of the time, totally take for granted but on further investigation reveals a layer or layers of knowledge or stories that are not widely-known. I like to write on a variety of topics each year, I feel it keeps my writing fresh and one topic can often inform another. When I first discussed the book with the publishers, I loved the idea of it not being a book purely on how different colours were invented. It was more about how people have adopted and adapted colours for various ends – from politics to fashion.”

“How long did the book take to write?”
“Illustrated books tend to have a lengthy genesis. You research hard and write in stages, modifying and revising as illustration roughs come in and can sometimes make you rip it all up and start again. But this book went incredibly smoothly I would say the core of the writing took six weeks but the research beforehand took longer.”

“Where did you get your information from?”
“It’s not fashionable to say *not* the Internet, but that was very much the case here. I have a large library of over 6,000 non-fiction books at home in Manchester and always seek out new information through museums, universities, talking with enthusiasts and experts. The Internet has its place but it is sometimes not the be all and end all.”

Did you have any say in the illustrations?
“My editor, the brilliant Laura Knowles, and I discussed the sorts of scenes we would like to see that would reinforce the text and the story we were telling about a particular colour or shade. I was allowed plenty of input and was thrilled with the outcome. But that said, we wanted to give the illustrator, Marc-Pierre plenty of latitude and scope to dazzle and amaze us – which he patently did.”

What is the subject of you next book?
“My next book written and out in May is about the space race between the United States and, then, Soviet Union, from World War II through the Apollo years right through to peaceful cooperation between the two superpowers on Apollo-Soyuz, Mir and the International Space

Station. Lots of lesser-known stories of bravery and ingenuity and some wonderfully atmospheric illustrations in a sort of 1950s propagandist style."

How do you feel about the library closures?
Livid. It's criminal. The thing is, some people think that authors campaign for libraries because they have a financial vested interest. We really don't. Quite the opposite for authors on royalties. The reason we're so passionate about libraries is that we see at first hand, far more often and far more closely than politicians ever do, the value of reading, the value of a safe, positive place to read, staffed by professionals with a wide range of books, magazines and materials on offer."