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PREMIO STREGA RAGAZZE E RAGAZZI 5th EDITION

Milan, 11 February. 4 December last saw the announcement at *Più libri più liberi* of the five finalists of the fifth edition of Premio Strega Ragazze e Ragazzi in the **two contest categories (+6, readers from 6 to 10 years, and + 11, readers from 11 to 15)**.

A few days after, the books selected went out to the young jury members – more than double the number of the previous edition: **over 2000 young readers between the ages of 6 and 15** from more than **140 schools, reading groups, libraries and teaching institutes** in Italy and abroad (Brussels, Madrid, Munich, Paris, Vienna and Zürich).

The Scientific Committee headed by **Giovanni Solimine** (Bellonci Foundation President) and made up of **Tania Coleti** (Alberto Manzi Elementary School, Rome), **Flavia Cristiano** (the Book and Reading Centre), **Fabio Geda** (writer), **Giovanna Micaglio** (Istituzione Biblioteche, Rome), **Martino Negri** (Milano-Bicocca University), **Elena Pasoli** (Bologna Children's Book Fair) and **Alessandra Starace** (Libreria dei Ragazzi, Milan) – chose the following volumes, motivating their choice as follows:

+ 6 category

1. **Daniela Carucci**, *Ruggiti*, illustrations by Giulia Torelli, Sinnos

Ruggiti is a story about friendship and courage. Full of adventure and at times the surreal, there is great tenderness for the characters: a spirited enterprising young girl, a majestic lion and a mechanic with a penchant for magical exploits. These join forces in the name of love and the desire for freedom against the Blues, the wicked, but hopelessly dim, representatives of the authorities. Punctuated with surprises and hilarious twists, the narrative proceeds at a rollicking pace. Extremely short incisive sentences make for a sparkling captivating style.

2. **Timothée De Fombelle**, *Capitano Rosalie*, illustrations by Isabelle Arsenault, translation by Maria Bastanzetti, Mondadori

Dramatic and heartrending, *Capitano Rosalie* tells the story of the very personal mission a 5 and a half year old French girl sets herself while her father is away at the front during the First World War: learning to read by herself. Her achievement is, however, a double-edged victory. Rosalie learns to read in secret only then to discover, by herself, a terrible truth. This powerfully told story describes from the perspective of a little girl what it is like to come up against the terrible incomprehensible adult world. The admirable balance that De Fombelle and Arsenault strike between text and image on the same page render the story even more touching.

3. **Susie Morgenstern**, *Vuoi essere mia amica?*, illustrations by Claude K. Dubois, translation by Maria Bastanzetti, Babalibri

Moving to the country, changing school, leaving the city and all her friends in the middle of the school year. This is the painful change that ushers in a new life for Juliette, who refuses to accept what she sees as her unjust fate. "It's not fair", she continues to complain as she

musters all her courage to find a friend who will help her overcome unhappiness and loneliness. The elegant narrative style and the lightly sketched yet highly expressive illustrations invite the reader with great delicacy into the rich and complex realm of childhood sentiments, here captured and narrated with extraordinary sensitivity.

4. **Marta Palazzesi**, *Nebbia*, Il Castoro

Set in a dark foggy London at the end of the 19th-century, *Nebbia* abounds with many of the classical themes of children's literature: a fascination for untamed nature, a sense of justice, and the yearning for freedom. The fateful meeting of the main character, Clay, with an animal imprisoned in a circus and passed off as the last wolf in England will trigger an indomitable determination in the young boy to return the animal to its natural state. The idea becomes a plan and then action, taking the story through adventures in unfamiliar places where insidious dangers lurk. The reader is kept in suspense until the final scene in which, symbolically at least, Clay too is set free.

5. **Guido Quarzo, Anna Vivarelli**, *La danza delle rane*, illustrations by Silvia Mauri, Editoriale Scienza

La danza delle rane is a mini-thriller. Set in the second half of the 18th-century, the book tells the story of scientist Lazzaro Spallanzani and a poor boy the professor chooses as his assistant. It is the story of how a chance meeting changes people's lives, opening up exciting new worlds. It is also a journey through the history of ideas, the enthusiasm felt as they take shape and the tenacity necessary to defend them in their infancy. The narrative achieves a convincing balance between the description of a special period of history and a compelling story full of unexpected twists and turns.

Categoria +11

1. **Annelise Heurtier**, *L'età dei sogni*, translation by Ilaria Piperno, Gallucci

L'età dei sogni is an intensely moving novel, a story that prompts such profound indignation that at the end of the book the reader wants to go out and make the world a better place. In September 1957, two young girls from Little Rock are about to start school. Grace is white and well-off; Molly is black, one of a group of Afro-American students to be accepted for the first time at a high school reserved for whites. Annelise Heurtier bases her narrative on real-life events to tell the story of the fight against racial segregation. Written in an effective, urgent style, her in-depth account of this episode of recent American history leaves an indelible mark on the reader.

2. **Lynda Mullaly Hunt**, *Una per i Murphy*, translation by Sante Bandirali, Uovonero

Some novels written in the first person allow the reader to identify totally with the narrator. *Una per i Murphy* is one of them. Carley Connors, the main character, resonates forcefully with the reader. Sent to a foster home since her fragile mother is unable to protect her daughter from a violent stepfather, she has to deal with a boisterous new family, which is, however, not without its own tensions. Lynda Mullaly Hunt weaves a story laden with questions and discoveries, failures and triumphs, epic but at the same time everyday. Exceptional in its normality, the story is striking for the honesty and respect with which the author treats her subject.

3. **Raffaella Romagnolo**, *Respira con me*, Pelledoca Editore

Using an appropriately intense narrative style, *Respira con me* gives a completely honest, almost surgical account of the head-on clash between a father and his adolescent son. The context is an excursion in the mountains amid the regenerating power of untamed nature far from the fog that encloses Amedeo since the death of his mother. The trek up to Liberté Peak is difficult and also dangerous, and the trip, intended by the father has a symbolically educational exercise, soon flirts with tragedy. Raffaella Romagnolo challenges her readers to walk along with her and the characters, clambering up with their hands if need be to get into the story.

4. **Rebecca Stead**, *L'amore sconosciuto*, traduzione di Claudia Valentini, Terre di Mezzo

Love, as the title of Rebecca Stead's novel tells us, is an unknown quantity until we bump up against it while doing something else. At that point, love has to be taken into the equation, in the knowledge, however, that every choice carries a risk and that growing up is a game with rules to follow: the rule of learning to know oneself, and that of being able to decipher the actions of others. *L'amore sconosciuto* is a novel in the classical sense, well-constructed and written in flowing elegant language. It invites the reader to ponder the nuances of love and affection.

5. **Florence Thinard**, *Meno male che il tempo era bello*, illustrations by Veronica Truttero, translation by Sara Saorin, Camelozampa

Meno male che il tempo era bello amuses, surprises and gives readers a taste for the surreal. A library adrift in the open sea. A group of young children and a few adults have to learn to survive by finding information in the books that surround them. Navigating the ocean of knowledge is an adventure that Florence Thinard describes with a light ironic touch, allowing herself to experience awe yet never forgetting to keep the reader in suspense.

The Premio Strega Ragazze e Ragazzi is sponsored by the **Maria and Goffredo Bellonci Foundation** and **Strega Alberti Benevento** – organizers of the **Premio Strega** – together with the **Centro per il libro e la lettura** and **BolognaFiere-Bologna Children's Book Fair**, in partnership with **BPER Banca**. The prize is open to narrative books for children and young adults published in Italy, **also in translation**, between 1 July of the previous year and 30 June of the current year.

The translators of the finalist books will meet with the public at **Bologna Children's Book Fair** on **Tuesday 31 March** at 12.30 p.m. at the **Translators Café**. The finalist authors will be the guests of the **Authors Café** on the same day for two meetings coordinated Giovanni Nucci: one dedicated to the + 6 category (2 p.m.), the other to the +11 category (3 p.m.). The prize-giving ceremony will be held on Wednesday **1 April** at 2.30 p.m. at the **Illustrators Café**.

Offered by **Strega Alberti Benevento**, the prize goes to those authors receiving most votes in each category from the school juries. If the winning book is a translation, a prize for the same amount will be awarded the translator by **BolognaFiere**. In the event of the winning works being both in the Italian language, the Committee will award the translation prize to the finalist of its choice. The decision of the committee is final.

Again this year, **BPER Banca** will award a plaque and a **1000 Euro** prize towards the purchase of school equipment to one of the schools in the +6 category for the most original reading



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activity. A prize of **500 Euros** will be given to a member of the +11 category for the best review of one of the finalist books of the category.

The winning authors of the fifth edition will be hosted at the **Turin Salone del Libro on Thursday, 14 May**.

The prize was established in 2016 to mark the 70th edition of the Premio Strega. As underlined by the then President of the Bellonci Foundation, **Tullio De Mauro**, it aims to “establish the habit of reading from early childhood and in adolescence - indispensable if a passion for books is to grow and last”.

Over the years, the Premio Strega has evidenced the demand by the new generations to be active participants of their world, spurring adults to focus greater attention on the environment, culture and mutual respect. With their votes for the Premio Strega Ragazze e Ragazzi, the younger members of society make their voices heard.

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