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## Bridge Prize national short story competition selects jury for 2026 cycle, submissions now being accepted

Submissions are now open for the 2026 version of Canada's largest literary prize for post-secondary students — the University of Lethbridge's Bridge Prize — and the main jury has been selected.

Now entering its fourth competitive cycle, the reputation of the cross-Canada short story competition continues to grow, garnering attention from some of Canada's most accomplished authors. Among those is Ian Williams, the author of seven acclaimed books of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, and whose book, *Reproduction*, won the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2019. He headlines a stellar main jury that includes representation from across the country.

The remainder of the jury consists of Sharon Bala (Newfoundland & Labrador), Ivan Coyote (Yukon), Alice Kuipers (Saskatchewan), Idman Nur Omar (Alberta) and David Robertson (Manitoba).



"The 2026 competition features some of Canada's most accomplished writers and thinkers," says Dr. Harold Jansen, ULethbridge librarian and dean of the School of Liberal Education, which presents the Bridge Prize. "These established and emerging writers represent a cross-section of Canada as well as genres of writing. We are grateful to our outstanding national and local jury members and to Munro's Books of Victoria for their support of the next generation of writers in Canada."

The success of the event has led to an increase in prize money for the 2026 cycle and a new structure for the competition. For the first time, the top story written by an undergraduate student and the top story written by a graduate student will each receive \$5,000. As well, one finalist in each category will earn \$1,000 and each of the four winners and finalists will be awarded \$200 gift cards from lead sponsor Munro's Books.

“Writing is alive and well in Canada and with each awarding of the Bridge Prize we see stronger and stronger submissions,” adds Jansen. “It truly has become a national literary competition, with each province represented by really outstanding young writers.”

Initiated by ULeithbridge alumnus Terry whitehead (BA '94) with support of the School of Liberal Education, the first prizes were awarded in 2020. Entry is open to all students attending colleges and universities in Canada, with a fee of \$20 per submission. Entrants can submit as many stories as they like. To date, over 1,000 stories have been submitted and over \$30,000 in prize money has been distributed.

Submissions are now being accepted until Jan. 26, 2026. For more information, visit the [Bridge Prize web page](#).

Following are short biographies of the 2026 jurors.

### **Sharon Bala**

Sharon Bala's best-selling debut novel, *The Boat People*, won the 2020 Newfoundland & Labrador Book Award and the 2019 Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction, was short listed for several awards, and is in translation in four languages. She won the Writers' Trust/McClelland & Stewart Journey Prize in 2017. Her short fiction has been published in: Best Canadian Stories 2024, The Journey Prize 29, Hazlitt, Grain, PRISM international, The New Quarterly, Maisonneuve, and elsewhere. Sharon is a member of The Port Authority, a St. John's writing group.

### **Ivan Coyote**

Ivan Coyote is a writer, storyteller and performer. Born and raised in Whitehorse, Yukon, they are the author of thirteen books, the creator of four films, seven stage shows, and three albums that combine storytelling with music. Coyote's books have won the ReLit Award, the B.C. Book Prize for Writing That Provokes, been named a Stonewall Honour Book, been longlisted for Canada Reads, been shortlisted for the Hilary Weston Prize for non-fiction, and the Governor General's Award for non-fiction twice.

### **Alice Kuipers**

Alice Kuipers is the bestselling, award-winning author of five novels, a memoir for teenager Carley Allison, *Always Smile*, and six books for younger readers. She's also a bestselling ghost author, experienced in writing adult memoir and self-help. Alice's work is published in 36 countries, and she's taught thousands of people online and in person. Now, she's Head of Coaching at The Novelry, and she shares writing secrets over on Confessions & Coffee, her weekly publication. Her newest book, *Spark*, is a guide for anyone wanting to write their own book for young readers.

### **Idman Nur Omar**

Idman Nur Omar was born in Rome and immigrated to Canada in 1991. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph and an MA in English Literature from Concordia University in Montreal. *The Private Apartments*, her first book, was a finalist for the 2024 Alberta Literary Awards, a finalist for the 2023 Writers' Union of Canada Danuta Gleed Literary Award and included in Brittle Paper's 100 Notable African Books of 2023. She lives in Calgary.

### **David Robertson**

David A. Robertson is a two-time Governor General's Literary Award winner and has won the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award and the Writer's Union of Canada Freedom to Read award. He has received several other accolades for his work as a writer for children and adults, podcaster, public speaker and social advocate. He was honoured with a Doctor of Letters by the University of Manitoba in 2023 for outstanding contributions to the arts and distinguished achievements. He is a member of Norway House Cree Nation and lives in Winnipeg.

### **Ian Williams**

Ian Williams is the author of seven acclaimed books of fiction, poetry and nonfiction. His previous book, *Disorientation*, was selected as a best book of the year by the Boston Globe. His novel, *Reproduction*, won the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2019 and was published in Canada, the US, the UK and Italy. His poetry collection, *Word Problems* won the Raymond Souster Award from the League of Canadian Poets. His previous collection, *Personals*, was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Robert Kroetsch Poetry Book Award. His short story collection, *Not Anyone's Anything*, won the Danuta Gleed Literary Award for the best first collection of short fiction in Canada. He is a trustee for the Griffin Poetry Prize. Ian completed his PhD at the University of Toronto. In the fall of 2024, Ian delivered the cross-Canada 2024 CBC Massey Lectures, *What I Mean to Say*, about rehabilitating conversations.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/bridge-prize-national-short-story-competition-selects-jury-2026-cycle-submissions-now-being>

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*Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.*