

# BESSIE HEAD LITERATURE AWARDS

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q1** *What do I need to include in my submission?*

**A** Each submission must contain the following items: **one** cover page, including at least two ways you can be contacted and a clear statement of which category you are entering, **one** copy of your ID, and **four** copies of your manuscript.

**Q2** *What information should be on the cover page?*

**A** The cover page must include your name, a clear statement of the category you are entering, and at least two ways you can be contacted. One way to contact you must be either an email or a postal address; the other can be a cell or other telephone number.

**Q3** *How do I submit my entry?*

**A** All entries must be posted to the address given on the call for submissions.

**Q4** *Can I submit my entry by email?*

**A** No, all entries must be posted.

**Q5** *Can I submit my entry by leaving it with someone?*

**A** No, all entries must be posted.

**Q6** *Why does my entry have to be sent by post?*

**A** ALL entries must be submitted by post so that we can use the postmark to verify that they were submitted before the deadline. A postmark is the easiest way to verify that your entry was submitted on time. Once the post office stamps your entry by cancelling the stamps, then even if it arrives after the deadline, we know that you submitted on time.

**Q7** *Why can't I hand-deliver my entry?*

**A** The Bessie Head Heritage Trust does not have an office. There is no safe place to hand-deliver entries, and leaving it with someone does not guarantee that we will receive it, nor does it tell us when you submitted your entry.

**Q8** *Why are there both a postmark deadline and a deadline for receiving?*

**A** All entries must be stamped at the post office by the postmark deadline. However, sometimes when you post something, it takes time for it to reach us. We want to include all entries that are postmarked on time, but we also have to get the entries to the judges in plenty of time for them to read and judge them all, so we can only wait for a limited time. For example, suppose the postmark deadline is 20 March and the deadline for receipt is 31 March. If your entry is postmarked by 20 March, but we don't receive it until 6 April, we cannot include it because all the entries will already have been sent to the judges. If your entry is postmarked by 20 March, and we receive it on 31 March (or before), then we can still include it in the set of entries that we give to the judges.

The deadline for receiving is not really a deadline that you can do anything about. It is just that we have to have some fixed point after which it is too late. After all, we might receive an entry after the awards have been given. It's very unlikely—it's just a rule to cover this possibility.

**Q9** *Why do I have to submit so many photocopies?*

**A** The reason we need four copies is that one goes to each of the three judges and one is kept in our files. The Bessie Head Heritage Trust is a group of volunteers that operates on a very tiny budget, and we do not have enough resources to photocopy all entries that come to us.

**Q10** *Do I also have to submit four copies of my ID?*

**A** No, you only have to submit one copy of your ID. We do not give identification information to the judges, and we only need one copy for our files so that we can verify your citizenship or residence.

**Q11** *Can't I just write my ID number on my manuscript?*

**A** No. In case of any dispute, we must be able to verify your identity, and to do that, we need a copy of your identity document.

**Q12** *Does the copy of my identification have to be certified?*

**A** No, a plain photocopy is sufficient.

**Q13** *How do I know if I have to submit my Omang or my passport and residence documents?*

**A** If you are a citizen of Botswana, you will have an Omang, and that is sufficient to verify your citizenship. If you are not a citizen, then you must verify your identity with a passport, and you must also verify that you are resident in Botswana, not just a visitor.

**Q14** *What if I'm a citizen of Botswana, but I don't have an Omang, for example because I'm under 16?*

**A** Photocopy your birth certificate or some other suitable document. If there is a problem, then contact us ([bessiehead@gmail.com](mailto:bessiehead@gmail.com)).

**Q15** *What if I don't have a residence, work, or exemption certificate?*

**A** If you are a citizen of Botswana, then you don't have a residence, work, or exemption certificate, and you don't have to submit one — you only need to submit a copy of your Omang. If you are resident of Botswana, then in addition to a copy of your passport, you must submit a copy of the certificate that shows you have permission to reside here, whichever type it is.

**Q16** *If I don't put my name on my entry, then how will anyone know that I'm the author?*

**A** The secretary of the Bessie Head Heritage Trust marks each entry with a number code. Because the judges do not know how the code is assigned, they do not know who the authors are; they just decide that the winner is, for example, number 27. The secretary has a record of who the author of number 27 is. When your entry is passed on to the judges, that code is on the copy, but there must be no other identifying information. Judges must not be prejudiced and must remain impartial when they evaluate the manuscripts and make their decision. For this reason, you

must not put your name or any other identifying information on any of the copies of your manuscript, only on the cover page. When the judges make their decision, the author of the winning entry is identified by the code.

**Q17** *What if my entry is based on my life story?*

**A** Autobiographical material is perfectly fine to use in fiction; however, there must not be anything in your entry that could identify you to the judges. You must, therefore, ensure that you have changed all characters' names, occupations, etc. that might let the judges know who you are. All entries must be anonymous in two ways: first, the author's name should not be on the manuscript anywhere, and second, there must not be any identifying information in the manuscript text itself. If a judge can identify you from your entry, then it has to be disqualified.

**Q18** *Why is it so important for my entry to be anonymous?*

**A** If the judges can identify you in any way, then their decision might be influenced, and the selection might not be fair.

**Q19** *What if the details of my life are important in my entry?*

**A** You can always change the names and occupations, etc. back to the real ones if your entry is published. But you must disguise them for the competition, because the entry must be anonymous for the judging.

**Q20** *Should I submit all my drafts when I send in my entry?*

**A** You should not submit any drafts of your manuscript. Make sure that you keep all drafts and the original of your entry. If these are needed for verification, you will be asked to produce them. You should always keep drafts and copies of your work in any case; never send off the only copy of your work and do not send your drafts.

**Q21** *Can I enter more than one category?*

**A** No, you can only enter one category in any one year.

**Q22** *How do I decide whether to submit an entry as a "novel" or as a "short story"?*

**A** All the entries in each category are judged according to standard definitions of novel and short story. You must decide whether your work fits those standard definitions and select the category that defines your manuscript. A "novel" is usually defined as a long fictional prose narrative in which the characters develop; it also has many settings and incidents, and it sometimes has subplots. A "short story" is often more focused, and it might have only a single important character, a single setting, and one main incident. You may find it helpful to consult a dictionary of literary terms. Also note that if your entry is in the novel category, it must be at least 40,000 words long.

**Q23** *Why is there a minimum length for novels?*

**A** It is true that there are short novels — Bessie Head's novel *Maru* is only 40,000 words. Since the competition is named in her honour, we have made 40,000 words the minimum length for a novel.

**Q24** *Can I enter again if I've already won?*

**A** If you have already won in one category, then for the next three years you cannot enter the same category. You may, however, enter in another category.

**Q25** *Can I re-enter the same category if I was a runner-up last year?*

**A** Yes, in fact you could enter with the same manuscript as before, but we advise you to revise it thoroughly.

**Q26** *Can I re-enter the same manuscript if I didn't win or become a runner-up?*

**A** Yes, you can re-enter the same manuscript, but you should get advice about revising and improving your entry.

**Q27** *Who decides on the winners?*

**A** A panel of three anonymous judges judges each category. These judges are not paid; they volunteer their time and expertise to assist us in promoting creative writing in English.

**Q28** *Will my manuscript be published if I win?*

**A** Pentagon Publishers, sponsors of the prize, have the right to publish your manuscript. By entering the competition, you are agreeing that Pentagon can publish your entry if they want to. They usually do, but it is not actually guaranteed. They will contact you regarding contracts, royalties, etc. You may not submit your manuscript elsewhere unless Pentagon decides not to publish it.

**Q29** *Will my manuscript be published if I'm a runner-up?*

**A** Pentagon Publishers also have the right to publish runners-up, and they will contact you about their decision. Some runners-up have been published, but it is not as common as with the winners. You may not submit your manuscript to another publisher without contacting Pentagon first regarding their decision.

**Q30** *Do the runners-up get prizes?*

**A** The runners-up have not received cash prizes, but beginning in 2009, they have received a set of books as a prize.

**Q31** *What happens to all the manuscripts?*

**A** All the copies that you submit become the property of the Bessie Head Heritage Trust (but see Question 32 regarding copyright, which is a separate issue). We keep file copies, and we also give copies to Pentagon Publishers so that they can evaluate them for possible publication.

**Q32** *If I don't have the copies of my manuscript, then who has copyright to my work?*

**A** First of all, we need to clarify the meaning of "copyright". When someone writes a book or a poem, the author has the copyright for that work, i.e., the rights to decide on its publication, to get royalties on it, etc. Authors make agreements with publishers about actually producing printed books for sale. By deciding to enter the competition, you are agreeing that Pentagon can publish your entry; in effect, you are making an agreement with a publisher in advance. If Pentagon decides not to publish your entry, then you can try other publishers.

Merely owning a paper copy of a work is different; after all, you probably own copies of books, but the authors own their copyright. The Bessie Head Heritage Trust owns the paper copies, which it keeps for its files, but this has got nothing to do with the copyright, which you own.

**Q33** *Who was Bessie Head?*

**A** Bessie Head is one of Africa's most famous writers. She was born in South Africa, but moved to Botswana in 1964 and settled in Serowe. She became a citizen in 1979, and died in Serowe in 1986. She is buried in the Botlalaote Cemetery in Serowe. Most of her work reflects her experience in Botswana and her affection for the people of this country, and her later writing reflects her interest in Botswana's history.

**Q34** *What is the Bessie Head Heritage Trust?*

**A** The Bessie Head Heritage Trust is a group of volunteers who established the Trust to promote the work and ideas of Bessie Head, both here in Botswana and abroad. We issue periodic newsletters about Bessie-Head-related activities around the world; we assist scholars in their research on Bessie Head; we encourage and support the publication of books about Bessie Head, and we work to ensure that Bessie Head's works remain in print. We also want to encourage the development of local literature in various genres, and that is why we began this competition.

**Q35** *Who are Pentagon Publishers?*

**A** Pentagon Publishers are a local company that publishes books for the educational market. They also promote local creative writing, and so they have generously supported the Bessie Head Literature Awards since it began in 2007. You can find out more about Pentagon at their website at [www.pentagonpublishers.com](http://www.pentagonpublishers.com).

**Q36** *Where can I buy the award-winning books?*

**A** Copies of winning titles, as well as other titles from the Bessie Head Series, can be purchased from Pentagon Publishers and from some local bookstores. Pentagon Publishers is located in Gaborone West Industrial, on Kgomokasitwa Road.

**Q37** *Where can I buy books about Bessie Head?*

**A** Unfortunately, because local bookstores do not stock them, you have to place a special order. This can be done via the Internet — at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and many other websites — or at a good bookstore. A number of excellent books about Head can all be found on the Africa Book Centre website, [www.africabookcentre.com/acatalog/index.html?http%3A//www.africabookcentre.com/acatalog/Literary\\_Criticism\\_Botswana.html&CatalogBody](http://www.africabookcentre.com/acatalog/index.html?http%3A//www.africabookcentre.com/acatalog/Literary_Criticism_Botswana.html&CatalogBody), including the excellent biography, *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*.

**Q38** *Where can I buy the books of Bessie Head herself?*

**A** A few of her books are sold in bookstores in Gaborone. For others you will have to place a special order. For seven of her books, please see the Head page on the Pearson Publishers site, [www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/International/Africa/Secondary/EnglishLiterature/African%20Writers%20Series/AfricanWritersSeries/Authors/BessieHead.aspx](http://www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/International/Africa/Secondary/EnglishLiterature/African%20Writers%20Series/AfricanWritersSeries/Authors/BessieHead.aspx).

You can also search the Africa Book Centre site above, and second-hand copies can be found on the Internet. Please see more about this on the Bessie Head website at [www.bessiehead.org/writings/writings.htm](http://www.bessiehead.org/writings/writings.htm). Enjoy your reading!