For immediate release

 **17 August 2021**

**Clare Balding in Kent to Announce Leeds Castle Story Writing Winners**

Lead Judge and children’s author Clare Balding was at Leeds Castle today to announce the results of the ‘Big Story Writing Competition’ which celebrates literacy in younger visitors. Children aged 5-13 were invited to get creative and write their own original story of no more than 900 words.

Children whose stories had been shortlisted by Clare, were invited with their mums and dads to a prestigious prize giving ceremony in the Castle Library, held on the 17th August. Clare announced the two winners and two highly commended runners up and described Leeds as “the friendliest Castle I’ve ever been to!”

The theme was inspired by an event that took place 500 years ago in 1520 when Henry VIII stayed at Leeds Castle with 5,000 of his couriers whilst on his way to meet the King of France for a massive jamboree, which has since been known as ‘The Field of the Cloth of Gold’.

The theme of this year’s story challenge was ‘One Golden Day’ and children were asked to put their royal thinking crowns on and use this golden theme to inspire them to write about anything at all – the more imaginative the better!

A panel of expert readers from the Leeds Castle Education Department have spent hours during lockdown reading all of this year’s entries carefully and have shortlisted 20 finalists. The ten finalists chosen from each age category; 5-9 years and 10-13 years, were invited to the very special prize ceremony at the Castle.

Clare Balding who hosted the ceremony, was introduced by Chief Executive Helen Bonser-Wilton, where she congratulated all 20 finalists and announced the winner and highly-commended runner up from each age category before reading aloud both winning stories – much to the delight of the children in attendance.

Ralph Hayward was declared as the winner of the 10-13 years category and Leyla-Maria Tezer was announced as the winner of the younger 5-9 age category, with her captivating story ‘One Golden Day’.

The winner’s prizes include a family stay at Leeds Castle Knight’s Glamping, tickets to Leeds Castle valid for a whole year and a hamper of fun prizes. The winner’s stories are available to read online by visiting [www.leeds-castle.com/storywriting](http://www.leeds-castle.com/storywriting).

Leeds Castle is located near Maidstone in Kent just off Junction 8 of the M20 and only one hour’s drive from London. For more information please visit [www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com).

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