

2021 Va. Festival of the Book to take place virtually in March

November 19, 2020—Charlottesville, Va.—A program of Virginia Humanities, the **Virginia Festival of the Book** announced plans for the **27th annual Festival, which will take place virtually, March 13-26, 2021**. In response to COVID-19, the 2021 Festival will take place over an elongated period of time—two weeks—and will continue its commitment to connecting people and ideas through books and reading by presenting accessible and inclusive events. **All virtual events are free and purchasing participating authors' books is encouraged but not required.** Building on the success of the [Shelf Life](#) series of virtual events—which has reached more than 22,000 viewers since April—the 2021 Festival will offer virtual events on Zoom and Facebook Live, with live captions.

Select headlining speakers for the 2021 Festival were also announced, including:

- **Ayad Akhtar** (*Homeland Elegies*) is a novelist and playwright. He is winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, among other awards.
- **Kerri Arsenault** (*Mill Town*) is the reviews editor at *Orion* magazine, and contributing editor at *Lit Hub*. She is also a member of the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance and PEN America.
- **Catherine Coleman Flowers** (*Waste: One Woman's Fight Against America's Dirty Secret*) is founder of the Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice and the rural development manager at the Race and Poverty Initiative of the Equal Justice Initiative. In 2020, she was named a MacArthur Fellow.
- **John Grisham** (*A Time for Mercy*) is the author of 35 novels, one work of nonfiction, a story collection, and six novels for young readers. He is a member of the Board of Directors for the Innocence Project.
- **Vashti Harrison** (*Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* and *Little Dreamers: Visionary Women Around the World*) is an author, illustrator, and filmmaker who earned her BA from UVA.
- **Judith Heumann** (*Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist*) is an internationally recognized leader in disability rights advocacy, serving in the Clinton and Obama administrations and as the World Bank's first adviser on disability and development.
- **Luisa A. Igloria** (*Maps for Migrants and Ghosts*) is the 20th Poet Laureate of Virginia and a co-recipient of the 2020 Crab Orchard Poetry Open. She is also author of thirteen books of poetry and four chapbooks, and received the 2015 Resurgence Poetry Prize and the 2014 May Swenson Prize.
- **Ian Rankin** (*A Song for the Dark Times*) is author of the John Rebus series and has received the Chandler-Fulbright Award, four Crime Writers' Association Dagger Awards, the Edgar Award.
- **Jacqueline Woodson** (*Red At the Bone* and *Before the Ever After*) is a four-time National Book Award finalist, a four-time Newbery Honor winner, a two-time NAACP Image Award Winner, and a two-time Coretta Scott King Award winner, among other honors. She was the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, the Young People's Poet Laureate, and in 2020 was named a MacArthur Fellow.

In addition, the Festival will continue its partnership with the National Book Foundation to present the following honorees for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction:

- **Rumaan Alam**, author of *Leave the World Behind*, studied writing at Oberlin College. His other novels are *Rich and Pretty* and *That Kind of Mother*. *Leave the World Behind* was a Finalist for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction.
- **Megha Majumdar**, author of *A Burning*, was born and raised in Kolkata, India. She moved to the United States to attend college at Harvard University, followed by graduate school at Johns Hopkins

University. *A Burning* is her first book and was a Longlist for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction.

- **Deesha Philyaw**, author of *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*, is a Kimbilio Fiction Fellow and a past Pushcart Prize nominee. *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies* was a Finalist for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction.

The full line-up and schedule for the 2021 Virginia Festival of the Book will be announced in January.

Images available here: <https://virginia.box.com/s/x1neulxjjaep08mysqncfavwefvkuv>

All media inquiries should be directed to Sarah Lawson at books@virginiahumanities.org.

About the Virginia Festival of the Book:

A signature program of Virginia Humanities and the Virginia Center for the Book, the Virginia Festival of the Book brings readers and writers together for author readings, panel discussions, programs for children, and more. The 27th annual Virginia Festival of the Book will take place virtually, March 13-26, 2021. To learn about Festival programming, visit VaBook.org.

About Virginia Humanities:

Virginia Humanities is the state humanities council. We aim to share the stories of all Virginians—or, better yet, find ways for people to share their own stories. We want to connect Virginians with their history and culture and, in doing that, help us all get to know each other a little better. We are headquartered in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia but our work covers the Commonwealth. To learn more visit VirginiaHumanities.org.

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