

Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

**Américas Award**  
for  
Children's and Young Adult Literature

The Américas Award is given in recognition of U.S. works (picture books, poetry, fiction, folklore) published in the previous year in English or Spanish that authentically and engagingly present the experience of individuals in Latin America or the Caribbean, or of Latinos in the United States. By combining both and linking the Americas, the award reaches beyond geographic borders, as well as multicultural-international boundaries, focusing instead upon cultural heritages within the hemisphere. Sponsored by the national Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP), the award/commended list was initiated in 1993.

The award winners and the other commended books are selected for their quality of story, cultural authenticity/sensitivity, and potential for classroom use. The winning books are honored at a ceremony held each summer at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**1996 AMERICAS BOOK AWARD WINNERS**

***Picture Book:***

**IN MY FAMILY/EN MI FAMILIA** by Carmen Lomas Garza. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-89239-138-3 (K-older)

In this bilingual picture book celebrating Mexican American culture, Lomas Garza shares memories of growing up in her hometown of Kingsville, Texas, near the Mexican border. Her paintings of children and adults playing and working together as they prepare food, celebrate life events, and mend ills enable readers to understand constancy and change among family and friends. The author's narratives are told as first person reflections that often add dialogue or other layerings to the story being conveyed in her paintings. Truly for all ages, this companion to *Family Pictures* will be an important addition to any study of family, community, personal storytelling, or narrative painting.

***Fiction:***

**PARROT IN THE OVEN: MI VIDA** by Victor Martínez. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. 216 pgs. ISBN 0-06-026704-6 (9-12)

The story of Manny Hernández propels readers into the heart of a Mexican American boy "who trusts too much." Using fresh, metaphorical language, Martínez captures Manny's tests of courage and masculinity, and his sense of self and place as he works alongside migrant workers in a chili pepper field, drives through an upperclass neighborhood with his teacher, and tends his grandmother's garden. Yet the central setting for the story is Manny's home, where, amidst his

family's love, fear and loyalties he is most able to reflect and begin to build a future. His vision, relationships, and judgments will enable young adolescents and their teachers to explore the social and personal complexities of finding a place for oneself that is spacious enough to hold the myriad, precise insights and experiences of Latinos in the United States.

### **1996 AMERICAS HONORABLE MENTIONS**

#### ***Picture Book:***

**DOWN BY THE RIVER: AFRO-CARIBBEAN RHYMES, GAMES AND SONGS FOR CHILDREN** compiled by Grace Hallworth. Illustrated by Caroline Binch. New York: Scholastic, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-590-69320-4 (K-3)

Storyteller Grace Hallworth offers this collection of rhymes, chants and lullabies, many remembered from her childhood growing up in Trinidad, and all showing traces of their African, French, English and American roots. Binch (illustrator of *Amazing Grace* and *Hue Boy*) combines the playfulness of the rhymes with illustrations of expressive, joyous faces and bodies in motion. Together, the text and pictures celebrate childhood and a true love of living.

#### ***Fiction:***

**SO LOUD A SILENCE** by Lyll Becerra de Jenkins. New York: Lodestar, 1996. 154 pgs. ISBN 0-525-67538-8 (9-12)

Seventeen-year-old Juan Guillermo feels unconnected to his family's life of hardship and hope in the city, until he spends time with his grandmother, a landowner in rural Colombia. Juan finds himself caught up in the fighting between guerrillas and the army and in the complex politics that surround him. His decisions in the midst of these struggles force his return to the city with a new sense of family, social and political choices, and his own future.

### **1996 AMERICAS COMMENDED LIST**

**ALPHABET CITY BALLET** by Erika Tamar. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. 168 pgs. ISBN 0-06-027328-3 (3-5)

Marisol, a ten-year-old Puerto Rican girl, wins a scholarship to attend ballet school, along with a Haitian-born classmate. Marisol's love of dancing coexists with her father's efforts to make ends meet and provide a good home for his children, and her brother's search for his own place in the world. This engaging, believable story provides a very real sense of this family's life in New York City.

**ANTHONY REYNOSO: BORN TO ROPE** by Martha Cooper and Ginger Gordon. New York: Clarion, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-395-71690-X (K-3)

Nine-year-old Anthony is learning to rope and ride Mexican Rodeo style from his father near Phoenix, Arizona. Color photographs highlight his combined Mexican cultural heritage and contemporary U.S. lifestyle. Cooper and Gordon have produced a very admiring and respectful story of this skillful young *charro* and his family.

**BARRIO STREETS CARNIVAL DREAMS** edited by Lori Marie Carlson. New York: Henry Holt, 1996. 127 pgs. ISBN 0-8050-4120-6 (6-8)

This homage to Latino American artistry is, at the same time, a history of Latinos in this century. With wit and memory, this varied collection of portraits, moments and culturally specific images combine to explore the lives and visions of Latinas/os.

**A BEAR FOR MIGUEL** by Elaine Marie Alphin. Illustrated by Joan Sandin. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. 60 pgs. ISBN 0-06-024521-2 (K-3)

In this "I Can Read" book, a young girl in El Salvador goes to the market with her father and helps him obtain necessities by trading a precious item of her own, her teddy bear. In addition to teaching empathy and contributing to the family, it also introduces the theme of political conflict to very young readers.

**THE BIG IDEA** by Ellen Schecter. Illustrated by Bob Dorsey. New York: Hyperion, 1996. 76 pgs. ISBN 0-7868-2085-3 (3-5)

Eight-year-old Luz Mendes is determined to turn a run-down vacant lot into a garden like the one her grandfather had in Puerto Rico, but she must convince her neighbors to help. This strong female protagonist has a dream and pursues it, despite the many obstacles in her path.

**LA BODA** by Nancy Van Laan. Illustrated by Andrea Arroyo. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-316-89626-8 (K-3)

A little girl and her grandmother watch as the whole Mexican village prepares for and participates in a traditional Zapotec Indian wedding celebration. Light, graceful illustrations accompany the rhythmical text.

**A CARIBBEAN COUNTING BOOK** compiled by Faustin Charles. Illustrated by Roberta Arenson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. 24 pgs. ISBN 0-395-77944-8 (K-3)

Told in the vernacular of the many countries of the Caribbean, this collection of counting rhymes is illustrated with simple, uncluttered collage images in bright colors. An attractive combination of sound and color, the book is childlike in its appeal. Faustin Charles is a professional storyteller, originally from Trinidad.

**CHAVE'S MEMORIES/LOS RECUERDOS DE CHAVE** by María Isabel Delgado. Illustrated by Yvonne Symank. Houston: Arte Público, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 1-55885-084-8 (K-3)

In this bilingual picture book, a woman recalls idyllic childhood visits to her grandparents' ranch in Mexico, where she and her brother played with her cousins, listened to the stories of an old ranch hand, and enjoyed other simple pleasures.

**CONFETTI: POEMS FOR CHILDREN** by Pat Mora. Illustrated by Enrique O. Sánchez. New York: Lee & Low, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 1-880000-25-3 (K-3)

Poems celebrate the beauty of the Southwest as experienced by a Mexican American girl. Spanish words and Latino culture are integrated into the text; the collection includes a glossary and bright acrylic illustrations add detail.

**DARKFRIGHT** by Holly Young Huth. Illustrated by Jenny Stow. New York: Atheneum, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-689-80188-2 (K-3)

Told in Caribbean dialect, this book tells of a woman who fears the night, but who learns, through her neighbors and a broken star, to befriend the dark. The author wrote the story after spending an extended period in Tobago. Whimsical mixed media illustrations complement the humor of Darkfright's efforts to keep night away.

**ELENA** by Diane Stanley. New York: Hyperion, 1996. 55 pgs. ISBN 0-78682211-2 (3-5)

A Mexican American girl recounts how her mother moved the family to the United States during the Mexican Revolution. In this story passed from the real Elena to the author's grandmother to the author, the strength of one woman mirrors the strength of countless other women, past and present, who have done what was necessary for the sake of family and future.

**FIREFLY SUMMER** by Pura Belpré. Houston: Arte Público, 1996. 207 pgs. ISBN 1-55885-180-1 (6-8)

At a plantation in rural Puerto Rico at the turn of the century, a young foreman seeks answers to the mystery surrounding his family. Typical of *costumbrismo* writing, the story provides extensive detail of folk customs and daily life long past. Never published during Pura Belpré's lifetime, the manuscript was brought to light through the efforts of the "Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage" Project.

**THE GARDEN OF HAPPINESS** by Erika Tamar. Illustrated by Barbara Lambase. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-15-230582-3 (K-3)

Marisol and her ethnically diverse neighbors turn a vacant New York City lot into a lush community garden. Mural-like colorful paintings, which move as if in a breeze, depict Marisol and her community as they plant and tend the garden. Her plant dies when the season changes but is reborn again in the art on a neighborhood wall.

**GOING HOME** by Eve Bunting. Illustrated by David Diaz. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-06-026296-6 (K-3)

Although a Mexican family comes to the United States to work as farm laborers so that their children will have opportunities, the parents still consider Mexico their home. The uniquely styled illustrations combine brilliant color with Mexican artifacts and magically real movement. The children begin to recognize not only their parents' sacrifice, but the bonds that connect an extended family to each other and to place.

**THE GOLDEN FLOWER: A TAINO MYTH FROM PUERTO RICO** by Nina Jaffe. Illustrated by Enrique O. Sánchez. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-689-80469-5 (K-3)

This myth explains the origins of the sea, the forest, and the island now called Puerto Rico. It will especially delight young children who know something about pumpkins, but who may be surprised to discover that the pumpkin becomes the source of life for the Taino people.

Background on the Taino culture before the arrival of Columbus is provided in an afterword.  
**GOLDEN TALES: MYTHS, LEGENDS, AND FOLKTALES FROM LATIN AMERICA/DE ORO Y ESMERALDAS: MITOS, LEYENDAS Y CUENTOS POPULARES DE LATINO AMERICA** by Lulu Delacre. New York: Scholastic, 1996. 74 pgs. ISBN 0-590-48186-X (English) ISBN 0-590-67683-0 (Spanish) (3-5)

These stories from thirteen countries and four indigenous cultures date from pre-Columbian and post-Columbian times. Maps, background notes, and source information demonstrate the effort which went into the collection and will provide further avenues for exploration of Latin American folklore. (Published as English and Spanish dual editions.)

**GOOD NEWS!** by Sarita Chávez Silverman. Illustrated by Melinda Levine. Carmel, CA: Hampton-Brown, 1996. 16 pgs. ISBN 1-56334-667-2 (K-3)

In this big book format, Chago loses his first tooth and writes to share the news with his grandmother in the Dominican Republic. Told in rhyme, the story follows his letter's journey from New York City to the island. English vocabulary labels are used throughout the illustrations.

**HOORAY, A PIÑATA!** by Elisa Kleven. New York: Dutton, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-525-45605-8 (K-3)

After she chooses a cute dog piñata for her birthday party, Clara pretends it is her pet and doesn't want it to get broken. Lively illustrations, brimming with detail, carry this story of family, good friends, and a little girl who loves her pretend dog.

**IN ROSA'S MEXICO** by Campbell Geeslin. Illustrated by Andrea Arroyo. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-679-86721-X (K-3)

In these three short, simple stories set in Mexico, Rosa encounters a rooster, a burro and a wolf. With her self-assurance and the blessings of the animals, the earth and the sky, all problems are solved. Written in a sparse, lyrical text with elements of magical realism, each story used Spanish words which are defined in the brief glossary.

**JADE AND IRON: LATIN AMERICAN TALES FROM TWO CULTURES** edited by Patricia Aldana. Translated by Hugh Hazelton. Illustrated by Luis Garay. Toronto: Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 1996. 64 pgs. ISBN 0-88899-256-4 (3-5)

With thoughtful presentation, the editor has selected a broad cross-section of stories that represent the indigenous and European cultures of Latin America. The collection was drawn from a rich variety of narrative sources, both oral and written, originally published in various Latin American countries.

**JALAPEÑO BAGELS** by Natasha Wing. Illustrated by Robert Casilla. New York: Atheneum, 1996. 24 pgs. ISBN 0-689-80530-6 (K-3)

For International Day at school, Pablo wants to bring something that reflects the culture of both

his parents who are Mexican and Jewish. By symbolically honoring his family, Pablo learns something about who he is. Warm illustrations show the tenderness with which the family lives, works and bakes together.

**JOSEFINA** by Jeanette Winter. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996. 36 pgs. ISBN 0-15-201091-2 (K-3)

Inspired by the work of Mexican folk artist Josefina Aguilar, the book also functions as a counting book in Spanish. Josefina learns to mold clay figures as a child by watching her parents and continues the art form throughout her lifetime. The illustrations are true to the clay folk art tradition.

**JOURNEY OF THE NIGHTLY JAGUAR** by Burton Albert. Illustrated by Robert Roth. New York: Atheneum, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-689-31905-3 (K-3)

Inspired by Maya legend, the sun becomes a jaguar at night, stalking through the jungle until it appears again as the sun in the eastern sky. As much a poem as a story, illustrations and text flawlessly dovetail as raindrops become jaguar spots become shimmering bubbles become the morning sun.

**THE MAGIC MAGUEY** by Tony Johnston. Illustrated by Elisa Kleven. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-15-250988-7 (K-3)

The maguey has many practical uses for the Mexican pueblo--from providing a roof to producing thread. Miguel cleverly discovers a way to save the beloved maguey plant from destruction by rich landowner Don César.

**MIRO IN THE KINGDOM OF THE SUN** by Jane Kurtz. Illustrated by David Frampton. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-395-69181-8 (K-3)

A young Inca girl succeeds where her brothers and others have failed on a quest to cure the king's son. The strength of this female protagonist comes across in the fine woodcut illustrations as well.

**MY MEXICO-MEXICO MIO** by Tony Johnston. Illustrated by F. John Sierra. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996. 36 pgs. ISBN 0-399-22275-8 (K-3)

A love of Mexico is expressed through the gentle poetry and dignified illustrations of this collection. The author lived in Mexico City for fifteen years; the illustrator is second generation Mexican American.

**NINA BONITA** by Ana Maria Machado. Illustrated by Rosana Faría. Translated by Elena Iribarren. Brooklyn, NY: Kane/Miller, 1996. 24 pgs. ISBN 0-916291-63-4 (K-3)

The white rabbit is enchanted by Nina's black skin and wants to have children as beautiful as she is. First published in Brazil as *Menina Bonita* and subsequently in Venezuela by Ediciones Ekaré, the U.S. edition allows an opportunity to read the work of one of Brazil's most prolific children's writers.

**OLD LETIVIA AND THE MOUNTAIN OF SORROWS** by Nicholasa Mohr. Illustrated by Rudy Gutiérrez. New York: Viking, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-670-84419-5 (K-3)

To end the devastation of a small Puerto Rican town, Letivia, a *curandera*, and her friends use their magic to conquer the evil forces hiding in *El Yunque*, the Puerto Rican rainforest. The story is notable for its depiction of an older woman as adventurous hero; the glowing illustrations convey the magical realism of the tale.

**THE OLD MAN AND HIS DOOR** by Gary Soto. Illustrated by Joe Cepeda. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-399-22700-8 (K-3)

Misunderstanding his wife's instructions, an old man sets out for a party with a door, *la puerta*, instead of *el puerco*, the pig for barbecuing, on his back. The amusing illustrations contribute to this comedy of errors as the old man struggles with the door but helps others along the way.

**PASCUAL'S MAGIC PICTURES** by Amy Glaser Gage. Illustrated by Karen Dugan. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-87614-877-1 (K-3)

Having saved enough money to buy a disposable camera, Pascual goes into the Guatemalan rain forest near Tikal to take pictures of howler monkeys, but the results are not what he expects. Illustrations mirror snapshots with borders of Guatemalan weaving.

**PRIETITA AND THE GHOST WOMAN/PRIETITA Y LA LLORONA** by Gloria Anzaldúa. Illustrated by Christina González. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-89239-136-7 (K-3)

Prietita, a young Mexican American girl, goes in search of an herb to cure her mother and encounters *La Llorona*. Rather than the negative image with which the legendary figure has traditionally been associated, here *La Llorona* is a compassionate figure. The two characters work together, symbolizing the strength of Chicana women (bilingual).

**RUNNING THE ROAD TO ABC** by Denizé Lauture. Illustrated by Reynold Ruffins. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-689-80507-1 (K-3)

Long before the sun even thinks of rising, the Haitian children run to school where they learn the letters, sounds and words of their beautiful books. The author is a Haitian poet; the engaging illustrations echo the Haitian painting tradition.

**SWEET, SWEET FIG BANANA** by Phillis Gershator. Illustrated by Fritz Millevoix. Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-8075-7693-X (K-3)

Young Soto plants a banana shoot and watches it grow; meanwhile he makes friends in the market where his mother works. In gratitude for their kindness, Soto gives each a ripened hand of his bananas. The Haitian illustrator gives a sense of specificity to this story of generosity, reciprocity, and the love of reading and art.

**TONIO'S CAT** by Mary Calhoun. Illustrated by Edward Martínez. New York: Morrow, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-688-13314-2 (K-3)

A cat named Toughy begins to fill the emptiness that Tonio feels because he had to leave his dog

behind in Mexico. Little by little, “el gato” becomes “my cat” as Tonio and Toughy grow closer and Tonio begins to find a place for himself as well.

**TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE: THE FIGHT FOR HAITI'S FREEDOM** by Walter Dean Myers. Paintings by Jacob Lawrence. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 36 pgs. ISBN 0-689-80126-2 (6-8)

A collection of paintings first exhibited at the 1940 Chicago Negro Exhibition chronicle the liberation of Haiti in 1804. A well-written narrative tells of the emotional journey of those who were enslaved and their desperate fight for freedom.

**UNCLE SNAKE** by Matthew Gollub. Illustrated by Leovigildo Martínez. New York: Tambourine, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-688-13944-2 (K-3)

When his face changes into that of a snake after he visits a forbidden cave, a young boy wears a mask for twenty years before being taken into the sky as lightning. The story is based upon folk culture about the natural world of Oaxaca, Mexico.

Although beyond the criteria for the Américas Award, other notable 1996 publications include:

**LIFE AROUND THE LAKE: EMBROIDERIES BY THE WOMEN OF LAKE PATZCUARO** by Maricel E. Presilla and Gloria Soto. New York: Henry Holt, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-8050-3800-0 (3-5)

With a very approachable style, the authors depict how the Tarascan embroiderers around Lake Pátzcuaro in central Mexico adapt to cultural, social and environmental change while holding fast to certain traditions.

**MOLA: CUNA LIFE STORIES AND ART** by Maricel E. Presilla. New York: Henry Holt, 1996. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-8050-3801-9 (3-5)

Molas, spectacular fabric designs in vibrant colors, provide a window into Cuna life. Created by the women of the San Blas Islands of Panama, the text loosely uses the designs to shape a narrative including songs, history, customs and explanations of mola art.

These photo documentaries introduce readers to indigenous women's responses to local and global economies, and the function and storytelling roles of their textile art. Through their clear narrative and close-up view, each sets a necessarily high standard for the representation of indigenous people and their art.

1996 Américas Award for Children's and Young Adult Book Award  
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