

Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

2001
Américas Award
for
Children's and Young Adult Literature

The Américas Award is given in recognition of U.S. works of fiction, poetry, folklore, or selected non-fiction (from picture books to works for young adults) published in the previous year in English or Spanish that authentically and engagingly portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or 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. The award is sponsored by the national Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP).

The award winners and commended titles are selected for their 1) distinctive literary quality; 2) cultural contextualization; 3) exceptional integration of text, illustration and design; and 4) potential for classroom use. The winning books will be honored at a ceremony, October 23, 2010 at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

2001 AMERICAS AWARD WINNERS

Picture Book Category

A MOVIE IN MY PILLOW by Jorge Argueta. Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez. Children's Book Press, 2001. 32 pages. ISBN 0-89239-165-0 \$15.95

This bilingual collection of poems for children opens with a simple ode to the cultural diversity in the Mission District of San Francisco, the "Neighborhood of Sun," in Argueta's words. In poetry and picture, the reader is gently moved into the experiences of a child in the Salvadoran community of that city. Throughout Gómez's delightful folk-art illustrations, parakeets periodically appear as symbols of the Salvadoran family, sometimes as joyful bursts of color, other times upside down amidst the terror of armed conflict. The pain of flight from a beloved country rift with civil war is poignantly conveyed. Yet with equal resonance, we hear the optimism and joy of a family that is finally reunited "like a big nest with all the birds inside" in a hope-filled city of giant buildings.

Fiction Category

BREAKING THROUGH by Francisco Jiménez. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001. 195 pages. ISBN 0-618-01173-0 \$15.00

A welcomed sequel to his award winning novel *The Circuit* (1997), the autobiographical journey of the son in a family of migrant farmworkers continues. Readers come to learn that Panchito, deported to Mexico when it seemed that his hardworking family was finally on the roads to some financial solvency, makes it back to the U.S. with his documentation in order. In the convincing voice of a young adolescent, we hear the details of his life in California in the early sixties. Not only in the fields but also throughout his high school experiences, we see Panchito straddle two worlds. He continues to be the hardworking, dutiful son in an economically struggling immigrant family and also dedicates himself to his role as a conscientious and respected student at Santa Clara High School. The tenacity and resourcefulness of this young man are simply yet powerfully revealed in the ordinary yet extraordinary events he recounts. The values Jiménez brings to the table, just as unobtrusively as migrant farm workers provide produce for consumption, offer stunning nourishment for young adolescent readers of this newest segment of his life story.

2001 AMERICAS HONORABLE MENTION

IN THE DAYS OF THE VAQUEROS: AMERICA'S FIRST TRUE COWBOYS by Russell Freedman. Clarion Books, 2001. 70 pages. ISBN 0-395-96788-0 \$18.00

Beginning with verses from a beloved Mexican Cowboy ballad, "El Caballero Blanco," Freedman invites readers of his latest expertly done non-fiction picture book to consider the historically overlooked Mexican cow-herders, the *Vaqueros*. Unlike their North American counterparts, *Vaqueros* never enjoyed the romanticized role that cowboys did in the U.S. Yet it was the *Vaqueros*, pitifully underpaid, landless laborers, that taught U.S. cowboys the trade they had practiced and perfected on the Mexican plains for almost five hundred years. Freedman educates us on the arrival of horses and cattle in the Americas from the days of Columbus and subsequent conquistadors to the end of the cow-herding era in the early 20th Century. Readers learn how American "buckaroos," a mispronunciation derived from the Spanish word *Vaquero*, borrowed not only their work-related vocabulary from Mexican cowboys but also their saddle design, clothing, and techniques of the trade. Beautiful period photographs, paintings and pencil sketches support the informative text. This book could easily be integrated into the social studies curriculum or coupled with novels of the American west. It fills a gap in our historical knowledge of the skilled and courageous poor laborers on horseback that provided the basis for the image that was so readily embraced in the U.S.

2001 AMERICAS COMMENDED LIST

HARVEST by George Ancona. Marshall Cavendish, 2001. 48 pages. ISBN 0-7614-5086-6 \$15.95

Once again, Ancona's expert photographs extend and support an informational story, this time of migrant farm workers, campesinos. Readers see striking images of farm workers on the job, with heads and faces wrapped for protection from the sun and pesticides. The immediacy and skill needed in harvesting fruits and vegetables to be swiftly transported to markets are clearly conveyed. The pictures tell a story of strenuous labor undertaken by both the young and old. They create a photostudy that places readers into a largely unknown world whose work graces our tables day in and day out. A child's personally made storybook and autobiographical sketches written by adult migrants are included. A brief biography of farm labor organizer, César Chávez, brings Ancona's *Harvest* to a fitting close. Students reading the book will get a taste of the campesino life and plight without bitterness. On the contrary, many smiling faces populate its pages with determined dreams for a better life.

IGUANAS IN THE SNOW AND OTHER WINTER POEMS by Francisco X. Alarcón. Illustrations by Maya Christina González. Children's Book Press, 2001. 32 pages. ISBN 0-89239-168-5 \$15.95

In their final collection of seasonal poetry, Alarcón and González celebrate winter in Northern California. With bilingual text and colorful images they frolic over the beach, through the city of San Francisco, a mission, a cable car, the harbor, and the ancient redwood forests of the Sierra. In the typical upbeat fashion readers have come to enjoy in Alarcón's earlier seasonal poetry, the writer honors families, neighborhoods, schools, holidays, and the talent of being bilingual. The warmth that poet Alarcón brings to the wintry slices of everyday life for children in the area is rivaled only by González's exuberant artwork that enfolds his words. "Children are the blooming branches of trees" he proclaims at the book's conclusion, and González plants smiling children, proudly standing tall in front of snow-covered sequoias, young growth juxtaposed with ancient giants. This engaging collection offers children the opportunity to grow in their experience with poetry, both in the appreciation and creation of it.

THE JUMPING TREE by René Saldaña, Jr. Delacorte Press, 2001. 181 pages. ISBN 0-385-32725-0 \$14.95

Rey Castañeda is growing up in a small Texas town near the Mexican border. Saldaña's stories follow him from sixth through eighth grade in Nuevo Peñitas. Just as Rey repeatedly crosses the border to visit relatives in Mexico, he is venturing across the borders of childhood into adulthood. With friends and family, teachers and pets, he struggles to understand his manhood while contending with a father who wants him to be "macho." The stories in the episodic novel could stand alone, each giving readers a poignant glimpse into the life of a young Chicano adolescent who is a critical thinker and wrestles with social injustices and personal experiences that are heartbreaking, then turns around to relate humorous stories as well. Told matter-of-factly, memorable vignettes are recounted honestly and directly. They remind us that Chicano Texans are a world apart from "mainstream" Texans and face racism routinely. In a voice that rings true, gliding between English and Spanish, Saldaña's *The Jumping Tree* enables us to dive into Rey's world and hope that he "lands on his feet."

MAMA DOES THE MAMBO by Katherine Leiner. Illustrated by Edel Rodríguez. Hyperion, 2001. 36 pages. ISBN 0-7868-0646-X \$15.99

The pastel, gauche, and spray paint illustrations with wood block-ink linework expressively set the stage for Katherine Leiner's picture storybook placed in Havana, Cuba. First, we see a well-ordered room, filled with straight lines, a portrait of a man hung prominently between scenes of flowers, and a woman stiffly looking out from her wrought-iron balcony. On the next, as a young daughter tells us of her memories of her once happy and exuberant mother, we see curving cameo framed, lovely sketches of a woman full of life and motion as she dances through household chores. Through the voice of Sofia, who has lost her father, we learn of her concern about her mother's continuing grief and her inability to dance the way she did in the past. Even when a new sister appears on the scene, Mama still cannot seem to capture the rhythm that was once her hallmark. Sofia becomes an integral part of the story's resolution during the spring carnival, allowing children to see the important role even the youngest character can play in the face of grief. Spanish words and phrases as well as warm pictures evocative of past and peaceful Cuba combine to portray bittersweet memory that reaffirms hopefulness after heartbreak.

UNCLE RAIN CLOUD by Tony Johnston. Illustrated by Fabricio Vanden Broeck. Charlesbridge, 2001. 32 pages. ISBN 0-88106-371-1 \$15.95

Third grader Carlos helps his Uncle Tomás adjust to life in the large English speaking city of Los Angeles. At first he dreads spending time with his Uncle Rain Cloud, as he has nicknamed him due to his stormy moods. But he soon realizes that his uncle is ashamed of his level of English comprehension and expression. The reader sees Carlos as a child translator for his uncle in the grocery store and at a parent-teacher conference. Uncle Tomás also reveals a tender side as he tells his nephew stories of the ancient gods of Mexico and finally confides in him of his worries regarding "el Blah Blah" English. Vanden Broeck's acrylic and color pencil illustrations convey the mood of frustration with a new language with darkened hues and shadows. On pages showing Tío Tomás's stories of the gods, soft images of Aztec deities appear in the background. A wonderful example of cooperation and adjustment to new necessities while holding fast to cultural pride emerges in this realistic picture storybook that tackles a difficult subject.