

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 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 6, 2007) at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Américas Award Winners

JOSIAS, HOLD THE BOOK by Jennifer Riesmeyer Elvgren. Illustrated by Nicole Tadgell. Honesdale: Boyds Mills, 2006. 32 pgs. ISBN 1-59078-318-2

Josias lives in Haiti, where the people are poor and school is not always a possibility. When the beans in his garden won't grow, he must find a solution or his family will not have enough to eat. He tries adding first extra water, then manure, but nothing works. Then he has an idea. Perhaps the answer is somewhere in a book. While Elvgren crafts effective narrative of rural Haitian life, Tadgell provides pale watercolors that aptly complement the text. (1-3)

THE POET SLAVE OF CUBA by Margarita Engle. Illustrated by Sean Qualls. New York: Henry Holt, 2006. 183 pgs. ISBN 0-8050-7706-5

Margarita Engle sensitively takes the reader back in time to the life of a Cuban slave. Juan Francisco Manzano was born into slavery on a wealthy sugar plantation. As a small child, separated from his birth family and raised as a "pet," Manzano provided entertainment for his owners by reciting poetry and prose for the elite. As an adult, though beaten and inhumanely treated, Manzano's talent for writing evolved and survived despite censorship and laws. Margarita Engle chose poetry to tell his story. Her use of point of view gives insight to Juan Francisco Manzano's feelings and hideous treatment as a slave, as well as insight into his slave masters. Sean Qualls' black and white illustrations enhance the division of the two worlds. The author gives an historical note about Manzano, the poet slave, and includes some samples of Juan Francisco Manzano's original Spanish poetry. (10-12)

Américas Award Honorable Mentions

WHAT THE MOON SAW by Laura Resau. New York: Delacorte, 2006. 258 pgs. ISBN 978-0-385-73343-4

Clara thinks her last name, Luna, is very apt. Clara Luna means “clear moon” in Spanish, but Clara’s head doesn’t feel clear at all these days. Sometimes the moon seems to call to her, and she sneaks out at night to wade in a nearby stream. No wonder her friends call her lunatic. Then a letter arrives from Oaxaca, Mexico inviting Clara to spend the summer, “*We will wait for you on the day of the full moon in June*” it says in Spanish. Reluctant but encouraged by her parents, Clara agrees to spend the summer in the mountain village of Yucuyoo, with grandparents she has never met. In doing so, Clara embarks on a journey of discovery, of her Mexican roots, and the powers that lie within herself. (4-7)

Américas Award Commended Titles

BEHIND THE EYES by Francisco X. Stork. New York: Dutton, 2006. 246 pgs. ISBN 0-525-44735-7

Going to Furman, a prison school to rehabilitate troubled teens, seems like Hector’s only choice. He thinks it’s ironic that he should have to go to prison, when it was his brother Fili who was always in trouble. Hector’s Mexican American family had high hopes for him. He spoke the best English. He liked to read and most importantly, stayed out of trouble. Now Fili is dead, and a gang has a marker on Hector head. An angry, scared, discouraged Hector enters Furman. There he must overcome his inner turmoil and begin the journey to reclaim the productive, high achieving life he once thought he could have. To do so, Hector must deal with threats inside Furman but also learn to trust and discover true friendship. (7-12)

CALL ME HENRI by Lorraine M. López. Willimantic: Curbstone, 2006. 237 pgs. ISBN 9-781931-896276

Enrique, a boy in middle school, wants to learn French, a beautiful language much closer to his native Spanish than English. Because he must take ESL classes, responsibilities and abuse at home, and constant threat from a neighborhood gang, studying French seems a dream. He persists, with the help of compassionate teacher. This book encapsulates the struggles of a second language learner dealing with the trials and tribulations of being a teenager. (7-9)

CROSSING THE WIRE by Will Hobbs. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. 216 pgs. ISBN 0-06-074138

Hobbs' latest puts a human face on the controversial issue of illegal immigration. No longer able to grow corn profitably in his Mexican village, 15-year-old Victor, who has supported his family since his father's death, resolves to go to El Norte. A well-paced story with information concerning the local geography and customs woven into the plot, readers suffer with Victor as he attempts the dangerous border crossing, jumping trains, fleeing thieves and border officials, and suffering from thirst and hunger. His desperation and fear are completely believable as he faces near-death situations and must decide whom to trust. (6-12)

EL LECTOR by William Durbin. New York: Random House, 2006. 195 pgs. ISBN 0-385-74651-2

This book portrays life in Florida in the 1930's. The main character is Bella, a girl who dreams of becoming a *lector* or reader, just like her grandfather. Being a lector meant reading to the workers in a cigar factory and conveying a love and understanding of classic Spanish literature. The invention of the radio, as well as the social conditions in which the story develops, will change the girl's dreams. (4-6)

LA FIESTA DE LAS TORTILLAS/ THE FIESTA OF THE TORTILLAS by Jorge Argueta. Illustrated by María Jesús Álvarez. Translated by Joe Hayes and Sharon Franco. Miami: Santillana., 2006. 32 pgs. ISBN 1-59820-094-1

Written in Spanish and English, Jorge Argueta is the storyteller recalling a fond childhood memory of delicious smells and food, and being surrounded by a loving, extended family. In El Salvador, the family's busy *comedor* vibrates with a rhythmic clapping. In the end, the "Spirit of the Corn" turns the daily tasks of making the tortillas for the family restaurant into the "Fiesta de las Tortillas." Argueta appears as a child in many of the vibrant and delightful illustrations highlighting this family memory. (K- 3)

THE HONEY JAR by Rigoberta Menchú with Dante Liano. Illustrated by Domi. Toronto: Groundwood, 2006. 64 pgs. ISBN 0-88899-670-5

This collection offers a retelling of the Mayan myths of creation (found in the *Popol Vuh*), legends and animal tales. The telling aptly captures the sense that these are oral stories passed from generation to generation; as such, the style is informal and at times charmingly repetitive and personal. As a matter of fact, this book would constitute a wonderful read aloud in any classroom since all its potential beauty and explanations can be conveyed to the listeners. The book is illustrated by Domi, a Mexican illustrator who uses colors and details that match perfectly the style and content of the book. (3-5)

LETTERS TO MY MOTHER by Teresa Cárdenas. Toronto: Groundwood, 2006. 103 pgs. ISBN 0-88899-720-5

This book is written as a diary by a Cuban girl whose mother has died, and she lives with her relatives. The entries reflect not only the pain of having lost her mother; they also reflect the girl's most intimate thoughts. Her revelations take us through the pain of loss, unkindness and violence, but perhaps the most poignant thoughts have to do with racism in Cuba. The entries also reveal the transition between being a girl to being a woman and finding strength in her independence. (6-8)

LA LÍNEA by Ann Jaramillo. New Milford, CT: Roaring Brook, 2006. 129 pgs. ISBN 978-1-59643-154-6

The hope of reuniting with his parents starts Miguel on his quest to cross the border. Just barely fifteen, Miguel gets a note from his father to seek out help to cross to California. Torn between leaving his grandmother and sister and heading toward a promise for something better, Miguel makes preparations to leave his home. The dangers of being an illegal immigrant forced to use *coyotes* are compounded when Elena, Miguel's younger sister decides to follow him. This contemporary realistic novel addresses some of the dangers, challenges, and emotions immigrants crossing the border face. (7- 12)

MY FEET ARE LAUGHING by Lissette Norman. Illustrated by Frank Morrison. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-374-35096-3

After her grandmother dies, Sadie, a young Dominican American, and her mother and sister move into Mama Didi's Harlem brownstone. Sadie has stories to tell and poems to write, and Norman has given her a voice in 13 accessible, narrative selections. Blending familial love and the optimism of youth, they convey Sadie's irrepressible personality. She explains that she can't sit still because her feet are laughing. Although Sadie's parents have separated, they remain good friends and continue to care for one another in healthy, nurturing ways, defying the stereotype of the broken home. With artist Morrison's double-page spreads full of curves and angles that express dancing rhythm action and quiet daydreaming moments, this book is fun for reading aloud. (1-5)

MY LITTLE CAR by Gary Soto. Illustrated by Pam Papparone. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2006. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-399-23220-6

Teresa has just receive a brand new *carrito* (little car) from her grandfather. She is delighted with it and can't wait to show it off to her friends in the *barrio*. Soon, however, the novelty wears off and Teresa's *carrito* is left abandoned, allowed to rust, even run over by her father's truck. Luckily, *abuelito* shows up and lovingly teaches Teresa the value of taking care of precious possessions. Vivid illustrations using bright pastels are in keeping with the Mexican American neighborhood setting of this lovely story. (PK-2)

NAPÍ VA A LA MONTAÑA by Antonio Ramírez. Illustrated by Domi. Toronto: Groundwood, 2006. 50 pgs. ISBN

When their father disappears one day, Napí and her little brother Niclé decide to leave their village to find him. They set off upriver on a raft. Their search assumes a magical quality and becomes a journey of self-discovery. Turtles carry the raft on their backs; the children are transformed into deer; and other animals offer help and advice. Finally, an armadillo tells them that if they return home, they will find a big surprise awaiting them. Domi's watercolors set the stage for this book about a culture that respects Mother Nature. (4-6)

SURPRISING CECILIA by Susan Gonzales Abraham and Denise Gonzales Abraham. El Paso: Cinco Puntos, 2006. 221 pgs. ISBN 0-938317-96-2

This book is the second in a trilogy, following *Cecilia's Year*. Both books relate the story of Cecilia, an adolescent living on a farm in New Mexico. The book stands alone, however, with its rich portrayal of everyday farm life, high school challenges, and the intricate relationships within the community. Cecilia is a girl determined to succeed in life and to carry her dreams beyond what is expected of her. The book was written by the daughters of the real life Cecilia. (5-8)

TALKING WITH MOTHER EARTH/HABLANDO CON MADRE TIERRA by Jorge Argueta. Illustrated by Lucía Angela Pérez. Toronto: Groundwood, 2006. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-88899-626-8

This book of bilingual poetry is beautifully connected by the overall theme of Mother Earth. It is written by a boy poet to help manage his feelings and spiritual wounds experienced when he is the target of discrimination by his classmates. The poems are often simple, lovely odes to

nature and at other times reflect the power nature has to heal the damaged caused by racism. The dramatic illustrations are a perfect complement to the moving story. (6 -8)

TO GO SINGING THROUGH THE WORLD: THE CHILDHOOD OF PABLO NERUDA by Deborah Kogan Ray. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2006. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-0-374-37627-7

The early life of Nobel Prize winner, poet Pablo Neruda, is made accessible to young readers through this wonderfully illustrated biography. Neruda spent his childhood year in the Chilean frontier town of Temuco. Exquisite illustrations tell his story, his relationship with his stepmother, and how his surroundings began shaping his poetry at a young age. Quotes from Neruda's autobiography, as well as excerpts of his poetry, are expertly intertwined in the narrative, bringing alive the essence and soul of Neruda. (1-5)

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