

Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

**2009**  
**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 on October 17, 2009 during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**2009 Américas Award Winners**

**Just in Case: A Trickster Tale and Spanish Alphabet Book** by Yuyi Morales.  
 Roaring Brook Press (A Neal Porter Book), 2008. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-1-59643-329-8

Señor Calavera is back again and ready to celebrate Grandma Beetle's birthday. Since Mexican etiquette requires that a guest never attends a *cumpleaños* empty-handed, our poor friend must find the perfect gift. But, what does Grandma Beetle really want for her birthday? Readers follow Señor Calavera as he collects a series of *regalitos*, each representative of the twenty nine letters of the Spanish alphabet, until he ultimately finds the present that Grandma Beetle loves the most. Morales' vibrantly-hued illustrations include layers of meaning imbued with cultural content and literary allusions. Many of the images in the Mexican Lotería cards on the endpapers are hidden within the pages of the humorous tale and little details, peppered throughout the illustrations, draw readers back to the pages again and again. Truly this is a visual fiesta that will have readers returning again and again "just in case" they missed something in Morales' well-crafted illustrations. (gr K-4)

**The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom** by Margarita Engle.  
 Holt, 2008. 169 pgs. ISBN 978-0-8050-8674-4

Written in breathtaking verse, *The Surrender Tree* portrays Cuba's three wars for independence spanning thirty years in the nineteenth century. As with her previous book: *Juan Francisco Manzano, the Poet Slave of Cuba*, Engle develops the story by presenting different points of view, especially from Rosa, a freed slave. Rosa, known in Cuba as Rosa *la Bayomesa*, healed the injured during the wars, turning caves into hospitals, using wild plants as her medicines. In a final proof of her humanity she treats the lieutenant who has sworn to kill her. The book describes the suffering and horrors during the wars, including the first systematic use of concentration camps, but the main message of the book is that freedom exists only when everyone shares it. (gr 8-10)

## Américas Award Honorable Mentions

**The Best Gift of All: The Legend of La Vieja Belén / El Mejor Regalo del Mundo: La Leyenda de la Vieja Belén** by Julia Alvarez. Illustrated by Ruddy Nuñez. Alfaguara/Santillana, 2008. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-1-60396-325-1

Julia Alvarez gives young readers a special holiday gift with her latest children's book. Following a well-known Christmas cadence, Alvarez crafts a poetic retelling of the legend of La Vieja Belén, a character of Dominican Christmas folklore. This book, presented in both English and Spanish, would fit nicely into a December celebration collection, enlightening its readers to holiday, culture and tradition of the Caribbean island. (gr 3-6)

**Dark Dude** by Oscar Hijuelos. Atheneum, 2008. 440 pgs. 978-1-4169-4804-9

Although he is 100% Cubano American, Rico's fair skin, freckles, and blonde hair label him a "dark dude" or outsider in 1960s Harlem. The bespectacled teen doesn't resemble the rest of his family, can barely speak Spanish, and often finds himself the target of trouble because of his "white boy" appearance. When Rico leaves his private school to attend a public high school, he quickly learns that his real education involves surviving the violence and drugs that surround him. After his best friend almost dies from a heroin addiction, Rico decides it is time for them to leave New York for the fresh air of Wisconsin where another friend owns a farm. However, the teen soon learns that even farm country has its own problems when you aren't comfortable in your own skin. Hijuelos first-person narrative superbly captures the joys and sorrows of this dark dude searching for his true identity and purpose in life. (gr 8-12)

**The Storyteller's Candle / La velita de los cuentos** by Lucía González. Illustrated by Lulu Delacre. Children's Book Press, 2008. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-89239-222-3

Two children, Hildemar and Santiago, have moved to New York in the winter of 1929. They both miss Puerto Rico and are especially worried about Three Kings Day (January 6<sup>th</sup>). One day, Pura Belpré, the New York City librarian, arrives in their classroom, and the children discover the meaning of the library and what it means for the community. The title of the book comes from Pura Belpré's habit of lighting a candle before she read a book. At the end of the story she would say: "We'll blow the story teller's candle and your wish will come true." This book is an homage to Pura Belpré. Lulu Delacre's remarkable illustrations use sepia colors and newspaper clippings from Three Kings Day, 1930. (gr 3-6)

## Américas Award Commended Titles

**Animal Poems of the Iguazú/Animalario del Iguazú** by Francisco X. Alarcón. Illustrated by Maya Christina González. Children's Book Press, 2008. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-89239-225-4

Distinguished poet Francisco X. Alarcón invites young readers into the South American rain forest. In both Spanish and English, individual animals and different forest features rhythmically express their beauty and relevance, not only to this ecosystem, but to the entire world. We learn of Guaraní myths of the clouds and sky, the jaguar's majestic spirit and even the importance of the pesky mosquito. Informative footnotes enlighten the journey and the vibrant colors and textures of Maya Christina González' illustrations bring this collection to life. (gr 1-6)

**Arco Iris de Poesía: Poemas de las Américas y España** selected by Sergio Andricaín. Illustrated by Olga Cuéllar. Lectorum, 2008. 40pgs. ISBN 978-1-930332-59-1

Sergio Andricaín's collection of poems introduces young readers to masterpiece writers of the Americas. Each country is represented through an innocent and beautiful Spanish poem, often representing nature or childhood fun. The selections are woven together with Olga Cuéllar's colorful, inviting illustrations, and the book concludes with short biographical notes about each author. This is a great collection for the Spanish classroom or bilingual elementary school. (gr 1-6)

**Baila, Nana, Baila / Dance, Nana, Dance: Cuban Folktales in English and Spanish** retold by Joe Hayes. Illustrated by Mauricio Trenard Sayago. Cinco Puntos, 2008. 128 pgs. ISBN 978-1-933693-17-0

Joe Hayes presents a rich, soulful collection of Cuban short stories. His retelling of these classic folktales will have readers of all ages tasting the flavors and moving to the beat of the Spanish, African and Caribbean cultures that blend together in the oral tradition of this Caribbean island. Working with Cuban author Martha Esquenazi, Hayes added his literary touch to each piece, maintaining cultural integrity as he introduces these folktales to U.S. children. Each story is presented in both Spanish and English, with additional endnotes for each, as well as rich, colorful illustrations by Mauricio Trenard Sayago. (gr 4-8)

**Cesar Chavez: Crusader for Social Change** by Brenda Haugen. Compass Point, 2008. 112 pgs. 978-0-7565-3321-2

Brenda Haugen's biography of Cesar Chavez (from the series Signature Lives: Modern America.) is an inviting and thorough exploration of this American civil rights leader. The high-quality production of expository text and photographic features, explores Chavez' migrant childhood, years of activism through peaceful strikes and boycotts that established better working conditions for farm laborers all over America. (gr 4-8)

**The Disappeared** by Gloria Whelan. Dial / Penguin, 2008. 136 pgs. 978-0-8037-3275-9

To Silvia, her brother has simply "disappeared," like so many other citizens who oppose the military dictatorship of 1970's Argentina. In alternating chapters, the siblings try to figure how to survive while recalling the events that led up to Eduardo's arrest. Silvia thinks she can help Eduardo if she gives in to the advances of the son of a high ranking general, and while she has not been arrested, her plans put her in many dangerous situations. Eduardo worries that his sister will be taken next, and will endure any amount of torture and pressure from his jailers to prevent further harm to his family. Through these two perspectives, readers meet other characters including family members and friends who cope with the terror in different ways, some actively opposing and protesting the government, and others fleeing the country. End matter provides historical information and context on which the novel was based as well as a reading list. (gr 9-12)

**Divali Rose** by Vashanti Rahaman. Illustrated by Jamel Akib. Boyds Mills, 2008. 32 pgs.

Set in Trinidad, this emotional story follows a young Indian boy, Ricki, as he prepares for Divali, the Hindu festival of lights. On his way to school, Ricki accidentally breaks a rose bud from the Divali rose bush that he and his grandfather have planted. Unfortunately, his grandfather blames the children of recent Indian immigrants. It is only after Ricki stresses the true meaning of Divali, “to make peace with everyone and start new for the new year,” that his grandfather decides to forgive the immigrant children and bring the final Divali rose to the family for the festival. Ricki finally admits he is the one who broke the rose. Although the story borders on didactic, it does provide a view of Trinidad culture not often reflected in children’s literature. (gr 1-3)

**Dolores Huerta: Labor Leader and Civil Rights Activist** by Robin S. Doak. Compass Point, 2008. 112 pgs. 978-0-7565-3477-6

Although most people think of Cesar Chavez as the driving force behind the National Farmworkers Association, Dolores Huerta also played a significant role in obtaining equal rights for farm workers. Known for her passion and uncompromising determination, the fiery mother of eleven was the “hands and heart” of the union, organizing boycotts, pickets, and marches. Part of the Signature Lives series of Modern America, this engaging biography describes the life and accomplishments of this dedicated social activist, lobbyist, and advocate. Numerous supplementary features support the informational text in the form of timelines, sidebars, maps, archival photographs, and a glossary. (gr 5-8)

**Down to the Bone** by Mayra Lazara Dole. HarperCollins, 2008. 351 pgs. 978-0-06-084311-3

“Happy Anniversary! I never thought I could love someone sooooo much. Remember our first kiss?” The worst day of Laura’s life begins when she gets caught reading these sentiments from the love letter she received the previous day. Her Catholic school nun catches the Cuban teen pouring over the letter and proceeds to read it to the entire class. Unfortunately, the letter is from Laura’s fly girlfriend! Told through a striking voice which mirrors the life of many LGBTQ teens, Dole’s emotionally-charged first novel follows Laura as she explores what it means to be a *tortillera* (Cuban slang for lesbian) when your family and the entire world seem to be against you. Laura’s journey for self-acceptance in a Latino community that shuns same-sex relationships will hit home for many teens. (gr 8-12)

**Facts of Life** by Gary Soto. Harcourt, 2008. 174 pgs. 978-0-15-206181-4

Lisa is a talented artist, but is unsure if what she draws is what she really sees. Ryan grows to respect the hard work it takes to be a good student after seeing how hard adult immigrants must work to master English. Letty learns that her cute and popular boyfriend might lead her down a path she does not want to tread. Hector’s impossible parents are getting divorced and give him a difficult choice. Each story in this collection stars a middle schooler on the cusp of adolescence. Most, but not all protagonists are explicitly Mexican-American and where culture is vague, the reader has an opportunity to reflect on assumptions about race, culture and language. Spanish words are sprinkled throughout and there is a glossary at the end with translations. (gr 5-8)

**He Forgot to Say Goodbye** by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Simon & Schuster, 2008. 321 pgs. 978-1-4169-4963-3

On the surface Jake and Ramiro have almost nothing in common. Jake is wealthy, white, the only child of a totally self-absorbed mother, and attends a pre-med high school. Ramiro is poor, Mexican, perpetually anxious about his brother's drug problem, and while a hard worker, is stuck at a depressed high school right next door to Jake's. After several false starts, the boys become friends in a class-defying friendship rare among teens, in part due to Ram's best friend Alejandra who eventually becomes Jake's girlfriend. Each boy's perceptions about being a man come from their often spotty knowledge of their absent fathers, and their different personalities are revealed as they try and get over their abandonment issues in different ways. Jake must learn to manage his anger and Ram must learn to deal with his overwhelming feelings of responsibility for his brother. (gr 10-12)

**Kitchen Dance** by Maurie J. Manning. Clarion. 2008. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-618-99110-5

Is there any place happier than a kitchen full of family and music? Two children creep down from their bedrooms to find their parents dancing and singing while cleaning up. They are invited to join in with hugs and kisses. Bright illustrations and asymmetrical perspectives create motion and momentum as the joy splashes across the pages. The characters speak in a naturally fluid mix of English and Spanish, and the color changes suggest a kind of multi-genre symphony of sound. When finally tucked back in to bed, it is clear that the narrator and her brother will fall asleep peacefully knowing that they are in a house full of love. (gr PK-4)

**Pablo (Cuando los Grandes Eran Pequeños)** by Georgina Lázaro. Illustrated by Marcela Donoso. Lectorum, 2008. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-1-930332-09-2

This picture book length biography focuses on the childhood of Pablo Neruda, Nobel prize winning poet and politician from Chile. Long before he published his first poem or advocated for the native people of Chile, Pablo was an observant and imaginative boy who grew up with a love for his country and for learning. Bright paintings reveal much about both his early life and the geography and natural landscape of Chile, as well as his interests and hobbies as an adult. Written in rhyme in Spanish, Pablo is part of a series called *Cuando Los Grandes Eran Pequeños*, intended to share the childhoods of famous Latin American writers with young children. (gr 2-5)

**Peace Jam: A Billion Simple Acts of Peace** by Ivan Suvanjiëff and Dawn Gifford Engle. Puffin/Penguin, 2008. 197 pgs. ISBN 978-0-14-241234-3

Eleven Nobel laureates are portrayed, including the Dalai Lama, Oscar Arias Sánchez, Desmond Tutu, Rigoberta Menchu, and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel. The book spotlights young people who were inspired by these laureates and who have made a difference by taking action in their communities. This book is about spreading positive energy around us and highlights the role of several Latin Americans in human rights and social justice issues. (gr 4-8)

**A Perfect Season for Dreaming / Un tiempo perfecto para soñar** by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Illustrated by Esau Andrade Valencia. Cinco Puntos, 2008. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-1-933693-01-9

This bilingual book (English and Spanish) explores the dreams of grandfather Octavio Rivera, a man who yearns to share his beautiful dreams with someone close to him. The striking illustrations evoke a world of magical realism, and the vibrant colors and images allow the reader to straddle the real and imaginary. It is through Octavio's relationship with his granddaughter Regina that we see how both individuals share a special bond with one another as well as a connection with the world of dreams. (gr 1-6)

**Reaching Out** by Francisco Jiménez. Houghton Mifflin, 2008. 194 pgs. 978-0-618-03851-0

The sequel to Jiménez's *Breaking Through* and *The Circuit*, this autobiographical book, set in the 1960s, tells of the author's experiences as a poor immigrant from Mexico to the United States. His family struggles to earn enough from agricultural work to make ends meet each month and faces hardships due to their economic situation, as well as the cultural and linguistic divide. As a result of hard work and the sacrifices that Pachito and his family make, he is able to enroll in college. Despite the changing times and cultural specificity of this book, the lessons in this autobiographical account offer hope to the children of other poor immigrant families in the United States. (gr 7-12)

**The Secret Legacy** by Rigoberta Menchú. Co-authored with Dante Liano. Illustrated by Domi. Greenwood, 2008. 64 pgs. ISBN 978-0-88899-896-5

This book of Mayan legends is told by Ixkem, the story's protagonist. Ixkem is a young girl who lives with her grandparents. One day, while tending to their cornfield, Ixkem is confronted by *b'e'n*, or spirits. When she visits the world of the *b'e'n*, her stories begin. After telling seven legends, and receiving a secret from the *b'e'n*, Ixkem returns to her family. Beautiful illustrations accompany each chapter, and a useful glossary of K'iche' Maya terms rounds out this collection. (gr 5-8)

**The Smell of Old Lady Perfume** by Claudia Guadalupe Martínez. Cinco Puntos, 2008. 249 pgs. 978-1-933693-18-7

Chela González has high hopes for sixth grade where, she is told, she can boss the younger kids around, get the best seats in the cafeteria, and get the best books from the school library. Unfortunately, as school begins, Chela's best friend abandons her for the popular crowd, her older siblings ignore her, and her father becomes seriously ill. Although Chela has many difficulties during the year, including the prejudices of her classmates, she manages to get through her ups and downs with wisdom beyond her years. (gr 6-12)

**Voices in First Person: Reflections on Latino Identity** edited by Lori Marie Carlson. Photographs by Manuel Rivera-Ortiz. Illustrated by Flavio Morais. Atheneum, 2008. 84 pgs. ISBN 978-1-4169-0635-3

A collection of narratives by top Latino/a authors is contained in this visually appealing volume. The diversity of perspectives and experiences come through as some authors write in English, others in Spanish, and others use a mix of languages. As these voices straddle languages, they also cross cultures and national borders, and together they begin to give shape to what it means to struggle with one's identity and come of age as a Latino/a in the United States. Biographies of the contributing authors are included. (gr 9-12)

**The Walls of Cartagena** by Julia Durango. Illustrated by Tom Pohrt. Simon & Schuster, 2008. 150 pgs. 978-1-4169-4102-6

This is the story of Calepino, a 13 year old slave boy who lives in Cartagena, Colombia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Calepino is raised by a rich woman who took him after his mother died in child birth. The story follows Calepino as he makes friends with a doctor and a priest (Father Pedro). Together they help slave ships get water and food for incoming slaves. An encounter with a slave mother and son reminds him of his own past, and he becomes determined to help them escape. The book deals not only with slavery but with universal topics of friendship and loyalty. (gr 4-8)

**What Can You Do With a Rebozo?** by Carmen Tafolla. Illustrated by Amy Córdova. Tricycle Press, 2008. 28 pgs. ISBN 978-1-58246-220-2

This book portrays a young Mexican girl who explains the many uses that her mother's big, red *rebozo* can have. It can be a cradle for a baby, or a superhero's cape. The book has colorful illustrations and the text is written following a question-answer pattern. Children will find that a *rebozo* has endless possibilities. (gr 1-3)

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

Kristel Foster (Sunnyside Unified School District, Arizona)  
Jamie Campbell Naidoo (University of Alabama)  
Hollis Rudiger (Madison, Wisconsin)  
Elena Gibbons Serapiglia (Yale University, Connecticut)  
Patricia Velasco, chairperson (Teachers College, Columbia University, New York)

**Award Coordinator**

Julie Kline  
CLASP Committee on Teaching and Outreach  
c/o The Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201  
(414) 229-5986 phone; (414) 229-2879 fax  
jkline@uwm.edu  
<http://www4.uwm.edu/clacs/aa/index.cfm>