

Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

2010
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.

2010 Américas Award Winners

Return to Sender by Julia Alvarez. Knopf, 2009. 318 pgs. ISBN 978-0-375-85838-3. *Return to Sender* is as much a book about politics as it is a book about a friendship, and the transformative power it can have to sustain and nurture entire communities even in the midst of chaos. Miraculously the relationship between two young people: one, a VT farm kid who fears his family might not be able to keep their farm in tough economic times, and another, a young Mexican girl who wants only the chance for her family to live safely together, working and supporting themselves with dignity, elucidate some of the major social, political and economic concerns of the day. Alvarez's cast of characters includes people of all ages and political perspectives, and readers cannot help but conclude that getting to really know and understand our neighbors is the only way to improve life for all who live in the United States. (Grades 5-9)

What Can You Do with a Paleta? / ¿Qué puedes hacer con una paleta? by Carmen Tafolla, Illustrated by Magaly Morales. Tricycle Press, 2009. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-1-58246-289-9.

"Where the *paleta* wagon rings its tinkly bell and carries a treasure of icy *paletas* in every color of the *sarape* . . . That's my *barrio*!" Lyrical language and vibrantly-hued illustrations abound in this stunning tribute to the magical beauty found within Latin American neighborhoods. Perfect for young children, Tafolla's bouncy bilingual text follows a young Mexican child as she describes the many things that you can do with *una paleta* (a traditional Mexican popsicle) from painting ice mustaches to making friends. Magaly Morales' bold acrylic illustrations sparkle with life and exude the warmth of a Mexican *barrio*. This charming title will leave the mouths of young readers watering for more! (Grades PreK-3)

Américas Award Honorable Mentions

Gringolandia by Lyn Miller-Lachmann. Curbstone, 2009. 280 pgs. ISBN 978-1-931896-49-8.

Miller-Lachman presents a marvelous work of historical fiction in *Gringolandia*. When Daniel's family flees Chile for Wisconsin in 1980, Daniel's father cannot go with them. It is not until many years later that Marcelo Aguilar rejoins his family in the U.S., or "Gringolandia." The Aguilar family struggles to regain a sense of normalcy after Marcelo's years as a political prisoner in Pinochet's Chile. Due to the interest of Courtney, Daniel's girlfriend, in Chilean history, Daniel begins to learn more about Chile and about his father's past. Miller-Lachman's book is an exciting book to read, and is an excellent tool for teaching about Chilean history, the Cold War in Latin America, migration out of Latin America, and challenges many stereotypes of the region. (Grades 9-12)

I Know the River Loves Me / Yo sé que el río me ama by Maya Christina González. Children's Book Press, 2009. 24 pgs. ISBN 978-0-89239-233-9.

Based upon the author's own personal relationship with the Yuba River in California, this timely, gently reassuring story follows a young Maya as she explains the deep connection she experiences with the river as it calls her name, jumps and sings in eager anticipation, and engulfs her in a loving embrace. With a nod towards environmental responsibility, Maya proclaims, "The river takes care of me and I take care of the river. I only leave behind what already belongs to her." Charcoal and watercolor illustrations perfectly complement the simple bilingual text, creating an ethereal and surreal atmosphere that successfully represents nature's fragility, reinforces the importance of being environmentally conscientious, and signifies the strong bond that centuries of Latin Americans have had with nature. (Grades K-3)

My Papa Diego and Me: Memories of My Father and His Art / Mi papa Diego y yo: Recuerdos de mi padre y su arte by Guadalupe Rivera Marín and Diego Rivera. Children's Book Press, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-89239-228-5.

Guadalupe Rivera Marín, daughter of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, shares her personal memories of her father in this touching and informative book, written both in English and Spanish. Rivera Marín uses her own personal photographs as well as her father's artwork to talk about her father, his art, and Mexican history. This book will be enjoyed by children and adults alike. (Grades 4-7)

Américas Award Commended Titles

Before Columbus: the Americas of 1491 by Charles C. Mann. Atheneum, 2009. 132 pgs. ISBN 978-1-4169-4900-8.

This beautiful adaptation of Mann's adult book, *1491*, reveals myriad misconceptions about the "discovery" of the Americas and the subsequent clash of cultures of many distinct people. Divided into three sections, readers learn about how old and complex the various indigenous cultures really are, how Europeans were able to conquer and colonize, and finally, a close look at the myth of the American Wilderness. Colorful fonts, maps, photographs and reproductions of representative art, make this accessible to a wide range of readers and the text itself is suitable for research. Teachers will also appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of historical

research, and will be able to find classroom links in the sciences and arts as well as social studies and history. (Grades 5-12)

Book Fiesta! Celebrate Children's Day/Book Day / Celebramos El día de los niños/El día de los libros by Pat Mora. Illustrated by Rafael López. HarperCollins/Rayo, 2009. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-0-06-128877-7.

“Hooray! Today is our day. ¡*El día de los niños!* Let’s have fun today reading our favorite books. Toon! Toon!” With these energetic words, readers are invited to join children from cultures around the world as they celebrate the joy of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* or Children’s Day/Books Day. From the first page to the last, blazing images of culturally diverse children mesmerized by books virtually leap from the page. Children joyfully celebrate a Book Fiesta or their love of reading in many languages, while soaring in hot air balloons, exploring in submarines, and braving jungles atop elephants. López’s vibrant illustrations imbued with elements of magical realism are the perfect complement to Mora’s delightfully simple text which celebrates cultural literacy. An author’s note about the celebration provides suggestions for planning Día events. (Grades PreK-3)

Braids / Trencitas by Kathleen Contreras. Illustrated by Margaret Lindmark. Lectorum, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-1-933032-27-6.

Abuela weaves colorful tales as she weaves Isabela’s hair, “Our stories, like our braids, bind us forever,” inspiring her granddaughter to create and write stories of her own. Isabela is saddened, yet inspired, when she realizes her storytelling grandmother doesn’t know how to read, and sets out to teach her using her family’s traditional Mexican bingo game of *la lotería*. This endearing tale of a modern Latino family, reminds us how special intergenerational bonds are and what a gift literacy is for us all. (Grades 1-3)

Confetti Girl by Diana López. Little, Brown, 2009. 198 pgs. ISBN 978-0-316-02955-1.

Will Lina’s dad ever get his nose out of a book and notice her? Does Lina’s new crush Luís like her crazy sock collection and most importantly the girl wearing them? How can Lina maintain her friendship with a heartless, boy-crazed best friend? Packed with wise *dichos* (Spanish proverbs), a huge collection of colorful socks, and enough *cascarones* (confetti-filled eggs) to brighten any celebration, this light-hearted gem follows sixth-grader Lina Flores as she deals with a host of problems such as coping with the recent death of her mother, living with a book aficionado for a father, avoiding the *cascarones*-obsessed mother of her best friend, and adjusting to the barrage of mixed emotions that ensue when she and her best friend experience their first crushes. Elements such as a *Quinceañera*, strong family bonds, *dichos*, and *cascarones* help ground this book in traditional Mexican American culture. (Grades 4-8)

Diego: Bigger Than Life by Carmen T. Bernier-Grand. Illustrated by David Diaz. Marshall Cavendish, 2009. 64 pgs. ISBN 978-0-7614-5383-3.

Diego Rivera was indeed bigger than life. In a series of short narrative poems, Bernier Grand treats all of the aspects of Rivera’s life that make him such an influential artist and man, more than 50 years after his death. Each short poem is accompanied by an illustration which supports the theme, such as politics, romance, intellectual and artistic truth. Several are accompanied by actual artwork by Rivera. While Diego Rivera lived a life of great excess, at times making choices not sanctioned by mainstream culture, readers can appreciate how his passion also allowed for breathtaking and ambitious art, which for many, is the artistic face of 20th century Mexico. The detailed end matter includes a glossary, a timeline of Rivera’s life, sources for further reading, and a page which reveals that many lines in the poems come from his own words. (Grades 6-10)

The Fiesta Dress: A Quinceañera Tale by Caren McNelly McCormack. Illustrated by Martha Avilés. Marshall Cavendish, 2009. 40 pgs. ISBN 978-0-7614-5467-0.

Everyone notices Lolo, the baby girl of the family, that is, until last minute preparations are under way for her older sister's *quinceañera* party. On this tumultuous day, Lolo wanders through the house room by room, slipping under the radar of her family, bored and a bit mischievous. The gentle acrylic and liquid watercolor illustrations portray an impish child in a party dress and pig tails as she accidentally finds the perfect, humorous way to place herself squarely back in the center of attention. After innocently letting the family dog loose in the house, she quickly figures out how to capture the creature as he races away with an important piece of the *quinceañera* dress. In the end, Lolo saves the day and is cuddled and loved by a large extended family while enjoying all the party events. (Grades K-3)

Grandmother, Have the Angels Come? by Denise Vega. Illustrated by Erin Eitter Kono. Little, Brown, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-316-10663-4.

The often avoided topics of aging and death are presented through poetic, repetitive text in the book *Grandmother, Have the Angels Come?* Brightly colored acrylic and pencil art evoke a Latino setting with monarch butterflies, tropical birds, and lemon trees. An elderly grandmother and her young granddaughter move through various elements of this setting during the course of a day, stopping to admire butterflies, a field of flowers, and hold one another with tenderness. At each point along the way, the girl asks a question related to her grandmother's aging body, receiving the reassurance, "Yes, my darling granddaughter..." together with an explanation of the benefits of such changes. Finally the child asks if the angels have indeed come, an inquiry given urgency by the sole image of the grandmother and a setting sun. However, she again receives an assurance, this time of eternal love, with benefits for both the girl and the world. Layered with meaning, the repetitive format of this text will appeal to the younger reader, whereas older children will be able to ponder the deeper significance of aging, love, and death. (Grades K-4)

Jorge Luis Borges by Georgina Lázaro. Illustrated by Graciela Genovés. Lectorum, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-1-933032-40-5.

From the "Cuando los Grandes Eran Pequeños" series, Lázaro's beautiful verse (in Spanish) transports the reader to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Readers will learn about Borges's childhood and his family. Through Genovés's illustrations, readers will also enjoy seeing images from their favorite children's stories and allusions to Borges's works. The "¿Te Gustaría Saber Más?" section at the end of the book gives more concrete information about the writer's life. (Grades 4-8)

Journey of Dreams by Marge Pellegrino. Frances Lincoln, 2009. 260 pgs. ISBN 978-1-84780-061-9.

In this modern Underground Railroad adventure, Tomasa flees the scorched earth of her Mayan village for safe refuge in the United States. The journey with her father and two brothers takes us over mountains, through rivers and across deserts, and finally into the safety of Arizona's Sanctuary Movement, where her family reunites and begins anew as Guatemalan refugees. Tomasa's narrative woven with Mayan folktales is an important, relevant, and heart-felt history lesson that should be shared so this Central American tragedy is not forgotten. (Grades 6-8)

Marcelo in the Real World by Francisco X. Stork. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2009. 324 pgs. ISBN 978-0-545-05474-4.

Seventeen-year-old Marcelo Sandoval's summer takes a drastic shift away from his original plans to care for the ponies at his private school for students with disabilities. Marcelo is on the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum, what he describes as "probably Asperger's syndrome" (p. 186). However, his lawyer father believes the school is not preparing him for the "real world" and makes a deal that Marcelo may return there for his senior year only if he is able to successfully work in the firm's mail room all summer. Thus, Marcelo grudgingly enters the gritty realm of his father's corporate law firm where he learns to navigate fast-tracked competition, friendships, betrayal, and injustices. The accidental discovery of a photo of a girl's face with severe injuries stirs Marcelo into making life-changing decisions. This honest, first person narrative seamlessly weaves a compelling story involving a strong character of Mexican heritage with a disability. (Grades 9+)

Muchacho by Louanne Johnson. Knopf, 2009. 197 pgs. ISBN 978-0-375-86117-8.

Johnson presents protagonist Eddie Corazón, a New Mexico teen with a lot of heart. Eddie is faced with a series of obstacles at home, in school, and with his friends. He doesn't always make the best decisions, but shows incredible insight into his life and his surroundings. Though labeled a delinquent, Eddie secretly spends much of his time reading, and aims to change his life for the better after meeting his girlfriend Lupe. (Grades 7-12)

My Abuelita by Tony Johnston. Illustrated by Yuyi Morales. Harcourt, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-15-216330-3.

Abuelita is robust and as old as the hills, a true "character," with salt-colored hair, a crinkled face, and a flamboyant pink bathrobe. Her story is narrated by a grandchild, who describes their daily morning routines, most of which center around the grandmother's preparations for work. In addition, the reader is provided with clues throughout as to the nature of Abuelita's profession (a storyteller), which is not revealed in full until the end of the story. Morales' illustrations fill each double page spread with vivid, colorful backgrounds across which romp the polymer clay characters dressed in brightly patterned fabrics and surrounded by Mexican crafts and images. A major strength of this text is the strong, loving bond between Abuelita and her grandchild. (Grades: PreK-2)

Pelé King of Soccer / Pelé el rey del fútbol by Monica Brown. Illustrated by Rudy Gutiérrez. Rayo, 2009. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-0-06-122779-0.

Giant bright and bold swirls of colorful illustrations tell as much about the life of Pelé, born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, as does the short text. Readers see clear images of his young face and symbols of Brazilian life and culture juxtaposed with blurry shots of his body in action, and impossibly high flying soccer balls. The story begins with the sound of a sports commentator, singing adult Pelé's praises and speculating on his next great feat, and then quickly flashes back through his life, depicting how he came to be such an international star, even as humble as his beginnings may have been. The text is in Spanish and English and would be a great addition to any bilingual classroom regardless of age of students, although the picture book nature will make it more appealing to younger readers. (Grades 1-6)

A Piñata in a Pine Tree: A Latino Twelve Days of Christmas by Pat Mora. Illustrated by Magaly Morales. Clarion, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-618-84198-1.

On the first day of Christmas, in a Latino family, we are surprised with a piñata rather than a partridge, followed by traditional tokens of cultural pride, like tamales, luminarias and more. Pat Mora recreates this classic Christmas carol and Morales' illustrations dance along as the reader sings their bilingual song. The celebration ends with the Feast of the Three Kings, and a bundle of a surprise that joyfully and rhythmically celebrates the holiday season. (Grades K-2)

René has Two Last Names / René tiene dos apellidos by René Colato Lainez. Illustrated by Fabiola Graullera Ramírez. Arte Público, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-1-55885-530-4.

René has a last name as long as a dinosaur's, say his friends who don't understand the Hispanic cultural tradition of using both parents' names rather than just one. Instead of dropping one or the other, as his teacher did when she labeled his desk, René sets out to teach his classmates why he cares about both and why he wouldn't be who he is without his two last names. This story highlights an experience many immigrant children have as they attend school and make friends in a new culture, and honors tradition and family along the way. (Grades K-2)

Sonia Sotomayor: a judge grows in the Bronx / Sonia Sotomayor: la juez que creció en el Bronx by Jonah Winter, Illustrated by Edel Rodríguez. Atheneum, 2009. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-1-4424-0303-1.

Sonia Sotomayor is the first Latina Supreme Court Justice, the most respected and highest ranking Latina in the government of the United States. She was, of course, once a little kid, and this picture book biography tells a story that is as inspiring as her title. She overcame many obstacles, including poverty and health challenges (she has diabetes), to go on to a prestigious university and law school. Soft illustrations support what, at times feels like a lot of text, making this valuable for a wide range of ages and reading abilities. (Grades 1-5)

Sopa de frijoles / Bean Soup by Jorge Argueta. Illustrated by Rafael Yockteng. Groundwood, 2009. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-0-88899-881-1.

This poetic story told in Spanish and then in English on each double page spread describes the process of cooking a savory pot of black bean soup to lovingly share with family members in a house filled with a wonderful rich smell, "... *como la tierra en las primeras lluvias de invierno /* like the earth after the first winter rains." Delightful illustrations in this smaller-sized picture book present a young boy initially bored with his video game, and then in the process of completing a self-determined project, reaching high to the top shelves as he gathers the necessary ingredients to create this soup. His growing independence is filled with joyful dance and thanksgiving to the earth, while parental supervision can be noted in the background, sometimes cleaning up the small spills and messes left in his wake. *Sopa de frijoles* provides a fusion of recipe instructions, poetic images, and the power of essential Central American cultural elements: family and black bean soup. (Grades 1-4)

Tan to Tamarind by Malathi Michelle Iyengar. Illustrated by Jamel Akib. Children's Book Press, 2009. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-89239-227-8.

This beautiful collection of poems and artwork celebrates the spectrum of brown, and subsequently brown skin, race and ethnicity. Both poet and illustrator connect children to nature, culture, place, history and ultimately themselves. The spectrum of brown celebrated here is a lovely tribute to minority children, validating not only their appearance, but also everyone's unique culture and heritage. (Grades 3-5)

Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba by Margarita Engle. Holt, 2009. 212 pgs. ISBN 978-0-8050-8936-0.

Told from the points of view of different characters, Engle's novel in verse explores the connections among different parts of the world during World War II. When Daniel escapes Nazi Germany and lands in Cuba, he must learn to adjust to life without his family in a new country. He befriends Paloma, a girl whose father (El Gordo) profits from shipping refugees to Cuba. David, an adult refugee who sells ice cream in Havana, also contributes his point of view to this gripping story. (Grades 6-9)

Victoria Goes to Brazil by Maria de Fatima Campos. Frances Lincoln, 2009. 36 pgs. ISBN 978-1-84507-927-7.

This beautiful travel log tells of a little girl's trip with her mother to her family's homeland of Brazil. Personal photos illustrate Victoria's adventure through well-known and unfamiliar sites, introducing the reader to the diversity and fun of this South American country. The text is straightforward and informative; every reader will learn something new from this journey. Our traveler, by the way, just happens to have Down Syndrome, but you would never know it, since it's never mentioned or discussed anywhere except in the endnote. This delivers the message loud and clear: kids are kids and culture is cool. (Grades 1-3)

We Were Here by Matt de la Peña. Delacorte, 2009. 356 pgs. ISBN 978-0-385-73667-1.

Told in the form of a journal written in a colloquial style imbued with slang and insults, this gritty work follows sixteen-year-old Miguel Casteñeda as he copes with the repercussions of a crime that has landed him in a juvenile detention center. At first, Miguel is glad to be at the center and away from his mother's mournful stares, but it doesn't take long before the mixed race teen finds himself on the run with two other teen escapees, Rondell and Mong. The majority of the novel details the exploits of the trio while highlighting the teens' struggles to achieve a true sense of self and leave their mark on the world. Although its length can be off-putting to some, this urban fiction, reflective of de la Peña's knack for authentically representing the lives of current young adults on the fringes of society, is one that is sure to appeal to both nontraditional and reluctant teens. (Grades 9 & Up)

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

Kristel Foster (University of Arizona / Sunnyside Unified School District, AZ)
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Hollis Rudiger (Madison, WI)
Elena Gibbons Serapiglia (Yale University, CT)

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
www.uwm.edu/Dept/CLACS/aa/index.html