

# Américas Book Award

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## 2019 Américas Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature

### 2019 Award Winners

***Islandborn*** by Junot Díaz; illustrated by Leo Espinosa (Dial Books, 2018). "Every kid in Lola's school was from somewhere else." When Lola's teacher invites the students to draw a picture of where they were from, the children are abuzz with plans for their drawings—except for Lola. She was just a baby when she left the island and doesn't remember it. She easily solves her dilemma as she interviews people in her neighborhood and borrows their memories of the island. Lola gleans mostly positive visions and sketches everything—until Mr. Mir, the Super tells her about the monster, who for thirty years "did as it pleased" and is the reason that most "everyone there has moved here." While the youngest readers won't understand the indirect allusions to Dominican history, teachers can choose, or not, to dig below the surface and understand the history of the Dominican Republic. Singularly delightful is the simultaneous publication of a Spanish edition—Lola. (Grades 2-5)

***Undocumented: A Worker's Fight*** by Duncan Tonatiuh (Abrams Books 2018). Tonatiuh delivers an expertly written and illustrated title that lays bare the realities of being undocumented in the United States. The narrative follows Juan an indigenous Mixtec who migrates from Mexico to the United States. The accordion style format of Undocumented: A Worker's Fight is an homage to Mixtec literature, of which few books survived the Spanish conquest, perhaps the most famous being the Codex Nuttall. Tonatiuh's signature style succinctly illustrates the realities that Juan and so many other undocumented migrants face every day. The book is timely and demonstrates strong themes of resilience. (Grade 5 and up)

### 2019 Honor Books

***Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings*** by Francie Latour; illustrated by Ken Daley (Groundwood Books, 2018). Auntie Luce explains that she paints what she has seen, heard, smelled and felt. In this lushly illustrated book, you too will see and feel the colors of Haiti and the Haitians: "colors that bleed from ash to cocoa to rust and butterscotch to nut and nut to clay." All of these rich browns affirm identity for a little girl who was not born in Haiti but feels safe, like she belongs. There is an author's note that explains about the birth story of Haiti, as well as a glossary to help with the Kreyòl (Creole) expressions. (Grades K-3)

***The Poet X*** by Elizabeth Acevedo (HarperCollins, 2018). This powerful verse novel is narrated by a young Dominican teen in a New York barrio who, repressed by her religious mother, seeks refuge in writing poetry in a journal given to her by her brother Xavier. Xiomara's name means "warrior" and she finds that she can fight with words against her repressive mother, confusing thoughts about God, mocking classmates, and her maturing body. A wide spectrum of poetry styles as well as the plot keep this book lively. (Grades 10-12)

### 2019 Commended Books

***Alma and How She Got Her Name*** written and illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal (Candlewick Press, 2018). Young Alma is trying to write her very long name on her paper—Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candelaria—and it doesn't fit. She doesn't hesitate to air her frustration to her father who regales his daughter with the stories behind each name. "Then you decide if it fits," he tells her. She comes to embrace not just her name but also her heritage. Warm, soft illustrations with subtle details unfold Alma's spunky personality. (Grades PreK-3)

***Carmela Full of Wishes*** by Matt de la Peña; illustrated by Christian Robinson (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2018) On Carmela's birthday, she is finally allowed to tag along with her brother to the laundry mat. On the way, she finds a dandelion and dreams of all the wishes she'd like to come true after she blows on it. When she accidentally drops her dandelion and crushes it before making her wish, she is saddened until her brother comes to her rescue with an alternative plan for wish making. (Grades K-2)

***Dreamers*** written and illustrated by Yuyi Morales (Neal Porter Books, 2018). A mother narrates a beautiful story about the journey she and her son made to the US. They struggled at first trying to navigate their way around their new surroundings, but then discovered a library where they learned to read, speak, write, imagine, and most important of all, dream for a better future. (Grades K-2)

## 2019 Commended Books

**La Frontera My Journey with Papá** by Deborah Mills & Alfredo Alva; illustrated by Claudia Navarro (Barefoot Books, 2018). This English-Spanish bilingual picture book shares the harrowing real-life journey the author took with his father from Guanajuato, Mexico, a place generations of family had lived for over 100 years, to the United States in 1980. (Grades 3-5)

**A Gift from Abuela** written and illustrated by Cecilia Ruiz (Candlewick Press, 2018). The story features a heartwarming relationship between a young girl and her grandmother who share their time together, including spending quiet times eating in the park. The soft, muted colors of the illustrations complement the endearing tale that chronicles the love that a grandmother and her granddaughter have for each other. (Grades K-2)

**Jazz Owls** by Margarita Engle (Atheneum, 2018) The Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, a little known piece of history, is the focus of this novel. Known as Jazz Owl girls, young Marisela and Lorena help lighten the mood of sailors on their way to the front lines. Told from the perspective of many voices, including reporters and police, we gather insight to the racial tension and violence that erupted between sailors and local zoot suiters. Engle captivates us with her poetry and brilliantly sheds light to this piece of history. (Grades 5-12)

**Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish** by Pablo Cartaya (Viking, 2018). Marcus has had a hard time in school. He is bigger than most and people immediately think that he is a bully, when all he wants to do is protect the weaker students from the real bullies. Marcus has another goal, which is to reconnect with his father. Marcus learns a lot of Spanish words and culture along the way. Cartaya's characters jump off of the page in this story of discovering home and new landscapes. (Grades 3-7)

**Merci Suárez Changes Gears** by Meg Medina (Candlewick Press, 2018). Medina introduces us to eleven year old Merci Suárez, a Cuban-American 6th grader who lives with her extended family in three little houses they call Las Casitas. She attends Seaward Pines Academy as a scholarship student and struggles with typical middle school problems. She deals with issues at home, one of which is the diagnosis of her grandfather's Alzheimer's Disease and comes to terms with the reality that although she wishes things could stay the same, she must learn to "change gears" and work through the issues that come her way. This coming-of-age story highlights the heartwarming benefits that can come from intergenerational relationships. (Grades 3-6)

**The Photographic Life of Graciela Iturbide** by Isabel Quintero; illustrated by Zeke Peña (Abrams Books, 2018). Graciela Iturbide is perhaps the most iconic Mexican photographer that you did not realize you know. This graphic novel offers a biographical survey of Iturbide's life and shares insight and context regarding some of her most recognizable photos. Themes of mentorship, feminism and the value of introspection are throughout. This book is an accessible and valuable biography for young adult readers. (Grade 7-12)

**Puerto Rico Strong: A Comics Anthology Supporting Puerto Rico Disaster** written by Vita Ayala (Author), Hazel Newlevant (Editor), Desiree Rodriguez (Editor) (Lion Forge, 2018). Published in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria (2017) this group of artists and writers put out a call to create a book about and in support of Puerto Rico. The resulting comics anthology features a myriad of writers and illustrators providing historical, political and cultural insight into Borikén aka Puerto Rico with a little over 40 separate contributions. Readers will gain a nuanced understanding of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican identity. (Grade 6-12)

**They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems** written by David Bowles (Cinco Puntos Press, 2018). While Bowles includes heavy themes of immigration, the sting of racism toward Güero, so called for his pale skin, and the ever-present psychological awareness of being a border kid, the lighter moments prevail: the market, music lessons, the best buds' bookworm squad, family celebrations. Readers will resonate with the narrator's navigation through seventh grade. The use of various poetic forms, including haiku, pantoum, free verse, sonnet, and rhyming couplets, appropriately reflects the self-described nerdy Güero's penchant for writing. Bowles artfully conveys Mexican culture and infuses Spanish words throughout this connected collection of 49 poems. (Grades 5-8)

**When Angels Sing: The Story of Rock Legend Carlos Santana** written by Michael Mahin; illustrated by Jose Ramirez (Atheneum, 2018). Often Santana felt like a cultural outsider as he navigated the turmoil of the 1960s—the Vietnam War, MLK's death—which Ramirez profoundly conveys. The blend of the lyrical text and strong, rich hues and bold black lines of the art evoke Santana's heritage and echo the power of his music. (Grades K-3)