



Américas Award Books on Guatemala

Abuela's Weave, Omar Castaneda. Illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez.

Esperanza, a young Guatemalan girl, learns traditional weaving alongside her grandmother. Taking their work to market, Esperanza worries when she sees the machine-made weaving that no one will buy their handmade cloth. Rich in Guatemalan details, this gentle story interweaves themes of individual resourcefulness and strength through family, and promotes discussion of maintaining cultural traditions. **1993**

Commended Title

Caminar, Skila Brown.

This is a work of historical fiction, set during Guatemala's civil war. It is the first-person account by the indigenous boy Carlos, whose happy life is destroyed when war comes to his village while he is in the forest gathering mushrooms. Alone in the forest, he struggles to stay alive, avoid soldiers and rebels, and as he communes with the forest he recalls various people and traditions of his village. Ultimately, the boy who was once afraid of the dark saves the people of his grandmother's village from an attack by government forces. The book shines as a work of literature. Written in free verse, including some compelling examples of concrete poetry, it is a story of indigenous culture, war, and what it means to be a man. The Note to Reader at the beginning of the book situates the story historically, and the final poem touches on the aftermath of the war. This book lends itself to the study of writing and poetry; certain poems could be used in the study of Latin America. The book as a whole is useful as a window on war's psychological effects. (Grades 5-12) **2015 Commended Title**

The Honey Jar, Rigoberta Menchú with Dante Liano. Illustrated by Domi.

The Honey Jar retells the ancient stories Rigoberta Menchú's grandparents told her when she was a little girl and we can imagine her listening to them by the fire at night. These Maya tales include natural phenomena narratives and animal stories. The underworld, the sky, the sun and moon, plants, people, animals, gods, and demigods are all players in these vibrant stories. Enchanting images by Domi draw on the Maya landscape and the rich visual vocabulary that can be found in the weavings and crafts for which the Maya are renowned. **2007 Commended Title.**

Journey of Dreams, Marge Pellegrino.

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



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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) **2010 Commended Title**

Mama and Papa Have a Store, Amelia Lau Carling.

In the heart of Guatemala City, a Chinese immigrant family owns a specialty store where they sell fabric, buttons, thread, and ribbons, in addition to a small selection of Chinese imports. The events of a typical busy day are recounted as seen through the eyes of the family's youngest daughter who is not yet old enough to attend school. We hear the voice of a young child in her first-person narration and see what she sees in the delicately detailed watercolor paintings that accompany the story: the sounds, the colors, the anticipation of her older siblings' return at midday for the large family meal they'll share, and her interest in the Maya customers who have an affinity for the store owners due to a shared sense of style and color. Through the details of everyday life, we see how cultures peacefully co-exist and enrich each other in this dazzling autobiographical picture story. **1998 Américas Award Winner**

Margarito's Forest / El Bosque de Don Margarito, Andy Carter, illustrated by Allison Havens.

This true story, set in a remote village in the mountains of central Guatemala, helps explain one Maya family's understanding of living in harmony with nature. Margarito's forest was inspired by Don Margarito and his lifelong commitment to the ecology of his community. After a young Esteban complains of having to carry a seedling tree to his grandmother's house, he is told the extraordinary story of Don Margarito's adventures learning about the varied benefits of his country's woodland plants and trees. Don Margarito planted trees throughout his life despite the ridicule he faced from some villagers. (Grades K-5) **2017 Commended Title**

The Only Road, Alexandra Diaz.

The Only Road describes the journey of a teenage boy, Jamie, and his cousin Angela traveling from their hometown in Guatemala to the United States. Author Alexandra Diaz illustrates the many obstacles, uncertainties, hopes, fears, and unexpected blessings that shape the teens' migration in a way that is both honest and sensitive to its intended young adult audience. This is without a doubt an empathy building novel. Being able to accompany the main characters through their harsh and humbling trek allows the reader to get a glimpse into what tens of thousands of Central American youth have experienced in recent years. The characters themselves also demonstrate a remarkable courage and humility, often observing the sacrifices that were made for them and acknowledging the even more dangerous and devastating hardships faced by others they meet along the way. (Grades 7-10) **2017 Award Winner**



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Rainbow Weaver – Tejedora del arcoirís, Linda Elovitz Marshall, illustrated by Elisa Chavarri.

This is the story of Ixchel, a young Guatemalan girl who wants to weave beautiful fabrics just as her mother does, and as Maya women have done for generations. Because she cannot use the expensive thread her mother needs for her own weavings to sell at the market, Ixchel creates her own weavings, first with articles from nature, then from an unusual source: the colorful plastic bags that litter the village and fields. Her rainbow weavings have “blues as clear as the sky, reds as bright as the flowers, and yellows as golden as the corn.” With her weavings, Ixchel is able to help pay for her own books and schooling. This colorful book celebrates the tradition of Maya artistry and emphasizes Ixchel’s girl power and ingenuity. The story is bilingual, told in English and Spanish, but it also points out that there are 23 different Mayan languages spoken in different regions of Guatemala. Ixchel’s language is Kaqchikel, and a glossary and pronunciation guide of key Kaqchikel terms are included. (Grades K-3)

2017 Commended Title

The Secret Legacy, Rigoberta Menchú with Dante Liano. Illustrated by Domi.

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. (Grades 5-8) **2009 Commended Title**