



## Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

### 2022 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 the Latinx community in the United States. By combining both and linking the Americas, the award reaches beyond geographic borders, as well as multicultural boundaries, focusing instead upon cultural heritages within the hemisphere. The award is sponsored by the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP), and coordinated by the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane University and the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies at Vanderbilt University.

The Américas Award winners, honorable mention titles 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 are honored each fall in a celebration coinciding with Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

### 2022 Américas Award Winners

***Child of the Flower-Song People*** written by Gloria Amescua and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams ComicArts, 2021. ISBN: 9781419740206.

As a young Nahua girl in Mexico during the early 1900s, Luz learned how to grind corn in a metate, to twist yarn with her toes, and to weave on a loom. By the fire at night, she listened to stories of her indigenous community's joys, suffering, and survival, and wove them into her heart. But when the Mexican Revolution came to her village, Luz and her family were forced to flee and start a new life. In Mexico City, Luz became a model for painters, sculptors, and photographers such as Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot, and Tina Modotti. These artists were interested in showing the true face of Mexico and not a European version. Through her work, Luz found a way to preserve her people's culture by sharing her native language, stories, and traditions. Soon, scholars came to learn from her. (Grades 3-5)

***My Two Border Towns*** written by David Bowles and illustrated by Erika Meza. Kokila, 2021. ISBN 9780593111048.

In this enchanting picture book, published in both English and Spanish, David Bowles brings readers along as a father and his young son cross the U.S.-México border for their biweekly trip. The two cross over to get groceries, pick up medicine, and to visit with family. On the way home, they meet up with the son's friend, Élder, an immigrant who has been waiting at the border for 6 months to be granted entry to the U.S. The narrative reveals that the medicine is for Élder's mother, who gladly accepts it as the children play. When their time to visit is up, the father and son return to the U.S., expressing hope that Élder and his family's unfair wait at the border will soon come to an end and the

friends can play together unimpeded by the border. Bowles's prose, punctuated by Erika Meza's poignant and touching artwork, invites readers to humanize the border and seek understanding and empathy for immigrant communities. (Grades K-4)

## 2022 Américas Award Honorable Mention Titles

***Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna*** written by Alda P. Dobbs. Sourcebooks Young Readers, 2021. ISBN: 9781728234656.

This middle grade adult novel introduces us to the history of the Mexican revolution, the conflicts of mixed identities, of war shaping lands, and the resilience of humanity. Based on the real life of the author's great-grandmother, we follow the vivid story of a twelve-year-old girl who is now responsible for the welfare of her two younger siblings and her grandmother. Petra walks barefoot through the harsh desert of the Mexican Revolution holding a piece of coal between her fingers. The rock is the only gift she has from her father, a simple piece of coal that has the potential of becoming a diamond, a hidden treasure, a piece of hope. During her journey she will learn about the struggles of her people, from the soldadera women, the mothers and grandmothers who nurture armies, the communities that fight for justice, and those who are forced to fight against their own people. Petra will realize that she is also a warrior, that she is full of the courage that drives her to save her family. Petra Luna is not dreaming alone, there will be so many people who, like her, hold on to that hope, the treasure of finding a prosperous safe place they can call home. (Grades 3 and up)

***Niños: Poems for the Lost Children of Chile*** written by María José Ferrada and illustrated by María Elena Valdez. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 978-0802855671.

*Niños: Poems for the Lost Children of Chile* pays tribute to the thirty-four children under the age of fourteen who lost their lives under the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Each child is remembered by their first name with a free-form verse and lovely, softly drawn illustration – it is a profoundly moving, quiet experience to think about each child and to sit with the discomfort of knowing how their lives were taken through no fault of their own. The last pages list their full names and ages noting that thirty-two were executed and one remains listed as arrested and disappeared. And one, just one, Pablo Athanasiu, was on the list until 7 August 2013, the day he was found alive by the Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo. *Niños: Poems for the Lost Children of Chile* is an important reminder to never forget the horrors of war. (Grades 8-12)

***The Last Cuentista*** written by Donna Barba Higuera. Levine Querido, 2021. ISBN 9781646140893.

The power of stories and storytelling are at the center of Donna Barba Higuera's *The Last Cuentista*. As Earth is about to be destroyed, 12 year-old Mexican-American Petra Peña, her brother Javier, and scientist parents are some of the few selected to board an interstellar ship that will take them to another planet to start anew. All those aboard the ship go into a deep sleep where they will be subconsciously educated on subjects that will aid in their new existence as humankind's last survivors. As an elective, Petra chooses to learn Earth's mythologies as she wants to become a great storyteller. However, as she wakes up after the 400-year-long journey, Petra realizes a group called the Collective took over the mission and imposed that all passengers lose their memories of Earth and their previous lives. Petra is the only one who remembers her life, home planet, and its mythologies. Now it is her responsibility to keep these stories alive and share them with her fellow passengers as a way to regain their memories. Barba Higuera's compelling science-fiction novel explores the power of stories and storytelling as being at the core of humanity no matter the place or circumstances at hand. (Grades 5

and up)

## 2022 Américas Award Commended Titles

***ABC El Salvador*** written by Holly Ayala and illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez. Luna's Press Books, 2021. ISBN 978-0964120358.

*ABC El Salvador* is a delightful bilingual children's book that introduces the ABCs through a brother and sister duo: Xiomara and Kevin -- whose names are also featured as part of the alphabet in this beautifully illustrated book. *ABC El Salvador* is rich in cultural content and joyously celebrates traditions unique to the region. The illustrations come alive with brilliant, saturated tropical colors. Xiomara and Kevin share their favorite foods, family, and places in El Salvador. It is a delightful book and just in case you do not know the Salvadoran words... there is a glossary to ensure that we know Q is for quesadilla – a traditional sweet bread made of cheese, sugar, and sesame seeds. *ABC El Salvador* is written for early readers. (Pre-school – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade)

***Aquí era el paraíso/Here Was Paradise*** written by Humberto Ak'abal and illustrated by Amelia Lau Carling. Groundwood Books Ltd, 2021. ISBN: 9781773064956.

*Aquí era el paraíso / Here Was Paradise* is a selection of poems written by the great Maya poet Humberto Ak'abal. They evoke his childhood in and around the Maya K'iche' village of Momostenango, Guatemala, and also describe his own role as a poet of the place. Ak'abal writes about children, grandfathers, and mothers, animals, ghosts, and thwarted love, and fields, rains, poetry, poverty, and death. (Grades 4-7)

***Coquí in the City*** written and illustrated by Nomar Perez. Dial Books, 2021. ISBN 9780593109038.

This vibrant picture book written and illustrated by Normar Perez follows little Miguel and his pet frog Coquí. Miguel and Coquí are always together going around San Juan greeting neighbors, visiting family, and shopping at the panadería. One day Miguel learns that he will be moving with his parents to the United States, leaving Coquí behind. Once in New York City, he misses Coquí but is also homesick for his native San Juan and his loving grandparents, especially his abuelo's stories about meeting baseball legend Roberto Clemente. To lift his spirits, Miguel and his mom go out exploring what the city has to offer. Although it is very different, Miguel is able to find familiar sights that reminds him of Puerto Rico, knowing it will always be with him. (Grades PreK-2)

***Isabel and Her Colores Go to School*** written by Alexandra Alessandri and illustrated by Courtney Dawson. Sleeping Bear Press, 2021. ISBN: 9781534110632.

This heartwarming children's book features a little girl who must face the fear of not only her first day of school, but also a new language. Everything seems scary and confusing, until she discovers there are more ways to communicate than just through words. Helped by the language of colors she finds a way to speak through her art. This is how she learns to use her love for colores and her creativity to make a new friend. Isabel's story is a universal story where many young children who have to navigate the transition between new schools and new languages can see themselves represented. (Grades Pre K-2)

***Lotería*** written by Karla Arenas Valenti and illustrated by Dana SanMar. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2021. ISBN: 9780593176962.

Drawing on influences from magical realism, el Día de los Muertos, and the traditional bingo

game *lotería*, Karla Arenas Valenti weaves a tale of magic and sacrifice. As Death (La Catrina) and Life reunite to play their annual game of *lotería*, the seemingly-innocent game holds eleven-year-old Clara's life in the balance. Chosen by a twist of fate, Clara encounters manifestations of the various *lotería* cards Life and Death pull. Ultimately, the game finds Clara transported to a mythical world in order to save her younger cousin who has been whisked away to be drained of his youth. Life and Death's game seems to control Clara's journey, divesting her of her agency or volition, yet Clara surprises the two supernatural figures at every turn. Her final sacrifice to save her cousin turns their game on its head, demonstrating that love and choice are themselves magic. (Grade 6-9)

***¡Manu!*** Written and illustrated by Kelly Fernández. Graphix, 2021. ISBN: 9781338264197.

Manu had certainly always been a bit different than her classmates at their school for magic and witchcraft, but that difference was always brushed aside and attributed to her troublemaking ways. Her classmates regard her with annoyance, except Josefina, Manu's best friend. When Manu's magic begins to wane following an ill-fated prank, Manu summons a monster who will supposedly return her magic, but the monster breaks free and escapes to the woods. After inadvertently starting a fire on school grounds, Manu also flees into the forest where she encounters the monster. This meeting triggers Manu's own inherent monstrosity, calling into question if her differences really do boil down to her mischief or if they indicate that she is something other than human. This enchanting graphic novel utilizes its fantastic setting and characters to explore identity, gender expression, and first romance. Fernández's illustrations are straightforward and unique in style, and the graphic novel format invites multiple ways of reading and engaging with text and images. (Grades 4-8)

***Neverforgotten*** written by Alejandra Algorta and illustrated by Iván Rickenmann, with English translations by Aida Salazar. Levine Querido, 2021. ISBN 9781646140947.

In this debut novel, Alejandra Algorta tells the story of a boy, his bicycle, and his town of Bogota. The boy, Fabio learns to ride an old bike and soon becomes inseparable from it, gliding through town appearing as if he was flying. He even becomes a leader to his friends, who would trail behind him through Bogota's streets. One fateful day, he forgets how to ride his bike. He tries and tries but keeps falling almost as if his body refuses to comply with muscle memory. Fabio knows he will never be the same. The setting in Bogota plays just an important role in the narrative as Fabio describes the streets as they are on and off his bike. Fabio needs to ride his bike just as the ever-growing city needs to be explored and his journey, while being of loss, will also lead to discovery. (Grade 3 and up)

***On the Hook*** written by Francisco X. Stork. Scholastic Press, 2021. ISBN 9781338692150.

*On the Hook* is an important book that centers Hector, an above average student and captain of the chess team who lives in El Paso and sees college as his future. Hector has no complaints, but for the fact that he is relentlessly bullied by Joey, the younger brother of a local gang member. Hector lives in fear by the constant terror inflicted upon him by Joey and as hard as he tries to be invisible, Joey finds him and threatens him. In a split second of outrage and uncontrollable anger, Hector shifts the steady course of his life, and the consequence of his actions place him and Joey into the same reformatory school for boys. It is there that he trades reading lessons for boxing lessons and there that Hector grapples with the larger lessons of life and wrestles with the first step of living with courage... the ability to shift away from anger and to give up on revenge. (Grade 9-12)

***The Life of – La Vida de Dolores*** written by Patty Rodriguez and Ariana Stein and illustrated by Citlali Reyes. Lil' Libros Press, 2021. ISBN 9781947971585.

*The Life of – La Vida de Dolores* is an important bilingual board book about the co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America, Dolores Huerta. This short biography takes us through the key

highlights of her early life and the influences that shaped her leadership skills. Huerta is noted not only as a labor leader and negotiator but also a civil rights activist. This book for young readers introduces us to the 1965 Delano grape boycott, the longest strike in U.S. history (1965-1970). Important to this campaign was her rallying cry: ¡Sí se puede! Yes you can! *The Life of – La Vida de Dolores* is an inspiring, powerful, and uplifting book that centers her life-long commitment to social justice. (Pre-K –1st grade)

***The Mirror Season*** written by Anna-Marie McLemore. Feiwel & Friends, 2021. ISBN: 9781250624123.

Characteristic of Anna-Marie McLemore’s lush fairytale retellings, *The Mirror Season* draws inspiration from the Snow Queen to render a heartbreaking story about two teens, Ciela and Lock, who were both sexually assaulted at the same party. Ciela, who possesses the magic to satiate any emotional hunger by suggesting the perfect pan dulce for every customer at her panadería, loses her magic following the assault. Perhaps more alarming, however, is the icy glass that is overtaking the town, shattering and lodging its cold magic into Lock. Ciela’s desire to save him from the mirrored glass and its grievous magic is complicated by their shared trauma. If she were to tell him about the glass, she risks revealing that they both were victimized that night—and Ciela isn’t ready to face that reality, at least not until it becomes necessary to save them both. In keeping with McLemore’s other works, queer characters hold affirming roles, even as the plot of *The Mirror Season* centers on tough topics. (Grades 10-12)

***To Carnival! A Celebration in Saint Lucia*** written by Baptiste Paul and illustrated by Jana Glatt. Barefoot Books, 2021. ISBN 9781646861613.

Carnival celebrations take place all over the world and are significant cultural events in Latin American culture. In *To Carnival! A Celebration in Saint Lucia*, we follow little Melba as she makes her way to the carnival parade on Main Street. Melba experiences the sights, sounds, and tastes of Saint Lucia as she meets all kinds of characters on the road to carnival. Although there are quite a few delays in their journey, Melba never loses her carnival spirit. This wonderful book filled with vibrant illustrations by Jana Glatt includes facts about Saint Lucia, Creole, and Carnival. (Grades K-3)

***When We Make It*** written by Elisabet Velasquez. Dial Books, 2021. ISBN: 9780593324486

Sarai is a first-generation Puerto Rican question asker who can see with clarity the truth, pain, and beauty of the world both inside and outside her Bushwick apartment. Together with her older sister, Estrella, she navigates the strain of family traumas and the systemic pressures of toxic masculinity and housing insecurity in a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn. Sarai questions the society around her, her Boricua identity, and the life she lives with determination and an open heart, learning to celebrate herself in a way that she has long been denied. (Grades 9-12)

***Your Heart, My Sky: Love in a Time of Hunger*** written by Margarita Engle. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 9781534464964.

Margarita Engle’s novel in verse *Your Heart, My Sky* is set during Cuba’s período especial en tiempos de paz (“the special period in times of peace”), a period in the country’s history when many of its citizens experienced starvation. The poems follow Liana, Amado, and the signing dog, their canine companion that also partakes in the story as an observer and a sort of cupid for Liana and Amado. Set in the summer of 1991 as the Pan American Games in Havana further limited the access to food for Cubans throughout the island, Liana and Amado struggle each day as there is not enough food to eat. They find each other and admire their individual acts of resistance as they both refuse to partake in government-mandated summer youth programs. As they grew restless and braver, hunger forces them to consider staying and starving or fleeing across the sea as refugees in a perilous journey. Engle centers the story on the blossoming love between Liana and Amado, which helps them satiate their spirits while surviving

an emaciated existence. (Grades 7 and up)

***Zonia's Rain Forest*** written and illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal. Candlewick Press, 2021.  
ISBN: 9781536208450.

Zonia's home is the Amazon rain forest, where it is always green and full of life. Every morning, the rain forest calls to Zonia, and every morning she answers. She visits the sloth family, greets the giant anteater, and runs with the speedy jaguar. But one morning, the rain forest calls to her in a troubled voice. How will Zonia answer? (Grades K-3)