



Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) 2014 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 boundaries, focusing instead upon cultural heritages within the hemisphere. The award is sponsored by the national Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP).

The Américas Award winners, commended titles and honorable mention 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 in October 2014 during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

2014 Américas Award Winner

Parrots Over Puerto Rico by Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, illustrated by Susan L. Roth. Lee and Low Books, 2013. ISBN 978-1-62014-004-8.

From the moment the reader picks up this book, he senses that he is in for an adventure, for the front cover shows no title, just the first of what will become hundreds of beguiling parrots, large and small, contrived of paper and fabric collage, in their natural environment. Moreover, the whole book has a vertical orientation, so that the reader's eye is drawn up to the parrots in the treetops and down to the human activities on the ground. The book is a feast for the eyes, a true visual treasure whose gorgeous collages do an excellent job of illustrating the fact-filled text.

This is the story the Puerto Rican parrot, which once numbered in the hundreds of thousands, nearly became extinct, and is slowly making a comeback. But this is also a history, told with surprisingly little text, of the various peoples who have shared the island with the parrots and whose mixing makes up the human population of Puerto Rico today. Integrated into these narratives is information about the island's flora and other fauna, international politics, and, most particularly, man's role in the near-demise of the Puerto Rican parrot. Much of the book, including its afterword, tells in great detail of the ongoing efforts of the scientists of the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program to restore the island's parrot population. The book lends itself to learning about ecology and conservation, as well as history and geography. (Grades 3-6)



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2014 Américas Award Honorable Mention

Diego Rivera: An Artist for the People by Susan Goldman Rubin. Abrams Books for Young Reads, 2013. 56 pages. ISBN 9780810984110.

With *Diego Rivera: An Artist for the People*, Susan Goldman Rubin highlights the life of one of Mexico's most celebrated painters and muralists. The engaging text thoughtfully connects the biography with the art, while Rubin expertly covers Rivera's complexity as an artist or as a person, without exaggeration. Carefully selected artwork and photographs, as well as Rivera's own words, bring added depth to the text. The book highlights murals from Mexico City, San Francisco, and Detroit, along with Rivera's own paints and those from artist influential in his development. Rivera's political and personal identities illuminate but never overshadow the focus on his art. The beautifully designed book features extensive backmatter, including a note on the history of Mexico relevant to Rivera's work and his artistic influences. These notes, along with a glossary and bibliography will further expand classroom use. (Grades 5-10)

Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale by Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2013. ISBN 978-1-4197-0583-0.

Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote opens with festive scenes of the Rabbit family preparing for Papá Rabbit's homecoming. Musicians, family and friends gather to welcome home Papá who had traveled north to work in the carrot and lettuce fields, years before. Plates of mole, rice and beans are prepared in anticipation of his arrival and the house is strung with papel picado. When Papá Rabbit doesn't arrive, his son Pancho decides to sneak away in the dark of the night to find him. The reader follows the young rabbit as he travels north with the aid of a sneaky coyote by train, by river, by tunnel, and by desert. Tonatiuh bravely presents the controversial issue of illegal immigration through the lens of a children's fable. Inspired by 14th century Mixtec codices and traditional folklore, the author / illustrator presents the sometimes startling realities of many modern day immigrants in a form which can be appreciated by both young and old alike. (Grades K-4)

2014 Américas Award Commended Titles

Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass by Meg Medina. Candlewick Press, 2013. 272 pages. ISBN 978-0763658595.

Rarely does a book open more honestly and simply. "Yaqui Delgado wants to kick your ass." The declaration shocks Piedad "Piddy" Sanchez, who only wants to be responsible at school and at home, not an easy task for a sophomore who has just transferred schools and whose mother works long hours. The unprovoked classmate's accusations of her as "stuck up, shakes her stuff when she walks, and isn't Latin enough with her white skin, good grades, and no accent" are the momentum behind the novel, initially propelling Piddy into a spiral of self-doubt and fear, and later motivating her to reclaim control over her life. The narrative is particularly compelling given how Medina grounds her writing in realistic considerations, complicating Piddy's experiences by layering additional concerns about body image, homosexuality and homophobia, domestic violence, ethnic identity, and community and family values. This homage to the messy complexity of real life is what makes the book such a powerful contribution to young adult literature. Nothing comes easily in young Piddy's life, yet she



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tenaciously and compassionately holds true to herself. This unpretentious novel will resonate with young readers everywhere, lending itself to a range of conversations focused on identity issues and self-empowerment. (Grades 6-12)

Maria Had A Little Llama/ María Tenía Una Llamita. Written and illustrated by Angela Domínguez. Henry Holt and Company, 2013. 28 pgs. ISBN 978-0-8050-9333-9

Everyone knows about Mary and her little lamb. But do you know María? In this bilingual version of the traditional rhyme, María has a llama. The book is set in the Peruvian Andes, and the beautiful and playful illustrations rendered in gouache and ink, show the llama following María everywhere she goes. She even follows María to school one day, which is against the rules. (Grades Pre-K to 1)

Tito Puente, Mambo King/ Tito Puente, Rey del Mambo. A bilingual picture book by Monica Brown; illustrated by Rafael López. Rayo, 2013. 32 pgs. ISBN 978-0-06-122783-7

From musical prodigy on the streets of Harlem to five-time Grammy Award winner, Tito's life was full of rhythm. With a vibrant text that begs to be read out loud and dynamic and colorful illustrations, this book takes us on a trip of Tito's life as he grows up in Harlem, studies music at Julliard, is recognized as the Mambo King and earns his first Grammy Award in 1979. Author Brown and illustrator López beautifully capture the beat and color of the legendary musician's life. (Grades K-2)

The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist by Margarita Engle. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. ISBN 978-0-547-80743-0.

In light of severe persecution and censorship, many of 19th century Cuba's staunchest abolitionists were poets who proclaimed their message in metaphor. In *The Lightning Dreamer*, Engle tells the fictionalized biography of the poet, abolitionist and feminist Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, also known as 'Tula'. The young protagonist resisted arranged marriage at the age of 14 and was henceforth sent away from home to live with extended family. The young girl defied the commonly held belief of the time that girls were 'expected to live without thoughts,' as she expressed herself skillfully in poetry. Engle captures the spirit of this budding young poet through verse which is at once light and lyrical, and heavy in references to the injustices of the era. In Engle's account, Tula writes 'I rise up out of a nightmare and grasp a feather pen, feeling winged.' Just as Tula found freedom in her poetry, Engle leaves the reader feeling hopeful, inspired and empowered by the story of this young brave girl who fought for justice for girls, women and slaves. (Grades 4-9)

Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario. Delacorte Books, 2013. 288 pages. ISBN 978-0385743273.

At its heart, *Enrique's Journey* is a "true story of a boy determined to reunite with his mother." Factually, it is a journalist's account of young migrants' traumatic and perilous experiences as they travel unaccompanied from Central America to the United States. Inspired by the family histories of immigrants in her community, Sonia Nazario undertook to thoroughly research and document the experiences of young adults' journey northward. The outcome is *Enrique's Journey* – a text which addresses both the nuances of the migrants' personal lives as well as the structural forces which influence their decision and affect their journey. It is a gripping narrative. She originally published the research in 2002 with the *Los Angeles Times* (for which she won a Pulitzer Prize), and since then has adapted it to various audiences, with the most



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recent iteration tailored to young people. In its latest form, *Enrique's Journey* offers young readers not only an accessible means of deepening their understanding about the issues surrounding immigration, but, more importantly, ample reason to empathize with those who undergo its travails. (Grades 9-12).

Round Is a Tortilla by Roseanne Greenfield Thong. Illustrated by John Parra. Chronicle Books, 2013. 40 pages. ISBN 9781452106168.

This delightful shape-based concept book will draw young readers in with its lively text and colorful illustrations. Circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, ovals, and stars are highlighted. Thong skillfully blends repetition and rhymes with occasional questions, as in the following: "Square is the park, and the *zócalo*. / Square is a fountain from long ago. / How many square things do you know?" Characters or various age groups are presented individually and in both small and large group scenes. Parra's intricately detailed illustrations (which include papel picado, swallows, and baseball) enrich the text and offer further opportunities for engagement with young readers across the curriculum. Spanish words are scattered carefully throughout and a glossary is provided. (Grades K4-2)

Serafina's Promise by Ann E. Burg. Scholastic Press, 2013. 304 pages. ISBN 978-0545535649.

The promise in the title can be read on several levels. Serafina, an 11-year-old Haitian girl, has plenty of it. She is strong-willed, focused, determined and intelligent. She has also promised her grandfather, an auto didact killed by the Tonton Macoutes, that despite the dire poverty in which she lives, she will succeed in her drive to get an education and become a doctor ("so babies like you/won't die anymore," she tells her deceased brother). And, blessed once more with a new baby brother, she promises him she will do all she can to keep him safe. Serafina has the interests and concerns of girls her age everywhere—friends, school, her mother's demands on her. But she also has adult responsibilities and worries imposed by the difficulties of everyday life in an impoverished country, made all the more tragic in light of such natural disasters as a flash flood and a devastating earthquake. Through beautiful free verse, the author makes us almost taste the burdens of such a life; yet inspiration and hope spring from the immutable bonds of family love and devotion, and the wisdom of a grandmother's frequent adages. As Papa says, "Love always finds a way./The important thing is to never give up." The story line of this book makes it accessible to middle-grade readers of all stripes. It could be usefully employed in writing classes, as well as for social studies. (Grades 5-9)



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