



## **Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) 2015 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 September 18, 2015 during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

### **2015 Américas Award Winners**

#### ***Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation***

written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Harry N. Abrams, 2014. ISBN: 978-1629238562

Seven years before the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* addressed segregation in schools throughout the country, the similarly significant but less known case of *Mendez vs. Westminster School District* challenged school segregation in California. Author and illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh has made this history available to young readers everywhere for the first time as he documents Sylvia Mendez and her family's fight for desegregation through the book *Separate is Never Equal*. The text pays tribute to this historical moment of social justice and the people who made it happen by drawing on court testimonies and personal interviews to ensure authenticity and accuracy. An author's note, glossary of legal terms, and bibliography complement the text and provide both younger and older readers with valuable resources for understanding the case's development and its ongoing implications. In addition to the meticulous text, readers will enjoy Tonatiuh's signature artistry as he draws upon Mesoamerican codices to create modern, multimedia collages of the Mendez family alongside people from their school, community, and trial. With this children's book,

Tonatiuh offers a significant contribution to US and Mexican-American histories. It would be a valuable asset to any elementary classroom or library. (Grades 1-6)

***Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal*** by Margarita Engle. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 272 pages. ISBN: 978-0544109414

With her characteristic economic yet moving verse Margarita Engle once again transports us to a world and time that few writers have explored, especially in the genre of children's literature. *Silver People* tells the story of the building of the Panama Canal, which opened in 1914 and connected the two largest oceans in the world, while at the same time signaling America's emergence as a global superpower. The canal was a miraculous engineering feat that created a path of water through a tropical jungle where a mountain once stood. Yet miracles often come with a steep price. Thousands of brown and black Caribbean Americans lost their lives, and those that survived were paid in silver, while their white counterparts earned gold. Engle gives these workers a voice, transporting us to the bottom of "serpentine cut" and describing the backbreaking labor required to accomplish it. We are also treated to the voices of the natural world that loudly or silently protest while their habitat is destroyed. This unique work and the apartheid-like inequality it portrays is a powerful contribution to Latino Children's Literature. Once read, its accurate description of the construction of the "largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken" will not be soon forgotten. (Grades 7 and up)

### **2015 Américas Award Honorable Mentions**

***Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker*** by José Manuel Mateo. Illustrated by Javier Martínez Pedro. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2014. 22 pages. ISBN: 978-1419709579

This handsome picture book is constructed accordion style, like an Aztec codex. Unfold it in one direction, and it reads in Spanish—in the other, English. The spare text runs in a column down the left side, while one long pen and ink drawing recalling Mexican *amate* paintings, rich in intricate detail, runs the length of the book. In it, a young Mexican boy tells about life in his village and the precarious, harrowing journey he and his mother and sister take to the U.S., hopeful of finding his father and work. Told in a very accessible way for young children, this is an important, timely story, and it is followed by an author's note about migrant children and various reasons for emigrating, as well as information about *amate* codices. There is at least as much to be gleaned from the stunning artwork as from the text, though because the drawings are so small, for classroom use they would best be projected onto a large screen. Possible classroom subjects of study are art, current events/immigration, and rural vs. urban life. It also lends itself to helping to develop children's powers of observation. (Grades 2-5)

***Strike! The Farm Workers' Fight for their Rights*** by Larry Dane Brimner. Calkins Creek, 2014. 172 pages. ISBN: 978-1590789971.

The 2014 release of the film *César Chávez* brought his achievements with the United Farm Workers union of the 1960s and 1970s back into the spotlight. This book, *Strike!*, which is meticulously researched by Larry Dane Brimner, tells a much fuller story. Beginning with the Filipino farm worker's strike of 1965 in Delano, California, moving through the conflict between the Filipinos and Mexican braceros, "years of consumer boycotts, beatings, arrests, and sacrifice," and ending with the legacy of the successful nonviolent movement of the United Farm Workers, this book tells the compelling story of a courageous group of people. Brimner is careful to include major figures besides Chávez, including Dolores Huerta, Larry Itliong, Robert F. Kennedy, and others. The design of the book is equally compelling. The use of color, Spanish and English pull quotes, original documents, and a wide variety of photos offer many intriguing entry points for the reader. Brimner also includes a timeline of events, a list of suggested resources for more information, and thorough source notes. *Strike!* is a fascinating read for the middle, high school, and adult reader, and could be read from cover to cover, or used in a variety of manners with excerpts from the book. Brimner, who has written about the U.S. Civil Rights movement in his books *We Are One*, *Birmingham Sunday*, and *Black and White*, presents another view of the fight for Latino civil rights in this bold and exciting treatment of the Farm Workers' struggle. (Grades 6-9)

### **2015 Américas Award Commended Titles**

***A de Activista*** written by Martha E. Gonzalez and illustrated by Innosanto Nagara. Triangle Square, 2014. 32 pages. ISBN: 978-1609805692

*A de Activista* is a Spanish language board book that invites younger and older readers alike to have a conversation about social justice. Each page segues into a different discussion by progressing through the Spanish spoken alphabet. Examples include F's "*de Frida...para las feministas fabulosas, mujeres y niñas*" and T's "*Tigres, Tulipanes o Trans...Tu decides quién eres. Transfórmate con certeza.*" The topics are radical, intriguing, and diverse. Written in Spanish and rooted in Latino/Hispanic culture, the book is a rare call to action. Eye-grabbing colors and compelling multimedia illustrations pull the reader in, while emphatic syntax and punctuation complement the vivid imagery. Both text and visuals depict people of all backgrounds and fiercely reinforce advocacy related to respect, resistance, and empowerment across communities. Given the language and cultural referents, readers of all ages will appreciate this publication. Younger readers will appreciate the colors and alliteration, while older readers will be able to delve into the sociopolitical implications. (K+)

**Abuelo** by Arthur Dorros. Illustrated by Raúl Colón. HarperCollins, 2014. 32 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0061686276.

*Abuelo* is a picture book that tells the story of the South-American gauchos through the eyes of a boy who moves to the city and his *abuelo* (grandfather) who lives on the plains of Argentina. This rich cultural heritage is described via the subtle shading of the images of the *pampa*! Corros conquers our hearts with a tender and familiar story related to rural to urban migration, and Mr. Raul Colón completes with his beautiful mixed media illustrations. The pampa stays with the boy long after he moves to the city, through memories of his abuelo. Similarly, the detailed and vivid illustrations offered by Colón will remain with the readers. Young audiences all over the world will appreciate the richness of the depiction of traditional and modern cultures in Argentina, and this relatable family story. All words in Spanish are accompanied by an English translation. This text is a wonderful way to encourage students to determine new word meaning and to engage with Spanish. (K-3)

**Caminar** by Skila Brown. Candlewick Press, 2014. 208 pages. ISBN: 978-0763665166.

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. Following the text of the novel is a glossary of Spanish and Mayan terms, as well as a Q & A with the Author. 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)

**Dalia's Wondrous Hair / El cabello maravillosa de Dalia** written and illustrated by Laura Lacamara. Piñata Books, 2014. 32 pages. ISBN: 978-1558857896

In *Dalia's Wondrous Hair*, readers watch as the young protagonist embraces her luxurious, untamed hair by turning it into a refuge for Cuban flora and fauna. Just as the plants and animals flourish, so too does Dalia. In an era when young children rarely see positive depictions of people of color, this book offers a welcome contrast. Whimsical descriptions show the lovely protagonist filled with wonder as she self-confidently discovers and explores her surroundings, and her loving relationship with her mother supports her as she embarks on each new day. Richly-saturated illustrations span each page, transporting young readers to a bright, sun-filled landscape where Cuba's natural resources abound. Spanish and English texts lie side by side on each page, so readers of either language can delight equally in the story. An author's note at the end offers

more information about the Cuban plants and animals in the book, and suggests ways to bring the book to life, so to speak, by creating a butterfly garden at home. This beautiful book by Cuban-born artist and illustrator Laura Lacámara lends itself to classroom instruction in foreign languages, arts, natural sciences, and language arts. Above and beyond academic learning, however, young readers will benefit from witnessing Dalia's enthusiastic and empowered ability to see beauty everywhere she goes. (Grades K-2)

***Frida & Diego: Art, Love, Life*** by Catherine Reef. Clarion Books, 2014. 176 pages. ISBN: 978-0547821849

This dual biography of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera traces their personal and professional lives, individually and as a couple, exposing their flaws as well as the lighter sides of their personalities, and shows how the two artists were bound by art, love, and politics. Befitting a book that is more biography than art book, few of the artists' paintings are shown; instead, there is an abundance of photographs, some personal and others illustrating the political and economic climate of the times. The book is simply written, and includes quotes by and about the artists as well as extracts from diaries and letters. Well researched and handsomely executed, it excels in showing that art is not produced in a vacuum but within the context of political, social, and economic currents. The author includes a list of museums and galleries where some of their works can be found, and suggests books for further investigation. The end of the book contains a lengthy timeline of events in the artists' personal, professional, and political lives, as well as a bibliography. The book could be used in a middle school language arts class to study identity and biography, and perhaps in high school classes of government and politics, and of history (world, Mexican, US, Russian, European). (Grades 6-12)

***Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*** by Isabel Quintero. Cinco Puntos Press, 2014. 208 pages. ISBN 978-1935955955.

In her quirky and heart-warming debut novel, Quintero gives us a character we will not soon forget. Hot-cheetoh eating, teenage Latina Gabi is insightful and compassionate as she navigates the often challenging cultural edge that divides teenage girls and boys, white kids and Latinos. As she explores her relationships with her drug-addicted father, angry little brother, hypocritical, yet loving mother and her two best friends she discovers that writing and reciting bilingual poetry is the catharsis she needs to survive her complicated world. All high-school girls will relate to Gabi's insecurities about body image, and Latina girls in particular will find a wonderful friend and role model in the strong, humorous, irreverent, yet ultimately victorious Gabi. (Grades 9+)

***Green Is a Chile Pepper: A Book of Colors*** by Roseanne Greenfield Thong.  
Illustrated by John Parra. Chronicle Books, 2014. 40 pages. ISBN: 978-1452102030

Colors are the starting point for showcasing elements of Hispanic American—primarily Mexican—culture: orange for Day of the Dead marigolds, the brown of churros, for example. Each double-page spread features a color, its name given in both English and Spanish, and a 4-line rhyme anchored in English but featuring, often in Spanish, some cultural phenomenon. The folkloric illustrations are large enough for use in a read-aloud setting, and offer a myriad of possibilities for exploration of foods, clothes, dance, crafts, holidays, and much more. It contains a glossary of the Spanish terms found in the text. (Pre-K-grade 3)

***I Lived on Butterfly Hill*** by Marjorie Agosín. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2014. 454 pages. ISBN: 978-1416953449

Marjorie Agosín, award-winning poet and critic, brings us a touching and lively tale of 11-year-old Celeste Marconi, a Chilean girl whose life changes when her country is taken over by the 1973 military coup. Celeste's liberal-leaning parents are doctors who help the poor and are considered "subversives." They decide that for her safety, it would be better to send her out of the country for a while. *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* is a story told in three parts: Celeste's innocent and carefree childhood in Valparaíso, her story of making a new life in "el norte" with her aunt who lives in Maine, and her eventual return to her beloved home on Butterfly Hill. Along the way, Celeste discovers poetry, a new language, friends where she least expects them, and courage. Because Celeste's Jewish grandmother, Abuela Frida, fled Nazi Germany, there are several parallels with her story and Celeste's. It is an accessible novel to approach many serious topics for younger readers. Peppered with whimsical illustrations by Lee White, it is a story that would appeal to a high middle reader or a young adult reader.

***Letters from Heaven/Cartas del Cielo*** by Lydia Gil. Arte Público Press, 2014. 128 pages. ISBN: 978-1558857988

After Celeste's grandmother dies, she is feeling lost and mournful – until she receives her first letter from ... her grandmother! How is this possible? In Lydia Gil's *Letters from Heaven/Cartas del Cielo*, part mystery, part coming-of-age book, Celeste receives a series of letters from her recently deceased grandmother that eases the pain of her mourning. The letters that reassure Celeste of how much she is loved also teach her to make her grandmother's Cuban recipes that Celeste remembers most fondly. With a dash of humor and pathos, Gil creates a sweet story that shows the trials of growing up – dealing with bullying at school and being alone more now that her mother's work schedule is more demanding – and how Celeste ultimately conquers these problems by relying on friends and family. This dual Spanish-English story is the perfect fit for a middle reader, or for students learning Spanish who are ready for chapter books. The recipes for *mariquitas* (plantain chips), *conгри* (rice and beans), *ropa vieja* (shredded beef), and three others hearken back to the traditional Cuban food of Celeste's grandmother, and all are easily reproduced. This short book of only 58 pages (116 total)

reads quickly and provides an excellent introduction to Cuban culture for a middle school reader. (Grades 4-8)

***Lowriders in Space*** by Cathy Camper. Illustrated by Raul the Third. Chronicle Books, 2014. 112 pages. ISBN 978-1452128696

In this entertaining and unique graphic novel three Chicano insects, Lupe Impala, El Chavo Flapjack, and Elirio Malaria are all obsessed with cars. But not just any cars: lowriders—cars that hip and hop, dip and drop, go low and slow, *bajito y suavecito*. The stars align when a contest for the best car around offers a prize of a trunkful of cash—just what the team needs to open their own shop! *¡Ay chihuahua!* What will it take to transform a junker into the best car in the universe? Striking, unparalleled art from debut illustrator Raul the Third recalls ballpoint-pen-and-Sharpie desk-drawn doodles popular in Lowrider fanzines, while the story is sketched with Spanish, inked with science facts, and colored with true friendship. *Lowriders in Space* includes a glossary at the back to provide definitions for Spanish and science terms and a truly whimsical window into the California lowrider culture. (Grades 4-8)

***Portraits of Hispanic American Heroes*** by Juan Felipe Herrera, with paintings by Raúl Colón. Dial Books, 2014. 96 pages. ISBN: 978-0803738096

This beautifully illustrated series of biographies of notable Hispanic Americans provides a necessary and well-written resource for a classroom or library. The author, Chicano poet Juan Felipe Herrera, who was just named the 2015 U.S. Poet Laureate, includes figures spanning from the 1700s with Bernardo de Gálvez, for whom the city of Galveston is named, to Ellen Ochoa (b. 1958), the first Latina astronaut and former Director of the Johnson Space Center. Herrera includes biographies of 19 men and women who have made outstanding contributions to the arts, politics, science, humanitarianism, and athletics. He includes well-known Hispanic Americans, such as Desi Arnaz, Roberto Clemente, and Sonia Sotomayor, as well as lesser known ones, such as David Glasgow Farragut, Julia de Burgos, and Helen Rodríguez-Trias. In the final section, Herrera includes “Hero Street, USA,” a group remembrance of the Mexican-Americans from Silvis, IL. The Department of Defense reported that there is no street of similar size where so many men and women left home in order to join the U.S. Armed forces. He also includes a touching sestina for Victoria Leigh Soto, one of the teachers who died in the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings (while mentioning how she died, Herrera does not include any upsetting details of the event). This beautifully illustrated book provides an excellent introduction to these important figures, and the source notes provide an indication of where students might learn more about these Hispanic American heroes. (Grades 3-7)

***The Secret Side of Empty*** by Maria E. Andreu. Running Press, 2014. 336 pages. ISBN: 978-0762451920

Blonde and fair skinned, Monserrat Thalia (M.T. to her friends), from Argentina, has good friends and a boyfriend, is actively involved in her high school and on track to become her high school’s valedictorian. But as graduation approaches and her classmates are excited about the prospect of going to college, the secret she has kept

from them haunts her: She is an undocumented immigrant and therefore, and, to her mind, ineligible to attend college in the U.S. Depressed about her future, she gives up on it. She cuts class, stops doing homework, and her grades plummet. Her boyfriend becomes estranged from her, she considers suicide, and relations with her abusive father become untenable. Finally she gets the help she needs to go to college, and when President Obama announces the DREAMER Act, she can finally relax and enjoy the life she has dreamed of. The tone of the novel's writing is perfectly suited to each situation; the dialogue and narrative are finely composed, though the ending is not as finely imagined as the rest of the book. At the end of the book the author tells of her first-hand knowledge of growing up "illegal," as well as information on getting help if you or someone you know is in an abusive situation or is contemplating suicide. History teachers could easily adapt this book to the study of current events/immigration; it is also applicable to classes of sociology, psychology, and Latin American or Latino studies. (Grades 9+)

**'Twas Nochebuena** written by Roseanne Greenfield Thong and illustrated by Sara Palacios. Viking Books for Young Readers, 2014. 32 pages. ISBN: 978-0670016341

'Twas Nochebuena and all through our casa, every creature was kneading tamale masa..." With deft writing, Roseanne Greenfield Thong adapted this familiar refrain to capture the cultural and linguistic variations that characterize many Latino/Hispanic winter celebrations, and her adaptation is as warm and welcoming as the original. Through the eyes of a young girl celebrating with her extended family, Thong riffs on the traditional story, refreshing it with perfectly placed Spanish words and descriptions all without losing the cadence of the original. Meanwhile, illustrator Sara Palacios complements the text with rich, saturated illustrations that depict the warmth and cheer of celebrations shared among family, friends, and community. In this beautiful rendition, everyone takes part in the winter celebrations of Nochebuena, or Christmas Eve as it's known in the English language. Young readers won't be able to resist being drawn into the inviting scenes. Between contextual clues and a helpful glossary, both Spanish and English readers will understand the narrative. All told, this is a lovely publication which should appear in every winter celebration list of children's books. (Grades Pre-K—2)