



**Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)
2017 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 Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP).

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 will be honored at a ceremony on **September 22, 2017** during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

2017 Américas Award Winners

Ada's Violin written by Susan Hood and illustrated by Sally Wern Comport. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016. ISBN: 978-1481-430-951

The Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay has received international attention because of the extraordinary story of the children living in Cateura, home of the main garbage dump for the capital city of Asunción and how they became musicians using instruments made of recycled trash. Many of the townspeople work in the landfill earning as little as two dollars a day. Before the arrival of a consultant engineer to the landfill (Favio Chavez, who happened to be a musician), many of the children had no creative outlets and their futures seemed bleak. *Ada's Violin* conveys the beautiful story of a young girl, Ada Rios, whose grandmother signs her up to learn how to play the violin through lessons given by Chavez. When there are more children interested in learning about music than there are instruments, Chavez turns to a local carpenter who begins to make instruments from recycled trash. At last, there are enough instruments for the children. Through diligent practice they develop the expertise to perform concerts for the local community. Their orchestra becomes so good, in fact, that they begin to perform in countries around the world. Coupled with magnificent illustrations, the author provides readers a background on the story, and website and videos links that teachers can use for extension activities, including a web address for how readers can help the orchestra. (Grades K-3)

The Only Road written by Alexandra Diaz. Simon & Schuster, 2016. ISBN: 978-1481457507

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. Yet Jamie and Angela are not one-dimensional by any means; they are teenagers with human emotions, needs and curiosities. They struggle with each other and with themselves. The sensory-rich prose of this novel allows the reader to be right there with the characters—as they travel hidden in the back of a pickup truck, ride on the notorious *bestia*, sleep on the floor of a safe house and, through it all, keep going. Classroom discussion on important contemporary issues and universal questions is invited through the many moving events of this story, such as: What happens when life forces one to travel “the only road?” This book also contains a Spanish/English glossary and suggestions for further reading for youth and adults. (Grades 7-10)

2017 Américas Award Honorable Mention Titles

Malaika's Costume written by Nadia L. Hohn and illustrated by Irene Luxbacher. Groundwood Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1554987542

In Nadia Hohn's touching and timely picture book, we are introduced to Malaika, a young girl living at home with her Grandma in the Caribbean while her mother is working far away in icebox-like Canada to provide a better life for her family. Told in distinctive Caribbean patois, Malaika's voice genuinely rings out to the reader, as she describes both her excitement about the upcoming Carnival celebrations, and her feelings of sadness and disappointment in missing her mother on this special holiday. Accompanied by colorful collage-style illustrations by Irene Luxbacher that bring Malaika's island home alive, the reader is introduced to the costumes and characters of Carnival. There are also numerous significant visual details to catch a young reader's eye, such as drawings presumably from Malaika herself that provide a window into her emotional state throughout the story. Moreover, Luxbacher does a magnificent job of displaying tender emotion in the expressions of Malaika and her Grandma, adding an even deeper richness to the story. We watch Malaika, with her Grandma's support, transform an old dusty costume into a bright and beautiful peacock costume. In the process, we witness her emerge as a "shiny and proud and strong" version of herself in the Carnival parade. Hohn's demonstrates a deft, expert touch in handling challenging topics such as family separation and immigration in a way that speaks sincerely to young readers while presenting a tale of vibrant strength, ingenuity and spirit. (Grades K-3)

The Distance Between Us written by Reyna Grande. Aladdin, Simon & Schuster, 2016. ISBN: 978-1481463713

This memoir is the story of Reyna Grande's journey from childhood in Mexico to becoming an American college graduate and accomplished author. This story beautifully captures what children who are left behind in Mexico experience as they long to be reunited with their parents who—ironically—have left their homeland to make a better life for them. Grande gracefully reflects on the love she had for her father who had left his family to cross over to the U.S., and recalls the ocean of emotions she experienced when she came to learn that her mother, too, was leaving. She candidly describes how she and her siblings were left under the care of her paternal grandmother who was harsh, and treated them as a burden and nuisance rather than the loving grandchildren they were. Holding true to his promise, her father returns nearly eight years later to cross his children into the United States. Grande does not hold back describing the discord in her life living in Los Angeles under the household of a loving, albeit abusive father. Many readers will be able to identify with themes of the book: loving parents who want the best for their children but at costs that are severe; the struggle to fit in at school while being undocumented and not knowing English; and the power of perseverance despite setbacks that are seemingly unfair. This book proves an engaging read. Grande includes a variety of photos of her family and of important milestones which make the memoir all the more enduring. (Grades 5-9)

2017 Américas Award Commended Titles

Burn Baby Burn written by Meg Medina. Candlewick Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0763674670

Award-winning author Meg Medina evokes the hot summer of 1977 in New York City when disco was king, temperatures were hot, and Son of Sam was on the loose. Seventeen-year-old Nora Lopez would just like to have fun in her senior year of high school, earn money in her part-time job at the hardware store, and go to discos with her friend Kathleen, but complications get in the way. Though she is academically talented, she feels torn about applying to college since her parents are divorced, her father is busy with his new family, and her first-generation Cuban mother relies on her to help at home and keep her increasingly challenging brother in line. Even when she experiences her first romance with Paulie, a college boy she meets at work, the fear of being caught by Son of Sam is a looming shadow over the relationship. She also carries the shadow of secrets she keeps from Paulie, her mother, her best friend, and even herself. Adult readers will enjoy this book for the cultural allusions to 1970s, especially in the clothing and music. Teen readers will appreciate this engaging, honest coming-of-age tale, layered with conflicts between first- and second-generation immigrants – family members who love each other, but who do not see the world in the same way. Medina writes powerfully, as she did with *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*, and she does not shy away from including violence or strong language. (Grades 8-12)

Juana & Lucas written by Juana Medina. Candlewick Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0763672089

Energetic narrator Juana is quick to tell us what she loves, such as her hometown of Bogotá, her best friend Juli, drawing, and her furry canine friend, Lucas. Her very strong dislikes include her hot and itchy uniform—not at all conducive to playing *fútbol* at recess—and as we find out, “the English” she is expected to learn in school, full of impossible sounds like *TH* and *Ws*. With charm and stubborn persistence, Juana leads the reader on her initially reluctant journey to learn English. As she consults with family and friends, she begins realizing the many benefits of learning the language. In particular, her “*abue*,” short for Grandpa, tells her of how useful of a tool learning English has been for him, as it helped him in his education as a future neurosurgeon studying in the United States, and allowed him to make many more friends along the way. He also announces that knowing English would be especially valuable on an upcoming trip to Spaceland in Florida, where they’ll be going as a family. While this proves to be a large incentive, and one that speaks to her family’s socioeconomic privilege, Juana eventually learns the most important lesson of all: languages open doorways to other cultures, and the possibility to meet new friends around the world. With delightful illustrations and scattered Spanish throughout, Juana’s story succeeds in offering a slice of one spirited girl’s life in Bogotá, Colombia and the often challenging, but rewarding process of language learning. (Grades 2-4)

Lion Island written by Margarita Engle. Simon & Schuster, 2016. ISBN: 978-1481461122

This book of stories through first-person poems reveals an important part of Cuban history, that of the Chinese indentured servants brought to the island and other Chinese descendants who escaped to find refuge there in the late 19th century. Margarita Engle has used historical research and testimony to bring alive three main characters, Antonio Chuffat, Wing, and Fan. Their lives are shaped by love, loss, and the rare seized opportunity. Through these characters we see how Chinese identities and culture is maintained but also impacted by the burden of forced or low-wage labor and the need to resist. The poetic narratives also illustrate differences in mobility and opportunity for men and women. We hear through Fan’s voice the perspective of a young woman who must find means of survival and expression that are distinct from her brother. The book raises simple but profound questions about resistance, its purpose and how it is effectively enacted; we see in the characters that some are called to violence, some to words, and others to art. Through the poetic testimonies of indentured and enslaved people in *Lion Island*, we see what it can mean to be a “warrior of words.” We see the power of stories. The larger narrative that is told is about fighting for both personal and collective freedom. The concept of honoring

the past while manifesting strength and endurance to create a better future runs throughout this compelling text.

Lowriders to the Center of the Earth written by Cathy Camper and illustrated by Raúl the Third. Chronicle Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1452123431

Cathy Camper's book, *Lowriders in Space*, is, as the title promises, a chopped and channeled rolling ride of a story. The three best friends, Lupe Impala, Elirio Malaria and El Chavo Flapjack make young readers feel like they are right there, in the low rider chop shop, dreaming with Lupe, El Chavo, and Elirio, of winning a low rider contest and a wheel of solid gold. As the adventure, and the low rider, take shape, the three friends take a detour, into – well, yes, space! The modern textures of the culturally rich and flamboyant world of custom cars leads the reader into a study of the stars, of astronomy and of how humans have followed the stars since the beginning of time. The loyalties and challenges the trio face in the building of their low rider are funny, and engaging because readers can see themselves in them. Readers are delighted by the time-warp Camper creates as she skillfully draws familiar themes and images from Mexican culture, and makes puns in the tradition of the mariachi as she invents new lyrics. The easy switches between languages and cultures, between story and science with the result that students revisit this book, and delight in sharing it with others, time after time. (Grades 3-6)

Mamá the Alien / Mamá La Extraterrestre written by René Colato Laínez and illustrated by Laura Lacámara. Children's Book Press, Lee & Low Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-0892392988

This whimsical book with colorful illustrations takes on the important topic of immigration. When she looks at her mother's old driver's license, Sofia discovers that her mother is an "alien," and she first imagines that her mother comes from another planet, and that she must have alien friends who visit her in flying saucers. After a funny mix-up, Sofia learns that her mother's license means that she was labeled a "Resident Alien," and that card indicated that she was allowed to live and work in the United States legally. Since then, she become a Permanent Resident, and the book ends as her mother celebrates becoming a citizen of the U.S. While the book does not discuss the negative connotations of the term "alien," it does introduce key concepts of immigration to younger readers. The fanciful book is bilingual, and it includes a short glossary of Spanish terms. In the author's note, she remarks, "I want readers to know that immigrants may be referred to as aliens, but this only means they come from other countries. We are all citizens of the planet Earth." (Grades K-3)

Margarito's Forest / El Bosque de Don Margarito written by Andy Carter and illustrated by Allison Havens. Hard Ball Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0997979701

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. Readers find out how his forest proved beneficial to the community, including being the perfect hiding place that saved his family during an attack on his village. Unfortunately, Don Margarito perished in that war, but his daughter, Maria Guadalupe, continues to tend to his forest to this day. At the story's conclusion, readers find Don Margarito's great-grandson, Esteban, honoring his great-grandfather and his forest. The unique illustrations combine artwork from a professional illustrator and the children of an elementary school where the story is set. This bilingual English/Spanish story includes photographs; captions in the indigenous Mayan language spoken in Margarito's village, Saq Ja'; and an explanation of Maya numbers. The author also provides ten study questions for teachers, librarians, and parents. (Grades K-5)

Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat written by Javaka Steptoe. Hachette Book Group, 2016. ISBN: 978-0316213882

Javaka Steptoe's most recent gift to readers of all ages is, *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat*. Steptoe, with color and theme, reveals the true and tragic events of Jean-Michel Basquiat in a way that redeems the artist and makes his brilliant work accessible. Steptoe guides the young reader into the realization that art was a path to success, and that almost anything can motivate a young person to make beautiful things that inspire others. Young readers learn from the simple, elegantly bold images Steptoe creates to illustrate Basquiat's talent, persistence, and the challenges he faced. The messiness of these colorful, textured layers suggests to young readers a joy in creating art that is not constrained by rules. In simple words and phrases young readers see the world as a more complex place, one where beauty grows out of tragedy in wild, expressive, and even popular ways. They experience a short, brilliant life thru images they can make while learning to temper themselves at the same time, learning thru Steptoe's story that it is better to climb a ladder than to ride a rocket to success over the course of a long, happy lifetime. (Grades K-3)

Rainbow Weaver – Tejedora del arcoíris written by Linda Elovitz Marshall and illustrated by Elisa Chavarri. Children's Book Press, Lee & Low Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-0892393749

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. As the Author's note mentions, "The Mayan people in contemporary Guatemala are among the most skilled, artistic weavers in the world. Yet they face many problems: poverty, lack of education, and employment." Ixchel's fictional tale illustrates one way to address these problems. This charming book could be connected with themes of recycling and repurposing, Maya culture, girls' education, art, and languages. (Grades K-3)

Shame the Stars written by Guadalupe García McCall. Lee & Low Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1620142783

In Guadalupe García McCall's *Shame the Stars*, she sets the tone of her novel with an explosive bang, by opening with an anonymous poem published in the local newspaper advising Tejanos that "these are dangerous/times in South Texas/times of trouble/times of loss." At the center of this historical novel set in the borderland region of Texas and Mexico in 1915, a simmering tension can be felt between the native-born Tejanos, who have called this land home for generations, and the Anglo Rangers, spearheaded by the corrupt and power-hungry Captain Munro. Meanwhile, with the Mexican Revolution rapidly transforming the landscape south of the border, we meet Joaquín and Dulceña, two teenagers bound together in a Romeo and Juliet-style romance, as their families quarrel over how to best speak out for justice in their town. As the plot rapidly thickens, readers will take note of many relevant and modern themes at the heart of this very well-researched work, which the author infuses with real newspaper clippings from the era. *Shame the Stars* easily sparks discussions around concepts such as the freedom of speech, the role of a free and independent press, and female leadership in a male-dominated world. Students and educators will find this fast-moving novel to be both educational and exciting in its presentation of the past, and García McCall will keep readers racing to the end to find what becomes not only of Joaquín and Dulceña, but also their community as a whole as it reaches a significant crux in its history. (Grades 6-12)

Somos Como Los Nubes / We are Like the Clouds written by Jorge Argueta and illustrated by Alfonso Ruano. Greenwood Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1554988495

Jorge Argueta's poetry and Alfonso Ruano's images complement each other beautifully in this thoughtfully crafted book. The pages are full of both fantastical, whimsical, dream-like images and realistic illustrations, many showing the harsher aspects of life during migration from Central America and Mexico to the United States. The poems reveal both the fragility and strength of humanity. Familial relationships, especially between parent and child, are made into metaphorical comparisons with the celestial--sky, stars and the moon, those things which are eternal—even while the time and space of physical togetherness can be so fleeting. The poems offer a balance between the specifics of where the first-person narrator is from, what they remember, and what they will leave behind with the collective experience shared by many migrants from several countries who become, through the passage from global South to North, "a huge family of stars." Pride, fear, victory and longing run through the pages. The poems are relatable and accessible. Through clear, simple description and colorful figurative language, this book creates a window into the journeys of migration taken by many millions of Central American and Mexican children and adults who move miraculously across miles—"like clouds." (Grades 3-5)

The Memory of Light written by Francisco X. Stork. Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic, 2016. ISBN: 978-0545474320

"How can you love someone and still try to kill yourself?" That is the question Vicky Cruz tries to answer for herself when she wakes up in a mental ward for teenagers after her suicide attempt. While the book begins in this jarring way, the journey that Vicky takes to heal is a profound and realistic one. Though she is in an under-funded public hospital in San Antonio that her status-conscious father wishes she would leave, after her initial resistance, Vicky decides that she does find relief there and fights to stay. More and more she is intrigued by her fellow Group Therapy Members: Mona, Gabriel, and E.M., and what they and Dr. Desai can teach her about handling the complications in her own life. Latin American culture is a backdrop to this novel that is chiefly about fighting depression, staying true to yourself, and re-knitting broken family bonds. There are, however, elements in Vicky's and other characters' lives that illustrate a multi-faceted, non-stereotypical view of Latin Americans and their quest to achieve the American Dream in the U.S. Inspired in part by the author's own experience, Francisco X. Stork, author of *Marcelo in the Real World*, writes a highly engaging, literary novel that will speak to all teens, and provides a powerful message of acceptance and empowerment for anyone struggling with depression. (Grades 9-12)

The Princess and the Warrior written Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2016. ISBN: 978-1419721304

The Princess and the Warrior: A Tale of Two Volcanoes is an invitation to young readers to explore different worlds through imagination, culture, and language. In Tonatiuh's tale, young readers return to an ancient historical and cultural past that speaks to them over the centuries, in the voices of the original people, princes and storytellers from times long past. The enchanting illustrations which accompany the text seem to jump from the Mixtec codices, brought to life on the pages as the hero wins his prize. Tonatiuh is an award-winning author-illustrator with roots in San Miguel de Allende and New York, reminiscent of the position held in the art world of other Latin American artists such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Tonatiuh draws from the vibrant culture history and symbolism of the Mixteca, to resolve the struggles of self-definition thru the story of the *Princess and the Warrior* in a special way that young readers today embrace and devour, again and again. (Grades K-3)

The School the Aztec Eagles Built written by Dorinda Makanaōnalani Nicholson. Lee & Low Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1600604409

In this wonderfully well-researched work, author Dorinda Makanaōnalani Nicholson transports readers to a time of heightened global tensions during World War II as viewed through the relationship between Mexico and the United States. Nicholson excels at providing strong historical context as she first walks

through periods of conflict between the two nations dating back to the 1830s and eventually to a time of cooperation in the early 1940s after both countries suffered wartime attacks. One example of such cooperation was Mexican president Ávila Camacho's promise to send 30 of Mexico's best pilots to fight alongside Americans in the Pacific. Nicholson simultaneously begins weaving in the inspirational story of Ángel Bocanegra, a dedicated teacher from the state of Morelos who enlists in the Mexican military. We learn that Bocanegra formed part of Mexico's elite air fighter Squad 201, aka the "Aztec Eagles." Before leaving for training, Bocanegra requested that a much-needed school building be constructed in his hometown, where he and his wife Laura both worked as educators. As this thrilling real-life story unfolds, readers have the opportunity to closely follow along with Ángel and his compatriots as they confront cross-cultural challenges, prepare and engage in combat, and persevere in their wartime mission. Large, well-situated photographs, together with posters and maps, capture the atmosphere of this time and undoubtedly bring this story to life while leaving readers with a deep sense of appreciation for the sacrifices and enduring legacy of Ángel Bocanegra and the other members of the "Aztec Eagles." (Grades 4-6)