



Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)
2020 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 in September during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

2020 Américas Award Winners

Beast Rider written by Tony Johnston and Maria Elena Fontanot De Rhoads. Amulet Books, an imprint of Abrams, 2019. ISBN: 978-1419733635

When twelve-year old Manuel finds a young boy bleeding in the family's fields in Oaxaca Mexico, he knows *La Bestia*, the train, has killed him. This discovery is Manuel's call to adventure to join his brother Tono, who left four years before. Little does Manuel know when he too rides atop the Beast that his journey to the United States will take three years. Manuel's present tense narration brings the brutal hardships of evading police, confronting gangs, and falling prey to thieves up close to readers. Yet alongside the trauma, Manuel's travails are tempered with the kindness of strangers. When he finally arrives in the U.S, he struggles with acculturation and he wonders if Los Angeles will ever feel like home. "Abue taught me that people are sent to you, 'guides' she calls them, to cross your path and to help you through life" (p. 145). An unexpected mentor shares "many wisdoms" with Manuel that will resonate for readers. Tony Johnston and Maria Elena Fontanot De Rhoads embrace the frame of the hero's journey in this compelling story. Teachers can explore a myriad of issues that confront migrants as well as themes of survival, multicultural and intergenerational connections, and the meaning of home. (Grades 6-10)

Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border written by Mitali Perkins and illustrated by Sara Palacios. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2019. ISBN: 9780374303730

Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border is the heart-warming story of siblings, María and Juan, who are eagerly anticipating a visit with their Abuela at the US-Mexico border to celebrate La Posada Sin Fronteras. It has been five years since their last visit, so each child is creating something special to give to Abuela, though unsure of how they will pass

their gifts through the fence at the border. María creates a beautiful scarf for her grandmother to wear home, and Juan colors a picture of Mary and Joseph, images representing the tradition of Las Posadas. As the visit draws to a close, María devises a plan to share the picture with her grandmother and is encouraged when visitors on both sides of the fence cheer her on. This story is filled with beautiful and vibrant illustrations created by Sara Palacios, a past recipient of the Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor Award. Perkin's debut picture book is a timely introduction of families separated by borders and will lead to thoughtful conversations of love, determination, family, and hope! (Grades K-3)

2020 Américas Award Honorable Mention Titles

My Papi has a Motorcycle written by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña Kokila. Penguin Young Readers Group, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-525-55341-0

Award-winning author and illustrator team Isabel Quintero and Zeke Peña bring a story of childhood memories to life in *My Papi has a Motorcycle*. Daisy Ramona waits for her dad to come home from work to go on a ride around town on the back of his motorcycle. Everything Daisy sees is familiar to her. The route, the locales, and the people all come together to tell the story of a lively immigrant community. As Daisy observes changes in her neighborhood, she takes comfort in knowing some things will never change, such as the quality time spent with her papi and the love they share. Quintero takes inspiration straight from her memories, growing up in Corona, CA and going on motorcycle rides with her dad. Peña's comics-inspired illustrations and sunset tones bring a magical feel to this golden hour tale. Together, Quintero and Peña create a mesmerizing picture book that wonderfully captures details of a happy childhood and the love between a father and his daughter. (Grades K-3)

The Moon Within written by Aida Salazar. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2019. ISBN: 978-1338283372

Aida Salazar sets a new standard for the coming of age novel with this expertly crafted debut novel that reflects many of the realities that young people of color face today. Celi, an 11-year old protagonist, navigates a first crush, supporting their best friend's gender non-conformity, and a first menstruation that Celi's mother is dead set on celebrating with a moon ceremony despite Celi's protests. The cultures of Celi's parents root the young protagonist in maternal Chicana/Mexica indigeneity and paternal Boricua music and dance. Written in verse, this novel is artfully done and accessible; a must read for all gender identities. By foregrounding menstruation, Salazar helps to normalize what is still considered taboo in the 21st century while reminding us that we are a small part of something much greater. Young readers will be affirmed by reading about the challenges they face as adolescents while adults are offered a reminder that we all face challenges as we grow up and define what it means to be a good person and honor the values and cultures with which we are raised. Teachers of Writing, English, Ethnic Studies and Social Studies will find many opportunities to incorporate this novel into their classrooms. (Grades 6 and up)

The Other Half of Happy written by Rebecca Balcárcel. Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-4521-6998-9

Quijana is a sixth-grade girl who lives in an in-between world. Her nick name "Qui" is pronounced Key. How can she find the key to unlock the way you are supposed to live as half-American, half-Guatemalan, half-child, half-teenager, and yet navigate a new school and parents who tell her she suddenly has to embrace her Guatemalan heritage? On top of that, she decides on her own to earn money for bus fare to secretly visit her sick grandmother. This

coming of age novel is both down to earth and philosophical at the same time. Her father likes music, Spanish literature and philosophy. Her grandmother like sea turtles, manatees and bald eagles. Quijana stumbles through challenges and comes up with philosophy of her own while getting to know herself and her family better. This book is appropriate for Language Arts class and independent reading. (Grades 5-6)

2020 Américas Award Commended Titles

Along the Tapajós written and illustrated by Fernando Vilela and translated by Daniel Hahn. Amazon Crossing Kids, New York, 2019. ISBN: 978-1542008686

The Tapajós is a river in Brazil along which communities live in stilted houses. Their lives are divided between the dry season along the river and the wet season at the beginning of which everyone in the town, including the animals, migrate to reach dry land deep in the forest. The story centers around a brother and sister who want to return to the town for their tortoise Titi, accidentally forgotten during the move. A huge water snake makes their rescue more precarious. The illustrations in tonalities of green, brown and orange are stunning, especially of the trees reflected in the river during the flooding. This book is excellent for introducing children to river life in the Amazon rainforest. (Grades K-3)

A New Home written and illustrated by Tania de Regil. Candlewick Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5362-0193-2

Author and illustrator Tania de Regil offers a paralleled insight into the minds of two children heading to a new home, one from New York City moving to Mexico City, and the other making the same trip but from Mexico City to New York City. Moving to a new place can be scary for anyone, especially for two small children fearing the unfamiliar and missing what they will leave behind. Both children express what they love most about their current home, from landmarks to favorite pastimes and even street foods. As the story jumps back and forth from New York City to Mexico City, the shared narrative displays more similarities than differences between these two great cities in the Americas. De Regil draws inspiration from personal experience as she travelled to New York City for college but decided to return to her native Mexico City to complete her degree. The last pages in this insightful picture book include information on landmarks featured in the illustrations as well as potential topics of discussion in the classroom. (Grades K-3)

Caravan to the North written by Jorge Argueta. Groundwood Books, 2019. ISBN: 1773063294

With so much recent attention focused on the migrant caravans traversing Central America and Mexico with the hope of achieving refuge in the United States, this title offers a human narrative that is often neglected in media coverage. Misael is the young protagonist who leaves El Salvador with his family and readers are given a glimpse into their rationale for leaving home along with details about the culture and customs they leave behind. Readers will discover that the term “caravan” is somewhat of a misnomer as the majority of travel is on foot and perilous. Social Studies and U.S. Government classes will benefit from reading this concise novel in verse as an opportunity to delve further into the historical and socio-political contexts that have driven thousands of migrants to depart on harrowing journeys north. (Grades 7 and up)

Freedom Soup written by Tami Charles and illustrated by Jacqueline Alcántara. Candlewick Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780763689773

It's New Year's Day and time for Belle, the young narrator, to learn how to make

Freedom Soup. Belle holds a pumpkin atop head (her pose mirroring a painting on the wall) as she joins Ti Gran in the kitchen. With a vibrant blend of the visual and verbal, the “cottony-think snow” of wintry outside mixes with Haitian traditions inside. Sensory images simmer and the “ribbons of steam” echo in the illustrations as Belle learns about her cultural roots and Haitian history, ingredient by ingredient. There was a time when her enslaved ancestors couldn’t eat the soup they prepared—until the revolution. As family members gather to eat, dance, and share stories of Ti Gran’s island, “the pumpkiny-garlic smell scents the air” and they “taste freedom again... and again.” Similar celebrations abound throughout the city. An author’s note regales not only personal family connections to the story but also details on Haitian history. A recipe for Freedom Soup is included. Rich with imagery, the book invites exploration of descriptive writing as well as exploration of family, tradition, and history. (Grades K-3)

Fuego Fuegito/ Fire, Little Fire/ Tit, Titchin written by Jorge Tetl Argueta and illustrated by Felipe Ugalde Alcántara. Piñata Books, 2019. ISBN: 978-1558858879

Argueta’s poetry offers a heartfelt and respectful meditation on the beauty and power of fire. From a tiny spark to an outstretched lightning bolt, this book honors fire, and gives life to its elemental authority. Accompanying the text are vibrant illustrations that also incorporate iconography dating back to pre-conquest glyphs and codices first created by indigenous peoples throughout central Mexico. English and Spanish text share the pages while the entire poem appears on one of the back pages in a Salvadoran variant of modern Nahuatl, one of the living, although severely endangered indigenous languages spoken in El Salvador. Bilingual educators will appreciate the opportunity to develop vocabulary and encourage an exploration of poetry for young readers/writers. This title is the sequel to *Agua, Agüita / Water, Little Water*. (Grades K-3)

Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré written by Anika Aldamuy Denise and illustrated by Paola Escobar Harper. HarperCollins Publishers, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-06-274868-3

Pura Belpré arrived in New York City in 1921 and quickly discovered a need to engage the growing Hispanic community across the city’s boroughs. As one of the first bilingual assistants hired in the New York Public Library, Pura found fertile ground to plant stories like seeds through storytelling. She quickly gained recognition for her bilingual story hours with handmade puppets animating cuentos folklóricos from her native Puerto Rico. Pura wrote and published her own cuentos and went around the city’s various library branches, classrooms, and community centers to continue planting her story seeds. Aldamuy Denise’s words and Escobar’s illustrations perfectly capture the life of one of the most influential librarians whose work and dedication to children’s literature while serving the Latinx community continues to make an impact today. This picture book includes a selected bibliography and other resources to engage Pura’s legacy in the classroom. (Grades K-3)

Soldier for Equality: José de la Luz Sáenz and the Great War written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-4197-3682-7

Award-winning author and illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh shares the heroic story of José de la Luz Sáenz (Luz), a Mexican American who joined the army during World War I. In *Soldier for Equality: José de la Luz Sáenz and the Great War* we learn that Luz quickly becomes an invaluable member of the Intelligence Office in Europe by learning to speak French. He participates in the war, 30 feet underground, receiving, translating, and relaying messages to his superiors. During the war, he faces discrimination and is not recognized for his contributions when returning home to Texas. To fight prejudice in his own community, he and fellow Mexican American veterans created the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which is the

largest and oldest Latinx civil rights organization. Readers will gain insight to this heroic man and his fight for equal rights. (Grades 4 and up)

The Other Side: Stories of Central American Teen Refugees Who Dream of Crossing the Border written by Juan Pablo Villalobos. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2019. ISBN: 9780374305741

In this collection of short stories, Juan Pablo Villalobos shares the personal testimonies of eleven teenage refugees crossing the border from Central America into the United States. Though the journey to escape violence and poverty includes harrowing experiences, these are hardships the teenagers are willing to face in order to reach the border. Some travel through the desert for days with little food and water, others recount days spent in the “freezers” as they wait to learn their fate. These timely stories give readers an insightful look into the lives of refugees who desire safer living conditions and the efforts they go through to find them. (Grades 5 and up)

Titanosaur written by Dr. José Luis Carballido and Dr. Diego Pol and illustrated by Florencia Gigena. Orchard Books, New York, an Imprint of Scholastic Inc. 2019. ISBN: 978-1-338-20739-2

A bone of the biggest dinosaur yet was found by a gaucho and his dog in Patagonia, Argentina. “Titanosaur” is the story of how two paleontologists, Dr. Carballido and Dr. Pol, along with their team of Argentinian scientists work against time on an archeological dig to preserve not one, but many titanosaur skeletons and take them back to their museum where they study the bones and set up a replica. The large book size gives you the impression that this dinosaur is indeed bigger than ten 7-ton elephants! There is a storyline of the discovery with culturally and geographically authentic illustrations by Florencia Gigena as well as sidebars with scientific facts and informational photographs. The book is evenly balanced between non-fiction and a compelling story, and would be great as a read-aloud, independent reading, or as a resource for a science report. (Grades Pre-K- 4)