



**Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)**  
**2021 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).

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.

### **2021 Américas Award Winners**

***Digging for Words, José Alberto Gutiérrez and the Library He Built*** written by Angela Burke Kunkel and illustrated by Paola Escobar. Schwartz & Wade, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2020. ISBN 978-1984892638.

*Digging for Words* tells the inspiring story of José Alberto Gutiérrez, a garbage collector in Bogotá, Colombia who began a library of discarded books, inspiring a generation of kids to open up their worlds through reading. This beautifully illustrated narrative follows two “José”s in the barrio of La Nueva Gloria in Bogotá. Little José, a young boy who goes about his days going to school, playing fútbol, doing chores at home, and anxiously waiting until Saturday, the day he can visit Paradise library. The other is Señor José, who scouts the city late at night in his garbage truck routes to find books for his community. Coming from a humble background, Señor José understands that these books are treasures, stories that fill heads with dreams and wonder. On Saturdays, the kids of La Nueva Gloria run to Paradise Library, where Señor José welcomes them to explore the piles of rescued books. With the help of Señor José, Little José spends this precious time on Saturdays finding the story he will devour next. Author Angela Burke Kunkel and illustrator Paola Escobar fill this story with evocative language and images that celebrate the power of community and books. (Grades K-3)

***Land of the Cranes*** written by Aida Salazar. Scholastic Press. 2020. ISBN 9781338343809

Written in verse by award-winning author, Aida Salazar, *Land of the Cranes*, is a heartfelt story of a young, bright 9-year-old girl who weaves a lyrical story of reverse migration back to the ancient homeland of Aztlán, the land of the cranes. Betita shares an endearing relationship with her father and holds on tightly to the story he tells her of the ancient place from which the Mexica-Tenochtitlán departed. Her father says that she and her family are cranes,

returning home to Aztlán – now known as the Southwestern U.S. She is a crane and migrates above and beyond the geopolitical border, her drawings show her with wings. As the story unfolds her poems reveal her sadness and despair as she grapples with the unjust laws of the land. She questions why ICE detained her father and why would anyone separate children from their parents? The cruel injustices of zero tolerance and inhumane conditions she and her pregnant mother endure in a detention center is a heavy weight she shoulders; although her wings are clipped, there is the continued possibility of flight in the future. (Grades 4-8)

## 2021 Américas Award Honorable Mention Titles

***Furia*** written by Yamile Saied Méndez. Algonquin Young Readers, an imprint of Algonquin Books. ISBN: 978-1-61620-991-9

*Furia* is full of energy – a story of girl empowerment in Argentina, of equal rights for girls' and boys' soccer, of the mounting activism against femicide and rape. Camila, aka Furia on the soccer field, is a talented *futbolera*, definitely not a *botinera* (girl fan), as she is expected to be by her family and her Argentine culture. Of mixed races (black, white, Arabic) she has two special talents – her athletic prowess and her refusal to be put down by her *machista* father, her older brother, her mother who continues in the expected mold, and even her dream star boyfriend Diego who plays for Juventus in Italy and brings tee-shirts to the children of their humble neighborhood in Córdoba. This novel is permeated with Argentine culture – soccer culture, the Argentine sense of humor, the Argentine variations of the Spanish language, as well as the characters who love to drink mate and eat local pastries. The *curandera* is trusted over the doctor for a sport injury. The story shows how lies and secrets can become part of family dynamics and of the culture that keeps women down. *Furia* fights back – and wins! (Grades 9-12)

***If Dominican Were a Color*** by Sili Recio. Illustrated by Brianna McCarthy. A Denene Millner Book. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5344-6179-6.

A dramatic rainbow of colors and wide spectrum of skin tones grace this delightful homage to the Dominican Republic, capturing its vibrant culture. Lyrical rhyming text is rife with sensory images—the colors of the sunset, taste of café con leche, rhythmic beats of drums, and flora of the countryside. “If Dominican were a color...It'd be the *maiz* coming up *amarillo* with green. It'd be the blue black you only see in a dream.” This poetic tribute serves not only as a delightful introduction to Dominican culture, but also holds appeal to educators as a mentor text, inviting students to see through an imagistic lens and craft word pictures of their own cultures. (Grades 1-5)

***¡Vamos! Let's Go Eat*** written and illustrated by Raúl The Third III, colors by Elaine Bay. Versify, 2020. ISBN: 978-1328557049

El Toro and the other luchadores need to eat, and they've asked Little Lobo to order and deliver food for the hungry luchadores before the big match at the Coliseo. With friends in toe, Little Lobo navigates his town on his cool new bike to visit an array of food carts each with their own specialty: tacos, tamales, burritos, aguas frescas, fresh fruit, pupusas, hamburguesas, there's even a Mexican Korean fusion truck, and that's just scratching the surface. This title honors the expanse and complexity of Mexican food while exploring other popular regional fare. It also gives recognition to the cultural value of food trucks and the people who run them. Bilingual readers will enjoy the hilarious word play throughout and there's something new to find in the detailed illustrations with every read. A joyous title, and at the heart of it all is the importance of community, friendship and following your stomach. A triumphant follow-up to the *¡Vamos! Let's Go to the Market*. (Grades Pre-K and up)

## 2021 Américas Award Commended Titles

**Brick by Brick** written and illustrated by Heidi Woodward Sheffield. Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-525-51730-6

This is the story of a Latinx father and son who show love for one another as the father builds their lives brick by brick. The universal theme of patience and persistence shines in this beautifully collaged picture book in which the son admires his father's brick laying trade and emulates him by building, drawing, and reading – book by book. Spanish words are interspersed as part of the construction in the text and the illustrations. Both father and son enjoy eating Mamá's empanadas and drinking cinnamon horchata from their lunch boxes. At the end of the story, we realize that Papi has been secretly building a brick home for the family – “nuestra casa para siempre.” (Grades Pre-K- 3)

**Clap When You Land** written by Elizabeth Acevedo. HarperTeen, an imprint of HarperCollins. 2020. ISBN 9780062882769

Based on the downed American Airlines flight 587 from New York to the Dominican Republic in 2001, *Clap When you Land* by bestselling author Elizabeth Acevedo is a profoundly moving account of two sixteen-year-olds, Yahaira Rios in New York and Camino Rios in the Dominican Republic. Unbeknownst to each other, they share a father who died in the crash. The verse novel captures the love a father had for two daughters in two places. Yahaira remembers learning to play chess with him, and Camino learned to swim with him. It opens an unexpected door of loss and grief as well as his secret life separated by the distance between New York and the Dominican Republic. Death brings the two daughters together where they feel the absence of him and yet his presence is mirrored in their features -- they see him in each other. Together, they work through their pain, they work through their loss, and move forward and press onward. (Grades 9-12)

**Don't Ask Me Where I'm From** written by Jennifer De León. Atheneum, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5344-3824-8

This is a story of belonging, of trying to fit in, of feeling out of water as a Latinx girl in a suburban high school of Boston. The METCO Program (The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), running since 1966, comprises urban students attending 33 suburban schools with the hopes of seeking a better education. Liliana reluctantly signs up and her world changes quickly as she struggles to adjust, complicated by the fact that her father has been deported to Guatemala and she did not even realize that he was undocumented! She does not really relate to the black kids who are stand-offish, testing her, and she takes a while to warm up to her white METCO counterpart, not to mention her best friend in Boston has become distant hanging with her activist boyfriend. Liliana faces racism, both blatant and unconscious, yet she learns how to work with allies to move forward the race conversation that is ubiquitous in our time. (Grades 9-12)

**Efrén Divided** written by Ernesto Cisneros. Harper Collings Publishers, 2020. ISBN 978-0062881694/

Family separation and childhood resilience is at the center of Efrén's story. Ernesto Cisneros' debut book *Efrén Divided* follows a boy whose life changes from day to night when his mom is deported back to Mexico. Efrén's amá is his soperwoman, an endearing term inspired by the delicious sopos (fried masa with topics) that she often makes for Efrén and his younger siblings, twins Max and Mia. Efrén is very conscious of the sacrifices his parents make to provide for their family, seeing his apá and amá work all day to make ends meet. Living through

ICE raids in his immigrant community, Efrén cannot help but fear what would eventually come true, being separated from one of his parents. When his mom does not return from work one evening, it is clear to Efrén what he must do. He takes on the role and responsibilities of his mom to be there for his family while still juggling school and trying to be a kid. Cisneros visits a harsh reality for many kids in the US, the fear of separation followed by the uncertainty of ever returning to a united family. Efrén faces his difficult situation with the hope that he can work for something greater that would benefit his community and inspired by his mom, become “soperboy.” (Grades 3-7)

***Evelyn Del Rey is Moving Away*** by Meg Medina. Illustrated by Sonia Sanchez. Candlewick Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5362-0704. Published concurrently: ***Evelyn Del Rey se muda***.

Honoring friendship across cultures that transcends the hard experience of moving, Medina’s text tugs at the heartstrings. “Evelyn Del Rey is my *mejor* amiga, my número uno best friend,” declares Daniela. The girls are mostly the same, just like their apartments, and they revel in inventive games. But today is no ordinary day as the pair plays for the last time and has to say goodbye. Sanchez’ autumn palette and Medina’s lyrical text set the tone and capture small details to perfection: Evelyn’s “easel for painting on rainy days” ready to be gobbled by the moving van, secret handshakes, sparkly stickers the friends press on one another’s cheeks to seal the promise of their forever bond. Readers will resonate with the bittersweet day of unbridled joy tinged with sadness. A final reassuring image shows older Daniela reading letters from her *mejor* amiga. (Grades K-3)

***From my Window*** written by Otávio Júnior, translated from the Portuguese by Beatriz C. Dias, illustrated by Vanina Starkoff. Barefoot Books. 2020. ISBN 9781782859789.

*From my Window* is a colorful and beautifully designed book that invites children to look and see the stories that unfold outside the window of one of the homes in a favela. Inspired by the author’s memories of growing up in Complexo do Alemão in Rio de Janeiro, it is filled with the illustrated day-to-day activities of children and adults, sights and sounds composing the poetry of life. There are school children learning in a classroom. There are bicycles riding along the streets – there are people everywhere! There is a celebration of diversity throughout the book. It highlights the richness of community and the ability to embrace an interconnectedness within the neighborhood and invites us all to consider what we see from *our* window. This picture book explains what a favela is as well as what writer Otávio Júnior and illustrator Vanina Starkoff see from their respective windows. (Grades Pre-K – 2)

***Gustavo, the Shy Ghost*** written and illustrated by Flavia Z. Drago. Candlewick, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2020. ISBN 978-1536211146.

In a year filled with loneliness and separation from friends and family, the tale of *Gustavo, the Shy Ghost* is a warm reminder that even the most timid souls can make new friends. Gustavo is shy and his reserved nature has kept him from being himself around others. Something that can be easy for many such as striking a conversation with a stranger is very difficult for Gustavo. He tries to make his mark but is left feeling invisible. Gustavo finds refuge by playing the violin by himself. In preparation for Día de los Muertos, a cultural festivity in Mexico that celebrates being together and remembering loved ones, Gustavo invites all the little ghouls and monsters in his community to a special violin concert at the cemetery. Instead of changing or trying to “fit in,” Gustavo is finally seen at his happiest, playing the violin, where he shines and glows for all to see. (Grades K-2)

***Letters From Cuba*** written by Ruth Behar. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2020. ISBN: 978-0525516477

Based off the author's family history, this book recounts the experience of a Jewish girl from Poland joining her father in Cuba prior to the outbreak of the second world war. Esther documents her experiences in letters to her sister. When she joins her father in Cuba, she quickly gets to work to help earn money to be able to bring the remainder of her family still in Poland. Esther and her father share their Jewish culture while learning about and adapting to the cultures of Cuba. Although they find refuge in Cuba, they do face anti-Semitism on their journey and eventually bring the rest of their family to safety. Behar helps readers to consider aspects of Latin American history and Cuban history rarely explored. (Grades 5-7)

***Rise of the Halfling King (Tales of the Feathered Serpent #1)*** written by David Bowles and illustrated by Charlene Bowles. Cinco Puntos Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1947627376

Set in the Yucatán 1000 years ago, this graphic novel adaptation is based on Bowles 2018 *Feathered Serpent, Dark Heart of Sky's* survey of Mesoamerican pre-conquest indigenous story telling traditions. In this first volume, readers are introduced to Almah a good witch who uses her knowledge to help her community with spells and herbal remedies for their ailments. Her work is put on hold when a self-appointed ruler of Uxmal, Kinik Kak Ek, puts a stop to her type of curanderismo. When Almah finds a large egg from which a talking boy emerges, Sayam, she raises him, sharing her knowledge in preparation for him to fulfill a prophecy foretold. Readers are introduced to the Aluxes of Yucatán Maya storytelling, rarely seen spirit beings who safeguard the forests and natural world from human destruction. The graphic novel format lends itself to giving new life to these meaningful stories and the conflict and cleverness of the characters bring depth to the history of the region. (Grades 3 and up)

***Santiago's Road Home*** by Alexandra Diaz. A Paula Wiseman Book: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5344-4623-6.

Santiago's journey begins in medias res with a prologue, "neither here nor there," plunging readers into the twelve-year old's harrowing story of almost certain death. The first part of the novel traces events that led to that moment. When Santiago left his abusive grandmother, he had no idea what his future would hold until he met Maria Dolores and her five-year-old daughter. Travelling together as they crossed the border from Mexico to the United States requires trust, and for the first time in his memory, Santiago feels he's part of a family. That is, until his hopes are dashed. In the second part of the novel, Diaz' searing descriptions regale readers with bleak life in the detention center after Santiago is forcibly separated from his companions. Themes of persistence, stamina, resilience, and the value of education resound in this heart wrenching but ultimately hopeful narrative. (Grades 5-8)

***Sharuko: El arqueólogo peruano /Peruvian Archaeologist Julio C. Tello*** written by Monica Brown and illustrated by Elisa Chavarri. Lee & Low Books, 2020. ISBN: 978-0892394234

Sharuko is the Quechua nickname for Julio C. Tello, an indigenous Quechua archeologist who used his own cultural heritage and knowledge to inform the field of archeology with regards to the origins of Peru's first nations. Sharuko means "brave" in Quechua, the nickname that was given to a young Tello for his fearlessness for exploring caves as a young boy in the Andean foothills. This title follows Sharuko's life story, leaving his family and hometown to attend school in Lima, completing medical school, obtaining a graduate degree from Harvard, spending time studying and teaching in Europe and his eventual directorship of Peru's Museum of Anthropology. Sharuko challenged the widely accepted theories that Peru's indigenous peoples originated elsewhere, and the title explores this through his work at the Chavín de Huántar archeological site and the work he did excavating sites of the Paracas

peoples. Beautifully illustrated by Peruvian born Elisa Chavarri with text by Peruvian descendant Monica Brown, this title celebrates one of Peru's national heroes. (Grades 1-6)

***We Are Not From Here*** written by Jenny Torres Sanchez. Philomel Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House. ISBN: 978-1-984-81226-1

This heart-rending tale of three Guatemalan teens who are caught in a desperate violent situation in their hometown make the decision to go North. The three of them, as their names proclaim: Pequeña, Pulga and Chico, are infinitesimal and powerless in their home world and they must find courage to face the unknown. It is difficult to figure out who can be trusted, who will rob or hurt them, and who to simply ignore. The first half of the story, Pulga is in charge as he did all the research ahead of time, but after a terrible accident on *la Bestia*, the Mexican train, Pequeña comes into her own and leads the way. This book vividly points out the enormous risks along the route from Central America to the United States and why children feel compelled to escape. (Grades 9-12)

***With a Star in My Hand, Rubén Darío, Poetry Hero*** written by Margarita Engle. Atheneum, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5344-2493-7

In homage to the great Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, the father of the modernism movement, Margarita Engle writes her own poems in Darío's myriad styles, experimenting as does he. She chronicles his tumultuous childhood up to his early 20's when he starts to find a foothold in the world of Latin American poetry. As a precocious child, he was known as *el niño poeta*, who could create poems out of thin air, so talented that he meets two presidents. She tells how his first publication is unbelievably interrupted by a Central American War, an earthquake, and a volcano. Persevering, he travels to Chile where he publishes *Azul*, a book of poems and short stories in which he discards traditional complex Spanish sentence structure and breathes a fresh look that will be emulated by 20<sup>th</sup> century poets and authors from Spain and Latin America. *With a Star in My Hand* introduces young people to the indigenous literary star who wrote poems about liberty, hope, love, and injustice. (Grades 6-12)