



**Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)**  
**2019 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.

### **2019 Américas Award Winners**

***Islandborn*** written by Junot Díaz and illustrated by Leo Espinosa. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2018. ISBN: 9780735230958

"Every kid in Lola's school was from somewhere else." When Lola's teacher invites the students to draw a picture of where they were from, the children are abuzz with plans for their drawings—except for Lola. She was just a baby when she left the island and doesn't remember it. She easily solves her dilemma as she interviews people in her neighborhood and borrows their memories of the island. Lola gleans mostly positive visions and sketches everything—until Mr. Mir, the Super tells her about the monster, who for thirty years "did as it pleased" and is the reason that most "everyone there has moved here." A fearsome green creature frightens not only fleeing islanders but also readers. While the youngest readers won't understand the indirect allusions to Dominican history, teachers can choose, or not, to dig below the surface and understand the history of the Dominican Republic (never named in the text but pictured in a map of the island on the Super's wall). Singularly delightful is the simultaneous publication of a Spanish edition— *Lola*. (Grades 2-5)

***Undocumented: A Worker's Fight*** written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-1419728549

Duncan Tonatiuh delivers an expertly written and illustrated title that lays bare the realities of being undocumented in the United States. The narrative follows Juan an indigenous Mixtec who migrates from Mexico to the United States. The accordion style format of *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight* is an homage to Mixtec literature, of which few books survived the Spanish

conquest, perhaps the most famous being the *Codex Nuttall*. We meet Juan in his hometown as he is faced with the need to migrate due to the lack of jobs and resources and the need to provide for his family. We see Juan cross the militarized U.S. Mexico Border, share cramped living quarters with other undocumented people, and work arduously for substandard wages. Juan becomes involved in a push for equitable wages and basic rights for himself and his co-workers taking great personal risks for the betterment of his new found community and his community at home in Mexico. Tonatiuh's signature style succinctly illustrates the realities that Juan and so many other undocumented migrants face every day. The book is timely and demonstrates strong themes of resilience. This innovative perspective can be incorporated into themes of migration across all grade levels. (Grade 5 and up)

### **2019 Américas Award Honorable Mention Titles**

***Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings*** written by Francie Latour and illustrated by Ken Daley. Groundwood Books, House of Anansi Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-77306-041-5

Do paintings talk back to you? Auntie Luce is from Haiti and her paintings always talk vibrantly about Haiti today and of days gone by. Her niece comes to visit the island and through art, she learns the history and heroes of a country ravaged by revolution, but brightened by everyday people who balance fruit baskets on their heads, sell water ice by the pink cathedral or ride on painted tap-tap buses. Auntie Luce explains that she paints what she has seen, heard, smelled and felt. In this lushly illustrated book, you too will see and feel the colors of Haiti and the Haitians: "colors that bleed from ash to cocoa to rust and butterscotch to nut and nut to clay." All of these rich browns affirm identity for a little girl who was not born in Haiti but feels safe, like she belongs. There is an author's note that explains about the birth story of Haiti, as well as a glossary to help with the Kreyòl (Creole) expressions. (Grades K-3)

***The Poet X*** written by Elizabeth Acevedo. Harper Teen, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-06-266280-4

This powerful verse novel is narrated by a young Dominican teen in a New York barrio who, repressed by her religious mother, seeks refuge in writing poetry in a journal given to her by her brother Xavier. Xiomara feels imprisoned by her growing body and her emotions that collide. She is protective of her sensitive twin brother who is starting to come out. She has budding romantic feelings for a classmate that she knows would be taboo according to her mother's set of strict rules. Lucky for Xiomara, there is an after-school poetry club that is practicing for the upcoming poetry slam. Is she up for this? Xiomara's name means "warrior" and she finds that she can fight with words against her repressive mother, confusing thoughts about God, mocking classmates, and her maturing body. A wide spectrum of poetry styles as well as the plot keep this book lively. (Grades 10-12)

## 2019 Américas Award Commended Titles

***Alma and How She Got Her Name*** written and illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal. Candlewick, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-7636-9355-8

Young Alma is trying to write her very long name on her paper—Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela— and it doesn't fit. She doesn't hesitate to air her frustration to her father who regales his daughter with the stories behind each name. "Then you decide if it fits," he tells her. Cuddled together in a chair looking at photo albums, Alma learns about every family member from Grandma Sofia who loved poetry to Candela her other grandmother who stood up for what was right. With every story, Alma sees herself in her relatives (virtually making eye contact and communing with the family portraits). She comes to embrace not just her name but also her heritage. Warm, soft illustrations with subtle details unfold Alma's spunky personality. Young children will request this charmer again and again. Teachers have the perfect lead-in to have students interview family members to discover their own heritage and stories about their names. A Spanish edition, *Alma y Cómo Obtuvo su Nombre*, was published simultaneously. (Grades PreK-3)

***Carmela Full of Wishes*** written by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Christian Robinson. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-399-54904-5

On Carmela's birthday, she is finally allowed to tag along with her brother to the laundry mat. On the way, she finds a dandelion and dreams of all the wishes she'd like to come true after she blows on it. When she accidentally drops her dandelion and crushes it before making her wish, she is saddened until her brother comes to her rescue with an alternative plan for wish making. The book is beautifully illustrated by Christian Robinson (reminiscent of the highly acclaimed picture book, *Last Stop on Market Street*) with charming pictures that capture Carmela's farming community by the sea. (Grades K-2)

***Dreamers*** written and illustrated by Yuyi Morales. Neal Porter Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8234-4055-9

A mother narrates a beautiful story about the journey she and her son made to the U.S. They struggled at first trying to navigate their way around their new surroundings, but then discovered a library where they learned to read, speak, write, imagine, and most important of all, dream for a better future. After the story, the author shares her experience immigrating to the U.S. with her two-month-old son, Kelly. The rich, vibrant pictures add a unique dimension that draws in readers to imagine the possibilities that books and libraries have to offer. (Grades K-2)

***La Frontera My Journey with Papa*** written by Deborah Mills & Alfredo Alva and illustrated by Claudia Navarro. Barefoot Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-78285-388-6

*La Frontera My Journey with Papa* is the autobiography of author Alfredo Alva. This English-Spanish bilingual picture book shares the harrowing journey he took with his father from Guanajuato, Mexico, a place generations of family had lived for over 100 years, to the United States in 1980. After facing many hardships, including very little sleep or food, and the fear of entering the United States illegally, he successfully crossed the Rio Grande River into Texas and began a new life. The end papers include photographs of Alva's family and pictures of the village he left behind along with a narrative about what it means to be an immigrant. Coupled with the brilliant illustrations of Claudia Navarro, readers will find this timely story to be engaging and relevant. (Grades 3-5)

***A Gift from Abuela*** written by Cecilia Ruiz. Candlewick Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-7636-9267-4

The story features a heartwarming relationship between a young girl and her grandmother who share their time together, including spending quiet times eating in the park. Abuela saves her pesos so that she can buy her granddaughter a present, but her plans are ruined when she forgets where she hid her money. In the end, the two experience the greatest gift of all: each other. The soft, muted colors of the illustrations complement the endearing tale that chronicles the love that a grandmother and her granddaughter have for each other. (Grades K-2)

***Jazz Owls*** written by Margarita Engle. Atheneum, 2018. ISBN: 9781534409453

The Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, a little known piece of history, is the focus of this novel written in verse by the talented Cuban- American author, Margarita Engle. As thousands of young Navy sailors poured into Los Angeles during WWII they enjoyed hot summer nights listening to the sounds of Jazz and dancing with local Mexican American girls. Known as Jazz Owl girls, young Marisela and Lorena help lighten the mood of sailors on their way to the front lines. Told from the perspective of many voices, including reporters and police, we gather insight to the racial tension and violence that erupted between sailors and local zoot suiters. Engle captivates us with her poetry and brilliantly sheds light to this piece of history. (Grades 5-12)

***Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish*** written by Pablo Cartaya. Viking, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-101-99726-0

Marcus has had a hard time in school. He is bigger than most and people immediately think that he is a bully, when all he wants to do is protect the weaker students from the real bullies. Marcus has another goal, which is to reconnect with his father. His mother works for the airlines, so she takes her two sons, Marcus and Charlie, who is special needs, to spend a week in Puerto Rico, home of their relatives. Relentlessly, Marcus writes emails to his Puerto Rican father. In a very full tumble-down vehicle with new friends and cousins, they travel around the island on a quest. Marcus learns a lot of Spanish words and culture along the way. Charlie, who usually needs a very structured routine, comes into his own in this new environment, surrounded by loving extended family members. Cartaya's characters jump off of the page in this story of discovering home and new landscapes. (Grades 3-7)

***Merci Suárez Changes Gears*** written by Meg Medina. Candlewick Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-7636-9049-6

Award-winning author Meg Medina introduces us to eleven year old Merci Suárez, a Cuban-American 6th grader who lives with her extended family in three little houses they call Las Casitas. She attends Seaward Pines Academy as a scholarship student and struggles with typical middle school problems, one of which is how to deal with the "mean girl" in her class. Meanwhile, at home, she has taken on the responsibility of watching her 5-year-old twin cousins after school. This extra chore causes her to miss the opportunity to try out for the soccer team. While dealing with this disappointment she also begins to notice changes in her beloved grandfather, Lolo. Although her family is aware that something is wrong with Lolo, they will not tell her what's going on. She eventually learns of his diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease and comes to terms with the reality that although she wishes things could stay the same, she must learn to "change gears" and work through the issues that come her way. This coming-of-age story highlights the heartwarming benefits that can come from intergenerational relationships. (Grades 3-6)

***Photographic: The Life of Graciela Iturbide*** written by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña. Abrams Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-1947440005

Graciela Iturbide is perhaps the most iconic Mexican photographer that you did not realize you know. This graphic novel offers a biographical survey of Iturbide's life and shares insight and context regarding some of her most recognizable photos. The narrative is non-linear, shifting through time and place. Iturbide was the oldest of 13 children, born and raised in Mexico City. As a young girl she aspired to be creative, enjoying poetry and photography, but faced discouragement from her parents. In early adulthood Iturbide turned to photography and found healing through creativity after the tragic death of her daughter. Reproductions of Iturbide's photographs are interspersed throughout the black and white illustrations accompanied by direct and at times poetic text. The book conveys a meditative tone. The majority of the narrative focuses on Iturbide's travels and documentation of the diversity of Mexican cultures, from the Sonoran Desert to Tijuana, La Mixteca region and Juchitán. Themes of mentorship, feminism and the value of introspection are throughout. This book is an accessible and valuable biography for young adult readers. (Grade 7-12)

***Puerto Rico Strong: A Comics Anthology Supporting Puerto Rico Disaster*** written by Vita Ayala (Author), Hazel Newlevant (Editor), Desiree Rodriguez (Editor). Lion Forge, 2018. ISBN: 978-1941302903

*Puerto Rico Strong: A Comics Anthology Supporting Puerto Rico Disaster* was published in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria (2017) when a group of artists and writers put out a call to create a book about and in support of Puerto Rico. The resulting comics anthology features a myriad of writers and illustrators providing historical, political and cultural insight into Borikén aka Puerto Rico with a little over 40 separate contributions. Some of the stories are deeply introspective, exploring issues of identity and the distinct and mixed racial and ethnic identities of Puerto Ricans, Taíno, West African and Spanish. Other stories provide a wakeup call and calls to action specifically addressing the impacts of Hurricane Maria while providing insight into the historical relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States government. The varied styles of illustration and storytelling offer something for readers with multiple interests. Each succinct story is expertly packed with valuable content and insight. Readers will gain a nuanced understanding of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican identity. Proceeds from book sales will support disaster relief and recovery programs in Puerto Rico. (Grade 6-12)

***They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems*** written by David Bowles. Cinco Puntos Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-947627-06-2

"No wall, no matter how tall, can stop your heritage/ from flowing forever, like the Rio Grande itself," the border kid's dad tells him. Readers see the landscape in "Borderlands," feel the fear at the checkpoint as Mom "clutches los papeles," and delight in the everydayness of the narrator's life, the "home that glows with love." While Bowles includes heavy themes of immigration, the sting of racism toward Güero, so called for his pale skin, and the ever-present psychological awareness of being a border kid, lighter moments prevail: the market, music lessons, the best buds' bookworm squad, family celebrations. Readers will resonate with the narrator's navigation through seventh grade. The use of various poetic forms, including haiku, pantoum, free verse, sonnet, and rhyming couplets, appropriately reflects the self-described nerdy Güero's penchant for writing. He was inspired by his Abuela's stories, which "like larvae in a chrysalis/ to unfold their paper wings/ and take me flying into the future." He takes his teacher's words to heart: "Poetry is the clearest lens for viewing the world." Bowles artfully

conveys Mexican culture and infuses Spanish words throughout this connected collection of 49 poems. (Grades 5-8)

***When Angels Sing: The Story of Rock Legend Carlos Santana*** written by Michael Mahin and illustrated by Jose Ramirez. Atheneum, 2018. ISBN: 978-1534404137

Writing in second person, Mahin intimately invites readers into the story and inner battle of Carlos Santana, from the moment of his birth to his time of triumph and inner peace as a performer at Woodstock. As a child growing up in poverty, Carlos was inspired by his father's music, "a sound that made angels real" and longed to produce that same feeling. He tried many instruments before choosing "la guitarra," but still he didn't feel that he was good enough. He continued his search for his sound—"the soul of the blues, and the brains of jazz, and the energy of rock and roll. And to that, you added the slow heat of Afro-Cuban drums and the cilantro-scented sway of the music you'd grown up with". Often Santana felt like a cultural outsider as he navigated the turmoil of the 1960s—the Vietnam War, MLK's death—which Ramirez profoundly conveys. The blend of the lyrical text and strong, rich hues and bold black lines of the art evoke Santana's heritage and echo the power of his music. (Grades K-3)