



Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) 2012 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-international 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 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 October 5, 2012 during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

2012 Américas Award Winners

Hurricane Dancers by Margarita Engle. Henry Holt & Co, 2011. 154 pgs. ISBN 9780805092400

The story of a biracial, bilingual child named Quebrado, or “the broken one” is told from multiple perspectives and in free verse poetry in this historical fiction text. Set during the early years of the Caribbean conquest (1509 or 1510), Quebrado reveals his own internal brokenness brought about by his Taíno mother’s death from a plague, the consequent abandonment of his Spanish father, followed by the capture of the powerful land owner-turned-pirate, Bernadino de Talavera. He is then enslaved on the pirate’s ship where the brutal conquistador and Venezuelan governor, Alonso de Ojeda, is held hostage, and where his translation abilities are exploited. However, a violent hurricane destroys the ship and wrenches the boy into the sea where he is rescued by a fisherman and quickly accepted into the local Taíno community whose children rename him Hurará or “Born of Wind.” Quebrado slowly begins to find some measure of healing there until the surviving de Talavera and de Ojeda stumble upon the locale, expecting his immediate compliance in their quest to subjugate and control the residents. At this point, Quebrado finds the courage to tell his story, and to claim his “quiet voice” that can speak two languages and feels “... like a small canoe/gliding back and forth/between worlds/made of words” (p. 76). Eventually, the fate of the two men rests solely with Quebrado, whose decision frees him from brokenness and wandering, and leads to friends, a home, and a new self-selected name. This small text accurately portrays historical events and real people, while also presenting high interest themes in an accessible format. The multiple voices narrating the story allow readers to see inside the injustices and radically different perspectives of the time period, while the author’s notes link this story to her own family background, and provide important historical information and resources invaluable to teachers, librarians, and students alike. (Grades 6-10).

Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People by Monica Brown. Illustrated by Julie Paschkis. Henry Holt, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8050-9198-4.

Brown and Paschkis have created a paean to renowned Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. A warm, lyrical text is embedded in soothing, color-saturated pictures. Streams of words -to delight the eye and ear- infuse the illustrations with surprising gems of multilingual word associations. They are a highlight of the book. Both provide a child-friendly introduction to aspects of Neruda's life and, most prominently, to his passions for the natural world and the social concerns of his times. (Grades 2-5)

2012 Américas Award Honorable Mention

Under the Mesquite by Guadalupe Garcia McCall by Guadalupe Garcia McCall. Lee and Low Books Inc., 2011. 207 pages. ISBN 978-1-60060-429-4.

Beautifully written in verse for grades 6 and up, first-time author McCall tells the story of high school student Lupita. Uprooted from her native Mexico, Lupita has to learn a new language and a new way of life in Texas. "And I doubted los girasoles [sunflowers] would understand me anymore, because now I was speaking a different language. I swallowed consonants and burdened vowels..." Throughout the book, Lupita reflects on what it means to be part of two worlds. Lupita has to care for her seven siblings when her mother gets ill and her father is working. While Lupita is in her senior year, her mother dies, leaving her feeling even more adrift. Her grief keeps her from finding a connection to either of the worlds. After graduation, Lupita goes to her grandmother's house in Mexico to heal and reflect. She comes to the realization that sometimes you have to start fresh, comparing herself to the cicadas that wait 17 years before they emerge from the ground.

The Queen of Water by Laura Resau and María Virginia Farinango. Delacorte Press. 352 pages. ISBN 987-0-385-73897-2 (hc); 978-0-385-90761-3 (lib. bdg.); 978-0-375-89680-4 (ebook).

This beautifully written memoir tells of a young Ecuadorean girl's struggles to come to terms with her indigenous roots and the mestizo world into which she is thrown. Taken (or given) to work as a care giver and servant for a mestizo family, she suffers abuse, humiliation, deceit, and manipulation, but eventually frees herself--only to realize that she has become a stranger to her birth culture, and is, in fact, embarrassed by it. Literacy motivates her to strive for a better life. As a native girl enrolled at a colegio attended mostly by the children of wealthy mestizos, she hides her origins, until she becomes a competitor in a pageant based on Inca tradition. She wins the title "The Queen of Water," and sees that her life, like water, has taken many forms. Living between two worlds, she finally comes to realize, offers her a unique perspective, and a certain freedom of action. She will go on to live the life that she wants.--with a hard-won understanding of her country's social hierarchy. In addition to being an admirable piece of literature, the book, or parts of it, lends itself to use in classes of Spanish, Latin American studies, and any class examining discrimination, or women's or minority groups' issues.

2012 Américas Award Commended Title

Sylvia and Aki by Winifred Conkling. Tricycle Press, 2011. 151 pgs. ISBN 978-1-58246-337-7

Upon the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Aki and the members of her family are forced from their home and sent to internment camps along with thousands of other Japanese-Americans. A young Mexican-American girl by the name of Sylvia Mendez moves into Aki's empty home with her family. Once the family learns that the Mendez children are restricted to the 'Mexican' public school on the other side of town, the father takes lead in the fight against school segregation. Conkling parallels the two girls'

experiences as each family struggles to hold onto their own cultural identity and fight for equality. This first-hand account of how segregation affected California children during the 1940's educates the reader on the Japanese-American internment camps, as well as the Mendez vs. Westminster case, which led to the desegregation of California schools and later set a model for the end of segregation nationwide. Told through the eyes of two young girls, Sylvia and Aki shows how friendship, family, and community can cross all racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national boundaries.

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