



## Américas Award Books

The Américas Award, which began in 1993, was founded by the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) to encourage and commend authors and illustrators who produce children's and young adult literature with themes concerning Latin America. More information can be found on the CLASP website (<http://claspprograms.org/pages/detail/37>). Each year the award names two winners, honorable mentions and commended titles.

The books listed below are those books of relevance to teaching about Latin America and cultural connections between Latin America and other regions. Themes include the blending of cultures among Latinos in the US and other areas as well as immigration into Latin America. Books focus on various areas of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a small selection of the Américas Award books which might be of relevance to teaching about cultural connections between Latin America and other areas. For a full list of Américas Award books please visit the CLASP website.



## Américas Book Award Resources

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***A is for Americas.*** Cynthia Chin-Lee and Terri de la Peña. Illustrated by Enrique O. Sánchez. An alphabetical exploration of the Americas introduces young readers to the wide range of people, places, and cultures that make up our hemisphere. A brief description and brightly colored illustration accompanies each letter and the corresponding word; for example, j is for jalapeño ... k is for kayak ... l is for Lake Titicaca. Young children will gain a good sense of both the immensity and the diversity of the Americas as a whole. (Grades K-3) 32 pages.

**1999 Commended Title.**

***A Caribbean Journey from A to Z: Read and Discover what Happened to Z.*** Mario Picayo. Join us in this fun and educational journey through the Caribbean islands, one letter at a time. From Aruba to Trinidad and from Alligator to Yam, you will learn the names of many of the islands, plus fascinating facts about them. A Caribbean astronaut? From which island? Seals in these tropical waters? An island with over 300 rivers? And what is a cokí? With beautiful illustrations by Native American artist Earleen Griswold, drawn during her years living in the Virgin Islands, this is a book that you and your family will enjoy opening again and again. It will captivate, entertain, and educate readers from any part of the world. And wait until you see what they did with the Z... **2008 Commended Title.**

***Caribbean Alphabet.*** Frane Lessac. With lively illustrations, Lessac presents an alphabet of images from the Caribbean (hibiscus, mangoes, reggae). The illustrations and vocabulary encourage a sense of place, and there is plenty to look for on each scenic page. The selections combine known and perhaps unfamiliar words (with a glossary), the latter specific to the Caribbean. 32 pages. **1994 Commended Title.**

***Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella*** Robert D. San Souci. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. Set in Martinique, this version of Cinderella is told from the fairy godmother's point of view. As in the Perrault version, Cendrillon becomes the stepchild of a selfish woman whose only daughter was spoiled and demanding. Cendrillon in the end finds true love. The story is interspersed with French Creole words and phrases that are explained in a glossary. (K- 4). 40 pages. **1998 Honorable Mention.**

***Cocoa Ice.*** Diana Appelbaum. Illustrated by Holly Meade. Two young girls, one in Santo Domingo, the other one in Maine, tell stories cleverly linked by the author through "the cocoa ice trade" of schooners in the late 19th Century. Each dreams about the other's place, "the island of always-summer, where giant pink seashells line the beaches and children pick chocolate from trees" and "the land where children walk on rivers of ice." Excellently formatted for young readers, this book provides a wealth of information in text and illustrations. (K-3). 52 pages. **1997 Commended Title.**

***Divali Rose.*** Vashanti Rahaman. Illustrated by Jamel Akib. Set in Trinidad, this emotional story follows a young Indian boy, Ricki, as he prepares for Divali, the Hindu festival of lights. On his way to school, Ricki accidentally breaks a rose bud from the Divali rose bush that he and his grandfather have planted. Unfortunately, his grandfather blames the children of recent Indian



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immigrants. It is only after Ricki stresses the true meaning of Divali, “to make peace with everyone and start new for the new year,” that his grandfather decides to forgive the immigrant children and bring the final Divali rose to the family for the festival. Ricki finally admits he is the one who broke the rose. Although the story borders on didactic, it does provide a view of Trinidad culture not often reflected in children’s literature. (gr 1-3) 32 pages. **2009 Commended Title.**

***Down by the River: Afro-Caribbean Rhymes, Games and Songs for Children*** compiled by Grace Hallworth. Illustrated by Caroline Binch. Storyteller Grace Hallworth offers this collection of rhymes, chants and lullabies, many remembered from her childhood growing up in Trinidad, and all showing traces of their African, French, English and American roots. Binch combines the playfulness of the rhymes with illustrations of expressive, joyous faces and bodies in motion. Together, the text and pictures celebrate childhood and a true love of living. (K-3). (32 pages). **1996 Honorable Mention.**

***Drummer Boy of John John.*** Mark Greenwood. Illustrated by Frané Lessac. This book’s story is inspired by that of Winston “Spree” Simon, the creator of Trinidad and Tobago’s national instrument, the steel drum. Drums and other percussive instruments take center stage in young Winston’s quest to compete to have the best band in his island’s Carnival parade. The celebration of sound drives the story, with onomatopoeia serving as an effective device to draw the reader into the fun feeling of Carnival. Young Winston hears percussive instruments all around him, and, discovering a wealth of sounds from all sorts of found objects, he eventually finds a “junkyard band,” which takes first prize. The illustrator’s use of vibrant tones and people in motion capture the energy of the occasion. Whimsical scenes in the junkyard and beyond add interest to the telling of this tale for young readers. (Grades K-3) 31 pages. **2013 Commended Title.**

***I Love Saturdays y Domingos.*** Alma Flor Ada. Illustrated by Elivia Savadier. A young child is doubly blessed to have two sets of loving grandparents, each with distinctive cultural heritages: her grandparents are European-American, and her abuelos are Mexican-American. She happily shares in the varied cultural experiences when visiting on the weekend. Ada effectively juxtaposes the joys to be found by a child growing up within dual cultures. Savadier accompanies the text with graceful color illustrations that capture the pleasures of childhood. 32 pages. **2002 Commended Title.**

***In Darkness,*** Nick Lake. Trapped in crushing darkness beneath debris of the 2010 earthquake, Shorty recalls his violent, gang, controlled life in Haitian slums. While despairing of rescue, he is heartened and disturbed by thoughts of Toussaint l’Ouverture who led a slave revolt in the eighteenth century and died in darkness. Ultimately Shorty is prepared to reclaim his life. ”I was in darkness, but now I am in light.” By braiding the parallel lives of Shorty and Toussaint, Lake paints an alarming, thought-provoking portrait of Haitian history, both present and past. It gives young readers a heady mix of the social, religious, and political realities of the Americas’ poorest country. (Grades 9-12) 341 pages. **2013 Commended Title.**



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***Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures*** edited by Patricia Aldana. Translated by Hugh Hazelton. Illustrated by Luis Garay. With thoughtful presentation, the editor has selected a broad cross-section of stories that represent the indigenous and European cultures of Latin America. The collection was drawn from a rich variety of narrative sources, both oral and written, originally published in various Latin American countries. (Grades 3-5). 64 pages. **1996 Honorable Mention.**

***Letters to My Mother.*** Teresa Cárdenas. Trans. D. Unger. *Letters to My Mother* is a young Afro-Cuban girl who, when her mother dies, must live with her aunt and cousins. Dependent on them and their goodwill, she's deeply wounded by their taunts about how dark her skin is and their attacks on her behavior in general, including her choice not to straighten her hair. When not at home, she must endure constant, casual racial prejudice. To keep the memory of her mother alive, and to remind herself that she was once unconditionally loved, she writes letters telling Mami what she is suffering and feeling. Composed wholly of these letters, this powerful, moving novel tells how the heroine comes of age. Is her inner strength sufficient to overcome her pain and the bigotry of the people in her life? When it was originally published, *Letters to My Mother* was attacked for exposing the problem of racism in contemporary Cuban society. Nevertheless, this illuminating, thoughtful work went on to win major awards. **2006 Commended Title.**

***Liliana's Grandmothers.*** Leyla Torres. Liliana has two grandmothers who are from different countries, have different interests, and even speak different languages. Liliana's grandmother, Mima, lives on the same street as Liliana in a climate where it is cold and snowy half of the year. Her other grandmother, Mama Gabina, lives in another country where it is always warm, and Liliana has to take a plane to get there. This story presents the common differences in North American and Latin American cultures through a figure that is very important to both: the grandmother. The simplicity of the story allows children to see cultural contrasts in a positive, appreciative way. (Pre-K- grade 2). 32 pages. **1998 Commended Title.**

***Martín de Porres, the Rose in the Desert*** . Gary D. Schmidt. Illustrated by David Diaz. Martin de Porres, the Rose in the Desert tells the moving story of the first Black Catholic Saint of the Americas. The illegitimate son of a former slave and a Spanish conqueror, Martin grew up in the poorest barrio of 17th century Lima, Peru where 'hunger lived in their home and illness was their companion.' The Rose in the Desert tells how the child was taken in as a servant by Dominican Friars, where he became known for his miraculous ability to heal both animals and humans. The poor came to Martin to be healed, and soon Spanish royals began to request his services but 'learned to wait for him to tend the poorest among the barrios first.' In spite of his humble spirit and service to the community, the mulatto child was frowned upon by the friars and addressed as 'son of a slave' and 'mongrel.' Finally, some thirteen years after his arrival at the monastery, he was permitted to take his vows as a Dominican tertiary. Among the Dominican brothers, he performed miracles and heal the sick, until his death in 1639. In San Martin, young readers learn about universal concepts such as charity, poverty, justice and community. Moments



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of tribulation, compassion and triumph are all present in this simple yet lyrical text. A full palette of emotion is expressed through mixed media illustrations which provide a unique blend of shapes and vibrant watercolors. This story of the patron saint of interracial harmony and social causes leaves the reader with a feeling of inspiration and hope for humanity. (Grades K-4) **2013 Honorable Mention.**

***Mama and Papa Have a Store.*** Amelia Lau Carling. In the heart of Guatemala City, a Chinese immigrant family owns a specialty store where they sell fabric, buttons, thread, and ribbons, in addition to a small selection of Chinese imports. The events of a typical busy day are recounted as seen through the eyes of the family's youngest daughter who is not yet old enough to attend school. We hear the voice of a young child in her first-person narration and see what she sees in the delicately detailed watercolor paintings that accompany the story: the sounds, the colors, the anticipation of her older siblings' return at midday for the large family meal they'll share, and her interest in the Maya customers who have an affinity for the store owners due to a shared sense of style and color. Through the details of everyday life, we see how cultures peacefully co-exist and enrich each other in this dazzling autobiographical picture story. (Pre-K - 4). 32 pages. **1998 Award Winner.**

***Sylvia and Aki.*** Winifred Conkling. 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. 151 pages. **2012 Commended Title**

***Voices in First Person: Reflections on Latino Identity*** edited by Lori Marie Carlson. Photographs by Manuel Rivera-Ortiz. Illustrated by Flavio Morais. A collection of narratives by top Latino/a authors is contained in this visually appealing volume. The diversity of perspectives and experiences come through as some authors write in English, others in Spanish, and others use a mix of languages. As these voices straddle languages, they also cross cultures and national borders, and together they begin to give shape to what it means to struggle with one's identity and come of age as a Latino/a in the United States. Biographies of the contributing authors are included. (gr 9-12) 84 pages. **2009 Commended Title.**