

Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

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 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 book will be honored at a ceremony on June 27, 2003 at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

2002 AMERICAS AWARD WINNER

BEFORE WE WERE FREE by Julia Alvarez. New York: Knopf, 2002. 167 pgs. ISBN 0-375-81544-9

Twelve-year-old Anita de la Torre's life changes suddenly when her cousins and friends must abruptly leave the country. What's more, she learns the extent to which members of her own family, particularly her uncle and father, are involved as leaders in the plot to overthrow *El Jefe*, dictator of the Dominican Republic. Using her keen powers of observation, Anita begins to understand the danger involved as she witnesses people taking great risks to gain freedom. Julia Alvarez 's portrayal of a courageous female protagonist brings to life for young readers the hardships endured by families who participate in democracy's struggle.

2002 AMERICAS HONORABLE MENTIONS

BEHIND THE MOUNTAINS by Edwidge Danticat. New York: Orchard, 2002. 166 pgs. ISBN 0-439-37299-2

Using eloquent language steeped in the language of proverb and the folklore of her native Haiti, Danticat paints a moving portrait of family as its members are caught in the physical, emotional and economic turbulence surrounding Haiti's transformation from military to democratic rule. Celiane and her family are forced apart as their father leaves Haiti to find work in New York City. Then Celiane's mother is wounded in cross fire during the electoral process. As the family leaves to escape the violence, Celiane bears witness to the continued struggles that coming to a new country can present. She records these experiences in her diary, offering her readers a first-hand account of immigration, through insightful and sensitive teenage eyes.

FRIDA by Jonah Winter. Illustrated by Ana Juan. New York: Scholastic, 2002. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-590-20320-7

Sparse text frames the visual narration that effectively recreates the intense life of Mexico's premier female artist. The stunning illustrations, though surreal, are child-centered and reflect the intriguing painting style that Kahlo herself incorporated in her artwork.

2002 AMERICAS COMMENDED LIST

FLIGHT TO FREEDOM by Ana Veciana-Suarez. New York: Orchard, 2002. 216 pgs. ISBN 0-439-38199-1

Ten-year-old Yara García narrates through her diary an eyewitness account of injustices following the Cuban revolution. Yara and her family are legally permitted to leave Cuba and arrive in Miami ready to start a new life. However, her bitter and disappointed father cannot let go of the past and consumes his every waking moment obsessed with a plot to overthrow Fidel Castro. This fictional account of a young immigrant girl coming of age in two worlds reflects the turbulence of national and international events that characterized the 1960s.

GRANDMA AND ME AT THE FLEA/LOS MEROS MEROS REMATEROS by Juan Felipe Herrera. Illustrated by Anita DeLucio-Brock. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2002. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-89239-171-5

Sunday mornings bustle with excitement as Juanito plays hide-and-seek, maneuvering through the flea market that is his playground. Juanito serves as grandma's courier, running from stand to stand, delivering bartered goods that grandma shares with other vendors. Herrera offers a tender, poetic story culled from his early childhood memories of fun-filled flea market days spent with *abuelita*. The vivid colorful illustrations aptly capture the sounds and sights of the flea market from a child's point of view.

I LOVE SATURDAYS Y DOMINGOS by Alma Flor Ada. Illustrated by Elivia Savadier. New York: Atheneum, 2002. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-689-31819-7

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.

A LIBRARY FOR JUANA by Pat Mora. Illustrated by Beatriz Vidal. New York: Knopf, 2002. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-375-80643-1

Pat Mora introduces young readers to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, with a picture book biography of the poet's early life. The eloquent watercolor and gauche artwork incorporates elements of illustrated manuscript, re-creating the environment that nurtured a gifted child who became colonial Latin America's most famous poet.

ME IN THE MIDDLE by Ana Maria Machado. Pictures by Caroline Merola. Translated by David Unger. Toronto: Groundwood, 2002. (Originally published as *Bisa Bia Bisa Bel* by Salamandra, Rio de Janeiro, 1982.) 110 pgs. ISBN 0-88899-463-X

Ten-year-old Isabel (Bel) helps her mother clean out a cluttered closet and in the process discovers an old photo of her grandmother, Bisa Bea, neatly tucked away in an old trunk. Soon Bisa (grandmother) Bea becomes Bel's imaginary friend. Her conversations with her grandmother lead to yet more fantasy when Bel imagines herself as the grandmother of a future granddaughter. As other children begin to have conversations about their ancestors, they soon discover forgotten histories of exile and struggle. Written by one of Brazil's foremost children's writers and recipient of the 2000 Hans Christian Andersen Award, the text is enhanced with expressive black and white watercolor illustrations.

MESSENGERS OF RAIN AND OTHER POEMS FROM LATIN AMERICA (Simultaneous Spanish edition: **MANDADEROS DE LA LLUVIA**) compiled by Claudia M. Lee. Illustrated by Rafael Yockteng. Toronto: Groundwood, 2002. 80 pgs. ISBN 0-88899-470-2 (English) 0-88899-471-0 (Spanish)

From Nicaragua's Rubén Darío, to Chile's Nobel winner Gabriela Mistral, to the gifted Salvadoran Claudia Lars, this handsome collection of poems for children brings together the best of Latin America's poets. The translations are impressive, garnered from respected professionals. The colorful illustrations delight, gracing the broad themes that group the various poets. Both English and Spanish editions belong side by side; this collection is highly recommended for every school and public library in the country.

MY DIARY FROM HERE TO THERE/MI DIARIO DE AQUI HASTA ALLA by Amada Irma Pérez. Illustrated by Maya Christina González. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2002. 32 pgs. ISBN 0-89239-175-8.

When Mama announces that Papa has lost his job, and the family will have to move to the United States, Amada's brothers are excited. But for Amada, the pain of leaving her best friend and the only home she has known is all the more difficult as she begins to worry about how she will manage her new life in Los Angeles without speaking the language. Thus begins Amada's venture into the diary form that serves as a sounding board for her fears and worries, and ultimately her adjustment. González provides vibrant color illustrations full of aesthetic appeal.

THE POT THAT JUAN BUILT by Nancy Andrew-Goebel. Illustrated by David Diaz. New York: Lee & Low, 2002. 32 pgs. ISBN 1-58430-038-8

This original cumulative tale effectively engages younger children in the ancient art of pottery making. On the opposite page, older children can read the story of Juan Quezada and his quest to re-create this art form from the village of Mata Ortiz in Chihuahua, Mexico. For students of art who want to learn more about pottery making, the last five pages are devoted to the process. The multilayered text is accompanied by artwork brimming with creativity, computer-generated by the talented and creative Caldecott winning medalist.

2002 Américas Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature
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Award Coordinator

Julie Kline (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)
CLASP Committee on Teaching and Outreach
c/o The Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201
(414) 229-5986 phone; (414) 229-2879 fax
jkline@uwm.edu
www.uwm.edu/Dept/CLACS/outreach_americas.html