



## Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)

### 2025 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 and multicultural boundaries, focusing instead on cultural heritages within the hemisphere. The award is sponsored by the [Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs](#) (CLASP).

The Américas Award winners, honor books, and commended titles are selected for their:

1. Distinctive literary quality
2. Cultural contextualization
3. Exceptional integration of text, illustration, and design
4. Potential for classroom use

The winning books are honored each year in a special celebration.

The annotated bibliography below was written by members of the 2025 Américas Award Committee.

### 2025 Américas Award Winners

***Libertad*** written and illustrated by **Bessie Flores Zaldívar**. Dial Books (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN 978-0593696125

*Libertad* is a riveting and emotionally resonant coming-of-age story. Set in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, during the politically fraught 2017 presidential election. The novel follows 17-year-old *Libertad* “Libi” Morazán as she navigates the complexities of adolescence amidst national unrest. Libi grapples with her emerging queer identity, familial expectations, and the oppressive political climate, finding solace and expression through her anonymous Instagram poetry account. The narrative draw parallels between Libi’s internal struggles and the external chaos of her country. Student protests and the escalating government crackdowns serve as a backdrop to her personal journey, highlighting themes of resistance, resilience, and the power of art as

activism. The story emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal and political narratives and serves as a testament to the courage of young people who, through self-expression and activism, challenge oppressive systems and envision a more equitable world. (Grades 8-12)

***Daughter of the Light-Footed People: The Story of Indigenous Marathon Champion Lorena Ramírez*** written by **Belen Medina** and illustrated by **Natalia Rojas Castro**. Atheneum Books for Young Readers (Simon & Schuster), 2024. ISBN: 978-1665931427

This beautifully illustrated picture book tells the true story of Lorena Ramírez, an Indigenous Rarámuri runner from Mexico who races in her traditional dress and huaraches. It highlights her strength, connection to land and culture, and the power of community. The artwork is full of movement and detail. Students will find something new each time they read it. It's a great entry point for conversations about Indigenous identity, representation in sports, and cultural respect. With extra info in the back, teachers can go deeper into history, geography, and cultural appropriation. A powerful, non-formulaic story that centers an Indigenous Latina athlete, just the kind of book students are excited to see. (Grades Preschool-5)

## **2025 Américas Award Honor Books**

***Canto Contigo*** written by **Jonny Garza Villa**. Wednesday Books (Macmillan Publishers), 2024. ISBN: 978-1250875754

*Canto Contigo* is a novel that breaks down harmful generational barriers passed down through communities about queerness and masculinity with a romance novel fully entrenched in Mexican American Mariachi culture in the Southwest Borderlands. The book centers on Rafael Alvarez, a mariachi singer used to winning national competitions, who tries to manage the loss of his Abuelo to Parkinson's Disease by kissing a fellow competitor. Little does Rafael know, however, that his world would be turned upside down when his family moves to San Antonio and he would have to come face-to-face with Rey Chavez, the boy he made out with at the competition. It also comes to light that Rey is the lead vocalist for Mariachi Todos Colores at Rafael's new school, the Selena Quintanilla-Perez Academy. In this enemies-to-lovers quarrel, author Jonny Garza Villa offers a delightful way for classrooms to introduce a counter narrative to traditional mariachi culture and machismo to show a nuanced experience of grief, anger, joy, and love from a conflicted protagonist. The story's love for Mexican culture and a fuller Latino male character offers many SEL lessons as well as a history of Mexican and Tejano music to uplift teens in high school classes wanting more diverse stories on LGBTQ+ BIPOC characters. (Grades 9-12)

**Churro Stand/El Carrito de Churros** written by **Karina N. González** and illustrated by **Krystal Quiles**. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2024. ISBN: 978-1951836955

This heartfelt bilingual story follows a mom who sells churros in the city with her kids by her side. When business is slow, the family leans on community and one another, showing resilience, love, and pride in their work. The book shines a light on food vendors and everyday urban life, something rarely seen in children's books. Set in NYC, but relatable to kids in any city, it is rich in cultural detail and shows how public spaces can be full of care and connection. The illustrations celebrate family, foodways, and POC representation with joy and warmth. A moving and relatable story about working families, dignity, and support. (Grades Preschool-3)

**Freedom Braids** written by **Monique Duncan** and illustrated by **Oboh Moses**. Lantana Publishing, 2024. ISBN: 978-1915244802

*Freedom Braids* is rich historical fiction rooted in the oral histories Colombian women have passed down throughout the centuries of enslaved African women using braids to map their journey toward freedom. The book's emphasis on women's powerful roles as freedom seekers captures the often-neglected gendered history of liberation. The picture book focuses on a whole community of women and girls working together and navigating the danger with a variety of braiding styles to survive the trek toward cimarron communities based in the countryside of Colombia. The braiding styles highlighted are given significant weight in the story and are depicted in stunning artwork and explanations of their meaning. While crafted for younger readers, the book's themes of love, liberation, legacy, and agency are transmissible for students of all ages. An appropriate book to encourage conversations on enslavement and resistance. (Grades Kindergarten-3)

**When the Mapou Sings** written by **Nadine Pinede**. Candlewick Press, 2024. ISBN: 978-1536235661

Set in early twentieth century Haiti, this immersive novel-in-verse follows Lucille as she flees her small village for Port-au-Prince following the disappearance of her best friend. Thrust into city life, Lucille becomes a servant in the household of a wealthy woman, but her time there is cut short when she falls in love with her employer's son. Lucille finds a new job, however, as the assistant to a visiting scholar and author from the United States: Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston, who is conducting anthropological study of vodou, utilizes (and sometimes exploits) Lucille's local knowledge. *When the Mapou Sings* is a versatile novel that complicates U.S. understandings of Haiti and Hurston's role as an anthropologist. The novel would pair well with

works by Hurston herself, but is also innovative in form, allowing for versatility in teaching. (Grades 7-9)

## 2025 Américas Award Commended Titles

[\*A Second Chance on Earth\*](#) written by Juan Vidal. Holiday House, 2024. ISBN: 978-0823457113

After his father's untimely death, Marcos feels unmoored, but finds comfort in his father's copy of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Marcos and his family travel to his parents' native Cartagena, Colombia to honor his father and to see their extended family. There, Marcos meets a young taxi driver who shows him the city and helps him learn more about Márquez, his father, and himself. This coming-of-age verse novel draws on key themes from Márquez's works, such as family, loss, and life. This novel could serve as an important introduction to Latin American literary figures but is also an outstanding individual read. (Grades 9-12)

[\*Angelica and la Güira\*](#), written by Angie Cruz and illustrated by Luz Batista. Kokila (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593406014

*Angelica and la Güira* is a joyful and emotionally resonant picture book that celebrates the power of music, ancestral love, and cultural identity. After spending the summer with family in the Dominican Republic, Angélica returns to Washington Heights with a special gift from her grandfather—a güira, a traditional Dominican percussion instrument. Though it initially feels out of place in her city surroundings, Angélica slowly discovers how music can connect generations and help her express her true self. Cruz's tender narrative honors the role of intergenerational wisdom and cultural memory, while Batista's vibrant, expressive artwork brings to life the rhythms of merengue and the warmth of Dominican culture. The illustrations also offer rich, culturally reflective portrayals of Afro-Dominican and Latin American characters. This visual representation provides an important mirror for many readers. This story offers an opportunity for students to learn about Afro-Caribbean musical traditions, Dominican heritage, intergenerational family bonds, and the immigrant experience. It is also available in Spanish as *Angélica y la güira*, translated by Kianny N. Antigua, making it a valuable linguistic and cultural resource for Spanish-language and dual-language programs. (Grades Kindergarten-3)

[\*Barrio Rising/El barrio se levanta\*](#) written by María Dolores Águila and illustrated by Magdalena Mora. Dial Books (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593462072

*Barrio Rising* is a fictionalized retelling of a true story about the activism that took place in Barrio Logan, a Chicano neighborhood in San Diego. Through the eyes of a young girl, we learn

that Barrio Logan's borders have gotten smaller and more closed off due to the construction of a highway that bisects their neighborhood. The highway not only caused the forced removal of many residents but has also contributed to the pollution of the neighborhood. The residents are looking forward to the construction of a new park—until they discover that it will actually be a police station. The book shares the ways the neighbors came together to advocate for their rights. *Barrio Rising* would pair well with other books about activism and inequality. (Grades Preschool-3)

**[Benny Ramírez and The Nearly Departed](#)** written by José Pablo Iriarte. Yearling Books (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593703731

*Benny Ramírez and The Nearly Departed* is mostly narrated by the titular Benny, an all-around nice kid who has just moved with his Cuban American family from California to his recently deceased grandfather's house in Miami. By his own estimation, Benny is the one untalented person in a family of accomplished artists, which makes him nervous about starting at his new arts school. He gets "help" from his famous trumpet-playing grandfather, whose ghost still haunts the house. At its core, this is a story about the relationship between hard work and talent, the value of family, and the true meaning of generosity. (Grades 3-7)

**[Borderlands and The Mexican American Story](#)** written by David Dorado Romo. Crown Books for Young Readers (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593567753

David Dorado Romo's book captures the history of Mexican American culture, survival, resistance, and joy in the borderlands for the early teen reader. A text that middle school teachers can use to reassess lessons on the early formation of Western America and incorporate the often-erased long history of Mexican Americans in a United States or Latin American history class. The book begins with MesoAmerican indigenous cultures, the arrival of the Spanish settler colonialists, then the series of civil rights conflicts endured after the Mexican-American War to subvert misinterpretations of migration stories and the erasure of Southwest Borderlands history from textbooks. Every chapter includes questions, bolded vocabulary with detailed definitions, and photographic vignettes with students in mind to engage in peer discussion to individual guided research. The personalized histories and perspectives of youth activists, leaders, and everyday Mexican Americans also provides a narrative focus on how to make history more accessible for young people that can encourage students to write their own personal narratives of self. The Race to the Truth series' new book reveals how literal and figurative borders shape the history of Mexican Americans, no matter where they live in the United States. (Grades 5-8)

**[Brownstone](#)** written by Samuel Teer and illustrated by Mar Julia. Versify (HarperCollins),

2024. ISBN: 978-0358394747

In this graphic novel and coming-of-age story, a teenager finally has the chance to spend time with her estranged father—in an unexpected way. Her mother drops her off at her father’s brownstone for an entire summer. Almudena receives two major surprises: her Guatemalan father does not speak English, and he needs her help to renovate the brownstone, which is essentially a construction zone. Because Almudena’s mother is not Latina, the teenager has grown up with no understanding of her Guatemalan heritage—let alone the Spanish language. As Almudena and her father, Xavier, begin to rebuild the brownstone, they also rebuild their fragmented relationship, and Almudena finally gets answers about his absence. In the meantime, she bonds with members of the local neighborhood, ultimately forming a true community. By the end of summer, Almudena has a stronger sense of self, a deeper understanding of her Guatemalan heritage, and new friendships. This graphic novel would pair well with other coming-of-age novels and books about being a second-generation immigrant. (Grades 9-12)

***Call Me Iggy*** written by Jorge Aguirre and illustrated by Rafael Rosado. First Second Books (Macmillan), 2024. ISBN: 978-1250204134

Ignacio Garcia, known as “Iggy,” is a Colombian American teen who was born in the United States and has rarely thought about his roots. On his first day of high school, Iggy is more focused on fitting in. His priorities change when he (literally) bumps into Marisol. He starts to like her and receives love advice from an unlikely source: the spirit of his dead grandfather. In addition to advice about flirting, Iggy’s grandfather helps him learn Spanish and teaches him about life in Colombia. Iggy also finds out more about his father’s past, including his feelings of regret about leaving his parents in Colombia. The story is set against the backdrop of the 2016 U.S. election, and the very real implications of this event are shown for the immigrants in the story, including Marisol. This book would pair well with other texts about immigration, politics, and identity. (Grades 9-12)

***Daylan and the River of Secrets*** written by Edd Tello. West 44 Books, 2024. ISBN: 978-1978597471

Set in a small Mexican town, this verse novel follows 12-year-old Daylan, who is haunted by a childhood encounter with Cihuamichin—a legendary water spirit believed to bring either protection or destruction. This traumatic experience instills in him a deep fear of swimming and contributes to his social anxiety, leading to bullying at school. The arrival of a new student, Eliam, challenges Daylan to confront his fears and feelings, especially as Eliam becomes involved with peers who disrespect the river’s sacred rules, threatening the community’s safety. Tello’s narrative, delivered in accessible and lyrical verse, captures the emotional depth of

Daylan's journey with sensitivity. The themes of Mexican folklore are woven throughout, offering perspectives on cultural narratives that emphasize respect for nature and the consequences of disrupting ecological balance. The story's exploration of Daylan's internal struggles provides a platform for discussions on mental health, environmental ethics, personal growth, and the importance of community. (Grades 5-8)

**[HaiCuba /HaiKuba: Haikus about Cuba in Spanish and English](#)**, written by **Carlos Pintado and Lawrence Schimel** and illustrated by **Juan José Colsa**. Ediciones NorteSur/North South Books, 2024. ISBN: 978-0735845688

Utilizing the traditional Japanese form of haiku, with its measured syllabic lines, *HaiCuba/HaiKuba: Haikus about Cuba in Spanish and English* offers readers with a series of haiku all about Cuba and Cuban culture. Carlos Pintado and Lawrence Schimel's work to ensure that the haiku resonate in both Spanish and English and that they are faithful translations is brilliant. As either an introduction to haiku or Cuba (or both!), this picture book is fun, creative, and educational. (Preschool - 3)

**[Hearts of Fire and Snow](#)** written by **David Bowles and Guadalupe García McCall**. Bloomsbury YA, 2024. ISBN: 978-1547610044

*Hearts of Fire and Snow* is a retelling of the Náhua legend of princess Iztaccíhuatl and the warrior, Popocatépetl. The main characters, Greg and Blanca, are teenage incarnations of Iztac and Popoca, living in modern-day Nevada. The story works on two levels. On one level, it's a story about a fight against environmental degradation by a powerful corporation. But because almost all the main characters are incarnations of people from the original Náhua tale, it also operates as an allegorical continuation of the ancient story. Interestingly - and perhaps uncomfortably - Greg and Blanca are both extremely wealthy heirs to corporate empires, mirroring the elite status of Iztac and Popoca. From a teaching perspective, this opens the door to discussions about whose stories we record and retell in both literature and history. (Grades 7-12)

**[Hurdles in the Dark](#)** written by **Elvira K. Gonzalez**. Roaring Brook Press (Macmillan), 2024. ISBN: 978-1250847850

*Hurdles in the Dark* is a memoir written in the style of a first-person, present-tense novel. It tells the story of Elvira K. Gonzalez from late middle school through the end of high school, as she persists through challenges to win a college scholarship as a hurdler. When Elvira's story opens she is in sixth grade, a promising track and field athlete who lives on the south side of Laredo, Texas, with her mother and extended family. Her life is thrown off course when her mother is

kidnapped by a cartel. Elvira is instrumental in raising the ransom to bring her home, but her mother returns traumatized, their relationship becomes contentious, and Elvira struggles with her anger. The rest of the memoir recounts Elvira's many challenges on her path to college and a different life, including incarceration in juvenile detention, incredible dedication to her sport, and her experience of being groomed and sexually exploited by her track coach. This book is a complex but relatable exploration of difficult issues including poverty, kidnapping and femicide in the borderland region, youth incarceration, and sexual abuse in sports. (Grades 9-12)

***I Am La Chiva! The Colorful Bus of the Andes/ Me llamo La Chiva! El colorido bus de los Andes*** written by **Karol Hernández** and illustrated by **Lorena Alvarez Gómez**. Dial Books (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593529201

This picture book follows La Chiva, a colorful open-air bus, as it travels through the Colombian Andes collecting farmers and their goods for market day. The rhyming narrative captures the energy and community spirit of rural Colombia, while Alvarez Gómez's stunning illustrations showcase the lush landscape and rich cultural details of the region. When La Chiva gets a flat tire, passengers work together to fix the problem. The book incorporates Spanish vocabulary throughout the text and includes helpful backmatter with an author's note and glossary. This story offers multiple classroom opportunities. Teachers can use it to explore themes of community and helping others, to introduce basic Spanish words, or to launch geography lessons about South American landscapes and transportation. The rhythmic text makes it perfect for read-alouds, while the detailed illustrations invite close examination and discussion. (Grades K-2)

***Lola***, written by **Karla Arenas Valenti**. Knopf Books for Young Readers (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593177006

Devastated by her brother's mysterious illness, ten-year-old Lola embarks on a magical journey in search of a cure. Following a traumatic event she refers to only as "The Thing That Happened," Lola watches helplessly as Alex battles what she calls "the Darkness," developing strange gray spots that seem to mirror the disease affecting the plants and trees around their Mexico City home. Lola is aided by the mystical creatures called chaneques who inhabit her family's Mexico City home as she travels through a portal to the land of Floresta in an attempt to save her brother. There, she learns that the ecosystem of Floresta is also sick and dying, just like her brother. Lola attempts to save both Floresta and her brother, a task that is neither straightforward nor easy. This novel's twist of an ending is jarring, poignant, and heartfelt, but it underscores the reality that loss and grief are integral parts of life. (Grades 3-7)

***Lucas and the Capoeira Circle*** written by **Joana Pastro** and illustrated by **Douglas Lopes**. Atheneum Books for Young Readers (Simon & Schuster). ISBN: 978-1665924771

*Lucas and the Capoeira Circle* tells the story of Lucas who wakes up excited to attend a capoeira circle, but who then struggles with his nervousness about performing publicly and temporarily loses his “ginga”. He overcomes his fear through a combination of his teacher's kindness and his use of his “tamborim” to calm and center himself. The images and text both convey the dynamism, excitement, and community of capoeira, as well as the instruments and clothing associated with the practice. (Grades preschool-3).

**[Mani Semilla Finds Her Quetzal Voice](#)** written by **Anna Lapera**. LevineQuerido, 2024. ISBN: 978-1646143719

*Mani Semilla Finds Her Quetzal Voice* follows the story of 12-year-old Mani Semilla, a girl from a mixed family (Chinese-Filipino-American dad, Guatemalan mom) who is struggling to find her place in school. Mani and her classmates face constant harassment and inappropriate behavior from male students, while school administrators dismiss their concerns or directly blame the girls. The book is organized around two intersecting storylines. In school, Mani and her friend group, Las Nerdas, move from self-consciousness to having the confidence to demand respect and safety as a young women, ultimately engaging in collective action to change their school’s culture. Meanwhile, at home, Mani learns the true story of her aunt and discovers a family legacy of feminist activism in Guatemala, including women who fought against violence toward women. . The parallel tales converge to show the value of courage and the power of raising one's voice against injustice. The novel tackles themes of bodily autonomy, menstruation, and the transition from childhood to adolescence with frankness and sensitivity. (Grades 5-9)

**[Old Clothes for Dinner](#)** written by **Nathalie Alonso** and illustrated by **Natalia Rojas Castro**. Barefoot Books, 2024. ISBN: 979-8888590683

*Old Clothes for Dinner* is a joyous book about mistranslations and cross-cultural differences amongst inter-generational families from the United States and Latin America. . The book offers social-emotional learning opportunities for students navigating between their family's native language and English. After learning her grandmother is cooking her *ropa vieja* (shredded beef cooked with tomatoes and spices), elementary aged Magaly worries about her clothing, especially when she can’t seem to find some of it around the house. She knows enough Spanish to understand that *ropa vieja* literally means “old clothes,” but doesn’t realize it is the name of a beloved dish. The book is a great entry to learning about Cuban dishes and family routines around food and dinner time. With this story, students can discuss misunderstandings, their own cultural foods and customs, and even try making the recipe that’s included at the end. (Grades Preschool-3)

***Saudade: Our Longing for Brazil*** written by Ana Crespo and illustrated by André Ceolin. Neal Porter Books (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0823452293

In *Saudade*, a young Brazilian-American girl is on a hike with her mother, who suddenly remembers and misses Brazil. Her mother then tries to describe the concept of saudade to her. Since it is a Portuguese word that has no English translation, it is best explained through examples: saudade is smelling your mother's perfume or feeling an ocean breeze miles away from the sea. Saudade is a longing for something that you cannot have. The girl thinks of her cousins in Brazil, her grandparents smiling through computer screens and photographs. Through the story, children can understand—or empathize with—the experience of being a second-generation immigrant, with one foot in one country and another foot in another country. Although this is a children's book, people of all ages can connect with it and appreciate its message. This book would pair well with other stories about immigration and texts about Brazil. (Grades Preschool-3)

***Sea of Constellations*** written by Melissa Cristina Márquez and illustrated by Rocío Arreola Mendoza. Penguin Workshop (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593523605

Told from the perspective of a whale, this poetic and visually stunning book invites readers into a deep, reflective journey through Latin American waters. With no human characters, it centers the ocean's voice and views ancient Mexica (Aztec) creators as part of its ecosystem. Blending mythology with environmental awareness, this unique creation story encourages young readers to think about the ocean as a living, feeling world. *Sea of Constellations* is beautiful blend of culture, storytelling, and ecology that opens up meaningful discussions about our relationship to nature. (Grades Kindergarten-3)

***She Persisted: Dolores Huerta***, written by Monica Brown. Philomel Books (Penguin Random House), 2024. ISBN: 978-0593623565

This biography of activist Dolores Huerta, whose groundbreaking work for farmworkers led to a lifelong dedication to advocacy, emphasizes her instrumental role in establishing the United Farm Workers. Though Huerta has been left out of histories of the labor movement, which tend to focus on her colleague Cesar Chavez, the *She Persisted* series recuperates the legacy of female activists like Huerta. This short chapter book emphasizes the unique struggles Huerta experiences as a woman in the labor movement and is a helpful reminder that change requires sacrifice. This book provides an excellent entry point for classroom discussions on labor rights and the role women have played in social justice movements, and it would work well for units on civil rights. (Grades 1-4)

***Shut Up, This is Serious*** written by Carolina Ixta. Quill Tree Books (HarperCollins), 2024. ISBN: 978-0063287860

This novel offers a raw and resonant portrayal of adolescence, identity, and resilience in Oakland’s Fruitvale neighborhood. The story follows 14-year-old Belén Dolores Itzel del Toro, a sharp, funny, and deeply introspective Mexican American teenager navigating the emotional turbulence of high school, family dysfunction, and the weight of intergenerational trauma. Abandoned by her father at a young age, Belén struggles with feelings of worthlessness and shame, compounded by her mother’s emotional absence and a school system that doesn’t support her. When her best friend Leti becomes pregnant and their once-tight bond begins to fray, Belén is forced to confront what growing up really means—on her own terms. The novel doesn’t shy away from hard topics like teen pregnancy, grief, self-harm, racism, and mental health, yet it treats each with honesty, nuance, and a fierce love for its characters. This novel is a valuable resource to foster discussions on cultural identity, societal expectations, and personal growth. Its authentic voice and relatable characters provide students with narratives that challenge stereotypes and encourage empathy. (Grades 8-12)

***The Circuit (Graphic Novel Edition)*** written by Francisco Jiménez, adapted by Andrew J. Rostan and illustrated by Celia Jacobs. Clarion Books (HarperCollins), 2024. ISBN: 978-0358348221

*The Circuit (Graphic Novel Edition)* is a powerful graphic novel adaptation of Francisco Jiménez’s acclaimed 1997 memoir. Told through the eyes of young Panchito, this visually rich retelling follows a Mexican migrant family journeying across California’s agricultural fields in search of work, stability, and a place to call home.

Through Panchito’s childlike yet perceptive lens, readers witness the exhaustion of field labor, the instability of constant moves, and the heartbreak of interrupted schooling, all underscored by his deep longing to learn. Jiménez’s personal narrative remains intact, while Jacobs’s expressive, painterly art adds emotional resonance. A warm, earthy color palette, punctuated by vibrant reds and golds, enhances moments of reflection and cultural symbolism, with recurring imagery of flames, butterflies, and flowers evoking prayer, magic, and resilience.

Visual specificity anchors the story in 1940s California, with carefully rendered depictions of migrant camps, vehicles, and schoolhouses enriching its historical context. The graphic format makes complex themes—child labor, poverty, and xenophobia—accessible to middle grade readers without minimizing their weight.

*The Circuit* encourages reflection on immigration, workers’ rights, and the role of educators in shaping migrant students’ lives. This visually striking edition invites students to connect history

with present-day conversations on farmworker justice and honors the enduring strength, family bonds, and hopes of Latine migrant communities. (Grades 3-7)

**[The Mango Tree / La mata de mango](#)** written and illustrated by Edel Rodriguez. Harry N. Abrams, 2024. ISBN: 978-1419745867

*The Mango Tree / La mata de mango*, a wordless picture book by Cuban American artist Edel Rodriguez, is a visually arresting and deeply personal tale of migration, memory, and resilience. Inspired by Rodriguez's own childhood in a Cuban village, the story follows two boys who spend their days playing, resting, and dreaming in the safety of a mango tree—until a powerful storm sweeps one of them and the tree out to sea, setting him adrift in a strange new land.

Rodriguez's evocative illustrations—created using oil-based woodblock printing inks, sumi ink, and digital media—offer a unique and expressive art style that captures both the wonder and emotional weight of the journey. In the absence of words, the imagery speaks powerfully to the themes of displacement, adaptation, and the enduring connection to home. The boy's planting of a mango seed in unfamiliar soil becomes a hopeful symbol of resilience and new beginnings. An author's note reveals the autobiographical roots of the story, recounting Rodriguez's friendship with a boy named Osledy and their shared mango tree, which became a sanctuary of joy before political upheaval forced his family to flee. The note offers meaningful historical and emotional context that deepens the reading experience and invites discussion. Ideal for visual literacy exercises and cross-curricular learning, *The Mango Tree/La mata de mango* lends itself to classroom conversations about immigration, symbolism, childhood resilience, and Latin American cultural landscapes. Its bilingual title enhances its accessibility and resonance for Spanish-speaking and immigrant communities. (Grades Preschool-3)

**[Ultraviolet](#)** written by Aida Salazar. Scholastic Press, 2024. ISBN: 978-1338775655

*Ultraviolet*, a novel in verse by Aida Salazar, is a heartfelt and candid coming-of-age story that explores puberty, first love, and emotional growth through the eyes of Elio Solis, a Mexican American eighth grader. Elio's world is shifting, his body is changing, friendships are evolving, and his feelings for Camelia, his first girlfriend, are lighting up his inner world in ways he has never experienced. As he begins to see his emotions in vivid colors, each hue a reflection of joy, confusion, desire, or heartbreak—Elio learns to navigate the overwhelming emotional palette of adolescence.

Salazar gives voice to a perspective rarely seen in middle-grade literature: the emotional interiority of a Latino boy as he grapples with societal expectations of masculinity, evolving relationships, and the complexities of consent and communication. When a personal crisis and a broken heart push Elio toward a moment of reckoning, he begins to define for himself what it means to grow up with empathy, courage, and self-awareness.

Spanish language and cultural references are woven naturally throughout, reflecting Elio's bicultural identity and grounding the narrative in his lived experience. The use of verse offers a

lyrical, accessible format that mirrors Elio's sensitivity and artistic introspection.

*Ultraviolet* is a valuable classroom resource for conversations about emotional literacy, gender roles, puberty, and healthy relationships. Elio's colorful perception of his feelings offers a creative and relatable entry point for readers exploring their own identities. (Grades 5-10)

***Vincent Ventura and the Curse of the Donkey Lady/Vincent Ventura y la maldición de la mujer burro*** written and illustrated by Xavier Garza and translated by Alaide Ventura Medina. Piñata Books (Arte Público Press), 2024. ISBN: 978-1558859968

This fast-paced, bilingual scary story draws from Latin American legend and Nahua cosmovision, bringing a fresh, cultural twist to the spooky genre. When Vincent encounters the mysterious Donkey Lady, he's pulled into a suspenseful and engaging tale that blends chills with deeper roots in cultural storytelling. Perfect for students who love scary books, this one stands out for its flow, energy, and cultural roots. A fun and meaningful addition to any classroom or library collection. (Grades 3-7)