

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.

Award winners will be honored at a ceremony October 5, 2012 during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

2012 Américas Award Winners

Hurricane Dancers: The First Caribbean Pirate Shipwreck by Margarita Engle. Henry Holt and Company. 160 pages. ISBN 978-0805092400.

Based on real historical events, this novel in verse introduces readers to the early years of Spanish colonization in the Caribbean through the story of Quebrado, a boy of Taíno and Spanish heritage. Kidnapped as a child from his island village (present-day Cuba), Quebrado has spent most of his life aboard the pirate ship of Bernardino de Talavera—a former Spanish landowner turned pirate after fleeing punishment for mistreating his Taíno laborers. On the ship, Quebrado is forced to serve as a translator between the Taíno language of his mother and the Spanish of his father. His name—Quebrado, meaning "broken"—reflects how others see him: part islander, part outsider, and caught between two worlds. When a hurricane destroys the ship, Quebrado survives alongside Talavera and another pirate. All three wash ashore in Cuba, where they are taken in by an Indigenous community. For the first time, Quebrado begins to experience life among people who treat him with care and respect. Now, as the one who understands both cultures, he must decide the fate of the men who once held him captive. The novel explores themes of identity, freedom, and justice, offering young readers an accessible and thought-provoking look at the human costs of conquest. Margarita Engle, a Cuban American author and former national Young People's Poet Laureate, is known for her award-winning historical novels in verse that center Latin American and Caribbean histories often left out of mainstream narratives. (Grades 6–9)

Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People by Monica Brown; Illustrated by Julie Paschkis. Henry Holt and Company. 32 pages. 978-0805091984

This bilingual picture book biography introduces children in early elementary grades to the life and legacy of Pablo Neruda, one of the world's most celebrated poets. From his childhood in Chile as Neftalí, a boy enchanted by words and nature, to his teenage years when he began publishing poetry under the name Pablo Neruda, the story highlights his deep love for people and the everyday world around him. Brown's lyrical text, paired with Paschkis' vibrant and colorful illustrations, celebrates language and culture while emphasizing Neruda's commitment to social justice and human connection. The bilingual format invites readers to experience the poetry and story in both English and Spanish, making it an excellent resource for diverse classrooms and families. This book honors Neruda's enduring influence and the power of poetry to inspire empathy and understanding. Monica Brown is an award-winning author known for her children's biographies that highlight Latin American and Latinx figures, blending accessible storytelling with cultural richness. (Grades K–3)

2012 Américas Award Honorable Mention

Under the Mesquite by Guadalupe Garcia McCall. Lee and Low Books, Inc. 224 pages. ISBN 978-1-60060-429-4 9 (hc)

Told in free verse, this coming-of-age novel follows Lupita, the oldest of eight siblings in a close-knit Mexican American family, as she begins high school and confronts her mother's cancer diagnosis. Set in a Texas border town, the story spans Lupita's four years of high school, capturing her growing love for the performing arts—something she later calls her “life raft”—and her struggle to balance her Mexican and American identities. When her mother's illness returns during Lupita's junior year, she is forced to take on more responsibility at home, while still trying to hold on to her dreams. The mesquite tree in the yard becomes a recurring symbol—both real and metaphorical—for strength, resilience, and the search for nourishment in difficult times. While not strictly autobiographical, the novel draws from McCall's own experiences, lending the narrative an emotional honesty and cultural specificity that feel deeply lived. A glossary of Spanish words and cultural references is included, making this verse novel an accessible and powerful resource for readers navigating themes of identity, loss, and creative expression. Guadalupe García McCall is an award-winning author and poet whose work reflects her experience growing up along the U.S.–Mexico border and centers bicultural, bilingual perspectives in young adult literature. (Grades 7–10)

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).

Based on the life of co-author María Virginia Farinango, this novel tells the story of a young Kichwa girl in 1980s Ecuador who is taken from her rural village at the age of seven to work as a domestic servant in the home of a well-off mestizo family. Promised wages and visits home, Virginia instead spends eight years in a household where she is physically abused, isolated from her family, and denied access to her culture and education. As she grows up in a space that denies her identity—Indigenous by birth, but forced to live according to mestizo expectations—Virginia struggles to understand who she is and who she wants to become. At age fifteen, she reconnects with her older sister and returns to her home village, only to realize that her dreams and ambitions have outgrown what her community can offer. Through her growing awareness and fierce determination, she begins to reclaim her autonomy and imagine a life beyond what others have prescribed for her.

María Virginia Farinango is a Kichwa author and activist whose life inspired this story. Laura Resau is an author known for cross-cultural narratives, often developed in collaboration with communities whose stories she helps bring to light. An extensive glossary and pronunciation guide are included, offering readers important cultural and linguistic context. (Grades 8–12)

2012 Américas Commended Title

Sylva and Aki by Winifred Conkling. Tricycle Press. 151 pages. ISBN 978-1-58246-337-7 (hc); 978-1-58246-397-1 (lib.bdg.).

Sylvia Mendez wanted to be like the other kids in her Southern California neighborhood—to attend her local elementary school, work hard, and go on to college. Aki Munemitsu, too, was simply a girl who loved her family, her school, and life on her parents' asparagus farm. The two girls never imagined they would come to share a part of history—until the events of World War II brought their lives together. In 1942, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Aki and her Japanese American family were forcibly removed from their home and sent to an internment camp in the Arizona desert. During their absence, the Mendez family leased their farm. When Sylvia and her brothers tried to enroll at the neighborhood school Aki once attended, they were turned away and sent instead to a segregated “Mexican” school. This injustice led to *Mendez v. Westminster*, the 1947 court case that ended school segregation in California and laid the foundation for the national ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Told in alternating chapters from Sylvia and Aki's perspectives, *Sylvia & Aki* brings to life two true

stories of courage and resilience. Based on extensive interviews and historical research, the novel explores themes of racism, civil rights, friendship, and identity, offering middle grade readers an accessible entry point into complex histories. Back matter includes historical notes, family photos, and background essays on Japanese internment and school desegregation that support classroom use. (Grades 4–7)