



Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)
2016 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 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, commended titles and honorable mention 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 September 16, 2016 during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

2016 Américas Award Winners

Echo written by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Scholastic Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0439874021

Echo, by Pam Muñoz Ryan, gives teachers a magic key that will open the door to their students' hearts as they read three interwoven stories. They will fall in love with Friedrich, Ivy, and Mike, and the ingenious and tender ways these three multicultural, international young adults survive the horrors of early 20th century war, cruelty, and discrimination. The daunting challenges that our young protagonists experienced (rescuing a father, protecting a brother, holding a family together) are nicely pulled together by the invisible thread of destiny. Students will experience these moments alongside the characters, learning in the process how music and self-expression bring extraordinary powers to heal and inspire. Muñoz Ryan's message in *Echo* sings right off the pages and into your students' imaginations. It is carefully crafted to delight our young readers. Middle school teachers will find endless ways to discuss and write about this story, and to lead students to deep reflection and understanding of the power of the human spirit to prevail. (Grade 5-8)

Out of Darkness written by Ashley Hope-Pérez. Carolrhoda Lab, 2015. ISBN: 978-1467742023

Once in a great while, a book is written that destroys the reader while at the same time creating a sense of hope, a way out of the darkness. Ashley Hope Pérez has written just such a book. Her young adult historical novel *Out of Darkness* begins with a real event: the explosion of the New London School in East Texas in 1937. Using this tragedy as a centerpiece, a metaphor, a

catalyst, Pérez weaves the fictional stories of two families brought together by forbidden love. Wash Fuller is an educated African American boy successfully navigating the complicated racial divisions of his community. Naomi Smith is a Mexican American girl, terrorized by the sexual advances of her white stepfather, yet compelled to live with him to protect her young twin siblings. This is not a story with a fairy tale ending, but there are moments of great beauty and pure joy as Wash befriends the twins and gradually falls in love with their big sister – all while they are surrounded by the gentle beauty of the East Texas woods. Written for the oldest of teens, *Out of Darkness* is as violent and cruel as the racially divided world it portrays, yet it also manages to guide readers onto a path out of the unimaginable: speaking truth to lies and writing the stories of those who do not survive. Grades10+

2016 Américas Award Honorable Mentions

Growing Up Pedro: How the Martinez Brothers Made it from the Dominican Republic All the Way to the Major Leagues written and illustrated by Matt Tavares. Candlewick Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0763668242

While there have been many Dominican baseball players in the major leagues, none have kindled the deep enthusiasm and allegiance in so many fans as pitcher Pedro Martinez. In his book, *Growing Up Pedro: How the Martinez Brothers Made It from the Dominican Republic All the Way to the Major Leagues*, Matt Tavares celebrates this larger-than-life baseball hero with meticulous paintings and simple words. Through realistic, almost cinematic paintings that reveal both the panoramic suspense and movement of the game, as well as the intensity as Martinez winds-up to pitch, Tavares takes us into the world of the Martinez brothers as they make their way from a poor Dominican village into the world of the US Major Leagues. Without his brother Ramón, Tavares lead us to believe, there would be no Pedro. The relationship between the two brothers is the centerpiece of the book: whether throwing rocks at **mangos** as boys or pitching against each other in a historic game in 1996, the two brothers maintain their deep connection and give each other the strength they need to continue through injury and involuntary trades. Any true baseball fan will be thrilled at the page of Martinez's stats in the back of the book, and aspiring pitchers will thrill at the visual interpretation of three of his classic pitches. From a small boy watching his big brother play in their village to the star pitcher that led the Red Sox to win the World Series in 2004, Tavares gives us a beautiful portrait of one of baseball's most prized and beloved players. The book is also available in Spanish. (Grades 2-4)

Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Harry N. Abrams, 2015. ISBN: 978-1419716478

Author and illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh's latest work presents an extraordinary blend of biography, art, and politics focusing on the life of José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1915), or Don Lupe, as he was known at the time. Posada is most famous for his socially-conscious depictions of calaveras, the often comic skeletons that are well-associated with Mexico's Day of the Dead holiday celebration. This non-fiction picture book will appeal to a wide range of readers, with its engaging hand-drawn, digitally collaged depictions of Don Lupe, first as a child with a natural talent in drawing, and then throughout his adult life as an artist mastering the craft of lithography. Throughout, we see as Done Lupe continuously pursues his artistic passion while offering social commentary about the world around him. The full-page spreads inspired by Don Lupe's work actively probe the reader to consider deeper meaning behind his artwork, such as critiques about social class, quickly changing technology, and violence during the Mexican

Revolution. This superb work is easily adapted to a variety of classroom settings spanning subject areas such as history, art, and cultural studies. Additionally, Tonatiuh includes a detailed author's note, glossary of terms, and bibliography for readers interested in diving further into Posada's work. (Grades 3-6)

2015 Américas Award Commended Titles

A Handful of Stars written by Cynthia Lord. Scholastic Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0545700276

Blueberries are the pride of the Maine town in which this novel takes place, with an annual festival dedicated to celebrating them in every culinary and aesthetic way possible. Yet the Latino workers who harvest the beloved crop are largely rendered invisible here. A serendipitous friendship develops between Hannah, a goal-oriented adolescent of French descent and Salma, an artistic Latina migrant worker who will head back south with her family at the end of the summer. Colorful dialogue and sympathetic characters allow the reader to connect with not only these two girls but their dreams. Hannah, who longs to know her deceased mother and hear her voice, is saving money to get an operation for her blind dog, Lucky, so that he can see again. Salma longs to stay in one place for a whole year, have a dog, and one day attend college. Soon, they join together in a quest to help Lucky. Hannah wrestles with the unspoken expectations held for the migrant workers whose labor ensures the availability of the town's symbolic fruit, while Salma teaches her the power of painting outside the lines. This is an engaging story about friendship that leads to adventure in new territory. (Grades 3-7)

Dream Things True: A Novel written by Marie Marquardt. St. Martin's Griffin, 2015. ISBN: 978-1250070456

This engaging YA read tells of the unlikely romance between Alma, a bright and academically talented undocumented Mexican teenager, and Evan, the popular, soccer-playing wealthy nephew of a senator. This book does more than explore the important topic of immigration and the harsh laws that many states have recently passed – it highlights how, even when people fall in love, it is just the beginning in understanding one another and overcoming barriers. Filled with well-rounded main and secondary characters, this book does not present easy answers and a simplified ending, showing just how complex the immigration system is. *Dream Things True* is a satisfying and rich debut novel about love and the importance of following dreams. (Grades 9+)

Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music written by Margarita Engle and illustrated by Rafael López. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, 2015. ISBN: 978-0544102293

Engle and López weave word, color, and form to create a story that sambas and cha-chas and cumbias, blending rhythmic prose with lyric illustration to invite young readers to a dance of discovery. Students are swept away by a Chinese-African-Cuban girl, dauntless in her dream to be a drummer, and to simultaneously open the world of drumming to other Cubanas. What a wonderful opportunity to have a young girl demonstrate her courage and overcome a stereotype that had prevailed against girl drummers. The vivid colors and compelling prose invite teachers to encourage students to explore their dreams, to be courageous and to love books that inspire. (Grades 1-4)

Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir written by Margarita Engle and illustrated by Edel Rodriguez. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2015. ISBN: 978-1481435222

In Margarita Engle's latest offering, readers will be deeply stirred and swiftly transported to the author's childhood experiences of growing up in a bicultural Cuban and American family during the Cold War era. Engle begins her accessible memoir with a captivating portrayal of early family trips to her mother's beloved homeland, trips that clearly left a deep impression on the author. Engle's aptly constructed metaphor of a winged experience explores the challenging balance of living between two worlds. Her experience is further complicated by the looming backdrop of U.S. and Cuban relations in which critical events such as the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis bring the island nation painfully into the national spotlight. Yet Engle deftly weaves hope throughout the work, as she describes building a refuge consisting of the natural world, reading and libraries, and artistic expression, all of which are capable of lifting her away from gloom and providing consolation. *Enchanted Air* presents a rich assortment of classroom applications, as it would easily fit into a language arts or writing curriculum while also proving to be an enlightening historical read for the social sciences. Furthermore, this poetic novel lends itself to conversation surrounding timely topics of immigration, statelessness, and the role that our communities can play in welcoming those fleeing conflict in their homelands. Verses from Hispanic poets Antonio Machado and José Martí bookend the memoir, along with a timeline spanning from 1945 to 2014 and author's note, which all offer further contextualization for learning and understanding. (Grades 5-8)

Finding the Music / En pos de la música written by Jennifer Torres and illustrated by Renato Alarcão. Lee & Low Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-0892392919

Filled with appealing, colorful illustrations, *Finding the Music* is a beautiful story of how Reyna makes discoveries about her grandfather's life while she hunts for the person who can best repair his old *vihuela*, the five-string high-pitched guitar used in mariachi bands. As she goes through the town, each shopkeeper tells her a story and offers her a memento from her *abuelo*. By the end of her journey, as she returns to the family restaurant, Cielito Lindo, Reyna reconnects with her Mexican history and appreciates her community, her family, and mariachi music anew. Written in both English and Spanish, this is an excellent book to use as an introduction to mariachi music and its influence in the American Southwest. (Grades 2-4)

Island Treasures written by Alma Flor Ada and illustrated by Antonio Martorell and Edel Rodriguez. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2015. ISBN: 978-1481429009

This gem of a book includes Ada's family stories of growing up in Cuba, illustrated with a wide variety of family pictures. Each story is distinctive for its beautiful writing and its lessons on topics such as respect for others and the goodness of humanity. One such story (originally from *Where the Flame Trees Bloom*) focuses on her great-grandmother Mina, who was illiterate but who "remembered the birth date and the exact age of seven children, thirty-four grandchildren, seventy-five great-grandchildren, and a few great-great grandchildren." She "knew how to add and subtract, how to accept and to give and to share so that the balance was always one of love." In similar moving fashion, the collection of stories from *Days at the La Quinta Simoni* begins with a colorful tale of all the street vendors who would call out their wares in the morning. Beyond being useful to learn about Cuba and its people, *Island Treasures* would be perfect for elementary read-alouds to discuss family relationships, the importance of learning from one's elders, and the need to look beyond appearances. This book includes Ada's previous collections *Where the Flame Trees Bloom* and *Under the Royal Palms*, but with the addition of

Days at La Quinta Simoni. Altogether it is a heartwarming, all-encompassing collection of “true tales.” While its main audience is elementary, this book is so well written that any adult would appreciate it as well. (Grades 3-7)

Maya's Blanket / La manta de Maya written by Monica Brown and illustrated by David Diaz. Lee & Low Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-0892392926

At a time when repurposing material objects is necessary to save our planet, Monica Brown and David Diaz have given us a bilingual, Latino retelling of the old Yiddish folktale, “I Had a Little Overcoat.” Using rich, color-saturated illustrations and a bilingual, rhythmic text that begs to be read aloud, this talented team has given us a simple, yet profound story for our youngest readers. Maya has a blanket hand-stitched by her grandmother. As the years go by the blanket gets transformed “using Maya’s own two hands” into smaller and smaller precious items until, in its last iteration as a book mark, it is lost forever. Maya, after frantic searching and careful thought, creates from her beloved magical object a story that will last long enough for her to read to her own daughter—the tale of which is depicted lovingly on the last two-page spread. Although Diaz’s touches of swirling rich greens and purples suggests a magical element, neither the illustrations nor the text lead the reader to believe that the magic Maya experiences is anything less than the love and protection of family. (Grades 1-3).

My Tata's Remedies / Los remedios de mi tata written by Roni Capin Rivera-Ashford and illustrated by Antonio Castro L. Cinco Puntos Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1935955894

In this beautifully constructed book, the topic of traditional natural medicine takes center stage as a young boy, Aaron, spends the weekend at his grandparents’ house, where he learns many remedies from his healer grandfather, Tata Gus. With great sensitivity, author Roni Capin Rivera-Ashford portrays a loving intergenerational relationship between Tata Gus and Aaron, one in which wisdom and knowledge are patiently passed down from grandfather to grandson. Readers join the pair for a day of healing in which several members of Aaron’s extended Latino family and community come knocking at Tata and Nana’s door in search of a remedy to cure a sudden ailment. Each community member is received attentively and given generous care, and may even enjoy a special treat of empanadas prepared by Aaron’s grandmother, Nana. With stunningly realistic artwork done by renowned Mexican artist Antonio L. Castro, *My Tata’s Remedies* offers an absorbing glimpse into a busy and productive day at Tata and Nana’s house. The book lends itself to classroom discussion of traditional medicine, family traditions, and the importance of community. A detailed glossary of medicinal herbs and remedies provides readers with the opportunity to delve more deeply into learning more about the healing properties of each item mentioned in the book. (Grades 2-4)

Salsa: Un poema para cocinar / A Cooking Poem written by Jorge Argueta, illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh, and translated by Elisa Amado. Groundwood Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-1554984428

Argueta and Tonatiuh concoct a recipe-in-a-poem featuring the Nahua, Aztec and Maya civilizations and language. As a brother and sister prepare salsa, they invite the whole family to follow along and help along the way – and readers become part of the journey. The process of roasting, grinding, and chopping comes to an end when the shells and seeds are composted and mother earth’s gifts are returned full cycle. They use a molcajete (the traditional Mexican version of a mortar, used for grinding various food products) to mix all ingredients to achieve the

right consistency of flavors into a unique sauce that conquers the most delicate palates. With this beautiful book, teachers can enchant student by beginning basic instruction in the five senses, in the gifts of our ancestral cultures, and the joys of cooking and eating with family. Alongside classroom instruction, parents may well enjoy reading this book to the students at home and sharing their own recipes with each other. And you may want to have plenty of salsa on hand! Moreover, Amado has translated the Spanish into lyrical, dancing English for this bilingual book, making it equally accessible to Spanish and English speakers. (Grades 1-3)

The Jumbies written by Tracey Baptiste. Algonquin Young Readers, 2015. ISBN: 978-1616204143

This colorful and gripping tale brings to life the Caribbean lore of the jumbies, shapeshifting creatures who were said to lurk in the forest and act with malice. Main character Corinne is a generous girl with a knack for gathering the sweetest oranges to sell in the market. With her comforting father always looking out for her, Corinne wonders about the person her mother, now gone, was. Friendships born of youthful curiosity create bonds of loyalty for the adventures that will ensue. A mysterious woman of unknown origins shows up around town--and even too close to home. Corinne must now face parts of the past while making brave decisions for the future. This story touches all of our senses and, like the varieties of eats described in it, is a blend of sweet and savory. Powerful imagery and intriguing action beg the reader to get lost in another world where the line between reality and otherworldly, past and present, blurs. In this in-between space, we are left questioning: Whom does the island belong to? What are the obligations of cohabitants to one another? (Grades 4-8)

The Lightning Queen written by Laura Resau. Scholastic Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0545800846

Laura Resau offers a beautifully rendered tale that centers on an improbable childhood friendship forged between a sensitive, animal-loving Mixteco boy, Teo, and Esma, a spirited and bold Romani girl. Set in the Oaxacan mountains on the Hill of Dust in the 1950s, these two members of seemingly disparate cultures form a bond that pulls them both through personal strife and leads them on the path to fulfilling their own dreams. Told through a framing device in which Teo's modern-day grandson, Mateo, visits him from the United States, Mateo learns of his grandfather's riveting personal story and the influential friendship that led him to become a natural healer in his community. Resau's writing eloquently depicts both worlds, and sensitive regard is shown for the often-marginalized Romani and Mixteco cultures and their respective languages and traditions. There is ample potential for classroom use, whether it may be in a language arts or social sciences classroom, and readers will find compassion and inspiration in Teo and Esma's uplifting friendship. (Grades 4-7).

Two White Rabbits written by Jairo Buitrago and illustrated by Rafael Yockteng. Groundwood Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-1554987412

This picture book tells the story of a young girl who is migrating with her father, presumably through Central America or Mexico to the U.S., as she learns to count. Specifics of place and time are questions left to be answered; this story is an invitation to see the world through the girl's eyes, a place of certain truths and ponderings for which there is no response. Home is not a constant; she has her father and "her" clouds, which offer a vivid world of their own. The realities of border militarization and poverty exist alongside the child's imagination, keen observation, and an instinct to learn and share. Along the way, she meets and plays with a boy while her father works. The boy gives her two white rabbits that join her and her father for part of

the journey. Rich and detailed illustrations reveal joys and anxieties of a child's life lived in motion and the father who cares for her along the way. A sense of wonder and wishfulness permeate the pages of this achingly relevant story. (Grades K-2)