



Américas Award Books: Connections with Latin America

A Handful of Stars, Cynthia Lord.

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. 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. (Grades 3-7) **2016 Commended Title.**

A is for Americas, Cynthia Chin-Lee and Terri de la Peña. Illustrated by Enrique O. Sánchez.

In 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)

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.**



Américas Book Award
Connections with Latin America

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. **1994 Commended Title.**

Carnaval, George Ancona.

Ancona's exquisite color photographs document the preparations leading up the annual five-day festival in Olinda, Brazil, as well as details related to specific carnival events. In an explanatory note, the author indicates that he specifically chose to focus on this small town in northeastern Brazil because everyone in the town participates in the celebration of folklore, music, and cultural traditions that demonstrate Brazil's rich blend of African, European, and Native peoples. (Grades 2-6) **1999 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. (Grades K-4) **1998 Honorable Mention.**

Celebrate in Central America, Joe Viesti and Diane Hall, Photographs by Joe Viesti.

Throughout Central America, holiday festivities offer a rich blend of indigenous and European traditions. Stunning color photographs accompanied by a brief text provide details about the origins of eight holidays and how each one is celebrated in a specific Central American town. Includes Día de los Muertos (Sacatepéquez, Guatemala); Baile de la Conquista (Chichicastenango, Guatemala); Semana Santa (Sonsonate, El Salvador); San José Fair (Copán Ruinas, Honduras); Virgin of Masaya Celebration (Masaya, Nicaragua); Columbus Day/Día de la Raza (Puerto Limón, Costa Rica) and two distinctive ways of celebrating Carnival (San Pedro, Belize, and Las Tablas, Panama). (Grades 3-5) **1997 Commended Title.**

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. (Grades K-3) **1997 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,



Américas Book Award
Connections with Latin America

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. (Grades K-3) **1996 Honorable Mention.**

Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music, Margarita Engle, Illustrated by Rafael López.

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) **2016 Commended Title.**

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 founds 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) **2013 Commended Title.**

Echo, Pam Muñoz Ryan.

Echo 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. (Grades 5-8) **2016 Américas Award Winner.**

Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir, Margarita Engle. Illustrated by Edel Rodriguez.

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



Américas Book Award
Connections with Latin America

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. (Grades 5-8) **2016 Commended Title.**

Fiesta Babies, Carmen Tafolla, Illustrated by Amy Córdova.

Follow the fiesta babies through this bilingual book as they enjoy Mexican-American customs and culture. Perfect for very young readers, *Fiesta Babies* is light on text and heavy on vibrant illustrations. A glossary is provided at the end to explain the Spanish terms that are used in the mainly English text. (Grades K-2) **2011 Commended Title.**

Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras, Duncan Tonatiuh.

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). 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 Posada, 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 Posada continuously pursues his artistic passion while offering social commentary about the world around him. 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) **2016 Honorable Mention.**

Growing Up Pedro: How the Martinez Brothers Made it from the Dominican Republic All the Way to the Major Leagues, Matt Tavares.

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 this book, Matt Tavares celebrates this larger-than-life baseball hero with meticulous paintings and simple words. 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, 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. Also available in Spanish. (Grades 2-4) **2016 Honorable Mention.**



Américas Book Award
Connections with Latin America

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. **2002 Commended Title.**

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) **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. (Grades K-2) **1998 Commended Title.**

Out of Darkness, Ashley Hope-Pérez.

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 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



Américas Book Award
Connections with Latin America

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 unimagined. (Grades 9-12) **2016 Américas 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. **2012 Commended Title.**

Two White Rabbits, Jairo Buitrago, Illustrated by Rafael Yockteng.

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 wistfulness permeate the pages of this achingly relevant story. (Grades K-2) **2016 Commended Title.**

Vejigante Masquerader, Lulu Delacre.

Ramon longs to participate in Carnival. He works hard to make a costume and buy a mask, so he can join in the pranks with all the other masqueraders. Inspired by Carnival in Ponce, Puerto Rico where the author grew up, this bilingual story overflows with plentiful detail, and offers marvelous possibilities for sharing both language and culture, including an introductory description, glossary of chants, vocabulary, and instructions on mask making. The closeness of



Américas Book Award
Connections with Latin America

family and community threads throughout; the joy and color of Carnival abound. Searching for the twenty-eight hidden lizards (one for each day of February) draws the reader even more deeply into the illustrations. (Grades K-5) **1993 Américas Award Winner.**

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. (Grades 9-12) **2009 Commended Title.**