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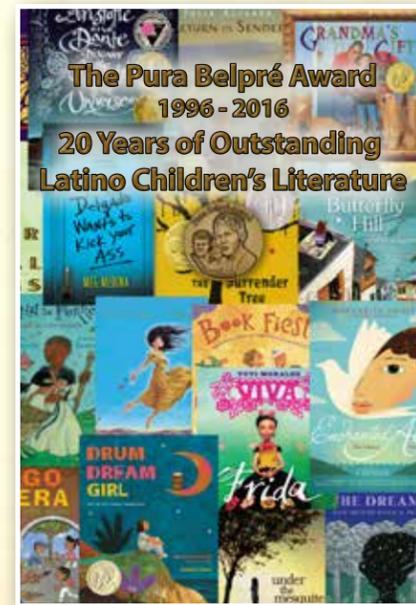
The Pura Belpré Award

1996–2016

20 Years of Outstanding Latino Children's Literature

“Through the power of a story and the beauty of language, the child escapes to a world of his own. He leaves the room richer than when he entered.”

—Pura Belpré, *The Stories I Read to the Children*



In honor of the 20th anniversary of the **Pura Belpré Award**, **Rosen Publishing** announces the publication of a new anthology of essays written by the past and present recipients of the award, detailing its significance for each winner. Featuring an introduction by Oralia Garza de Cortés and Sandra Ríos Balderrama, cofounders of the award, this collection is a beautiful, fitting tribute to the history of Latino children's literature and the illustrious award that honors it.

From the 2016 winners...

2016 Narrative Medal Winner



Margarita Engle
Enchanted Air

I hope *Enchanted Air* will show how desperately we need mutual understanding and peace in this our era when—just as during the Cold War—certain groups are singled out by politicians and the media for hatred, fear, and distrust. I feel certain that this profoundly significant recognition by the Pura Belpré committee will help my book reach young readers who are the only possible peacemakers of the future.



I was astonished and thrilled to learn that *Enchanted Air* will receive the 2016 Pura Belpré Medal at the 20th Anniversary Celebration! This book is a memoir so personal that writing it was both painful and medicinal. I can't change history, but the Pura Belpré Award can change the way my life story is perceived. It can also dramatically increase the number of young readers who will find *Enchanted Air* in their libraries and schools. All I did is share memories and emotions, but the award is confirmation that memories and emotions matter.

All our life stories are important. Only by learning about each other can we develop empathy, which is the first step toward peace. Imagine how wonderful it will be if teachers are the Pura Belpré Award and as a result, and decide to use it to help students write about their own lives! Imagine how wonderful it will be if some of those students go on to become writers, educators, and librarians, carrying the message that life stories matter for into the future.

More than any of my other books, *Enchanted Air* speaks directly about the immigration experience, which has so many universal aspects, even in the second generation. Of course, Latino authors don't just write for Latino readers. We write for all young people. I hope my year tale is a family limited by history will speak to anyone who has ever felt like an outsider for any reason.

“I can’t change history, but the Pura Belpré Award can change the way my life story is perceived. It can also dramatically increase the number of young readers who will find *Enchanted Air* in their libraries and schools. All I did is share memories and emotions, but the award is confirmation that memories and emotions matter.”

—Margarita Engle, author of *Enchanted Air*,
2016 Narrative Medal Winner

2016 Illustration Medal Winner



Rafael López
Drum Dream Girl

I'm convinced that if Pura met Milla Castro Zaldarriaga, the heroine of *Drum Dream Girl*, they would have been good friends. These two determined women shared courage and imagination, daring to change beliefs and minds. Milla's passion and perseverance broke Cuban traditional taboo against female drummers, helping the next generation impact the future. Pura's originality and advocacy for the Spanish-speaking community through bilingual story hours and inventive programming transformed the 15th Street Branch Library into a New York center of culture. Agents of change, they broke barriers and challenged the status quo.

Surely planets aligned when I was given the chance to work with Margarita Engle, who crafts magnetic stories about independent thinkers. Her rhythmic, poetic style gave me the freedom to invent, evoking anecdotal ideas to channel the spirit of the *Drum Dream Girl* text.



I consider myself the lucky son of a dreamer. Despite resistance and challenge, my mother worked several jobs in order to secretly attend university and pursue her passion. She was in the first generation of female architects in Mexico City. I grew up making music, reading books about distant locations, dancing, and dreaming.

I'm deeply grateful to REFORMA. Thank you, Pura, for magnifying our diverse voices and daring us to dream.

“For twenty years, a medal that bears her name has given voice to Latino artists and writers by honoring the aspirations of children to see themselves in the pages of books. Words and pictures are not enough to express what it means to me to win the Pura Belpré Illustration Award on this anniversary year. It’s gratitude that lifts me up, encourages me to keep taking chances, and affirms my desire to make a difference with my work.”

—Rafael Lopez, *Drum Dream Girl*,
2016 Illustration Medal Winner

In the media...

“The upcoming year promises to be extra special, with the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the award. [...] The celebration will feature [...] sales of the new commemorative book “The Pura Belpré Award: Twenty Years of Outstanding Latino Children’s Literature.” [...] The book is a labor of love for Teresa Mlawer, director of educational partnerships with Rosen Publishers, which is publishing the book...”

—ilovelibraries.org

“The Pura Belpré Award: 20 Years of Outstanding Latino Children’s Literature (Rosen Publishing), edited by Teresa Mlawer and Nathalie Beullens-Maoui, will feature book images and synopses, along with essays by the winners and honorees on what the award has meant to them.”

- American Libraries Magazine

“We thought of it as a reference tool, something that will be in school libraries, public libraries, and the classroom and that teachers and librarians can share with all their students, Latino and non-Latino students, but also that the Latino students would feel proud to see so much talent reflected in one book.”

—Teresa Mawler for American Libraries Magazine

2008 Illustration Medal Winner



Yuyi Morales
Los Gatos Black on Halloween

From the very beginning I loved this bilingual Halloween story Marisa Montes created. There was such an irresistible playfulness not only to the story, but also to the way English and Spanish mingled to form spooky rich scenes.

dictator Porfirio Díaz rises from his tomb. The ghost of *La Planchada*, the nurse with the well-ironed uniform who visits many Mexican hospitals, also makes her way to the monstrous ball. The dancing floor is taken by the ghost of the poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, by an Olmec head, by Cantinflás, Diego Rivera, Tin Tan, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, an Aztec goddess called Cihuateotl, and even my aunts whom I always suspected to be witches.

In the pages of the book, my son lets me button his coat as we both come out of our coffins to join this Halloween monster’s parade.



In my first Halloween in the USA, I pushed my son’s stroller through the suburban neighborhood where I lived with my husband’s family. I gasped at the dark house’s decorations and winced at the bloody toy chainsaws laying on the lawns. When I looked up at the trees, I found all kinds of hanging dead: ghosts, witches, evil-looking skeletons, and even figures and artifacts taken from horror movies. Halloween was meant to scare! I knew about being scared. During my childhood I had grown through the stories my aunts and uncles told about their encounters with anything from the weeping *Llorona* to little people called *chanques*, who usually got children lost.

When I accepted the offer to illustrate Marisa’s story I wondered if our publishers understood what they had gotten into when they published my book. I was ready to have a Halloween of my own.

I am a fan of research, and I am a fan of stories of scary creatures that would haunt this book to childhood in Mexico. My drawing table was in all kinds of dead people and other monsters book, you will find them: witches riding their skateboards and bicycle riders. The skeleton of *América*, dances in a procession. *La Llorona*, the apparition. A mummy from Peru escapes his wolf man carries his school report card in his

2002 Narrative Medal Winner



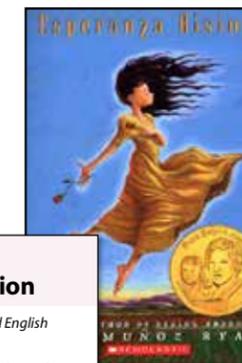
Pam Muñoz Ryan
Esperanza Rising

Esperanza Rising parallels my grandmother’s immigration story from Aguascalientes, Mexico, to the segregated farm labor camps in California. It is my family’s story—a riches-to-rags story, which is a common thread in some immigrants’ stories, no matter their country of birth.

When *Esperanza Rising* won the Pura Belpré Medal in 2002, the award was bestowed every other year, so I received the news eighteen months after publication. It was an unexpected surprise and validation for me, my publisher, and my readers.

All children deserve to have stories with which they can identify or escape, either compelling stories they can “fall into” or a story that reflects their own culture or circumstance. In a perfect world, your ethnicity should not hold you back. It should thrust you forward, giving you a rich well of stories, language, and history from which you can draw and reap. But we do not live in that world. Prejudices, misconceptions, and stereotypes still exist, however veiled. We cannot simply look into another person’s eyes and understand him or her. We must look into other people’s stories before we can accept differences or celebrate

Today, *Esperanza Rising* has been in print for sixteen years. Many people have asked whether I had trouble getting the story published because it was about diverse characters. I was fortunate to have an editor, Tracy Mack, and a publisher, Scholastic, who embraced the story from the onset and who were consistently collaborative and enthusiastic. The publication was followed by the Pura Belpré Medal, which brought *Esperanza Rising* to the attention of people who might not have known about or read the book. And when a book is brought to the attention of librarians, educators, and booksellers, it can’t help but affect readership. That was how this distinguished award significantly affected my authorship: It has helped sustain the life of the book in print. For that, I am deeply grateful.



1998 Honor Books for Narrative



Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/ Jitomates Riseños y otros poemas de primavera
Francisco X. Alarcón (1954–2016)

This award for *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems*, my first book of bilingual poems for children made me laugh out so loud

I felt so proud, cheerful, and round as the laughing tomatoes in my book. I was so happy to share the spotlight with the winner of the narrative award,

my close friend, Victor Martínez, author of *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*, with whom I shared so many things in life, like exact same birthdays and then, these awards.

This award made possible four other books of poems celebrating the stations of the year. For that, I am forever thankful. *Muchas gracias.*

© Francisco X. Alarcón



Spirits of the High Mesa
Floyd Martínez (1941–2013)

A native of New Mexico, Floyd Martínez had a lifelong interest in fiction and wrote various short stories. *Spirits of the High Mesa* is his first published novel. As a Latino writer, his “storytelling” perspective is interesting and refreshing. His interest in writing originated from his family and heritage, and it was obvious in his reminiscences about his inspirations as a writer:

“I am the self-appointed legacy of those who came before me who were readers, storytellers, and surely good liars. Fiction is the art of blending how things are with how we would want them to be. Writing fiction requires the unleashing of the imagination to work its contained magic and yet sculpturing the product into an engrossing and believable story...And the ultimate pleasure is to produce a story that others will enjoy.”

1998 Honor Books for Illustration



Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English
Simón Silva

In 1998 I was the recipient of the Pura Belpré Honor Book Award for illustrating the book *Gathering the Sun*. This recognition meant for me the acknowledgement not just of the merits of my art, but of the dignity, pride, and honor of my people—Latino farmworkers in the United States. The book, written by Alma Flor Ada, continues to be in print eighteen years later, and every day I find a new child who tells me, “That is me on page...” Nothing could be more rewarding than to be embraced by a common identity with the readers!



The Golden Flower: A Taino Myth from Puerto Rico
Enrique O. Sánchez

I was honored with the Pura Belpré Honor Award for illustrating *The Golden Flower: A Taino Myth from Puerto Rico*. It is a story of how water came to the world and how the island of Puerto Rico was created. On receiving the award in 1998, I talked about how much I enjoyed working on the book, and that Pura Belpré would have appreciated this book, since she wrote and collected many folktales from Puerto Rico and published them as children’s books. Pura was also a puppeteer, and my characters in the book look puppet-like with angular bodies and painted faces.



In My Family/ En mi familia
Carmen Lomas Garza

Dancing, hitting a piñata, eating sweet turnovers, and feeding horned toads—these are more of my childhood memories in South Texas that are in my paintings in my second children’s picture book, *In My Family/ En mi familia*. My paintings are a celebration of our Mexican-American culture and history. I have been an artist since the age of thirteen, and I hope that when Latinos see familiarity in my artwork they will feel pride in their own stories. Readers not familiar with the subject can get a better understanding of our every day lives and join in the celebration.