

Patam, Cortázar, Neruda, Rulfo, and Others: Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents

by Isabel Schon

From a fanciful ABC and a friendly soccer-playing dinosaur for the very young, to imaginative Spanish renditions of popular English-language titles, to excellent selections of acclaimed Latin American authors, these recently published books are sure to entice Spanish-speaking readers (and learners). At the same time, a disappointing Spanish translation of Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Year of Our Revolution: New and Selected Stories and Poems* shows what not to do when translating literary works into Spanish.

For the Young

Gisbert, Montse. *El abecedario fantástico de Patam, el elefante* (*The Fantastic ABC of Patam, the Elephant*). Valencia: Tàndem, 2006. 48 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 84-8131-524-9, \$16.95. Gr. K-2.

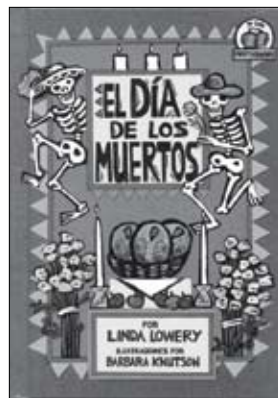
In this fanciful ABC, Patam, a charming, five-legged elephant, highlights each letter of the Spanish alphabet. Appealing double-page watercolor illustrations, in soft pastel shades with splashes of bright colors, and simple sentences focus on each letter (*Llena la BAÑERA de BOTONES; Da PERAS a los PECES*). Young Spanish learners will enjoy practicing their ABCs with a whimsical elephant.

Jaffe, Nina. *La flor de oro: Un mito taíno de Puerto Rico* (*The Golden Flower: A Taíno Myth from Puerto Rico*). Houston: Arte Público, 2006. 30 pp. Illus. by Enrique O. Sánchez. Trans. from English by Gabriela Baeza Ventura. ISBN 1-55885-463-0, \$14.95. Gr. K-3.

The simple retelling of the popular Taíno myth explaining the origin of the sea, the forest, and the beautiful island of Boriquén (Puerto Rico) is now available in this straightforward Spanish rendition. Sánchez's glowing, stylized full-color illustrations dramatically convey the pre-Columbian ambiance and mood, which "*así fue como, dicen los taínos, que entre el sol y el brillante mar azul nació su isla, su hogar—Boriquén*" ("as the Taíno say, between the sun and the sparkling blue sea, their island home—Boriquén—came to be").

Lowery, Linda. *El Día de los Muertos* (*Day of the Dead*). Series: Yo Solo Festividades. Minneapolis: Lerner, 2006. 48 pp. Illus. by Barbara Knutson. Trans. from English by translations.com. ISBN 0-8225-3122-4, \$25.26. Gr. 1-3.

Despite an awkward beginning in which people are described as preparing to *¡Celebran la muerte!* (celebrate death), followed by *¿Te parece extraño?* (Does it sound strange to you?), this simple, easy-to-read introduction to *El Día de los Muertos* (Day of



the Dead) does convey the spirit of this enduring holiday. It highlights important aspects of this Mexican celebration, such as "*Es una fiesta de afecto y amor en la que recordamos a aquellos que ya no están*" ("It is a warm and loving time to remember people who have died"); the circle of life and death; Mexican traditional foods, treats, and flowers; and other happy events that celebrate life. Knutson's festive color illustrations and the lively Spanish rendition make up for the inexplicable beginning.

Marshall, Pam. *De la idea al libro* (*From Idea to Book*). Series: De Principio a Fin. Minneapolis: Lerner, 2007. 24 pp. Illus. with photos. Trans. from English by translations.com. ISBN 0-8225-6495-5, \$18.60. Gr. K-2.

In a simple text with a color photograph on each facing page, this book describes how an author gets an idea for a book, proceeds to write it, sends it to a publisher, and illustrates it, followed by the technical processes at the publishing house. Young Spanish speakers will appreciate the lucid explanations, even though the photos show the production of an English-language book, *It's Not My Fault!* Unfortunately, the glossary lacks definite articles, a serious obstacle for young readers and Spanish-language learners.

McLaren, Thando. *Así es mi día* (*My Day My Way*). Barcelona: La Galera, 2006. 10 pp. Illus. by Olivia Villet. Trans. from English by Paulino Rodríguez. ISBN 84-246-2145-X. Gr. Preschool-2.

Through lively watercolor illustrations and well-placed overlays, readers/viewers lift the flaps to find out about the everyday lives of four children from four continents—Juan from Spain, Keiko from Japan, Alí from Morocco, and Bibi from Guyana. The book describes their houses, foods, schools, recreational activities, and bedtime rituals. A concluding poster describes further the geographical location, housing, food, and sports of these countries.



Mora, Pat. *Doña Flor: Un cuento de una mujer gigante con un gran corazón* (*Doña Flor: A Tall Tale about a Giant Woman with a Great Big Heart*). New York: Knopf, 2005. 32 pp. Illus. by Raul Colón. Trans. from English by Teresa Mlawer. ISBN 0-679-98002-4, \$17.99. Gr. K-3.

Set in a Latin American village where “*las plantas de maíz . . . crecían tan altas como los árboles*” (“corn plants grew as tall as trees”), this magical tall tale features Doña Flor, a giant lady with a big heart. Always ready to help her neighbors, she even makes delicious tortillas, which the families can also use for rafts. When a dangerous animal terrorizes the villagers, she is determined to find the culprit and to return peace to her village. Mlawer’s straightforward Spanish rendition and Colón’s whimsical scratchboard art maintain the uplifting tone of this satisfying tale.



Pawagi, Manjusha. *La niña que odiaba los libros* (*The Girl Who Hated Books*). Barcelona: Juventud, 2006. 26 pp. Illus. by Leanne Franson. Trans. from English by Christiane Reyes. ISBN 84-261-3407-6, \$25.95. Gr. 1-3.

Meena, who absolutely hates books and hates to read, lives in a home where books clutter everything. Incredibly,

her avid-reading parents keep buying more books. When Max, the family cat who shares her book phobia, needs to be rescued from a tower of books, the books, pages, and characters come tumbling down. As Meena attempts to get them back to their proper home, she reads the books aloud and enjoys them. Although Franson’s crammed watercolor illustrations are a bit repetitious, Reyes’s Spanish rendition cleverly maintains the author’s message. Despite a few Peninsular Spanish conjugations (such as *buscarais*), young Spanish speakers from the Americas will empathize with Meena’s open defiance.

Torres, Daniel. *Tom tu gran amigo: Juega al fútbol* (*Your Friend Tom Plays Soccer*). Barcelona: Norma Editorial/Dist by Public Square Books, 2004. 32 pp. Illus. by Carlos Arroyo. ISBN 1-59497-120-X, \$17.95. Gr. 1-3.

Tom, a friendly dinosaur, is eager to join a group of boys playing soccer. Although he is too big to play goalkeeper, too strong to kick the ball, and too loud to be a cheerleader, he becomes the perfect coach. Computer-generated cartoons and a lively, easy-to-read text will please young soccer fans.

For the Middle Grades

Auster, Paul. *El cuento de Navidad de Auggie Wren* (*Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story*). Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2003. 32 pp. Il-

lus. by Isol. Trans. from English by Mariana Vera. ISBN 950-07-2450-2, \$12.95 (pb). Gr. 2-5.

Vera’s fable-like Spanish rendition about a lost wallet, a blind, lonely old woman, and an unexpected Christmas dinner is as affecting as the English original. Isol’s fantastically imaginative color illustrations add a contemporary tone to the shop owner’s tale of a young, pitiful shoplifter whose story may or may not be true.

Campoy, Isabel F. and Ada, Alma Flor. *Cuentos que contaban nuestras abuelas* (*Tales Our Abuelitas Told: A Hispanic Folktale Collection*). New York: Atheneum, 2006. 118 pp. Illus. by Felipe Dávalos and others. ISBN 1-4169-1905-8, \$19.95. Gr. 4-6.

An informative foreword to Hispanic culture and folklore introduces this joyful collection of 12 traditional tales with a few colorful illustrations. The collection includes well-known versions as well as lesser-known variants about a sly fox, a colorful bird, a clever turtle and a wise maiden. My favorites are *Juan Bobo*, the traditional scoundrel of the Spanish-speaking world; *La gaita alegre* (“The Joyful Bagpipes”), which features the proverbial generous young brother; and *La túnica del hombre feliz* (“The Happy Man’s Tunic”), which highlights the meaning of true happiness. Personal and informal notes at the end of each tale add mirth to their tone and tempo.

Deary, Terry. *Esa bárbara edad media* (*The Measly Middle Ages*). Barcelona: RBA/Planeta, 2006. 128 pp. Illus. by Martin Brown. Series: Esa Horrible Historia. ISBN 84-272-2033-2, \$10.95 (pb). Gr. 6-9.

Like the previous titles in this facetious series, this one highlights important aspects of the Middle Ages, beginning with *Los antipáticos normandos* (the disagreeable Normans) up to the murderous rampage of San Carlos de Blois from France. The irreverent writing style and witty black-and-white cartoons are sure to entice reluctant historians-to-be as they realize that *la crueldad, la estupidez, y las supersticiones* (cruelty, stupidity, and superstitions) are still prevalent today.



For Adolescents

Cortázar, Julio. *La autopista del sur* (*The Southern Thruway*). 39 pp. Illus. by César Cortés. ISBN 970-09-0732-5.

Fuentes, Carlos. *El prisionero de Las Lomas* (*The Prisoner of Las Lomas*). 62 pp. Illus. by Ricardo Peláez Goycochea. ISBN 970-09-1004-0.

Neruda, Pablo. *Veinte poemas de amor y*



una canción desesperada (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*). 47 pp. Illus. by Margarita Sada. ISBN 970-09-0733-3.

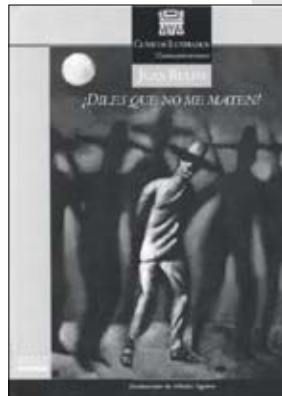
Rulfo, Juan. **¡Diles que no me maten!** (*Tell Them Not to Kill Me!*). 26 pp. Illus. by Alfredo Aguirre. ISBN 970-09-1003-2.

Ea. vol.: Mexico: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2003–2006. Series: Clásicos Latinoamericanos Ilustrados. \$12.95. Gr. 9–adult.

This excellent selection of some of the best short stories and poems by Latin American authors is presented in a large format with full-page color illustrations. Set on an expressway near Paris where drivers and passengers must deal with hours/days of endless frustration, Cortazar's (Argentina) *La autopista del sur* is as disconcerting as it is engrossing. Unfortunately, some of the illustrations are mere decorations. The dark history of a luxurious and most admired mansion in Mexico City is narrated in Fuentes's (Mexico) compelling *El prisionero de Las Lomas*. Peláez Goycochea's appropriately rough and suggestive full-page color illustrations are as realistic as Fuentes's depiction of the falsehoods and deceptions common among the politicians and wealthy people of Mexico. Neruda (Chile), considered by many to be "America's Poet," is represented by his *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*, a collection of his bittersweet, realistic love poems that highlight the pain, passion, and sensuality of love. Sada's imaginative watercolors are just as evocative and sensuous. The chaos, cruelty, and misery of life in rural Mexico is depicted in Rulfo's (Mexico) *¡Diles que no me maten!* Aguirre's strikingly robust full-page illustrations underscore the protagonist's fear of being executed by an all-powerful colonel. Although written for adults, this is indeed an accessible, representative sample of some of the most esteemed Latin American writers.

Eisner, Will. **La conspiración: La historia secreta de los protocolos de los sabios de Sión** (*The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*). Barcelona: Norma Editorial/Distributed by Public Square, 2005. 150 pp. ISBN 1-59497-145-5, \$24.95 (pb). Gr. 10–adult.

Using the power and simplicity of the graphic-novel format, Eisner presents, through expressive ink-wash drawings, the plagiarisms and fabrications behind *Los protocolos de los sabios de Sión* (*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), a widely circulated, anti-Semitic essay of the nineteenth century. Accepted as a Jewish political conspiracy by Czar Nicolas II, Henry Ford, Adolf Hitler and many hate groups,



this vigorous Spanish rendition confronts the baseless propaganda behind the unfounded Jewish international plot. Despite long, detailed passages and comparisons, Eisner's final work may appeal to Spanish-speaking adolescents as an example of bigoted political propaganda and opinionated disinformation.

Poniatowska, Elena. **Obras reunidas I: Narrativa breve** (*Collected Works I: Short Stories*). Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005. 310 pp. ISBN 968-16-7469-3, \$19.95. Gr. 9–adult.

Four shorter works by the acclaimed Mexican author and journalist Poniatowska, who was born in 1932, are included in this volume. In *Lilus Kikus*, her first book, the author relates her impressions of Eden Hall, a convent where she was educated. This is followed by *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (known in English as *Dear Diego*), a re-creation of the letters that Angelina Beloff might have sent Diego Rivera; *De noche vienes*, which highlights themes of love, solitude, children, patience, and kindness; and *Tlapalería*, a collection of eight tales about her grandmother, her favorite canaries, her life as a reporter, and her friends. Especially appealing to adolescents is the author's 11-page prologue, in which she tells about her childhood in Paris as well as her early years as a journalist and writer.

Caveat Emptor

Ortiz Cofer, Judith. **El año de nuestra revolución: Cuentos y poemas** (*The Year of Our Revolution: New and Selected Stories and Poems*). Houston: Arte Público, 2006. 105 pp. Trans. from English by Elena Olazagasti-Segovia. ISBN 1-55885-472-X, \$9.95 (pb). Gr. 9–12.

As opposed to the smooth Spanish rendition of Ortiz Cofer's previous book, *Una isla como tú: Historias del barrio* (*An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*), published by Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, this translation includes several ungrammatical sentences, spelling errors, and absurd punctuation that affect its readability. Until a more accessible translation that does justice to the author's spirit is available, Spanish-speaking adolescents will have to be satisfied with this collection of 15 stories and poems. These are not lighthearted coming-of-age pieces; rather, they are interconnected, deeply moving reflections focusing on the tensions between Puerto Rican immigrant parents and an American-influenced adolescent, heavily affected by the trends of the late 1960s. She tells about her parents' marriage, her father's unexpected death, her Catholic-school education, her first love, and the ever-present tensions with her mother.

For additional high-quality books in Spanish for children and adolescents, please go to the "Recommended Books" section of the Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents web site, www.csusm.edu/csb/.

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