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Celebrating the Hispanic Experience in the United States: We've Come a Long Way since *The Story of Ferdinand*

BY KAREN ADAMS

Many of us remember from childhood that 1936 classic, *The Story of Ferdinand*, in which we learned about the young bull Ferdinand who did not share the other young bulls' desire to fight in Madrid's bull ring, wanting only to sit quietly under his favorite cork tree and smell the flowers (Leaf, 1936). We came to love Ferdinand and his non-conformity, and we also learned intriguing Spanish words including *mata-dor*, *banderilleros*, and *picadores*. But this was an introduction to the exotic world of Spain and its national sport, rather than to a Spanish-speaking culture in the United States. Our minds were stretched beyond our own households by Ferdinand's life in his land of bull rings and cork trees just as they would be with Bemelmans' beloved 1939 story of *Madeline* and her adventures in a Paris filled with well-known monuments and new French words, but we did not connect these languages and cultures with our own home country.

These respectful, while humorous and imaginative, depictions of other cultures and countries in children's books were few and far between in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, and it was not until 1980 that the very popular Tomie de Paola would actually celebrate the story of the patron saint of Mexico City, the Virgin of Guadalupe, in a book widely available for young readers in both English and Spanish—*The Lady of Guadalupe/Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. Children's books simply did not widely represent the increasing U. S. Hispanic and Spanish-speaking population.

United States demographics, however, were shifting dramatically, changing to include an increasing Hispanic or Latino population, defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (2008) as "a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race." In 1980, the U. S. Census estimated the Hispanic population to be 14.5 million, and by 1989, it had grown by 39 percent to 20.1 million. In 2004, this number had more than doubled to 41.3 million. Projections are that by 2050, the Hispanic population in the U. S. will reach 102.6 million. As an additional descriptor, in 2006, approximately 31 million U. S. residents reported speaking Spanish at home, a number that had doubled from 1980, making Span-

ish the second most-spoken language in the U. S. Across the nation, 13 of the 50 states have at least a half million Hispanic residents. Focusing specifically on the school-aged population, in 2005, 18 percent of U. S. elementary and high school students were Hispanic, triple the percent reported in 1970 (Office of Management and Budget Federal Register Notice, 2008). With these population changes, teachers have struggled to prepare classroom lessons best suited for English language learners, particularly Spanish-speaking students.

A significant part of such lesson planning has involved the search for excellent children's books that include and actually celebrate the growing U. S. Hispanic population, presenting the Hispanic culture and people with respect. Alma Flor Ada (2005), an award-winning author of many such books, notes that many are "coming as immigrants or children of immigrant families to a country that is made up of different cultures. And one way in which this country can be stronger is if everyone learns about each other's different cultures and learns not only about their celebrations and their food but also about their values, their ideas, their history, dreams—so that we can learn to not only celebrate but also deeply respect and appreciate others" (Teaching Multicultural Literature, 2005). Using books that treat the

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Hispanic culture respectfully can be a way of affirming the self-worth of Hispanic students in a classroom as well as introducing non-Hispanic students to aspects of a culture that is vital to and increasing in U. S. life. They can learn customs, beliefs, and words that will help them avoid a limited monocultural or monolingual approach to life.

The goal of this article is to assist teachers by providing an annotated discussion of excellent books available, organized by categories, to meet this growing classroom need. Book types selected range from humorous talking-animal stories for young children such as *Chato's Kitchen* (Soto, 1995) to wonderfully rich folk tales that can be enjoyed by all ages including two from Cuba, *The Bossy Gallito* (Gonzalez, L.M., 1994) and *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* (Deedy, 2007), to contemporary realistic picture books such as the beautifully illustrated *In My Family* (Garza, 1996), and conclude with longer realistic chapter books such as Francisco Jiménez autobiographical *The Circuit* (1997). Books chosen in these four categories all share a common thread: they can be used by families and teachers to celebrate the growing U. S. Hispanic culture in ways that add a sense of value to the daily classroom experiences of Hispanic students as well as provide increased linguistic and cultural knowledge to the lives of non-Hispanic students—a clear enrichment opportunity.

Another common thread is that a number of these books have been recognized as winners of the prestigious Pura Belpré Award. Named for Pura Belpré, the first Puerto Rican librarian in New York City, this award, first given in 1996, is intended to honor Latino writers and illustrators whose work for children “best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience” (ALA Website, 2008). An individual author and illustrator are selected for each major award, and others may be acknowledged with honorary status in both categories. As a source of on-going information about excellent, newly published children’s books portraying aspects of the Hispanic culture, teachers may look each year for an updated list of award winners on the American Library Association’s Web site at www.ala.org/ala/ also under the Awards and Scholarship category. This Web site can assist teachers as they continue building classroom collections of excellent books portraying the Hispanic culture.

Easy and Humorous Picture Books for Younger Readers and Listeners

Gary Soto’s delightful *Chato's Kitchen* (1995) was recognized with one of the first Belpré honor awards for Susan Guevara’s colorful, rollicking illustrations. It is the clever and surprise-filled story of Chato, the “low riding” (p. 4) and hippest cat in East L.A., and his efforts to tempt the new family of mice who have moved in next door by sending over an invitation to dinner. Clearly, he is planning to dine *on* them rather than *with* them, but he is ultimately outsmarted when the mice bring along their friend *Chorizo*, whose tempting name means sausage but who turns out to be a “low, road-scraping” (p. 26) dachshund capable of overpowering Chato. Once Chato realizes that he has been outsmarted, all join forces to have a wonderful meal of *fajitas*, *enchiladas*, *guacamole*, *frijoles*, *carne asada*, and *chiles relenos*, with a sweet *flan* for dessert. All of these foods, as well as expressions used such as *híjole* to express the wonder of “wow” and *de veras*, *hombres* for Chato’s reassuring “it’s true, guys” are explained in context and in a glossary at the book’s beginning (p. 2).

Thus, *Chato's Kitchen* provides a great opportunity for young readers and listeners for whom Spanish is a first language to hear their language spoken, while for others it is an opportunity to learn a few new Spanish words. Although increasingly the kinds of foods served by Chato and his new friends appear regularly on many U.S. tables, simply including them as normal elements in this picture book is a positive statement. Soto is to be commended for imaginatively presenting a new, contemporary story set in Latino culture rather than following the pattern sometimes used of forcing a few hints of Latino culture into a contrived and forced retelling of a European-based folk tale.

Soto and Guevara successfully joined forces for a sequel with *Chato and the Party Animals* (2000) in which Chato has continued his friendship with the mice next door and their friend *Chorizo*, whose birthday they are celebrating. But, at the same time, Chato also learns that his best friend *Novio Boy*, who is originally from the pound, not only does not know his birth date, but has never had a birthday party. In humorous style, Chato plans a great surprise party but almost forgets to invite the guest of honor. All

is satisfactorily resolved, and Novio Boy assures the guests that “you guys are *mi familia*” (p. 30). Again, the illustrations are delightful and include all sorts of cultural details to be found in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.

Another author, Alma Flor Ada, recognized for her wonderful folk tales for young readers and her novels for the middle grades, has created an excellent alphabet book for young children, *Gathering the Sun* (1997). Written in parallel Spanish and English text, she provides beautiful little poems for each letter of the alphabet, focusing on vegetables and fruits harvested by Hispanic farm laborers such as *duraznos* or peaches, *lechuga* or lettuce, and *zanahorias* or carrots. She describes particular foods that are prepared, such as the *nopal* or prickly pear from the cactus that can be eaten with eggs at breakfast, as well as less concrete terms such as *orgullo*—the pride workers feel in family, language, culture, and self. The illustrations by Simón Silva are at one with the lyrical words and communicate Alma Flor Ada’s intense pride in her people, while helping children learn to read.

Los Gatos Black on Halloween, a sparkling poem by Belpré winning author Marisa Montes (2006), contains a generous sprinkling of Spanish words that celebrate a combination of the traditional U. S. Halloween and the Mexican Day of the Dead. “*Los gatos* black with eyes of green, cats slink and creep on Halloween, with *ojos* keen that squint and gleam” (p. 2). Carved *calabazas* or pumpkins, “fat and round,” (p. 5) light up the flight of *las brujas* or witches on their broomsticks. *Los Esqueletos* rattle their bones while *los fantasmas* “drag their chains” (p. 10). *Los muertos* rise from their coffins at *medianoche* for the “monstrous ball” (p. 21). But as they celebrate this spooky night, a suspicious rapping at the door brings “the thing that monsters most abhor” (p. 31). What can this scary thing be? Oh—“human *niños* at the door!” (p. 31). For “of all the horrors they have seen, the WORST are kids on Halloween!” (p. 31). The visually delightful illustrations are the perfect match for this fun-to-read seasonal book, containing a helpful glossary that not only defines Spanish words used, but provides pronunciation assistance. Such pronunciation assistance is particularly important for teachers so that they not only use books that describe and celebrate the Hispanic culture but also demonstrate the respect due this culture by learning to pronounce words, phrases, and names correctly.

Folk Tales for All Ages

Folk tales give us an introduction to cultural norms and history, and they also can include clever word plays, story patterns, and moral lessons. In the 1960s and 70s, with an increasing interest in African culture, teachers and parents looked for books to use in celebrating the rich cultural heritage of African Americans. Excellent works appeared including Gail Haley’s *A Story, A Story*, (1970) which won the American Library Association’s Caldecott Award for best illustrations, and *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears* (Aardema, 1975), which won the same award for Leo and Diane Dillon. In recent years, the number and variety of folk tales tied to Hispanic culture have increased somewhat comparably.

The Bossy Gallito—El Gallo de Bodas: A Traditional Cuban Folktale (Gonzalez, 1994), named a Belpré honor book for both narrative text and illustrations, is a clever cumulative tale in the genre of *The House that Jack Built*. The bossy little rooster is frustrated at his inability to command first the water, then the fire, the stick, the goat, and even the grass to wash off his beak so that he can continue on his journey to the wedding of his Tío Perico. Only after the intervention of the sun, who agrees to help in gratitude for the rooster’s morning wake-up song, does he receive assistance, and this assistance comes in a polite and mannerly way, without the bossiness that has failed the rooster in the past. The underlying moral is quite clear. A glossary is provided to define Spanish words used in the story, and the illustrator Lulu Delacre explains that she has based her beautiful illustrations of settings and characters on her knowledge of the Cuban area in greater Miami—a reminder of changes in U. S. population trends.

Another Cuban folktale, *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*, retold by Carmen Agra Deedy (2007), is the entertaining story of Martina Josefina Catalina Cucaracha, a cockroach in old Havana who, now that she is 21 days old, is “ready to give her leg in marriage” (p. 5). Her household is “crawling with excitement,” (p. 5) and all have advice to offer, but it is her Cuban grandmother, her *Abuela*, who offers what at first appears to be the most unusual advice, but which actually turns out to be the best of all. She suggests that Martina spill coffee on the shoes of her potential suitors to assist in the selection process. Will this “Coffee Test” work? Deedy’s story is attention-grabbing and filled with delightful descriptions

of Martina as she “daintily...sat down and crossed her legs, and crossed her legs, and crossed her legs” (p. 11) and her feisty responses to some of her suitors such as the rooster whom she finds “too cocky for me” (p. 15). Spanish words are sprinkled throughout, and Michael Austin’s large, colorful illustrations support the text perfectly. Not only is this a clever story with a surprising ending, it also helps young readers and listeners to understand the important role that grandparents play in Hispanic families. They are respected and valued for their life experiences and wisdom, as evidenced by Martina’s wise Cuban *Abuela*.

Just a Minute: A Trickster Tale and Counting Book is a very simple story for young listeners by Yuyi Morales (2003) about Grandma Beetle’s encounter with Señor Calavera, the skeleton of death. Through a trickster approach, she avoids his invitation to follow him to death by instead inviting him to a party for her nine grandchildren. As she plans it all, she introduces young listeners to the Spanish counting words from 1 to 10 as well as foods and customs from Mexico. She grinds corn to make *tortillas*, slices mangos and papayas, and fills *piñatas* with candy. At the end of the party, Grandma Beetle seems finally prepared to accompany Señor Calavera, but instead finds a note assuring her that he has had so much fun that he is eager to attend next year’s party. This fun folktale closes with Grandma winking slyly at her readers. The beauty of the illustrations explains why Yuyi Morales was given a Belpré award. Another invaluable aspect of Hispanic culture introduced in *Just a Minute* is a different view of death. Teachers may want to spin off from this book with a study of the “Day of the Dead” and beliefs and activities customarily associated with this extremely important religious and cultural event at the end of October.

Rain Player, a mythic tale from Caldecott Award-winning illustrator David Wisniewski (1991), uses beautiful cut-paper illustrations to support a Mayan story of Pik, a young ballplayer who challenges the fierce rain god, Chac, to a game in an effort to secure much-needed rain for his people. In preparation, Pik’s father reminds him of the pouch he was given as a baby and the items it contained—a stick for planting corn, a rubber ball, a jaguar tooth for strength, a quetzal feather for speed, and water from the sacred *cenote* or well to signify wisdom. These gifts do indeed assist Pik, and the people receive

rain, while Pik avoids Chac’s threatened penalty of transformation into a frog for life. *Rain Player* is a delightful story, and the illustrations are beautiful and sure to capture the amazement of young listeners and readers. Wisniewski, in the author’s note, provides additional information for older readers and adults to share with young children, explaining more about the Mayan civilization, its geographical spread and historical time period.

Realistic Picture Books

Simple and realistic picture books for young listeners and readers can introduce some very basic elements of daily Hispanic life and culture. *My Colors, My World/Mis Colores, Mi Mundo*, a dual language book in English and Spanish for very young listeners and readers by Maya Christian Gonzalez (2007) describes young Maya’s life in her desert world filled with sand—always blowing and always the same color. Maya, however, opens her eyes “extra-wide to find the colors” (p. 6). Her favorite is the pink or *rosa* of the desert sunset as well as in all the bright pink colors she wears throughout the day. She loves the orange or *anaranjadas* marigold flowers, purple or *violeta* irises, and green or *verde* cactus. She imagines a world in which she is dressed fantastically, somewhat like Frida Kahlo. We see the agave cactus around her and the adobe homes. And she eagerly welcomes home her *Papi* with his “shiny black hair” (p. 20) or *pelo negro y brillante*. This beautifully illustrated story is an excellent introduction to the basic color words in Spanish as they apply to a Southwestern desert setting.

Gary Soto’s *Snapshots from the Wedding* (1997) introduces young readers and listeners to realistic aspects of Hispanic life and culture as Maya, the young narrator, describes a traditional wedding in which she serves as the flower girl. There is mariachi music for dancing and a meal of *pollo con mole* and *arroz y frijoles*—chicken with a special chili and chocolate sauce and rice and beans. The story is brought to life by Stephanie Garcia’s creative “snapshot” illustrations of boxed, clay-sculptured figures. Recognized with a Belpré Award, they may easily encourage aspiring young artists to create some of their own “boxed” artwork. Soto’s natural use of Spanish words and an included glossary support this realistic and respectful portrayal of cultural particulars of a Latino wedding celebration.

Carmen Lomas Garza (1996) has masterfully melded text and illustrations to create *In My Family – En Mi Familia*, a dual language Belpre honor book about growing up in south Texas, near the border with Mexico. She explains that as a child “a lot of us were punished for speaking Spanish... for being who we were, and we were made to feel ashamed of our culture.” Her art is “a way of healing these wounds,” (p. 3) evidencing the pride and respect she exhibits for her family and her culture as she savors such distinctive foods as *empanadas*—sweet turnovers filled with sweet potato or squash, describes the *curandera* or healer who combined the burning of copal incense and prayer with counseling, tells folk stories of *La Llorana* or the weeping woman, and explains the blessing of the bride by her mother on her wedding day. Lomas Garza ties her life intrinsically to all aspects of this book to help young listeners from Hispanic backgrounds feel an even stronger sense of self pride and to inform those from non-Hispanic backgrounds about this rich culture.

Another of Carmen Lomas Garza’s family-based, dual language books, *Family Pictures-Cuadros de Familia* (1994), tells more about her years growing up in south Texas. Her illustrations in the folk or naïve style of Grandma Moses are clearly worthy of the Belpre honor they received and perfectly match the vignettes she presents. She describes the fun of a *piñata* at her sixth birthday party, the tradition of *Posadas* when children act out the story of Mary and Joseph journeying to find lodging for the birth of the Christ child on the nine nights before Christmas, and her family making *tamales* and picking the *nopal* cactus to stir fry with chili powder and eggs for breakfast. This is a book that celebrates well the regular seasons and events of Hispanic family life.

The Secret Stars, a Belpre honor book for the illustrations of Felipe Dávalos, is a simple, seasonal story of young siblings Pepe and Sila who live in New Mexico with their grandmother (Slate, 1998). They worry that the heavy clouds, rain, and resulting lack of stars on the 12th night after Christmas will prevent the Three Kings from finding them and bringing the presents they traditionally bring to young children. In response, their grandmother takes them on a dream journey to find the “secret stars” (p. 14) in sparkling sights such as the garden spider’s web, the hens’ dreams of popcorn, and the deer horns glittering with frost. The next morning the children find gifts from the Three Kings, including a star

piñata. Thus, a religious event important to Hispanic culture is presented for young listeners and readers, with accompanying descriptions about how to create their own “glittering stars” (p. 33) with *farolitos* or lanterns made from paper bags, votive candles, and sand. This is an excellent opportunity to introduce the tradition of the visit of the Three Kings or Magi who come, bringing gifts to young children in remembrance of the kings who visited Jesus with gifts after his birth. This tradition is practiced in many parts of the world including Mexico, Latin America, Spain, and the Southwestern U. S.

The parallel or dual language *Magic Windows – Ventanas Mágicas*, with text and Belpre award-winning illustrations by Carmen Lomas Garza (1999), introduces young readers to the Mexican art of cut-paper or *papel picado* designs linked to Mexican history and culture. Lomas Garza explains how she learned this art from her grandmother, describing the intricacies of holding the very thin pieces of paper together as portions are snipped away to depict a beautiful scene. These scenes depict Day of the Dead observances, writing in ancient Mexican murals, the Mexican flag’s portrayal of an eagle on a cactus holding a rattlesnake in its mouth, and Aztec beliefs about hummingbirds. Lomas Garza’s illustrations may well challenge readers to create their own *papel picado* designs.

Tomás and the Library Lady, is based loosely on the life of Tomas Rivera, born in Texas in 1935 to a family of migrant workers (Mora, 1997). As a boy, he loved reading and was encouraged by a librarian to explore the many worlds available through books. Rivera ultimately became chancellor of the University of California at Riverside, and, on his death, the campus library was named in his honor. In this picture book, the fictionalized Tomás is encouraged by his grandfather to visit the local library during his family’s stay as migrant workers in Iowa where he is welcomed by the Library Lady who offers him a cool drink of water and two books to check out in her name—books that fit his expressed interests perfectly. Tomás subsequently spends all of his free time reading at the library—finding imaginary adventures in lands populated by tigers, dinosaurs, and cowboys. As he and the Library Lady become friends, he teaches her some Spanish phrases, the saddest of which is *adios*, or good-bye, when his family must return to Texas. This very simple story can introduce young readers and listeners to the challenges faced

by many young children, the ways in which they overcome these challenges, and, additionally, offer a subtle plug for the wonders of reading.

Tomie de Paola, always popular with children for his texts and illustrations, has often addressed serious legends and religious content. *The Lady of Guadalupe* (1980), also available in a Spanish language version as *Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe*, tells the story of the patron saint of Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe, who appeared to a poor Indian named Juan Diego in 1531. Juan is chosen by the Virgin, who appears to him in the robes of an Aztec princess, to go to the Bishop of Mexico to tell him to build a church in her honor. Although the Bishop does not initially believe Juan, the miracle provided by the Virgin of Guadalupe is finally convincing. In the dead of winter, she sends Juan to gather roses of Castile to take to the Bishop. Although he knows that such roses do not grow in the winter, Juan obeys her direction and indeed finds the roses growing. Taking this miraculous gift to the Bishop in his *tilma*, the cactus-fiber cape he is wearing, Juan finds that his ordinary *tilma* has changed to display a painting of the Lady just as he had last seen her at the foot of the hill of Tepeyac. The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe was subsequently built on this very spot in Mexico City, and millions of people still come here to pray to her, especially on her special day in remembrance—December 12. Juan's *tilma*, now over 400 years old, is also enshrined—its image unchanged. What better way to understand a people and culture than to understand the belief behind the patron saint of a major city?

Chapter Books of Contemporary Realistic Fiction, Autobiography, or Biography

Longer realistic chapter books can deal with more sophisticated aspects of Hispanic life. In the 1950s, Ann Nolan Clark, concerned with the lack of appropriate Native American representation in quality children's books, responded by writing her own books, including *Little Navajo Bluebird* (1948) and *Blue Canyon Horse* (1954). One of her later chapter books for slightly older readers, *Secret of the Andes* (1952), even received the American Library Association's Newbery Award for best text. Her location here shifted to South America as she told the story of a young Inca boy, Cusi, living a very isolated life in the Peruvian Andes as one of the few remaining in the

royal Incan lineage whose secrets he will soon learn, including the location of the hidden Inca riches—a secret the Spaniard conquerors failed to discover. Also in the 1950s, Dorothy Rhoads received Newbery honor recognition for *The Corn Grows Ripe* (1956), a realistic story of 12-year-old Tigre who shouldered a man's role in the corn fields when his father was injured, linking his life experience to the Mayan belief that humans were created from corn in this coming of age story. Another Newbery Award book from the 1950s, *And Now Miguel*, by Joseph Krumboltz (1953), presented the life of a young boy growing up in a family of shepherds in California's Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Based on a documentary film that Krumboltz made of the lives of these shepherds, this is an accurate portrayal. These three authors were convinced that older readers must see the realities of their own cultures in well-written literature, and they made an effort to do so when it was not nearly so popular or well represented.

Following this same commitment to quality cultural presentation, a contemporary chapter book for middle grade readers, *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*, is a semi-autobiographical account by Francisco Jiménez (1997) of his childhood years spent following the California crops with his family. He describes many of his teachers who encouraged him, helping him to learn English as a young child and to catch up as he missed months of school each year because of work in the fields. Jiménez acknowledged that he was writing not only for himself, but for many migrant children who grew up as he did and who inspired him with their "courage, tenacity, and unwavering hope in the midst of adversity" (p. ix). He hoped to "voice the experiences of a large sector of our society that has been frequently ignored" and thereby "give readers an insight into the lives of migrant farm workers and their children whose back-breaking labor of picking fruits and vegetables puts food on our tables" (p. 115).

The Circuit is actually a collection of short stories that merge well to help the reader know each member of the family distinctly. Perhaps the most touching story describes the special attention provided to Francisco by an English teacher, Mr. Lema, who tutors him during lunch and eventually offers to teach him to play the trumpet. Francisco returns home that day to share the wonderful news of this opportunity with his family, but instead he finds that they are fully packed to move on to the next

seasonal crops in another part of the state. While the story ends with a sense of sorrow, the life and growth of Francisco continue. And in the sequel, *Breaking Through*, Jiménez (2001) describes his ultimate success. Hazel Rochman, in her starred review of *The Circuit* for *Booklist*, compared this work to Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1976) because of its striking combination of "stark social realism with heartrending personal drama" (Rochman, 1997, p. 619). This is a well-deserved comparison and further emphasizes the importance of this chapter book for middle grade students who could never handle the Steinbeck novel.

Francisco Jiménez has also selected two stories from *The Circuit* to repackage as picture books for younger children. *La Mariposa* (1988) describes young Francisco's first day at school, delayed until late in January because his family has not before been sufficiently settled in one of their migratory tent city homes to spare him from family responsibilities. Unfortunately, Francisco does not speak English, and he finds that this strange language he hears on the crowded school bus gives him a serious headache. He finds one classmate friend who speaks some Spanish, but they must be careful that their teacher does not hear them, as she wants only English spoken. Francisco never really loses hope, and his beautiful drawing of the caterpillar in the jar near his desk as it changes into a beautiful butterfly or *mariposa* mirrors his own butterfly-like metamorphosis. The second story adapted from *The Circuit* is *The Christmas Gift-El Regalo de Navidad*, a dual language, seasonal story about the true meaning of Christmas and the gifts we give and receive (Jiménez, 2000).

Pam Muñoz Ryan has received much recognition for two of her novels for older middle grade readers that address interesting aspects of the Hispanic experience. *Esperanza Rising* (2000), a Belpré award winner inspired by her grandmother's life story, describes Esperanza's challenges as her family, cruelly dispossessed of their land in Mexico, must travel illegally to the U. S. in the early 1900s to work on California farms. In this short novel, Ryan explains much about the U. S. Deportation Act of 1929 whereby at least 450,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans, many of whom were born in the U. S. and were citizens, were deported over a 6-year period in an effort to counter U. S. unemployment numbers produced by the Great Depression.

Another Pam Muñoz Ryan novel, *Becoming Naomi León* (2004), is tied to the annual *Noche de los Rabanos* or Night of the Radishes, when people come from all over the state of Oaxaca to its capital city to compete in a radish carving contest. The central character, Naomi, is living a peaceful life with her great-grandmother and her brother, Owen, in a trailer park in California. With little knowledge of her mother or father, Naomi has imagined mothers she might want, such as the spectacular home room helper at school or a business executive. She is not, however, prepared for the sudden return of her actual mother, Skyla, and her new boyfriend, tattoo artist trainee Clive. Only a sudden nighttime escape with friends to Oaxaca during its *Noche de los Rabanos* can reunite her with her long-lost father. The page-turning excitement of this novel provides an excellent introduction to a unique cultural event.

Mark Talbert's *A Sunburned Prayer* (1995) presents a little-known religious event that takes place annually outside Santa Fe, New Mexico—the 17-mile procession on Good Friday to the shrine of the *Santauria de Chimayo*. Young Eloy, worried about his much-loved grandmother who is dying of cancer, decides to make this walk with his grandfather, hoping and praying for a miracle. He learns about himself as he contemplates his life, his family, and his relationship with God in the heat of the New Mexico sun. The reader, in turn, learns about this religious tradition, respectfully presented by Talbert without pious didacticism.

Alma Flor Ada's *My Name is María Isabel* (1993) is a simple and straightforward account of third-grader María Isabel Salazar López and her difficulties adjusting to a new school after her family moves to the U. S. mainland from Puerto Rico. Because there are already two Marías in the classroom when she arrives, her teacher decides to call her "Mary López," not recognizing the importance of her entire name nor the cultural fact that Salazar is her father's name and López her mother's maiden name, and both are central to her identity. María Isabel feels belittled by the teacher when she fails to respond to the new name of Mary and struggles to bond with her classmates and her new country.

While the story concludes in a somewhat contrived and happy way, nevertheless this book provides teachers and other adults with a mechanism to discuss with young readers the ways in which María

might have been treated more sensitively when she arrived in her new classroom. Hopefully children will internalize these considerations as they prepare to greet those who might be new to their own country and language. Identity is important to maturing children, and this story of the unintentional harm caused to María's fragile sense of self can offer an important lesson for all readers.

Julia Alvarez, is best known for *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (2005), written for adolescent readers. She reflects a strong sense of multicultural identity in her stories that reflect her own youth in the Dominican Republic and her adulthood in the United States. *How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay* (2001), geared to early middle grades readers, describes the sudden arrival of the eccentric and exuberantly loving Tía Lola to the Gomez household. Miguel and his younger sister, Juanita, already feel their lives are in flux—their parents are divorcing, and their mother has moved them away from their father and their home in New York City to rural Vermont where they find no others of common culture. Miguel's classmates even wonder if his skin coloring fades like a tan. And now Tía Lola, who speaks very little English, arrives. Alvarez is an engaging storyteller, as is Tía Lola, and young readers will be swept up in the story of the Gomez family and the impact of their visiting Tía who helps her niece and nephew to feel more cultural pride and comfort in themselves. A great deal of Spanish is used in the book, but Alvarez is always careful to ensure that context and discussion provide translations.

Beth Atkin has collected poems, first person narratives, and photographs from Hispanic migrant children in California's Salinas Valley to produce *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories* (1993). This is an important work for older middle grade readers in light of the contemporary concerns presented, including the rights of legal and illegal immigrant workers, bilingual education as an approach to schooling for English-language learners in U. S. schools, and cultural identity as it relates to the meaning of family. In researching this American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, Atkin moved to California, interviewing migrant workers to understand all aspects of their lives—the events that determined their moves to the United States, whether legally or illegally; living and working conditions; and future goals.

The black and white photographs are compelling and sensitive in showing the extended families of these migrant children. The poems are presented in both Spanish and English, and the longer narrative stories written by the children are introduced with specific background information. The reader finishes this non-fiction collection with a fuller picture of the issues faced by these children, including forms of hidden prejudice, gangs, teenage pregnancy, and families separated by employment opportunities.

Summary and Application

The goal of this article has been to assist classroom teachers in light of changing U. S. demographics that have brought an increased Hispanic population into classrooms. The books selected for inclusion have represented a wide range of excellent books for younger and older audiences—talking animal tales and folk tales from various locations, realistic stories that celebrate religious holidays and special family events, and non-fiction works that describe ways in which individuals have succeeded in the light of what might have seemed daunting circumstances. Some stories were written in English, others in parallel English and Spanish text. Many provide readers and listeners with the opportunity to learn new words and phrases in Spanish. Hopefully teachers will be encouraged to use some of the books described, to look for other works by the authors and illustrators included, and to take advantage of the resources noted. Such classroom use can greatly increase the self esteem felt by Hispanic students as they see themselves and their own culture mirrored in stories read, as well as provide non-Hispanic students the opportunity to learn more about another culture—its customs, beliefs, and language. All will have gained something of worth in the process.

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