

FROM Rosa and Adelita to Caramelo: BOOKS IN ENGLISH ABOUT LATINOS

By Isabel Schon

From always-popular trickster tales to inspiring dreamers and a reviled conqueror, these fiction and nonfiction books published in the last two years provide a wide panorama of Latino/Hispanic people, places, and culture.

For Young Readers

Campoy, F. Isabel. **Rosa Raposa.** San Diego: Gulliver/Harcourt, 2002. 32 pp. Illus. by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey. ISBN 0-15-202161-2, \$16.00. Ages 4-8.

Campoy moved the setting of these three trickster tales from Spain to the Brazilian jungle and changed the wolf into a jaguar. As in the original tales, Rosa Raposa, a wily fox, constantly outwits Jaguar. In the first one, she leaves Jaguar trapped in a hole; in the second, she ties him to a tree; in the last, she makes sure the angry bees chase Jaguar and not her. The bright pen-and-ink, gouache, and watercolor illustrations perfectly depict the Brazilian jungle and the wily, high-spirited animals. Especially appealing are the first two tales, "A Cry for Help" and "A Strong North Wind." "The Green Dress" is a little longer and more difficult for younger children to follow. The snappy rhymes at the end of each tale are humorous summaries.

Cohn, Diana. **Dream Carver.** San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002. 34 pp. Illus. by Amy Córdova. ISBN 0-8118-1244-8, \$15.95. Gr. 1-3.

Young Mateo, who lives with his family in a small village in Oaxaca, Mexico, dreams of carving the dazzling, large, colorful animals he sees in his imagination rather than the little *juguets* that the family sells at village *fiestas*. Despite his father's disapproval, Mateo secretly carves his animals and displays them with great success at the *Día de los muertos* fiesta. Cohn's simple text and Córdova's brilliant double spreads, rendered in acrylic on a gessoed ground and color pencils, are a beautiful testament to this much-admired folk-art tradition. A brief afterword tells about Manuel Jiménez, the modern creator of Oaxacan wood carving who inspired

the story.

de Paola, Tomie. **Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story.** New York: Putnam, 2002. 32 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-399-23866-2, \$16.99. Gr. K-3.



Set in a village in Mexico, this Cinderella story features sweet Adelita, who after her father's remarriage and death is abused by Doña Micaela, her cruel stepmother. As in the popular version, Adelita goes to the *fiesta*, assisted by kind Esperanza, her long-time caregiver, and meets handsome Javier, who falls in love with her. And of course, *Cenicienta* and her *Príncipe* live happily ever after. De Paola's festive acrylics, which beautifully combine the colors, people, and ambiance of rural Mexico, make this a most unique and captivating *Cenicienta*. Despite some awkward Spanish expressions (*muy felices por [sic] siempre*), Spanish

speakers/listeners may enjoy the numerous Spanish phrases inserted into the text. English readers, however, may be bothered by the constant interruptions in the narrative.

Elya, Susan Middleton. **Eight Animals Play Ball.** New York: Putnam, 2003. 32 pp. Illus. by Lee Chapman. ISBN 0-399-23569-8, \$15.99. Gr. 1-3.

As eight *animales* head for the *parque* (park) to play, each wants to play something different. But when *Gato* (Cat) shares her bat, they decide on a game of baseball. Soon they start arguing until a rainstorm leads to an amusing confusion. Like its predecessors by the author, the lively rhymed text, liberally sprinkled with Spanish words, is accompanied by vibrant oil pastel cartoonish illustrations amid a Latin American setting and motifs. Unfortunately, neither the glossary nor the captions include the Spanish definite articles, which is a loss.

Ichikawa, Satomi. **My Pig Amarillo.** New York: Philomel/Putnam, 2002. 30 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 0-399-23768-2, \$15.99. Gr. K-2.

The simple, easy-to-read text describing the special feel-

ings between Pablito, a Guatemalan boy, and Amarillo, his yellow pig, is the best part of this story. Young readers/listeners will especially empathize with Pablito's sadness on the loss of his beloved Amarillo and Pablito's efforts to send him a message that he still loves him using a kite. Regrettably, the watercolor illustrations depict too many tourist-type scenes of rural Guatemala, including barefoot Pablito and a poor family's dinner of beans and *tortillas*. The universal emotions of children are here. Guatemala, however, is much more than these illustrations convey.

Winter, Jeanette. **Niño's Mask**. New York: Dial, 2003. 32 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN 1-8037-2807-7, \$15.99. Gr. K-3.

Amid the joyous preparations for a Mexican *fiesta*, Niño dreams of wearing a mask, of being something else for just one day. But when his parents tell him he is too young, he makes his own *Perro* (dog) mask and surprises his family and the whole village. Dialogue balloons, sprinkled with Spanish words, are inserted in Winter's colorful Mexican-style folklore illustrations highlighting rural scenes. A brief explanation about masks and an incomplete glossary (which lacks Spanish definite articles) conclude the story. Fans of quaint Mexico will enjoy.

For the Middle Grades

Calvert, Patricia. **Hernando Cortés: Fortune Favored the Bold**. New York: Benchmark/Cavendish, 2003. 80 pp. Series: Great Explorations. ISBN 0-7614-1482-7, \$28.50. Gr. 5-8.

In a lively and most engrossing narrative, Calvert describes the life of the Spanish explorer and conquistador who conquered Aztec Mexico for Spain. She rightly emphasizes the Spaniard's disease "that could only be cured by gold" and reports many positive aspects of Aztec culture, such as their sunken pools, which were used for daily bathing and which astonished the Spaniards "who rarely bathed," as well as their "exotic dishes," the cleanliness of their streets, their exquisite markets, and their beautiful city. This attractively designed book includes numerous color maps, drawings, reproductions of period paintings and codices, and informative sidebars. A chronology, a bibliography, and a list of suggested books conclude this readable chronicle of Cortés, who after "almost five hundred years...is still despised as the man who, with a few hundred soldiers, ruthlessly destroyed an entire culture in the name of glory, gold, and God."

Gnojewski, Carol. **Cinco de Mayo: Celebrating Hispanic Pride**. Berkeley Heights: Enslow, 2002. 48 pp. ISBN 0-7660-1575-0, \$18.95. Gr. 3-5.

An easy-to-read text and numerous color photos introduce readers to the history, customs, and practices of *Cinco de Mayo*, the holiday that commemorates the victory of the Mexican army over the French on May 5, 1862. Especially

well explained is the importance of Benito Juárez and the Battle of Puebla in the history of Mexico. The only caveat in this attractive and complete overview of the holiday—both in Mexico and in the United States—are the mostly quaint and misguided sidebars that tell about *piñatas* in the beginning of the chapter "Mexico Gains Its Freedom," "siesta time" in "The Battle of Puebla," and others.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. **Celebrating a Quinceañera: A Latina's 15th Birthday Celebration**. New York: Holiday House, 2002. 32 pp. Illus. with photos by Lawrence Migdale. ISBN 0-8234-1693-3, \$16.95. Gr. 3-6.

Hoyt-Goldsmith has done a nimble job of chronicling the preparation of a big *fiesta* in which Cynthia Anguiano, a beautiful *quinceañera*, is joyously celebrated by family and friends. Migdale's exquisite candid photographs accompany the fluent narrative, sprinkled with Spanish words and phrases, from the initial plans to the delivery of the invitations, church ceremony, elegant waltz, and fabulous meal. This is indeed an engaging introduction to this always-happy Latino/Mexican-American tradition. A glossary and an index assist non-Spanish speakers.

Lourie, Peter. **Tierra del Fuego: A Journey to the End of the Earth**. Honesdale, Pa.: Boyds Mills Press, 2002. 48 pp. ISBN 1-56397-973-X, \$19.95. Gr. 4-7.

With gusto and a great sense of excitement, Lourie narrates his trip to and experiences in Tierra del Fuego, an archipelago off southern South America. He intermingles descriptions of the history, fauna, and flora of the region with personal impressions. Along with exquisite color photos, period illustrations, and maps, the result is a compelling photo-essay for adventurers-to-be of any age. From Magellan's tragic circumnavigation to a view of Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, from an encounter with an elegant and graceful guanaco to Darwin's poignant perceptions of the Yámana people, this is an enticing invitation to a remote land.

Molzahn, Arlene Bourgeois. **Hernán Cortés: Conquistador and Explorer**. Berkeley Heights, N.J.: Enslow, 2003. 48 pp. Series: Explorers! ISBN 0-7660-2069-X, \$18.95. Gr. 4-6.

Attractively designed with excellent color illustrations, drawings, codices, and maps and an easy-to-read text, this accessible book introduces readers to the life and times of Cortés, describing his exploits in Hispaniola and Mexico and the capture of Tenochtitlán. A bibliography, Internet addresses, a time line, and a glossary are also included.

Mora, Pat. **Maria Paints the Hills**. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2002. 30 pp. Illus. by Maria Hesch. ISBN 0-89013-410-3, \$9.95 (pb). Gr. 2-5.

Exquisite paintings by Maria Hesch, the late folk artist from New Mexico, joyously depict the seasons, landscape,

and traditions of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in this well-designed picture book. Mora's simple text, sprinkled with Spanish words, tells about the life and dreams of Maria, a poor girl, and her hard-working mother. This is an evocative view of northern New Mexico.

For Adolescents

Cisneros, Sandra. **Caramelo**. New York: Knopf, 2002. 446 pp. ISBN 0-679-43554-9, \$24.00. Gr. 10-adult.

Devoted fans of Cisneros's celebrated *The House on Mango Street* will enjoy her most recent family saga, which intermingles "healthy lies," exaggerations, and anecdotes in a series of humorous vignettes, full of Mexicanisms and Spanish expressions. Despite its length and somewhat repetitive passages, Cisneros's fictionalized history of her Mexican-American family is a vivid panorama of family trips, a difficult grandmother, and a beloved father. Some readers will appreciate the cultural footnotes that describe Mexican movies, music, places, and entertainers. Serious readers with a strong interest in Mexico and U.S.-Mexico relations will welcome the historical/political footnotes and the chronology that highlights U.S. immigration policies.

Dent, David W. **Encyclopedia of Mexico**. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2002. 343 pp. ISBN 0-8108-4291-2, \$49.50. Gr. 9-adult.

Arranged in dictionary format with more than 250 brief entries—from a few paragraphs to two pages each—this encyclopedia includes information for those seeking "a better understanding of contemporary Mexico." Dent, a professor of political science, states that the entries "are designed to draw the reader's attention to aspects of Mexico that are often neglected or not well understood in the U.S." He comments extensively on the corruption in Mexico as well as on the deep divisions between rich and poor and includes forthright observations. For instance, regarding Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, the billionaire television broadcasting pioneer, he states that despite a personal fortune estimated at \$2 billion, Azcárraga had "no sense of noblesse oblige...He often referred to Mexico as a nation of poor people with little hope for economic and social improvement." Serious students of Mexico will appreciate the concise information, suggested readings at the end of each entry, time line, and statistical appendices.

Farmer, Nancy. **House of the Scorpion**. New York: Simon & Schuster/Richard Jackson, 2002. 380 pp. ISBN 0-689-85222-3, \$17.95. Gr. 7-10.

Born in Opium, a strip of poppy fields between the United States and what was once Mexico, young Matteo Alacrán,

who could "speak both English and Spanish fluently," grows up as a despised clone. As he struggles to understand life among "eejits," mindless slaves with computer chips in their brains, dangerous bodyguards, and *El Patrón*, the 142-year-old supreme ruler of Opium, he is assisted by kind Tam Lin, who encourages him to escape to freedom and eventually break down the evil empire. This compelling science fiction novel intermingles serious contemporary scientific and ethical issues and an engrossing coming-of-age story. It features numerous Mexican cultural/traditional themes and stereotypes, including the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Llorona, the statement "People from Durango are called *alacránes* [sic]," the poverty in Aztlán ("It was poor then it's worse now. Nothing grew there except weeds, and they were so bitter that they made the donkeys throw up"), El Día de los Muertos, and incorrect Spanish ("*Voy a enseñarle la* [sic] *mapa*"). This unique book is sure to provoke discussion and controversy among Mexican-American and other Latino readers.

Foster, Lynn V. **Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World**. New York: Facts on File, 2002. 402 pp. ISBN 0-8160-4148-2, \$50.00. Gr. 9-adult.

In well-organized chapters with numerous subheadings and an accessible text, Foster provides information on Maya history, geography, ancient society, rulership, warfare, religion, architecture, astronomy, hieroglyphic writing, and economy. An extensive bibliography and index as well as a chronological chart, numerous black-and-white maps, drawings, and (mostly pedestrian) photos are included. Serious students of the ancient Maya will appreciate this approachable handbook, which presents "the contrasts between old and new theories [and provides] the background for understanding ongoing debates."

Sayer, Chloe. **Textiles from Mexico**. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002. 87 pp. ISBN 0-295-98234-9, \$19.95 (pb). Gr. 9-adult.

An excellent introduction on the evolution of costume throughout Mexico's history sets the stage for this exquisite overview of Mexican women's and men's clothing, textiles, weavings, embroideries, and other decorative techniques. With more than 100 full-page color samples, readers/viewers will appreciate close-up and complete views of bedspreads, *quechquemits*, wrap-around skirts, *rebozos*, *sarapes*, and *huijipiles*. A glossary and selected readings are also included.

Isabel Schon is director of the Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents. For additional high quality books in English about Latinos, go to the Barahona Center web site, www.csusm.edu/csb. 