



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity and encourage social action. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Planting Stories

Anika Aldamuy Denise (Author), Paola Escobar (Illustrator)

When she came to the U.S. in 1921, Pura Belpré carried the folktales of her Puerto Rican homeland. Finding a new home at the New York Public Library as a bilingual assistant, she turned her popular retellings into books and spread story seeds across the land. Today, these seeds have grown into a lush landscape as generations of children and storytellers continue to share her tales and celebrate Pura's legacy. This is an inspiring picture book biography of storyteller, puppeteer, and New York City's first Puerto Rican librarian, who championed bilingual literature. A Spanish-language edition, *Sembrando historias: Pura Belpré: bibliotecaria y narradora de cuentos*, is also available.

ISBN: 978-0062748683

Publisher: HarperCollins

Year Published: 2019

Age Range: 4–8

Book Themes

Latin American/Hispanic people, Identity and Culture, National Latin American/Hispanic Heritage Month, Power of books



Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind children of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| ■ balcony | ■ garment | ■ possibility |
| ■ bilingual | ■ hope | ■ publisher |
| ■ factory | ■ landscape | ■ reunion |
| ■ fertile | ■ lush | ■ roots |
| ■ folktales | ■ opportunity | ■ separation |

Additionally, below are Spanish words and phrases in the book and their English translations:

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|---|------------------------------------|
| ■ cuentos folclóricos: folktales | ■ una bendición: a blessing |
| ■ en inglés y español: in English and Spanish | ■ y una vida nueva: and a new life |
| ■ un año : one year | |

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- What can you tell about the book by looking at the cover?
- What is the title of the book and what do you think it means?
- Who or what do you think the book might be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers.

- In Pura Belpré's eyes, what is Manhattan like? (page 5)
- What does Pura Belpré do to try to get more books for the library? (page 16)
- Who is Clarence Cameron White? What happens when Pura Belpré meets him? (page 22)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- What did you learn about Pura Belpré?
- What do you think it was like for Pura Belpré to leave her home in Puerto Rico and come to NYC?
- Where does Pura Belpré first work? How does she feel about working there?
- What does Pura Belpré notice when she starts working in the library?

- What does she do when she discovers there are no Puerto Rican folktales at the library?
- What are some of the folktales that Pura Belpré knows? Do they remind you of any other folktales you've read or heard?
- Why does Pura Belpré share the folktales in English and Spanish?
- When Pura returns to the library after being away, how does she feel when she sees other storytellers?
- How did you feel when the book ends?
- Pura Belpré says stories are like seeds. When you plant seeds, what happens? Is Pura Belpré really planting stories in the ground like seeds? What is she doing with stories? How do seeds and stories spread, grow and blossom?
- Why do you think the book is called *Planting Stories*?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book? What do you think her overall message is?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Learn More about Pura Belpré

Elicit from students what they learned about Pura Belpré from reading the book. Read the Author's Note on pages 30-31 to learn more about her. Explain that Pura Belpré was the first Puerto Rican librarian to be hired by the New York Public Library. She was a gifted storyteller and puppeteer and used stories and puppets to share the stories that had been handed down across generations of her family. In 1966, the Pura Belpré Award was created in honor of her, which is presented every year to a Latin American/Hispanic writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and honors the Latin American experience. After talking together about Pura Belpré, have students conduct their own research about her using some of the following sources: [Pura Belpré: Library Storyteller](#), the [Pura Belpré Award](#), [Pura Belpré: Her Life and Legacy](#) and [How NYC's First Puerto Rican Librarian Brought Spanish To The Shelves](#). (With younger students, read and share aloud some of this information.) After conducting their research, have students create a presentation based on what they learned, which could include one of the following: a picture of her with a short caption (younger students) a poem about her, a puppet show based on one of her stories (younger students), a short essay, a PowerPoint presentation, imagined journal entries, or a timeline of her life. After the presentations, discuss by asking the following questions: *What more did you learn about Pura Belpré? What more do you want to know about her? Why do you think they named the award after Pura Belpré?*

2. Conduct a Class Pura Belpré Award Contest

Explain that the [Pura Belpré Award](#) is an award and recognition presented to a Latin American/Hispanic author and illustrator each year whose children's book best portrays the Latin American experience. The award was established in 1996 (25 years ago in 2021) in honor of Pura Belpré. First, talk with students about the importance of having this specific award for Hispanic/Latin American writers and illustrators. Engage students in a Pura Belpré award contest in your classroom. You can first collect the names of children's books by Latin American authors and illustrators whose work portrays the Latin American experience and community. Have students identify the names of relevant books by looking in your classroom, school or community library and bookstore, [past Pura Belpré award recipients](#) and ADL's [Books Matter](#) lists for additional ideas. Try to find as many books as you can in your school so students can read the books prior to the contest, but you may have to

also rely on reviews. (This is also an opportunity to point out to students the extent to which you have some, many or few of these books and commit to growing that library.) Have students read and review as many books as they can—for younger students, the contest may be more modest, and the books and reviews will have to be read aloud to them. After reading and reviewing, have students nominate their favorite and most impactful book. You can either do one overall contest or have one for authors and one for illustrators. Then refine the list to three nominations for each category. Invite a few students to share why they want to nominate each of the finalist books. As a class, vote to decide the winning books. If time permits, hold a ceremony (inviting other classes and families) for the books, read them aloud and have some students share their thoughts about each book.

3. Make a Plant of Your Own Story

Talk with students about how the book uses the metaphor of “planting seeds” as a way to create stories and that Pura Belpré planted “her story seeds throughout the land.” Talk with children about how plants and flowers start off as seeds and then become plants, flowers and trees. Elicit/explain about the different parts of a plant, which could include the seeds, roots, stem, leaves, branches (in the case of a tree) and flowers. Have children draw a plant, tree or flower with those parts (or find a sample outline of one online) and have them create a story about their life using the different parts of a plant. For example, the seeds could represent when they were infants and babies, the roots could represent when they were toddlers (ages 3-4), and the leaves or flowers could represent them now. For each section of the tree, plant or flower, have them write words or phrases (or draw a picture) about those times in their lives. For older students, you can have them elaborate and provide more details on their words and phrases and turn these into an essay or story about their lives. As an alternative, instead of having the plant/flower stories about their lives, it could be another kind of essay or story that you assign and using the same process.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on Latin American people identity and culture and the power of books.

Curriculum Resources

8 Ideas for Teaching National Hispanic Heritage Month, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/8-ideas-for-teaching-national-hispanic-heritage-month.

Identity, Hair and Seeing Myself, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-hair-and-seeing-myself.

Who Am I? Identity Poems, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems.

Websites

9 Must-Read Children's Books for National Hispanic Heritage Month

www.adl.org/blog/9-must-read-childrens-books-for-national-hispanic-heritage-month

This blog offers recommended children's books for National Hispanic Heritage Month to help young people explore identity, names, culture, immigration, discrimination and important people in Latin American history.

Books Matter: The Power of Children's Literature

www.adl.org/blog/books-matter-the-power-of-childrens-literature

Anyone who has ever read to or with a child—parent, family member, teacher or friend—knows books leave lasting impressions. This blog speaks about books having the power to instill empathy, affirm, teach, transport and inspire action.

National Hispanic Heritage Month: Ideas for Teachers

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/national-hispanic-heritage-month-ideas-for-teachers

A curation of PreK-12 educational resources curriculum and other resources that help bring the themes of Hispanic Heritage Month to your classrooms.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

People, Identity & Culture: Latino/Hispanic, Latino American, Hispanic-American, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[210\]=210](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[210]=210)