



YOUR LITTLE
ONE'S LOVE OF
READING STARTS
WITH YOU!

Hungry Bunny
Claudia Frantz
Illustrated by
Kathryn Brown

MISC
LIGHTNING
GIRL

Radgers in the meadow
He's strumming his guitar
Early morning, the sun
is shining brightly
Aki Borek

THE INSIDE STORY

These Latino children's book authors and illustrators know a thing or two about captivating young imaginations. So prepare to be inspired!

BY DAMARYS OCAÑA PEREZ PHOTOGRAPHS BY PRISCILLA GRAGG

IN MY FAMILY, the world stops for books. My 6-year-old daughter, Artie, wakes me up bright and early on Saturdays to get ready for a trip to the library. And I could be in the middle of cooking dinner and my 2-year-old son, Cami, will tap me on the leg and ask me to make funny *gallo* sounds from his favorite bilingual book, *Animals: Animales*.

Not that I mind. I moved to the U.S. from Cuba when I was 8. Books helped me master English and navigate a new world as an immigrant. They weren't just entertainment. They made me believe that anything was possible.

I want my kids to have the same passion for reading, to experience the pure joy of getting lost in a good tale and

reap the many educational benefits too. The statistics about literacy among Latino children are concerning, though. According to Child Trends, just 21 percent of Latino fourth-graders read at grade level, making them four times more likely to drop out of high school.

But parents can reverse the trend. Countless studies

show that they play a key role in the literacy development of children. So we turned to the experts—the Latino authors and illustrators of some of the most beloved and best-selling kids' books of recent years—to get the scoop on how they get their own children to fall in love with reading. And how you can too.

MEET THE PANEL

Our authors and illustrators share how they became bookworms.

Pablo Cartaya, Cuban-American author of *Each Tiny Spark*

> “My fourth-grade English teacher, Mrs. Mead, introduced me to Roald Dahl’s *The BFG*, the story of a girl who befriends a big, friendly giant. It was the first book I ever read cover to cover by myself. After that, I started to love reading just for pleasure.”

Elisa Chavarri, Peruvian illustrator of *Federico and the Wolf*

> “My grandfather would write his own stories for me—like the one about a butterfly who helped others in need and finally got her wish to have colorful wings. Then he’d have my uncle illustrate them. Seeing the process come alive ignited my reading passion.”

Matt de la Peña, Mexican-American author of *Superman: Dawnbreaker*

> “When I was young, I was a basketball nerd—I definitely didn’t consider myself much of a reader. But the summer before high school, I got my hands on a biography about legendary basketball player and coach Larry Bird. For two weeks straight, I read it every night after playing ball.”

Christina Forshay, Mexican-American illustrator of *Goodnight Soccer*

> “My parents read a lot—fairy tales, westerns, Victorian novels, biographies. So whenever I was bored, I’d pick up anything lying around. I was reading by age 4.”

Zara González Hoang, Puerto Rican author and illustrator of *A New Kind of Wild*

> “My mom was a teacher, and her time was in short supply. But she made it a point to read a book every night with my siblings and me, one on one, until we were in middle school. That made reading feel special.”

Jorge Lacera, Colombian coauthor and illustrator of *Zombies Don’t Eat Veggies*

> “We spoke mostly Spanish at home in

“For a while when I was in elementary school, I didn’t have a TV at home. So every day, I borrowed a different book at the library from the Choose Your Own Adventure series—the plot is determined by the reader—and spend the entire afternoon reading.”



Duncan Tonatiah, Mexican-American author and illustrator of *Soldier for Equality*

Miami. When I was 10, my cousins dropped off a plastic bag full of comics in English. They became my treasured possessions, expanding my world and my vocabulary—every time I saw a new word, I’d look it up.”

Juana Martínez-Neal, Peruvian author and illustrator of *Fry Bread*

> “Our house in Lima was filled with books of all kinds. My parents, brother, and I all had little libraries in our rooms. When we’d go to a book fair, my mom would say, ‘Get whatever you want!’ What a thrill.”

Juana Medina, Colombian author and illustrator of *Juana & Lucas: Big Problemas*

> “When I was growing up, my older cousin would read me books during sleepovers and take artistic license with the stories, like a Colombian version of the classic riches-to-rags-to-riches tale *A Little Princess*, set in Bogotá and with Spanish-speaking characters!”

Raúl the Third, Mexican-American author and illustrator of *¡Vamos! Let’s Go to the Market*

> “As a kid, I was blown away by illustrations, like the ones in the mystery novel *The House With a Clock in Its Walls*. How could a person think up such amazing pictures? I’d copy the drawings and create ones of my own.”

Jennifer Torres, Mexican-American author of *The Fresh New Face of Griselda*

> “My grandmothers would always tell me tales about their childhoods or my parents. That storytelling tradition is what inspired me to read for fun.”

THE EXPERTS ON GETTING KIDS TO LOVE READING

1

Bring stories to life.

● SEE BEYOND THE BOOK

“Check your local bookstore’s calendar for author events. Kids can hear their favorite book read out loud, ask some questions, and engage in activities such as signings. When children connect with a book and they can share that with the author, it’s very moving.” —MARTINEZ-NEAL

● DIY

“Make a book together. Cut two pieces of cardboard for the cover, grab some paper, and use shoestrings as a binder. Have kids write about a great memory and draw pictures. When your story is reflected in a book, it holds special value.” —MEDINA

● GO FOR AN OSCAR

“My 9-year-old son and I are pretty performative readers. We do different voices and have a great time. Living through a book’s characters helps children express themselves and think through situations in their own lives.” —RAÚL THE THIRD

● LEAVE TIME FOR QUESTIONS

“It’s okay to pause while reading a book and ask, ‘What do you think is going to happen next?’ Or let kids ask questions. If they’re really into the story, though, talk



EVERY YEAR, ELISA CHAVARRI TAKES A PHOTO OF HER DAUGHTER, LUCÍA, SURROUNDED BY HER FAVE BOOKS!

about it afterward. Ask: 'What is your favorite part?' And be sure to share your own thoughts. Make it a conversation, not an interrogation." —TORRES

● **SEE THE MOVIE**

"Whenever there's a film adaptation of a kid's novel coming out, I read the book with my children, and then we watch the movie and discuss the differences. My 12-year-old son and I did this recently with *Wonder*, the uplifting story of a fifth-grader with Treacher Collins syndrome. It's not something that he normally would've picked up. But it deepened his reading experience, and he ended up loving it." —FORSHAY

● **GIVE THE WORDS A BREAK**

"My twins are toddlers and don't have a long attention span. Sometimes we skip the reading and just enjoy the pictures, or we look at character expressions and talk about feelings. We replace names in the book with their names, or say, 'Let's try to spot all the red T-shirts in the book.' Details like that can capture their imagination, and they can build on that as they start reading." —MEDINA

● **MAKE MEMORIES**

"When my 5-year-old, Lucía, was 3, we spread her favorite books out on the floor and I took a cute picture of her with them. She was so excited and asked me to read her every single one of the books. We've continued the tradition for the last few years. It creates a wonderful memory for kids, and they can see how their tastes change." —CHAVARRI



PL's *Love Libros* initiative helps parents create a culture of reading at home by highlighting the power of books.

2 Embrace your culture.

● **HOST A POETRY SLAM**

"Free-verse poems like those by Cuban-American writer Margarita Engle say so much with so few words, and the Spanish is easy to absorb. My family makes a production out of reading them with a 'poetry karaoke' night. We have snacks and play mics, and take turns going to the front of the living room to read." —CARTAYA

● **CREATE A CONNECTION**

"When we read Yuyi Morales's *Niño Wrestles the World*, which incorporates Spanish vocab, my 6-year-old son, Kai, wears his *lucha libre* mask and pretends he's a fighter. When we read about tamales, my parents will tell Kai about how our family ate them every New Year's Day when I was a kid." —LACERA

● **BOOST BILINGUAL VOCAB**

"A traditional game like *lotería* is a great way to learn language." —TONATIUH

● **FIND RELATABLE CHARACTERS**

"I read the classic coming-of-age story *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros, in fourth grade.

The fact that this book was written by a Latina, about a Latino family, resonated with me in a way that most of the books I read at my very white, midwestern school did not."

—CONZÁLEZ HOANG

● **CALL ON ABUELITA**

"The app Caribu lets you video-call grandparents—or any other relatives—long-distance and read with them in Spanish from the app's library." —LACERA

● **PUT ON AN ACCENT**

"I read my kids the pop-up Harry Potter books aloud. I give the character Hagrid a Spanish accent and translate dialogue on the spot, like 'Oye, Harry, ¿cómo me vas a decir eso?'" —CARTAYA



BEST
BOOK
BETS

3

Read everything, everywhere.

● **BROADEN HIS BOOK LIST**

“My 9-year-old reads gaming and instructional manuals. Anything your child reads to absorb knowledge is a valid entry point to develop a love of books.” —*RAÚL THE THIRD*

● **CREATE EASY ACCESS**

“My kids have their own little playroom library. The books are all at a height they can reach.” —*TONATIUH*

● **KEEP BOOKS ON HAND**

“I have stacks of novels by my bed. I read at my kids’ soccer practice or at doctors’ appointments. Showing children that you enjoy reading will inspire them to do the same.” —*FORSHAY*

● **TAKE A LITERARY VACAY**

“Bring books on trips so your kid knows they’re a part of life. My family and I drove from Maine to southern Mexico last year. We placed racks filled with books behind the front seats of the car. Whenever my kids wanted to look at them, they could. Being able to do so on their own made them happy.” —*MEDINA*

4

Give kids the power of choice.

● **DON'T CRAMP THEIR STYLE**

“Every child is different, so pay attention to their needs. My 12-year-old has ADHD and has to read a book and listen to the audiobook version at the same time. My 8-year-old doesn’t care to be read to. So we read our own books together on the couch, and it works.” —*CARTAYA*

● **FOLLOW THEIR LEAD**

“It’s absolutely vital to let kids read what they want to read, especially at home. My daughter has been wanting to read princess stories over and over. I don’t love it, but I figure she must be exploring something in her head. I usually let her pick three books, and I get to pick two so I can mix in some stories with a different sensibility.” —*DE LA PEÑA*

● **WELCOME THE WEIRD**

“When your kids gravitate toward a certain subject matter, support it. I was into spooky, creepy books as a kid. My mom called them ‘muñecos feos’ but never discouraged me.” —*LACERA*

UNLOCK THE POWER OF THE LIBRARY

“A library card gives children an autonomy that is lacking in other areas of their lives. It’s this key to a secret world where adults don’t have a say in what happens.”

—*GONZÁLEZ HOANG*

Reads That Represent

Selected by literacy experts and tested by kids, these books featuring Latino characters are bound to become favorites in your home. *BY KAREN CICERO*

1

¡Vamos! Let’s Go to the Market

written and illustrated by Raúl the Third

Set in the Mercado and around La Placita, this bilingual book reminded our reviewers of Richard Scarry tales because of its alluring depiction of everyday activities. “Each page allowed me to share bits of my childhood with my boys, and we pored over all the details and the Spanish words,” says Lucy Newhouse, of San Diego, who blogs at *Lucy Lou & Co.* Ages 4 to 8

2

The Piñata That the Farm Maiden Hung

written by Samantha R. Vamos, illustrated by Sebastián Serra

In the style of *The Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, this delightful story details the creation of a colorful star-shaped piñata for a birthday party with the help of a boy, a horse, a goose, a cat, a sheep, and a farmer. It smartly weaves in Spanish words, bolding them in the text. “We’re a big fan of this one because it rhymes and it’s so funny!” says Wanda Martucci, a mom of two in Brooklyn, New York. After storytime, expect your kid to want to make a piñata of his very own. Good thing that directions are in the book’s back matter. Ages 4 to 8

3

Juana & Lucas:

Big Problems

written and illustrated by Juana Medina

In this humorous and heartwarming chapter book, Juana worries that her relationship with her *mami* will change when she starts spending more time with her new “friend” Luis. “My sons and I loved Juana’s best amigo and dog, Lucas, and the fact that there’s Spanglish throughout,” Martucci says. Ages 6 to 10

4

Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story From the Border

written by Mitali Perkins, illustrated by Sara Palacios

Our kid reviewers were immediately invested in this story of a family from San Diego that takes a bus to meet Abuela (whom they haven’t seen in five years) at the fence along the border. When they learn that no gifts are allowed to pass through the fence, the girl comes up with a genius idea to get her little brother’s drawing across. “I really felt like my 4-year-old daughter could relate, since she loves to draw pictures and gift them,” says Melissa Rojas, of Donna, Texas. Ages 4 to 8



Hover your phone’s camera for more book picks for Latino kids.

5

Think Big, Little One
written and illustrated
by Vashti Harrison

This inspiring board book introduces young kids to 18 diverse women who "made their dreams come true." Each woman's accomplishments are summed up in a sentence that kids will understand. For instance, Frida Kahlo "painted her feelings and opinions," while Violeta Parra "preserved the songs of Chile for all to learn." Ages 2 to 6

6

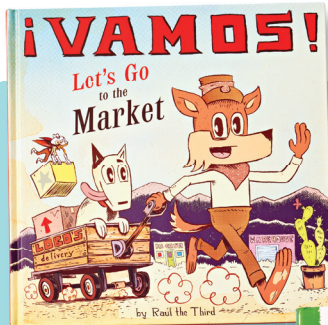
Sofia Valdez, Future Prez
written by Andrea Beaty,

illustrated by David Roberts
In this inspiring rhyming story, second-grader Sofia starts a petition to turn the city's landfill into a park. Her persistence pays off: "Now every evening till long after dark, the town comes together at Citizens' Park. They hold this truth to be self-evident. Sofia Valdez could grow up to be president!" Ages 4 to 10

7

Cerca/Close and Lejos/Far
written by Juan Felipe Herrera,

illustrated by Blanca Gómez
You'll get a lot of use out of these "sister" dual-language board books. Toddlers will learn spatial concepts, and beginning readers can practice in English and Spanish. "I loved that the English translation is directly under the Spanish sentence," says Brittany Hernandez, of Brandon, Florida, who blogs at *Style Me Britt*. Ages 1 to 6



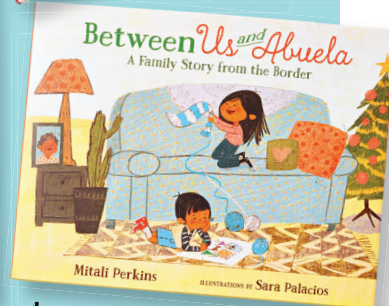
Includes instructions for making your own piñata!



8

Holy Squawkamole! Little Red Hen Makes Guacamole
written by Susan Wood,

illustrated by Laura González
A spicy twist on the classic *Little Red Hen*, this story is "too cute and stuck to our heritage," says Hernandez. Spanish terms are integrated throughout, and kiddos will love making the recipes in the back of the book. Ages 4 to 8



9

My Papi Has a Motorcycle
written by Isabel Quintero,

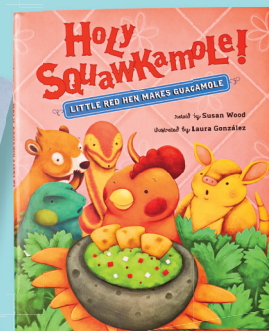
illustrated by Zeke Peña
Depicted in vivid watercolor illustrations, a girl and her papi travel the neighborhood each night—a tradition that she cherishes. "When it's so difficult for many to imagine the Latino children waiting for safe harbor as the children they are, this book is a powerful reminder of the wonders of childhood that all deserve," says Kim Parker, Ph.D., a literacy expert in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ages 5 to 9



10

¿De dónde eres?/Where Are You From?
written by Yamile Saied Méndez,

illustrated by Jaime Kim
Available in English and Spanish editions, this book tells the story of a girl who is constantly asked the title question, and she doesn't quite know how to answer. "This was amazing because it teaches us that people are from everywhere," says Martucci. Ages 5 to 9



Inspired by author Isabel Quintero's neighborhood rides with her papi in Corona, California.