

HISTORY

The Pura Belpré Award is presented annually to a Latino writer and to a Latino illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children. It is co-sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), an ALA affiliate.

Inspired by the desire to encourage Latino authors and illustrators in their efforts to produce children's works celebrating the Latino experience in the United States, Oralia Garza de Cortés, Sandra Ríos Balderrama and Toni Bissessar of REFORMA and Linda Perkins, President of ALSC appeared before the ALSC Board at the 1993 Midwinter Meeting. They requested the establishment of a joint task force to discuss the possibility of a joint book award.

The following summer the ALSC/REFORMA Children's Book Award Task Force was established to develop the terms and criteria of the award. At the 1994 Annual Conference the terms and criteria were accepted. Due to a moratorium on new awards, however, final approval for the award was postponed, conditional on the procurement of funding.

At the 1995 Annual Conference the American Library Association Awards Committee agreed to approve the award the following Midwinter if funding was assured by that time. During the 1996 Midwinter Meeting, ALSC voted to provide seed money to establish the Pura Belpré Award to be presented biennially by ALSC and REFORMA. Following approval by the ALA Awards Committee it was initially agreed that the award was to consist of a medal (to be struck at a later date) and no monetary award.

The first award recipients were announced at the ALSC membership meeting during the 1996 Annual Conference in New York City. The awards were given the following August at the REFORMA First National Conference in Austin, Texas. It was announced that for the first award only, the winners would receive \$1000. In the absence of a medal, certificates were presented to the award winners and to the honor winners.

At Midwinter of 1998 the second biennial Pura Belpré Award winners were announced during the ALA Youth Media Awards Press Conference and the award certificates were presented the following summer at a program at the ALA 1998 Annual Conference. This was the pattern to be followed for the subsequent Pura Belpré Awards.

In 2000 the first Spanish and English announcements of the award winners were made at the Midwinter press conference. Caroline Ward, President of ALSC was instrumental in forwarding the cause of the award by her outstanding and persevering support. An Endowment was begun at ALSC to ensure the long-term viability of the award.

In preparation for the 2000 Pura Belpré Award, a search was initiated for an artist to design a medal for the two categories of author and illustrator. Emanuel Martinez, a Colorado artist produced a design approved by both ALSC and REFORMA. Using photographs of Pura Belpré obtained from her papers

housed at the Puerto Rican Institute at Hunter College in NYC, he portrayed Pura Belpré with two children, capturing her true likeness and spirit.

In 2006, ALSC and REFORMA created a Memo of Understanding that clarified each organization's roles and responsibilities for administering the award. At the 2007 Midwinter Meeting, the REFORMA Board voted to approve the Belpré Award be given annually beginning in the year 2009, and the ALSC Board followed suit at Annual Conference 2007.