

# Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:  
EXPLORING DIVERSITY WITH THE  
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS  
BY JULIE GREEN

This article was first published  
August 6, 2012 (Booklist Online).



Authors of books for youth continue to reflect the world's ever-growing diversity in their pages, exposing young people to new traditions, celebrations, and experiences through their stories. The books below are focused on youth literature with Hispanic characters or settings, or are written by Hispanic authors, and are paired with activities that encourage readers to explore the structures and genres of the texts.

**RL.1.5. Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.**

**Nacho and Lolita.** By Pam Muñoz Ryan. Illus. by Claudia Rueda. 2005. 40p. Scholastic, \$16.99 (9780439269681). 398.24. Gr. 1–3.

Read through this charming, original folktale and record the elements that make it a “story” book. Then read through the author’s note (teachers will need to paraphrase for first-graders) and discuss how much learning, research, and information went into creating this story. This can lead into a discussion about how stories sometimes begin when the author has read an informational title that sparked an idea for a narrative.

**RL.4.5. Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.**

**Dancing Home.** By Alma Flor Ada. 2011. 147p. Atheneum, \$12.79 (9781416900887). Gr. 4–6.

Read this story together as a class, or in small groups, followed by discussion. The story ends with a beautiful Spanish poem accompanied by an English translation. Have the students talk about the poem’s meaning in relation to the characters in the story. How does this poem explain, in so few words, issues in the book? If there are Spanish-speaking students in the class, discuss how the English translation differs from the original Spanish version. What elements of

the original poem were changed by the translator in order to make it sound and look like a poem?

**The Dream Stealer.** By Sid Fleischman. Illus. by Peter Sís. 2009. 89p. Greenwillow, \$14.49 (9780061755637). Gr. 2–5.

While not exactly a poem, this brief story is written in poetic, direct language. After reading the text, have students try to retell it by writing their own versions in poem form. What words would they use? How would they structure or shape their poems? After the writing exercise, discuss the reasons behind each structural choice the students made in creating their poems.

**How Tía Lola Saved the Summer.** By Julia Alvarez. 2011. 141p. Knopf, \$13.64 (9780375867279). Gr. 4–7.

The Tía Lola books focus on a high-spirited aunt and the adventures of her family. After reading one or more of the books and learning about the characters, have small groups of students create their own dramas about the next adventure for Tía Lola, complete with settings and stage directions. Have students practice and then perform their plays for the rest of the class.

**Olé! Flamenco.** By George Ancona. 2010. 46p. Lee and Low, \$19.95 (9781600603617). 793.3. Gr. 5–8.

While reading this informational book about the history and tradition of flamenco dancing, record facts that are new to the students on chart paper. Discuss why this title isn’t a fictional story. Next, using the information gathered on chart paper, write a fictional story together as a class. Compare and contrast the writing styles of *Olé! Flamenco* to the class story.

**RL.6.5. Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.**

**Diego: Bigger Than Life.** By Carmen T. Bernier-Grand. Illus. by David Díaz. 2009. 64p. Marshall Cavendish, \$18.99 (9780761453833). 759.972. Gr. 7–10.

In this beautifully illustrated biography, each poem tells another chapter of Diego Rivera’s life. Although this book is intended for an older audience, it has a gorgeous way of introducing Mr. Rivera’s story in poems. Select a poem to read aloud. Because *Diego: Bigger Than Life* is a picture book, a biography, and a poetry title, it provides a creative opportunity to discuss genres. Can they have more than one genre? Ask students why Bernier-Grand may have chosen to write in poetry instead of narrative prose or short bursts of facts? This is a good book to incorporate into an artist study on Diego Rivera, using additional books, such as *Diego Rivera: His World and Ours*, by Duncan Tonatiuh.

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**The Firefly Letters:** A Suffragette's Journey to Cuba.

By Margarita Engle. 2010. 151p. Holt, \$15.34  
(9780805090826). 811. Gr. 6–12.

In this story based on true events about a female-rights activist, Fredrika goes to Cuba to write and meets a slave girl named Cecilia. Another major character in the story is Elena, who is a wealthy Cuban girl whose family owns Cecilia and is hosting Fredrika. Throughout the story, Fredrika and Cecilia run around at night trying to free the fireflies that children capture. Ask students how each of these three characters is similar to the trapped fireflies. Then have students go back through the text and pick out the specific passages in the story that prove this.

**Hurricane Dancers:** The First Caribbean Pirate

Shipwreck. By Margarita Engle. 2011. 145p. Holt, \$15.34  
(9780805092400). 811. Gr. 6–10.

This novel in verse tells a fascinating story through different perspectives about a slave, a pirate, and a hostage who are shipwrecked on an island inhabited by native people. Share the whole book aloud, then reread the first page of the book and discuss how these first lines could be seen as a theme for the slave Quebrado as he comes into his own identity. How is the ship like Quebrado? What phrases in the story show the progression of Quebrado discovering his true self?

**Under the Mesquite.** By Guadalupe Garcia McCall. 2011. 224p. Lee and Low, \$17.95 (9781600604294). Gr. 7–10.

This is a beautiful, heartbreaking story of a Mexican family who is dealing with the mother's cancer struggle. As a class, read the chapter "Sisters." Most students will be able to relate to many descriptions of the family scenes in this chapter. After reading through it a few times, have students record the lines that they feel best describe what a sister means in this particular family. What are the words and phrases that really explain "sister" to the reader? Next, have students write their own poems about a specific member of their own families.

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