

Reading Matters

Carly and Carolina by Jean Dugan

Carly is six. She lives with her grandmother Maria in the outskirts of Cevicos, a small town in the impoverished center of the Dominican Republic, her mother long gone to a larger city. When we visited Carly's home, we climbed over a low gate, trying to avoid stepping on, or being pecked by, the chickens wandering in the muddy yard. And there was Carly sitting with her pink Dora backpack in one of the ubiquitous white plastic chairs that are a symbol of hospitality here, engaged in the very serious business of doing her kindergarten homework. "She's good in school" Maria tells us. "I hope she does well." Carly's family has dreams for her.



Jean Dugan, a long-time friend of *Exchange*, has been connecting kids with books for over 40 years. She helped establish a library program in the elementary schools of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and later brought her love of children's literature to the public library there. This is one more opportunity for her to share the best new books with children and those who care about them.

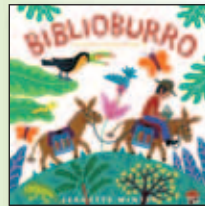
Carolina is 21. She lives in the heart of Cevicos, in a house where her single mother is the caretaker. Carolina loves clothes, especially shoes — the more outrageous the better; she dreams of becoming a fashion designer someday. But she's a practical young woman and is working toward a university degree in accounting. Unlike her contemporaries in the United States, however, her path is long and difficult. The classes she needs are offered only sporadically and many of them at night. Bus transportation is spotty or nonexistent, sometimes leaving her in a vulnerable position when the bus breaks down or fails to show up. Carolina is often discouraged, and occasionally there are tears, but she holds tight to her dream, knowing that education is the first big step out of poverty.

Here are some of the newest books for children — most of them based on true stories — where dreams of a better future are held fast.

Biblioburro by Jeanette Winter (Beach Lane Books, 2010); Ages 4–7.

Waiting for the Biblioburro by Monica Brown; illustrated by John Parra (Tricycle Press, 2011); Ages 5–8.

These two stories from Colombia celebrate a real-life hero whose mission is to transform the lives of children with books. The first is told from the perspective of Luis Soriano Bohórquez, the teacher turned librarian who carries books to remote villages on the backs of his two donkeys, Alpha and Beta. The other is the story of Anna, who waits impatiently in her mountain village for the arrival of the biblioburros; the stories she reads about the world beyond her mountain home inspire her to write, draw, and share her own.



Rain School by James Rumford (Houghton Mifflin, 2010). Ages 4–8.

It's the dry season in Chad, and time to go to school. But before classes start, the students have to learn to make the mud bricks and walls, and gather saplings for the roof of their new, and very seasonal, school. The second lesson, the moment they've been waiting for, is learning to read and write. When the rain clouds come again and their school disappears, the children run back home, full of all they have learned that can never be washed away.

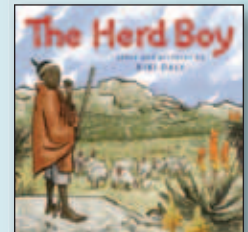


The Herd Boy by Niki Daly (Eerdmans, 2012); Ages 5–8. Niki Daly asks, "What is there in the life of a herd boy that would help prepare him to become the shepherd of a

nation?" Malusi cares for his grandfather's sheep and goats in the hills and grasslands of South Africa.

Every day he must be brave in his encounters with baboons and puffadders, vigilant in looking after the herd and a gentle caretaker when one of his lambs is wounded

— all the time dreaming of someday becoming president of his country. "A boy who looks after his herd will make a very fine leader," says an old man passing through Malusi's village, who is none other than Nelson Mandela, himself a former herd boy.



In recent years there has been a trend toward picture book biographies for elementary school children that offer brief, colorful insight into the lives of historic figures that makes them feel very relevant to children of the 21st century. Many of those who have been admired throughout history started off with little more than a dream in their pockets, among them: **Henry Aaron** (*Henry Aaron's Dream* by Matt Tavares; Candlewick Press, 2010); **Booker T. Washington** (*Fifty Cents and a Dream* by Jabari Asim; illustrated by Bryan Collier; Little Brown, 2012); **Sonia Sotomayor** (*Sonia Sotomayor: A Judge Grows in the Bronx* by Jonah Winter; illustrated by Edel Rodriguez; Atheneum, 2009); **Frederick Douglass** (*Words Set Me Free* by Lesa Cline-Ransome; illustrated by James E. Ransome, Simon and Schuster, 2012).

These are all beautifully illustrated introductions to history to read aloud, or for children to read themselves and discover that famous people were once just like them.