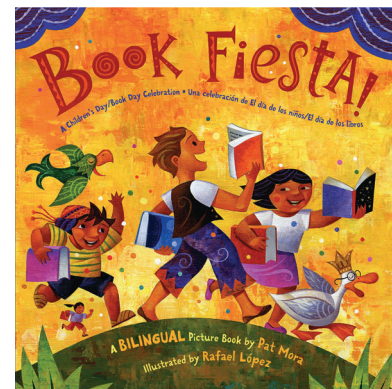


2016 May Hill Arbuthnot Lecture

Bookjoy, Wordjoy: *Alegría en los Libros*

PAT MORA



On September 29, 2014, I received a special email. It was from friendly Hannah Ehrlich at Lee & Low Books who forwarded a lovely and affirming message from [2016 Arbuthnot Committee Chair] Julie Corsaro. I was speechless and so grateful at what Julie had written.

No, she wasn't going to bring me a coconut cake, nor a carrot cake—which might also have put a smile on my face. Julie was informing me that I'd been chosen to deliver the 2016 May Hill Arbuthnot Lecture. I sat in my small Santa Fe atrium feeling stunned. Me? Initially, I couldn't even share the news. I just sat there with my house plants who are used to, and very tolerant of, my ways. (Silently, those plants can also be demanding.)

Many people deserved thanks for creating the special Arbuthnot Lecture in Santa Barbara. Such presentations are opportunities for me to meditate, reflect, ponder. *Muchísimas gracias*, to the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), an active Día partner, and to the Arbuthnot Committee.

I began keeping a scribbly journal the afternoon of September 29, 2014, reminders of ideas I wanted to include in the lecture and this essay.

We are a community, thinking together about the importance of children, all our children, bundles of promise, who deserve and need to become readers for their sake—and ours. In one sense, that doesn't seem such a lofty goal for the world's most powerful nation. We have impressive national educational and library systems and a long tradition of aspiring to serve families in all our states and to be exemplars of the power of small and huge libraries, creatively and responsibly serving their patrons.

The Arbuthnot Lecture is an invitation to ponder the complex world of children's books now, a very different world from that of May Hill Arbuthnot, but I think she'd be excited by our challenges. Sounds and feels like a heavy load, but what joy we have to share, bookjoy, *alegría en los libros*. Think with me about *your* bookjoy story while I briefly tell you mine.

I was born and grew up in El Paso, Texas, an area once part of Mexico, the neighboring country visible across the Rio Grande. I am the oldest, and three might have said the bossiest, of four children. Do not believe everything they say. My parents were hard-working, bilingual, wonderful. Dad was born in Mexico and came to El Paso at a young age with his family, just walking across the border fleeing the Mexican Revolution. Years later, he opened his own small optical company, the United Optical Company, and Mom, born in El Paso, fabulously articulate in English and Spanish, helped as she could but devoted most of her energies to her children. None of my grandparents spoke English. Due to the Depression, neither of my parents had the opportunity to attend college, *but* Mom was a reader.



Author and literacy advocate **Pat Mora** has written more than three dozen books for young people that represent the Mexican American experience. She is the founder of *El día de los niños/ El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day), or "Día." She delivered the 2016 May Hill Arbuthnot Lecture April 15, 2016, at Santa Barbara City College's Garvin Theatre. Her lecture coincided with the 20th anniversary of Día.



Young Pat Mora in El Paso.

Many of our children have wonderful parents, but not all read nor *can* read in any language. They may be illiterate; they may not as children have experienced the magic in books or libraries. Such parents need our help.

As you think about your life-journey, relax into your early reading memories. I hope you have some; not all adults do. Mine are delicious.

I'm in the room I shared with my sister, Cissy, in the rock house my father had built instead of taking mom on a honeymoon. Whoops! I'm perhaps in second grade and home from school with a slight cold. My dear maternal grandmother, Mamande, brings me a bowl of Campbell's tomato soup and oyster crackers. She sits and pats the hand of her first grandchild, *moi*.

Extremely comfortable in my bed years ago, I open one of my favorite books, Volume 1, *Poems of Early Childhood* in the Childcraft series. I turn the pages enjoying the illustrations and delighting in the words, in language. I read "The Little Turtle," "Sing a Song of Sixpence," and oh! "The friendly cow all red and white/I love with all my heart . . ." And, I was loving that cow in the desert, remember. Although Robert Louis Stevenson might have seen a red and white cow, I certainly hadn't—and haven't.

The wonder and joy of words, sounds, images. I was transported and hope you have been too, year after year. I'll have that delicious experience again tonight and tomorrow night—*sans* tomato soup. I've been reminded that reading is a *privilege*; reading in two languages, a double privilege. The joy of words, languages.

I've smiled at Virginia Woolf's words, "When the Day of Judgment dawns and people, great and small, come marching in to receive their heavenly rewards, the Almighty will gaze upon the mere bookworms and say to Peter, 'Look, these need no reward. We have nothing to give them. They have loved reading.'"

We probably think we're a bit hip to be "bookworms," today, but readers know what Woolf means.

It may have been in 1996, when I was writing my family memoir *House of Houses* (the same year we started *Día*), that I decided to purchase a used set of the Childcraft books, copyright date 1947. Some I'd favored more than others. For the first time, I skimmed the Preface and saw the name May Hill Arbuthnot in the list of those thanked for their assistance. I'm grateful too.

The words describing the Arbuthnot Lecture, "significant contribution to the field of children's literature," have weighed on me. I tried to distract myself with the word "field" which could

take me back to the pastoral scene, "the cow all red and white," to the *pleasure* of reading as a child, and to the pleasure of having adults read to me.

The aunt who is the star of my first children's book, *A Birthday Basket for Tía*, that turns twenty-five next year, came to this country with her maternal family during the Mexican Revolution. No one spoke English, and yet, by the time my sister and I were young readers, that beloved aunt would sit us one on each side and read us Nancy Drew mysteries. The power of love.

You and I firmly believe that words and languages offer us both pleasure and *power*: the power to express ourselves, defend ourselves and others; the power to do research and teach ourselves skills, to entertain ourselves, to tease others, to understand human and environmental complexity, to increase our knowledge, and ideally, our wisdom. Readers know there can be wealth in books. What power we find in the small symbols on the page in all languages, wealth that as readers many of us want to share. We need to continue to explore how best to do that.

Words Free As Confetti

Come, words, come in your every color.
 I'll toss you in storm or breeze.
 I'll say, say, say you,
 Taste you sweet as plump plums,
 Bitter as old lemons.
 I'll sniff you words, warm
 as almonds or tart as apple-red,
 feel you green
 and soft as new grass,
 lightwhite as dandelion plumes,
 or thorngray as cactus,
 heavy as black cement,
 cold as blue icicles.
 Warm as *abuelita's* yellowlap.
 I'll hear you words, loud as searoar's
 purple crash, hushed
 as *gatitos* curled in sleep,
 as the last goldlullaby.
 I'll see you long and dark as tunnels,
 bright as rainbows,
 playful as chestnut wind.
 I'll watch you, words, rise and dance and spin.
 I'll say, say, say you
 in English,
 in Spanish,
 I'll find you.
 Hold you.
 Toss you.
 I'm free too.
 I say *yo soy libre*,
 I am free
 free, free,
 as confetti.¹

In 1945, the Chilean author, educator, diplomat, and international advocate for children and women, Gabriela Mistral, was the first Latin American woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. She used her prize to buy a small home in Santa Barbara. Gabriela Mistral also wrote for children and said of children's poetry, "*poesía que si no se canta, podría cantarse*." (Poetry that if not sung, could be sung.)

When I speak to audiences about the need for quiet to develop our creativity, I see apprehension, but it's hard to think, write, or read deeply without quiet, and ours can be a noisy media world. Music or TV always on, the emphasis on celebrities and consuming, working too much and then being addicted to plugging in and zoning out. I see fewer adults reading at airports, reading books, that is, in any format. Sound bites seem awfully popular. *Hmmm*. Who is going to be setting our critical national priorities and policies?

I wonder if, like the Environmental Movement and the Healthy Foods Movement, in the spirit of Día, we need an exciting and excited reading movement in the United States today, a movement with a sense of urgency, a reading or bookjoy movement or initiative with a compelling vision—and action: *Let's Read* or *America Reads* or *Reading Rocks*. Might a new administration provide a grand opportunity? Might the American Library Association want to lead gathering collaborators and funders for the common good?

It has become an important part of my life to think with librarians and educators about children and books and how vital literacy and bookjoy, the enjoyment of books, are to children's future. The context for our work is complex. I have never been asked to be ashamed of speaking English, but in subtle and not so subtle ways, I've been nudged to be ashamed of speaking Spanish, of being of Mexican descent. Spanish is the second most spoken language in our country, and languages are cultural wealth. Of our twenty million children under five, one out of four is Latino.³ Of course, we want all of our children to speak English well and to savor reading in English. We also want them to be proud of their home languages, as we are.

Think of the wonderful Russian nesting dolls. (You may choose your gender.) Our adult bodies often, though not always, protect our young selves inside. For a few moments, connect with yourself in first grade, all that vulnerability. We have armor, some more than others, but the children we are thinking about don't.

I began writing children's books when, in reading to my three children, I fell in love with the form, in many ways connected to poetry, my favorite genre whether I'm writing for children or adults. It's a thrill to see a child or family enjoy a book I wrote. The journey has not been easy, and yet I feel extremely fortunate that some of my manuscripts have been published and that I'm able to celebrate languages and words. Yum! I wish I were trilingual.

I've been a mom, teacher, university administrator, and writer, but I never expected to become a literacy advocate. By 1996, I was beginning to realize how many children had no books and no connections to libraries nor to our library tradition. I was realizing that what I'd taken for granted, such as enjoying the public library and joining the Summer Reading Club, were foreign and intimidating to some children and families. I also knew that I wouldn't be me without books, and I wanted, as you want, that reading pleasure for children as we want them to be fed, safe, healthy, and enjoying the outdoors.

We care about the well-being of our diverse kiddos. We want them to have a fair chance to develop and contribute their talents, to lead fulfilling lives. The poet Mary Oliver says she had an insufficient childhood. Is that what we want for any of our young? No. We want our young to thrive as I want my Austin granddaughter Bonny to thrive.

This year, for Día's twentieth anniversary, I wrote a gift poem of short verses, presently available on my site, that I hope will be published as a book, "Twenty Ways of Looking at a Child." Here are a couple of the verses related to books,

Page after page,
the child relaxes,
friendly predictability.
Pointing at pictures,
the child confidently tells
her grandmother the story.
Bookjoy! ¡Alegria en los libros!⁴

Twenty years ago, when I learned about the Mexican celebration of April 30 as *El día de niño*, the day of the child, I proposed that in this country we celebrate all our children, and, that we link them to books, bookjoy bundles. We now know that our children need to be active readers by the third grade, or they will struggle in schools. We know that failing cycle, the embarrassment of not being able to read, and, of course, many families feel that embarrassment also. Luckily, there is growing interest in the importance of early literacy—although not always the budget to support this essential work.



Pat Mora, second from left, with her children Cissy, Bill, and Libby.

The Día journey has taught me many lessons, including the price of being an advocate and the importance of persistence. In the spirit of May Hill Arbuthnot, of ALSC, and of Día's twentieth, I want to focus on the need to be active advocates for *significantly expanding our community of young readers.*

This is important for children's individual lives, for their families, communities, *and* important for this country that needs the talents of future generations. If more and more of our children don't develop their talents, what a loss to them—and to us.

It sounded like such a simple idea—celebrating all our children and linking them to bookjoy, and my friends in REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, quickly supported the concept. Ever the optimist, I assumed that when people heard about the idea, they would think, “Well, yes, we have Mother's Day and Father's Day, we need *El día de los niños, El día de los libros/Children's Day, Book Day.*”

Was that the snag, proposing the celebration in two languages and soon in all the languages our children speak? Children's Day, Book Day, is often known as *Día*, which means “day,” to remind us of the daily-ness of our commitment and as the acronym DÍA for Diversity in Action. Humans need reminders, and although we say that every day is Día, we also need culminating April celebrations. Not all of our children are celebrated, and they deserve to be. My dream remains that this becomes an annual tradition, an April part of our national calendar. Like Mother's Day in May and Father's Day in June; Children's Day, Book Day, Día, can be celebrated in April at homes, schools, libraries, child care centers, colleges and universities, parks, and community centers.

I often smile when I see publicity about Día around the country with lots of music and dancing. Fun is fun. I also stress, though, that we want to show children and families in all languages how much fun books and book activities can be. I want children to have the daily tactile experience of holding and savoring books. (I want that for adults too.)

We are building excitement about the reading habit. We want to clap for our young, all our young, and share with them our enthusiasm about being readers. We are creating a new tradition for some families, a meaningful tradition. Ideally we are also collaborating with other literacy advocates. Given the challenge we face, we need all the help and zip we can get.

If we agree that reading is a privilege, pleasure, and a source of power, and we agree that many librarians and educators work to expand, and I mean significantly expand, the community of young readers—think of ripples expanding— what else can we

do since we know that too many of our young in this country are just not developing necessary literacy skills? That half the students in our public schools live in low-income homes⁵ is part of the context for our work. Such daily challenges.

Literacy is essential in our democracy. Voters need to be informed rather than merely swayed by advertising. Día unites communities because of the celebration and because readers tend to be more engaged in community life, more likely to be volunteers.

We believe that reading is important for all, but hard as we work, are our strategies and efforts to nurture young readers as effective as they need to be?

Reading: a privilege, a pleasure, a power. I propose that nationally as well as locally, more of us need to creatively and courageously, yes courageously, establish new collaborations with those locally, regionally, at the state level, and nationally who share our goals.

We need librarians, teachers, professors, child-care workers, foundations, business people, families, and publishers working together, daring to create new networks because we so believe in our cause.

“More work?” You may fairly ask. “But have you seen my calendar?”

The more I ponder the challenge in 2016, though, the more I think that we won't succeed in expanding the community of young readers unless we expand our community of allies, broadening our view of ourselves. We need new strategies, to leave our silos, good as the work in those silos may be.

Relying on, “But that's how we've done things,” or “That's not how we do things,” can be polite impediments to vibrant and necessary change. Surely, the tensions in our nation proclaim the importance of growing a reading public.

Given this significant challenge, don't we need to expand the group committed to this work? What are the impediments to collaboration? Time. Money. Wariness about the results, but what is our alternative if we are committed to this expansive reading vision? At the local level, first steps can be an exploratory meeting—librarians, feeder schools, a beginning. We each start where we are, and together, we grow the connections.

Recently at a campus conference, I reminded future educators how important it was that they be readers themselves. (Reading needs PR agents.) When I asked the organizers if they'd invited the local librarians, some were surprised by my question. If we

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intentionally establish ties with our literacy colleagues, think of the impact we can have.

Among our necessary allies are our colleagues and friends in the publishing industry who donate books and create book and literacy awards for young readers. Unless a publisher is a non-profit, publishing is a business, a fact we may too often forget. Maurice Sendak in his Arbutnot Lecture mentions publishing corporations. Like consumers in any field, we can participate in supporting what is published, a power we can use more consciously.

I can be dense. Let me admit that it took me a quarter of a century to realize that if I'm in book marketing and need to sell books, I need to advertise in publications with readers who buy books. If I'm an editor, and I publish diverse authors, and the books only sell modestly, what happens to my job?

How can our friends and colleagues in publishing join us in nurturing new readers, in exploring nontraditional markets, meeting potential consumers where they are? Much is cleverly marketed to children and families. We need a diverse publishing community that can explore new strategies for inspiring all our children and their families to see books as wise investments. The movement We Need Diverse Books is contributing to this conversation.

We believe in the power of story and in the power of books. Imagine a rich array of our children holding hands in a circle. If we could also see around us all the children's books published in this country last year, also a complex and beautiful array, what is the *story* that array tells our children about themselves? Do they see themselves and their families? Do our children's books, so deeply important—a legacy—affirm that *all* our children matter?

Surely, we believe that there are amazingly talented US Latino writers and illustrators, including African American, Asian, and Native American writers and illustrators, yes? And, we know, for example, that we have a growing Hispanic population. Yet, in 2015, of the thirty-two hundred books by US publishers, only fifty-six were by Latinos.⁶ Breaks my heart.

Those who work with underserved families might have ideas for promoting books to them, but can publishers invest in listening, given the pressures of the industry? People in this country have ideas and answers, but often they are not people we are used to listening to. I think of the pre-school teacher who recently said

it made her sad when, after exciting her students about books, a shy girl said to her, "But my mother never reads me books."

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You and I know that her mom may be illiterate and may never have been read to. The context for our work. We could have spent this entire evening on collaborative strategies for coaching and supporting families who are not readers nor familiar with our libraries. We need allies and we can begin now in our own cities, regions, and national organizations. We have important work to do for our young and for this country. The challenge is to be persistent year after year. Our work is both patriotic and humanitarian.

In 2008, I was named an honorary member of the American Library Association. What a surprise. I had been a teacher

but never a librarian. Thanks to Día, however, for twenty years, I have gotten to know amazing librarians. I am a bit of a groupie. Many librarians do not speak Spanish, but many so want to help other language speakers feel welcome. Día became an easy bridge.

The Bookjoy Bridge

Together, *cada día*, every day,
we're building the bridge to bookjoy.
Young and old stroll across it chatting night and day.
Together, *cada día*, every day,
in many languages, library families say,
"Reading. A happy habit we enjoy!"
Together, *cada día*, every day,
You and I build the bridge to bookjoy.⁷

I think of a librarian at a school in Texas years ago who was so excited that a group of Spanish-speaking students was coming to visit her library. She had everything ready but was nervous. She greeted the children in Spanish which made them smile. After the program, I asked her why she was willing to do that. She said, "When I was a little girl in Kentucky, I could hear music coming from the library. I didn't have shoes, so I would hide outside and listen to the music. I'm happy to make a fool of myself to help children feel welcome at my library."

I have met so many warm and generous librarians. Twice a week, I read ALA's online newsletter, "American Libraries Direct," so I am somewhat aware of all the digital and social media changes, the innovations. I still wonder, though, if the lure of technology can distract us a bit from our mission, creating a national literacy community.

Recently in Santa Fe, US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor spoke about the importance of reading when she was growing up. I'm not convinced apps, although entertaining, will have the same impact. Many parents need our guidance.

Within our Día work, twice a year, at the beginning of the academic year and again in January, we reach out to our network with reminders. Next year, I'm going to encourage our Día community to involve other local and state literacy professionals and funders in their planning.

With ALSC, we encourage family book clubs, seldom a challenge for private schools or middle-class schools, but half of the students in our public schools come from low-income families with time and resource challenges. We cannot fully do our work of growing a nation of readers without the families. I'm delighted that First Book has joined our Día community.

What progress will we have made when, a year from now, some of you will enjoy the next Arbuthnot Lecture and the wonderful Jackie Woodson?

We are all “mutts,” if you know what I mean. We all have ethnicities and cultures. We are *all* multicultural. Throughout history, civilizations have had power elites based on family, religion, skin color, physical prowess, language, gender, wealth, education. Our United States, however, was founded with the stirring concept that humans are created equal. (Lady Gaga and many celebrities probably disagree.) As our society works through its assumptions, habits, and prejudices, we who work with children and care deeply about their futures can illustrate that we respect and value our differences in our collaborative work.

Librarians and educators create classics. What you use in story times, as examples and themes in programming, in displays, as exemplar texts for new librarians and students, in workshops and classes—librarians and educators create classics. I believe in your commitment to all our children.

Last June, I was fortunate to be on a panel to honor Walter Dean Myers at a Marion Wright Edelman Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools Training in Knoxville. The event was high energy, and repeatedly in that conference center, thousands of diverse young people would burst into, “Good job! Good job! GOOD JOB, good job, I said good job!”

What Marion Wright Edelman and her team of trainers were doing is building excitement about the challenges ahead—and I think, in our own style, we need to do that too if we want together to invigorate our literacy initiatives. The event reminded me of the importance of celebrations and of motivating others.

Born in the American Southwest, I live in a beautiful place, Santa Fe. Cold, but beautiful. Santa Barbara was also a beautiful place to visit. A child of the desert, I always find the ocean—all that water!—a source of fascination.

I have many loves: family, laughter, the natural world, and I love words—reading them and playing with them on the page and in my presentations. Ashley Bryan, who creates wonderful art and text for children, reminds us to savor poetry out loud. In the spirit of Día and Ashley, enjoy some bilingual fun out loud.

Jazzy Duet: Dueto de jazz

Play
juega
 with sounds.
con sonidos.
 Improvise!
¡Improvvisa!
 Slide into the river
 of music,
Resbala a un rio
de música,
 slish, slosh,
rurro, rorro,
 a duet
un dueto
 with tree's leafy rhyme
con la frondosa
rima del árbol,
 with cricket's castanet clicks,
con las castañuelas del grillo,
 with coyote's moon croon.
con la copla lunar del coyote.
 Sing too.
Canta tú.
 Sing. *Canta.* Sing.
Canta. Sing! *¡Canta!*⁸

Unique and different as we each are, many of us want in our own way to share our love of reading. Imagine what the readers in this country could do together!

Such different challenges we face in 2016 than May Hill Arbuthnot and her fellow teachers and writers faced as we strive to expand the diverse community of young readers. Together, remembering the privilege, pleasure, and power of reading, and our personal and collective power to enrich our country, may we annually promote Children's Day, Book Day, creatively and courageously collaborate with our fellow literacy partners locally and nationally, and may we celebrate all our children and link them to *alegría en los libros*, bookjoy! 📖

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Arne Nixon Center Announces New Research Fellowships

The Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature in the Fresno State Henry Madden Library is pleased to offer two Research Fellowships of up to \$2,000 to support scholars from outside the Fresno/Clovis area engaged in graduate-level, post-doctoral, and independent research.

The Arne Nixon Center, a leading resource for the study of literature for young people, houses a collection of more than 60,000 books, periodicals, manuscripts, original art and papers of authors and illustrators. With an emphasis on diversity, the holdings include:

- The largest LGBTQ collection of books for young people in the nation
- A World Languages collection with books in over 50 different languages
- An extensive Lewis Carroll collection
- The Helen Monette Amestoy collection of over 6,000 books on cats

Additional information about the Arne Nixon Center and its collections may be found on its website and through the Henry Madden Library.

Further information about the program may be acquired by contacting the Arne Nixon Center's Curator, Jennifer Crow.

Individuals interested in conducting on-site research to support projects pertaining to children's literature are welcome to apply.

Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature

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