

REFORMA DE FLORIDA

Noticias del mes/News of the month

Notes from the Editor

Welcome to this February all-things Pura Belpré edition.

Our 2026 Pura Belpré Book Donation Grant opens for applicants on February 2, Pura's birthday. More information is on p. 7.

Who was Pura Belpré, and why is she important? Read about her in the President's column, as well as on p. 8.

IMPORTANT: Save the Date! Read why on p. 2.

Welcome new Corporate Sponsor, *The Shelf*. Read how they support you on p. 2.

Dear Future Librarian is back on p. 12, with news about library school student/Youth Services Manager Natalie Aguirre.

President Lucia's new Book sharing column titled "*Lo-que-leo*" is on p. 6, while Past-President Maria Vega, and member Kathleen Peña de la Cook, are being honored this month. See why on p.15.

Enjoy celebrating Pura with us!

Alma Ramos-McDermott,
Editor

President's column: I want to be like Pura!

by Lucia M. Gonzalez



This February, we celebrate the life and visionary contributions of Pura Belpré, a pioneer of Latino librarianship in the United States. Pura Belpré was born February 2nd, between 1899 and 1903, in Cidra, Puerto Rico. She began her career in 1925, becoming the first Puerto Rican librarian hired by the New York Public Library. Through her

community outreach and relentless dedication to preserving and transmitting language, stories, and culture, she has remained a guiding light and an inspiration for generations of librarians, storytellers, authors, educators, and community activists serving Latino youth and their families. Her contributions have shaped the past, continue to impact the present, and provide a roadmap for future service.

In 1996, the Pura Belpré Book Award was established to honor Belpré's impactful contributions as a children's book author, storyteller, and librarian. For the past 30 years, this award has recognized outstanding original children's and young adult books created by authors and illustrators that portray, affirm, and celebrate the Latinx cultural experience.

The prominence of the Belpré Award highlights, promotes, and perpetuates the works of Latinx authors and illustrators who authentically reflect the lives and experiences of Latinx children and youth in the United States. Pura Belpré's name is forever linked to the creation of programs and collections that genuinely reflect the linguistic and cultural identities of children and families in our communities. To provide effective and equitable service that meets community needs, libraries must offer meaningful and diverse collections. The books available should reflect the lives of the children who read them.

I urge all REFORMA members and library workers to emulate Pura Belpré—speak up and advocate for representation in staffing, develop inclusive programs and collections, and validate children's cultural heritage and

I want to be like Pura! (continued)
literary traditions.

In these challenging times, let our motto be: "I want to be like Pura!"

***Save the date: Online Town Hall on Human-Centered AI for
Libraries, February 12 (2-3:30 pm EST)
[Registration details coming soon]***



Spotlight: The Shelf Media, Inc., An Infinite Shelf for REFORMA

by José Ángel Santamaría, The Shelf Media, Inc.

We view libraries as the cultural and integrative heart of our communities. As librarians ourselves, we work to provide accessible knowledge and diverse and inclusive cultural experiences that generate a real emotional and social impact.

I am José Ángel, Director of The Shelf Media, Inc., and I have spent over **thirty years dedicated with passion to the library sector**. First, as the founder of one of Spain's largest library service groups, and now as the director of The Shelf, I am deeply committed to meeting the needs of U.S. librarians and libraries - especially regarding their Spanish-language resources.

Estante Infinito: Libraries without Limits

Estante Infinito is a customizable content system that offers virtually limitless possibilities: movies, series, theater, opera, animation, books, magazines, games, and virtual meetups and events. Through this platform, libraries can offer a complete digital collection, providing access to Pan-American cultures and authentic Spanish-language content. It is a flexible and adaptable tool designed to respond to the voice of the community.

The Shelf Media (continued)

Spanish: A Language of Inclusion and Social Progress

At The Shelf, we are specialists in Spanish-language content, ranging from editorial richness to the power of the audiovisual universe. Language is about more than just inclusion: it is a fundamental tool and a driver of competitiveness and development that fuels professional success and the progress of our communities.



We are The Shelf. We Listen to You.



Innovation is born from active and honest listening. Therefore, beyond offering products or services, we offer you our open collaboration. We want to understand your challenges, your ideas, and the vision you have for your libraries. We invite you to talk with us, share your needs, and let us build the future of Spanish-language culture together.

I conclude by placing myself and the entire team at The Shelf at the disposal of each member of REFORMA. **We offer simply what we are: librarians at the service of culture and social development. We are one of you.**

Because every library deserves a shelf without limits, and every community, a shared cultural universe.

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The Shelf Media, Inc.: Un Estante Infinito para REFORMA

by José Ángel Santamaría, The Shelf Media, Inc.



Entendemos las bibliotecas como el corazón cultural e integrador de las comunidades. Somos bibliotecarios y trabajamos para ofrecer conocimiento y experiencias culturales diversas, inclusivas y accesibles, con impacto emocional y social.

Soy José Ángel, Director de The Shelf Media, Inc., y **llevo más de treinta años entregado con pasión** al servicio del sector bibliotecario. Primero, como fundador de uno de los mayores grupos de servicios bibliotecarios de España; ahora también como director de The Shelf, comprometido con las necesidades de los bibliotecarios y bibliotecas de Estados Unidos y, especialmente, con sus recursos en español.

Estante Infinito: Biblioteca sin límites

Como bibliotecarios y latinos, sabemos que la diversidad es una fortaleza. También sabemos que el acceso a la cultura y al conocimiento es la mayor riqueza que podemos ofrecer. Por eso, en The Shelf hemos creado Estante Infinito, una plataforma digital accesible, multiformato y multiplataforma. Porque cada biblioteca merece un estante sin límites y cada comunidad un universo cultural compartido.

Estante Infinito es un sistema personalizable de contenidos que apuesta por ofrecer posibilidades virtualmente sin límite: películas, series, teatro, ópera, animación, libros, revistas, juegos, encuentros. De este modo, las bibliotecas pueden disponer de una oferta digital completa que ofrece acceso a las culturas panamericanas y genuinamente en español. Una plataforma flexible y adaptable para responder a la voz de sus comunidades.

El español: Un idioma de inclusión y de progreso social

En The Shelf somos especialistas en contenidos en español, abarcando desde la riqueza editorial hasta la potencia del universo audiovisual. Estamos convencidos de que nuestro idioma es mucho

The Shelf Media (continued)

más que inclusión: es una herramienta fundamental y un **motor de competitividad y desarrollo** que impulsa el éxito profesional y el progreso de nuestras comunidades.

Somos The Shelf. Te escuchamos.

La innovación nace de la escucha activa y honesta. Por ello, más allá de ofrecer productos o servicios, en The Shelf os ofrecemos nuestra **colaboración abierta**: queremos conocer vuestros retos, vuestras ideas y la visión que tenéis para vuestras bibliotecas. Os invitamos a que hablemos, a que compartáis con nosotros vuestras necesidades y a que construyamos juntos el futuro de la cultura en español.

Finalizo poniéndome a mí y a todo el equipo de The Shelf a disposición de todos y cada uno de los miembros de REFORMA. Ofrecemos simplemente lo que somos: bibliotecarios al servicio de la cultura y el desarrollo social.

Porque cada biblioteca merece un estante sin límites, y cada comunidad, un universo cultural compartido.

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Bibliotele February Highlights

Identity, Memory, and Human Connection: Stories that connect cultures, communities, and generations

by Javier Hidalgo

February brings stories shaped by memory, emotion, and lived experience. With celebrations like **Black History Month, International Mother Language Day, and Valentine's Day** (known as **Love and Friendship Day in Colombia**), it's a great time to explore how identity is formed through personal histories and shared experiences.

This curated selection on Bibliotele highlights films, documentaries, and theater that reflect the richness of Spanish-language storytelling, offering perspectives that resonate across cultures and generations while inviting reflection, empathy, and meaningful community engagement.



Cultural Identity and Memory

Delve into stories that explore identity, memory, and social history through voices and experiences that reflect cultural resilience, heritage, and shared struggles across communities.



Tayta Shanti: Feature Film • Peru, 2023

Tayta Shanti, a visually stunning film set in the Peruvian Andes and filmed in Quechua and Spanish, explores themes of cultural identity and inclusion. It follows a young person's return to their community, sparking a discussion around tradition, gender norms, and collective identity. This engaging film is an excellent choice for Black History Month or for programming designed to promote dialogue on diversity and community.

Bibliotele (continued)**Time Riders (Los jinetes del tiempo): Documentary • Mexico, 2016**

Retracing a key moment in Mexican history through a modern horseback journey, this thought-provoking documentary links past and present, prompting reflection on social change. *Time Riders* provides an excellent resource for exploring historical memory, intergenerational dialogue, and the evolution of communities across time.

**Native (Nativo, la conquista musical): Theater • Argentina, 2005**

A vibrant musical performance that brings Argentine history to life, depicting the struggle between indigenous peoples and conquerors through folk rhythms and over 30 performers. *Native* highlights the richness of ancestral traditions and cultural memory, offering dynamic programming ideas for Black History Month or similar celebrations.

**Night of the Living Dead: Feature Film • USA, 1968**

George A. Romero's horror classic stands out as one of the first American films to feature a Black lead in a genre-defining role. Beyond its impact on cinema, *Night of the Living Dead* sparks conversations about representation, race, and social tension, making it highly relevant for Black History Month programming.

**Love, Connection, and Emotions**

In the spirit of Valentine's Day and the celebration of love and friendship across cultures, these works explore the many facets of human bonds and emotional connections.

**Many Pieces of Something (Muchos pedazos de algo): Feature Film • Spain, 2015**

Ideal for Valentine's Day programming, this intimate, Spanish-language indie film offers a reflective look at youth, love, friendship, and uncertainty. It follows young adults navigating post-crisis Spain and provides a thoughtful take on modern relationships.

**A Wild Stream (Una corriente salvaje): Documentary • Mexico, 2018**

Focusing on two fishermen whose survival depends on trust and companionship, this minimalist documentary examines loneliness, masculinity, and human bonds. *A Wild Stream* offers rich material for discussions on connection and emotional resilience, making it fitting for Valentine's Day or Love and Friendship programming.

**Romeo and Juliet (Romeo y Julieta): Theater Play • Mexico, 2024**

Experience a unique solo rendition of the timeless classic, *Romeo and Juliet*. This inventive adaptation features a single actor and live musical accompaniment, delivering a powerful and memorable theatrical experience for Valentine's Day audiences.

**Spanish as a Language of Culture**

Celebrating International Mother Language Day, this selection of works emphasizes the importance of Spanish as a vibrant language of culture, expression, and identity.

**Chicha Your Mother (Chicha tu madre): Feature Film • Peru, Argentina, 2006**

Chicha Your Mother offers a vibrant look at Spanish-language narrative and Latin American social dynamics, capturing the pace of popular culture and daily existence in Lima. This Peruvian Argentine film centers on a taxi driver grappling with a personal

Bibliotele (continued)

crisis, family, and destiny.



Mi mamá me mima: Documentary · USA, 2025

This short documentary portrays Spanish as both a cultural refuge and a contested space in the United States. *Mi mamá me mima* illuminates issues of language, identity, and cultural preservation, offering valuable programming in celebration of International Mother Language Day.



The Dictionary (El diccionario): Theater Play · Argentina, 2019

Through the story of María Moliner, who devoted her life to words, even as disease threatened her memory, this poetic play celebrates the resilience and power of language. *The Dictionary* is an inspiring option for programming that highlights Spanish, cultural heritage, and the enduring role of language in shaping identity.

All these titles - and many more - are available on **Bibliotele**, supporting libraries in their cultural programming, community conversations, and seasonal outreach initiatives throughout February.



LO-QUE-LEO!
Welcome to the Book Sharing Corner

by Lucia M. Gonzalez



¡Feliz mes del amor y happy Valentine's Day! This month, and always, I hope you find those special reads that, like great loves, stick with you for a lifetime. I'm really excited because just this past month I stumbled upon some fantastic books that completely swept me away. You know those kinds of reads that make you lose all sense of time? The ones you can't wait to devour from cover to cover? I wanted to share this little list of three books by authors from Latin America or Spain that I think you'll love. And in the future, I'd love to hear your own recommendations too! Please share your "short lists" with me each month in our future newsletters. Happy reading!

¡Feliz mes del amor! En este mes, y siempre, les deseo la fortuna de encontrarse con esos libros que, como los grandes amores, nos acompañarán toda una vida. Yo estoy feliz porque recientemente me he encontrado con algunos de esos libros que enamoran y hacen que uno pierda la noción del tiempo, inmerso en su lectura de principio a fin, de esos que se leen con urgencia. Me complace compartir esta pequeña lista de tres libros, escritos por autores de América Latina o España, y los invito a que ustedes también se animen a compartir cada mes sus "pequeñas listas" en las próximas ediciones de este boletín/Newsletter.

Favorite Reads of the Month

En la Habana nunca hace frío (*It's Never Cold in Havana*) by Zoe Valdez. Almuzara, 2023. (Espanol/Adult/Fiction)

In this novel, the iconic Cuban writer Zoé Valdés delves into the Cuban underground rock scene of the 1970s through the perspective of young "hippies" in Havana. The story explores themes of music, rebellion, sexuality, and the pursuit of freedom, all set against a backdrop of political repression.

Lo-que-leo (continued)

Revolucion! (*Revolution!*) by Arturo Perez-Reverte. Alfaguara, Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2022 (En español / Adult/Historical Fiction)

A captivating adventure set during the Mexican Revolution in which an engineer from Spain is trapped in the tumultuous events next to historical figures such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa.

Un silencio lleno de murmullos (A Silence Full of Whispers) by Gioconda Belli. Seix Barral, 2024. (Spanish/Adult/Drama-Historical Fiction).

In this novel, renowned Nicaraguan author Gioconda Belli explores the complex relationship between a revolutionary mother and her daughter. It is a poignant story that explores themes such as the Sandinista Revolution, political disillusionment, feminism, and exile.

We look forward to receiving your "favorite reads" next month!

2026 Pura Belpré Book Donation Grant: Opens for applications February 2

Applications will be accepted for the 2026 REFORMA de Florida Pura Belpré Book Donation Grant beginning **February 2nd**, Pura's birthday. **The deadline** for submitting your proposal is **April 1st** (seriously, for real, not a joke, etc. etc.).

The grant consists of a collection of Children and YA books published in 2025, among titles submitted by publishers for consideration to the 2026 Pura Belpré Award Selection Committee. All titles were created by Latinx authors and illustrators portraying the Latino cultural experience in the lives of children. REFORMA de Florida members serving in all types of Florida libraries are encouraged to apply.

More information on how to apply and the criteria for your application will be released on February 2nd, so stay tuned to your email as well as to our website and social media.

NEW: You must be a member of REFORMA de Florida to apply.

NEW: You have the opportunity to win Children **OR** Young Adult books for your library. Be sure to indicate on your application **which type** you'd like to win.

NOTE: If you're not yet a member of REFORMA de Florida, go to REFORMA National's website and fill in your information on their "become a member" page. Be sure to check "*Florida*" as your state. Once you've submitted your information and joined the chapter, send an email to the Book Grant committee to let them know you became a member so they could note it on your application when it's received.

Good luck!

Who was Pura Belpré?: A Tutorial with Commentary

by Alma Ramos-McDermott

What do you know about Pura Belpré?

There are disputes on Pura's birth month and year, but the consensus is she was born February 2, 1899 in Cidras, Puerto Rico. *(That's why REdeFL chose this date to open applications for our book donation grant.)*

Pura came from a long line of storytellers, all handed down by mouth for generations. Stories she learned at her abuela's knee came with her when she left Puerto Rico for New York City in the early 1920's for her sister's wedding and decided to stay. She was part of the first wave of Puerto Ricans to settle in New York City. *(My mom came by boat from Puerto Rico to NYC in 1945 when she was 11).* When Pura arrived, she briefly found work in the garment district *(as did my grandmother and many others from Puerto Rico).*



In 1921, the New York Public Library (NYPL) started a campaign to recruit women from the area who spoke Spanish, as the neighborhood had greatly expanded with Puerto Ricans (known as *El Barrio/Spanish Harlem*.) When Pura was hired at the 125th Street branch of the NYPL that year as an Hispanic Assistant, she became the first Puerto Rican Librarian hired in NYC. *(iWepa Pura!)*

It didn't take Pura long to realize the library didn't have Spanish language books or programs for Latino children. She wrote a Puerto Rican folktale in English titled "Pérez and Martina" and, when the book came out in 1932, it was the first Latino storybook in the U.S. to be published by a major publisher. *(The publisher was Frederick Warne & Co., famous for publishing Beatrix Potter's books. It's now part of Penguin Random House).*



In 1929, Pura arrived at the 115th Street branch of the NYPL where she began bilingual storytelling, puppet shows, as well as celebrations of "*El Día de Reyes/Three King's Day*." This event is recounted in President Lucia's Pura Belpré Honor winning book "*The Storyteller's candle: La velita de los cuentos*." Over the years, Pura took her folktales to Latinos across Manhattan as well as in the Bronx. She passed away in New York City on July 1, 1982, leaving behind a rich legacy.

In 1986, REFORMA members Sandra Ríos-Balderrama and Oralia Garza de Cortes wanted more Latino representation in children's literature. They began working on something which would honor Latino contributions to literature. Along with Toni Bissessar and Linda Perkins, they called their award the Pura



Who was Pura Belpré? (continued)

Belpré Award in honor of the first Latina librarian hired at the New York Public Library.

As noted on the ALSC website, the award was “*established in 1996...presented annually to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth.*” It was originally co-sponsored by REFORMA and ALSC but, in 2021, a Young Adult Author category was added under YALSA's sponsorship. I’m proud President Lucia was one of the 1996 authors to win a Pura Belpré Honor medal for her book “The bossy gallito/El gallo de bodas.”



The Pura Belpré Awards will celebrate 30 years this coming June, and I’m sure there will be a huge celebration at the ALA Conference in Chicago. If you’re attending, come to the Celebración. It’s held on a Sunday, around 1 pm, and is always free. Will you be there? (*I was a member of the 2011 Pura Belpré Committee when the award celebrated its quinceañera. We held a celebración with a young lady celebrating her own quinceañera, which included the ceremonial removal of her sneaker to heels, as well as a cake!*)

I wonder what’s in store for Pura’s 30th? Come to ALA and find out!

Bibliography

ALSC List: *Pura Belpré Award winners and Honorees from 1996-2025.*

American Libraries: “*Pura Belpré Award to celebrate 20th year.*”

Center for Puerto Rican Studies: “*Pura Belpré a Storyteller.*”

Chalkbeat New York: “*How a Puerto Rican folklorist brought bilingual story time to the New York Public Library.*”

Harlem World: “*Harlem’s Pura Belpré: The first Puerto Rican librarian in NYC.*”

The Horn Book: “*Reflections on the Pura Belpré award: An interview with Sandra Ríos Balderrama.*”

Library of Congress: *Puerto Rico.*

NPR: “*How NYC’s first Puerto Rican librarian brought Spanish to the shelves.*”

NYC Public Schools: “*Pura Belpré: The librarian who brought Puerto Rican folktales to life.*”

REFORMA National: *Pura Belpré’s 25th Anniversary mini documentary.* (Co-chaired by ReDeFL member, Jenny Lizarraga).

UF Libraries: “*Pura Belpré: Bringing Boricua stories to the shelves.*”

Images

American Libraries: *Pura Belpré medals*

NPR: *Pura Belpré with puppets Pérez and Martina*

New York Public Library: *Pura Belpré Library Storyteller*

Pura Belpré at the 115th Street Branch of the NYPL

Pura Belpré Award History: *Sandra Ríos Balderrama and Oralia Garza de Cortes*

2026 Pura Belpré Winners

by Alma Ramos-McDermott

On January 26th, the American Library Association Youth Media Awards were announced at the Hilton Chicago Hotel. Known as “*The Librarian Oscars*,” the YMA’s used to be held at the Midwinter/LibLearnX conferences before a live audience of almost 1000 librarians. The last of these winter conferences was held in January 2025, so the YMA’s this year had audience members

2026 Pura Belpré award winners (continued)

made up of committee members, publishers, and librarians who pre-registered. The rest of us, who would have been at the conference if it still existed, had to watch online.

Trust me, watching from my kitchen was NOT the same as being there in person! I missed the excitement of screaming, cheering, clapping, and giving the occasional standing O's with my fellow librarians as awards were presented. I sincerely doubt that REFORMA National Vice-President/President-Elect Edwin Rodarte heard me screaming "Go Edwin!" when he presented the 2026 Pura Belpré Honorees and Award winners for Illustration, Middle Grade, and Young Adult in English and in Spanish.

Thank you Celia Ávila de Santiago, REFORMA PR Chair, for creating the beautiful graphics (below) which showcase the 2026 Pura Belpré winners and honorees. They were posted on REFORMA's [Facebook page](#) almost as soon as they were announced. Great job Celia!



The Children's Illustration Honor Award was awarded to "*A-Ztec: A Bilingual Alphabet Book*," illustrated and written by Emmanuel Valtierra, and "*The Invisible Parade*," illustrated by John Picacio, written by Leigh Bardugo and John Picacio.

The Children's Author Honor Award was awarded to "*A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation*," written by Pablo Cartaya, "*The Island of Forgotten Gods*," written by Victor Piñeiro, and "*A Sea of Lemon Trees: The Corrido of Roberto Alvarez*," written by María Dolores Águila.

The Young Adult Author Honor award was awarded to "*Rosa by Any Other Name*," written by Hailey Alcaraz, "*Silenced Voices: Reclaiming Memories from the Guatemalan Genocide*," written and illustrated by Pablo Leon, and "*The Story of My Anger*," written by Jasminne Mendez.

The winner of the 2026 Pura Belpré Illustration Award was "*Popo the Xolo*," illustrated by Abraham Matias, written by Paloma Angelina Lopez.

The winner of the 2026 Pura Belpré Children's Author Award was "*The Pecan Sheller*," written by Lupe Ruiz-Flores.

The winner of the 2026 Pura Belpré Young Adult Author Award was "*On the Wings of la Noche*," written by Vanessa L. Torres.

Be sure to go to the June 2026 ALA Conference in Chicago to see and hear these authors and illustrators accept their awards at the 30th Anniversary Pura Belpré Celebración. As always, it's free for ALA attendees.

Latineando!

by David Hernandez Rivero



Saludos a todos los Reformistas en este inicio de mes de febrero.

2026 is already moving fast, and we made it to February

February is known among other things for being the last month of winter. February got its name after a series of rituals performed during the Roman festivals known as Lupercalia. It's another winter month of transformation, reflection and transition, slowly transitioning to spring as days get longer. February is also a shorter month with only 28 days and every fourth year it has 29 days. Lastly, February is known internationally for being the month of Love when we celebrate San Valentín, one of the most popular holidays in our culture. All these aspects make February a very attractive and singular month.

Libraries celebrate Black History for the entire month of February, giving us the opportunity to carry out numerous programs using interesting ideas such as book displays, events, festivals, lectures, Storytime and others. Interestingly, this year is the 100th anniversary of Black History Celebrations as this designation was established in 1926. A historian named Dr. Carter G. Woodson was instrumental in the creation of Black History Month. This year we can celebrate 100 years of Black History Month with special programs. The options are endless, from Motown Records celebrations to Harlem Renaissance, dance, film, poetry series lectures, slam poetry, and much more. For children's librarians, it is a great opportunity to showcase great children's books in displays or featuring them in story times.

However, this time, I want to emphasize the role of partnerships and community resources. Libraries play a substantial and remarkable role in our communities. Libraries function as forums for preserving intellectual freedom and historical preservation, sharing democratic values, and much more. Numerous institutions, organizations, community groups, private and collective artist groups, museums, musical ensembles, and others would appreciate it if you invited them to perform or present at your library.

If your library has nice and secure spaces, some artists and organizations might be willing to display art, cultural artifacts, or memorabilia relevant to Black History. Remember that numerous organizations are celebrating Black History Month as well. Numerous nonprofits and others might want to make presentations. Moreover, you can schedule Black History programs such as storytelling and invite numerous community members to read a book and share with kids about the importance and relevance of Black History Month. During January's MLK celebrations in our community, my library was invited to participate in the local MLK community parade. We decided to participate and carried a banner to represent our county library system. We realized the great impact we had on the community by participating. It's important that your library is visible and recognized by your community. As you make your library visible, community members, partners, and others will come to you to create valuable partnerships for your library members and the community in general.

Valentine's Day is another national celebration that resonates to all. Decorations, displays and other activities will help elevate the community's mood. Children, in particular, love storytelling and arts and crafts celebrations for San Valentine. Adults will love music programs, trivia programs, festivals etc. It is also a great opportunity to showcase your new acquisitions such as books, magazines, DVDs, and other types of resources.

Latineando (continued)

In February, libraries also celebrate the Freedom to Read. This celebration allows us to bring poets, writers, or other community members to lecture, share their writing, etc. It is of paramount importance to create awareness of how our intellectual freedoms might be at stake.

And finally, February is also the month of the Oscars ceremony. The Academy Awards or Oscar's ceremony has significantly impacted our American culture. Numerous possible ideas to celebrate it would range from story time to arts and crafts, trivia programs, or movie nights, etc. What about making a library display with numerous winners? The first Academy Award was given back in 1929!

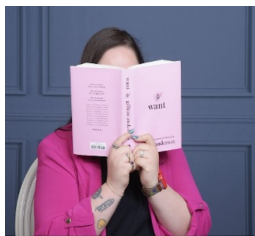
Happy February Reformistas. Nos vemos en marzo.

Dear Future Librarian

Meet Natalie Aguirre, Youth Services Manager Who's Not Afraid to Throw a Snake Party

by Gaby Gomez

If you think librarianship is all about "shushing" and silently shelving books, let me introduce you to Natalie Aguirre. She's the Youth Services Manager at North Riverside Public Library (IL), and yes, she's as cool as she sounds. Natalie's journey into librarianship started way back in fifth grade, was briefly derailed by peer pressure (rude), and reawakened during an MLIS info session that literally lit a fire in her book-loving soul.



Now in grad school and running a department full-time (yes, full-time, and still thriving!), Natalie juggles everything from budgeting and baby sensory rooms to battling the myth that librarians just read all day. Spoiler: she also plans snake welcome parties, complete with hats and cupcakes. Iconic? Absolutely.

In this edition, Natalie gets real about stress, the surprising skills she uses daily, and the pure joy of watching someone's face light up when they discover everything a library offers, for free. She reminds us that

librarianship isn't just a career; it's a calling, a creative force, and for some of us... a full-on personality trait.

I. What made you choose librarianship, and at what point did you think, "Yep, this is my personality now"?



I've never been a person to make quick decisions, but I remember in fifth grade, as my class was in line coming back from the library, I turned to a classmate, bright and enthusiastic, and said, "I want to be a librarian when I grow up!" Of course, it wasn't that plain and simple. My classmate made fun of me for saying this, and I promptly tucked that dream away.

Fast forward to my college years when I was doing my undergrad at Dominican University, I saw an advertised information session for an MLIS degree. There were stars in my eyes as I learned that there was a whole degree and world dedicated to librarianship! After a swift career

change, and covid times, I found a part time library position to "test the waters" and the rest is history. Librarianship started to feel like a personality trait to me when I started giving unsolicited children's book recommendations to my friends. Now, I have friends and family who will turn to me for book

Meet Natalie Aguirre (continued)

recommendations. "I'm going on a road trip, and we need audiobook recommendations," "I'm up next to pick a book from book club, do you have any suggestions?" It brings me joy to connect with my family and friends over something I love.

2. What is something about libraries or library school that people on the outside completely misunderstand?

When I tell people I am going to school for Library and Information Science and that I am the manager of the Youth Services Department, oftentimes, they respond with "Aw! That's so cute that you work with kids and get to read all day!" I try to restrain myself from rolling my eyes at that response. Yes, those two things can be true to an extent, but that is not the job in a nutshell. I have a lot of administrative work that I do along with standard library work. Think scheduling, budgeting, day to day managing, advertising, outreach, community partnerships, administrative meetings, and other tasks as assigned.

Since I work at a small library, I also have a lot more on my plate. I sometimes supplement maintenance work, I've done my fair share of heavy lifting to reformat the library space, and I've worked with a small budget to create useful and quality spaces for the public and staff.

Another common misconception that I hear is when people exclaim, "You need a degree to be a librarian?!" I love filling people in on the multitude of concepts that I have learned in my program so far.

3. Be honest. What part of library work or library school do you pretend is fine but secretly stresses you out?

The workload! It's difficult to manage a full-time job while going to school. I am trying to make a concerted effort to manage my health by eating right and exercising, but the workload makes relaxing and watching another episode of Friends or New Girl that much more tempting.

4. What skill did you not expect to need as a librarian but now use way more than you ever imagined?

My creativity! I am constantly using my creativity to solve problems or better the department. For example, I created a Baby Garden room that has baby safe manipulatives, and acts as a safe space for littles with their adult to play and learn. I did research and enlisted a local artist (and family member) to create a mural for the space. I also created a sensory room full of sensory manipulatives. The room's purpose is to be a calming space where kids can explore and feel in a calm environment. Although research is necessary and important for projects like these, it is also crucial to think outside the box and make it fun and engaging. It's important to remember your audience.

5. What has been your most "this could only happen in a library" moment so far?

A reptile library performer I often hire for programs has offered to temporarily loan my library a snake to have on display as a reading buddy for kids! So, naturally, a staff member of mine came up with the genius idea to have a snake welcome party. We will have party hats, crafts, cupcakes, and a snake themed scavenger hunt. We are all thrilled to welcome our little snake friend.

6. If you could give your past self one piece of advice before starting library school, what would it be, and would past you actually listen?

I would tell myself to apply for those scholarships and to do the program during covid when I had more time! I would like to think that I would listen to myself, especially if this were a "Back to the Future" type of scenario.

7. What kind of librarian do you see yourself becoming, and what kind do you absolutely know you are not?

Meet Natalie Aguirre (continued)

I see myself being a librarian that is connected to the community and its needs. I want to be a librarian that is in touch with the ever-changing times even as I age. I think it can be easy to slip into a "this is how we've always done it, and that's how it's going to stay" mindset, which can close doors to important possibilities. This profession requires change and adaptability for the communities and the people that need our resources. I know that I am absolutely not a librarian who will create unnecessary boundaries to resources. I want resources to be as easy as possible to access! Libraries should always bridge a gap, not create any. If I can make something happen for a patron, like get them into a booked program, or find an extra zoo pass, I will go out of my way to try to make it happen.

8. What is something that brings you genuine joy in library work, even on chaotic or exhausting days?

I love to see the surprise on kids or adults faces when they find out about the things that we offer for free. Everything costs something nowadays, and I am proud to work in one of the few third spaces left in society. I love giving kids take and make crafts, connecting kids to our yoga program, letting people know about our library of things for kids, or giving a child a book to take home and keep. The awe and wonder that I have seen emanate from families because of our resources has been the privilege of a lifetime to be a part of and witness.

9. If a future MLIS student asked you, "Is this worth it?" what would your honest answer be?

I am in a unique position because I was able to obtain a position as a Youth Services Manager while pursuing my degree. I have learned a great deal on the job that overlaps with what I learned in school but have also gained skills and knowledge on the job that were not taught in school. I think the degree is worth it because it evens the playing field of knowledge for all professionals. Every library is different and, in total, I have worked in three libraries. Different places will challenge you in different ways, but having those skills from your degree in your back pocket will help you make those advancements in the profession or do that task or project to your best ability.

10. Finally, when you imagine yourself years from now as a librarian, what do you hope you are still proud of about the way you show up in this profession?

I hope I will still be proud of the way I show excitement towards the things that I do. I never want to lose the way that providing new resources, doing a Storytime, connecting with my team, going to an outreach event, or trying something new makes me feel. I am unabashedly proud to work in a library and to be a student who wants to do something that is worth being proud of. I can't wait to see what my career in librarianship holds, and I want to continue to show up with enthusiasm and joy.

As I wrap up this column, I'm sipping a sugar-free Strawberry Breeze from Swig and listening to "Lachryma" by Ghost on repeat, because sometimes you need a dramatic soundtrack to match your emotional commitment to librarianship.

P.S. I'm still on the lookout for MLIS students to interview! If you'd like to be featured in the next *Dear Future Librarian*, email me at gaby.gomez.26@outlook.com

Until next time, stay weird, stay bookish, and never underestimate the power of a snack and a playlist.



Gaby

Florida Panthers celebrates Immediate Past President María Mega



As noted in the November newsletter, Immediate Past President María Vega was chosen by the Florida Panthers as part of their "*Celebration of Hispanic Heritage Series*" for her work in South Florida.

"Growing up as a Mexican American in South Florida gave María a deep desire to serve the Hispanic community—from teaching at migrant camps in Michigan to translating for volunteer doctors in rural Ohio to interviewing Hispanic authors at the Miami Book Fair, María has always put her community first. Currently María is focusing on creating a love of lifelong learning and reading among children, teens, and their caregivers. You can find her at the Panther's Summer Reading Tour as the unofficial hockey bibliotecaria

(librarian) or hosting bilingual storytime at the Broward County Library's Pop-Up Hollywood Branch while the Hollywood Library is being rebuilt after a recent fire." (Florida Panthers: Celebration of Hispanic Excellence.)

María will be honored at *¡Vamos Gatos!* Night on Monday February 2nd at the Florida Panthers game at Amerant Bank Arena. For tickets go to seatgeek.com or FloridaPanthers.com/ThemeNights.

María is Assistant Manager/Librarian Senior at the Hollywood Branch of the Broward County Library (which recently reopened after a fire.) She is also the Immediate Past President of REFORMA de Florida, and served as Co-Chair for a Graphic Novel/REFORMA Collaboration to create the first ever *Core List of the Best Latinx Graphic Novels*.

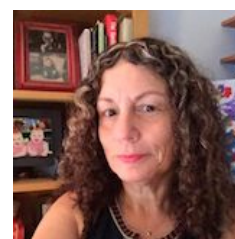
Congratulations María!

Webinar to honor Kathleen Peña de la Cook*

**Editor's note: Kathleen is a member of REdeFL.*

The information below was posted on REFORMAnet by Dr. Michele A.L. Villagran.

The Library History Round Table (LHRT) is sponsoring a free webinar in honor of our friend and colleague Kathleen de la Peña McCook, whom you know from her recent leadership on the *Librarians We Have Lost* series. During this session, we will bring together the authors of the Public Libraries Quarterly issue, "*In Service of Equity: Essays in Honor of Kathleen de la Peña McCook*" to highlight the historical aspects that connect to her work on community building, human rights, and equity in library services.



Date: February 25, 2026

Time: 11:00 a.m. Eastern/10:00 Central/9:00 Mountain/8:00 Pacific.

Zoom link: <https://umsystem.zoom.us/j/92890701058>

Please join us and spread the word!

by Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran, Associate Professor, School of Information
San José State University

You are invited!

Every month, the Executive Board of REdeFL holds a meeting to discuss chapter business, ways to encourage growth, and fine-tune our community involvement.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday February 3rd at 7 pm EST. A ZOOM link will be sent to members on February 2 (Pura Belpré's birthday), so check your email.

Get to know Board members and find out what's going on with your chapter. We hope to see you there.

Are you a Corporate member of REFORMA de Florida?

Corporate members are an important part of our chapter. Send a photo, business card, or a short blurb about your company for a future newsletter. We want to know more about you!

What's happening?: Northern, Central, or Southern regions

What's happening in your library or region related to our Latino community? Email your name, region, title, library name, a short summary of your news or event, and photos. Your news could help grow membership in your region, so we look forward to hearing from you.

Were you forwarded this newsletter but are not yet a member of REFORMA de Florida?

To join or renew, go to REFORMA National's Membership page and be sure to check REFORMA de Florida as your chapter.

Is your membership getting ready to expire? Are you a Member-at-large?

If you're not sure if your membership is expiring, email us to learn your status.

If you're a REFORMA National **Member-at-large** (that means you're not associated with REFORMA de Florida or any local chapter), **join the REFORMA de Florida chapter** as a full member.

Just log into your membership account, and check REFORMA de Florida as your chapter.

It's as easy as that!