

Día at 20:

Bringing “bookjoy” and cultural awareness to children nationwide

Children’s Day—*El día de los niños*—has long been celebrated in Hispanic culture on April 30 as a way to honor children. But what if the day could also be a celebration of books, reading, and literacy?

That’s the inspiration behind “Día” (*El día de los niños/El día de los libros*, or Children’s Day/Book Day), a program created 20 years ago by Texas author Pat Mora, a former high school English teacher. In her vision for Día, not only are children celebrated (usually on or near April 30), but so is “bookjoy”—a term Mora coined to refer to the love of reading.

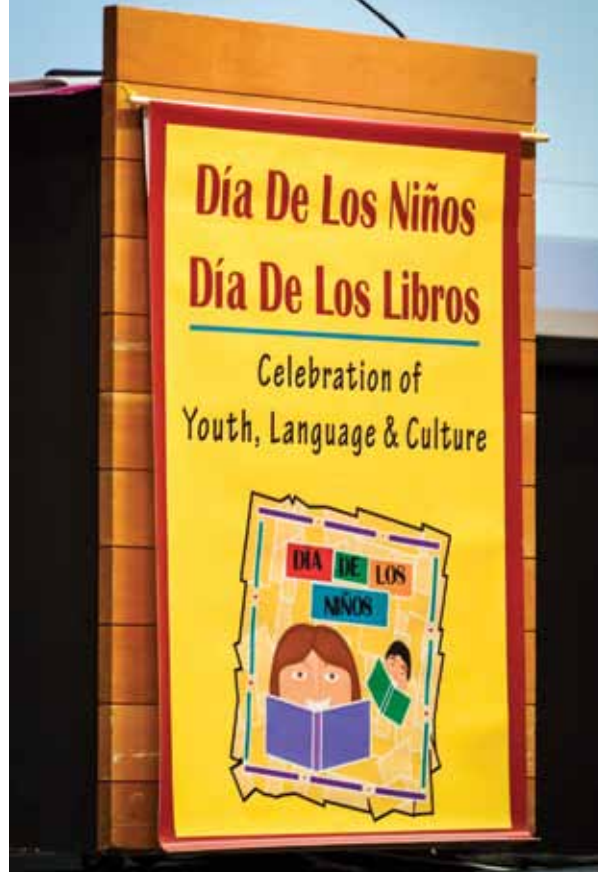
“Día has excited thousands of children and families about the pleasure and fun of reading and enjoying books together,” says Mora, who would like to see Children’s Day/Book Day become a national holiday alongside Mother’s Day and Father’s Day.

Over the past 20 years, Día’s mission has grown. Today, says Mora, it celebrates cultural diversity as well—the many home languages and cultures children grow up with. This shift in focus is “essential” in order to “creatively serve and motivate our highly diverse students,” she says.

Last year, 501 registered Día programs took place in 37 states plus the District of Columbia, most run by public libraries (453), as well as school libraries (22) and other organizations. Spanish is by far the most prevalent language featured (353 programs), though other languages include Mandarin (32), French (30), Japanese (25), and Arabic (23).

Mora’s goals for Día include broadening its scope from a single day of celebration to a year-round effort aimed at fostering literacy and enhancing awareness of cultural diversity. For example, Día encourages libraries—public and school—to diversify their collections. Another goal: for parents of all languages “to share bookjoy with their children.”

Mora has partnered Día with American Library Association organizations such as REFORMA (which promotes library services to Latinos and Spanish-speaking populations) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). First Book,



A colorful sign on the campus of Arizona State University welcomes participants to Día activities each year.

which helps provide books to needy children, is a new partner.

NCTE is an official supporter of Día, and includes among its position statements an NCTE resolution (<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/eldiade-losniñoslibro>), which includes aims such as helping raise public awareness of Día, reaffirming family literacy and the value of home languages, and promoting multilingual programs that offer young people and families a voice. Other organizations, including local and state groups like the Texas Library Association, have worked with Día as well.

So what does Día look like in action? And how does it work to help children learn to love books and reading—to find their inner bookjoy, as Mora might term it? Here are several examples.

Making Connections across Cultures in Utah

Día was celebrated at Mountain View Elementary School in Salt Lake City, Utah, for the first time last May 1 (April 30 falls on a testing day, so the school chose May 1 instead). The school hosted an all-day celebration, involving 600 children, that coincided with a district literacy night, says third-grade teacher Tyson Price.

The school's student population is about 60 percent Hispanic, Price says, but about 30 languages are spoken overall (including Tongan, Somali, Swahili, Russian, and Chinese). Día celebrated Hispanic culture but brought in other cultures as well.

For example, some students wrote essays about important moments in their lives, then went to other classes to read them out loud. Some of the narratives were from refugee students who—for the first time—shared what they'd endured to come to the US.

"To hear those students' perspectives about traveling to America or living in those refugee camps was a great opportunity for other kids to connect with them and understand what they've gone through," Price says.

Though none of Price's students wrote narratives, they listened to those who visited their classes and then discussed the presentations. "One girl said that was really brave of [the refugee student] to come and tell her story because it was a scary time in her life and it might be hard to talk about it."

Many of Price's students are Mexican immigrants who were better able to relate to refugee students from other countries after they shared their essays, says Price. "They connected on that level of wanting to have a better life; before, I don't think they saw that common connection, but that brought it to their attention."

Another event involved a former NFL player from the community (his mother is a Mountain View teacher), who spoke to students about how his love of reading got him through school, including college, and thus into the NFL, ultimately earning him a trip to the Super Bowl with the New Orleans Saints. The former player, Marcus Mailei, is a Pacific Islander, a culture that is represented at the school, says Price.

Other events included:

- a readers' theater schoolwide presentation of *Where the Wild Things Are*
- teachers and students dressing up as favorite book characters and decorating classroom doors to honor favorite books
- a book exchange and giveaway, ensuring that students went home with new books
- visits to the new public library down the street, where students learned about summer reading programs and prizes they could earn by reading books
- library staff visits during the evening literacy night, where parents were given kits full of activities to help their children become better readers
- read-alouds by Latina moms who attend a community learning center on the school's campus; the mothers also shared their experiences about how reading had helped them in their lives
- tweets by teachers throughout the day to reach out to the community and show the importance of Día and how the school is trying to make a difference.

"Our main goal for the day was for the kids to learn to love reading and how it can be a positive influence on their lives," Price says.

Mountain View plans to do a Día day again this spring, says Price. He hopes to have his students prepare essays in advance of the



Photo courtesy of Bruce Matsunaga

Día at ASU: Students crafted their own writer's notebooks in a workshop led by teacher Dawn Lambson.

event so that this year they can have writing to share with other students.

"I like this because kids are writing it and other kids are reading it and it's giving them the opportunity to see different perspectives," Price says. "Even though we may speak different languages or come from different places, we have those connections that bring us together."

Arizona University Hosts Día for 6th- to 12th- graders

NCTE member Tracey Flores, a doctoral student in English education at Arizona State University (ASU), has been working on a Día initiative for six years. Schools in cities surrounding the ASU Tempe campus bring 6th- through 12th-graders (often with parent chaperones) to campus for a morning Día event, usually from about 9 a.m. until 1 or 2 p.m., held in May after state testing is done. The event has grown from 250 students its first year in 2011 to more than 600 in recent years.

Día at ASU features speakers, slam poets, visiting and local young adult authors, mariachis and baile folklórico dancers from

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Photo courtesy of Bruce Matsumaga.

Author Matt de la Peña was one of the authors invited to participate in ASU's 2015 Día celebration.



Photo courtesy of Bruce Matsumaga.

Students engaged their ideas in Tomas Stanton's session.

Why Is Día Important?

NCTE member R. Joseph Rodríguez, Assistant Professor of Literacy and English Teacher Education at the University of Texas at El Paso, supports Día—so much so that he co-wrote NCTE's resolution in favor of the program in 2005. Rodríguez is a longtime friend of founder Pat Mora, and started a nonprofit literacy program inspired by Día in Houston (the East End Education Project), which ran for 10 years in the early 2000s). He remains active in literacy efforts in the Austin area with *Libre con Libros*.

One reason Día is important, says Rodríguez, is because of its focus on parents learning how to help their children enjoy reading. He likes how Día creates moments between parents and children that are rare in today's hurried, distracted, device-filled world. "It's the ability to pause . . . and to say 'words matter, we're made up of stories.' It changes how we view language and how we define ourselves as literate human beings."

On seeing children interact with books—especially outside the classroom, in a public space with readers of all ages, colors, and backgrounds—and then get to take books home: "I think that fulfills the full circle of literacy happening in our everyday, year-round lives."

Rodríguez also appreciates Día's emphasis on the importance of cultural diversity, which can help children establish identity.

"Día promotes removing the word 'foreign' from foreign languages," he says. Instead, Día emphasizes "world languages" and the recognition and use of home languages, plus it values storytelling and cultural conservation.

"Americans, all Americans, possess culture. How we define origin within our family is distinct as well as culturally relevant. These are defining moments for identities, for belonging. It begins in our families and what we value, what children can treasure—and that begins with books, literacy, and our culturally rich lives."

the Agua Fria High School, and hoop dancers. Students listen to keynote speeches, then break into small, interactive groups (sometimes run by authors) that focus on literacy activities, such as crafting and sharing a slam poem or learning how to write strong dialogue for a character, create a writer's notebook, or craft song lyrics.

"It's really about getting them to see themselves in all their uniqueness and also having a space for them to share who they are—and to start to think about what that means," says Flores. "It's a celebration of culture, languages, and literacies."

Students also come away with free books, written by one of the featured authors present at the event (and often signed by the author). Teachers have told Flores this is especially motivating for students, even those who aren't normally big readers, because now they feel a personal connection to their book.

While the ASU event primarily features Spanish as well as English, Flores says organizers are trying to bring in resources representing other cultures, languages, and literacies, such as American Indian; the hoop dancers are an example of this effort. Flores would also like to involve more children from nearby reservations.

One perennial challenge: budget. "Each year we start with zero," Flores says. Partnerships with community organizations and businesses help fund the event. Dunkin Donuts provides doughnuts and milk; the local Phoenix Book company provides books at cost, while authors donate time or take reduced fees. Flores also seeks a humanities grant to fund free books and author visits.

She would like to try to create a two-day Día event in the future—if she can work out budgetary and time constraints.

"We are helping to expand the view of literacy and expand the network of people in the state working toward this goal," she says. "We've really garnered excitement from schools to attend."

"It's a Party for Books!"

At Travis Elementary School in Houston, Día has been celebrated the past two years as a night-time event so more families can attend. The event began at Travis partly as a result of efforts by parent and PTA member Debbie Muñoz, a former Houston school district researcher who had worked with Día in the past through a nonprofit organization in Houston. She suggested Día to principal Tom Day, who quickly embraced it.

"We wanted to have better outreach and engagement with our Hispanic families," says Day, noting that nearly half the students (44 percent) in the school are Hispanic. "We thought what a great idea to have an event where we celebrate culture and instill a love of reading—and bring the community together."

At Travis's most recent "book fiesta" celebration, the school provided three to four free books for children; a folk singer/storyteller performed Spanish/Mexican folk tales; and the Houston Children's Museum helped teachers work with students in about 20 different literacy-related activities. Students and their families rotated among tables where they could, for example, create the life cycle of a

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Photo courtesy of Debbie Muñoz.

Día at Travis Elementary: Shown enjoying Día 2015 festivities at Travis Elementary School, Houston, are (from left) Jorge L. Arredondo, HISD Assistant Superintendent of Family and Community Engagement, with his wife Veronica Arredondo (an HISD teacher), Travis Elementary Principal Tom Day, and Travis parent Debbie Muñoz.



Photo courtesy of Debbie Muñiz.

caterpillar on a paper plate (to honor *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*), make glasses using pipe cleaners (an homage to *Arthur's Eyes*), or participate in other ways.

Parents also were given activity books with suggestions for enhancing their child's literacy at home over the summer. "Some parents said 'I don't know what to do to help my child,'" Muñiz says. "So we were able to give them hands-on simple things to do at home with items they probably already have. For me, that is why we need to keep doing this. We take for granted that a lot of parents already know how to do this, and some want to do it, but they don't necessarily know how."

Muñiz says many parents came to her to say how grateful they were for the night and for the new books, which let the children start their own home libraries.

As for the children, says Muñiz, a parent of two Travis students: "They say, 'this is so cool! We are having a party for books!'"

Muñiz noticed as the last Día was winding down that one child was sitting on the steps of the stage, his new books arrayed around him, already engrossed in one. "I just thought, 'Oh my gosh, this is what it's about. He's so excited, he's got these books, he's like, 'I'm ready to start reading them now.'"

Lorna Collier's articles about education and technology have appeared in *US News & World Report*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *MSN.com*, and *AARP Bulletin*. She is the former online editor for *GetEducated.com*. Reach her at lorna@lornacollier.com.



Celebrate Día 2016!

NCTE is an official supporter of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day) on April 30

The Council celebrates Día through its support for literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. View the NCTE Resolution at: <http://bit.ly/1PJ6f4J>

"Día is a year-long literacy initiative with culminating April celebrations for children and families across the country," says author Pat Mora, who created *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* in 1996. "Join us, NCTE members, in celebrating all our children and linking them to bookjoy!"

Explore ideas for celebrating Día!

• **Children's Days, Book Days: Planning for a Día Year:** <http://bit.ly/1Lw6mfW>

• **In a series of videos provided by WETV's ¡Colorín Colorado!, Mora talks about Día:** <http://bit.ly/1TpbmJW>

• **Read Pat Mora's Tips for Creating a Bookjoy Family:** <http://bit.ly/1WuAH4q>

• **Are you a Día advocate or do you aspire to be one?** See this mini-poster: <http://bit.ly/1QMxObc>

• **The Día Family Book Club National Curriculum—** lesson plans for ages 4–8 and 8–12 offered by the Association of Library Service to Children (ALSC): <http://bit.ly/1WuAXR4>

• **Classroom activities from ReadWriteThink.org:** <http://bit.ly/1RLLeVee>

• **Tune into the ReadWriteThink.org podcast "Latino Literature for Teens":** <http://bit.ly/1RRUNGN>

• **Visit Arizona State University's Vimeo channel for Día** and listen to Tracey Flores's moving story: "I will not speak Spanish on the playground/No hablaré Español en el patio." <https://vimeo.com/channels/eldia>