

# Pat Mora

## *Bookjoy!*

The sound of the desert wind carries me back to our rock house in El Paso, Texas. Conversations and teasing in English and Spanish were the braided music in our childhood home. Nighttime stories comforted my three siblings and me. Words soaked into us—moon, *luna*; star, *estrella*. In time, books extended our verbal experiences. Magic.



I wouldn't be me without books. Early on, I discovered their pleasure and power. All my reading was in English, though my aunt and grandmother read their prayer books in Spanish. Neither of my parents had the opportunity to go to college, but they invested in books. Among my favorites were the Childcraft series, particularly the poetry book.

When I was home sick, I'd pull down that orange volume and savor "Old King Cole," "Daffy-Down-Dilly," and "Lady-Bird, Lady-Bird." Opening other books, in time, I rode in elegant carriages, learned with Clara Barton, traveled to Russia, heard the wind on a faraway prairie, tasted sorghum molasses, and solved mysteries with Nancy Drew—all through black symbols on a white page. Such wonder.

Early in my life, books became a rich and dominant thread in my family fabric, my memories. Reading was part of my school memories, too—waiting in anticipation for a teacher to read aloud the next section of "*B*" *Is for Betsy*, memorizing poems the nuns assigned year after year, rhythms that are still part of me. Through reading, I'd discovered, and still discover, that sitting still at home or in a plane, I can shed my physical self, forget about me, and enter a place or ideas created by a fellow human I'll probably never meet. Reading expands me.

When my three children were little, I experienced the intimate joy of sharing a habit I loved—reading! How we reveled in Mother Goose and books by Beatrix Potter and Richard Scarry. Now, I watch my adult children when, with a smile, they hold their old, worn books. Each thinks, "This is mine. I loved it best." They savor book memories, the books that were/are their steady friends. That private family joy prompted me years ago to write my own children's books, to hand other children some reading pleasure. I imagined a young stranger opening one of my books. Now, my daughter, Libby, who writes with me, also visualizes an unknown reader. Libby and I laugh together as we revise and revise to create "bookjoy."

Because I'd grown up bilingual, I've reached out to children in English and

Spanish. Slowly, I began to realize that not all our children were equally valued—many children didn't see the details of their daily lives affirmed on the page. I realized that growing up a reader, I'd never read about a family who spoke two or more languages, or who enjoyed cheese enchiladas on Friday night. What we called American children's literature wasn't a balanced sampling of wonderful voices and traditions, of our plurality. I discovered how parents who spoke many other languages hadn't had my extensive literacy experience in English; indeed, many felt ashamed of not speaking English. Many low-income parents, including English-speaking parents, didn't feel welcomed at schools, libraries, and museums nor had they been coached to support their children's reading habit.

My reading life has been long and rich. Reading helps me to understand my country and my world—our cultural, religious, and personal complexities.

In 1996, I founded a family literacy initiative to honor *all* children and to share bookjoy with them. It's often known as *Día*, which means "day" in Spanish. *Día*, this daily commitment, significantly altered my life and has, I hope, enriched the lives of many committed literacy supporters. By 2018, children of color will be the majority in our country. Together, all of us who value all our children can work together to create a diverse reading nation, proclaiming again and again that literacy is essential in a democracy.

I now have a *grand* baby, a granddaughter, and I'm savoring the opportunity to share stories and books with Bonny, to continue a cherished family tradition. I want Bonny and all our children to be anticipating the next story, their next book. All our children deserve *alegría en los libros*, bookjoy.



Pat Mora is the author of more than 40 books, and has published poetry books for adults, teens, and children. *Zing! Seven Creativity Practices for Educators and Students* is one of her books of nonfiction. Her more than 30 children's books include books in bilingual formats and Spanish editions. An educator and literacy advocate, Mora founded *Día*, *El día de los niños*, *El día de los libros*, a year-long family initiative that honors children and connects them with bookjoy. Annually, across the country, April book fiestas reach out creatively to all children of all cultures and languages.

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