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You are here: [Home](#) / [Industry News](#) / Pat Mora on Día, the Arbuthnot Lecture, and Diverse Books: 20 Years and Counting

Pat Mora on Día, the Arbuthnot Lecture, and Diverse Books: 20 Years and Counting

By Ruth Quiroa on  April 30, 2016 [Leave a Comment](#)

Children who are members of the “Community of Readers” have access to “privilege, pleasure, and power,” says [Pat Mora](#), award-winning author and longtime literacy advocate. For more than 20 years she has focused on expanding this community to ensure that literacy is accessible to all young people. Her April 15 [Arbuthnot Lecture](#) at the Santa Barbara City College’s Garvin Theatre, called “Bookjoy! ¡Alegría en los libros!”, coincided with the 20th anniversary of the celebration she founded, “[El día de los niños/ El día de los libros](#)” (Children’s Day/Book Day), commonly known as “Día.”

Mora was born in El Paso, TX, where she lived for more than 40 years, growing up in a bilingual home and community. Her mother valued the library and always made sure her children had books at home. In fact, she cannot remember a time in her life when she was not a reader, and fondly recalls one of her favorite childhood books being a *Childcraft* poetry volume. This love and delight in books



Pat Mora was framed!

influenced her years as a teacher, university administrator, museum director, consultant, and author. In fact, as an adult she was drawn to the lyrical nature of the many picture books she read to her own children, as these sparked ideas for future writing and publishing adventures.

BOOKJOY AND DÍA

In 1996, Mora first learned of the Mexican holiday, Day of the Child, and began pondering this and other annual celebrations, such as Mother’s Day, questioning the lack of an equivalent event for books and reading. This led to the creation of the compound word *Bookjoy*, which joins two otherwise separate concepts to represent the deep, transformational power and resulting pleasure in textual transactions, particularly within the context of a Community of Readers. Armed with Bookjoy, she began work on the family literacy initiative “Día,” partnering with [REFORMA](#) (the National Association To Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking); [ALSC](#) (Association for Library Service to Children), an affiliate of ALA (American Library Association); and now [First Book](#) to bring her ideas to reality. [Día’s goals](#) are to:

- Celebrate children and connect them to the world of learning through books, stories and libraries.
- Recognize and respect culture, heritage, and language as powerful tools for strengthening families and communities.
- Nurture cognitive and literacy development in ways that honor and embrace a child’s home language and culture.
- Introduce families to community resources that provide opportunities for learning through multiple literacies.

Twenty years later, the children's author enthusiastically shares that recent ALSC data for Día 2016 shows 38 states, including Alaska, have registered celebrations to occur in more than 25 languages, with more than 90,500 potential attendees. Although she is encouraged with these statistics, Mora continues to focus on the work that remains, a major point in her recent Arbuthnot Lecture.

ARBUTHNOT LECTURE

Armed with a notebook to record thoughts and ideas, Mora immediately began work on the [Arbuthnot Lecture](#) paper presentation the day she received selection notification in 2015. This owing to the lasting, significant impact on the world of children's literature it proffers, as well as the legacy it has honored since 1968—Mary Hill Arbuthnot's strong advocacy for children's literature. Her resulting paper emphasizes the privilege, pleasure, and power of being a reader and proposes that “if we want to expand our community of young readers, we need to enthusiastically collaborate with our fellow literacy advocates: librarians, teachers, professors, child care programs, families, literacy non-profits, as well as foundations, businesses, and publishers who can help fund and promote our important work.” She also notes that “the field has to recognize that our children need to be readers to develop their unique talents for the good of their families, communities, and our society—our future citizens.”

In order to achieve these tasks, as well as encourage biliteracy, Mora believes that parents, teachers, and librarians must remember to promote Bookjoy every day and find habitual ways to link children to books. These practices, together with a culminating, celebratory Día event, can serve as bridges among families, library staff teams, and feeder schools and districts with positive literacy/biliteracy outcomes. In fact, Día celebrations can start in small ways, with simple readalouds of diverse texts among all children. She recommends that libraries develop a strong planning team so as to build the capacity for increasingly elaborate Día events that might provide multiple stations for making bookmarks, playing book games, watching puppets, writing stories, and more.

WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS

Mora's perspective around changes observed for diverse literature is pragmatic, based on data faithfully compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the University of Wisconsin, Madison since the early 1980s. Annual publication rates for such books have simply not changed. Even more eye-opening is the lack of diversification during this time period within the publishing industry, library staff teams, and teaching force. Mora concludes that these factors result in a body of books for children that “do not yet show the diversity of our country.” At the same time, the literacy advocate believes that teachers and librarians can “make a classic,” as they hold the power to choose to feature high-quality books with diverse themes in programming and instruction—and more importantly, to attain a new mindset, one that celebrates diversity as the norm.

LOOKING FORWARD

For the next 20 years, Mora envisions continuing “the work,” as she calls her involvement with Día. She hopes to see publishers creatively promote its annual celebration and literacy strategies, as well as see an ongoing rise in the initiative's growing list of educational and non-profit partners. She even muses that someday Día will become a national celebration to honor the year-long process of linking each child, title-by-title, to Bookjoy and the Community of Readers.

See Mora's Arbuthnot Lecture below.



Pat Mora at the Arbuthnot Lecture, flanked by Julie Corsaro and Andrew Medlar.