

Dominican Writers Conference presents:

Reclaiming Our Palabras

Dedicated to
Julia Alvarez



**DOMINICAN
WRITERS**



DOMINICAN WRITERS



ABOUT THE DOMINICAN WRITERS ASSOCIATION

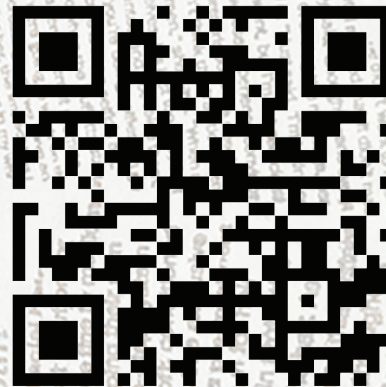
The Dominican Writers Association is a 501(c)(3) literary arts organization dedicated to amplifying Dominican voices and supporting writers across the diaspora. Through workshops, literary events, mentorship, and publishing resources, DWA creates spaces where Dominican stories can be written, shared, and celebrated, helping ensure Dominican narratives remain visible in the literary and cultural landscape.

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#DWA2026 · #ReclaimingNuestrasPalabras · #DominicanWriters



Dominican Writers Conference presents:

Reclaiming Our Palabras

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE · Dominican Writers Conference 2026

Five years after its historic debut, the ***Dominican Writers Conference*** returns to New York City with two days of programming built entirely around one conviction: Dominican-American writers deserve a room of their own.

In 2019, that room changed things. Writers found mentors. Manuscripts got finished. Connections were made, communities formed, networks built. All of them left knowing, maybe for the first time, that their stories had a place.

The 2026 conference is built on that foundation and on the path that Julia Alvarez, to whom this conference is dedicated, helped make possible long before we had a room to gather in.

THE THEME


Reclaiming Our Palabras is a declaration. It names what has been taken, what has been silenced, and what we are choosing, deliberately and collectively, to take back: our language, our narratives, our rightful place in the literary canon.

Every panel, workshop, and conversation at this conference is an act of that reclamation.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Two days of craft, community, and candor. Workshops that go deep. Panels that don't shy away from the harder truths about publishing. Keynote voices that have walked this road. And throughout it all, the rare experience of being in a room where your reference points are shared, your history is understood, and your work is taken seriously.

*Panels & Conversations · Craft Workshops · Keynote Addresses
Manuscript Reviews · Networking Events*



Dominican-American writers have never lacked stories worth telling. We gather to make sure those stories reach the world on our own terms. This is not only a professional development opportunity. It is a return to community, a space to reconnect with purpose, and a reminder, in case you needed one, that your voice matters.

Table of Contents

Dominican Writers Conference 2026
Reclaiming Our Palabras
May 1–2, 2026 · John Jay College of Criminal Justice, NYC

Program Contents

FRONT MATTER

Welcome from the Executive Director

Dedicated to Julia Alvarez

About the Conference

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Friday, May 1 — Full Day Program [FRI]

Saturday, May 2 — Full Day Program [SAT]

PARTICIPANTS

Panelists & Moderators

Workshop Facilitators

AWARDS & HONORS

DWC 2026 Planning Committee

JULIA through the years

MANUSCRIPT REVIEWERS

BACK MATTER

Sponsors & Community Partners

Advertisements

Back Cover

<https://dominicanwriters.substack.com/>

DWA mission · www.dwaconference.org · #DWA2026 · social handles
dominicanwriters.org · #DWA2026 · #ReclaimingNuestrasPalabras



A Note from Our Founder & Executive Director

For most of my life, I had never seen myself in a book. Not really. It wasn't until I was 21, sitting in a creative writing class at John Jay College, that everything shifted. Not because the class celebrated my work. It didn't. My writing was dismissed, made to feel like it didn't belong. But that invalidation sent me searching. I went looking for writers like me, writers who wrote about their Dominican experiences, who didn't apologize for where they came from. And when I found them, I couldn't stop asking: where were these stories my entire life? Why was I only now discovering these voices, the ones that made me feel seen and understood? And why didn't everyone know about them?

I don't know how you feel when you pick up a book and see yourself in it. When you hand a Dominican story to your child and watch them recognize themselves on the page for the first time. But me? I feel immense pride. I feel like we matter enough to be included in the literary canon. Like our history, our culture, our complexity, all of it, is worth preserving, worth celebrating, worth fighting for.

And that feeling is exactly why, since 2015, I have dedicated all of my time, my energy, and my heart to this work. But I have never done it alone. The Dominican Writers Association has been built by a community of people who believed in Dominican storytelling before it was on anyone's radar. Writers, educators, partners, volunteers, and collaborators who showed up, again and again, because they understood what was at stake. This has always been a collective act of love.

Because representation isn't just about feeling good in the moment. It's about a young Dominican kid growing up knowing that writers who look like them, who sound like them, who carry the same histories, exist. That their stories have a place. That they have a place. That they don't have to wait until they're 21 to find out.

That is why this conference exists. That is why we keep building.

In 2019, we proved something: when you build a room specifically for Dominican writers, people show up. Over 300 of them. And they didn't just show up, they found each other. They finished manuscripts. They got agents. They formed communities that lasted long after that weekend ended. More than anything, they told us they finally felt like they belonged.

We have been building toward this moment ever since.



This year's conference is dedicated to Julia Alvarez, and that dedication means something specific to me. When I was figuring out who I was as a writer, her books were already out there telling me Dominican stories could travel the world. She wrote about exile, migration, girlhood, and memory, and she didn't apologize for any of it. She didn't translate herself for anyone. She showed us what it looked like to take up space. In honoring her, we honor every Dominican writer who came before us, and every one still finding their voice.

And now, all these years later, we are back at John Jay, the place that sparked everything, doing the work I didn't even know I was destined to do when I was a student walking these halls. Some things come full circle for a reason.

Dominican stories are not a footnote. They are not a niche. They are not "too specific" or "not universal enough." They are literature. And everything we have built since 2015 has been for this, for you. For the writer who hasn't finished their manuscript yet. For the reader who just wants to see themselves on a page. For the kid who will one day pick up a book by someone who looks like them and think: I matter. This weekend, in this building, we are claiming that, together.

Welcome to Reclaiming Our Palabras.

Con cariño,

Angy Abreu

Julia Á

Celebrating Julia Álvarez By Amaris Castillo

In her 1998 essay collection, *Something to Declare*, Julia Álvarez recounted with sharp precision a question many are asked as children. Her grandfather wanted to know: “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

The young Julia first said a bullfighter, which elicited chuckles. Later came another answer: a cowboy. Then, a movie actress.

Finally, Julia realized there were many other things to be in this world. An abundance of possibilities. She wanted to drive a red pickup truck, travel to the moon in a rocket ship, and go underwater in a submarine. “And I want to be a pilot and go to Nueva York and shop for toys,” she then told her abuelo, “and I want to be a poet and write lots and lots of poems.”

The room, she recalled, fell silent. Smiling, Julia’s grandfather took her face in his hand, tilted it. “A poet, yes,” he confirmed. “Now you are talking.”

It was a moment etched in memory. Some will say it was foretold. Because Julia Alvarez would not only grow up to become a poet, but an acclaimed novelist whose books have been celebrated and taught worldwide for more than three decades. At 41 she published her debut novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*—launching her as one of most critically and commercially successful Latina writers of her time. The Dominican Writers Association is delighted to give her her much-deserved flowers at the 2026 Dominican Writers Conference: *Reclaiming Our Palabras*.

Real recognize real. The name Julia Alvarez means something for many writers of the Dominican diaspora. Through her intricate tales detailing dominicanidad, she has carved a path for generations of authors—among them Angie Cruz, Elizabeth Acevedo, and Cleyvis Natera. Authors who have praised Alvarez for her contributions to Dominican literature.

Several years ago, at an event in collaboration with PEN America and the Strand Book Store, the National Book Award-winning Acevedo gave Alvarez her flowers before a large crowd at the CUNY Graduate Center. The Poet X author shared how she had written a letter to Julia Álvarez. In it, she said the first Christmas gift she had ever bought her mother was a copy of Alvarez’s *In the Name of Salomé*, in Spanish. Acevedo said she bought herself the same copy in English. The novel became the first book she and her mami read together. “For me, your literature was a way to be like, ‘I’m not just the gringita cousin.’ That I have a connection here that I can explore through this work,” Acevedo told Alvarez. “And that also makes me a better sense of myself, of my mother, of my family, of the women I come from—through this text that affirms that.”

Cruz, whose most recent novel, *How Not To Drown in A Glass of Water*, won multiple awards, has also credited Alvarez as having a deep impact on her own writer path.



In a Q&A interview with journalist Cristiana Lombardo, Cruz said it wasn’t until she read *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* that she was able to conceive of the idea that a story like hers, about a young woman and daughter of Dominican immigrants, could also live in a book. “At the time I was incredibly intimidated by bookstores, but seeing her book on display compelled me to go inside the store because of the book title,” Cruz said. “And when I read that Julia Álvarez was Dominican, I fell through a trapdoor into a life of reading which led me to becoming a writer. I am very grateful to the booksellers who thought to put Álvarez’s book in the window. These gestures of inclusion change lives. It changed mine.”

Alvarez



And when she is in need of comfort, Natera—author of *Neruda on the Park* and *The Grand Paloma Resort*—reads *In the Name of Salomé*. In an interview for The PEN Ten, PEN America’s weekly interview series, Natera spoke about the power in Alvarez’s 2000 novel about Dominican poet Salomé Ureña. “It often reminds me that fiction is an effective way to correct history as it can collapse the boundary between the present and the past,” Natera said. “It is also a gentle reminder that novels are archives to honor figures who successfully changed the world through the written word.”

Much of Álvarez’s written work, in fact, has been influenced by her experiences as a New York-born writer who spent the formative years of childhood in the Dominican Republic before moving back to the United States. In a 2002 sit-down interview with Fran Stoddard of Vermont Public Television, the author said that, had it not been for the life disruption of migrating to the U.S., she may have never become a writer. “Coming to this country, losing everything: my family, my homeland, my language. It was sort of a realization that I needed a portable place that I could set foot on and stay on, root in, and I found that in the world of books.”

Álvarez’s devoted readers may remember their first time finding her words. For me, it was *In the Time of the Butterflies*—her famous 1994 historical fiction novel about the Mirabal sisters who rose up against the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo and who were brutally assassinated by his orders on Nov. 25, 1960. Through fictionalized journal entries and prose, Alvarez transformed these historical figures to life on the page. She brought Dominican Americans like myself a critical education on a piece of Dominican history that was never granted a proper place in our history books at school.

When I went to the Dominican Republic one summer as a teen, I asked my tío to take me to Salcedo, where *Las Mariposas* were from. I wanted to visit the museum dedicated to the sisters, their former home filled with their personal belongings, in rooms frozen in time. As we entered, I recognized Dedé Mirabal—the surviving sister—leading a group of young children. I was so moved that I teared up and tried to find the words to explain how much the story of her sisters impacted me. I thought of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and how the book itself was dedicated to Dedé. And how reading the book led me to want to know more about my own heritage and history. It was a moment in which I really felt and recognized the power of literature.

Julia Álvarez has given her readers so much throughout the years. She gave us a series about Tia Lola, the quirky aunt who comes from the Dominican Republic to shake up life for family in Vermont. She gave us Yolanda García in the novel, *Yo!*—a hilarious story about the consequences of writing a novel based on one’s own family. She gave us many more books: about ciguapas, about producing coffee in DR, about a graveyard of manuscript drafts whose characters demand to tell their stories.

Stories aside, Julia Álvarez gifted us something perhaps more profound. She has granted other Dominican writers the gift of representation and of the freedom to tell our own tales—to study our own cultural roots to create our own unique art. She let us know we have a place in literature, and in books. Having recently published *Visitations*, a new collection of poems, she is a writer who continues to give to her readers and to our literary community. And by the end of this year, we will celebrate her again with the publication of *In the Time of the Butterflies: A Graphic Novel* (illustrated by Krystal Quiles).

We hope Julia Álvarez likes her bouquet of blooming flowers, and we thank her for the gift of her words.

FRIDAY - MAY 1st

PROGRAM PANELS

COMMUNITY ARRIVAL + OPENING CEREMONY

Lecture Hall Friday | 10:00AM-11:00AM

Whose Stories Get Published? A Frank Conversation on Power, Access, and the Future of Diverse Books

Lecture Hall

Friday | 11:00AM - 12:00PM

The publishing industry is shrinking and writers of color are paying the price. Imprints are folding. The editors and agents who spent their careers fighting for our stories, who went to bat for authors the industry would have otherwise overlooked, are losing their seats at the table. And when they go, they take the doors they opened with them. So what does this mean for us, for writers of color who are still writing, still submitting, still believing their stories deserve to be published? Join us for an unfiltered conversation about the state of publishing, what is truly at stake for diverse voices and how we refuse to be erased.

Panelist:

Caroline Bleeke (Flatiron Books/MacMillan- Editor), Angela Quezada Padron (Dream Jar Publishing-Editor), Marcela Landres (Editorial Consultant), Leslie Zampetti (Open Book Literary-Literary Agent), Nancy Mercado (Penguin Random House-Editor), and Rita Veras (Rosecliff Literary-Literary Agent)

Moderator: Sara Munjack, Board Treasurer for Latinx in Publishing

LUNCH BREAK+ Mingle Friday | 12:00PM - 12:45PM

KEYNOTE BY ANGIE CRUZ

Lecture Hall

Friday | 1:00PM - 1:55PM

Angie Cruz is one of the most essential voices in Dominican and American literature. A writer whose work Julia Alvarez herself has called "so right for this moment" - Cruz takes the stage for a keynote address that sits in the intersection of story, community, and what it means to write Dominican life in honesty and love. A conversation not to be missed.

The Dominican Graphic Novel Movement

Lecture Hall

Friday | 2:00PM – 2:45PM

Graphic Novels and illustrated storytelling have become one of the most dynamic spaces for Dominican creators, where image and narrative, memory and myth, folklore and futurism collide. But what does it mean to tell Dominican stories visually in an industry still catching up to the form? Join Dominican graphic novelist and illustrators from the island and diaspora, for a conversation on craft, representation, and the growing presence of Dominican voices in one of publishing's most exciting and evolving spaces.

Panelist: Eddaviel Montero, Barbara Perez Marquez, Kelly Fernandez, and Kiara Valdez

Moderator: Gabriel Castillo

Middle Grade: The Page Is Listening: Writing Middle Grade with Purpose

Lecture Hall

Friday | 3:00PM – 4:00 PM

Middle grade is where young readers first see themselves, or don't. For Dominican and Latinx writers, the stakes are deeply personal: how do we create stories that affirm identity, honor cultural specificity, and expand what young readers believe is possible for someone like them? Join Dominican authors for a conversation on craft and responsibility of writing for young readers who are paying attention.

Panelist: Jasminne Mendez, Hilda Eunice Burgos, Julian Randall, Jasminne Paulino

Moderator: Amaris Castillo

The Poem as Memory: Dominican Voices, Craft, and Inheritance

Lecture Hall

Friday | 4:15PM – 5:15PM

Poetry is where Dominican Writers have long stored what cannot be said any other way - memory, migration, grief, joy, and the spaces between languages. Join Dominican poets for a conversation on craft, lineage, and what it means to write poetry that carries the full weight of who we are and where we come from.

Panelist: Roberto Carlos Garcia, Roxana Calderón, Yaissa Jimenez, Stephanie Pacheco and JP Infante

Moderator: Aide Montilla



SATURDAY - MAY 2nd

PROGRAM PANELS

Coming of Age, Coming Into Voice

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 10:00AM - 11:00AM

Growing up Dominican is not a simple story- it is identity forming and fracturing, belonging, negotiating, family expectation navigating, all at once. Join Dominican authors for a conversation on the craft of writing adolescence with the complexity it deserves- how to build teen voices that are specific, layered, and true without sacrificing the emotional depth young readers are hungry for.

Panelist: Vincent Tirado, Francesca Padilla, Camille Gomera Tavarez and Barbara Perez Marquez

Moderator: Leiry Santos.

Interior Lives: Writing Desire, Silence & Emotional Truth

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 11:15AM - 12:00PM

The most powerful moments in fiction are often the ones that go unsaid. This craft conversation centers the page itself -how to write emotionally charged material with restraint, how to render intimacy without melodrama, how to let silence carry weight, and how to build characters whose inner lives feel urgent, lived-in, and true. Join Natalie Guerrero and Alejandro heredia for a conversation about quiet intensity that makes a story impossible to put down.

Panelist: Alejandro Heredia and Natalie Guerrero

Moderator: JP Infante

IBBY Panel: Impulsando el futuro de la literatura infantil y juvenil Dominicana

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 12:20PM - 1:00PM

IBBY — la Junta Internacional de Libros para Jóvenes — ha sido una de las fuerzas más importantes en el desarrollo de una cultura de literatura infantil en la República Dominicana, conectando a autores, ilustradores y educadores dominicanos con una red global dedicada a poner libros de calidad en manos de cada niño. Únase a los miembros de IBBY-RD para una conversación sobre el estado de la literatura infantil y juvenil dominicana, los recursos disponibles para escritores que trabajan en este espacio, y cómo la diáspora y la isla pueden continuar fortaleciendo el ecosistema literario para la próxima generación de lectores y narradores dominicanos.

Panelist: Elizabeth Balaguer -Presidenta/IBBY Dominicana, Dulce Elvira de los Santos, Vice-Presidenta, IBBY-Dominicana, Geraldine de Santis **Moderator:** Angy Abreu

Inheritance & Intuition: Writing Dominican Women

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 1:05 PM – 1:55 PM

Dominican women carry generations inside them— memory, silence, fracture, and an instinct for survival that gets named. In *Family Lore*, National Award-winning author Elizabeth Acevedo weaves magic, mortality, and the secrets of Dominican women across generations and continents. In *The Grand Paloma Resort*, Cleyvis placed womanhood against the weight of class, labor, and family loyalty. In *My Train Leaves at Three*, Natalie Guerrero wrote grief, ambition, and inheritance through the body of an Afro-Latina woman refusing to disappear. Together these three writers bring conversation about the craft of rendering Dominican women not as a backdrop— but as the full, complicated architecture of a story. What does this mean to write us with the depth we deserve?

Panelist: Angie Cruz, Elizabeth Acevedo, Cleyvis Natera and Natalie Guerrero

Moderator: Annecy Baez

KEYNOTE BY JULIA ALVAREZ & CLEYVIS NATERA

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Some books don't just tell stories. They open doors. Julia Alvarez's work gave Dominican women writers permission to see themselves on the page, to claim history as their own, and to write with the full weight of who they are. In this keynote conversation, Alvarez joins Cleyvis Natera to explore the literary inheritance Dominican women carry, what it means to write our stories into permanence, and where the next generation is taking the tradition. This is a conversation about lineage, courage, and what gets passed down when a writer refuses to be invisible.

Carrying the Voice Across: Translation, Power & Dominican Literature

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 3:15 PM – 4:15 PM

Translation is one of the most invisible — and most essential — forms of literary labor. It is the work that carries Dominican voices across languages, cultures, and borders. But who shapes that journey? Join us for a conversation on what it truly means to translate Dominican literature — navigating fidelity, cultural nuance, and the weight of carrying a community's stories into new hands.

Panelist: Erika Morillo, Jasminne Mendez, Kianny Antigua

Moderator: Francis Mateo

Writing Desire on Our Own Terms: Power, Pleasure & the Modern Romance

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 4:30PM – 5:30PM

Romance is one of the most commercially powerful genres in publishing and one of the most underestimated. For Latina writers, it is also something more; a space to center our pleasure, assert our agency, and tell love stories that don't ask us to flatten who we are to earn a happy ending. Join Dominican authors for an unfiltered conversation on crafting intimacy with intention, writing emotionally resonant love stories rooted in cultural specificity, and what it truly means to write desire on our own terms.

Panelist: Adriana Herrera, Ligia Cushman and Elle Diaz

Moderator: Andreina Rodriguez

Building the Shelf: Writing & Illustrating Dominican Stories for Children,

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 5:45PM – 6:45PM

The books a child see themselves in are the books that shape who they believe they can become. For Dominican children, representation in picture books is not a bonus- it is a foundation. Join Dominican picture book authors and illustrators for a conversation on the collaborative craft behind children's literature: how text and image work together, how Dominican childhood is rendered on the page, and why getting these stories right matters far beyond the picture book shelf.

Panelist: Doris Rodriguez, Luz Mack, Angela Quezada Padron, and Kiara Valdez

Moderator: Alyssa Reynoso-Morris

CLOSING CEREMONY

Lecture Hall

Saturday | 6:45PM – 7:00PM



FRIDAY - MAY 1st

WORKSHOPS

How to Find and Query the Right Agent for You w/ Rita Veras

Classroom

Friday | 2:00PM – 3:00PM

Finishing a Manuscript is only half the battle. The next step- finding the right agent, writing a query that gets noticed, and navigating a process that can feel overwhelming stops too many writers before they get started. This workshop breaks it down: which agents represent your genre, how to evaluate whether an agent is reputable, what belongs in a strong query letter, and why you might be getting silence instead of responses. Leave with a clear, actionable roadmap for getting your work in front of the right agent.

Rita Veras is an Associate Agent at Rosecliff Literary. She started writing short stories and poetry at a young age, inspired by her upbringing in the Dominican Republic. Rita is passionately dedicated to uplifting BIPOC voices, enhancing representation, and championing diverse narratives.

Voice Without Self-Erasure Writing the Truth Without Abandoning Yourself or the Work w / Jani White

Classroom

Friday | 3:00PM – 4:00PM

Many writers don't stop because they lack skill or commitment. They stop when the work begins to feel risky. As a story moves closer to the page, quiet questions surface: Who will be affected by this? What loyalties might be tested? What changes once these words exist outside of me? In families and cultures where silence has long been a way to survive, those questions can slowly reshape the work - until the book is softened, delayed, or set aside altogether.

This workshop is for writers who want to stay with the work they are carrying without erasing themselves in the process. It is not a craft workshop. It does not focus on technique, productivity, or exposure. It offers clear language and grounded ways of thinking that helps writers make...

Jani Decena-White is a Dominican-Puerto Rican educator and facilitator whose work centers voice, authorship, and the cost of silence. She supports writers navigating cultural loyalty, family secrecy, and visibility, helping them stay with their work without self-erasure. Her approach emphasizes discernment, dignity, and authorship that survives truth-telling.

From Book to Animation and Audio: Turning Your Story into Multimedia Content w/ Luz Maria Mack

Classroom

Friday | 4:00PM – 5:00PM

Your story doesn't have to live only on the page. This workshop explores how written work — especially children's and family storytelling — can be adapted into animation and audio experiences that reach new audiences and open new doors. Writers will learn how to identify which parts of their stories translate powerfully to sound and image, how to reshape those moments into scripts, and how to navigate the creative process from page to production. We'll cover the roles involved — illustrators, animators, voice actors — and how you, as the writer, remain at the center. Accessible tools and realistic starting points will be shared for writers at every budget level. Leave with a clear understanding of the process and concrete next steps for bringing your story to life beyond the book.

Luz Maria Mack is a Dominican-American children's author and filmmaker whose stories celebrate her Villa Mella roots and South Bronx community. A Bridge Fest Best Animated Short Film winner and Disney collaborator, she is the author of *Bachatica* and *The Secret of the Plátano*. She creates culturally rooted stories empowering young readers.

SATURDAY - MAY 1st

WORKSHOPS

El duelo migratorio: Writing Between Languages, Loss, and Belonging w / Dr. Egli Colón Stephens, Ed.D

Classroom

Saturday | 11:00AM – 12:00PM

What do we grieve when we migrate — especially when we leave before we have words for the loss? This bilingual workshop explores migratory grief as both a lived experience and a generative source for writing. Through guided reflection, short readings, and writing prompts, participants will explore displacement, language loss, interrupted memory, and the silences that shape our voices on the page. This workshop especially welcomes writers who feel estranged from Spanish, who live between languages, or who have been made to feel that their words don't belong anywhere. Here, there is no correctness — only permission. Write bilingually, in fragments, or in whatever language arrives first. Leave having reclaimed a little more of what was never meant to be taken.

Dr. Egli Colón Stephens, Ed.D., is an educator, writer, and cultural worker with over 25 years of experience in K-12 and higher education. Her work centers grief, migration, resilience, and voice within immigrant and Dominican communities. She is the author of *Unbroken*, *El duelo no es el final*, and its English counterpart, *Beyond Grief*.

LUNCH BREAK+ Mingle Saturday | 12:00PM – 1:00PM

Reclaiming La Madre: Writing the Dominican Mother Wound w/ Dariana M. Pichardo, LMSW, MPA

Classroom

Saturday | 1:00PM – 2:00PM

In Dominican culture, la madre is untouchable — la que se sacrifica, la fuerte, la que nunca se queja. She is revered, defended, and rarely questioned. But what happens when the story of strength has also required silence? When survival demanded emotional disappearance? When loyalty meant swallowing truth?

This generative workshop dares to examine the myth of la madre fuerte and the generational silences it carries. Through guided prompts and craft-based exploration, participants will interrogate inherited narratives of sacrifice, endurance, and obligation — and explore how those narratives shape identity and writing. This session does not seek to dishonor our mothers. It seeks to humanize them. To name the grief beneath the resilience. To give language to what was endured but never spoken.

Writing becomes an act of cultural courage — transforming silencio into story, obedience into authorship, and inheritance into choice. Leave with newly generated work and a deeper understanding of why telling the fuller truth about la madre is not betrayal. It is liberation.

Dariana M. Pichardo, LMSW, MPA, is a first-generation Dominican American psychotherapist and founder of Live Life Free Wellness. She creates healing spaces for women of color to break cycles of generational trauma, reclaim their voices, and embody self-love. Through therapy, ritual, and storytelling, her work carries a single, powerful conviction: generational trauma ends with me.

The Home That Lives Within Me: A Food & Memory Workshop w / Massiel Alfonso

Classroom

Saturday | 3:00PM – 4:00PM

Food is memory. It is culture, longing, survival, and love — all on one plate. This interactive writing workshop uses the sensory world of food as a portal into personal narrative, guiding participants through creative exercises that uncover stories of home, identity, and belonging. Drawing on the work of writers like Esmeralda Santiago and Vanessa Mártir, you will learn techniques for crafting vivid, emotionally resonant prose that blends food writing with memoir. Through exercises like capturing a taste memory that transports you back, rediscovering a long-lost dish, and writing an ode to a meaningful meal, you will develop the descriptive language and “show, don’t tell” skills that make readers feel what you felt. No previous writing experience required. Leave with new pages — and a deeper understanding of what home asks us to remember.

Massiel Alfonso is a Dominican multidisciplinary artist, spoken word poet, and award-winning author who engages creative expression and education. Rooted in poetry, storytelling, and performance, her work treats language as a practice that builds confidence, strengthens communication, and helps us better understand y(our) stories (and one another). As a teaching artist, Massiel designs and facilitates creative writing and performance-based instruction for youth, teens, and adults. Her debut poetry collection, *Handful of Poems*, received First Place in the Poetry Collections category at the 30th Annual Writer’s Digest Self-Published Book Awards and earned Honorable Mention at the 2024 International Latino Book Awards. Her writing is known for its honesty, accessibility, and ability to engage diverse learners through reflection and voice.

Oh My Gooseness: Reclaiming Our Palabras Through Craft and Creative Wellness

Classroom

Saturday | 4:00PM – 5:00PM

The Emerging Writers Track is designed for writers who are just beginning their journey — finding their voice, building their practice, and discovering the community that will carry them forward.

Writers are often asked to carry a great deal — culturally, emotionally, professionally. In a landscape that can be demanding and extractive, sustaining creative work requires intentional care. This workshop introduces the Oh My Gooseness framework — Explore, Excavate, Exhilarate — as a structured journaling and iterative writing practice designed to support writer wellbeing. Rather than focusing on producing draft-ready material, this session centers journaling as a tool for clarity, emotional grounding, and creative stamina. Through reflective and embodied writing exercises, participants will reconnect with voice, lived experience, and inner alignment — and learn how iterative writing can help move through blocks, self-doubt, and fatigue. Leave with a framework you can integrate into your daily life to sustain your creativity for the long haul.

Dr. Cindy Bautista-Thomas is an Afro-Dominican scholar, writer, social worker, and psychotherapist dedicated to creating spaces of healing, transformation, and impact. Through narrative practice and healing-centered approaches, she supports individuals in reclaiming voice and lived experience. She is the creator of the Oh My Gooseness! framework.

Hay Pájaros in the Guava Garden: A Writing Generative Workshop

Classroom

Saturday | 5:00PM – 6:00PM

“Las negras racializadas, prietas e indias tercermundistas, somos marikas, maricones, jotos, y pajaros...Somos calibanes, somos las otras, las de-deshumanizadas. Soy no-binario, soy una marika travesti. Soy lo abyecto, soy la bestia. Soy travesti. Yo nunca soy yo, existo en lo relacional, soy porque somos, soy en lo colectivo.” — Mikaleah Dullard

This generative writing workshop explores the intersections of indigeneity, Blackness, and queerness through a decolonial lens — inviting participants to challenge and expand their understanding of self, identity, and belonging. Drawing on the frameworks of Gloria Anzaldúa, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Smith, and Qwo-Li Driskill, and inspired by the lives and work of Audre Lorde, Yoseli Castillo Fuentes, and Dionne Brand, participants will move through reflection and into writing. Leave with several drafted poems — including your own Litany for Survival.

Scarlet Gomez (she/they) is a queer Dominican poet, writer, zine-maker, and founder of Poetry House LLC, based in the Bronx. Her work has appeared in Philadelphia Stories, The A3 Review, and Femme Dyke Magazine. She is a Hedgebrook alum and is currently at work on her debut novel, No World Without You.

PANELIST BIOS





Angie Cruz

Angie Cruz is a novelist and editor. Her most recent novel *How Not To Drown in A Glass of Water* (2022) was a finalist for the 2024 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, shortlisted for The Aspen Words Literary Prize, winner of the Gold Medal, Latino Book Award/ The Isabel Allende Most Inspirational Book Award, longlisted for the Joyce Carol Oates Literary Prize and chosen for The New York Times 100 Notable Books of 2022 and The Washington Post 50 Notable Works of Fiction. Her novel, *Dominicana* was the inaugural book pick for GMA book club and shortlisted for The Women's Prize, longlisted for the Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction, a RUSA Notable book and the winner of the ALA/YALSA Alex Award in fiction. It was named most anticipated/ best book in 2019 by Time, Newsweek, People, Oprah Magazine, The Washington Post, The New York Times, and Esquire. Cruz is the author of two other novels, *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee* and the recipient of numerous fellowships, residencies and awards including the 2025 USA Fellowship, The Poets & Writers /Writers For Writers Award, and the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature. She's the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the award-winning literary journal, *Aster(ix)* and teaches at Columbia University.



Jasminne Mendez

Jasminne Mendez is a Pura Belpré Honor Award Author and an NAACP Image Award Nominee. She is a Dominican-American poet, playwright, translator and award winning author of several books for children and adults. Both her middle grade novel in verse *Aniana del Mar Jumps In* and her YA novel in verse *The Story of My Anger* received Pura Belpré Honor Awards and her other books have received prizes from the Texas Institute of Letters, the Writer's League of Texas and the International Latino Book Awards. She has had poetry and essays published in numerous journals and anthologies including *The Acetos Review*, *The New England Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and others. She has also had the privilege of translating the work of NYT Best Selling authors Amanda Gorman, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Renee Watson, and Claribel Ortega. She is an MFA graduate of the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University and a University of Houston alumni.



Adriana Herrera

USA Today Best Selling and Audie winning author Adriana was born and raised in the Caribbean, but for the last fifteen years has let her job (and her spouse) take her all over the world. She loves writing stories about people who look and sound like her people, getting unapologetic happy endings. The New York Times once called her book "sweet, thoughtful, and delightfully filthy too." When she's not dreaming up love stories, planning logistically complex vacations with her family or hunting for discount Broadway tickets, she's a trauma therapist in New York City, working with survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Adriana is represented by Taylor Haggerty at Root Literary.



Luz Maria Mack

Luz Maria Mack is an award-winning author dedicated to creating culturally rooted stories that empower children through culture, literacy, and a sense of belonging. Her diverse catalog features bilingual English-Spanish adventures, Spanglish titles, and stories celebrating Latine joy, roots, and imagination. From the beloved *María Series* and the heartwarming *Santo & Sheepy* collection to standalone titles addressing identity, inclusion, and social-emotional learning, her work is designed to strengthen reading skills and cultural pride.



Elizabeth Acevedo

ELIZABETH ACEVEDO was the 2022 Young People's Poet Laureate and the New York Times–bestselling author of *The Poet X*, which won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the Michael L. Printz Award, the Pura Belpré Award, the Carnegie medal, the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award, and the Walter Award. She is also the author of *With the Fire on High*—which was named a best book of the year by the New York Public Library, NPR, Publishers Weekly, and School Library Journal—and *Clap When You Land*, which was a Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor book and a Kirkus finalist.

She holds a BA in Performing Arts from The George Washington University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Maryland. Acevedo has been a fellow of Cave Canem, Cantomundo, and a participant in the Callaloo Writer's Workshops. She is a National Poetry Slam Champion, and resides in Washington, DC with her love.



Cleyvis Natera

Cleyvis Natera is an award-winning author, essayist, and critic. Her debut novel, *Neruda on the Park*, was a New York Times Editor's Choice and winner of a Silver Medal by the International Latino Book Awards for Best First Book of Fiction. Her sophomore novel, *The Grand Paloma Resort*, was named a best book of 2025 by ELLE, Electric Literature, and CrimeReads. She teaches fiction at Barnard College, The New School and Montclair State University. She is also a Fulbright Specialist.



Kianny N. Antigua

Kianny N. Antigua es escritora, traductora y narradora de audiolibros. Trabaja como profesora titular de español en Dartmouth College y como traductora y adaptadora independiente. Antigua ha publicado 41 libros en los géneros de narrativa, poesía y literatura dirigida a la infancia (11 bajo seudónimo) y 9 traducciones. Ha ganado múltiples premios literarios y sus textos aparecen en diversas antologías, revistas y otros medios. Traducida al hindi, italiano, inglés y francés. Ha traducido libros de Angie Cruz, Elizabeth Acevedo, Xochitl González, Ruth Behar, Lilliam Rivera, Lisette J. Norman & Lorgia García Peña, entre otras; y ha narrado varios libros para Audible.



Alejandro Heredia

Alejandro Heredia is a writer from The Bronx. He is the author of *LOCA*, a finalist for the 2025 Center for Fiction First Novel prize, and *You're the Only Friend I Need*, winner of the Gold Line Press Fiction chapbook contest. He has received fellowships from Lambda Literary, VONA, the Dominican Studies Institute, Kenyon Review, Trinity College, and UNLV's Black Mountain Institute. Heredia's work has been featured in *Teen Vogue*, *LitHub*, *American Short Fiction*, and elsewhere. He received an MFA in fiction from Hunter College.

Heredia currently serves as an artist in residence at Trinity College, where he teaches creative writing.



Julian Randall

Julian Randall is a Living Queer Black poet from Chicago. A recipient of multiple fellowships, including a Pushcart Prize. He holds an MFA from University of Mississippi. His writing appears in New York Times Magazine, POETRY, PEOPLE and The Atlantic. Julian is the author of *Refuse* (Pitt, 2018), winner of the Cave Canem Poetry Prize and a finalist for an NAACP Image Award, *The Pilar Ramirez Duet* (Holt Books for Young Readers), and the forthcoming *Shook* (August 4, 2026). He can be found at @JulianThePoet and on his website JulianDavidRandall.com.



Erika Morillo

Erika Morillo is a writer, photographer, and translator born and raised in the Dominican Republic and based in Jersey City. Her work focuses on family, identity, and the possibilities of image-text publications. At the core of Morillo's practice are bookmaking and the use of archives to reimagine family narratives and as a case against erasure.

Morillo's photographs have been published and exhibited both nationally and internationally. Her photobooks are part of the collections at the Whitney Museum of American Art Library and the International Center of Photography Library, among others. Her memoir, *Mother Archive: A Dominican Family Memoir* (University of Iowa Press, 2024), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and shortlisted for the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature. She holds an MA in Sociology from The New School for Social Research and an MFA from Image Text Ithaca (now Image Text M.F.A. at Cornell University).



Angela Quezada Padron

Angela Quezada Padron is a Latina author-illustrator who spent her childhood days writing stories and doodling on the garage walls of her New Jersey home and enjoying summers visiting family in the Dominican Republic. Angela has always been a Renaissance woman who wears several hats, including as an educator, curriculum developer, fine artist, musician and novice fashion designer, just to name a few. She is also the owner of Dream Jar Publishing, an independent children's book publisher. Angela has released five books so far with three additional titles releasing between 2026-2027, including *SISTERS ALL THE TIME* with Charlesbridge's STEAMWorks program and *AN ISLAND CALLED HOME* with Eerdman's Books, both featuring Dominican-American characters. When she's not working, you can find Angela observing wild dolphins and collecting seashells, singing along to Lady Gaga and Ricky Martin, playing baseball, or binging on Star Wars.



Jasminne Paulino

An unapologetic code switcher, Jasminne grew up in Washington Heights. Exact address: West 190th, corner of St. Nick.

Her heart's soundtrack is a cacophonied *hoya* sizzling with *sonidos latinos*: Salsa, Merengue, Bachata, Reggaeton. New York City, la vida en familia, underrepresented voices, and a next to "normal" way of experiencing the world, inspire her stories.

When she's not busy teaching and writing, you can find her sipping on *cafesitos* (her favorite: un cortadito), *leyendo libros para niños*, and scheming her next *empanada* snack break.

Jasminne holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing for Young People from Lesley University. She lives in New York con su familia.



Hilda Eunice Burgos

Hilda Eunice Burgos is an award-winning author of books for children, including the *Bodega Cats* chapter book series, the middle grade novels *Ana María Reyes Does Not Live in a Castle* and *Miosotis Flores Never Forgets*, and the picture book *The Cot in the Living Room*, which is also available in Spanish as *La camita de la sala*. The first time Hilda read a book-back when she was in elementary school in Washington Heights, New York City—she knew she wanted to write stories about Dominican-American city kids like her. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard Law School, Hilda has two grown children and lives in the Philadelphia area with her husband and their adorable dog, Bear. Please visit her website at hildaeaniceburgos.com.



Kiara Valdez

Kiara Valdez is an Afro-Dominican writer and comics editor from New York City (shout out to Washington Heights). She graduated from Williams College with a double major in English Literature and Japanese, and spends her free time reading, writing, and enjoying a long list of other hobbies she can't keep up with. She writes graphic novels, picture books, and story books that include titles such as *Dear Dad* (with Jay Jay Patton and Markia Jenai, Marvel's Little Groot, *Big Feelings* and *We Are Groot* (both with Wendy Tan), *Mami's Magic Words* (with Richy Sánchez Ayala), and *Stepping Up* (with Diana Tsai Santos).



Camille Gomera-Tavarez

Camille Gomera-Tavarez is an Afro-Dominican authoress, designer, and creative from Clifton, New Jersey. She has a BFA in Graphic Design & Creative Writing from the Maryland Institute College of Art and is currently based in Philadelphia, PA. Her debut novel "High Spirits" – a short story collection for all ages – was a Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Book of 2022, an International Latino Book Award Silver medalist, a 2023 International White Raven's List selection, and a 2023 Pura Belpré Honor winner. Her sophomore YA novel, "The Girl, the Ring, & the Baseball Bat" was released February 2024, earning starred reviews from Kirkus and Publisher's Weekly. Camille is also the founder of *Plantin Magazine*, an online platform for Black Immigrant writers funded by the Greater Philadelphia's Cultural Alliance.



Ligia Noemi Cushman

Ligia N. Cushman, MA is a Dominican-American fantasy author and former therapist crafting dark, Caribbean-rooted worlds full of rage, love, and reclamation. She is the force behind *The Mōsa Chronicles*, a BookTok sensation centered on women of color navigating power, magic, betrayal, and the kind of love that costs something. The third installment, *Rise of a Cursed Kingdom*, claimed an Amazon bestseller rank for seven days and proved this series is only getting bigger.

A former therapist, Ligia brings psychological precision to every character she builds. Her people are complicated, wounded, and real. That depth is not an accident. It is the whole point. With *Fhear's Fury*, she expands her universe into the stars, bringing the same *corazón* and uncontainable energy that made *The Mōsa Chronicles* a phenomenon.

A Washington Heights native, she now lives in Tampa with her illustrator husband, their son, and their dogs, Jake and Ollie.



Geraldine de Santis

Geraldine es una prominente autora, investigadora y mediadora italo-dominicana especializada en Literatura Infantil y Juvenil (IJ). Nacida en la República Dominicana, ha publicado más de 30 títulos y es una figura clave en la promoción de la lectura y de la cultura dominicana a través de sus obras. La temible banda de los atracadores de sueños: Ganadora del Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil Aurora Tavárez Belliard en 2023 y seleccionada entre los 100 títulos recomendados por la Fundación Cuatrogatos en 2026. También está prevista una adaptación cinematográfica internacional de esa novela. Dominicanas Fuera de Serie: Obra significativa que reúne a más de 150 mujeres que transformaron la República Dominicana. Ganó igualmente el Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil Aurora Tavárez Belliard en 2020. Nela, la revoltosa: Ganadora del prestigioso Premio El Barco de Vapor en 2016. Liderazgo literario: Fundó y presidió el capítulo dominicano de la International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) entre 2019 y 2022. Investigación: Colabora como voluntaria en el Fondo Bibliográfico IBBY RD-UNIBE, que alberga la mayor colección de literatura infantil dominicana del mundo.



Doris Rodríguez

Doris Rodríguez is a Dominican-born visual artist, writer, and illustrator based in New York. Her multidisciplinary practice spans children's literature, editorial illustration, and fine art, exploring identity, memory, and cultural narratives. She studied at Altos de Chavón School of Design, earned a BFA from Parsons School of Design, and an MS in Art Education from Florida International University.

Rodríguez has completed residencies at The Bakehouse Art Complex, Oolite Arts, Art Center South Florida, and Art Hub Abu Dhabi. She has collaborated with Target, Lee & Low Books, Scholastic, and Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Her books have received notable recognition in children's literature.

She is also a dedicated art educator committed to inspiring creativity and connection.



Barbara Perez Marquez

Barbara Perez Marquez was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, now she lives in the USA. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and writes multigenre short and long-form fiction. During her career, she has also been an editor, translator, and even a sensitivity reader for several publications and projects. Her work was first featured in a student collection in the 7th grade, which inspired her desire to become a writer. As a comics writer, Barbara has received nominations for the Eisner and the Ignatz Awards, as well as bestseller recognition.



Roberto Carlos Garcia

Roberto Carlos Garcia is a 2023 NJ State Council of the Arts Poetry Fellow & the author of five books: four poetry collections, & one essay collection. He's the founder of Get Fresh Books Publishing, a literary nonprofit.



Elizabeth Balaguer

She was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and is an educator, translator, illustrator, and the author of children's books that celebrate the rich cultural heritage and traditions of her homeland. Through her stories, she brings Dominican culture to life for young readers around the world.

She holds a Master's degree in Spanish, with a specialization in Hispanic and Peninsular Literature, from the City College of New York, as well as a Master's degree in Children's Literature and Reading Promotion from the University of Castilla-La Mancha in Spain.

She has published more than 15 wonderful books, including Trucando, Mi Carnaval (Bilingual), Cuco (Bilingual), Mi oruga no quiere comer (Bilingual) and La Gallina de la abuela Catalina (Bilingual).

With over three decades of experience in early childhood education, she serves as president of IBBY-RD. Her stories are filled with adventure, tradition, and a touch of Dominican magic, inspiring children to explore and celebrate cultural diversity.



Dulce de los Santos

Escritora de literatura infantil, poeta, gestora cultural y locutora. Egresada de la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo con el título de licenciada en Letras Puras; en este mismo centro educativo completó un postgrado en Lengua y Literatura. Tiene una maestría en Promoción de la Lectura y Literatura Infantil por el Centro de Estudios de Promoción de la Lectura y Literatura Infantil (CEPLI), de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.

Ha ocupado importantes posiciones, tales como directora de Proyectos Infantiles y Juveniles del Ministerio de Cultura y directora de la Biblioteca Infantil y Juvenil República Dominicana; actualmente ocupa la función de vice-presidenta de IBBY-RD.

Entre sus publicaciones se encuentran: Una lección para todos; El trencito azul; El día más claro llueve; El día de los abrazos; La tarea; El secreto del gusanito; La sombrilla que perdió los colores; Aprender a decir No. Guía de Prevención del abuso infantil; El hombrecito de luz; Me llamaron Javier y La patineta roja de mamá gallina.



Yaissa Jiménez

Yaissa Jiménez (she/her)
(poet/writer)

Poet, performer, writer, and screenwriter addicted to observation. Ritual de la papaya (2018).

In 2022, she obtained her MFA from New York University's Creative Writing in Spanish Program. Winner of the Salm Petry Continental Cup, Abya Yala, Copa América, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2021. As a performer, Yaissa has presented her poetic shows in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Belgium and Spain. Across New York City, in venues such as MoMA, PAC, BAM, IATI Theater, and El Puente, among others. Notably, her performance *Blindada: Poems of Protection*, a poetic show combining drums and dance, has been presented at Harvard University, Wesleyan University, and other institutions.

Her poems have been published in renowned media outlets such as *Forgotten Lands*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Periódico UNAM* (Mexico).



Amaris Castillo

Amaris Castillo is a Brooklyn native and the author of *Bodega Stories*, forthcoming in September 2026 from the University Press of Florida. She is also the lead book reviewer for the Dominican Writers Association. A former newspaper reporter, Castillo's work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Lowell Sun*, *Bradenton Herald*, and elsewhere. She currently works at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and lives in Florida with her family.



Roxana Calderón

Roxana Calderón, born in Brooklyn, NY, and raised in Santo Domingo, DR, is a writer, poet, and editor specializing in poetry. She holds a Master's in Publishing from George Washington University.

She is the author of *La casa de las maletas* (DWA Press, NYC, 2019) and the self-published collection *Esto no es poesía* (2024). Her work has appeared in publications including *El vuelo más largo* (Peru, *Ángeles Del Papel*). In October 2021, she presented her monologue *Once We Loved at Alianza Dominicana*.

Roxana serves as editor-in-chief of *Spanglish Voces*, collaborates with the Dominican Writers Association, and works as an editorial coach, supporting emerging writers through the creative process.

Her work explores memory, identity, and the emotional landscape of lived experience.



Francesca Padilla

Francesca Padilla is a queer Dominican-American fiction writer born and raised in New York City and living in Rochester, NY. She holds a bachelor's degree in creative writing from the State University of New York at Purchase College and is a past recipient of a Walter Dean Myers Grant from We Need Diverse Books. Her debut novel *What's Coming to Me* (Soho Teen, 2022) has been recognized as a Junior Library Guild selection and a Best Teen/YA Book of 2022 by Kirkus Reviews and School Library Journal. By day, she also works in health and human services. For more information and updates, visit francesca-padilla.com.



JP Infante

JP Infante is the author of *On the Tip of Your Mother's Tongue* and *Aquí y Allá: un retrato de la comunidad Dominicana en Washington Heights*. He is the winner of PEN's Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize and Thirty West's Chapbook contest. His writing has appeared in *Kweli*, *Guernica*, *The Poetry Project* and elsewhere. He has been awarded scholarships and fellowships from the NY State Writers Institute, PEN America and The Center for Fiction. He holds an MFA from The New School.



Kelly Fernández

Kelly Fernández is a Dominican-American cartoonist from Queens, New York. Her debut graphic novel, *MANU*, was published by Scholastic Graphix in November 2021. Since its publication, *MANU* has received four starred reviews, was recognized as one of the Washington Post's Best Children's Book of the Year, was the Silver Medal Winner at the 2022 International Latino Book Awards, and was included in Kirkus's "Best Books for the 21st Century (So Far)" list. Currently, Kelly works as a children's librarian by day, while working on her second graphic novel by night.



Eddaviel Montero

Eddaviel is a multidisciplinary artist, co-founder of the think tank and publishing house *Mentes Extremófilas*. He has worked with public and private educational and cultural institutions, film productions, foundations, and publishing houses. In 2015, he was honored Distinguished Son by the Barahona City Council. His work has been in streets, museums, galleries, and cultural centers around the world. Eddaviel has published the art books *Afro-inks* and *365* and the graphic novel *Esú: The Most Misunderstood Entity in the Universe* with Darren López, which won the Outstanding Emerging BIPOC Creator Runner-up Award 2023 at the University of Texas, as well as the Best Graphic Novel and Best Spiritual Book awards at the International Latino Books Awards in Los Angeles. He illustrated *Viaje al centro de los mitos*, a fantasy based on Taino mythology written by Odilius Vlak and the children's album *The Never Told Story* with Emily Klonicki and Alizé Jireh.



Francis Mateo

Francis is a writer and multidisciplinary artist whose work moves fluidly between poetry, short fiction, vignettes, and photography books written in both English and Spanish. His published works include *Ubre Urbe*, *El Alto*, *TropicalYork*, and *Saçarle Pétalos al Pavimento*, books that have garnered international recognition for their lyrical exploration of memory, migration, and urban life. Holding a B.A. in English Literature and an M.F.A. in Acting, Francis extends his artistic practice beyond the written page, remaining actively engaged in theatre and captivating audiences through performance. His work also finds its way into classrooms, where it invites readers to reflect on language, identity, and the textures of contemporary experience.



Gabriel Castillo

Gabriel Castillo is a Dominican artist whose work explores the ancestral memory and layered histories of the Caribbean. Through a multidisciplinary practice rooted in drawing, muralism, and graphic storytelling, Castillo constructs visual narratives that blend sociocultural research with the rich, syncretic aesthetics of his native island.

Illustrator, painter and creative director, specialized in the development of comics and graphic novels, animation, and concept art for cinema. Founder and creative director of *LTEVISUAL*, a studio of illustrators and designers specializing in the production of literature and graphics novels. Art instructor with 5 years classroom experience.

Based between Santo Domingo and New York, Castillo's work invites viewers into spaces of memory and migration, where the past speaks through the body, the myth, and the brush stroke.



Leiry Santos

I am a higher education professional at New York University, where I work with the Center for Multicultural Education and Programs (CMEP) to design and facilitate programs that support student development, mentorship, and identity exploration. My work focuses on creating intentional spaces for reflection, well-being, and community building. I previously served as a book facilitator with the Dominican Writers Association, guiding conversations that uplift Dominican voices and foster meaningful dialogue through literature. I am also a lover of Dominican history and was honored to serve as one of the first members of the Guerrilla Archiving collective alongside Dr. Sophia Menogro. I am passionate about amplifying community narratives and supporting spaces where stories are shared, preserved, and transformed into connection and action.



Anney Baez

Anney Báez, PhD, is a Dominican American educator, psychotherapist, and writer, and the author of *My Daughter's Eyes and Other Stories*, winner of the 2007 Mármol Prize for First Latina Fiction. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in *Callaloo*, including "The Silence of Angels" and poems such as "Flowing" and "My Parents' Room", *Riverine: Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers*, *Vinyl Donuts*, *Brújula/Compass*. Select works have been translated into Spanish, including "Besos de Mariposas" (*Viajeros del Rocío*) and "Tacones Rojos" (*Caudal, Dominican Republic*). Recent publications include *The Vote* (2020), and "Sweet Cake Enzo" (2022) have appeared in HTI Open Plaza, "Time Being" (2022) in *Quislaona: A Dominican Fantasy Anthology*, "Resurrection" (2021), "The Vote" (2020), "Sheltering with Late Husband" (2020), and "Dominican Cake" (2020) in *Fourthreethree*.



Alyssa Reynoso-Morris

Alyssa Reynoso-Morris is a queer Afro-Latine/x and Indigenous (Taino) award-winning storyteller, author, and motivational speaker with Dominican and Puerto Rican roots. She is also a mother and community organizer. During the day, she works with community members, non-profit organizations, and government officials to make the world a better place. Then she puts on her writer's hat to craft heartfelt stories. Alyssa was born and raised in The Bronx, New York, and currently lives in Philadelphia, PA, with her family. She is the author of *Plátanos Are Love & Los plátanos son amor* (a NCTE Charlotte Huck Recommended Read); *The Bronx Is My Home*; *Gloriana Presente: A First Day of School Book & Gloriana Presente: De la República Dominicana al Bronx*; *Bold, Brilliant and Latine: Meet 52 Latine and Hispanic Heroes from Past and Present*; and *Pieces of Home*. She hopes you enjoy her stories. You can learn more about her at alysaauthor.com



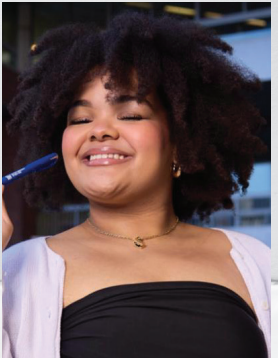
Amaris Castillo

Amaris Castillo is the author of *Bodega Stories*, forthcoming in September 2026 from the University Press of Florida. A former newspaper reporter, her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Lowell Sun*, *Bradenton Herald*, and elsewhere. She is the lead book reviewer for the Dominican Writers Association.



Andreina Rodriguez

Andreina Rodriguez is a Dominican American reader and book community builder who runs a bookstagram spotlighting books by Latine authors. As a volunteer book reviewer for the Dominican Writers Association—where she focuses on romance novels—she's discovered Dominican authors whose stories reflect experiences she rarely saw growing up. By day, she's a journalist covering personal finance; by night (and weekends), she's deep in books and building community around reading. She's passionate about representation in literature and believes that seeing ourselves in stories—whether romance, literary fiction, memoir, or anything in between—is powerful and necessary. Andreina is currently pursuing her Master of Library and Information Science at St. John's University, driven by her commitment to connecting readers with books and making sure diverse voices are accessible and celebrated.



Stephanie Pacheco

Stephanie Pacheco is a multi-hyphenate storyteller, performer, and advocate from the South Bronx. She is the 8th U.S. National Youth Poet Laureate and has served as both the NYC and NYS Youth Poet Laureate before earning the national title. Stephanie is a long-time advocate for equity in arts and education, organizing with The Healing Centered Schools Task Force and Alliance for Quality Education since her teen years. Stephanie is a playwright, recently completing her debut artist play "On The Other Side" with Broadway Advocacy Coalition. Stephanie has been highlighted by The Today Show, NPR, and CBS for her poetry and advocacy, and has performed at The Barclays Center, Lincoln Center, The Apollo Theater, The Kennedy Center, and more. Stephanie's intention is to free others by freeing herself — one poem, play, and performance at a time.



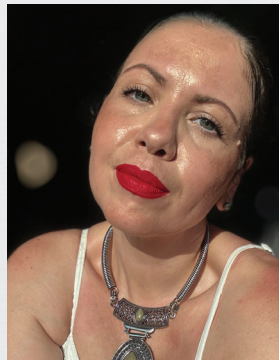
Natalie Guerrero

Natalie Guerrero is a Dominican and Puerto Rican writer from New York. Her debut Novel, *My Train Leaves at Three* was published July 2025 by One World (Random House) and was named a finalist for The California Book award as well as the REFORMA National Book Award. She is currently working on her next novel.



Yahdon Israel

Cultural engineer using books, language, and institutions to elevate literacy in American life. He works as a senior editor at Simon Schuster; currently serves on the Board of Directors for The Center for Fiction, Baldwin for the Arts and is the creator of *The Fiction Revival*, a book club inspiring heterosexual men to read (more) fiction.



Aidé Montilla

Aide Montilla is a Dominican writer, poet, and literary alchemist based in New York City—writing, guiding, and creating entre un fregao y el otro, usually with a greca nearby and a story in progress.

She is the founder of *Bonooq* and *Bonooq Press*, where she works closely with aspiring writers—everyday people with real lives—to help them turn their stories into books. She believes writing isn't reserved for the trained, but for the ones who have lived deeply, felt fully, and are ready to put language to what they carry.

She is also the creator of *Mujeres Oruga*, a space for women in transition—for the ones becoming. Through journaling, poetry, retreats, and honest conversation, she creates spaces where women can pause, reflect, and return to themselves.

Aide is a certified bibliotherapy practitioner and a fierce mental health advocate. She holds a Mental Health First Aid certification in New York and is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Psychology—grounding her work in both lived experience and study.



Elle Diaz

Elle Diaz writes contemporary romance that's funny, cathartic and scorching hot. Her characters are lovable messes navigating real struggles by laughing through the tears. She can't get enough of love stories — she co-hosted the podcast *Make Out Already*, and helps other writers perfect their books as a professional copy editor.



Vincent Tirado

Vincent Tirado is a nonbinary Afro-Dominican born and raised in the Bronx. They are a Pura Belpré Award winner, Bram Stoker and Lambda Literary award finalist known for their books *BURN DOWN RISE UP* (2022), *WE DON'T SWIM HERE* (2023), and *WE CAME TO WELCOME YOU* (2024). *YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN NICER TO MY MOM* (2026) is their sophomore adult novel. When they're not writing new spine-chilling horrors, they can be found making another pot of coffee and harassing their cat, Bugsy.

Awards & Honors

Angela Quezada Padron

Awards: First place Portfolio Showcase, Florida SCBWI 2023

Book Published:

As the Seas Rise: Nicole Hernández Hammer and the Fight for Climate Justice (Atheneum Books (S&S) 2024); From the Fields to the Fight: How Jessica Govea Thorbourne Organized for Justice (Atheneum Books (S&S) 2026); Lucia's Goals (Lee & Low Books, 2026); Sisters All the Time / Hermanas todo el tiempo (Charlesbridge, 2026)

Barbara Perez Marquez

Awards: The Mimi Lozano Best Family History Book Honorable Mention, 2024, International Latino Book Awards

Book Published:

The Curie Society: Game of Code, MIT Press, 2026
The Cardboard Kingdom: Snow and Sorcery, Alfred Knopf Books for Young Readers and Random House Children's Books, 2023
Animal Rescue Friends: Learning New Tricks, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2023
Paulina and the Disaster at Pompeii: A Mount Vesuvius Eruption Graphic Novel, Capstone, 2023
Por La Sombrita, Bottlecap Press, 2023

Hilda Eunice Burgos

Awards: Bodega Cats: Picture Purrfect--Maryland Library Association Blue Crab Young Reader Award, 2025, awarded by the Maryland Library Association
Miosotis Flores Never Forgets--Carolyn W. Field Award Honor Book, 2022, awarded by the Pennsylvania Library Association
The Cot in the Living Room--Charlotte Zolotow Award Honor Book, 2021-2022, awarded by the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Book Published: The Cot in the Living Room (also available in Spanish as *La camita de la sala*), Kokila (an imprint of Penguin Random House), 2021
Miosotis Flores Never Forgets, Tu Books (an imprint of Lee and Low Books), 2021
Bodega Cats: Picture Purrfect, Henry Holt (an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Company), 2024
Bodega Cats: Just Kitten Around, Henry Holt, 2025
Bodega Cats: Pawsome Pals, Henry Holt, 2025

Luz Maria Mack

Awards: Bank Street College's Best Children's Books of 2023--The Secret of the Plátano

Book Published: A Story for Chloe Luz Maria Mack Oct. 2024
Not All Mermaids Have Fins Luz Maria Mack Oct. 2024

Not All Mermaids Have Fins Activity Book: A Magical Activity Book for Little Learners
Luz Maria Mack

Sleepy Baby!: A Cuddle-y, Wuddle-y, Snooze-zy Adventure Luz Maria Mack
Oct. 2024

Bachatica: A Little Girl Finds Her Bachata Beat Con Todo Press Jun. 2025

Kianny N. Antigua

Awards:

- 6to Encuentro Nacional de Escritoras dedicado a Kianny N. Antigua, Proyecto Anticanon (July 2024)
-Latine & Caribbean Community Advocate Award by the Office of Pluralism and Leadership at Dartmouth College (June 2024)
-Black Legacy Month Spotlight for Excellence at Dartmouth Green (February 2023)
-The Guiding Light of Peace Award by The School of Heroes (June 2022)

BOOK AWARDS:

- 2026 IBBY Honour List Nominees ~ Translation: Angélica y la güira (2024)
- 30th Annual Audies Gala Spanish Language Finalist - Audiobook: Hija ilegítima (2025)
- 2024 Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection Award ~ Translation: Los plátanos van con todo (November 2023)
- The Best Children's Books of the Year in Spanish - 2024 Edition: Los plátanos van con todo (January 2023)

Jasmine Paulino

Awards:

A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year (2025)
An ALA/ALSC Notable Children's Book (2026)
A Texas Lone Star Reading List Selection (2026)
A Georgia Children's Book Award Finalist (2027)
A USSBY List of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities Selection (2026)

Book Published: The Extraordinary Orbit of Alex Ramirez, Putnam/Penguin Random House (2025)

Jasminne Mendez

Awards: Pura Belpré Honor Award for *The Story of My Anger*, YALSA. ALA, 2026.
NAACP Image Award Nominee, *The Story of My Anger*, Young Adult Fiction, NAACP, 2026
Pura Belpré Honor Award for *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*. YALSA. American Library Association. 2024.
Outstanding Book for Young People With Disabilities for *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*. The United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY). 2024.
Américas Award. Children's Literature Commended Title for *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*. 2024.
Best Book of Poetry Title for *Aniana del Mar Jumps In*. National Council of Teachers of English. 2024.

Book Published:

-Josefina's Habichuelas. Arte Público Press. 2021.
-City Without Altar, Noemi Press (Akrilika Series). 2022.
-Islands Apart: Becoming Dominican-American. Arte Público Press. 2022.
-Aniana del Mar Jumps In. Dial Books. 2023.
-The Story of My Anger. Dial Books. 2025.

Gabriel Castillo

Awards: Bronze Medal - International Manga Award 2019, Tokyo Japan
10 Most creative 2020 Forbers Centraamerica
Palma Sola - Liborio Mateo, el origen

Book Published:

-Graphic novel Palma Sola - Liborio Mateo, El origen. DWA Press 2021
-Planeta de los Besos - Litevisual editorial 2025
-Graphic novel Los Nadie - Dolmen editorial 2025

Erika Morillo

Awards:

2024 National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist, *Autobiography Shortlisted for 2025 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, Nonfiction*

Book Published:

Mother Archive
A Dominican Family Memoir (University of Iowa Press, 2024) A family murder kept secret, the mysterious disappearance of her father, the systematic erasing of family photographs, a turbulent relationship with her mother, layers of trauma and abuse. In *Mother Archive*, Erika Morillo reconciles these demons of her past by searching for and seeking out the roots of her family. Intertwining memories with archival family photographs, news clippings, film stills, and artistic images, Morillo revisits her childhood growing up in the Dominican Republic, a place and time riddled with a history of violence and a tradition of erasure.

Spanning three generations across three different countries, this memoir works as a map in which the author traces incidents in her family history to help her understand herself and her own experience as a mother.

Ligia N. Cushman

Awards: 2021- Top Latino Leader Award 2021, Awarded by the National Diversity Council, 2024 Mentor of the year award by AdoptUSKids and the Children's Bureau.

Book Published:

2026- *Fhear's Fury*
2025- *Rise of a Cursed Kingdom*,
2024- *Magick Rising*,
2022- *Rise of a Dark Throne*

Doris Rodriguez

Awards:

Gloriana Presente: A First Day of School Story, has earned multiple honors, including a Silver Medal at the 2025 International Latino Book Awards (Most Inspirational Picture Book - English) - 2025

The 2025 Northern Lights Book Awards (Picture Book - Family Category)

Commendation from the 2025 Pedro and Daniel Intersectionality Book Awards (PADI-BA).

2020 Oolite Alumni Artists Grant.

Book Published:

Gloriana, Presente: A First Day of School Story 2024

Christy Ottaviano Books By Alyssa Reynoso-Morris Illustrated by Doris M. Rodríguez

Geraldine de Santis

Awards: Lista de honor Ibby 2026: Categoría Escritura por novela infantil *La temible banda de los atracadores de sueños*, ceremonia de entrega Ottawa Canadá, 40.º Congreso Ibby Internacional 2026, agosto 2026.
To be awarded in August 2026

Selección de 100 recomendados de Premios Fundación Cuatrogatos 2026 por novela infantil *La temible banda de los atracadores de sueños*, enero 2026.

Libro "Dominicanas fuera de serie" seleccionado para proyecto intercultural en Valencia 2025

Libro *Dominicanas fuera de serie* seleccionado para el III Catálogo Cerlalc-IBBY de Libros infantiles para el desarrollo sostenible 2024, pág. 66.

Dominicanas fuera de serie aparece en la edición *The World Through Picture Books: Librarians' favourite books from their country* (3era edición), aparece el libro

Book Published:

25. *La temible banda de los atracadores de sueños* [Novela infantil, Premio Aurora Tavárez Belliard 2023]. Santo Domingo: Editora Nacional; San Juan de Puerto Rico: EDP University, 2024; Salerno: Arcoiris Edizioni, Italia, 2024; Ayacucho: Ediciones Altazor (2026); São Paulo: Saíra Editorial (2026).

26. *Cuentos para atreverse* [Cuentos infantiles]. Santo Domingo: Loqueleu-Santillana, 2025.

27-29. Trilogía infantil *El corito del Higüero SM-CAEI* [Saga infantil]. Santo Domingo: SM, 2025.

Libro 1, *El poder de cuidarse juntos*

Libro 2, *La paz se construye*

Libro 3, *Vencimos al monstruo*

30. *Game Over, Mauricio* [Cuento infantil]. San Juan De Pasto: Lapin Ediciones, 2025.

31. *Poemas chiquitos para reír / Little Poems Just for Laughs* [Poesía infantil]. New York: Hostos Review 21: *Landscapes of Humor / Revista Hostosiana* 21: *Parajes del Humor*, CUNY, 2025.

32. *Ilusiones de colores: Colección infantil / Por mi país primero* [Antología de cuento y poesía infantil]. Puerto Plata: Sociedad Cultural Renovación, 2025.

JP Infante

Awards:

Winner of La Asociación Dominicana de Críticos de Arte's Prize for Criticism 2023 for *Aquí y Allá: Winston Vargas Retrata la Comunidad de Washington Heights*.

-Center for Fiction Susan Kamil Emerging Writers Fellow 2022-2023

-Finalist for the Letras Latina's Andres Montoya Poetry Prize 2022 for *La Kapital*

-Flash fiction "Mary" Finalist for Digging Through the Fat Editor's Choice Award 2021

Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts Residency (fiction) 2026

Center for Fiction Susan Kamil Emerging Writers Fellow 2022-2023

PEN America Writing as Activism Fellow 2022

Book Published: *On the Tip of Your Mother's Tongue/ En La Punta de La Lengua de Tu Mama Bilingual* 2nd Edition, Thirty West Publishing 2025.

Aquí y Allá: A PORTRAIT OF THE DOMINICAN COMMUNITY IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, Colección Inicia, 2023

"*Aquí y Allá*", a portrait of the Dominican community in Washington Heights, from its germination to its designation as "Little Dominican Republic". The evolution of this community captured for over 60 years thru the lens of Dominican photographer Winston Vargas, a homage to this important space between two nations that is vital to Dominican identity.

Kelly Fernández

Washington Post's Best Children's Books of the Year, 2021, The Washington Post

International Latino Book Award - Silver Medal for Best Graphic Novel, 2022, Empowering Latino Futures

Best Books for the 21st Century (So Far) - Middle Grade Category, 2025, Kirkus Media LLC
Manu: A Graphic Novel, Scholastic Graphix, 2021: Two best friends, Manu and Josefina, attend a magic school for girls hidden away within a tropical forest. Manu is not only a star student, but also a class clown. When one of her pranks goes wrong, she actually begins losing her magical powers. With Josefina's help, Manu manages to regain her magic, but at a dangerous cost that might tear the two of them apart forever.

DWC Planning Committee Bios

Angela Abreu- Executive Director

Angela "Angy" Abreu is executive director of the Dominican Writers Association (DWA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to amplifying and promoting the works of Dominican authors in the United States. As executive director of DWA, Angy is committed to supporting emerging writers who aspire to publish their work, whether through traditional or independent means, by providing tools, resources, and opportunities for the continuous development of their craft. Her vision is to integrate these writers into the Dominican literary canon, enriching the narrative, visibility, and representation of the Dominican diaspora within the global literary landscape.

Dr. Sofia B. Pertuz

Dr. Sofia B. Pertuz is an executive coach, consultant, and leadership strategist with extensive experience partnering with senior leaders and mission-driven organizations to strengthen performance and organizational effectiveness. As founder of Mainstream Insight, she leads executive coaching, retreats, and leadership development programs grounded in both research and real-world execution. Her career includes senior roles at Billie Jean King Enterprises, The Jed Foundation, and Hofstra University.

A bilingual speaker and Dominican immigrant raised in the Bronx, Sofia brings a lens of resilience, identity, and purpose to her work. She is currently writing a memoir inspired by her mother's leadership, capturing lessons in resourcefulness, entrepreneurship, and strength that continue to shape her approach to leadership today.

Sydney

Sydney Valerio is a writer & ultra marathoner. She daylights as an educator & moonlights as a creative. In 2016 she wrote and performed Matters a one woman show at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. Her poetry is in several anthologies including the BreakBeat Poets Vol. 4: Latinext. A 2019 BRIO Award winning poet & a 2025 BRIO Award winning non-fiction writer, she is currently working on her first book as a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing program at CCNY. She managed the program's Archives as Muse: a Harlem Storytelling project and is the creator of her own digital archive project Perspective Matters: NYC Kid Who's Now a NYC Adult. She is a Kenyon Review '23 & '24 Alumna. She has served New York State for 20+ years as an educator in the high school through graduate school levels & serves on the NYSSB task force. Visit www.sydneyvalerio.com for more about her.

Lisa "Rubi G." Ventura

(she/her) is a Washington Heights-bred Black Dominican author of ¿Con qué papel me envuelves la luna? She is a first-generation daughter of immigrants and mother to two male athletes. A poet, essayist, performer, and teaching artist, Lisa has been published by Dominican Writers, Raising Mothers, and Economic Hardship Reporting Project in conjunction with Slate, among others. She has served as an empowerment panelist, is a 2022 VONA alumna, and a 2024 Latinx-In-Publishing program mentee. She's been a featured poet for the Nuyorican Poets Café and the Morris-Jumel Mansion in conjunction with Writing the Land. She has served as a guest editor for La Libreta Online Poetry Journal. Her work has been showcased by Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, The Billie Holiday Theatre, In Full Color, Arts by The People, Literary Liberation, Listen To Your Mother, and others. You can find her at lapoetarubi.com.

Jenny Martinez

(she/her) describes herself as a walking concept, an idea, a match ready to be lit. A Santo Domingo-born, Bronx-raised creative strategist and founder of JMM Consultants, she came to the United States at age 8, returned home, and made her way back in her twenties carrying with her the cultural richness and resilience that now fuel everything she builds. After years of learning organizations from the inside through executive support roles, she took her leap at 37 and never looked back. Today she works alongside nonprofits and purpose-driven brands to shape their identity from the ground up. The events, the aesthetics, the voice, the feel of the room and the operations. She operates at a concierge level, bringing sophistication and vision to every idea she touches. A passionate advocate for seniors and young adults aging without protections, she believes in honest conversations about money, mindset, and access. She is a proud

Dominicana, mother of two, and devoted partner of 13 years. You can see more of her at JMMConsultants.com.

JULIA through the years





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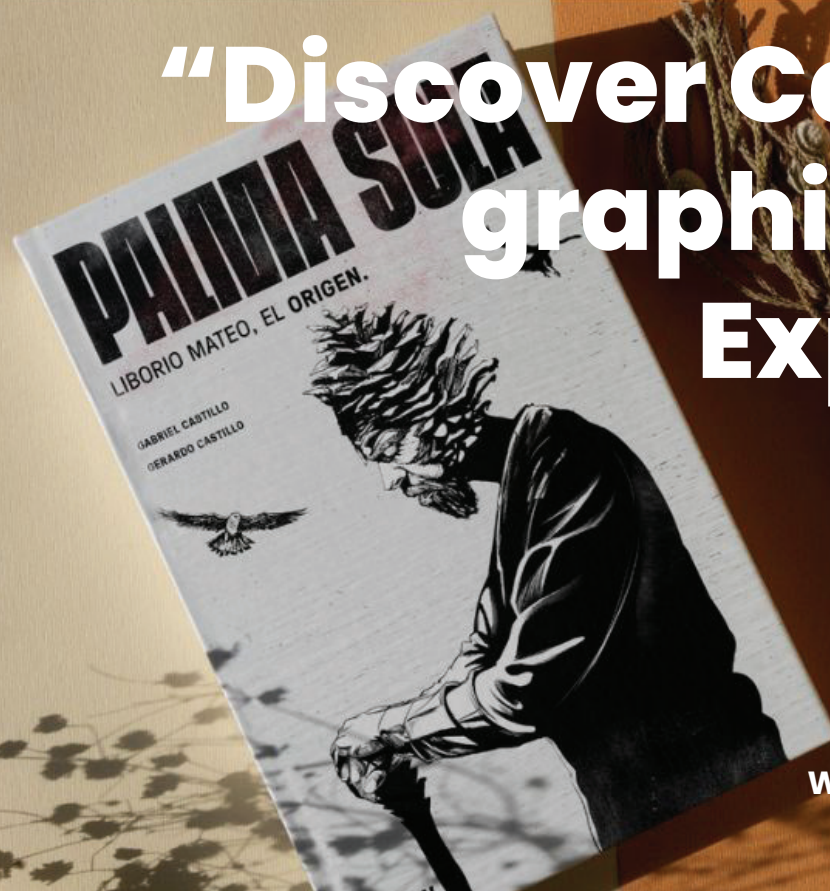
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