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Author Rudolfo Anaya seeks to help raise self-esteem of young readers

"We're not creating a multicultural country, it's already here!"

—Rudolpho Anaya

Rudolfo Anaya is widely known as the author of *Bless Me, Ultima*, a classic, award-winning bestseller about a young Hispanic boy coming of age in rural New Mexico.

In addition to other works for adults, Anaya has written *The Farolitos of Christmas* and *Farolitos for Abuelo* for children. Beautifully illustrated by [Edward Gonzales](#), they portray a little known way of Hispanic life in New Mexico.

What prompted you to write for children and young adults?

After *Bless Me, Ultima* was published in 1972 I was invited to visit schools to speak about my novel. I grew concerned that many Hispanic children lacked literacy skills. Back then there were no books in the curriculum that portrayed our Mexican American reality. That was a good reason for me to write books that began to tell our story. Also, I grew up in the oral tradition listening to a lot of *cuentos*, folktales. I used to tell my granddaughter those stories. Given these elements, it seemed natural to want to write for children.

What do you hope to accomplish with your books?

I hope my books present some of my New Mexican culture which includes Hispanic and Native American traditions and ceremonies. When children read stories that relate to them they are more apt to want to read. I hope my stories build self esteem and self interest, that is, an interest in our history. We need the stories of our community told so we can see ourselves as actors in the drama of life.

What do you think of multicultural children's literature today?

Multicultural children's literature is a field of flowers, and it truly is becoming a rainbow of many colors. But we still have a long way to go. I visit many schools and libraries where there isn't a single book by a Hispanic writer on the shelf. Hispanic parents need to be involved by making sure our literature is represented in the schools and libraries. Children's literature also teaches history, and when children do not see their history in school they began to think it is not worthy of learning.

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Seussville.com

How can we encourage young people, particularly young people of color, to write children's books and books for young adults?

Years ago I was involved in a very interesting publishing effort by Houghton Mifflin. Their editors invited a group of Latino/a writers to a conference. Their goal was to encourage us to write in the children's literature field. That was a great idea! I don't know if that particular effort has continued, but I firmly believe all publishers need to recruit Hispanic writers through such pro-active efforts. Writers write for the love of writing and to make a living. It helps to have an interested publisher.

Where do you get inspiration? Where do you go for your research?

Inspiration comes from my love of storytelling. I need to write, that's my role in life. The more I write the surer I am that I'm a writer. I write using my New Mexican culture as the background. I write about what I know. I wrote a story about a roadrunner, and I didn't need to research. We have those birds running around our neighborhood. On the other hand, if I write about a particular tradition or ceremony, I may want to read some factual accounts.

What do you think draws children or young adults to your books?

My books give children a sense of belonging. Children are sensitive. They need that sense of identifying their inner selves with the stories and illustrations in books. When I published my first children's book, *The Farolitos of Christmas*, I went to classrooms and showed the children the illustrations before I read the story. [Edward Gonzales](#) did an excellent job of capturing the reality of our brown-skinned New Mexican children. Suddenly the world was not all about Dick and Jane. The illustrations created a mirror of our reality, and the colors of our faces and the background were ours! Those illustrations speak a thousand words.

I went all the way through college and never saw a Mexican American as a hero in a book. We need to correct that! It's time to see our multicultural reality in books.

You make school visits. What's the best question you've ever had?

The best question is always, "Why did you become an 'Arthur?'" Then they want to know how old I am and how much money I make.

Has anything or any child or educator surprised you during a visit?

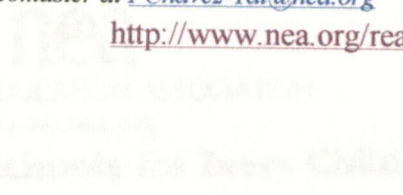
I love going into elementary classrooms, because they are always a world full of surprises. What creates those surprises is the creativity flowing through the children. I praise the good teachers who can exist all day in that soup of creativity.

Where can educators go to find a greater diversity of books, voices, and images?

With the internet there is no excuse for not finding multicultural books. Librarians are always a resource. The bottom line is our students need to know the variety of communities in our country and in the world. We're not creating a multicultural country, it's already here! We can't hide our heads in the sand. Let's prepare our children for the wonderful variety that is life.

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Ranaya seeks to help engage young readers

“I grew up in a country, it’s already there!”
—Ranaya Anaya

Anaya is the author of *Bliss Me, Lullaby*, a picture book about a young Hispanic boy coming of age in rural

California. Anaya has written *The Fortunes of* and *The Dreams for Children*. Beautifully illustrated by her mother, Anaya uses a little-known way of illustrating to help

children write for children and young adults!

When published in 1972 I was invited to speak at the NEA conference. I was concerned that many Hispanic children and young adults were not in the curriculum. The problem was not just money. That was a good reason for having some people who were not Hispanic. Also, I grew up in the oral tradition. My grandmother used to tell my granddaughters these stories. I found it natural to want to write for children.

What goals to accomplish with your book?

I want some of my New Mexican children to be able to read and write. I want them to know and understand their own history and culture. When children read stories that relate to their own lives, they are more likely to read. My stories build self-esteem and are meant to be read by children of all ages. We are all part of our community and we can all learn from each other.

What do you think of multicultural children's literature today?

Children's literature is a field of flowers, and it will be becoming a field of many flowers. I will have a long way to go. I will have to write more books. I will have to write for the school. Hispanic parents need to be more involved in their children's education. Children's literature is not just for the schools and libraries. Children's literature is also for the home. When children do not read in school they begin to lose it. It is the ability of literacy.

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