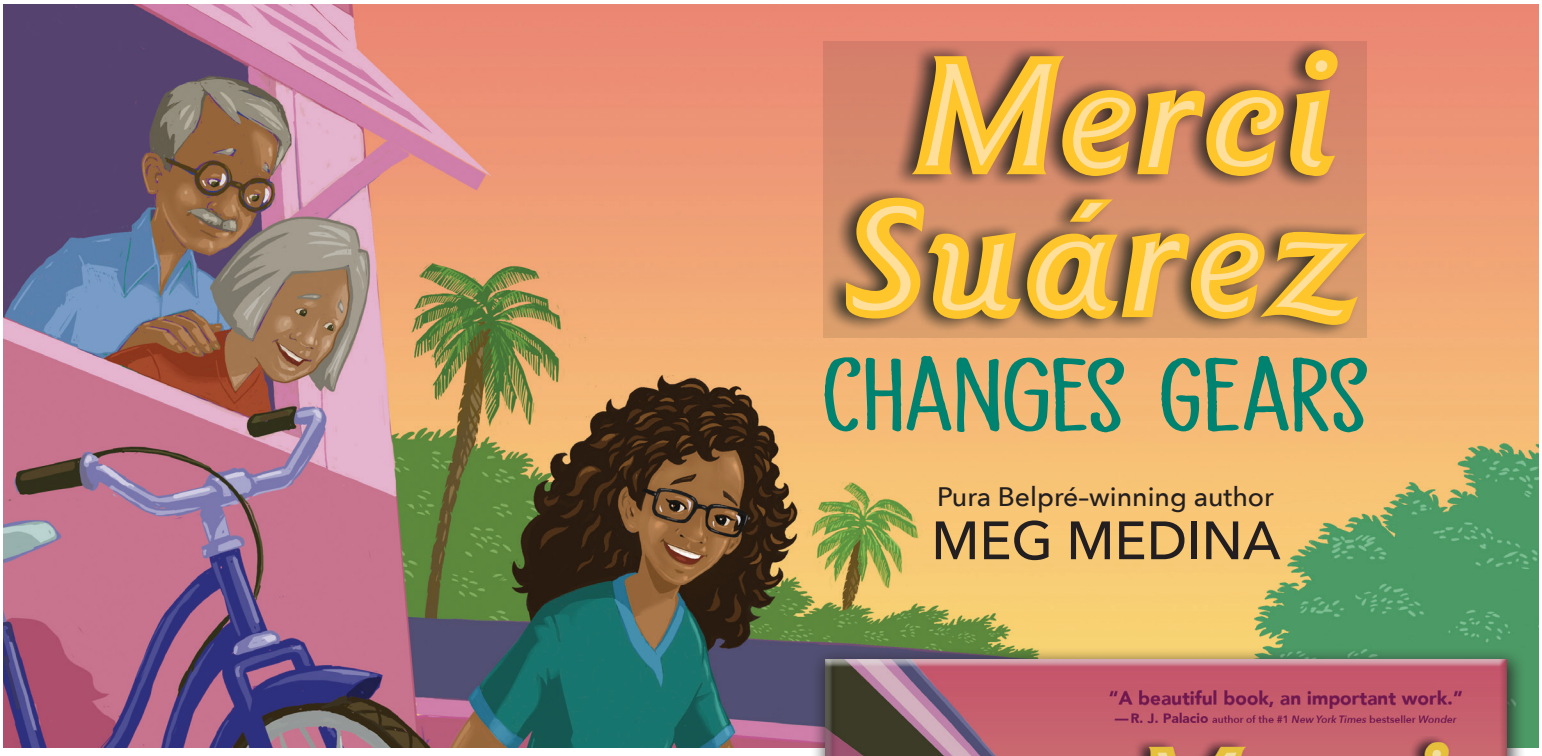


Merci Suárez knew that sixth grade would be different, but she had no idea just *how* different. For starters, Merci has never been like the other kids at her private school in Florida, because she and her older brother, Roli, are scholarship students. They don't have a big house or a fancy boat, and they have to do extra community service to make up for their free tuition. So when bossy Edna Santos sets her sights on the new boy who happens to be Merci's school-assigned Sunshine Buddy, Merci becomes the target of Edna's jealousy. Things aren't going well at home, either: Merci's grandfather and most trusted ally, Lolo, has been acting strangely lately—forgetting important things, falling from his bike, and getting angry over nothing. No one in her family will tell Merci what's going on, so she's left to her own worries while also feeling all on her own at school. In a coming-of-age tale full of humor and wisdom, award-winning author Meg Medina gets to the heart of the confusion and constant change that defines middle school—and the steadfast connection that defines family.

HC: 978-0-7636-9049-6 • $17.99 ($22.99 CAN)
PB: 978-1-5362-1258-7 • $8.99 ($11.99 CAN)
Ages 9–12 • 368 pages
Also available as an e-book and in audio

Also available in a Spanish-language edition:
Merci Suárez se pone las pilas
HC: 978-1-5362-1257-0 • PB: 978-1-5362-1259-4
416 pages
Also available as an e-book

Media Contact: Phoebe Kosman
Director of Marketing, Publicity, and Key Partnerships
phoebe.kosman@candlewick.com • (617) 588-4445

CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com

Illustration copyright © 2020 by Joe Cepeda

About
MEG MEDINA

Meg Medina is an award-winning Cuban-American author who writes picture books and middle-grade and young adult fiction. Her most recent young adult novel, *Burn Baby Burn,* has earned numerous distinctions, including being long-listed for the 2016 National Book Award and short-listed for the Kirkus Prize. She is the 2014 recipient of the Pura Belpré Author Award and a 2013 Cybils Award winner for her young adult novel *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass.* She also received the 2012 Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award for her picture book *Tía Isa Wants a Car.* Her other books are *The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind,* a 2013 Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year; *Mango, Abuela, and Me,* a 2016 Pura Belpré Honor Book; and *Milagros: Girl from Away.*

Meg Medina's work examines how cultures intersect through the eyes of young people, and she brings audiences stories that speak to both what is unique in Latino culture and qualities that are universal. Her favorite protagonists are strong girls. In March 2014, she was recognized as one of the CNN 10 Visionary Women in America. In November 2014, she was named one of Latino Stories' Top Ten Latino Authors to Watch.

When she is not writing, Meg Medina works on community projects that support girls, Latino youth, and literacy. She lives with her family in Richmond, Virginia.

Photo by Petite Shards Productions

MEG MEDINA'S
Love Letter to Intergenerational Families

For several years, my household included me, my husband, our three teenage children, a dog, and two dueling cats, as well as my ninety-year-old mother-in-law, my eighty-six-year-old mother, who was struggling with advanced cancer, and my eighty-year-old aunt (the inspiration for my picture book *Tía Isa Wants a Car*), who had barely survived a stroke.

All of us. Together in one house.

My family is Cuban, a culture where this kind of intergenerational living doesn't seem strange. In fact, it feels normal. My husband grew up sharing a small apartment with his grandparents, and I never lived more than a few blocks from my aunts and grandparents, often spending days and sometimes weeks with them. My cousins in Miami even lived in three houses, side by side, with additions that connected them. Our family tackled its troubles like an organism, for better or worse. There was attempted parenting by every adult, lots of shared opinions in decision-making, and financial support for whoever needed it most at the time. It was a pain in the neck at times but, looking back, a beautiful way to grow up, too.

As an adult—suddenly faced with three generations under one roof—I began to see another side to intergenerational living as I watched my children struggle to cope with what was happening to the elders they loved. They had to reconcile fond memories of extra helpings of ice cream with doctor's appointments, changes in behavior, and a flurry of caretakers coming into and out of our home. As teens, they stopped bringing home friends, left the dinner table early, and seemed reluctant to connect. There's not an easy solution, and I know that families everywhere find themselves in this same situation.

I often write about how kids grow up in families—sometimes happy ones, sometimes injured ones. But this time, I came to the page with a new question: How do kids in middle school navigate the changes that are part of their lives at school at the same time that heartbreaking changes are happening at home? How do they hold on to joy?

Merci Suárez Changes Gears is about a Latino family in south Florida whose members are colorful, vibrant, and interconnected. It's a story that celebrates all that families give us—fun, support, resilience, safety, and lots of silly arguments. But it also speaks to the painful realities of change. During Merci's middle-school years, a time when so many young people feel stretched to the breaking point, she learns a family secret. Her beloved grandfather, Lolo, has entered the later stages of Alzheimer's disease, an illness that affects five million Americans and their families each year. Now her days are consumed not only with navigating friendships and being anxious about her looks and grades at school, but also with trying to figure out how to relate to a family member she's not sure she knows anymore.

For Merci, the solution hinges on a journey that turns inward. This is a story of a spunky girl discovering the power of culture and family, the beauty of real friendships, and the strength she never knew she had.

From *MERCI SUÁREZ CHANGES GEARS*

I climb up on the stool next to Lolo, who is perched at his usual spot in the corner, acting more or less like himself again, thank goodness.

I biked over to El Caribe as soon as I got home from school. It's peaceful in here today, nothing like Sunday mornings, when the line snakes all the way out the door and people shout out their orders to Tía for takeout coffee, pastelitos, and warm loaves of bread. Everybody knows this is the best bakery between Miami and Tampa, so it gets crazy.

Tía Inéz is busy refilling the cups of toothpicks that are decorated with mini Cuban flags. "She can't stay long, viejo," she tells Lolo. "Merci has to help Abuela with the boys today."

We both stare at her.

"Oh, Teresita needs help, does she?" Lolo says. He's still bitter about the new arrangements. Abuela is going to be walking to and from school with the twins, too. She bought new kicks at Foot Locker just for the job, white Chucks that I may have to borrow from time to time when she's not looking.

But he's not the only one annoyed.

I should mention here that 1) no one *ever* asks me if I want to babysit the twins, 2) Roli almost always gets out of it thanks to his tutoring job and working on his college applications, and 3) I get paid exactly zero for keeping them from swallowing pennies and running blindly into traffic. How am I supposed to buy a bike when nobody pays me for anything?

"I wish you'd find somebody else, Tía," I say. "There are kids at school who took that Red Cross class and actually want to babysit. I can get you names. Hire them. I won't be able to watch them once soccer season starts, anyway."

She frowns at me. "Who in their right mind would hire a stranger to watch their kids when they have relatives around?"

I sigh. It's no use fighting. When it comes to helping, the motto around here is *family or bust*.

"Can't I at least have a snack before I go?" I say. "I've had a long day, in case you're interested. And I'll need my strength for the twins."

She sizes me up and slides over a small guava square, still warm, on a plate. "Ten minutes, then out you go."

MARKETING AND PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

- Multi-city national tour
- National consumer advertising
- Trade, school, and library advertising
- National publicity campaign
- Blogger outreach
- Discussion guide
- Promotional bookmarks
- Online giveaways
- Social media campaign
- Featured in *Candlewick Classroom* and *Candlewick CIRC* e-newsletters

CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com

Illustration copyright © 2020 by Joe Cepeda

More Acclaimed Titles by MEG MEDINA

HC: 978-0-7636-7467-0 • PB: 978-1-5362-0027-0

Also available as an e-book and in audio

Long-listed for the National Book Award

A Kirkus Prize Finalist

★ "Medina is on point with the teen voices, evoking their intense fear, panic, and dreams. A devastatingly intense story, this work is a must-have for all collections." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

★ "Rooted firmly in historical events, Medina's latest offers up a uniquely authentic slice-of-life experience. . . . An important story of one of New York City's most dangerous times." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ "Powerfully moving, this stellar piece of historical fiction emphasizes the timeless concerns of family loyalty and personal strength, while highlighting important issues that still resonate today." —*Booklist* (starred review)

★ "Medina depicts her troubled family and their diverse Queens neighborhood with realistic, everyday detail." —*The Horn Book* (starred review)

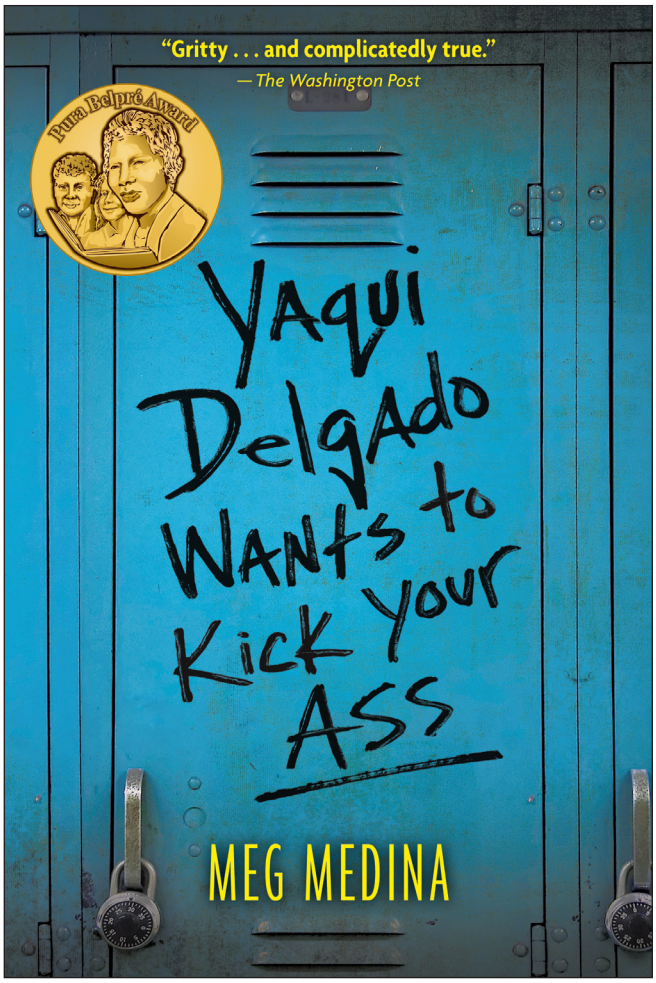
"Nora is strong and believable, a possible romance has heat, and Medina gets gritty 1977 New York City right." —*Publishers Weekly*

"This novel is a strong choice for its message, characters, and historical perspective." —*Voice of Youth Advocates*

"Meg Medina once again shines in evoking a specific setting peopled with complex, diverse characters." —*Chicago Tribune*

"Medina draws her characters deeply, and makes a struggling New York City their perfect, complicated backdrop." —*The Plain Dealer*

More Acclaimed Titles by MEG MEDINA



HC: 978-0-7636-5859-5 • PB: 978-0-7636-7164-8
Also available as an e-book and in audio

Also available in a Spanish-language edition
HC: 978-0-7636-8992-6 • PB: 978-0-7636-7940-8
Also available as an e-book

Winner of the 2014 Pura Belpré Author Award

★ "This book sheds light on a serious issue without ever losing sight of its craft." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ "The message here is that tough and unfair stuff is really tough and unfair, but it's also survivable; that's a takeaway that readers will recognize as both true and valuable." —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (starred review)

★ "The Latino cultural milieu adds a richness and texture. . . . The plot points are dexterously intertwined, and the characters are distinct." —*School Library Journal* (starred review)

★ "Medina's setting stands out." —*The Horn Book* (starred review)

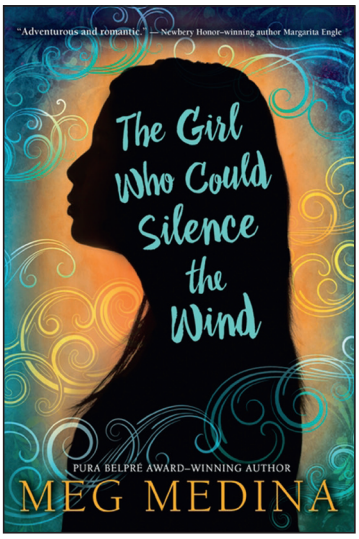
"Medina effectively prods at the motivations behind bullying (without excusing it) and sensitively explores the delicate balance between belonging and maintaining individuality." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Heartfelt, truthful writing that treats the complicated roots of bullying with respect." —*Booklist*

"Gritty. . . . Unflinching." —*The Washington Post*

"Wonderful." —*NBC News*

More Acclaimed Titles by MEG MEDINA

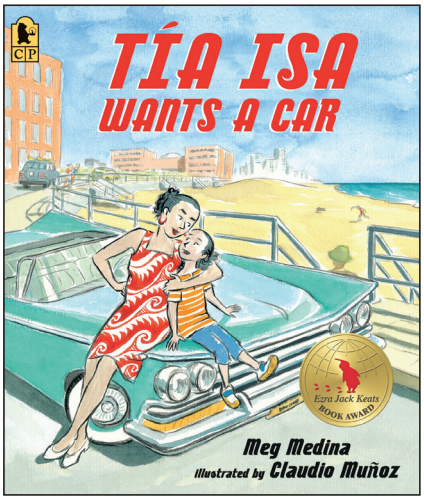


A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year

"Medina's writing is fluent and lovely, weaving Spanish words in with the English text to paint a heartwarming story of a girl's journey to find out who she is." —*School Library Journal*

"Medina breathes life into Sonia and many of the secondary characters, and the vivid descriptions and touches of magical realism will enthrall readers." —*Kirkus Reviews*

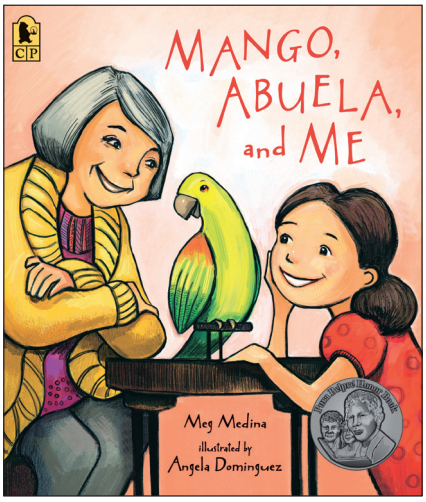
HC: 978-0-7636-4602-8 • PB: 978-0-7636-6419-0
Also available as an e-book and in audio



An American Library Association Notable Children's Book

"The strength of family and the importance of pursuing one's dreams are the bedrock of middle-grade author Medina's lyrical first picture book." —*Publishers Weekly*

HC: 978-0-7636-4156-6 • PB: 978-0-7636-5752-9 • Also available as an e-book
Also available in a Spanish-language edition
Tía Isa quiere un carro
HC: 978-0-7636-6129-8 • PB: 978-0-7636-5751-2



★ "Heartfelt, layered, and beautiful." —*Booklist* (starred review)

★ "Emotional nuance and understated, observant narration." —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

HC: 978-0-7636-6900-3 • PB: 978-0-7636-9513-2 • Also available as an e-book
Also available in a Spanish-language edition
Mango, Abuela y yo
HC: 978-0-7636-8453-2 • PB: 978-0-7636-8099-2 • Also available as an e-book