

Memoirs as fluid and flowing waters: Stories inspired by Tomás Rivera Award-winning Books

The Tomás Rivera Children's Book Award was established in 1995 at Texas State University. The mission of this national book award is to highlight exceptional quality books for children and young adults that depict the Mexican American experience. We believe all children need affirmation by seeing their lives, languages, and communities reflected in the books they read. The Tomás Rivera Award, is an award that honors Mexican American children's and young adult literature in the USA, and annually recognizes authors and illustrators that meet our criteria at the Author Presentations' event.

In this presentation, the presenters will share a description of the award, the annual celebration, and how one teacher was inspired by the Rivera Book Award to write her own stories about her Mexican American heritage, family, and serving her country in the military. The discussion will connect the significance of memoirs as fluid and everchanging directions much like humans change the direction of rivers through channelization. Like water flowing from a stream that cannot stand still, Carlson's (2002) philosophy also urges us to flow and leave our "safe harbors" to challenge our daily lives.

The presenters will also discuss how utilizing the 2001 Tomás Rivera Award winner, *My very own room* by Amada Irma Pérez can instill pride and confidence in students by illustrating that their stories matter. Sims Bishop (2003) stated, "if a people view their story as anchor, compass, and sail – functioning to bind members to the group, to guide, and to empower – then passing that story on to children becomes an important responsibility for the group's literary artists" (p. 35).

Historically, stories of marginalized groups have been impassable much like a dam stops water. Children need to see themselves in books to establish strong identities. Campbell (2000) affirms if Latino children do not see characters that resemble them in children's literature, they discern the dominant groups' culture through the images and narratives they encounter in their reading material. We hope the Tomás Rivera award-winning books are anchors for Mexican American children and will increase an understanding of other communities and experiences for other groups.