



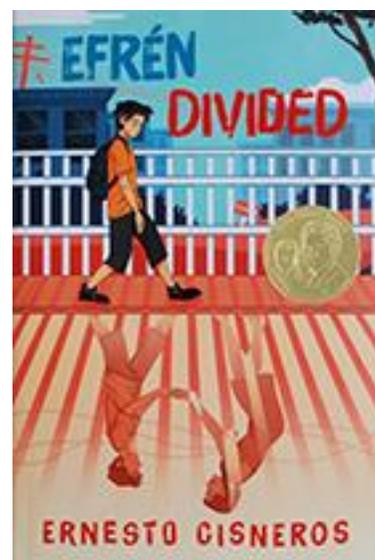
Pura Belpré Children's Author Award Acceptance Speech

Ernesto Cisneros received the 2021 (Pura) Belpré Children's Author Award for Efrén Divided (Harper). He delivered his acceptance remarks during the Pura Belpré Award Celebración held Sunday, June 27, 2021, on YouTube.

Hola, Amigos,

I wish we could all be meeting in person; however, keeping each other safe takes priority.

To begin with, I'd like to thank everybody associated with this award. This includes all the members of ALA, the ALSC, REFORMA, and the Pura Belpré Award committee for helping to elevate Efrén's voice and giving him a platform to help children like him. Because of you, many more Latinx children are finally seeing themselves reflected in American literature in an authentic and meaningful way.



To receive this award—alongside so many of my peers like Yamile Saied Méndez, Lilliam Rivera, Jenny Torres Sanchez, Raúl the Third, Adrianna Cuevas, Donna Barba Higuera, and Monica Brown, and all past recipients—is a true honor.

Thank you to my wife, Esther, as well as my entire family for their endless support and motivation. Thank you to my incredible agent, Deborah Warren, the amazing Rosemary Brosnan, Jessica MacLeish, Courtney Stevenson, Jacquelynn Burke, and everyone at HarperCollins for all they do. Thank you, Jay Bendt, for the amazing cover. Your work is a gift.

Thank you to all my students—past and present—for encouraging me to keep writing and keeping me current on all things cool. Thank you, Tightens, the best critique group anyone could ever wish for. I wouldn't be here without you. And thank you, my SCBWI community, for taking me under your arm and helping to guide me.

The Pura Belpré Award is awarded to the book that best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience for children. Seeing my name attached to it is...beyond anything I could have imagined.

In fact, the night before the award, I received an email from Rosemary Brosnan, my brilliant editor at HarperCollins. Immediately, my mind thought the worst. I was overdue on the edits to my next book, and I thought she was reaching out to check in on me. So, I logged onto my zoom conference, expecting just her.

Only, instead of one face, my screen was filled with an entire screenful of faces. My mind raced, immediately assuming it was the entire HarperCollins team there for some sort of author intervention.

But then, one of the committee members introduced themselves and then proceeded to inform me that I had just won the 2021 Pura Belpré Award Medal. That's right, the Pura Belpré *Medal*.

The rest of the conference call is kind of fuzzy...to this day, I don't know what I said to them. Hopefully, it wasn't anything embarrassing.

I still have trouble believing it ever happened. To be honest, I didn't write *Efrén Divided* thinking that it would someday be published. I wrote it, thinking that I would print out copies for my students to read, and that someday...if I were lucky, one of them would write a book and, just maybe, mention me in their acknowledgment pages.

Only my agent and friend, Deborah Warren, didn't quite see it the same way. She believed in my work in a way I never could. I thank her for not giving up and waiting patiently over the years for me to hone my craft.

Efrén Divided is my ode to immigrant families everywhere. In 2016, hate was given a national platform. Suddenly, it became politically acceptable to share hatred towards others simply because of where they were born. The comments were not new; they were things I heard plenty

growing up. Things I'd long internalized, such as believing myself to be a second-class citizen—something other....

Something lesser.

This is part of the reason why I decided to write this novel. For a change, I wanted to make sure Latinx children everywhere saw themselves center page, and that it would be something positive and affirming. That they would see the beauty and value in who they are and where they come from.

I wanted them to see themselves as first class citizens. Something I never did.

Growing up my entire family was made up of service people. My uncles, my cousins, my parents, my friends, *their* parents, *their* cousins, they all fixed cars, cleaned homes, watched children, or like my parents, worked long hours in factories or cut grass for a living.

So...to think that anything different waited for me, felt like a huge lie. You see this uniform shirt on me...it's the same one my dad wore for the majority of his life. And as a kid, I just assumed I'd someday wear something similar, too.

Rain or unbearable shine, my father got up and went to work. He fought to change the trajectory of his family's future. So did my Mom, who works 70-plus hours in a steam filled factory. This award isn't just affirming to me as an author. More importantly, it is affirming to my parent's struggles and sacrifices. On the day that my mom watched the ALA Awards from home, right after she watched me win...she turned to my dad and told him: "Ya vez, Panchito... si valio la pena."

Yes, mom... it *was* worth the sacrifice.

Los quiero mucho a los dos. Y, gracias por darnos una vida mejor.

It's so strange that I'm here giving an acceptance speech for this award, when it's really my parents who put in most of the work. I remember the day that my Dad brought a few of his friends over to the house. One of them, upon seeing me, stated how lucky my dad was to have a son old enough to do all the yardwork. I remember my dad immediately chiming in: "No, no son of mine will ever have to cut grass as long as I can help it. I do it because I don't have a choice. He will."

[remove dress jacket to reveal landscaper uniform]

Well, today, I chose to wear this uniform proudly and with the utmost respect. I wear it in honor of everything that my parents, and thousands of parents across the world, do for the welfare of their families.

Efrén Divided is what I like to call “an open garage book,” meaning you get to see all of Efrén’s life—even the messy parts.

Hopefully, readers everywhere, regardless of where they are born, will feel empowered to dream big and speak out for not only *their* rights, but those of everyone else around them.

To all the children out there, please remember: “Your place of birth does not decide how far you will go.”

GRACIAS, amigos... You are all SOPER!

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