

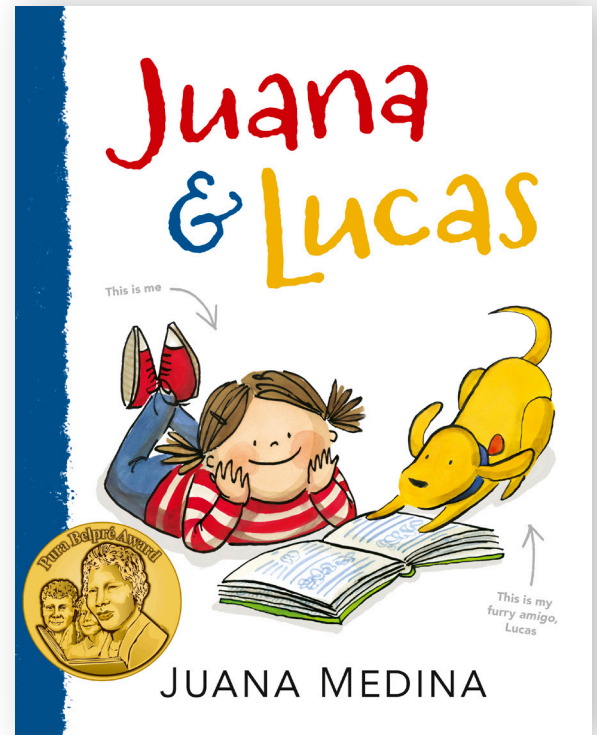
Winner of the 2017 Pura Belpré Author Award

Juana & Lucas

by Juana Medina

Fans of Judy Moody and Clarice Bean will love Juana, the spunky young Colombian girl who stars in this playful, richly illustrated new series.

Juana loves many things: drawing, eating Brussels sprouts, and living in Bogotá, Colombia. Most of all, she loves her dog, Lucas, the best *amigo* ever. She does not love her itchy school uniform, math problems, or dance class. Above all, Juana does NOT love learning the English. Why is it so important to learn a language that makes so little sense? But when Juana's *abuelos* tell her about a special trip they are planning — one where the English will be very useful — Juana works *muy* hard at becoming a fountain of the English! Hilarious, energetic, and utterly relatable, Juana will win over *los corazones* — the hearts — of readers everywhere in her first adventure, presented by namesake Juana Medina.



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96 pages · Ages 5–8


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A Q&A with author-illustrator Juana Medina

What role does the city of Bogotá play in the book?

Bogotá plays a very important role! It provides the background for the unique details in Juana's life. For example, the fact that Bogotá is high up in the Andes Mountains makes for very cold mornings and warm afternoons, which explains Juana's uniform, with the heavy blazer for the cold mornings . . . and her stinky classroom with sweaty kids in the afternoon. Also, they speak Spanish and love soccer, two very important things for Juana in the story.



Young Juana Medina at a market in Bogotá

Bogotá is a diverse city, full of hidden stories. Small pockets of European immigrants settled in Colombia after or during periods of duress in their home countries. That's how the Sheldons make it into the book; they represent a number of neighbors and friends who were always sharing fantastic stories that filled my imagination when I was a child.

Bogotá is where I grew up, and it's a city I love deeply. Setting the story there was a small way to share this very special place with readers.

How does Juana's family shape her experiences?

Juana's family, like any other family, is unique. Her father died when she was a baby, and she is very attached to her mother, her aunt Cris, and her *abuelos*. They shape her interests and feed her curiosity, which I find very empowering for children.

They each offer Juana a distinct point of view, and she enjoys learning from all of them. Especially when their lessons involve eating chocolate with Abue or singing at the tops of their lungs with Tía Cris.

How did you decide to make Juana's dog, Lucas, a central character?

I grew up with a fantastic dog named Lucas. He loved me and protected me throughout my early childhood. I have very fond memories of playing with him, and they helped shape the Lucas in the book. For the story, I wanted to make sure there was a constant in Juana's life, a sidekick of sorts, but a character that would support Juana, let her be herself 100 percent, and perhaps add a bit of extra humor to the story (especially visually).

How did you figure out how to depict Juana's progress learning English?

This is a story based on a real experience. The way it happened was somewhat different, but the overall feel was pretty much the same.

Juana has zero interest in learning English. She can't see why it is important or should matter to her at all. Through the people around her, she soon discovers plenty of reasons that learning a new language can be helpful, though she also discovers how things might not turn out as expected! I wanted to show the learning experience as something that doesn't just affect one individual, but how the community around that person plays an important role. For example, the Herrera brothers might not have known English, but they were supportive of Juana as she learned; the Sheldons might have had better things to do, but they allowed Juana to visit and read endless stories. I wanted to show different voices and an array of components to Juana's learning experience. Guaranteeing that there would be a community cheering on her attempt to learn was important to me, because learning tends to happen like this — not as an isolated experience, but through collective discoveries and common discussions.

It also allowed for me to show — in a teeny tiny way — the impact of a child's education in their community, without being tremendously didactic or preachy.

More importantly, and without wanting to give away the ending, we often go on a journey with one very specific goal in mind, only to discover later that the precise goal or the circumstances around it can change when we least expect it. This happens not just to children but to adults, too. I thought it would be good to explore this through Juana's eyes.



Juana Medina's *abuela* in her studio

What advice do you have for students learning foreign languages?

There will be moments when you want to give up. We all go through those. Sometimes they'll happen due to frustration; sometimes you'll even get a headache from the effort it takes to remember all the words! But no matter what, don't give up. Learning a new language is always worth it.

Do you create words or images first?

Ofentimes words come first, but I usually draw at least a couple of illustrations as I write to gain a bit more understanding of the characters. How they move, act, who they are . . . Drawing helps shape a few characteristics a little bit faster, which helps ease the writing. Then I write for a long, long time, and it's not until things are more fleshed out that I start drawing again.

How was your experience of writing and illustrating a book different from illustrating another author's work?

This was a great experience. I learned a lot through the process of creating the book. It allowed me to decide what I wanted to share about the story through images and what I wanted to share in words. When I've illustrated books for other authors, this isn't something I could do.

This also made for an interesting ongoing conversation with my editor and the designer of the book. There was a lot to learn from them. It made for a very enriching process for me. As Juana learned "the English," I learned a lot about writing a book in English.

Since you work in a variety of media, how did you decide what sort of images to create for this book?

Because *Juana & Lucas* is based in a personal story, I wanted it to have a very personal feel. I decided ink and watercolor would do that. The process was very slow, but enormously gratifying.

What has been your favorite response to your work from a young reader so far?

I feel very fortunate to share my work with others — especially young readers — and get to hear their opinions. There are two responses I've enjoyed deeply: one, hearing that, based on my work, young readers are considering becoming writers or illustrators. That's huge! And two, about a year ago, during an event, I asked the audience to raise their hands if they were excited, and someone raised not only a hand, but *both* hands, as well as feet, to show how excited they were. What more can one ask for?



Young Juana Medina on her first day of school

What were your favorite books when you were growing up?

Some of the books I remember most fondly are *Le petit Nicolas* by René Goscinny (beautifully illustrated by Jean-Jacques Sempé), *Me and My Sister Clara* by Dimiter Inkiow, and *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh.

I was an avid reader growing up. By age seven, I had devoured most of Jules Verne's books and was attempting to read the whole newspaper every morning. Since this was in Colombia during the 1980s, war was taking place, and this was something my mom wasn't thrilled about.

What were the first English-language books that spoke to you?

Hard to say. I don't remember clearly which books I read in English and which in Spanish. The one thing I do remember moving me greatly was discovering that I could understand the lyrics to many songs. This was a mind-blowing discovery that had me listening very attentively to the Beatles, Pink Floyd, Simon & Garfunkel, Cat Stevens, the Doors . . . and a never-ending list of music my parents, aunts, and uncles listened to.



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Juana Medina was born and raised in Bogotá, Colombia. She is the illustrator of *Smick!* by Doreen Cronin and the author-illustrator of *1 Big Salad: A Delicious Counting Book*. Juana Medina has studied and taught at the Rhode Island School of Design and now teaches at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at George Washington University. She lives in Washington, D.C.



"Medina's beautiful, vivid prose conjures the Colombian setting with tactile language. . . . Juana's narration is also peppered with easy-to-figure-out Spanish words."

— *The New York Times Book Review*

- ★ "Through this strong, adventurous, and smart female protagonist, Medina presents an extraordinary story about the many opportunities learning a new language can bring. Full-color illustrations provide excellent depictions of Juana's life in Bogotá and allow readers to connect with her character and culture. The artwork playfully interacts with dynamic text, which often arcs across the page, employs large fonts for emphasis, and smoothly incorporates Spanish words. Fans of Judy Moody and Lola Levine will absolutely love Juana. This upbeat new series for young readers is a must-buy."

— *Booklist* (starred review)

- ★ "As both author and illustrator, Medina is able to integrate the text and illustrations in unique ways, including spreads in which Juana tells us why, for example, she strongly dislikes her school uniform or why Mami is the most important person in her life. Font design is also used creatively, such as when Medina traces the arc of a soccer ball hit hard enough to be sent 'across the field.' An essential selection that creates multicultural awareness, has distinguished and appealing design elements, and has a text that is the stuff of true literature."

— *School Library Journal* (starred review)

- ★ "Both comfortably familiar (this will be an easy sell for fans of Pennypacker's Clementine, for instance) and keenly specific in its setting and characters, *Juana & Lucas* is much needed for the gap it fills in American children's literature, but it will be much beloved for its warmly depicted family relationships, eminently read-aloud-able high jinks, and sunny protagonist."

— *The Horn Book* (starred review)

