



IRENE VASCO

A LIFE SURROUNDED BY BOOKS

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Languages: Spanish, French, English, Portuguese



Recognition from the Ministry of Education of Colombia for a lifetime dedicated to education, 2021.



IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award, 2024



XX Ibero-American SM Award for Children's and Youth Literature, 2024.

- Recognition from the Ministry of Education of Colombia for a lifetime dedicated to education, 2021.
- Recognition from the Colombian Book Chamber and the Literature Department of the National Institute of the Arts (IDARTES) for her career as a writer and contribution to reader formation, 2023.

IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award, 2024

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IRENE VASCO, UNA HISTORIA ALREDEDOR DE LOS LIBROS

Researcher: Irene Vasco

Editorial Design: Emiliano Prado

Edition, 2025



Attachments

Please click on the following buttons if you want to view them

CV

Website

Certificates

Press

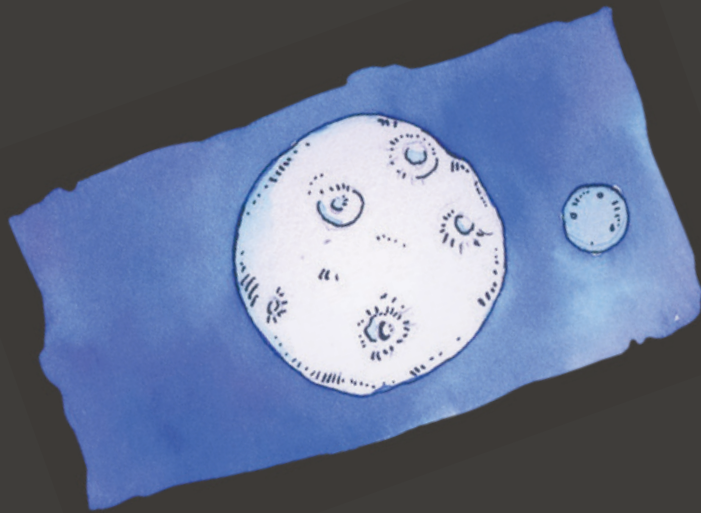
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Who is Irene Vasco?





I grew up reading and writing. During my childhood and adolescence, I spent time with my mother, Sylvia Moscovitz, a Brazilian artist who created children's programs for Colombia's newly established National Television. My mother asked me to write stories, song lyrics, and adaptations of traditional tales. I also recorded character voices for the National Radio, bringing to life the stories we created together. The program featured artists such as Fanny Buitrago, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Beatriz Caballero (writers), Jaime Manzur (puppets), Teresa Tejada (scenography), Hilda Pace (choreography), Ignacio de Narváez (composition), Clarita Correa and Amparo Ángel (pianists), Esteban Cabezas, Leonor González Mina, and Francisco Zumaqué (musicians). I learned from them how to create for children.

Since the programs were broadcast live, only a few photographic records remain.

Professionally, since 1984, I have dedicated myself to writing for children and young adults. Additionally, I have led and supported reading and writing formation programs throughout Colombia, visiting libraries, communities, and schools as an author and reading promoter.

“Children's literature tells life like any other literature; sometimes the conflicts are less painful or can be addressed with a lot of humor, but without conflict, there is no story. We have all encountered violence; it is part of our nature.”





Writing for Children and Young Adults





My literary production includes both documentary and fiction books for children and young adults. Some are published by various publishing houses in Latin America, while others are included in anthologies or magazines.

So many travels, experiences, stories heard, and an irresistible urge to tell them! Who could keep these adventures to themselves? I certainly cannot. They become an obsession. Fortunately, I am meticulous and carefully preserve my travel notebooks. My memory is fragile, so I want to have everything documented. When writing a story, a novel, an article, or a lecture about my work as a promoter, I rely on photos, videos, notes, addresses, and maps—my travel logs, the footprints of my journeys.



My books explore different themes. Some are about librarians, teachers, and readers, with stories collected from workshops I conduct in various communities. Others depict the everyday lives of young children, while a few feature animal protagonists. Several books reflect Colombia's history, geography, and culture.

The "Expedition" collection consists of reading guides designed to introduce children to great works and authors of world literature. Below, you will find a catalog of these publications, as well as books that have been translated into other languages, books written in collaboration about Public and School Libraries, health program booklets, books I have translated from Portuguese (my second language), articles on Colombian artists, and various "fragments" published in different places.





Published Books



Picture books about reading and readers

La joven maestra y la gran serpiente (The Young Teacher and the Great Serpent)

After a long journey through unknown places, she finally arrives at her destination, carrying books and good intentions. This young teacher soon realizes that she is not the only one with knowledge to share. The children showed her where the tiny school was. It had no walls, just a thatched roof sheltering a few chairs and a blackboard propped against a tree trunk. Determined, she improvised a bookshelf to place her books—her treasure, the only thing that made her feel secure. Then, the children led her to her new home, a small room on the hill. After a storm floods the region, the teacher loses her books. The inhabitants of the jungle, storytellers of ancient legends, offer her the greatest lesson after this misfortune. This book is dedicated to the Elder Siblings, guardians of life, water, and traditions. It is also dedicated to Latin American teachers who give up everything in pursuit of the dream of education.

Awards:

- Selected by the New York Public Library as one of the 10 best children's books in Spanish in 2019.
- Winner of the Fundación Cuatrogatos Award in 2020 and recognized by Crescer magazine of O Globo, Brazil, as one of the best books of 2022.
- A Professora da Floresta e a Grande Serpente, published by Editora Pulo do Gato, São Paulo, Brazil, 2021—selected by Crescer magazine of O Globo, Brazil, as one of the best books of 2022.
- Nominated and approved as "Best for Children – International" by CELLIJ (Center for Studies in Reading and Children's and Youth Literature) – UNESP, São Paulo, Brazil, 2022.
- Selected by the New York Public Library as a Best Illustrated Children's Book in 2023.
- Highlighted by the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) in its list of the best books of 2024.

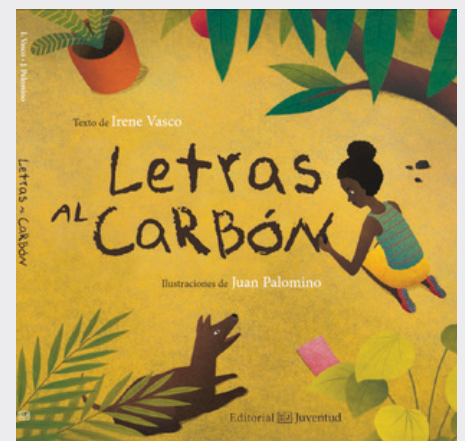


Letras al carbón (Letters in Charcoal)

In the town of Palenque, almost no one knows how to read or write. Mr. Velandia, the shop owner, is one of the few who can. When Gina starts receiving letters, which she imagines to be love letters, her little sister decides to learn to read so she can uncover the mystery. Soon, the two sisters discover the power of the written word.

Awards:

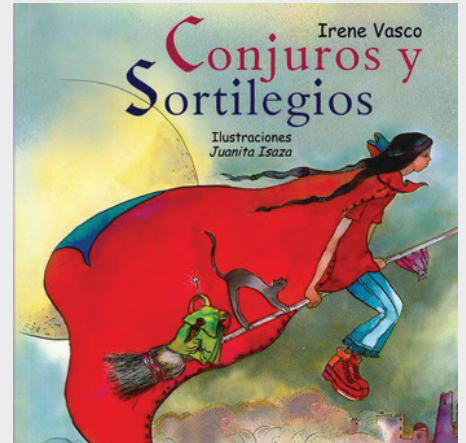
- Awarded Best Book by Fundación Cuatrogatos in 2016.
- Banco del Libro de Venezuela: Winner of the Librarians' Award in the Essential Library Category in 2016. Seleccionada por la
- Selected by Biblioteca Itaú with the book Letras de Carvão, Brazil, 2016.
- Recipient of the UNESCO Chair Selection Seal and the Interdisciplinary Institute of Reading at PUC-Rio for the book Letras de Carvão, 2016.
- Winner of the Altamente Recomendável seal in the Translation category, FNLIJ (Brazilian section of IBBY), for the book Letras de Carvão, 2017.
- Highlighted by the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) in its list of the best books of 2024.



Illustrated books for early readers

Conjuros y sortilegios Spells and Enchantments

Fun literary magic games! Recipes to turn girls into frogs and boys into bats, formulas to disappear or transform into an animal. Potions for flying, seeing the future, and even for love—all part of this essential handbook for young apprentice wizards. Everything is guaranteed to work, as long as the recipes are followed to the letter—no mixing ingredients or muddling magic words! But beware: bad wishes come back doubled. Proceed with caution!

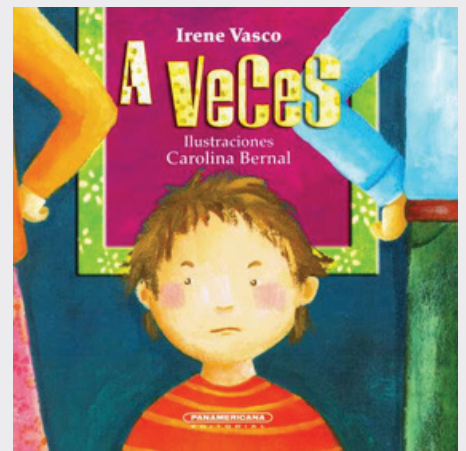


Awards:

- Best Children's Literature Book, *Conjuros y sortilegios*, 1993.
- Banco del Libro de Venezuela: Honor List in the Best Children's Books selection for *Conjuros y sortilegios*, 1994.
- Selected in an international competition by the Mexican Ministry of Education with the book *Conjuros y sortilegios* to be included in 46,100 School Libraries, Mexico, 2003.

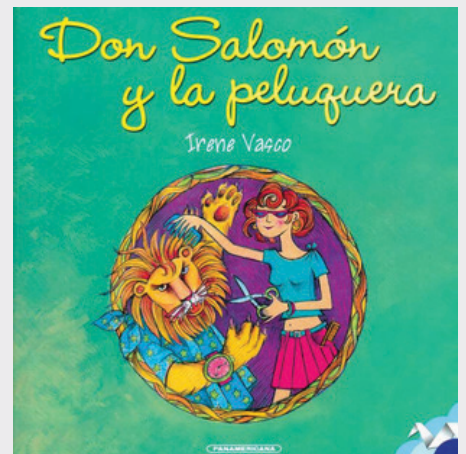
A veces Sometimes

Adults have their own way of seeing the world, very different from that of children. That's why, at times, it seems like communication is impossible. Punishments and rewards depend on who gives them and who receives them. The protagonist of this story struggles to understand what is expected of him. Understanding grown-ups is truly difficult.



Don Salomón y la peluquera Don Salomón and the Hairdresser

This rhyming tale tells the story of Don Salomón, who, despite his reputation as a bully, is invited to a party. Of course, this lion wants to look his best and hires a forgetful hairdresser who can never seem to find her scissors. In the end, Don Salomón becomes the star guest of the party, thanks to the hairdresser's unexpected talent.



Atchú y otros cuentos

Atchú and Other Stories

Four stories designed for children who are just beginning their reading journey. Reality, everyday life, and fantasy intertwine in these short narratives.

A bedridden angel with a cold causes chaos in Isabel's life. A finger that changes color and flavor depending on the day delights Estefanía. A worried mother, concerned for the health of María del Sol and the cat Nata, accidentally mixes up their prescribed pills under the bedcovers.



Sin pies ni cabeza

Without Rhyme or Reason

Ágata, a clumsy witch, wakes up one day with a terrible headache and knows that the only way to relieve it is by removing her head and taking it to the head repair shop. But Ágata can't remember any spells to take off her head, so she tries every trick she can think of.

After many misadventures, the unexpected ending leaves her with more aches and pains than ever—all because she was a poor student and couldn't remember her magic lessons.

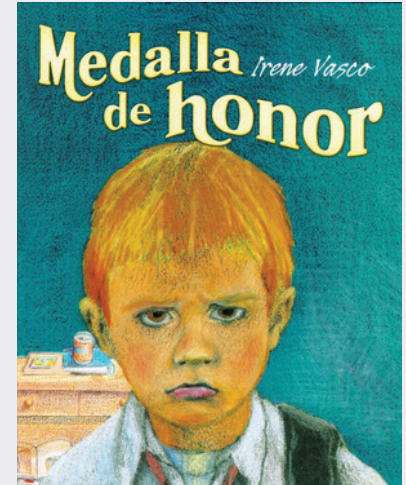


Medalla de honor

Medal of Honor

Martín is afraid that his mother will find a medal he received that morning at school. He hides it at the back of his closet and does everything he can to keep her from discovering it.

The next morning, while Martín is at school, his mother finds the medal and mistakenly believes he has stolen it. Will she punish Martín? Will he be able to explain why he is so afraid of being punished? Sometimes, medals aren't as desirable as we think.



La gran barca

The Great Boat

Noah, his wife Noela, and their three children build a great ark to shelter many pairs of animals during the Great Flood.

How is life organized for so many species living together for forty days and forty nights in this floating hotel? What are the rules? What dramas unfold? How are they resolved? And what does the daily menu look like for such a diverse group of inhabitants?

This story introduces young readers to a biblical tale in a unique and engaging way.

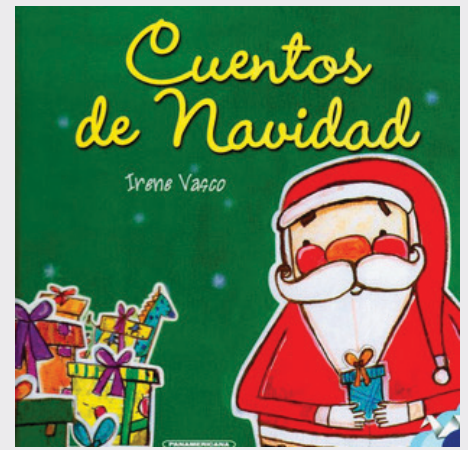


Cuentos de Navidad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Dyz8DQ&t=205s>

Two stories recount the challenging problems faced by Saint Nicholas and his wife, Santa Nicolasa, on Christmas Eve.

Finding the perfect gift for someone very special is a particularly tricky task. But even more difficult is delivering presents while wearing the wrong outfit!



Simón quiere perder el año

Simón wants to fail the year.

Simón is an excellent student. He gets the best grades in his class and is hopelessly in love with his beautiful teacher, Miss Rosalía.

As the school year comes to an end, Simón feels sad knowing that next year he won't be with his beloved teacher. So, he makes a bold decision—he'll fail the year on purpose just to stay in her class.

What Simón doesn't know is that his grand love will come to an abrupt end with a single unexpected encounter at the beauty salon with his mother. A surprising revelation awaits him!



Jero Carapálida y el guardián de las cosas perdidas

Jero Paleface and the Guardian of Lost Things

Family life in any given city unfolds with its ups and downs—sometimes joyful, sometimes a bit dramatic.

Jero Carapálida, a nine-year-old boy, narrates the adventures of his siblings, mother, father, and stepfather with complete ease and humor.

This first installment of Jero Carapálida is just a preview of more stories to come, sharing new experiences from the everyday life of a family that is both like and unlike any other.



Jero Carapálida y el concierto desconcertante

Jero Paleface and the Disconcerting Concert

A new adventure of Jero Carapálida and his family! This time, his sister Lunática discovers that her brother is a true cyber genius when, after ending up at the wrong party, Jero lifts her spirits with recordings of her noisy band—getting everyone dancing to the rhythm of wamwamwamwamwam, uli-uli-uli, pripripri!



Abril Celeste y el acertijo de la sopa verde

April Celeste and the Riddle of the Green Soup

Abril Celeste's ninth birthday is just around the corner! This year, her party will be different from all the others because, for the first time, she gets to choose everything she loves the most. Being born on October 31 doesn't mean everything has to be about monsters, cobwebs, and—most of all—witches. Abril prefers fairies and the color blue. Join her as she unravels the riddle of the green soup, a unique tale filled with magic and fun!



Mis ciento treinta apellidos

My One Hundred and Thirty Surnames

A Latin American Jewish boy visits his family in Israel to celebrate Passover. He is surprised to find that each of his relatives spells their last name differently. At first, he feels strange and out of place. But when the family gathers around the table and the sacred rituals begin, his fears fade away, and he realizes that despite their apparent differences, they all share the same traditions.



Como todos los días

Like Every Day

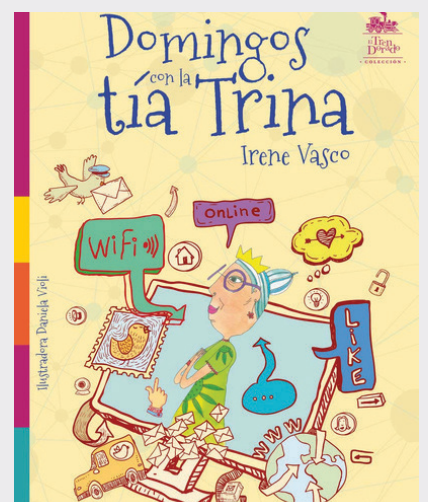
This is the story of the everyday life of a young girl who goes to school and faces various challenges with classmates, teachers, parents, and siblings. Throughout the week, Carolina wonders when something exciting will happen to break her daily routine—without realizing that new things are happening to her all the time.



Domingos con la tía Trina

Sundays with Aunt Trina

When Aunt Trina suddenly shows up one day, the family must adjust to taking care of her every Sunday. The afternoons a young girl spends with her turn into amusing and unfinished stories, all sparked by Facebook—which drives Aunt Trina wild at 90 years old. Mystery after mystery, the protagonist uncovers the secrets Aunt Trina hides amid her cyber adventures.



Stories for Big Readers

El último vuelo de Hortensia The Last Flight of Hortensia

Fleeing from violence, Hortensia and her family leave their land and animals behind, seeking refuge in the city. But instead of finding safety, the young girl is thrust into a sordid and unfamiliar world.

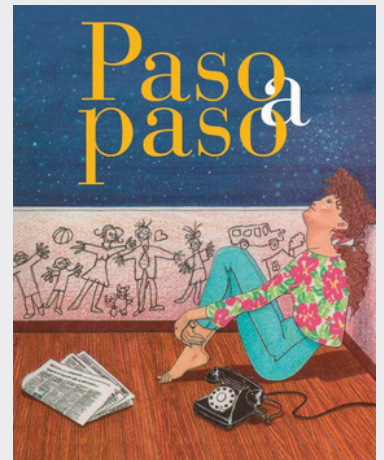
Alone in the heart of the urban jungle, she clings to memories of the past to endure the present, facing deep dilemmas and immense challenges as she searches for a way out of her misfortune.

Will she survive, or will she succumb to a blind society that destroys without mercy?



Paso a paso Step by Step

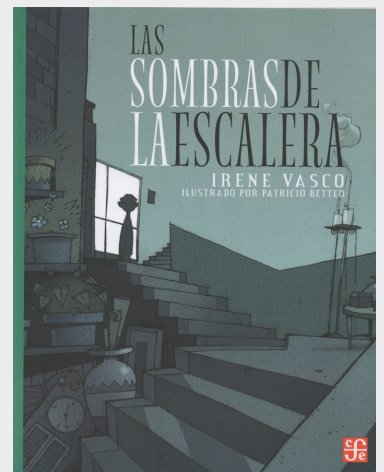
The life of a family is shattered the day the father is kidnapped. Through the eyes of the eldest daughter, readers follow, step by step, the anguish and the slow process of rebuilding. The story unfolds from the moment of the abduction, revealing its far-reaching impact on everyone. Clinging to love and solidarity, the family endures a year and a half of relentless searching and waiting.



Las sombras de la escalera The Shadows of the Staircase

Everything around Beto fills him with fear—the new city, the new school, even his new deskmate. Both his grandmother's house in the big city and his home in the village seem haunted by ghosts, mysteries, and omens. Fortunately, charms and protective spells appear just in time when a curse falls upon Beto during his town's Holy Week procession.

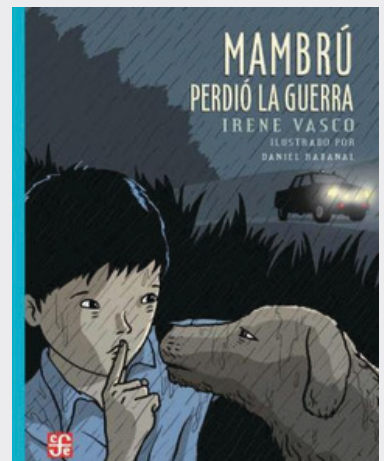
Can his fears help him find a way forward?



Mambrú perdió la guerra Mambrú Lost the War

When Emiliano is forced to live on his grandmother's farm, he thinks it's the worst thing that could have happened to him. He doesn't know where his parents are, and no one answers his questions.

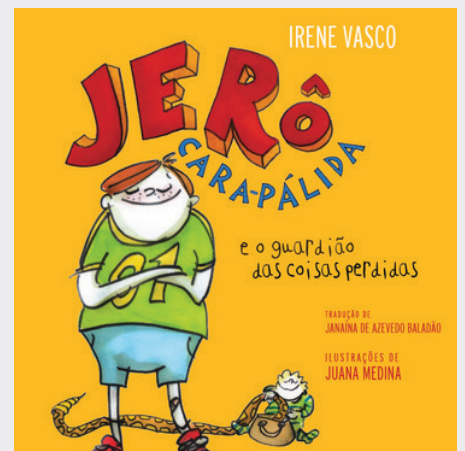
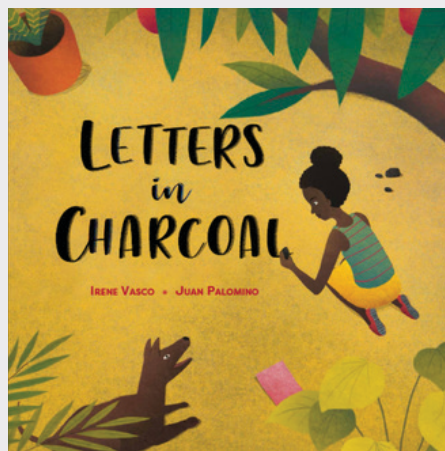
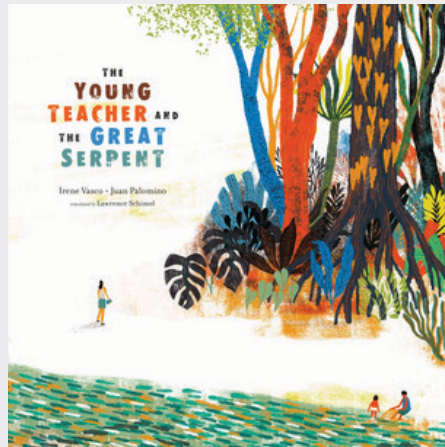
Yet, little by little, he realizes that things aren't as bad as they seem—the townspeople are kind, his grandmother shares family stories, and he meets Mambrú, a dog who becomes his loyal friend.



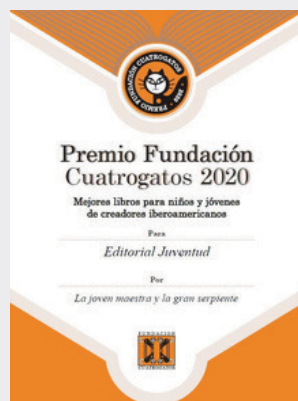
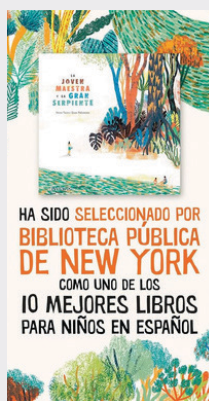
Translations of my books

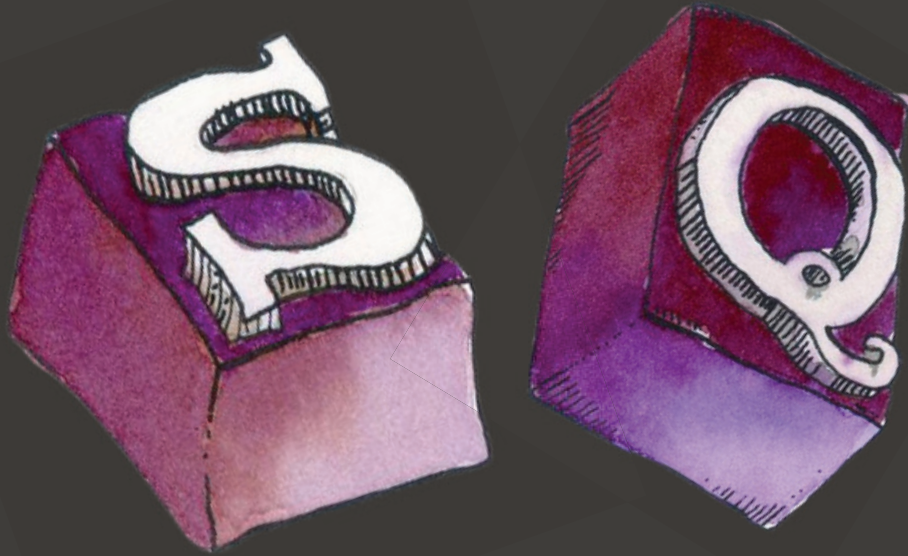


Translations of my books

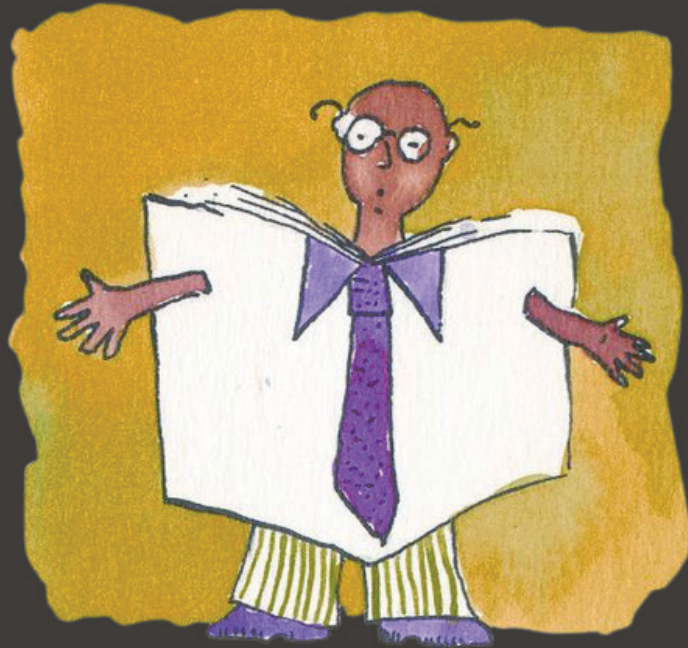


International Awards – The Young Teacher and the Great Serpent





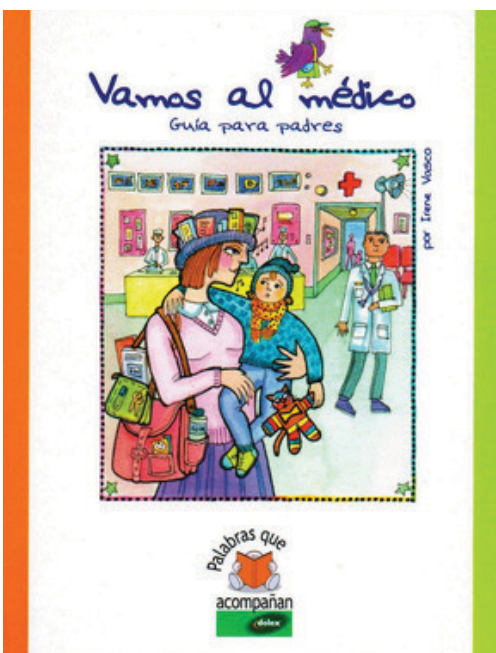
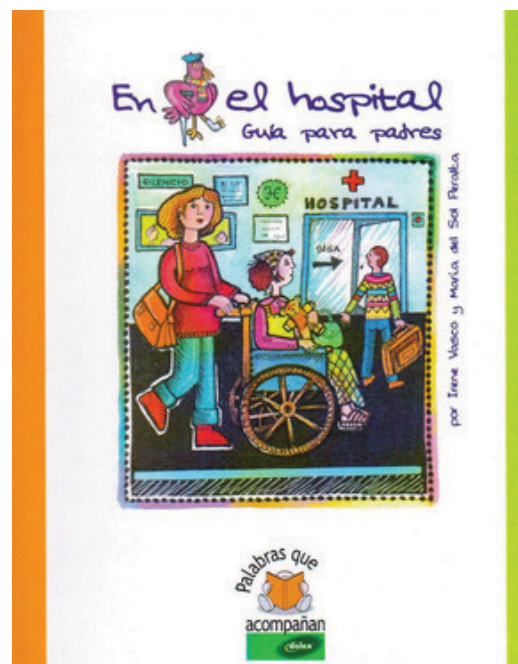
Other publications



Relying on the reconciliatory power of words, the PALABRAS QUE ACOMPAÑAN campaign was launched in 2002 as a social contribution program by the DOLEX-PANADOL brand from the GlaxoSmithKline laboratory. The program included two parallel aspects:

- Reading in hospitals.
- A collection of materials aimed at medical staff, parents, and hospitalized children

For the creation of this collection, together with María del Sol Peralta, we visited hospitals, met with pediatricians, interviewed parents and children, and developed a series of seven booklets beautifully illustrated by Esperanza Vallejo and designed by Ana Milena Piedrahíta.



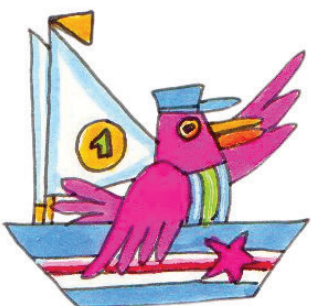


List of the 5 representative books submitted to the jury

- Conjuros y sortilegios, Panamericana (1998)
- Mambrú perdió la guerra, Fondo de Cultura Económica (2012)
- Letras al carbón, Editorial Juventud (2015)
- La joven maestra y la gran serpiente, Juventud (2019)
- El último vuelo de hortensia, Panamericana (2021)

List of Awards and Distinctions

- Fundalectura: Award for Best Children's Literature Book, Conjuros y sortilegios, 1993.
- First Cocorí Children's Story Contest, UNICEF, Costa Rica: Finalist with the story Atchú, 1993.
- Norma-Fundalectura Latin American Children's Literature Contest: Finalist with the book Cambio de voz, 1997.
- Comfamiliar del Atlántico Contest: Finalist with the story Sin pies ni cabeza (1998). Winner with Simón quiere perder el año (2007).
- Special Mention – Best Books of the Year by the Colombian Book Chamber for Pedro Nel Gómez, mitos, minas y montañas, 2000.
- Banco del Libro de Venezuela: Honor List Mention in Best Children's Books selection for Conjuros y sortilegios (1994, 2010) and Lugares fantásticos de Colombia, guía de viaje (2010).
- Librarians' Award from Banco del Libro de Venezuela for Mambrú perdió la guerra, 2013.
- Guest writer at the Redwood City Public Library, California, USA, 2017.
- Special Mention – Best Books of the Year by the Colombian Book Chamber (2000) for Pedro Nel Gómez. Mitos, minas y montañas.
- Ciudades históricas de Colombia, Lugares fantásticos de Colombia, and La independencia de Colombia: así fue were included in the Semilla collection of the Colombian Ministry of Education for school libraries.
- Cambio de voz was a finalist in the Norma-Fundalectura Contest, 1997.
- Las sombras de la escalera was selected in an international contest by the Mexican Ministry of Education for 96,000 school libraries (2007).
- Simón quiere perder el año won the 15th National Children's Story Contest by Comfamiliar del Atlántico.
- Atchú y otros cuentos was selected for the Palabras que acompañan collection (GlaxoSmith-Kline-Alfaguara) with 82,000 copies printed (2002).
- Don Salomón y la peluquera was selected by Houghton Mifflin, USA, for its bilingual education program (1992).
- A veces was selected in an international contest by the Mexican Ministry of Education for 81,000 school libraries (2006).





IRENE VASCO, UNA HISTORIA ALREDEDOR DE LOS LIBROS

Investigadora: Irene Vasco

Diseño editorial: Emiliano Prado

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