

Viola Canales



Photo Credit: Reynaldo Barrios

“I write because I need to: I was raised on the Texas-Mexico border in a barrio always bubbling with people telling stories on porches during long summer evenings or around tables after enjoying home-cooked meals. I came to believe that imagination and creativity were as important as food and water. . . .”

—Viola Canales

Viola Canales's debut novel, *The Tequila Worm*, won a 2006 Pura Belpré Author Award for its portrayal, affirmation, and celebration of the Latino cultural experience.

About the Author

As a kid growing up in McAllen, Texas, Viola Canales shared a bedroom with her grandmother . . . and a big statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe that her grandmother treated as if it were alive! Because her parents considered it disrespectful to speak English in front of her grandmother, Viola started school not speaking or reading English. So for her, it was the outside world that seemed alien, and not the world of her barrio where *curanderas* (folk healers) cured cases of evil eye with chicken eggs, her mother made dolls out of old stockings, and the heat of the *canicula* (the dog days of summer) made everyone a little bit crazy (crazier).

Her barrio felt so wonderfully rich with the magic and mystery of traditions, family, friends, and foods that she didn't realize she was poor until she won a scholarship at the age of 15 to attend

St. Stephen's Episcopal School, an elite boarding school over 300 miles away in Austin. Although the school introduced her to another *mundo* and fostered her lifelong love of literature, she was so homesick that she started writing stories—to conjure up her family and the barrio that she missed so much.

Over the next years, Viola graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Law School, served as a captain in the U.S. Army, was a community organizer for the United Farm Workers, practiced law, held a presidential-level appointment in the Clinton Administration, worked with chief executive officers, but she never stopped writing stories to conjure up the magical world of her barrio. These stories and memories inspired her first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Orange Candy Slices and Other Secret Tales*, and her novel, *The Tequila Worm*, which was awarded the 2006 Pura Belpré Medal for Narrative. She now lives in Stanford, California, with her family, and owns a house in McAllen, Texas, too, where her mother and many of her relatives still live, and where she often comes to visit.

Praise for:

THE TEQUILA WORM

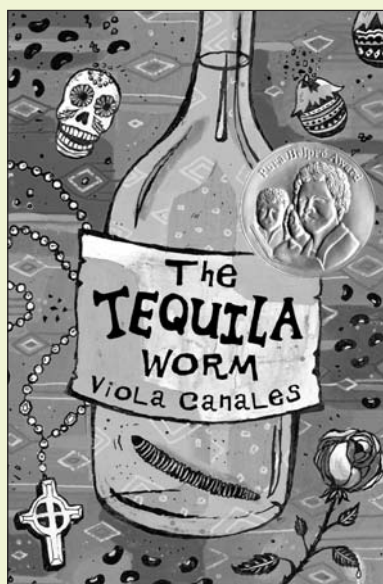
★ "In this warm, entertaining debut novel, Canales follows Sofia from early childhood through her teen years, when she receives a scholarship to attend an exclusive boarding school. Each chapter centers on the vivid particulars of Mexican American traditions—celebrating the Day of the Dead, preparing for a cousin's *quinceañera*. The explanations of cultural traditions never feel too purposeful; they are always rooted in immediate, authentic family emotions, and in Canales's exuberant storytelling, which, like a good anecdote shared between friends, finds both humor and absurdity in sharply observed, painful situations."

—*Booklist*, Starred

"Canales includes vivid descriptions of life in a Mexican-American community. Her prose is engaging and easy to read."

—*School Library Journal*

Book List



THE TEQUILA WORM

Ages 12 up • Wendy Lamb Books
978-0-385-74674-8 (0-385-74674-1)
GLB: 978-0-385-90905-1 (0-385-90905-5)
• A Pura Belpré Author Award Winner
• A Judy Lopez Memorial Award Honor Book
• An Americas Award Honorable Mention