

# NOTEWORTHY Books in Spanish for ADOLESCENTS

► ISABEL SCHON

From richly satisfying Spanish renditions of popular American works; to engaging narratives by Spanish-speaking authors; exceedingly accessible texts about nutrition, contraception, and adolescence; and serious art and literature creations, these recently published books in Mexico, Colombia, Spain, and the United States are sure to please, engage, and inform Spanish-speaking teens.

## FICTION

Farmer, Nancy. **El mar de los Trolls.** (*The Sea of Trolls.*) Trans. by Gemma Gallart. Barcelona: Destino, 2006. 476p. \$19.95 Trade pb. 978-84-08-06565-4. **M J**



*Set in 793 England, where fierce Viking warriors and large trolls pillage innocent villagers, Farmer's hugely successful fantasy is now available in Gallart's richly satisfying Spanish rendition that maintains the tension, magic, cruelty, and bravery of the original. Serious readers also will appreciate the well-done appendix that includes interesting facts comparing Islandic and Spanish pronunciations.*

Gutiérrez Nájera, Manuel. **Cuentos.** (*Stories.*) Madrid: Anaya, 2006. 405p. \$19.95 Trade pb. 978-84-376-2315-3. **SA/YA**



*This collection by one of the best Mexican writers of the nineteenth century and a prime mover of Mexican Modernism includes thirty-four short stories that resonate with his elegant and sensitive vision of reality. He writes about fantasies unfulfilled, his concern for the unprotected, and the inequalities of life in Mexico. Set in Mexico City, his stories depict with good-natured humor his admiration for European culture. The brevity of many of these stories—from four to fifteen pages each—is just right to introduce Spanish-speaking adolescents to this well-known author and journalist. Serious readers will appreciate the lengthy scholarly introduction and the complete bibliography.*



Muñoz Puelles, Vicente. **¡Polizón a bordo! El secreto de Colón.** (*Stowaway on Board! The Secret of Columbus.*) Illus. by Federico Delicado. Madrid: Anaya, 2005. 158p. \$17.95 Trade pb. 978-84-667-4749-3. **M J**

*In a most engaging first-person point-of-view, Gonzalo, a brave and intrepid teen, relates his experiences in Spain in the 1490s, just before Spain's expulsion of the Jews and as a confidant of Columbus and witness to Columbus's arrival to the New World on October 12, 1492.*

*Perhaps there are too many coincidences as young Gonzalo overcomes ruffians in the slums of Sevilla, meets beautiful and wealthy Simonetta Berardi who teaches him how to read and write, and without too much difficulty, finds a place to hide in one of Columbus's ships. Nonetheless this fast-paced, historical novel is an accessible introduction to a controversial time in the history of Spain as well as an unconventional view of Christopher Columbus. Unfortunately Delicado's bland watercolor illustrations lack the excitement of the well-written narrative.*

Plaza, José María. **¡Tierra a la vista! La historia de Cristóbal Colón.** (*Land Ho! The History of Christopher Columbus.*) Illus. by Julio Carabias Aranda. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2005. 202p. \$19.95 Trade pb. 978-84-670-1957-5. **M J**



*Written in a carefree, almost colloquial style, this fictional biography is based on the life of the Italian explorer who discovered the New World in the service of Spain. Reluctant history readers will not*

mind Plaza's dramatized or invented parts that show what Columbus might have thought regarding his predicaments at sea, popular acclaim, and ultimate repudiation. The computer-generated, color cartoon illustrations and such title chapters as "Un rey tramposo" (A tricky king) and "¿Qué se propone este loco?" (What does this madman propose?) as well as a humorous color cartoon book cover might encourage heretofore unenthusiastic Spanish-speaking readers to read more about Columbus. Serious readers will appreciate the appended detailed chronology and list of important historical people and notes.

Repún, Graciela. **El mago y el escritor: Biografía de J. R. R. Tolkien.** (The Magician and the Writer: Biography of J. R. R. Tolkien.) Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2006. 106p. \$12.15 Trade pb. 978-958-04-9309-9. **MJ**



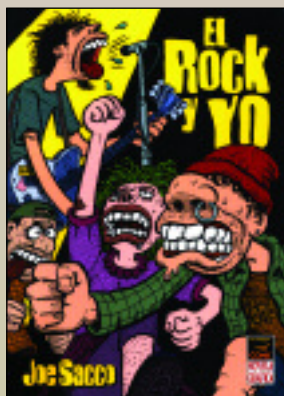
With the life and work of J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973), the well-known British writer, Repún intermingles a story "in the manner of Tolkien" about Gandalf, an old magician and revered storyteller, and his avid listener-elves. Admirers of the South African-born author will want to skip Repún's contrived story line and her plodding recitation of Gandalf's narrative, but they will enjoy the

simply told life of the popular author who has captivated readers around the world. An appendix explaining Tolkien's perception of myths and folklore as well as a chronology are included.

## GRAPHIC NOVELS

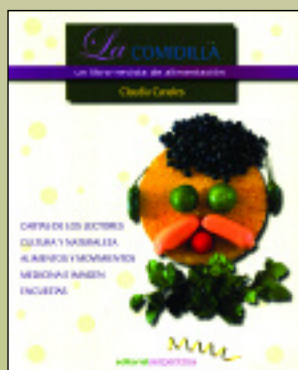
Sacco, Joe. **El rock y yo.** (Rock and Me.) Trans. by Joe Sacco. Barcelona: La Cúpula, 2006. 978-84-7833-700-2. Public Square Books, 2007. 88p. \$17.95 Trade pb. 978-1-59497-298-0. **S A/YA**

Cartoonist Sacco describes his passion for the world of rock 'n' roll in this compilation that includes some of his early works as well as examples of his powerful rock posters. In addition to appreciating his biting depiction of punk bands, groupies, triumphant stars, and sexy women, Spanish-speaking rock fans will enjoy his brief introductions and sarcastic notes. Some Spanish speakers from the Americas will object to the Peninsular Spanish pronouns and conjugations (e.g. nuestras, acordáis), others will object to numerous slang terms and vulgar expressions, and still others to the risqué cartoons, yet Sacco's humor and irreverence toward popular musicians and the music industry are most appealing in this fluid Spanish rendition.



## HEALTH

Canales, Claudia. **La comidilla: Un libro-revista de alimentación.** (La Comidilla: A Book about Nutrition.) Illus. by Heyliana Flores. Mexico: Serpentina, 2006. 79p. \$12.95 Trade pb. 978-968-5950-11-4. Glossary. Photos. **JS**  
In one of the best books about nutrition for Spanish-speaking adolescents this reviewer has ever



seen, using a clear, easy-to-understand, and at times chatty manner, Canales explains basic aspects about food, health, and nutrition with many references to Mexican culture, good Mexican eating habits—tacos de frijoles (bean tacos)—and malnutrition and diabetes in Mexico. Although a few examples pertain to Mexico, all Spanish speakers will recognize such issues as constipation, soft drinks and sugar, the benefits of exercise (sacudir el esqueleto [shake the skeleton]), dangerous substances such as amphetamines and other stimulants, anorexia, and bulimia. It is not a preachy book about the benefits of healthful habits; rather its lucid explanations—because Las proteínas son como el fútbol (Proteins are like soccer) and other verities—and colorful, witty illustrations are sure to enlighten and convince adolescents. An informative glossary is included.

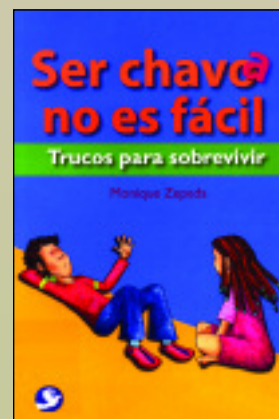
Ochoa, Anabel. **Los anticonceptivos explicados a los jóvenes.** (Contraceptives Explained to Teens.) Mexico: Aguilar/Santillana, 2005. 269p. \$14.95 Trade pb. 978-970-770-227-1. **JS**

In a candid, almost colloquial style, Ochoa, a well-known sex educator and writer in Mexico, explains in a well-organized manual basic information about the advantages, disadvantages, and common quandaries about more than fifteen contraceptive methods—from the pill to the patch, vaginal ring, injections, male and female condoms, vasectomy, and abstinence. Readers will note that she mentions the free availability of contraceptives for teens in Mexico's public health clinics as well as the macho attitudes of Mexican males regarding sex. An unfortunate shortcoming is the lack of illustrations to explain how to use some of the devices. Yet the overall message, especially to teen girls "con derecho al placer, dueña de su sexualidad y de su cuerpo" (with the right to pleasure, master of her own sexuality, and her own body), is conveyed in a manner that teens can appreciate.



Zepeda, Monique. **Ser chavo no es fácil: Trucos para sobrevivir.** (Being a Teen Is Not Easy: Tricks for Survival.) Illus. by Patricia Márquez and Arturo Ruelas. México: Pax México, 2005. 152p. \$11.95 Trade pb. 978-968-860-755-8. **MJ**

In a most accessible, conversational style, Zepeda guides teens through some of the changes and frustrations experienced during adolescence. With such colloquialisms as Qué onda con los adolescentes (What's up with teens) and ¿Qué hacer después de 'llegarle' a una chava? (What to do after you've hit it off with a girl?), she provides simple suggestions about understanding adults, tolerating teachers, dealing with friends, recognizing love, and other aspects concerning life. The black-and-white cartoons and the relaxed layout and fonts add to its appeal. It is not an in-depth discussion for reflective adolescents (the subject of sex is barely mentioned); rather it is a lighthearted, fun, how-to guide.



## THE ARTS

Vilchis, Alfredo. **La revolución imaginada.** (**The Imagined Revolution.**) Mexico: Serres, 2005. 140p. \$28.99. 978-970-9705-08-9. Source Notes. J S A/YA



As noted in the prologue, this book intermingles three histories—the history of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), the history of exvoto (a traditional votive offering given or dedicated in fulfillment of a religious vow), and the history of Alfredo Vilchis,

pintor del barrio (loosely translated as “painter of the slums”). It includes fifty-four excellent, full-page color reproductions of Vilchis’ powerful exvotos depicting personal views of historical aspects of the Mexican Revolution. Vilchis provides a strikingly commanding “imagined” view of Mexico’s Revolution for mature readers.

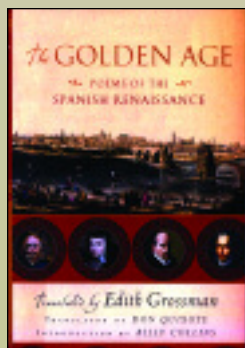
## LITERATURE

Manguel, Alberto. **Diario de lecturas.** (**A Reading Diary.**) Trans. by José Luis López Muñoz. Madrid: Alianza, 2004. 233p. \$13.95 Trade pb. 978-84-206-5667-0. Biblio. J S A/YA



Manguel’s characteristic passion and gusto for books and reading are tastefully captured in López Muñoz’s delightful Spanish rendition. From June 2002 to May 2003, Manguel set out to reread twelve of his favorite books as he traveled from his native Buenos Aires to London—una de las ciudades más incómodas del mundo (one of the most uncomfortable cities in the world)—to Paris and other cities. He intermingles his personal impressions of the places he visits, his beloved books—from Adolfo Bioy Casares’s **La invención de Morel** (**The Invention of Morel**) to Joaquim M. Machado de Assis’s **Memorias póstumas de Blas Cubas** (**Epitaph of a Small Winner**)—his reactions to the world after September 11, and his disapproval of the war in Iraq and the policies of the Bush administration. Spanish-speaking book lovers, discriminating travelers, and critical thinkers will appreciate Manguel’s thoughtful and candid observations.

## POETRY



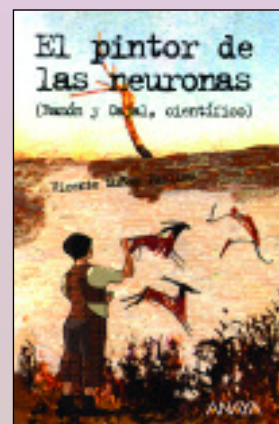
**The Golden Age: Poems of the Spanish Renaissance.** Selected and trans. by Edith Grossman. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006. 201p. \$26.95. 978-0-393-06038-6. Photos. Biblio. Source Notes. J S A/YA

Grossman offers a tantalizing selection of poems by some of her favorite authors for this neither comprehensive nor scholarly anthology of poems by Spanish-speaking poets from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The results are eminently

readable English translations that appear side by side with the original Spanish texts. Spanish-speaking adolescents will especially enjoy Manrique’s deeply felt Verses Written on the Death of His Father, Lope de Vega’s tongue-in-cheek Instant Sonnet, and Sor Juana Inés’s quick-witted poems. In addition, poetry enthusiasts will appreciate Billy Collins’s introduction, the brief notes on the poets, and the black-and-white illustrations.

## BIOGRAPHY

Muñoz Puelles, Vicente. **El pintor de las neuronas: Ramón y Cajal, científico.** (**The Painter of Neurons: Ramón y Cajal, Scientist.**) Illus. by Pablo Torrecilla. Madrid: Anaya, 2006. 158p. \$17.95 Trade pb. 978-84-667-5196-4. M J



The early life of Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852–1934), one of Spain’s foremost scientists who shared a Nobel Prize for research on the structure of the nervous system, is related in a fast-paced narrative. Despite some dramatized aspects of his life—a most severe father, a horribly mean teacher—this biography will certainly awaken readers’ interest and enthusiasm in Ramón y Cajal. It highlights his numerous childhood pranks and rowdy behavior as well as his love for painting. Although it lacks a chronology and the illustrations are neither exciting nor informative, it provides thoughtful insights into Ramón y Cajal’s critical thinking abilities and candidly depicts the dearth of interest in the sciences in Spain.

For additional high-quality books in Spanish for adolescents, please visit the Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents’ Web site <http://www.csusm.edu/csb>. ■

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