

# • Meet the Author •

## Pam Muñoz Ryan



Pam Muñoz Ryan is the 2007 Author Recipient of the National Education Association's Human and Civil Rights Award. She has written over thirty books for children that include those for the very young: *Mud is Cake*, *Mice and Beans*, *Hello Ocean*; picture books for older readers: *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride*, *Nacho and Lolita*; and the novels *Esperanza Rising*, *Becoming Naomi León*, *Riding Freedom* and *Paint the Wind*. Her books have received many accolades, including the Pura Belpré Medal, the Jane Addams Peace Award, the Americas Award Honor, the ALA Schneider Family Award, and the Tomás Rivera Award.

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).

**Your book shines with an enormous respect and love for Marian Anderson. How did your interest in her evolve into the idea for a book? How did you proceed with the necessary research?**

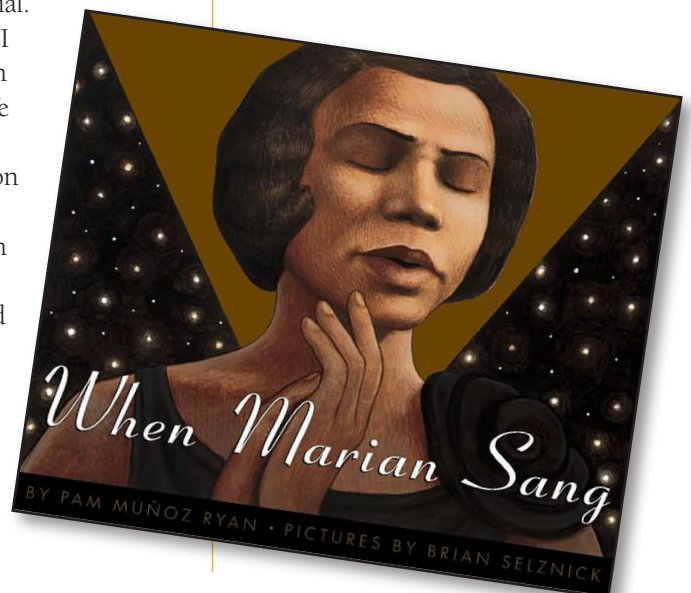
**PRM:** One book often leads to another and that's what happened with *When Marian Sang*. After I wrote, and Brian Selznick illustrated, *Amelia and Eleanor Go For A Ride*, many people approached us at signings to share their own Eleanor Roosevelt stories. Even Brian's uncle had a memory of being at an event in Washington, D.C., when Eleanor Roosevelt and Marian Anderson were present. That led me to the research on Marian Anderson and the concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Both Brian and I were invested in the research. We traveled to the Marian Anderson Historical Society in South Philadelphia, which is located in the singer's

childhood home. We went to the Metropolitan Opera to see *Un Ballo in Maschera*, the opera in which she debuted, and we spent time in the Met's archives going through files of clippings and photographs about Marian Anderson.

**When *Marian Sang* has a strong sense of history in its pages. Yet it tells the story of a time in American history that many young readers may not be aware of before reading your book. Reflect on the journey you hope children will take through the reading of your book.**

**PRM:** First, I hope they will appreciate the story of her perseverance and how her mother's faith and that of her community



supported her when society would not. I hope readers will be able to recognize the change that has taken place since the time of Jim Crow Laws. That they will feel indignant about how things used to be, but hopeful at how far we have come. I hope too, that the story will inspire discussions about how much farther we need to go for so many others.

**Do others of your books deal with injustice, inequality, or prejudice? What leads you to write on this topic for children?**

**PRM:** Some of my books reflect those issues. I often write about those who have been marginalized in society, especially women. But that said, I'm also intrigued by characters, real or imaginary, who lead me to a promising story. My most ardent desire is for the reader to want to turn the page. If I'm excited about a story, if I *care* about the story, then hopefully that feeling will be reflected in my writing and will make the story more compelling for the reader.

**You and illustrator Brian Selznick have formed something of a team over the years. Please talk about how this all began and any joys and challenges of the ongoing relationship.**

**PRM:** Brian and I have been paired for three books: *Riding Freedom*, *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride* and *When Marian Sang*. We had never met until after the first two books were published. We were scheduled

as co-presenters at a conference in Minnesota and our first meeting was at a baggage carousel in the Minneapolis airport. That evening we merged our slides into one show, and the next day, we spoke at the luncheon. Soon after, he told me his uncle's memory about Marian Anderson and another book idea began to take shape in my mind. Now, he lives near me for part of the year so we're able to spend more time together. I hope to work with him again someday. I love the theatrical quality of his work and am a huge fan.

**This issue of *Library Sparks* celebrates Children's Book Awards. Tell us about your response to winning a 2003 Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Honor and the 2003 Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children for *When Marian Sang*.**

**PRM:** It's an honor to be recognized. I deeply appreciate all of the hard work of the committees, their dedication to our profession of children's literature, the volunteer hours they devote to reading, evaluating and discussing the books. The awards often help sustain the life of the book in print and bring it to the attention of many who might not have known about it had it not been for the award. I'm grateful for that too.

**You have written many kinds of books over the years, including picture books and several non-**

**derful middle grade novels. Please reflect on the differences between writing a shorter nonfiction book like *When Marian Sang* and a novel.**

**PRM:** I'll use this analogy. When I write, I paint with words. If I'm writing a picture book, I use a limited palate because I know that the illustrator will say things in the art that I do not need to say with words. So, with a picture book, I hold back, knowing and trusting that the story will be expanded with the art, often in wonderful ways I never expect. But with a novel, I paint with a limitless palate, in a way that is much more descriptive. I'm allowed to engage all of the reader's senses through the words, or at least try. Also, when I write a picture book, I don't necessarily see the illustrations in my mind. I see the text in relation to the pagination. When I write a novel though, I actually see the story in my mind as if it were a movie.

**What is your most recent work?**

**PRM:** My new novel is called *Paint the Wind*. It was a grand departure. Until the idea for the story came to me, I'd been on horseback only a few times. I took hundreds of lessons to prepare for two research rides, one for eight days in southwestern Wyoming, where I slept in a tepee on the banks of the Sweetwater River and rode 6-8 hours a day to track a harem band of wild horses. As my character grew in my imagination, I discovered new territory too, away from the safe and

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familiar. And I became impassioned about our country's wide open spaces, places where there is much more sky than there is earth. The story is about captivity and freedom, holding on and letting go. . . but not in the ways you might expect.

**How can readers learn more about you and your books?**

**PRM:** Go to [www.PamMunozRyan.com](http://www.PamMunozRyan.com) or [www.Scholastic.com](http://www.Scholastic.com).

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the*

*author of five picture books, most recently *Fire Up With Reading!* (UpstartBooks, 2007) and *Our Librarian Won't Tell Us ANYTHING! A Mrs. Skorupski Story* (UpstartBooks, 2006) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*

### Books by Pam Muñoz Ryan

- *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride* illustrated by Brian Selznick. Scholastic, 1999.
- *Armadillos Sleep in Dugouts, and Other Places Animals Live* illustrated by Diane deGroat. Hyperion Books for Children, 1997.
- *La Bandera Que Amamos* illustrated by Ralph Masiello. Charlesbridge, 2002.
- *Becoming Naomi León*. Scholastic Press, 2004.
- *A Box of Friends* illustrated by Mary Whyte. McGraw Hill, 2003.
- *California Here We Come!* illustrated by Kay Salem. Charlesbridge, 1997.
- *The Crayon Counting Book* written with Jerry Pallotta; illustrated by Frank Mazzola, Jr. Charlesbridge, 1996.
- *Doug Counts Down* illustrated by Jumbo Pictures. Disney Press, 1998.
- *Doug's Treasure Hunt* illustrated by Jumbo Pictures. Disney Press, 1999.
- *Esperanza Rising*. Scholastic, 2000.
- *The Flag We Love* illustrated by Ralph Masiello. Charlesbridge, 1996.
- *The Funnie Family Vacation* illustrated by Jumbo Pictures. Disney Press, 1998.
- *Hello Ocean* illustrated by Mark Astrella. Charlesbridge, 2002.
- *How Do You Raise a Raisin?* illustrated by Craig Brown. Charlesbridge, 2003.
- *Mice and Beans* illustrated by Joe Cepeda. Scholastic, 2001.
- *Mud is Cake* illustrated by David McPhail. Hyperion Books for Children, 2002.
- *Nacho and Lolita* illustrated by Claudia Ruida. Scholastic, 2005.
- *One Hundred is a Family* illustrated by Benrei Huang. Hyperion Books for Children, 1994.
- *Paint the Wind*. Scholastic, 2007.
- *A Pinky is a Baby Mouse* illustrated by Diane deGroat. Hyperion Books for Children, 1997.
- *Riding Freedom* illustrated by Brian Selznick. Scholastic, 1998.
- *There Was No Snow on Christmas Eve* illustrated by Dennis Nolan. Hyperion Books for Children, 2006.
- *When Marian Sang* illustrated by Brian Selznick. Scholastic, 2002.
- *Where's Porkchop?* illustrated by Jumbo Pictures. Disney Press, 1999.