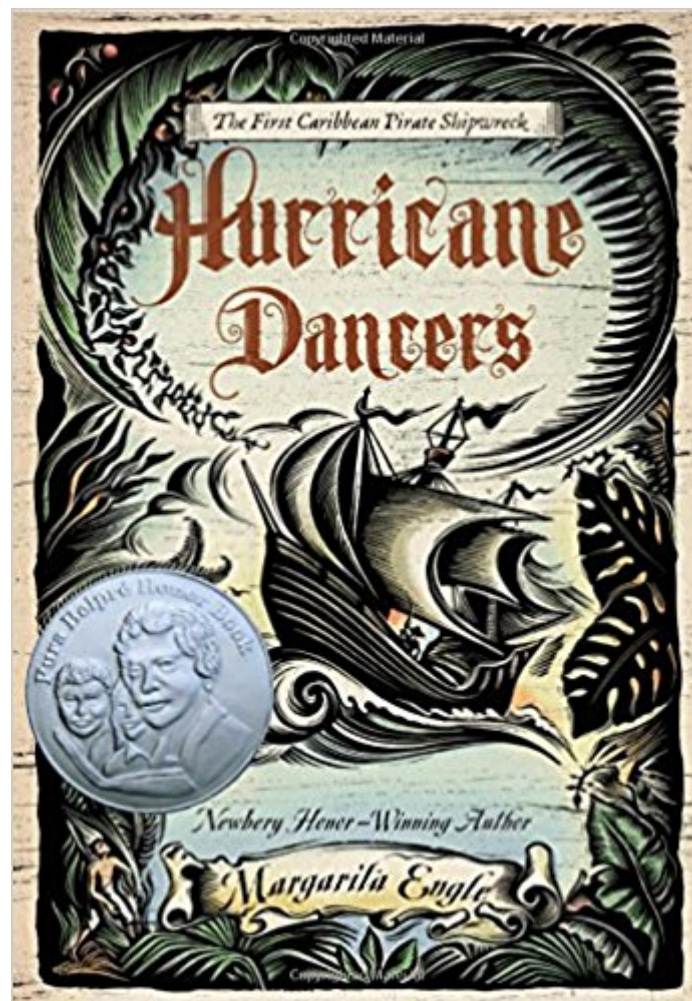




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# Hurricane Dancers: The First Caribbean Pirate Shipwreck (Pura Belpre Honor Books - Author (Narrative))



## Synopsis

Quebrado has been traded from pirate ship to ship in the Caribbean Sea for as long as he can remember. The sailors he toils under call him el quebrado—half islander, half outsider, a broken one. Now the pirate captain Bernardino de Talavera uses Quebrado as a translator to help navigate the worlds and words between his mother's Taíno Indian language and his father's Spanish. But when a hurricane sinks the ship and most of its crew, it is Quebrado who escapes to safety. He learns how to live on land again, among people who treat him well. And it is he who must decide the fate of his former captors. Latino interest.

## Book Information

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Series: Pura Belpre Honor Books - Author (Narrative)

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Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Engle, whose award-winning titles include the Newbery Honor Book, *The Surrender Tree* (2008), offers another accomplished historical novel in verse set in the Caribbean. Young Quebrado's name means "the broken one," a child "of two shattered worlds." The son of a Taíno Indian mother and a Spanish father, he is taken in 1510 from his village on the island that is present-day Cuba and enslaved on a pirate ship, where a brutal conquistador, responsible for thousands of deaths throughout the Americas, is held captive for ransom. When a hurricane destroys the boat, Quebrado is pulled from the water by

a fisherman, NaridãfÂ , whose village welcomes him, but escape from the past proves nearly impossible. Once again, Engle fictionalizes historical fact in a powerful, original story. With the exception of Quebrado, all the characters are based on documented figures (discussed in a lengthy author's note), whose voices narrate many of the poems. While the shifting perspectives create a somewhat dreamlike, fractured story, Engle distills the emotion in each episode with potent rhythms, sounds, and original, unforgettable imagery. Linked together, the poems capture elemental identity questions and the infinite sorrows of slavery and dislocation, felt even by the pirate's ship, which "remembers / her true self, / her tree self, / rooted / and growing, / alive, / on shore." • Grades 6-10. --Gillian Engberg

"The unique juxtaposition of poetry and cruelty creates a peculiar literary tension." •  
 "Once again, Engle fictionalizes historical fact in a powerful, original story." •  
 "Unique and inventive, this is highly readable historical fiction that provides plenty of fodder for discussion." •  
 "Like intersecting rip tides, several first-person narratives converge in this verse novel of the sixteenth century." •  
 "the subject matter is an excellent introduction to the age of exploration and its consequences, showing slavery sinking its insidious roots in the Americas and the price paid by those who were there first." •  
 "Taken individually the stories are slight, but they work together elegantly; the notes and back matter make this a great choice for classroom use." •  
 "Kirkus Reviews

This was a very well written book. It had some great historical context throughout. While the main character, Quebrado is fictional, the rest of the characters are actual people. Engle's ability to tie together these historical people in verse made the book more enjoyable. However, there were some things that threw me off. One of which was the poetic language used. While at some times it was super good, other times the language took away from the story. This might make some turn away from the book. It was very good at the times that the words were used to benefit the story. It was fairly short, but packed full of information about the time.

A wonderful little "epic" that brings the medium of epic poetry to the hands of children. Why more people don't write beautiful things like this, I don't know.

This book tells a fascinating story about a part of the world that many children are unfamiliar with, despite its close proximity to the U.S. The story is told through the viewpoints of several of the characters, which provides a deeper look at the events described. While the main character is fictional the other characters are not. The story is a gripping one about slavery and what being free really means. The fact that the story is told in free verse poetry may turn some students off, but if they will stick with it there is much to enjoy and learn. This book would be great to use as a read-a-loud, or for class discussions. Highly recommended for those who love a well-told story.

In free verse, Engle gives voice to five characters based on early 1500s Caribbean history, including the ruthless conquistador Alfonso de Ojeda and the pirate Bernardino de Talavera. The protagonist, the fictional Quebrado, a boy born of a Taino mother and Spanish father, is enslaved on the pirate ship holding Ojeda captive. With literary legerdemain, Engle's light, quick-moving verses pack into a mere 8,000 or so words a hefty measure of Caribbean history and culture during the tragic years when the indigenous peoples attempted to survive Spanish conquerors. To catch the text's many allusions, readers may want to first read the author's historical endnotes and even do some independent research on the Taino and Ciboney peoples. "Hurricane Dancers" gleams with lyricism and emotional resonance. Because Quebrado speaks both Taino and Spanish, he's called upon to bridge the tenuous, danger-laden relationships between the two groups. Here he feels the freight of that task: My quiet voice feels like a small canoe gliding back and forth between worlds made of words. Teachers may want to use "Hurricane Dancers" as the basis of a classroom dramatization, using the text as dialogue among the five characters. Small groups might research the history and perspective of each party: islanders, conqueror, failed Spanish settler-turned-pirate.

I thought this would be sensational. We studied Columbus's voyages and the beginnings of Spanish conquest. I thought this book would be a good tie-in and tell another side of the story. I hate to say this about a book of poetry, but maybe it's too poetic? metaphoric? I am raising a family of boys, and I think they were about 50/50 on whether or not that "got" it. And age has nothing to do with it... it's more a thing where visual/spatial kids kind of miss a lot of the story, while auditory/verbal kids got it right away. Tough book to teach with when only half the room "gets" it. Especially in a read-aloud situation -- teachers should think twice. Maybe an activity where the children can journal/doodle while they listen would help connect every kid to the story. Personally, I liked it. I think the idea that this \*had\* to be done as free-verse poetry is a little hokey, because it could just as

easily have been written as paragraphs and been about a 20-page book. But so it goes.

Margarita Engle's *Hurricane Dancers: The First Caribbean Pirate Shipwreck* is a beautifully written novel in verse, similar in many ways to her earlier book *The Surrender Tree*. Here again, Engle brings to life a lesser known period of Caribbean history through three distinct but intertwined stories: that of Quebrado; NaridÃfÂ and CaucubÃfÂº; and Ojeda and Talavera. While many of us are familiar with the history of Christopher Columbus, other stories of the conquest and colonization of the Americas are often overlooked. This book offers part of that missing perspective. Set in the early 16th century, *Hurricane Dancers* tells the story of Quebrado, a young boy enslaved on a pirate ship after losing his TaÃfÂ- no mother and Spanish father. In learning about Quebrado's story, we also hear the tales of those around him. Here we learn about Alonso de Ojeda, a contemporary of Columbus, who sailed with Columbus on his second voyage to the Americas. Ojeda became famous for his brutality, both in his settlement of Hispaniola and his later conquest of South America. Yet, in Engle's book we find Ojeda the injured captive of Spanish pirate Bernardino de Talavera. We learn that Talavera is an impoverished conquistador. Once awarded a profitable land grant, Talavera literally worked his indigenous slaves to death, resulting in the loss of all his wealth. In order to avoid debtor's prison, Talavera steals a ship and takes to the seas. And then, on this ship, we are introduced to Quebrado. The sailors name him Quebrado, meaning a broken one, because he is half islander and half outsider. Enslaved and beaten, Quebrado is used by Talavera as a translator because he speaks both Spanish and TaÃfÂ- no. Quebrado eventually gains his freedom when a hurricane sinks the ship and kills most of the crew. After the crash, Quebrado is saved and befriended by NaridÃfÂ , a TaÃfÂ- no fisherman. NaridÃfÂ is in love with CaucubÃfÂº, the daughter of the tribe's leader, who is to be given away in an arranged marriage. Meanwhile, in an interesting twist of fate, Talavera and Ojeda find themselves alive, albeit severely injured, and are forced to depend on each other to survive and find help. In the prose-poetry that follows, Ojeda and Talavera find themselves among the same villagers who have taken in Quebrado. Banished to an alligator infested swamp, the two Spaniards seem to have the nine lives of a cat, surviving even this. Quebrado is soon banished as well and sent away from his newfound home. Ultimately, Quebrado must find the courage to banish the two from the island forever. *Hurricane Dancers* is one of those books with limitless possibilities for classroom use, appropriate across grade levels for read aloud, independent reading or novel study. If you're hesitant to use novel in verse in your classroom, don't be. I'll admit I had my doubts before I read Engle's *Surrender Tree*. But I, along with the other teachers in our monthly book group, loved it. The novelty of this style will be

interesting to students not familiar with it. It's also a much simpler read. There's no complicated dialogue to keep track of or dense pages to wade through. Each page is a poem written from one character's perspective which makes it a great book to be read out loud--especially if you have enough copies for each student to have his or her own. Then, students can take turns reading the lines of the different characters as if it was a play. The simple style won't intimidate struggling readers, but the engaging plot and beautiful descriptive imagery will catch the attention of all of your students. Booklist writes in its review, "Engle distills the emotion in each episode with potent rhythms, sounds, and original, unforgettable imagery. Linked together, the poems capture elemental identity questions and the infinite sorrows of slavery and dislocation. . ." It would be a perfect book to teach elements of literary or poetic analysis. Many students can struggle to understand or analyze the symbolism or imagery of a short poem, but within the context of an entire novel, these things can be easier to uncover and understand. The simple but beautiful imagery will paint amazing pictures in the minds and imaginations of young and old readers alike. But, it's not just a book for reading or language arts classes. It could be quite powerful in a social studies or history course. Hurricane Dancers could easily be integrated into any study on early exploration and conquest of the Caribbean and South America. An amazing unit could be put together using Engle's novel along with Michael Dorris' *Morning Girl*, and the teacher's guide *Rethinking Columbus* published by Rethinking Schools. Quite often our classroom resources focus on the point of view of Columbus or other explorers, but rarely do they give voice to the indigenous groups who inhabited the land or even name those groups. This is not the case with Hurricane Dancers. Engle's "Author's Note" at the end provides a wealth of information on the background of the historical figures and peoples mentioned in the book. *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years* also has a number of great resources written specifically about the Taíno. While Engle's book doesn't focus on current events, it could be an excellent resource for those teaching about more contemporary Social Studies issues, like child slavery. We featured another novel in October, *The Queen of Water*, that, if paired with Hurricane Dancers, could provide an excellent means for studying both historical and contemporary issues around child. If nothing else, this is a moving story of a young boy's journey to redemption. His final message is one that I believe we hope all our students understand and accept for themselves: "I no longer feel like Quebrado, a broken place. . . I am free of all those shattered ways of seeing myself. I am whole" (p. 133). Check out our free educator's guide at our wordpress blog *Vamos a Leer*.

<http://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/january-2013-hurricane-dancers-the-first-caribbean-pirate-shipwreck/>

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