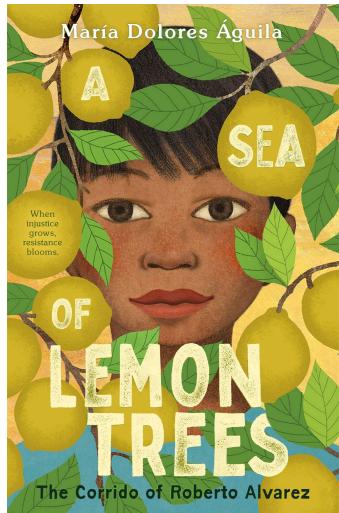


Kent State University's iSchool Reinberger Children's Library Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A SEA OF LEMON TREES BY MARÍA DOLORES ÁGUILA WINS THE 2026 SCOTT O'DELL AWARD FOR HISTORICAL FICTION



[January 2026] The Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction Selection Committee is pleased to announce that the winner of the 2026 award is *A SEA OF LEMON TREES* by MARÍA DOLORES ÁGUILA, published by Roaring Brook Press.

Written in lyrical verse, *A SEA OF LEMON TREES* illuminates an often-overlooked chapter of American history through its compelling narrative and emotional depth. The novel demonstrates exceptional storytelling and historical authenticity, bringing the past vividly to life for young readers. Through poetic language and carefully crafted storytelling, Águila invites readers to engage deeply with history in a way that is both accessible and profoundly moving, while

resonating powerfully with contemporary audiences.

Mary Ann Stahr, Ph.D., Chair of the 2026 Committee, noted, "Among an exceptional group of nominees, *A Sea of Lemon Trees* stood out for its clear historical vision and its thoughtful invitation to young readers to bear witness to a lesser-known chapter of American history, fostering empathy, reflection, and lasting historical understanding."

After receiving news of her award, María Dolores Águila said, "I'm beyond honored to receive the Scott O'Dell Award for *A Sea of Lemon Trees*. This recognition means the world to me, not only as an author, but as someone who believes in the power of stories to connect young readers with history and hope. To know that *A Sea of Lemon Trees* is being celebrated in this way is incredibly humbling, and I'm so grateful to everyone who helped bring it to the hands of young readers."

The 2026 Committee members included Mary Ann Stahr, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, iSchool, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio; Emma Wright, Graduate Student and Children's Assistant, Wood County District Public Library, Ohio; Sue Michalowski, Librarian, St. John of the Cross School, Chicago, Illinois; Lisa Mulvenna, Head of Children's and Teen Services, Clinton-Macomb Public Library, Michigan; Stephanie

Raub, Media Specialist, East Woods Intermediate, Hudson City School District, Ohio; and Kate Davis, Youth and Inclusive Services Consultant, Prairie Lakes Library System, Wisconsin.

KSU iSchool Scott O'Dell Committee Advisors included Mary Anne Nichols, Senior Lecturer and Michelle Baldini, Director, Reinberger Children's Library Center.

The Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction was established in 1982 by children's author Scott O'Dell to encourage the writing of historical fiction for young readers. The award, administered by the matriarch of the O'Dell family, Elizabeth Hall, offers a prize of \$5,000 to an author of a distinguished work of historical fiction set in the Americas and published by a U.S. publisher. For more information about Scott O'Dell and the Scott O'Dell Award, please visit <https://scottodell.com/the-scott-odell-award>.

About Kent State University School of Information's Reinberger Children's Library Center

As part of its mission, the Reinberger Children's Library Center (Reinberger Center) serves as a research facility on the Kent State Campus and works to cultivate a community of passionate and dedicated individuals, including faculty, students, staff, practitioners, researchers, authors, illustrators, children's book creators, and community members, who are committed to advancing comprehensive literary education, interdisciplinary research and career exposure in the field of children's literature and youth services.

The Center plays an integral role in its dynamic initiatives, dedicated to fostering education, training, connectivity, and empowerment within its community. Serving as the central hub to the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction Selection Committee is one notable example. This esteemed committee comprises a distinguished group of experts in children's literature, including external professionals such as library practitioners, as well as faculty and professional staff from KSU's iSchool. Each year, at least one committee member from the Kent State University School of Information is selected to serve, ensuring continuity and facilitating the onboarding of new members and chairs. This approach allows for fresh perspectives from outside members while ensuring that the knowledge and experience of the Kent State University School of Information members are actively engaged in the committee's work.

The 2026 committee continued Kent State University School of Information's commitment to providing meaningful professional experiences through the successful inclusion of iSchool graduate student intern Emma Wright. Her service on the committee

demonstrates how emerging professionals can contribute valuable perspectives while gaining practical insights in library services and children's literature through the specialized internship program that offers four graduate credit hours. This initiative enhances both the award's mission and the School's broader goal of bridging academic study with professional practice.

About the Reinberger Collection

The Reinberger Center at Kent State University serves as a dynamic hub for research, education, and cultural engagement that extends far beyond its physical collection. While housing over 40,000 thousand children's books, limited prints and original picture book art, posters, and related ephemera that represent a rich tapestry of children's literature and its evolution over time, the Reinberger Center's impact is felt through its vibrant programming, community engagement, and scholarly initiatives. As an irreplaceable primary source for researchers and scholars, the collection enables investigation into how children's books have reflected, shaped, and challenged societal values across different eras. Through conferences, symposia, workshops, international fellowships, connected research grants and creative residencies, the Reinberger Center creates meaningful connections across varied communities and disciplines. Students gain hands-on professional experience through initiatives like the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction and specialized internships, working alongside established practitioners.

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