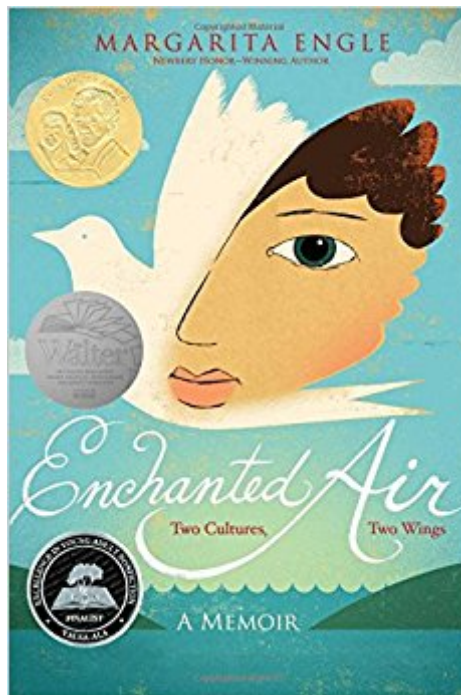




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Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir



Synopsis

In this poetic memoir, which won the Pura Belpré Author Award, was a YALSA Nonfiction Finalist, and was named a Walter Dean Myers Award Honoree, acclaimed author Margarita Engle tells of growing up as a child of two cultures during the Cold War. Margarita is a girl from two worlds. Her heart lies in Cuba, her mother's tropical island country, a place so lush with vibrant life that it seems like a fairy tale kingdom. But most of the time she lives in Los Angeles, lonely in the noisy city and dreaming of the summers when she can take a plane through the enchanted air to her beloved island. Words and images are her constant companions, friendly and comforting when the children at school are not. Then a revolution breaks out in Cuba. Margarita fears for her far-away family. When the hostility between Cuba and the United States erupts at the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Margarita's worlds collide in the worst way possible. How can the two countries she loves hate each other so much? And will she ever get to visit her beautiful island again?

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 6-10 • A deeply personal memoir-in-verse filled with Engle's trademark intricately woven lyricism. The author's memories focus on the first 14 years of her life, beginning with idyllic summers spent in her mother's homeland of Cuba and ending during the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and subsequent travel ban. Engle captures the heart of a quiet, young girl torn

between two cultures. This historical memoir/love poem to Cuba couldn't be more timely. With the recent easing of relations with Cuba, teachers can use the text as an accessible entry point into the history behind this very current event. And while the narrative unfolds over 50 years ago, Engle's experiences will still resonate with adolescents and teens today. Any child who has felt like an outsider will recognize themselves in Margarita's tale. When the Cuban Missile Crisis ended and everyone's focus shifted, the author was left confused, empty and unfulfilled by her school's seemingly senseless focus on what felt like irrelevant historical events. What American child with ties to a country experiencing turmoil couldn't relate to the lingering after-effects of far off events in our era of two-minute news bytes? VERDICT A more than worthwhile purchase for any library in need of a universally applicable coming-of-age tale, a fantastic new memoir-in-verse, or a glimpse into Cuba's past. —Jill Heritage Maza, Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, NJ

"In Margarita Engle's hauntingly beautiful memoir, readers can't help but feel as if they are pressing their hands with her against ancient cave walls and at the same time falling asleep in a darkened room full of fireflies. Engle's struggle to unite her twin selves—the Cuban girl who rides bareback with her cousins under a hot, steamy sun and the American girl who pretends to smoke in the school bathroom—lead the way to 'Herds of wild feelings/long extinct.' This is a book to return to, page after page, line after line. Exquisite." (Kathi Appelt, author of *The Underneath*, Newbery Honor and National Book Award Finalist)* "A deeply personal memoir-in-verse filled with Engle's trademark intricately woven lyricism. The author's memories focus on the first 14 years of her life, beginning with idyllic summers spent in her mother's homeland of Cuba and ending during the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and subsequent travel ban. Engle captures the heart of a quiet, young girl torn between two cultures. This historical memoir/love poem to Cuba couldn't be more timely. With the recent easing of relations with Cuba, teachers can use the text as an accessible entry point into the history behind this very current event. And while the narrative unfolds over 50 years ago, Engle's experiences will still resonate with adolescents and teens today. Any child who has felt like an outsider will recognize themselves in Margarita's tale. When the Cuban Missile Crisis ended and everyone's focus shifted, the author was left confused, empty and unfulfilled by her school's seemingly senseless focus on what felt like irrelevant historical events. What American child with ties to a country experiencing turmoil couldn't relate to the lingering after-effects of far off events in our era of two-minute news bytes? VERDICT: A more than worthwhile purchase for any library in need of a universally applicable coming-of-age tale, a fantastic new memoir-in-verse, or a glimpse

into Cuba's past." (School Library Journal, May 2015, STARRED REVIEW)* "Poet and novelist Engle has won a Newbery Honor, the Pura Belpré Award, and the Américas Award, among others.... This time she brings readers her own childhood. Employing free verse, she narrates growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s and early '60s torn by her love of two countries: the United States, where she was born and raised, and Cuba, where her mother was from and where she spent vacations visiting family. Woven into the fabric of her childhood is the anxiety of deteriorating relations between the two countries as the Cuban revolution takes place, affecting both her family and the two countries at large.... Though it is a very personal story, it is also one that touches on issues affecting so many immigrants.... As so many of our children are immigrants or children of immigrants, we need more of these stories, especially when they are as beautifully told as this one." (Kirkus Reviews, May 2015, STARRED REVIEW)* "Reflecting on her childhood in Los Angeles and her Cuban heritage, Engle's memoir in verse is, indeed, nothing short of enchanting. Descriptions of Cuba as a tropical paradise and the home of her beloved abuelita come alive in the spare free-verse poems. She evocatively addresses weighty issues, such as her mother's homesickness, being bicultural, the challenge of moving homes and schools, the Cuban Revolution, and negotiating an identity that is being torn apart by politics and social attitudes at complete odds with her feelings and experiences. With characteristic precision, Engle captures a range of emotions and observations salient to a young girl.... In addition to the arresting content that provides many opportunities for learning, the craft of this memoir lends itself to creative exploration in the classroom.... The book's poignancy and layered beauty make it a worthy addition to any collection and a fitting companion to Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) and Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011)." (Booklist, May 2015, STARRED REVIEW)

As a teacher of English learners, I see lots of connections my students can make to being bi-cultural. As a citizen of the world, the beautiful insight and the author's recall from memories were delightful. A quick and easy read I highly recommend.

Great book, but the author reveals some of her American political bias. This is only seen in one of the supplemental sections, not in the poetry itself. The book would work well with my middle school students, especially in showing the relationship between current Cuban affairs and history.

This is a beautifully written book that conveys the pull between cultures experienced by many

children. Margarita Engle's *Enchanted Air* tells her story in breathtaking verse, accessible for even very young readers. Highly recommended!

Bought this for my 13 year old and she loved it.

Gorgeously written, deeply moving memoir in verse.... an engaging read for teens and adults. I read this in one sitting and learned so much!

Beautiful novel written in verse.

Brilliant and poignant

Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings (A Memoir) by Margarita Engle
Atheneum Books for Young Readers
2015
189 pages
ISBN: 9781481435222
Enchanted, indeed! Readers will experience the sights and sounds of Cuba through Margarita Engle's triumphant YA book. Engle captivates and transcends decades and distance. Remembering back to her youth spent in Cuba before the Cold War, Engle describes an enchanted island of sun, sea, horses, farms, fragrant flowers, bright colors, music and tropical fruit. The lime picked by her grandmother is the most fragrant lovely thing young Margarita has ever tasted. When her family moves to smoggy Los Angeles, she is forced into a school where she's an outsider. As she looks at the other students, she realizes that she will never fit in. The girl longs for her other home, her island home. She misses her Abuelita and the enchanted air of Cuba. April 1961 brings the Bay of Pigs, a failed U.S. attempt to control Cuba and Margarita is looked upon as the enemy by classmates. She is afraid that she may have to go to a war camp like Japanese Americans during World War II. The girl retreats into books where she can be free. 1962 is the beginning of the Cold War and American school children are taught to hide under their desks for nuclear drills. Grown ups whisper and people are visibly shaken. America is afraid of Cuba and the Soviet Union. America holds its breath as the President continues talks with Khrushchev. America closes its doors to Cuba. Margarita's family may never see their relatives again. Engle writes in the author's note, "While I was writing *Enchanted Air*, my hope was that normalization would begin before it went to press. That prayer has been answered....one of the closest neighbors of the United States is just beginning to be accessible to other American citizens." Young Margarita lives for books and poetry, spending much of her time visiting the library. She writes, "Books become my refuge./Reading keeps me hopeful." How many readers have

escaped through books? The written word is powerful indeed, connecting a lonely child with a world outside her four walls and a country that does not welcome her. The "two wings" are the two countries: America and Cuba, her two lives so different yet both a part of her. Readers will engage with the verse structure of the book. Easy and accessible to readers, even reluctant ones, *Enchanted Air* is a great addition to any multi-cultural studies collection or classroom. Engle describes the historical incidents of the Cuban missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs from a child's point of view. It is powerful and poignant. Highly, highly recommended grade 6-up. This is one book that has many teaching opportunities: history, sociology, English, poetry, and teach it for the love of literature! Visit my YA blog for all YA reviews; Books By Pamela Thompson--What We're Reading Now

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