

## **BELPRÉ, PURA (1899–1982)**

“For a while at least, through the power of a story and the beauty of its language, the child escapes to a world of its own.” Pura Belpré. *Latina Legacies: Identity, Biography, and Community*.

Pura Belpré was born in Cidra, Puerto Rico, and came to New York in 1919 to attend her sister's wedding, but remained in the city for the rest of her life. In 1921 she accepted a position as Hispanic assistant at the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library (NYPL), and discovered her love of working with children there. *Perez and Martina: A Porto Rican Folk Tale* was the first of her many successes as an author. She compiled and published *The Tiger and the Rabbit and Other Tales* (1946), the first collection of Puerto Rican folktales in English published in the United States. She became a writer, editor, and translator of children's stories, but Belpré's interests expanded beyond the world of books. A pioneer helping to build the early Puerto Rican community, Belpré advocated on behalf of Spanish-speaking New Yorkers. Among her innovations, she instituted bilingual story hours in the library. While working as the Spanish children's specialist, Belpré published *Juan Bobo and the Queen's Necklace: A Puerto Rican Folk Tale* (1962). In retirement, she continued working with the South Bronx Library Project and published five more books before her death, leaving a rich literary and public service legacy.