Younger teens (and plenty of adults) will be transported by Washington writer Donna Barba Higuera’s second novel *The Last Cuentista* (Levine Queirdo/Chronicle), the story of Petra Peña, refugee from a ruined Earth and the sole holder of earthly memories. Relocated to a distant planet after Earth is struck by a comet, Petra and her fellow refugees are the last remnants of the human race, but only Petra can remember what was left behind, including the stories she learned from her beloved abuelita. Someone wants all memories of the past erased – can Petra keep the stories alive? *The Last Cuentista* has received starred reviews from both *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*. Higuera’s previous novel for middle grade readers, *Lucy Wong Won’t Dance*, won a Pura Belpré Honor Award, the ALA Sid Fleischman Award, and a PNBA Award.

**Deborah Hopkinson / The Story of a Story**

For anyone who has ever faced an empty page with a feeling of trepidation, award-winning author Deborah Hopkinson offers some wonderful words of advice in her new picture book, *The Story of a Story* (Neal Porter Books/Holiday House), illustrated by Hadley Hooper. Written with even the youngest would-be-author in mind, the tale follows the struggles of a young boy yearning to create something special and unique. This simple picture book shows how inspiration often comes from persistence, and that all stories are built one word at a time. Deborah Hopkinson is herself the author of over 40 fiction and non-fiction books for young readers, including *Apples to Oregon* and *Titanic: Voices from the Disaster*. Among her many honors and awards, she is the recipient of two SCBWI Golden Kite Awards. Hopkinson lives near Portland.

**Varian Johnson / Playing the Cards You’re Dealt**

Issues of toxic masculinity and family legacy propel Varian Johnson’s *Playing the Cards You’re Dealt* (Scholastic), a middle-grade novel about Anthony (Ant) Joplin. Now ten years old, Ant is finally old enough to participate in the spades tournament every man in his family has won before him. Determined to meet his father’s expectations and uphold the family tradition, Ant decides to keep secret the fact that he has a new partner at the card table, because his new partner is a girl! Turns out, winning at spades isn’t the only Jordan family tradition – seems that keeping secrets is, too. Varian Johnson is the author of numerous middle-grade and young adult novels, including *The Parker Inheritance*, which was a Coretta Scott King Award Honor winner and a Boston Globe/Horn Book Honor winner.

**Frank Morrison / Kick Push**

In a lively and joyous picture book, Frank Morrison offers young readers a reassuring story about being true to yourself in *Kick Push* (Bloomsbury Children’s Books/Macmillan). Skateboarder Epic has just moved in to a new neighborhood, and he’s on the lookout for a skating crew just like the one he left behind at his old home. Not finding one, he decides to try other sports in order to fit in. Football, soccer, baseball – nothing seems right – until Epic discovers that by staying true to himself, new friends will surely follow. Frank Morrison works as a fine artist and has illustrated many books for children, including the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award-winning *RESPECT: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul*. *Kick Push* marks his debut as writer/illustrator.