



Title: [Henry's Freedom Box](#)

Author: Ellen Levine

Illustrator: Kadir Nelson

Themes: Slavery, Underground Railroad

Hear the book read aloud here: [Henry's Freedom Box](#)

Volunteer readers should review the Author's Note at the end of the story for relevant background information beforehand.

★ 3rd Grade Common Core Reading Standard ★

Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

I. INTRODUCTION (PREP QUESTIONS)

- Read the entire title, pointing out that it is a true story, nonfiction. Have students recall another recent book called [Follow the Drinking Gourd](#), reviewing the Underground Railroad and the dangerous struggle of slaves who tried desperately to escape to freedom. Point out the silver Caldecott Honor on the cover, an award the book won in 2008 for outstanding illustrations.
- Tell students that today's story is true. It is another story of courage and bravery and they will learn more about the evils of slavery and how slaves were treated at that time in American history.

II. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES

During Reading

- Pp. 1-2: Read; have students share their feelings on how slaves were not allowed to know their birthdays. Ask students to suggest reasons why that was done with the slaves (to make them feel worthless, powerless, etc.).
- Pp. 3-4: Read; reread the second paragraph about what Henry's mother said. Have students note the **simile** (a comparison of two things using the words **like** or **as**) and ask students what two things are being compared (*slave children/leaves torn from trees*). Have students reflect on how such an image makes them feel, and why.
- Pp. 5-6: Read; have students discuss how Henry was feeling on p. 5 and why (hopeful), and what caused it to change on p. 6 (will be given to master's son).
- How does the author use "**showing writing**" on p. 6 to share a character trait about Henry (not saying "thank you" because that would be a lie).
- Pp. 7-8: Read; have students look at the illustration and describe what they see on the pages. How do the characters look on these pages? How does it make you feel? Discuss the author's use of the bird representing freedom.
- Pp. 9-10: Read; have students imagine being beaten every time they made a mistake.
- Pp. 11-12: Read; have students infer why slaves didn't dare sing in the streets.

- Pp. 13-14: Read; have students share their feelings about the concept of “selling” people for money. Reread the last paragraph and final sentence. Tell students these are an example of **foreshadowing**, a type of **figurative language** when an author warns or indicates that something is about to happen in the future.
- Pp. 17-18: Read; have students share their feelings about Henry’s family being sold. Have them imagine how they would feel if that could happen to them.
- Pp. 19-22: Read; discuss the feeling tone of loss and devastation.
- Pp. 23-24: Read; have students share their feelings about Henry’s plan. Have them predict what kinds of things Henry would have to endure sealed in a box. What does the author’s use of “**showing writing**” help us understand about Henry? (desperate for freedom, willing to take any risk to be free, has nothing left to lose since his family was taken away from him, etc.)
- Pp. 25-26: Read; ask students why Henry needed the help of Dr. Smith, who was white, in addition to the help of James? (slaves didn’t know how to read or write; knowledge of someone to whom Henry could be mailed in a free state)
- Pp. 27-28: Read; tell students that *vitriol* is a highly corrosive strong mineral acid. Using the author’s use of “**showing writing**”, ask students what character traits we continue to learn about Henry (willing to suffer horrible personal injury in order to be free, etc.).
- Pp. 29-30: Read; have students identify the kinds of risks Henry was taking with his box plan. Have them anticipate what Henry would have to endure for days inside a box (no food, no toilet, hot, hard to breathe, etc.).
- Pp. 31-32: Read; discuss what ways Henry had to suffer.
- Pp. 33-34: Read; have students share their observations on the size of Henry’s box. Have them imagine how painfully uncomfortable it would be to maintain that position for a long time.
- Pp. 35-36: Read; ask students what Henry meant when he thought, “I *am* mail. But not the kind they imagine.”
- Pp. 37-38: Read; discuss Henry’s “birthday”.
 - Why do you think that the author decided to title the book Henry’s Freedom Box? Why is important for us to remember such stories of our country’s history? How can it help us for the future?
 - Refer to the end of the book with the author’s note. Talk about why authors sometimes include an author’s note. How might the author’s note be helpful to the reader?

III. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES

Post Reading

- Why do you think that the author decided to title the book Henry’s Freedom Box? Why is important for us to remember such stories of our country’s history? How can it help us for the future?
- If time allows, either read The Author’s Note to students or share some of the details such as Henry spent 27 hours (longer than one day) in the box, traveling 350 miles.