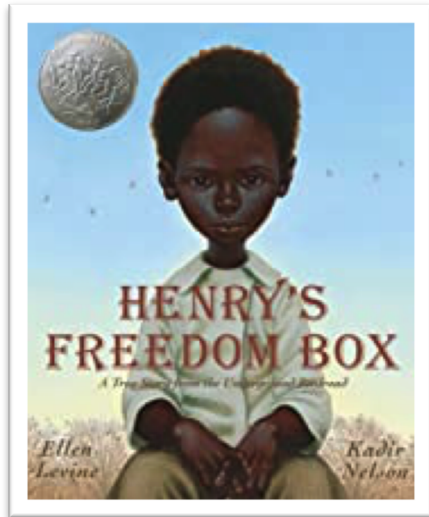


Read for Pleasure

Henry's Freedom Box

By Ellen Levine and Kadir Nelson



Henry Brown wasn't sure how old he was.

Henry was a slave and slaves weren't allowed to know their birthdays.

But what he did know was that he wanted to live in a world where his life belonged to him.

It was then that he had a most ingenious idea...



Title Talk

The title of this story is: Henry's Freedom Box.

- Henry's box is described as a FREEDOM box. What do you think this might mean? Discuss.
- Interestingly, we are told that this box is owned by Henry. Might this be significant?
- We are also told that this story is one that is true. How does this make you feel towards A] the story and B] Henry "Box" Brown?

Cover Chat

Now look at the cover of this picture book.

- We see Henry sat in the middle of a cottonfield. A cloudless sky looks down on him and the harvest is ready to be picked. Yet Henry is not smiling. Why might this be?
- In the sky, high above Henry, are some birds. Might this be significant?
- Which word in the book's title might these birds refer to? Why?
- What might Henry be thinking of at this time? Why might this be?

Page 1-2

- How does the fact that, as a slave, you weren't allowed to know your birthday make you feel? Why?
- Again, we see Henry Brown as a child, resting. He is wearing the same clothes. Again, he is not smiling and looks directly into our eyes. Might this be significant?
- He is sat on an upturned barrel, his back leaning against a wall. His feet are bare. Why do you think the illustrator chose to depict Henry in this way?
- Compare this illustration to the one we see on the front cover. How is it similar? How is it different? Might this be significant?

Page 3-4

- How do the words spoken by Henry's mother link to the illustration seen on page 4?
- At what time of year is this scene set? Might this be important?

Remember: autumn is a season we often associate with change and reflection.

- Why do you think Henry's mother spoke these words to Henry and his siblings when they were too young to do anything about their situation? Discuss.



Page 5-6

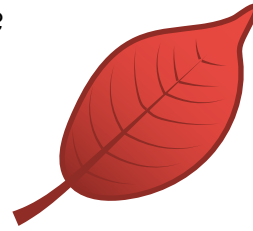
- Why did Henry not say thank you when his master told him he must now work for his son? Discuss.

Page 7-8

- How long was it before Henry had to say goodbye to his family?
- How traumatic must this have been for A] Henry and B] his family?
- This is a time of great change for Henry. How is this depicted by the season in which it is set?
- Why do you think the words '*Free bird! Happy bird!*' have been written in italics. Discuss.
- Does this idea remind you of the front cover in any way? How so?

Page 9-10

- Where does Henry end up working? Is he good at his job?
- What would happen to Henry (or anyone else) who made a mistake?
- How would this have made the workers feel?
- How is this depicted on page 10?



Page 11-12

- When Henry meets Nancy he wants to sing. Why might this be?
- And yet he does not. He hums instead. Why?

Page 13-14

- How can Henry think himself lucky when he is still a slave?
- What threat hangs over Henry and Nancy?
- How does this make you feel when you hear this? Why?



Page 15-18

- Why do you think Henry reacts as he does when he finds out his wife and children have been sold at the slave market? Discuss.

Page 19-20

- How traumatic an experience would this have been for Henry, as well as for Nancy and their children?
- Why was such a terrible thing allowed to happen?

Page 21-22

- Henry no longer sings. He cannot even bring himself to hum. Why?
- The illustrator hides Henry's face and depicts him with his back to us. Why do you think the illustrator chooses to do this?

Remember: this is a very personal time of grief for Henry and he deserves some privacy at this time.

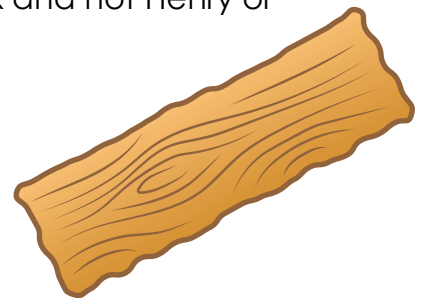
- What does this tell us about how the illustrator feels towards Henry and the situation he finds himself in through no fault of his own?

Page 23-24

- Why does Henry think about being free after hearing a bird singing in a tree and watching it fly into the open sky? Discuss.
- Have we considered this idea before? Where?
- What idea does Henry come up with to set himself free?
- What does James worry might happen to Henry while he is inside of the box?
- Which word does Henry use that would have motivated him to put his plan into action?
- How powerful a word is HOPE? Why?

Page 25-26

- Where is Henry's box being delivered to? Why is it being delivered to this address?
- Why is it Dr Smith who writes this address on the box and not Henry or James?
- What else does Dr Smith write on the box?
- Why might he have written this in capital letters?



Page 27-28

- Why does Henry need an excuse to stay at home the next day?
- What does he do to give himself the excuse he so desperately needs?
- What does this tell us about Henry? Discuss.

Page 29-30

- Why does Henry climb into the box under the cover of darkness?
- Why does James nail the box shut?
- What does this mean for Henry?



Page 31-32

- The box that Henry is hiding in is placed upside down. What does this mean for Henry?
- How does the illustrator depict this on page 32?

Page 33-34

- How does luck play a part in Henry's survival?
- How relieved must Henry have felt during this time?
- Do we feel the same way? Why?

Page 35-36

- Eventually, Henry continues his journey on a train, the sound of which is described as being a song to which Henry falls asleep to. Might this be significant? Discuss.

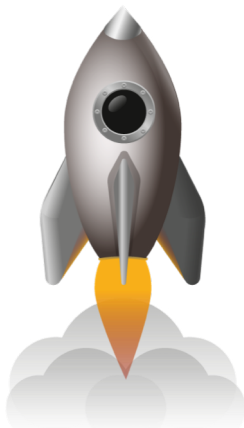
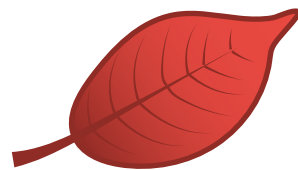
Page 37-38

- On which date did Henry arrive in Philadelphia?
- Why does Henry consider this to be his birthday from that day on?
- What nickname is he given to Henry because of his experience?
- How happy would Henry have been from this day forward? Discuss.

Remember: he has still lost Nancy and his children and never sees them again.

Think about the story as a whole:

How important is it that we tell (and keep telling) the story of Henry "Box" Brown?



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Thomas Wharton