

LESSON PLAN – READING *HENRY’S FREEDOM BOX* (GRADES 3-5)

OBJECTIVE: Introduce students to Henry “Box” Brown and the remarkable way he escaped slavery.

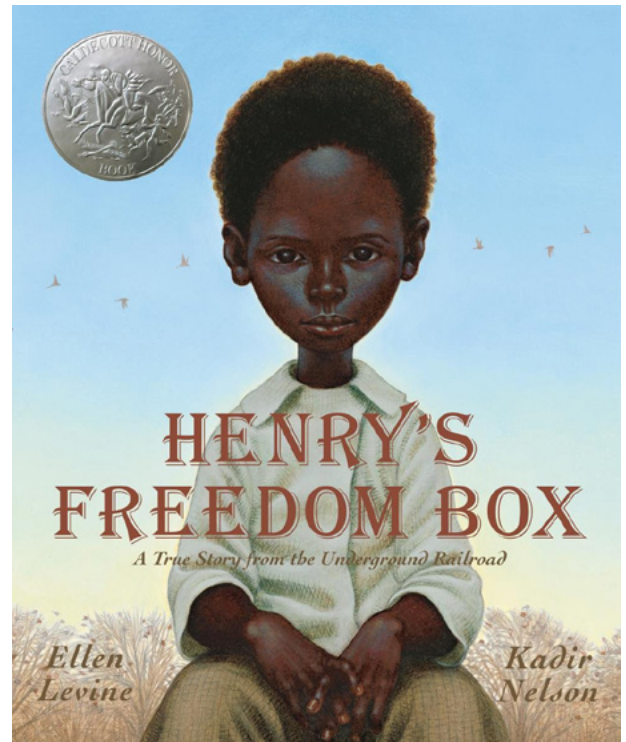
CONTENT AREA: Social Studies

TIME ALLOTMENT: One class period (could be extended)

SKILLS: Reading and analysis, cause and effect of historical events

DESCRIPTION: Explore Henry’s journey of freedom from slavery. This is an inspiring portrait of one of the most notable stories of escapes to freedom during the era of the Underground Railroad.

TEACHER TIP: Great lesson plan for remote learning opportunities and Black History Month.



PRE-READING ACTIVITY I

Ask students to carefully look at the cover of *Henry’s Freedom Box* and predict how Henry might escape to freedom.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY II

Introduce students to the vocabulary words. Ask students to write each of the following words on a note card and they will use their vocabulary note cards for the post reading activity.

Slave: term for persons held in bondage and forced to perform labor or services against their will, under threat of mistreatment, or death. Note: Enslaved is the preferred term.

Master: A person who owns slaves .

Free: Not under the control or in the power of another person.

Market: A gathering for the purchase and sale of “goods.”

Station: A terminal where trains load or unload passengers or goods. Note: Also the term used to identify a safe place for freedom seekers.

Steamboat: A boat driven by steam power.

Mistress: A woman who has control or ownership of another person.

READING

Read the book *Henry Box Brown: A True Story From The Underground Railroad* by Ellen Levine (author) and Kadir Nelson (Illustrator) or visit website below to watch a video of Ms. Levine reading the book aloud.

<http://www.scholastic.com/teacher/videos/teacher-videos.htm#3193529792001/5705791001>

POST READING ACTIVITY I

Ask your students the following discussion questions:

- » Why didn't Henry know his birthday?
- » Even though Henry's master didn't abuse his family, what was his mother's warning?
- » How was Henry able to get off work?
- » Why did Henry mail himself in a box?
- » How long was Henry in the box?

POST READING ACTIVITY II

Explain to students that you will read them a sentence that is missing a word. Ask them to hold up the vocabulary card that correctly finishes each sentence.

- 1) Families were sold apart from each other at the slave _____. (market)
- 2) Henry did not know his birthday because he was a _____. (slave)
- 3) Henry was given to the son of his _____. (master)
- 4) Henry hoped that his mater would set him _____. (free)
- 5) Henry met Nancy when she was shopping for her _____. (mistress)
- 6) His friends put Henry in the box and took him to the railroad _____. (station)
- 7) The box Henry was hiding in was placed on a _____. (steamboat)

KEY FACTS AND INFORMATION

- » Born in Louisa County, Virginia in 1815 or 1816
- » On his owner's deathbed, Henry was given to his owner's son at age 15
- » Worked in a tobacco factory
- » Had to have permission to marry (enslaved marriages was just a ceremony, not legal by states standards)
- » Wife belonged to a different owner



Advertisement for Adams & Co. from an 1852 directory. Adams was the express delivery service that had taken the box containing Henry Brown from Richmond to Philadelphia three years earlier | Courtesy of Library of Virginia.

KEY FACTS AND INFORMATION (CONT.)

- » Henry paid money to his wife's owner so that she and their children wouldn't be re-sold; he sold them anyway
- » His wife and children were sold apart
- » Henry's crate was only 3 ft. long, 2 ft. wide and 2 ½ ft. deep
- » Henry was over 6 feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds, so he laid in the box in a fetal position
- » Henry fled at the age of 33
- » On March 24, 1849, Henry reached Philadelphia, still not free and considered a fugitive
- » Fredrick Douglass criticized Henry for publically revealing how he escaped
- » Two other abolitionists, Samuel Smith and James Caesar Anthony Smith, built similar crates but were captured because Henry's story spread. Samuel Smith was arrested; James C.A. Smith was never charged.
- » He received his nickname (Henry "Box" Brown) at a Boston antislavery convention
- » He fled to England once the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act became law
- » Henry married a British woman in 1855 and they had a daughter together
- » He worked as a "Magician" and "Mesmerist" (mesmerist was a hypnotist) naming himself the "African Prince"
- » Left England, moved to Canada, and remained there the rest of his life
- » Henry died in 1897 in Toronto, Canada

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Students may want to learn more about Henry “Box” Brown and the Underground Railroad. Those interested in learning more will find the following websites offer a variety of materials:

Encyclopedia Virginia: "Henry Box Brown (1815 or 1816–1897)"

Encyclopedia Virginia is an authoritative and user-friendly resource on the history and culture of Virginia. A project of Virginia Humanities in partnership with the Library of Virginia, they publish topical and biographical entries written by scholars, edited to be accessible to a general audience, and vigorously fact checked. Entries are accompanied by primary documents and media objects, including images, audio and visual clips, and links to Google Street View tours of historic sites.

https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Brown_Henry_Box_ca_1815

The New York Times Article: "When Special Delivery Meant Deliverance for a Fugitive Slave"

Learn more about this story and view a copy of the actual account that Mr. McKim wrote within days of Mr. Brown's stepping out of the box and into his life, which was made available to *The New York Times* by the New York Historical Society.

<https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/26/when-special-delivery-meant-deliverance-for-a-fugitive-slave/>



The resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia | Library of Congress