

Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad

By Ellen Levine

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A stirring, dramatic story of a slave who mails himself to freedom by a Jane Addams Peace Award-winning author and a Coretta Scott King Award-winning artist.

Henry Brown doesn't know how old he is. Nobody keeps records of slaves' birthdays. All the time he dreams about freedom, but that dream seems farther away than ever when he is torn from his family and put to work in a warehouse. Henry grows up and marries, but he is again devastated when his family is sold at the slave market. Then one day, as he lifts a crate at the warehouse, he knows exactly what he must do: He will mail himself to the North. After an arduous journey in the crate, Henry finally has a birthday -- his first day of freedom.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Levine (*Freedom's Children*) recounts the true story of Henry Brown, a slave who mailed himself to freedom. Thanks to Nelson's (*Ellington Was Not a Street*) penetrating portraits, readers will feel as if they can experience Henry's thoughts and feelings as he matures through unthinkable adversity. As a boy, separated from his mother, he goes to work in his new master's tobacco factory and eventually meets and marries another slave, with whom he has three children. In a heartwrenching scene depicted in a dramatically shaded pencil, watercolor and oil illustration, Henry watches as his family—suddenly sold in the slave market—disappears down the road. Henry then enlists the help of an abolitionist doctor and mails himself in a wooden crate "to a place where there are no slaves!" He travels by horse-drawn cart, steamboat and train before his box is delivered to the Philadelphia address of the doctor's friends on March 30, 1849. Alongside Henry's anguished thoughts en route, Nelson's clever cutaway images reveal the man in his cramped quarters (at times upside-down). A concluding note provides answers to questions that readers may wish had been integrated into the story line, such as where did Henry begin his journey? (Richmond, Va.); how long did it take? (27 hours). Readers never learn about Henry's life as a free man—or, perhaps unavoidably, whether he was ever reunited with his family. Still, these powerful illustrations will make readers feel as if they have gained insight into a resourceful man and his extraordinary story. Ages 4-8. *(Jan.)*
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From School Library Journal
Grade 2–5—Inspired by an actual 1830s lithograph, this beautifully crafted picture book briefly relates the story of Henry "Box" Brown's daring escape from slavery. Torn from his mother as a child, and then forcibly separated from his wife and children as an adult, a heartsick and desperate Brown conspired with abolitionists and successfully traveled north to Philadelphia in a packing crate. His journey took just over one full day, during which he was often sideways or upside down in a wooden crate large enough to hold him, but small enough not to betray its contents. The story ends with a reimagining of the lithograph that inspired it, in which Henry Brown emerges from his unhappy confinement—in every sense of the word—and smiles upon his arrival in a comfortable Pennsylvania parlor. Particularly considering the broad scope of Levine's otherwise well-written story, some of the ancillary "facts" related in her text are unnecessarily dubious; reports vary, for instance, as to whether the man who sealed Henry into the crate was a doctor or a cobbler. And, while the text places Henry's arrival on March 30, other sources claim March 24 or 25. Nelson's illustrations, always powerful and nuanced, depict the evolution of a self-possessed child into a determined and fearless young man. While some of the specifics are unfortunately questionable, this book solidly conveys the generalities of Henry Brown's story.—*Catherine Threadgill, Charleston County Public Library, SC*
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From Booklist
Starred Review Although the cover shows a young boy staring intently at the reader, this book is really about Henry Brown as an adult and a staggering decision he made to achieve freedom. Henry, born a slave, hears from his mother that leaves blowing in the wind "are torn from the trees like slave children are torn from their families." When his master grows ill, Henry hopes that he will be freed; instead, he is given to his master's son, and his life becomes worse. Eventually, Henry marries and has children; then his family is sold. With nothing left to lose, he asks a white abolitionist to pack him in a crate so he can be mailed to freedom. The journey is fraught with danger as he travels by train and then steamboat, but 27 hours later, he reaches

Philadelphia. A brief author's note confirms the details of the story, but it's the dramatic artwork that brings the events emphatically to life. According to the flap copy, an antique lithograph of Brown inspired Nelson's paintings, which use crosshatched pencil lines layered with watercolors and oil paints. The technique adds a certain look of age to the art and also gives the pictures the heft they need to visualize Brown's life. Transcending technique is the humanity Nelson imbues in his characters, especially Brown and his mother--her dream of freedom deferred, his amazingly achieved. *Ilene Cooper*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Flynn:

Here thing why this specific Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad are different and trusted to be yours. First of all looking at a book is good but it really depends in the content of computer which is the content is as delicious as food or not. Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad giving you information deeper and in different ways, you can find any guide out there but there is no publication that similar with Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad. It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your personal eyes about the thing in which happened in the world which is perhaps can be happened around you. You can easily bring everywhere like in park your car, café, or even in your approach home by train. Should you be having difficulties in bringing the published book maybe the form of Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad in e-book can be your alternative.

Quentin Ryan:

The guide untitled Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad is the guide that recommended to you to learn. You can see the quality of the reserve content that will be shown to you actually. The language that creator use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The article author was did a lot of study when write the book, therefore the information that they share to your account is absolutely accurate. You also could possibly get the e-book of Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad from the publisher to make you more enjoy free time.

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David Moore:

Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad can be one of your starter books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to get every word into joy arrangement in writing Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad nevertheless doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information could drawn you into new stage of crucial pondering.

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