

# Henry's Freedom Box

By Ellen Levine

**Contributed by: Amanda Ashley and Sarah Whitten**

## *Library of Congress Summary:*

A fictionalized account of how in 1849 a Virginia slave, Henry "Box" Brown, escapes to freedom by shipping himself in a wooden crate from Richmond to Philadelphia.

## **Book Information:**

Time Period: 1840's      Setting Location: Richmond, Virginia and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania      Genre: Historical Fiction  
Curriculum Ties: U.S. Slavery, Underground Railroad

**Booktalk:** [http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/levine\\_henry's.htm](http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/levine_henry's.htm)

## **Author Information**

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=3318> – author reads from Henry's Freedom Box, and a video interview of the author.

## **Illustrator Information – Kadir Nelson**

<http://www.kadirelson.com/>

## **Picture Book**

### **Questions:**

1. Why did Henry's master tell Henry to always obey his son and never tell a lie when working for him? In the book did Henry tell any lies?
2. Why was Henry's wife and children taken away from him?

3. What do you think would happen to Henry if someone caught him being mailed in the box?
4. Why was it so important to Henry to have a middle name and birthday?
5. Why would Henry not say thank you?
6. Why would saying thank you be a lie for Henry?
7. What could happen to Henry if someone heard him cough or make any kind of noise?
8. What do you think the crate was made of so that it was strong enough to hold Henry?
9. Do you think Henry knew these 'friends' he was mailing himself to?
10. Who do you think these 'friends' were?
11. How many days do you think the trip took?
12. What do you think that Henry will do now that he is free?
13. What could have happened to the six gentlemen that helped Henry to freedom?

### **Journal Topics**

What would it be like to leave your family knowing you would never see them again?

What do you think it would be like to get into a box at one place then get out of the box in a place you have never seen before?

If you were Henry how would you celebrate your first birthday of freedom?

### **Vocabulary**

Slave (p. 1): A person who held against their own will to be a property of another.

Master (p. 3): The owner of slaves.

Beckoned (p. 5): To signal or summon, as by nodding or waving.

Mistress (p. 12): a woman who has authority, control, or power, esp. the female head of a household

Tobacco (p. 17): An agricultural product processed from the leaves of plants in the genus *Nicotiana*.

Slave Market (p. 17): Slaves sold for money or goods to other masters.

Warehouse (p. 24): A commercial building for storage of good.

Slavery (p. 24): the condition of a slave; bondage.

Crate (pg. 24): any completely enclosed boxlike packing or shipping case

Clerk (pg. 29): a person employed, as in an office, to keep records, file, type, or perform other general office tasks.

Freedom (pg. 36): the state of being free or at liberty rather than in confinement or under physical restraint

Vitriol (p. 27): A acid

Baggage Car (p. 29): A type of railroad passenger car.

## **Other Works by Ellen Levine:**

- *Freedom's Children: A Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*
- *If Your Name Was Changed At Ellis Island*
- *Catch a Tiger by the Toe*
- *Up Close: Rachel Carson*
- *The Journal of Jedediah Barstow: An Immigrant On The Oregon Trail*
- *If You Traveled West In A Covered Wagon*
- *If You Traveled on the Underground Railroad*
- *If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King*

## **Related Works:**

*Follow the Drinking Gourd* by Jeannette Winter

*Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson

## **Additional Websites:**

<http://readingtokids.org/Books/BookView.php?pag=3&bookID=00000590> – Discussion questions and craft ideas.

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/collateral.jsp?id=32442> – Lesson ideas with several pdf files – vocabulary worksheet, comprehension quiz, slavery and underground railroad thinking chart.

<http://coolkidlit-4-socialstudies.pbworks.com/Henry's+Freedom+Box:Lesson+Plan> – lesson plan including primary document links.

<http://www.nps.gov/history/Nr/travel/underground/> - National Parks service information about the underground railroad

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/>