



# TeachersFirst READING TREKS

## *Henry's Freedom Box*

### Teacher Guide

### Grade Level & Content Areas

Access Reading  
Trek Map

**Ages:** 5–9+

**Grades:** K–3 (read-aloud), 3–5  
(independent reading)

**Reading Level:** 3rd grade

**Lexile Measure:** AD490L/380L

**Guided Reading Level:** Q

**Developmental Reading**

**Assessment (DRA):** 40

**Content Areas:** English/language arts, reading, literature, and social studies (including culture, history, people groups, rights and authority, identity, and geography).

## Synopsis of Book

This beautifully illustrated story shines a light on the human cost of slavery by following the life of Henry Brown—his early life as a slave, the tragedy of losing his wife and children through the slave trade, the risk of seeking his freedom, and the beginning of his new life as a free man. The story begins with Henry, his mother, and his siblings working in the master's house. When the master falls ill, Henry is given to a new master who owns a tobacco business. Henry makes friends with a free Black man and a white man who have friends in the North, where slavery no longer exists. Henry decides to mail himself to freedom, taking a 27-hour journey by wagon, train, and steamship while hiding in a box.

## Standards

### Common Core State Standards for K–5

#### Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure

#### Writing

- Text Types and Purposes
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge

### National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Theme 1: CULTURE
- Theme 4: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Theme 2: TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE
- Theme 3: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

- AND IDENTITY
- Theme 5: INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS
- Theme 6: POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

## National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts

- CREATING
- RESPONDING

## Social Justice Standards

- DIVERSITY
- JUSTICE
- ACTION

## Using a TeachersFirst® Reading Trek to Explore This Book

TeachersFirst Reading Treks create a virtual field trip of resources about a piece of literature or a text using the My Maps feature of Google Maps. To motivate and enrich student reading, teachers and students can reference this visual collection of web resources and images as they relate to the contents of a book.

TeachersFirst has done the hard work for you! Use the activities in this teacher guide and the accompanying [Reading Trek map](#) as you and your students explore this book. And, if you feel inspired, you (or your students) can create your own Reading Trek about this or another book!

## Using This Reading Trek in Class

Below is a list of ideas for how to use this Reading Trek in your educational setting.

### Working with the Map:

1. Introduce the book to the whole class on an interactive whiteboard using the Reading Trek map and highlighting various layers.
2. Discuss the demographics of the classroom and school and both the seen and unseen characteristics that make up one's personal and social identity. Using [Digging Deep into Social Justice Standards: Identity](#) as a guide, have students create a two-circle concept map to define their identity without using their names. These can be hand-drawn on paper circles or paper plates or created digitally using Microsoft PowerPoint or Google Slides. Note that if using digital tools, it's easier to add the words to the circles if you create the text boxes outside of the circles, then move them into place and rotate them as desired (use this [Simple Circle Identity Map](#) as an example). As an additional activity, class members may try to match the identity maps to classmates.
3. In the story, Henry receives help from his friend James Smith, who other sources describe as a "free" man. Speculate as to how this could be in Richmond, Virginia.



Compare and contrast the daily lives of Henry and James, noting the unfairness, level of privilege, and discrimination that both faced.

4. With younger students, define and discuss the terms “freedom,” “responsibility,” and “rights” as a whole class. Students may create word clouds of the definitions or synonyms by dictating their thoughts to the teacher, who can record them using WordItOut ([TeachersFirst review](#)) for younger students or Word Clouds for Kids ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
5. Discuss taking a long journey for approximately 24 hours in cramped traveling conditions. Consider the necessary items one would want to take, especially noting the limited resources that would be available. Have students create a collage of the food and comfort items using hand-drawn pictures, images cut out from

other resources, or digital images with tools like Shape Collage ([TeachersFirst review](#)) and write or dictate why they chose those items.

6. For older students, use the locations found in the primary sources [The Narrative of Henry “Box” Brown](#), [Encyclopedia Virginia](#), and [New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park](#) to create a timeline of Henry Brown’s life with Padlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)), working as a small group or whole class. Younger students can create a timeline as a class using only locations mentioned in the story. Students can work individually or in pairs to create drawings to illustrate the timeline. You can then photograph these drawings and upload them to add them to the timeline.

## Extension Activities:

1. Virtually tour [Kadir Nelson’s gallery](#). Students can compare two or more of his works and create a Venn diagram using Class Tools Venn Diagram Generator ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
2. As a whole class, discuss how visual art portrays a mood or emotion (or even multiple moods) and create a list of varied attitudes. Create a bar graph, either on posterboard or digitally using LiveGap Charts ([TeachersFirst review](#)), to chart the emotions depicted by an artist or illustrator, recording the attitude across the bottom axis. Virtually tour [Kadir Nelson’s gallery](#), which houses more than sixty pieces of art. Students can vote on the emotion shown using their devices and Kahoot! ([TeachersFirst review](#)) or by using colored strips of paper, and the most popular response can be added to the graph. You

can also repeat this activity using the illustrations in the text.

3. View [“One Noble Journey: A Box Marked Freedom,”](#) an actor’s portrayal of the first portion of Brown’s journey and the events leading up to his quest for freedom. Discuss how this rendition varies from Levine’s telling of the story as well as how it’s similar and create a Venn Diagram using Canva’s Venn Diagram Creator ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
4. For Older Students (grades 4–5), identify places where peoples’ freedoms and civil rights are severely limited due to government regulations or the control of militant groups. Brainstorm ideas to promote awareness of these situations and create videos to share using Adobe Express for Education ([TeachersFirst review](#)).

5. Older students can write journal entries responding to the prompts, “What would I risk my life for?” and “Who might risk their life for me?” This is a very personal topic,

and the journals should not be shared. The journaling can serve as a springboard activity to create a poem about courage and taking action.

## Helpful Resources

### From TeachersFirst:

- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review of Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Google My Maps Basics](#)
- [OK2Ask: Engage & Inspire with Reading Treks](#)

### Other Resources:

- [Kadir Nelson](#)
- [Kadir Nelson Interview](#)
- [Teaching Hard History: Grades K-5 Introduction](#)
- [Class Tools](#)
- [Delaware Model Unit](#) regarding Henry Brown and Primary and Secondary Resources
- [The Underground Railroad](#) by William Still