

## YHBA Novel Resources “Short”

### *Night Boat to Freedom*

**Margot Theis Raven**

**Square Fish 2008**



Margot Theis Raven has been a professional writer and author for almost thirty years. She earned her degree in English and Theatre from Rosemead College and Villanova University. She has over 1,000 published articles to her name and is a national public speaker. She says her books are written to give others the belief that the worst of times can bring out the best in people. The story *Night Boat to Freedom* was written from stories she heard from numerous people. She splits her time living in Boston, MA, and Charleston, SC.

<http://margotraven.com>

**Other Books by the Author:** *America’s White Table, Challenger: America’s Favorite Eagle, Circle Unbroken: The Story Of A Basket And Its People, Happy Birthday To You, Let Them Play, M is for Mayflower: A Massachusetts Alphabet, Mercedes & The Chocolate Pilot: A True Story Of The Berlin Airlift & The Candy That Dropped From The Sky*

#### **Author Honors:**

- **The International Reading Association’s Teacher’s Choice; Children’s Choice; and Editor’s Choice Awards; Booklist Editor’s Choice Award;**
- **The Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People List;**
- **First Place Carter G. Woodson Book Award, National Council for the Social Studies**
- **First Place 2002 Midwest Children’s Literature Book Award;**
- **Three Storytelling World Honor Awards;**
- **Two Skipping Stone Magazine Honor Awards;**
- **Writers Notes Book Award**
- **The Martin Luther King Living the Dream Award; Fielder Freedom Award**
- **Children’s Crown Honor Book Award;**
- **Honor book Winner -- Jane Addams Peace Award**
- **A select nomination for the James Madison Book Award, which recognizes**

- **excellence in knowledge and understanding of American History**  
• **Book Sense Top Ten Pick**

***Awards for *Night Boat to Freedom****

IRA Notable Books for a Global Society  
IRA Teachers' Choices  
Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year  
Beacon of Freedom Award Nominee  
Book Sense Children's Pick  
CCBC Choice (Univ. of WI)  
NCSS-CBC Notable Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies  
Booklist Editors' Choice  
Arkansas Diamond Primary Book Award Master List  
Indiana Young Hoosier Award Master List  
Kentucky Blue Grass Award Master List  
Louisiana YR Choice Book Award Master List

**Annotation:** Christmas John, a young slave in Kentucky, is told by Granny Judith that he needs to row fellow slaves to freedom across the Ohio River. For every slave he helps free, Granny Judith teaches him about hope, freedom and colors as she sews a piece of fabric, the color the last slave was wearing when they were freed, to a quilt. When there are two left, he and Granny Judith will row to freedom. Christmas John must be the strong, brave boy that Granny Judith knows he is if he doesn't want to get caught.

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Point of View:** This story is told by the main character, Christmas John, in first person.

**Theme:** One theme in this story is courage. Christmas John must find the courage to help the slaves escape to freedom, knowing he will get in trouble if he gets caught.

The title is very straight forward: A boat at night will help others escape to freedom.

**Conflict:** Christmas John shows emotional conflict as he struggles to find the courage needed to row the other slaves to freedom.

**Conflict Resolution:** The resolution occurs after he makes his first trip back from bringing the first slave, Molly, safely across and does not get caught. It takes him two weeks to feel as though he made it back safely.

**Characters:**

**Christmas John:** Main character, 12 years old, Christmas John must take the slaves to freedom without getting caught. He is a courageous boy and built strong.

**Granny Judith:** Granny raised Christmas John from a baby and was taken as a girl to be a slave. She tells Christmas John that he needs to help take the other slaves to freedom. Granny is a hopeful woman who has a good heart.

**Setting:** The setting takes place around the early 1930's on a plantation in Kentucky near the Ohio River.

**Interest Level:** Grades 2-5

**Reading Level:** 4.1

**Booktalk:** If you knew you would get a leather whip smacked across your backside for helping someone do something, would you do it? Granny Judith asks Christmas John to do something he knows would get him in a heap of trouble. Will he have the strength to do it? Will he get caught?

**Language:**

**hanks:** A length of yarn, p. 1

**weave:** crossing yard over one another to create a piece of material p. 3

**loom:** a hand operated machine used for weaving p. 3

**hulk:** bulky, strong p.9

**feeble:** weak p.9

**baying:** a howl p. 19

**lapped:** water smacking against something p. 35

**Indiana Academic Standards:**

Grade 3 English: 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.4, 3.3.4, 3.3.6, 3.3.8  
 Grade 3 Social Studies: 3.1.7

Grade 4 English: 4.3.1-4.3.4, 4.3.6, 4.3.7  
 Grade 4 Social Studies: N/A

Grade 5 English: 5.1.6, 5.3.1-5.3.5, 5.3.7, 5.3.8  
 Grade 5 Social Studies: N/A

Anticipation Guide:

Before		<b>Night Boat to Freedom</b>	After	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		It's ok to be afraid.		
		Colors have meanings.		
		Secrets can keep you safe.		
		Kids can be heroes.		

**Read Aloud Passage #1:** “It was so pretty she grabbed for it, but they tricked her on and on with bigger pieces till they got her across a river and onto a ship. “Lord, child,” Granny Judith cried, “when that ship sailed away, I wept to go home, but the ship sailed on—across the ocean—and the pretty color of red turned the sad color of slavery for me.”

This passage is on page 5. This is the beginning of the story and tells how Granny Judith became a slave and why colors are important to her. Colors are important throughout the story.

**Read Aloud Passage #2:** “I grew so quiet you could’ve heard a sewin’ needle fall on feathers. I was twelve summers grown and a strong hulk of a boy, but I felt feeble as a baby knowin’ what she wanted me to do. “I know you got fear, child,” Granny Judith said, “but what scares the head is best done with the heart.”

This passage is on page 9. This sets the tone for the rest of the book. It starts the talk of the theme of courage and tells you what Christmas John feels as he’s told of his task to help the slaves escape.

### Bibliography

Davies, J. (2007). *The lemonade war*. New York: Sandpiper.

Keane, N. (1995-2009). *Booktalks Quick and Simple*. Retrieved June 14, 2009 from , Nancy Keane's Children's Literature Webpage Web site: [http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/raven\\_night.htm](http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/raven_night.htm).

Raven, M. T. (n.d.). *Margot Theis Raven*. Retrieved June 14, 2008 from, Microsoft Office Live Web site: <http://margotraven.com/default.aspx>

Raven, M. T., Lewis, E. B. (2008). *Night Boat To Freedom*. Retrieved June 14, 2008 from, MacMillan Web site: <http://us.macmillan.com/nightboattofreedom>