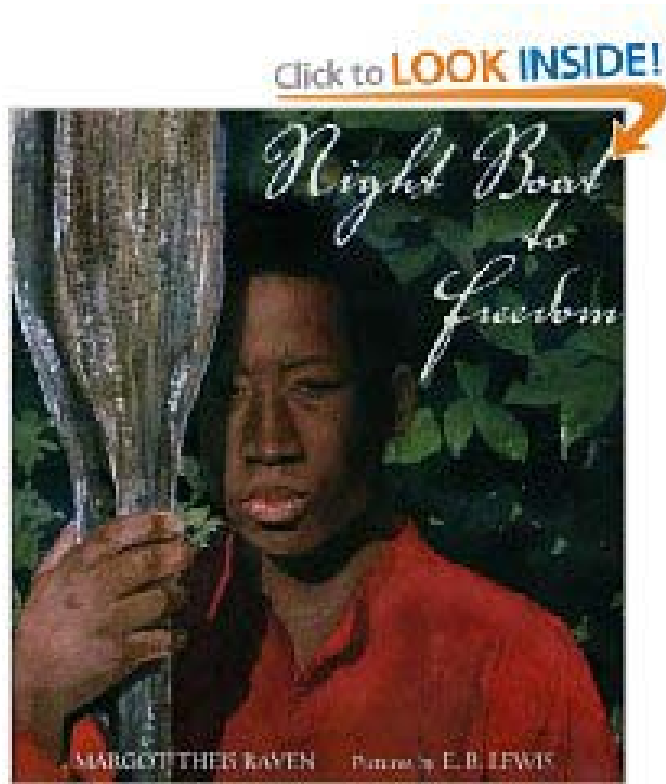


Night Boat to Freedom
Written by Margot Theis Rave
Illustrated by E.B. Lewis



Copyright 2006, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Margot Theis Raven



<http://us.macmillan.com/author/margottheisraven>

Margot Theis Raven has been a professional writer and author for almost 30 years. She has written many books including: Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot, Challenger: America's Favorite Eagle, Circle Unbroken, America's White Table, M is for Mayflower: A Massachusetts Alphabet, Let Them Play, and Happy Birthday to You!: The Mystery Behind the Most Famous Song In the World. Theis Raven has been honored with many different awards including: The Children's African Book Award Honor Book for Young Children, *Booklist* Editors' Choice, a teacher's Choice Award, *Booklist's* Top Ten African-American Picture Book and The Young Hoosier Book Award

Theis Raven earned her degrees from Villanova University and Rosement College. She currently lives in Charleston South Carolina.

Annotation:

Margot Theis Raven and E.B. Lewis bring to life the character of Christmas John, a twelve year old slave, living with his Granny Judith in Kentucky during the 1860's.

Granny Judith asked Christmas John to secretly take a slave girl across the river to freedom in Ohio. Christmas John overcomes his fear and delivers the girl safely to freedom. This becomes the first of many dangerous night time excursions for Christmas John.

While Christmas John helps others to freedom, Granny Judith works on her 'freedom quilt'. The quilt includes all the colors of the clothing the escapees wore on the night of their escape; Granny considers these their 'freedom colors'.

When the night time trips become too dangerous for Christmas John, Granny Judith sews him a shirt in his 'freedom color'. Christmas John must decide if he can take the most challenging trip of all.

Theis Raven competently builds her story by weaving together the accounts of hundreds of slaves recorded in the *Slave Narrative Collection*, a Federal Writers' project. The real slave accounts help create believable characters and a realistic story line.

The illustrations of Lewis help the reader visual the journey of Christmas John. The vibrant colors of the 'freedom quilt' and along with the muted night scenes create memorable images.

Genre: Historical fiction

Point of View: First person, told by the main character Christmas John

Theme: There are some minor themes in the story including slavery, the underground railroad, quilt making and the Ohio River. The major theme is love and family bonds are stronger than fear and even more important than freedom.

The title Night Boat to Freedom is directly tied to what is happening in the story and not necessarily the underlying theme.

Conflict: There are a few conflicts in the story. Christmas John has an internal conflict when Granny Judith asks him to help free the slaves. His fear of being beaten or killed conflicts with desire to please his Granny and to do what is right. He also has a similar internal conflict at the end of the story, when he must decide whether to leave his Granny behind. He knows his chances of being caught are much greater if he has his grandmother with him, but he loves her too much to leave her behind. There is also external conflict in the story. There is the constant threat of Christmas John being caught by the slave owners or the dogs.

Conflict resolution: The internal conflicts are resolved by Christmas John following his heart and doing what Granny Judith asks of him and by his going back to take her with him to escape. The external conflict is resolved by Christmas John and Granny Judith reaching freedom in Ohio.

Characters:

Name	Relationship to main character	Traits
Christmas John	main character	12 year old slave brave, mentally and physically strong, loving, fearful and respectful
Granny Judith	Christmas John's grandmother	patient, wise, loving, giving, physically slow, crafty
Molly	Cook's daughter First slave that Christmas John helped escape	young, sad eyes, quiet, hopeful
Other slaves that escape	Christmas John helps them escape	traits are unknown except for the color of their clothing
slave owners and dogs	Christmas John's owners	The reader never meets these characters, but we sense that they are cruel due to Christmas John's fear of them.

Setting: The story takes place in the 1860 in Kentucky and Ohio. Most of the story takes place in Granny Judith's cabin and on the Ohio River.

Reading level: 4.1 (Perma bound books)

Reading Interest: 2-5 grade (Perma Bound Books)

Book talk:

Audience: third and fourth graders

Has your grandma ever asked for your help? Maybe she has asked you to wash the dishes or shovel the driveway. What if she asked you to do something scary.....really scary? That is what Christmas John's grandma, Granny Judith, asks him to do. The year is 1863 and Christmas John is a slave, so is Granny Judith. Granny Judith asks Christmas John to row a slave girl across the river to the state of Ohio, where she can find freedom. If Christmas John says "yes" to his grandma and he is caught by his master, he will be beaten and maybe even killed. If he says "no" to his grandma, she will be disappointed and the slave girl will lose her chance of being free. Will Christmas John find enough bravery to sneak out in the middle of the night and row the slave girl to freedom? What would you do?

Discussion questions:

Pre- reading

1. What is slavery and why did it exist?
2. Did people all over the United States own slaves?

During reading

(After page 3)

1. Who is telling the story?
2. How did Christmas John get his name?

(After page 8)

1. How does Granny Judith become a slave?
2. How old is she when she becomes a slave? How do you know?

(After page 10)

1. What does Granny Judith ask Christmas John to do?
2. How do you think Christmas John feels?
3. What would you do, if you were Christmas John?

(After page 14)

1. Why do Molly and Christmas John not talk?
2. Why do they go to Ohio?

(After page 15)

1. Why is Granny Judith making the quilt?
2. Why does she want to know about the colors the escapees are wearing?

(After page 19)

1. Where do the dogs come from?
2. How come the dogs cannot find Christmas John?

(After page 23)

1. What does Granny Judith tell Christmas Jon to do?
2. Why is she not going along with him?

(After page 26)

1. Would you leave your grandma?

(After page 29)

1. Predict how the story will end? Why do you think so?

After reading

1. Were your predictions correct?
2. What does Granny mean when she says "In the dark of the moon we are all the colors of freedom, sugar! You and me, child!"?
3. Why is the quilt so important to Granny?

Vocabulary

hanks- page 1 - a loop or a bundle

loom - page 3 - a machine that wove thread into cloth

indigo - page 3- a blue dye that comes from plants

'twelve summers grown' -page 9- Twelve years old

feeble - page 9 - weak

'mornin' star' -page 9 - a planet, usually Venus, that can be seen in the east, right before sunrise

rawhide - page 11- a whip made of leather (animal skin)

weathered - page 11 - old and worn down

'foghorn voice' -page 14 - loud voice

Menare- page 15- a pass word used by slaves, who said it came from the Bible. In Italian it means to lead someone on a journey

bayin' - page 19 - coming

bridge - page 22 - to connect

lapped - page 35 - to come up around

Indiana Academic Standards:

Language arts: 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.6, 3.3.8, 3.7.1, 3.7.2, 3.7.3

Social Studies: 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.2.2, 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.9

Anticipation statements:

Before reading the story		Night Boat to Freedom by Margot Theis Raven	After reading the story	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		In America, only adults were slaves.		
		Only adults can do heroic things		
		The only purpose for making a quilt is to stay warm.		
		Adults are never afraid.		
		In the 1800's, people all over the United States owned slaves.		
		Colors, smells and sounds can help us remember events from our past.		

Read-alouds:

Page 5:

One night by pine wood light, Granny Judith told me the story of the strangers who came to her village and laid down a red flannel cloth in front of her. 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"

I chose this passage because that it has the elements of fear and excitement that children love. It will hopefully create the desire to want to hear more.

Page 9, paragraph 1 & 2:

Then Granny Judith spoke so low even the dark couldn't hear her. "but now, Christmas John, we got a chance to learn the color of freedom! A man across the river has a station for escapin' slaves. Cook's child, Molly can go to him by boat tomorrow when the moon's black. I'm askin' you to take her."

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 chose this passage because of the strong emotions revealed at this part of the story. I want the children to predict what Christmas John will do and consider what they might do is the same situation.

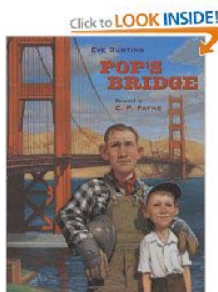
Read-alikes:

If you like [Night Boat to Freedom](#)
by Margot Thesis Raven
you might try reading....



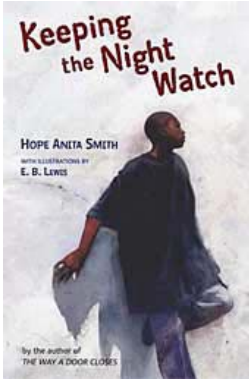
[Brothers](#) by Yin

(similar genre)

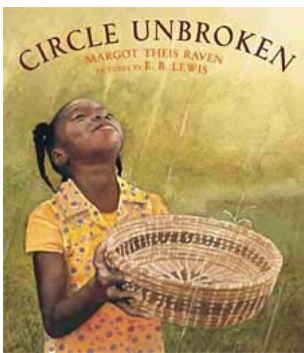


[Pop's Bridge](#) by Eve Bunting

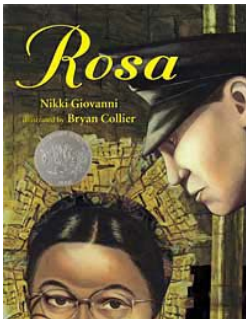
(similar genre)



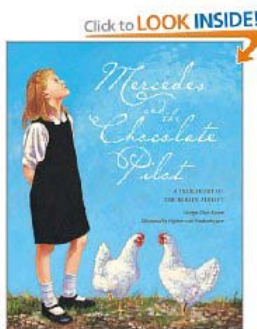
[Keeping the Night Watch](#) by Hope Anita Smith
(character similarity)



[Circle Unbroken](#) by Margot Theis Raven
(same author)



[Rosa](#) by Nikki Giovanni
(similar theme)



[Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot](#)
By Margot Theis Raven (same author)

Across the curriculum:

Idea 1: Math, visual arts, social studies

Students will learn about the history of quilt making using the following websites:

<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jp/quilt>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/qlthtml/qlthome.html>

Students will measure and cut 9 squares of 4" x 4" cloth to make their own quilt. Their quilt is to tell their history. The squares should represent something about them and should have some patterning or symmetry. Students will use markers, paints and fabric to create their squares. Students will connect all 9 squares to make a personal quilt. After all quilts are complete they will be connected together to make a classroom quilt.

Indiana standards:

Math: 3.4.4, 3.4.8, 3.4.9, 3.5.1, 3.5.4,

Social Studies: 3.1.4, 3.1.6

Visual arts: 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.2.3, 3.5.1, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, 3.7.1, 3.8.4, 3.8.1

Idea 2: language arts, social studies, fine arts-theatre

Students will read stories of slavery using the following website:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro00.html>

Students will work in teams of 4. After reading some slave accounts and the story, students will create their own play. Students will pretend that they are slaves that are helped by Christmas John to freedom. Students will write their own script as a group; it must include the reason that they are trying to escape and how they finally do escape.

Students can use props and costumes from home and school to add to their play. Students will perform their play for the rest of the class.

Indiana standards:

Language arts: 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.6, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.6, 3.4.8, 3.5.5, 3.6.2, 3.6.5, 3.7.2, 3.7.5, 3.7.6, 3.7.7, 3.7.8, 3.7.12,

Social studies: 3.1.4, 3.1.6

Fine arts- theatre 3.1.2, 3.3.2, 3.6.1, 3.6.3, 3.7.1, 3.7.2

Lessons:

Lesson 1

Independent activity

After students have read the story, have them complete the following activity:

Write a journal entry that might be found in Christmas John journal the night that Granny Judith asks him to help Cook's daughter, Molly escape.

- * How would Christmas John feel?
- * Discuss the choices that Christmas John must make
- * Use descriptive words

Uses Indiana standards: 3.3.3, 3.3.6, 3.4.9, 3.5.2, 3.5.7

Lesson 2

Done in pairs

Given the story, the map below and the following internet sites:

http://www.worldbook.com/wb/Students?content_spotlight/civil_war/geographic

<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/usstates/artwork/rivers/uslayout.htm>

The pair should do the following:

Color the map and create a map legend to identify the following things:

1. The state where Christmas John lived at the beginning of the story.
2. The state where Christmas John escaped to freedom.
3. The Ohio River
4. The slave states in 1861
5. The free states and territories in 1861

Uses Indiana standards: 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.1.3

United States of America: 1860

Outline Maps
Copyright © The McGraw-Hill Companies. All rights reserved.

MapSource™
www.mcgraw-hill.com



Home

Data

This map can be accessed at the following site:
<http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/pdf/us1860.pdf>

Bibliography

America's Story from the Library of Congress

<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jp/quilt>

Eduplace

<http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/pdf/us1860.pdf>

Macmillan Books

<http://us.macmillan.com/author/margottheisraven>

Perma bound

<https://www.perma-bound.com/ViewDetail/10800-night-boat-to-freedom>

Quilts and quilt making in America

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/qlthtml/qlthome.html>

Raven Theis, Margot. Night Boat to Freedom. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006

Sleeping bear Press

http://www.sleepingbearpress.com/authors_illustrators/margot_raven.htm

World Atlas

<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/usstates/artwork/rivers/uslayout.htm>

World Book

http://www.worldbook.com/wb/Students?content_spotlight/civil_war/geographic