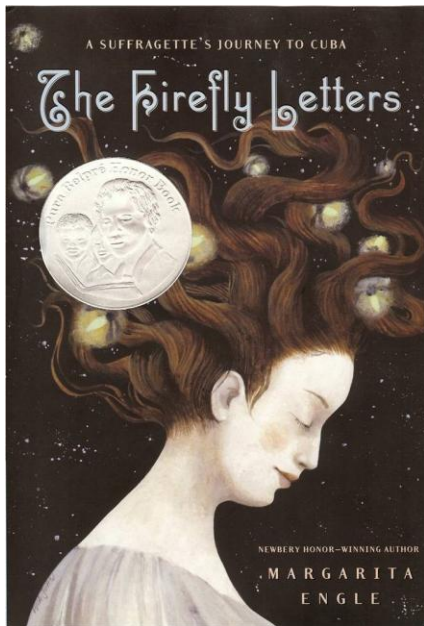


Firefly Letters Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

- **Poetry:** How does the poetic form affect your perception of this text? What impact do aspects like word choice, line breaks, rhythm, or other poetic devices have? Why would Engle write in poetry instead of prose?
- **History and Perspective:** In what way does this book provide a unique historical account? How do the multiple voices/perspectives play into this?
- **Slavery:** How does this book change your perception of Young people's role or participation in Slavery? What messages does it send?
- **Age Range:** How does the form and ages of the characters complicate the age at which this book might be read? In what ways is it children's, adolescent, or adult literature?
- **Fireflies:** Engle uses a host of symbols to tell her tale, including the fireflies that Frederika, Cecilia, and later Elena Set free. Trace this and other symbols in the text.
- **Freedom:** This story explores several different kinds of freedom, related to slavery, but also gender. How is freedom a multifaceted idea in the text, and why include this variety of perspectives?
- **Cuba:** America children frequently learn about slavery, but not often from a Cuban perspective. How does the setting affect your reading?

Daybook Possibilities

- Research other Pura Belpre Award winners, including fiction, poetry, and picture books. What do you note about these books?
- Choose another historical event or period to write a short narrative poem about. How does trying to tell history through poetry change your perception of it?
- Do a character sketch of each of the different individuals whose voices are presented in *Firefly Letters*. Why include such multiple perspectives?
- Using the author's note, do additional research to discover more details about the slave trade in Cuba.
- Learn about setting by reading about the climate, geography, and lives of people in Cuba. Find photographs to support your research.
- Look up other books by Margarita Engle or visit her website at <http://www.margaritaengle.com/>. How many of her books are award winners, and why do you think she is so commonly recognized?
- Rewrite some of Engle's story into prose and consider how this changes the story.
- Engle's writing is frequently very visual—create illustrations you might add to this text.

Suggested Critical Reading

"Children of the Revolution: A Literary Case Study" by Rafael Ocasio and Fiona Dolougham

"Cuban-Exile Identity and Novels for the Young" by Alexandra McPherson

"Is There Poetry in Children's Poetry?" by Janice Bogstad

"Beyond Tamales, Tacos, and Our Southern Neighbors" by Susie Jans-Thomas

Background and Context

Margarita Engle is winner of many awards including the Newbery Honor and Pura Belpre Award. Her 2011 *Firefly Letters: A Suffragette's Journey to Cuba* is based on true accounts of early women's rights pioneer Fredrika Bremer. Told through several perspectives as narrative poetry, the story explore the viewpoints three young women as they struggle for freedom: Fredrika, who is visiting from Sweden in 1851 to learn about the people of Cuba, Cecilia, a young slave who translates for her, and Elena, the wealthy daughter of the house who longs to make choices in her life.