



A Letter from Kadir Nelson

Dear young and cool readers,

You may wonder what goes into creating images for an historical picture book. I'll tell you that it would be very easy if I could simply make everything up, but that would be the worst thing I could do because I would get it all wrong. For each historical subject, I have to do an awful lot of research to learn all about it. It's kind of like doing homework, but I love homework. So to start *Henry's Freedom Box*, I read Henry Box Brown's autobiography. I had recently finished a book about Harriet Tubman so I was pretty familiar with slavery and the Underground Railroad.

When I was finished reading about Henry and the Underground, I then had to find images of urban slaves, free African-Americans, townspeople, wagons, horses, etc. Since this is a true story and set in a real place, I had to find photographs of each setting to make sure the images I was painting were authentic. Since Henry worked in a factory, I had to learn the process of growing, smoking, and twisting tobacco and along the way found some very interesting photographs of farm workers who work on tobacco plantations. I've attached

I decided to base the style of the artwork for *Henry's Freedom Box* partially on a lithograph of a drawing created by Samuel Rowse for the purpose of raising funds for the slavery abolitionist movement. I fused the cross-hatched rendering style with my own painterly style to give the artwork an antique-like feel.

In this [slide show](#), you can see the original Rowse lithograph as well as some of the other primary source photographs and reference materials that I found and used for the artwork. You'll also find a few sketches of my artwork to give you a sense of how each image looks in the early stages.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, but I hope it gives you an idea about the work that goes into creating paintings for picture books!

Best regards,

Kadir Nelson