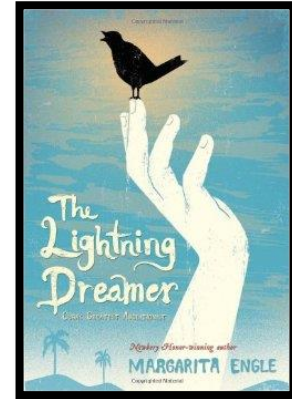


Title: The Lightning Dreamer
Author: Margarita Engle
Grade Level: 6th Grade



SUMMARY

The Lightning Dreamer is a wonderfully unique book that your family will absolutely love. It's historical fiction told through poems written by Tula, the younger version of Cuba's greatest abolitionist, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Students will immediately connect with Tula's story as she describes the injustices in her world including slavery, woman's rights, arranged marriage, and freedom of speech. Your family will appreciate the real story of how Avellaneda and her brother, Manuel, teamed together to speak out against slavery. This is a perfect read aloud book for sixth graders because the entire novel is written in "verse" or short poems from the perspectives of different characters in the story. The points of view constantly shift, so you might assign different members in your family to read for different characters. The multicultural and historical aspects of this book and short verses make this book very accessible for both native Spanish speaking ESL students and native English speakers.

QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING

VOCABULARY

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

In this book, you might talk about these words:

- enchantment (pg. 3)
- smuggler (pg. 7)
- bondage (pg. 20)
- abolitionist (pg. 22)
- democratic (pg. 24)
- perched (pg. 56)
- shunned (pg. 113)
- exile (pg. 160)

You might use a question like:

In the story, Tula calls her brother a "smuggler of words." What does smuggle mean and what does this suggest about her brother?

KEY IDEAS and THEMES

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

- 1) The author includes many themes of injustice or inequality in this novel including: slavery, women's rights, freedom of speech, government dictatorship. What are some examples of these injustices in the book? How does the author talk about them?



- 2) The story is also told through the eyes of one of the slaves that works for Tula's mother, Caridad. In what ways are Caridad and Tula similar? How do these two characters represent the irony of slavery? In what ways are both characters enslaved?
- 3) In the story, Tula's mother does not let her read books. Why does she do this and what is she afraid of? What does this say about Mama?
- 4) This book is divided into five parts. Talk with your child about each part and have him or her describe each part. Why do you think the author chose to divide the book in this way? What impact does it have on the story?

EXTRA ACTIVITIES

1. *The Lightning Dreamer* falls under the genre of historical fiction. That means it tells a fictional story that is based on real historical events. The poems are written by the author of this book, Margarite Engle, in the voice of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Avellaneda's actual stories were some of the first written by a woman in Cuba speaking out against slavery. Her mentor was a poet by the name of Jose Maria Heredia who also wrote about the horrors of slavery and yearning for Cuban independence. Using the Internet or your local library, read some of the poems and stories by Avellaneda and Heredia. How do you hear Tula's voice in their stories? What are some of the similarities and differences between Engle's poems (Tula's voice) and Heredia and Avellaneda's?
2. Read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, an American female abolitionist. This novel is probably the single most important written work about the American fight to end slavery. Compare and contrast the similarities and difference between slavery and abolitionists in Cuban and American history as told in these two books.