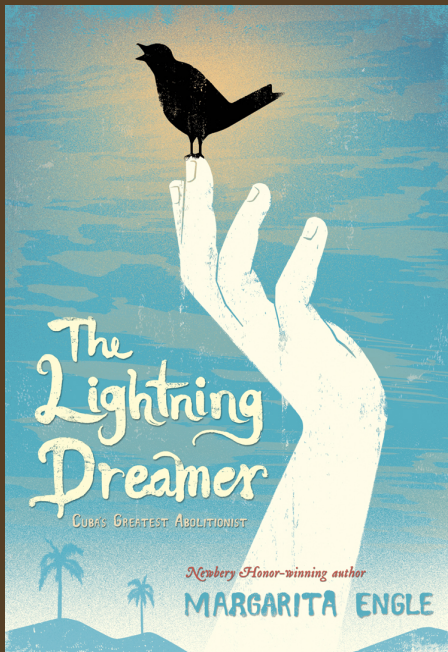


# Lightning Dreamer Reading Guide



## 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?
- **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?
- **Writing:** How is the concept of writing or being a writer explored in this text? In what ways is the story a Künstlerroman?

## 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 *Lightning Dreamer*. 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 Doloughan

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

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

## Background and Context

Newbery and Pura Belpre Award winner Margarita Engle delves again into Cuban history in her 2013 *Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist*. Based on true story of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, nicknamed Tula, the text is told through several perspectives as expressive narrative poetry exploring the history of Cuba through the story of a young teen facing an arranged marriage. Questioning gender roles and trying to find the power to fight injustice, Tula finds solace in writing, which eventually shapes her into a remarkable revolutionary writer.