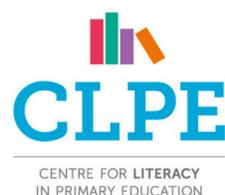


The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2026 Shadowing Resources



Freedom Braids

Carnegie Medal for Illustration

Illustrator: Oboh Moses

Age range: 5+

Description:

Life on the plantation is strict and harsh for Nemy. However, messages are woven into the braids of the characters whose strength and beauty are highlighted through radiant skin tones. There's a strong sense of place throughout the book. Light and shadow is used to great effect and use of guttering provides a powerful separation between those who are enslaved upon the plantation and those who are enslavers. Subtle details throughout reward rereading.

Themes:

- Enslavement
- History
- Africa
- Freedom
- Hair

Shadowing Ideas:

1. Explore some of the different braids and hair styles mentioned in the book by downloading Lantana's official colouring sheet here:-
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6600017613bb95575cebfcde/t/66eeed612d468c6dbbe270fe/1726934371751/Freedom%2BBraids%2Bcolouring%2Bsheet.pdf>
2. In Freedom Braids, we learn about how enslaved people used different braids and hairstyles to send warnings and messages to others, or as maps and guides to danger. Find out about other ways of signalling and sending messages. Could you lay a tracking trail for your friends to follow? Find out about 'dead drops' or a 'dead letter box'. Try using one to pass messages between the different members of your shadowing group.
3. Learn or practice a simple piece of braiding. Learn to plait, make friendship bracelets or make a simple braided paper bookmark like this one:-
https://youtu.be/cYJPddSI4_U?si=RMVsHa5PVBbdamwK

Teaching Ideas for the Carnegie Medal for Illustration Shortlist 2026

These notes have been written by the teachers at CLPE to provide schools and settings with ideas to develop comprehension and extended provision around Carnegie-shortlisted picturebooks and illustrated texts for children of all ages. They build on our work supporting teachers to use high-quality texts to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. We hope you find them useful.

These notes have been written with children from age 7 in mind. However, this is a sophisticated picture book which has scope for it to be interpreted in different ways with pupils of different ages.

Introduction:

- Inspired by the true story of enslaved African women in Colombia, Monique Duncan, a New York-based author of Jamaican descent and Lagos-based illustrator Oboh Moses have worked together to create a poignant and fascinating tale of courage and resistance and of long-standing cultural traditions given practical and life-altering meaning in a dark chapter in human history: the elaborate pattern in the braids Big Mother and other women make in each other's hair carry a secret message that signals their intent to flee, a map to guide them in their escape and even gold or seeds for use once safe and sound.

Reading the book and close reading of illustration:

- Begin by scrutinising the front-cover illustration: *who do you think this character might be? What can you tell about her from her facial expression and body language? What do you think she might be thinking or feeling?* Now read the title, "Freedom Braids". *What do you think this title means, and how might it relate to the character you have just met?* The word "braids" may draw their attention to the character's distinctive hairstyle: *how do you think this might be important in the story you are about to read?*
- As you read the book together, encourage the children to be detectives, forensically looking for any clue the illustrator may be offering to the thoughts and actions of the characters, and to the setting: every mark is intentional. Now open the book cover out flat to share the front- and back-cover illustrations together: they may observe that the vegetation suggests a warm climate; there is a winding path; we see a settlement of huts in the top-left corner and some kind of construction in the bottom-left; the sun is shining from behind the girl, suggesting time of day. Similarly on the back cover: we see the girl with other simply dressed women with braided hair, pointing the way; they are standing in a field where stalks have been cut with cranes flying low across it. *What might all this suggest about the book you are about to read?*

- Turn to the endpapers, which show eight different hairstyles with their (Colombian) Spanish names: depending on their experience children may have differing familiarity with the ways hair can be dressed, but they will perhaps predict that braiding is to be a significant element in the story. Finally turn to the title page where we see the girl again: *what do you think might be the significance of the blue butterfly, what might the girl be thinking as she contemplates it?*
- Then share the opening spread, where the storytelling starts and some of the speculation is resolved: invite the children to pore over the details and consider what they might suggest: *who do you think these people are, what do you think you know about them, from the words and from the illustration? From the cover, do you recognise the mill in the shadow of the left-hand page? What do you think Nemy and the others are doing?*
- Turn to read the next six double-page spreads — introducing Big Mother and the women braiding one another’s hair: *what do you learn from these pages, what do you see the women doing? What do you understand about life for the plantation slaves? What is the significance of the braids and the stories that they weave? What do you think their practical use might be?*
- Now share the next two spreads as the women spy on then escape their captors, and the spread where the patterns in Nemy’s braids map their escape route. What do you notice in these spreads? *What might each character be thinking or feeling, and how does the illustration convey this? How do the spreads draw the threads of the story together? Is this what you expected?*
- Read the final spread of the book, allowing time and space for the children to discuss. Children might comment on how there is now colour; and sunlight, with shade for comfort, but no shadow; there is play and leisure but also work for the community not for masters — and hair is still being braided! Read also Monique’s “Dear Reader”. *What do you think the book wants to tell you about the change in their lives that the women and their braiding bring about, as girls escape their captors and a life of drudgery, as slaves become free?*
- After reading, encourage the children to share their thoughts. *What did they like and/or dislike? What did it make them think about? How did it make them feel? What made them feel this way? How do Oboh’s illustrations convey the transformative power of the women’s actions?*

Engaging in illustration:

- Revisit a range of different spreads to see how Oboh's illustrations complement Monique's text to tell the story of Nemy's and the other women's journey to freedom, and the role braiding played in achieving this. Support the children to see how Oboh's illustrations convey a sense of the warmth and welcome of the women's group; the peril of their escape; the light and joy of their new future. Freedom Braids has a distinctive look and palette. Oboh's use of light and shade, the clandestine activities of the women in the shadows. You can see more examples of his work, and insights into his process, on [his website](#).
- Invite the children to explore the use of light and shade and how this can evoke a setting: they may note that the only spread bathed in sunlight is when Nemy and the others are free; otherwise the light comes from firelight, fireflies and moonlight, the early rays of the rising sun. This gives a rich, warm distinctive palette of deep blues, mauves, purples and greens playing in the shadows. Model how to use a range of materials, including coloured pencils, oil pastels, and watercolours that mirror the palette and effects used in the book. Turn out the lights, draw the blinds, and invite them to imagine or recreate a scene from Nemy's night-time life using available light: *where does the limited light come from, what shadows are cast, how are colours different in the twilight? Work alongside the children, encouraging them to find tones that evoke a setting from the story. Afterwards, reflect on the work together. What did they like about working in this way? Were there any challenges? What were these and how could you overcome them?*
- Give space for the children to pin up and share their drawings, allowing them to look at the similarities and differences in their work and to talk about what is effective in their own work and that of others.

This sequence of activities was designed in partnership with CLPE, a UK-based children's literacy charity working with primary schools to raise the achievement of children's reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's books at the heart of all learning. Find out more about their work, and access further resources and training at www.clpe.org.uk.