

# Chasing the Nightbird

Written by Krista Russell

ISBN: 978-1-56145-597-3 | HC | \$15.95  
Ages 10 -14 | History/Fiction/Middle Reader

## Book Level Score

Fountas & Pinnell | Level: V | Grade Level: 5-6

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Fourteen-year-old Lucky Valera is a seasoned sailor on the crew of the whaling ship, *Nightbird*. When his estranged half brother, Fernando Fortuna, kidnaps him and forces him into servitude at the nearby textile mill, his life takes a dramatic turn for the worse. Determined to escape, Lucky links up with some unlikely allies: Daniel, a fugitive slave who works alongside him at the mill, and Emmeline, a Quaker ship captain's daughter. Emmeline offers Lucky passage on her uncle's ship in exchange for his help leading escaped slaves through the Underground Railroad, but Lucky knows getting away from Fortuna will be difficult and dangerous. When their plans go awry and Daniel is threatened by ruthless slave catchers, Lucky discovers that true freedom sometimes requires sacrifice.

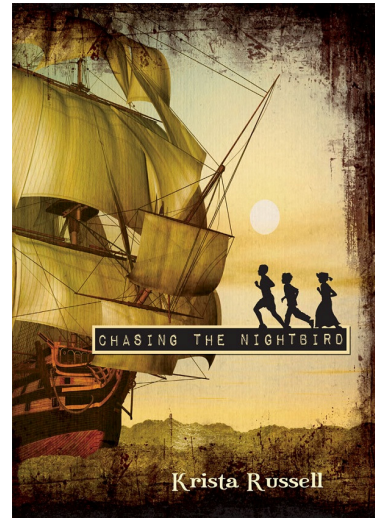
## REVIEWS

"...Solid work, featuring a strong-minded protagonist bent on doing the best he can with what he's been given."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"...Stories like this are a way to get students interested, and make history come alive..."—*Work a Day Reads, a blog by Sarah*.

"...Lucky was such a scrappy, likeable character. I was rooting for him from the very beginning...a good adventure for young readers..."—*The Literate Mother, a blog, reviewed by Aimee Brown*.

"...Without slowing the story's pace, Russell gives readers plenty to think about...Strong-willed and good-hearted, Lucky is an especially vibrant hero in this multifaceted and suspenseful historical adventure..."—*Publishers Weekly*



## THEMES

- Whaling
- Underground Railroad
- Quakerism
- Abolitionist Movement
- Fugitive Slave Act
- Cape Verdeans
- Sailors
- Textile Mills

## NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

### LANGUAGE ARTS (K - 12)

[English Language Arts Standards provided by the NCTE.]

#### NL-ENG.K-12.1 READING FOR PERSPECTIVE

Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

### MATH (K - 12)

[National Mathematics Standards provided by the NCTM.]

**NM-PROB.PK-12.3** Apply and adapt a variety of appropriate strategies to solve problems.

### TECHNOLOGY (K - 12)

[National Technology Standards provided by the International Society for Technology in Education.]

#### NT.K-12.5 TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH TOOLS

Use technology to locate, evaluate and collect information from a variety of sources.

Use technology tools to process data and report results. Evaluate and select new information resources and technological innovations based on the appropriateness for specific tasks.

## BEFORE YOU READ

- Have the class research the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. What political situation in the country did the Fugitive Slave Act attempt to address? Would you say it succeeded or failed?
- Explain or have the class research the Underground Railroad and the Abolitionist Movement. What were they and what do they have in common?
- Frederick Douglass, Henry “Box” Brown, and Harriet Tubman each lived or spent time in New Bedford. What was it about the whaling industry in general and New Bedford in particular that made them attractive to fugitive slaves?

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### LANGUAGE ARTS

#### Thematic Connections/Discussion Questions:

**Freedom** – *Daniel has escaped slavery to find freedom in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Lucky and Emmeline are also in search of freedom.*

1. How do the laws and customs of society hold each of them back?
2. What sacrifices does each make to try to save Daniel from being captured and returned to slavery?

**Courage** – *Ask students to define courage.*

1. Is there a difference between physical and mental courage?
2. How does Lucky show courage during the story?
3. Who else in the story demonstrates courage?
4. Who in the story acts on fear?

**Mentors** – *Several people in the story give Lucky advice.*

1. What are some examples of the advice Lucky is given?
2. Which advice do you think is helpful and which harmful?
3. Do you believe that the motive of the mentor (person giving advice) helps to determine whether the advice is beneficial or harmful?
4. Is Lucky able to decide which is which?

**Choices** – *We make choices and decisions every day, some more important than others.*

1. How do we make good decisions?
2. Fortuna chooses to use the law to his advantage to make himself Lucky’s guardian. Does Lucky have any choice in what happens to him during the first part of the story?
3. How can an individual’s decisions and actions change his or her life?

*The law is on the Jessup’s side when he comes to New Bedford to capture Daniel and the other fugitives.*

1. How do the decisions and actions of the characters reveal their personalities?
2. What influences Lucky’s decision to stay and help Daniel and the fugitives, even though it means missing his own chance for freedom from Fortuna?

**Identity/Belonging** – *Lucky identifies so strongly with his fellow sailors that he follows a list of “Whalemen’s Commandments.”*

1. What are some of the ways we form our identities?
2. Name some groups that people might belong to. Do the groups help them form their identities?

*At the beginning of the story, it’s clear that Lucky puts people into two groups: sailors and landlubbers.*

1. How is our identity shaped by our experiences?
2. How does what others think of us shape how we think of ourselves?
3. What are the benefits to belonging to a group and what are the drawbacks?

*Fortuna belongs to another group: the mule spinners.*

1. Compare and contrast the mule spinners and sailors.
2. When should an individual take a stand in opposition to an individual or larger group?

### SOCIAL STUDIES & MATH

**Geography** – Show maps of some of the typical voyages of whale ships out of Massachusetts: Go to

[www.girlonawhaleship.org/jernapp/whaling.do](http://www.girlonawhaleship.org/jernapp/whaling.do)

to see maps and explore other aspects of the whaling industry.

- From the ports Lucky mentions, trace the route that the *Nightbird* would have traveled.
- Whale ships typically traveled at 4-7 knots (depending on wind and currents). A knot is a nautical mile per hour. 5 knots = 5.8 miles per hour. Calculate distances traveled between the ports mentioned above and time it took to reach the next port based on speed.
- Devise math word questions based on the speed.

## MUSIC

Find and play a digital recording of nineteenth century sea chanteys. What are some of the purposes these might have served aboard ships? What do they tell us about life as a sailor?

## VISUAL ARTS

The art of scrimshaw—carving or engraving on whalebone or whale ivory—was a common pastime of whalers and is mentioned in the story (the handle of Pa’s rigging knife). Study some examples of nineteenth century scrimshaw. Can you draw a design based on a scene in the book?

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

[www.whalingmuseum.org/library/amwhale/am\\_in dex.html](http://www.whalingmuseum.org/library/amwhale/am_in dex.html)

[www.teachervision.fen.com/black-history/field-trips/4969.html](http://www.teachervision.fen.com/black-history/field-trips/4969.html)

[www.nps.gov/nebe/planyourvisit/upload/ugrr.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/nebe/planyourvisit/upload/ugrr.pdf)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Krista Russell** writes historical fiction for young readers. She was born in Massachusetts and spent many summers near New Bedford, where *Chasing the Nightbird* is set. She has a bachelor’s degree from

Agnes Scott College and master’s degrees from Seton Hill University and The London

School of Economics and Political Science. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Visit her website at [www.kristarussell.com](http://www.kristarussell.com).

## **School Visits**

Krista Russell’s presentations are multimedia-based interactive programs for schools, including *History is Story* (Learning About the Past from the People Who Lived It) and *Getting it Write* (Research and Story Building Techniques).

**(Intended audience: Grades 4-8) E, M**

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Peachtree Teacher’s Guide for CHASING THE NIGHTBIRD was prepared by Krista Russell.

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