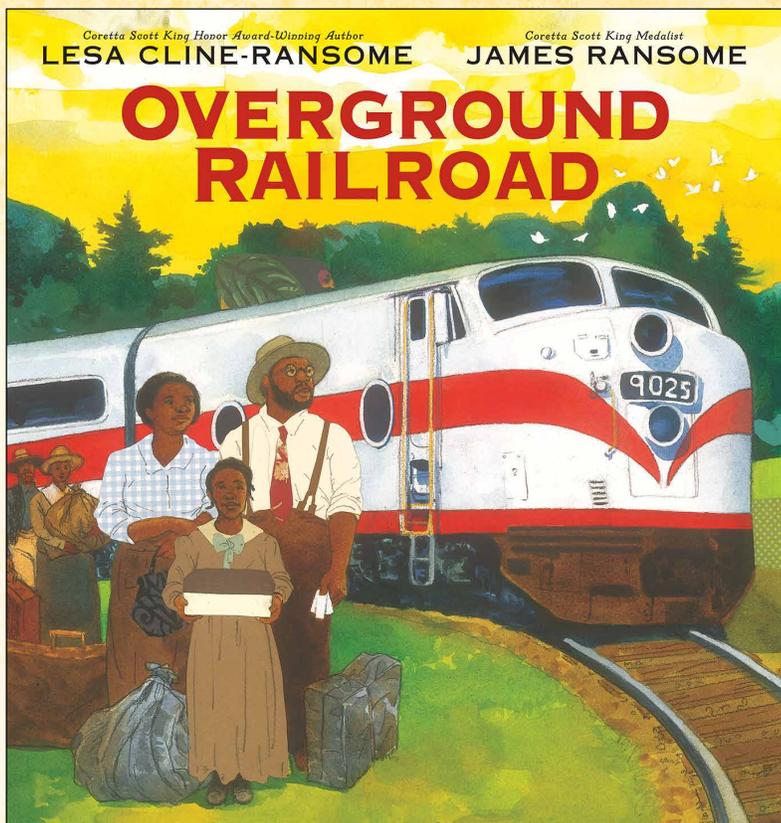


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



HC: 978-0-8234-3873-0 • E-book: 978-0-8234-4390-1

## OVERGROUND RAILROAD

by **Lesa Cline-Ransome**  
illustrated by **James Ransome**

### ABOUT THE BOOK

A window into a child's experience of the Great Migration from the award-winning creators of *Before She Was Harriet* and *Finding Langston*.

As she climbs aboard the New York bound Silver Meteor train, Ruth Ellen embarks upon a journey toward a new life up North—one she can't begin to imagine. Stop by stop, the perceptive young narrator tells her journey in poems, leaving behind the cotton fields and distant Blue Ridge Mountains.

Each leg of the trip brings new revelations as scenes out the window of folks working in fields give way to the Delaware River, the curtain that separates the colored car is removed, and glimpses of the freedom and opportunity the family hopes to find come into view. As they travel, Ruth Ellen reads from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, reflecting on how his journey mirrors her own—until finally the train arrives at its last stop, New York's Penn Station, and the family heads out into a night filled with bright lights, glimmering stars, and new opportunity.



## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- What is the difference between the Overground Railroad and the Underground Railroad? Study the illustrations on the endpapers of the book. What do the various types of transportation symbolize? Explain the significance of the cotton ball on each illustration. How do these illustrations help readers understand the concept of the Overground Railroad?
- Discuss the relationship between the illustration on the title page and those on the endpapers. Study the house, and explain why it is empty.
- The family leaves in the dark when no one can see them. What might happen if they are seen leaving? Discuss why Daddy is “mad” and Mama is “proud.” How does it take courage to leave their homeland behind?
- The family is led to the “colored car.” How does this fact suggest the time period in which the book is set? Explain how the illustrator uses light to help the reader distinguish Ruth Ellen and her parents on the train. When the travelers reach Washington, D.C., the conductor tells them they are “past the line” and can move elsewhere on the train. Explain the meaning of the “line.”
- Note the newspaper that the white boy is reading. How does this reveal the year in which the book is set? Explain the woman’s hand on the empty seat. Why is the boy glancing toward the woman? How does the close-up illustration of the hand, rather than an entire view of the woman, make the message bolder?
- Ruthie reads aloud *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to Mama. Notice the birds out the windows on the double-page spread about Frederick Douglass. Discuss the phrase “free as a bird.” How does Frederick Douglass represent freedom? Why is this an appropriate book for Ruthie to read to her mother? How does this book offer the family hope and encouragement as they journey North? Discuss the reaction of the people in the dining car when Ruthie and her family pass through.
- How do stories from the Bible give the travelers hope? Explain “The Promised Land.” What do the travelers expect when they arrive North?
- Discuss what the family is running from and running to. How does the direction of the train in the illustrations lead the reader’s eye to the next part of the family’s journey? The family leaves in the dark and arrives in the dark. What does this symbolize? Explain the illustration on the last page. What do you think Ruthie sees?
- Study the illustrations carefully. Point out where the illustrator uses the following media: paper, graphite, paste, pencil, and watercolor.



## ABOUT THE CREATORS

Children’s book author **LESA CLINE-RANSOME** and illustrator **JAMES E. RANSOME** have collaborated on a number of award-winning picture books, including *Before She Was Harriet*, which received a Coretta Scott King Honor, a Christopher Award, and was nominated for an NAACP Image Award; *Benny Goodman & Teddy Wilson: Taking the Stage as the First Black-and-White Jazz Band in History*; and *Just a Lucky So and So: The Story of Louis Armstrong*. Their newest book is *Overground Railroad*.

Lesa’s debut middle grade novel *Finding Langston* received a Coretta Scott King Honor, the Scott O’Dell Award, and five starred reviews, and its companion, *Leaving Lymon*, is the recipient of three stars to date.

James’s numerous accolades include a Coretta Scott King Medal, three Coretta Scott King Honors, and an NAACP Image Award. The Ransomes live in New York’s Hudson Valley with their family.

