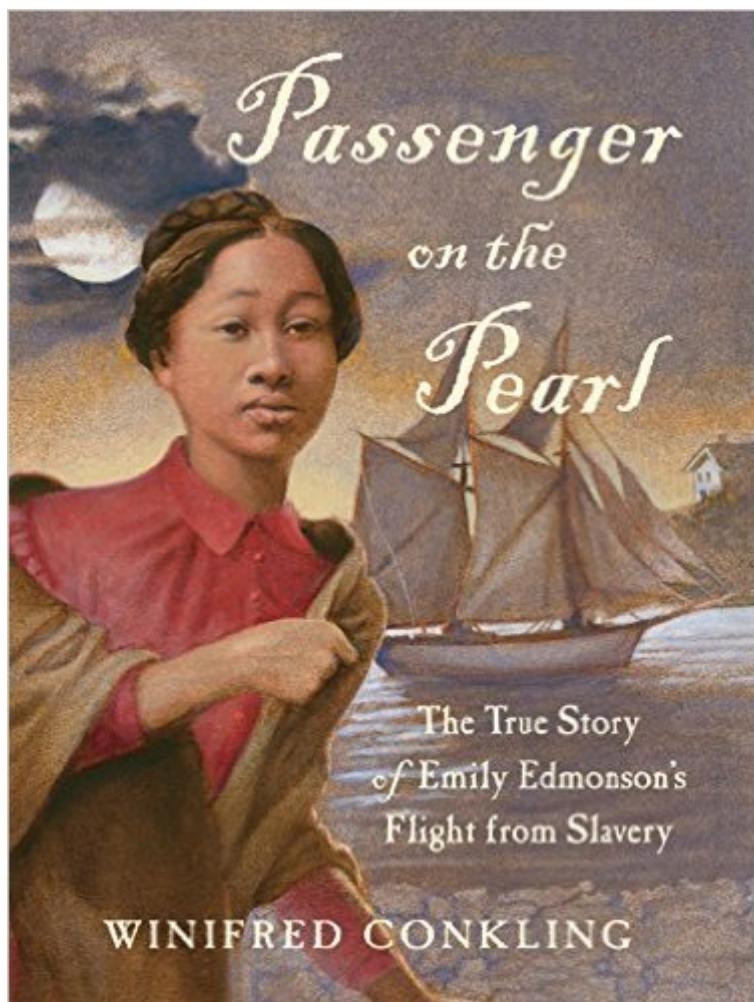


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# Passenger On The Pearl: The True Story Of Emily Edmonson's Flight From Slavery



## Synopsis

NOW IN PAPERBACK! The page-turning, heart-wrenching true story of one young woman willing to risk her safety and even her life for a chance at freedom in the largest slave escape attempt in American history. In 1848, thirteen-year-old Emily Edmonson, five of her siblings, and seventy other enslaved people boarded the Pearl under cover of night in Washington, D.C., hoping to sail north to freedom. Within a day, the schooner was captured, and the Edmonsons were sent to New Orleans to be sold into even crueler conditions. Through Emily Edmonson's journey from enslaved person to teacher at a school for African American young women, Conkling illuminates the daily lives of enslaved people, the often changing laws affecting them, and the high cost of a failed escape. Clearly written, well-documented, and chock full of maps, sidebars, and reproductions of photographs and engravings, the fascinating volume covers a lot of history in a short space. Conkling uses the tools of a novelist to immerse readers in Emily's experiences. A fine and harrowing true story. • "Kirkus Reviews" [Passenger on the Pearl] covers information about slavery that is often not found in other volumes . . . Conkling's work is intricate and detailed . . . A strong and well-sourced resource. • "School Library Journal" Conkling is a fine narrator . . . Readers familiar with the trials of Solomon Northup will find this equally involving. • "The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books" Edmondson's life story is compelling and inspiring. It provides the perfect hook for readers into the horrors of slavery. • "VOYAA Junior Library Guild Selection

## Book Information

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Biographies > Women

Age Range: 12 - 15 years

Grade Level: 7 - 10

## Customer Reviews

Arguably the most egregious defilement of civilized behavior, slavery and its attendant cruelties and violence has been part of human history long before we knew how to write about it. Inexcusably it continues to exist around the world in the 21st century, though now usually stripped of most official state sanction. But America's shameful tolerance if not endorsement of slavery was challenged even before a bloody war helped bring it to an end. Slaves in pre-Civil War border and southern states sometimes escaped their bondage, often with the aid of abolitionists in the north. One such incident is the subject of a new book by veteran author Winifred Conkling, who previously penned the award-winning book *Sylvia & Ali* involving a true account about America's shameful internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Again in *Passenger on the Pearl: The True Story of Emily Edmonson's Flight from Slavery*, the author uses meticulous research of real people and events to relate a tale of fortitude in the face of outrageous denial of freedom to innocent victims. And as before, Ms. Conkling shines a spotlight on a part of our history that must not be forgotten lest we be doomed to repeat it in some form or degree. Aimed at younger readers around the teenage years, *Passenger on the Pearl* is nevertheless a recommended read for those of any age who treasure individual liberty and take heart in those who refused to accept less. Part adventure story and part morality play, this well-crafted work takes readers on a fascinating voyage into a past from which our current history emerged. Even those who believed ourselves to be reasonably-well informed about antebellum life in the mid-19th century likely will gain new information and insights into conditions and practices then, and may feel a renewed anger and anguish by these revelations. *Passenger on the Pearl* will inform, inspire and perhaps properly inflame indignation.

On April 15, 1848, 13-year-old Emily Edmonson, her sister Mary, four of her brothers and 70 other people board a schooner called the Pearl for one purpose --- to escape slavery. Unfortunately, salvation lasts less than 24 hours before slave owners catch up with the boat. Returning to captivity, Emily goes from a Virginia slave pen to the New Orleans slave market and back again. Although Emily never ceases to pray for release from her enslaved situations, she has no idea that it will take the efforts of a well-known New York preacher to answer her freedom cry. In her first nonfiction book for young readers, award-winning author Winifred Conkling recreates a piece of unconscionable

American history that has a powerfully optimistic ending. Conkling's homey storytelling skillfully captures the incredible story of Emily's trials and tribulations as a slave, her transition into freedom through Henry Ward Beecher and beyond. *PASSANGER ON THE PEARL* not only zeroes in on Emily's life, but also on what becomes of her parents and siblings, pre and post slavery. High on that familial list is Emily's relationship with Mary --- the sisters remain constant companions. (On a personal note, my interest peaked when I read that Mary Edmonson was buried in Westwood Cemetery, which is walking distance from my home!) Obviously, Conkling's narrative is not limited to Emily's manumission --- she also writes about Emily's continued educational opportunities, her anti-slavery activism and her eventual marriage to another freed slave. Additionally, Conkling incorporates another fascinating Edmonson account regarding two of Emily's younger siblings who were also allocated for the slave trade. This situation leads Emily to Beecher's sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, who miraculously comes to the siblings' aid. Conkling includes other peripheral pieces to the Edmonson account, such as the men involved in the Pearl escape plans and their trials. Amid the various aspects of Emily's story, Conkling interweaves significant information about topics like slavery, literacy and the second middle passage that further explain what life was like back then. Replete with a plethora of wonderful primary sources, a time line, family tree and additional information for further reading/research, *PASSENGER ON THE PEARL* is not only an essential addition to the African American history collection, but is also guaranteed to be another award-winning book. Reviewed by Anita Lock

*PASSENGER ON THE PEARL* by Winifred Conkling tells the true story of Emily Edmonson's flight from slavery. The work of nonfiction for youth is an authentic portrayal of the heartbreaking reality of slavery. Readers are immediately immersed in the story as Emily and her sibling's attempt to escape on a ship called the Pearl. After their unsuccessful quest for freedom, the story continues to follow Emily's life in slavery as well as the plight of the abolitionists who planned the escape. Ultimately, Emily and her sister are freed, educated, and became abolitionists themselves. They even develop a friendship with Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book includes a variety of compelling primary source documents including photographs, paintings, manifests, and posters that dramatically visualize the story. Graphic elements including maps, a timeline, and a family tree that help orient readers. The source notes, bibliography, and index are helpful to young researchers. Focused fact sheets interwoven into the story help readers understand the laws and practical threats to slaves seeking freedom in the mid 19th century. Conkling does a masterful job merging the real-world story of Emily

with background information about the time period and specific events associated with the famous failed escape. The combination creates both empathy for the runaway slaves as well as an understanding of the context of the escape. The National Park Service Underground Railroad Map at [http://www.nps.gov/subjects/discover\\_history/underground\\_map.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/discover_history/underground_map.htm) provides a map showing hundreds of locations related to the Underground Railroad. To learn more about author Winifred Conkling, go to <http://www.winifredconkling.com/>. After reading this wonderful book for youth, some teens might be interested in a more in-depth examination of the attempted escape and the aftermath. Read *ESCAPE ON THE PEARL* (2007) by Mary Kay Ricks, a work of nonfiction for adults.

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