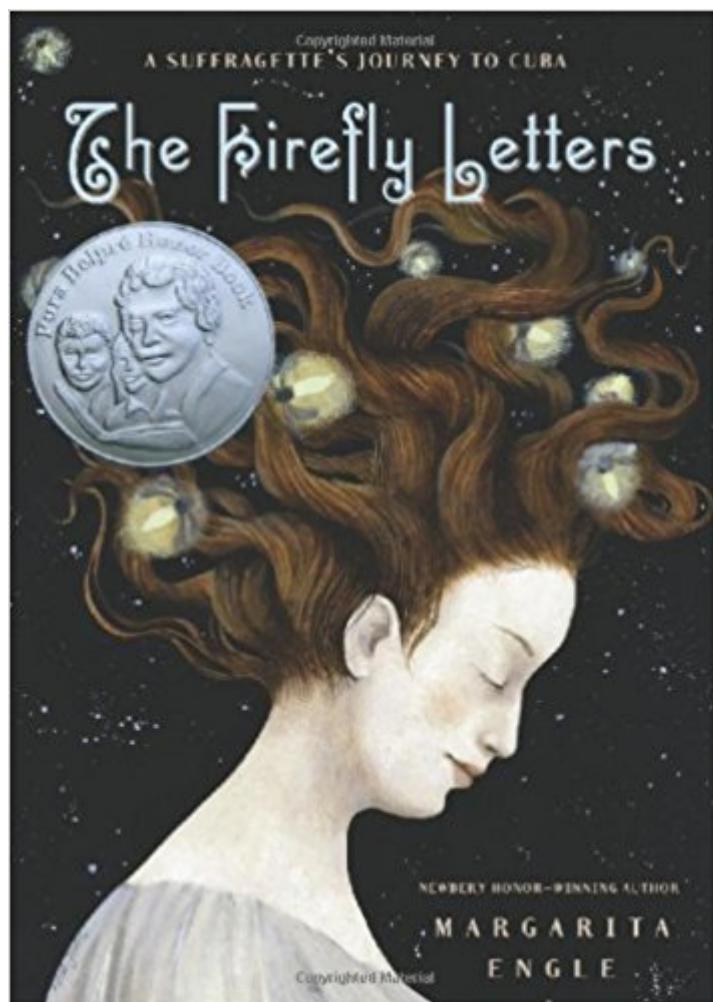


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# The Firefly Letters: A Suffragette's Journey To Cuba



## **Synopsis**

The freedom to roam is something that women and girls in Cuba do not have. Yet when Fredrika Bremer visits from Sweden in 1851 to learn about the people of this magical island, she is accompanied by Cecilia, a young slave who longs for her lost home in Africa. Soon Elena, the wealthy daughter of the house, sneaks out to join them. As the three women explore the lush countryside, they form a bond that breaks the barriers of language and culture. In this quietly powerful new book, award-winning poet Margarita Engle paints a portrait of early women's rights pioneer Fredrika Bremer and the journey to Cuba that transformed her life. *The Firefly Letters* is a 2011 Pura Belpre Honor Book for Narrative and a 2011 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In 1851, author and activist Fredrika Bremer spent three months in Cuba, traveling around the island with a young African-born slave who belonged to her hosts and who served as Bremer's translator. Drawing upon the nineteenth century writings and sketches of Fredrika Bremer, an early, important, and still relatively unknown figure in the women's rights movement, Margarita Engle has crafted *THE FIREFLY LETTERS*, a prose poetry dramatization of Bremer's time on the island. The story is told in alternating poems by Fredrika, her young translator Cecilia, by Cecilia's husband, and by Elena the fictional daughter of Bremer's hosts, a twelve year-old growing up in wealth and privilege who often seems to have even less freedom than the slaves owned by her father. It is when

Fredrika leaves the confines of her host's home with Cecilia in tow (leaving young Elena stuck at home without companionship), and sets out across the island, that we come to grasp how the lively and rich culture that the slaves have brought with them contrasts so sharply with the strait-jacketed patriarchal society and customs from which Fredrika has escaped and to which Elena is a young, unwilling victim. *THE FIREFLY LETTERS* is a sterling example of how less can so often be more. Good prose poetry -- like all good poetry -- relies on strategic employment of the right words to paint pictures. As with so many great poetry novels, there is so much payoff here and relatively few words. I had not previously heard of Fredrika Bremer. I had no idea that Sweden and Denmark had enacted that legislation so far in advance of the U.S. I had no idea what Cuba was like 160 years ago.

Before I even get to the book, let me just say, I love this cover. The artist behind it is Ana Juan. *Firefly Letters* is written in free verse. Fredrika Bremer, was an author and she fought for the rights of women. In 1851 Bremer went to Cuba for three months. Engle read, Bremer's letters, diaries, notes and sketches from that visit, *The FireFly Letters* is derived from that. ( I got all this lovely information from the historical note in the back of the book) The Swedish consulate places Fredrika with a rich family in Cuba. The family has slaves. Cecilia, a slave (around 15 yrs old), is Bremer's guide and translator. 12 yr old Elena, is the daughter of the house. The story is told through these three women. Engle has given Cecilia's husband Beni, a few poems of his own. I like them, especially the first one. Though I do think Beni's poem messed with the rhythm of the story a little. Cecilia  
The huts of the freed slaves make me think of my lost home! I remember a ghostly mist rising over the river after a boy drowned trying to escape from the slave traders. The mist was silent but the water sang softly telling its own flowing story. If I had known that my father would trade me for a stool, I would have run away into the forest to live in a nest made of dreams and green leaves. Fredrika is against slavery and hates how women are treated in Cuba. Fredrika documented her trip in hopes of making people care about what was going on. With Cecilia as her guide Fredrika sees much of Cuba. At night the two save fireflies, from the children who pull off their wings. Elena watches from her window.

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