



# Slipping the Noose

AUTHOR  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Violence, Sexual Content, Language)

## SYNOPSIS

*The way out is through.*

Anne Bonny is chained up in the hold of a prison ship, nursing nine-month-old Molly. The baby is all she has left of Calico Jack, the swaggering pirate captain who loved her and stole her away to sea—and who now hangs from a gibbet. When armed men rip the child from her grasp, Bonny can do nothing and Molly seems lost. But Anne Bonny was not cut out for despair. She will plan for escape and rescue, and the plan will become action. And the streets of London will belong to her and her daughter—and the ragtag remnants of Calico Jack’s crew.

Anne Bonny looms large in the history of piracy on the high seas. But history, having left the notorious female buccaneer languishing in a Jamaican jail, then carelessly mislaid her. Fortunately we have Meg Caddy to imagine her subsequent exploits and whereabouts, and to bring them so vividly and rakishly to life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meg Caddy is a part-time bookseller and a full-time nerd. Their fantasy novel *Waer* was shortlisted for the 2013 Text Prize and the 2017 CBCA Book of the Year Award, and their historical fiction *Devil’s Ballast* was shortlisted for the 2020 Readings YA Book Prize. They are currently undertaking a PhD in queer fiction.

## BEFORE READING

- Although Meg Caddy has taken fictional liberties with Anne Bonny’s story, she was a real character, and her existence, loves, and friendships are well documented. Read about the life of Anne Bonny here (<https://www.maritimeprofessional.com/blogs/post/anne-bonny-14856>). Imagine what the life of a female pirate must have been like. Why were female pirates so rare?
- Read *Devil’s Ballast*. Use this story, and the blurb of *Slipping the Noose* to make predictions about what challenges Anne Bonny might face in this novel.
- What do you know about London in the 1700s? Discuss the historical setting of the book and the ways in which it differs from contemporary society. Read this timeline (<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofScotland/The-Jacobite-Revolution-Chronology/>) of the Jacobite revolts to get a sense of the political tensions running through the book.

**WHILE READING**

- How does the writer describe London in a way that makes it seem particularly threatening when Anne first steps off the boat?
- What contradictory feelings does Anne have when she discovers that Fletcher has Molly? Why does she feel this way? Do you trust his intentions?
- What does Anne sacrifice when she chooses to stay with Fletcher? Does she really have a choice?
- What does the title of the book refer to?
- In what ways can a prison be a 'profitable enterprise' (p 54)? How does Rook take advantage of this, and why does he need to?
- Why do Bram and Fletcher have to be particularly careful in hiding Anne?
- How does Rook make Read and Darling reliant on his protection?
- What does Rook say to Anne that makes her truly afraid for the first time?
- How do Read and Anne continue to draw strength from each other when they're apart?
- How does Anne describe her relationship with Read to Fletcher?
- When Rook finally confronts Anne, he says that he needs something from her. What does he need? What do you think he means by this?

**AFTER READING****CHARACTER**

- How do you think Lucy truly feels towards Rook? Do you sympathise with her choice to align herself with him or should she have stood with Anne from the beginning?
- Fletcher tells Anne that she should fear Rook more than any other man she's met. Why does he see Rook as more evil than other men? What does Rook have to lose? What do you think is the thing that matters to him most?
- Caddy writes London and the river as characters in their own right, describing the river as a 'pockmarked, lazy hag [...] grey and harsh and always hungry, covered with a thick film of grease and mist' (p 120). What other examples of personification can you find in the novel? How does this technique contribute to the overall emotional tone of the story?

**STYLE AND STRUCTURE**

- *Slipping the Noose* and the prequel, *Devil's Ballast*, are both based on the real-life pirate Anne Bonny. Meg Caddy has used her life and other historical truths as inspiration for a work of fiction. What are some of the ethical questions a writer of historical fiction might need to ask themselves? How important is it to get the historical details (clothes, names, places) accurate? What kind of research do you think writers do to ensure a book's accuracy?
- Meg Caddy uses a different point of view for different character voices—Anne's chapters are written in first person, while Read's are written in third. What does this say about them? How does it shift the way you encounter them as a reader?

**THEMES****Gender**

- What are some of the challenges facing women in London at the time the novel is set? Why does Anne find freedom in a 'man's anonymity' (p 33)?
- How does Rook use Read's gender identity as a way to control him? How does Read stay true to himself despite this?
- Anne is a pirate, an outlaw and also a mother. What can you say about her attitude towards motherhood? What expectations does society (still) place on women as mothers?

**Freedom**

- Rook offers Read and Darling freedom in exchange for committing piracy. Can true freedom be bought? Discuss the moment in the story that you think Read and Darling become truly free.

- Anne is faced multiple times with the choice between sacrificing her personal freedom and saving those she loves. What factors help her to make her decision each time? Do you agree with her choices?
- What freedoms does Anne offer Fletcher when she suggests that they marry? What freedoms will she receive in return? Do you think she will ever be completely free? What would her freedom look like?

### Power

- ‘I’d never been a coward and I wasn’t going to start now. No one knew who I was. I had nothing to fear’ (p 45). How does Rook attempt to gain control of Anne? Why is he unable to wield power over her?
- Rook has political and financial power, but he is afraid of the articles published by Harper and Mist. What power do they have against institutional and financial privilege? Why do people like Harper, Fletcher, Mist and Bonny fight against injustice despite having relatively little power?
- What are the Jacobites fighting for? Do they just want power over the throne, or is it something greater than that?

### RESPONDING

- Anne is haunted by her last words to Calico Jack. Imagine that she is able to talk to him one final time—write a scene that imagines what she would say.
- Make a list of the political and religious persecutions that underpin the novel. Choose one and write a short essay that compares it to the way that people experience these persecutions today.
- What are some of the ethical questions historical fiction needs to take into account? How do writers of historical fiction ensure accuracy in their writing? Choose a chapter from the book, and make a list of the types of research that might have been used to write it (consider diaries, old photos, books, newspapers). Underline parts of the chapter where you can see evidence of the research and make a list of some of the ethical questions the author might have considered while writing.
- Write your own short piece of historical fiction. Choose a person or moment in history that you’re particularly interested in. What research do you need to do? How is the setting different then compared to now? Who is your story about and what happens to them?