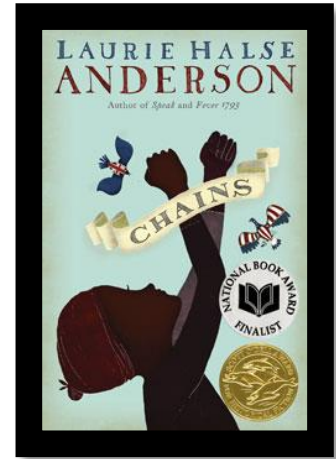


Title: Chains

Author: Laurie Halse Anderson

Grade Level: 5th Grade



SUMMARY

Set in the early days of the American Revolution, this gripping story begins with the illegal sale of two young, orphaned slave girls—Isabel and Ruth. They are purchased by a Tory family, who is fighting in support of the British. Your family will be immediately engaged in the story Isabel tells about her attempt to survive during this turbulent time in Colonial American history. Isabel brings the perspective of a slave to inform listeners, as well as to inspire questions and the desire to know more. Anderson does a masterful job of bringing the complexity of these events to life in an accessible way. Your family will surely be intrigued by this part of American history!

QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING

VOCABULARY

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

In this book, you might talk about these words:

- procure (pg. 20)
- dawdling (pg. 35)
- bellowing (pg. 75)
- heated (pg. 108)
- muttered (pg. 164)
- tidying (pg. 201)
- converse (pg. 260)
- melancholy (pg. 299)

This story promises to provoke a lot of conversation around vocabulary. For example, the term *heated* is not used in the traditional sense. You can make these words pop out even more by focusing on the small differences between definitions.

You might use a question like:

On page 35 the book says, "Lockton grunted and glared at me. 'Be quick about your business, no dawdling, understand?'" In your own words, what does dawdling mean in this passage? Let's reread part of the story before and after this word and then talk about why this word is important. How does it connect to the words and what is going on at this point in the story? Do you think this word could be used correctly in talking about another event from the book? Why?

KEY IDEAS and THEMES

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

1. The author of *Chains* includes quotes from primary sources at the beginning of each chapter. These primary sources are from people who actually witnessed events at the time of the American Revolution. The quotes often come from diaries, documents, images and artefacts. Ask your child how these quotes connect to the events of each chapter. How do they connect to the story and events of this history overall? (Note: you may need to lead your child through the older language of the Colonial Period; however, this opportunity is so rich it should not be missed).
2. It's important to know who is telling a story. Ask your child who is telling this story. How do you know? Ask your child to find examples from the story to explain his or her answer. After talking about who is telling the story, explain that this is called a *first-person narrative*, the process in which the story is told from one person's perspective. How does the author include actual narrative conversation and the conversation Isabel has in her mind? Have your child point to places in the text where she or he can see where that is happening. How can you identify the difference between these two types of conversations? What clues does the reader have?
3. Consider questions 1 and 2. They point to two different examples of a first-person perspective. How do you think they are different? How are they the same? Why do you think the author would include both in this novel? Where in the text do you see why the author would do this? (Suggestion: Revisit this question periodically throughout the book to allow opportunity to get at this complexity).
4. Anderson's novel is rich with figurative language. For example, on page 23, the story reads, "Mr. Robert dropped the heavy coins into the velvet bag. The thudding sound they made as they fell to the bottom reminded me of clods of dirt raining down on a fresh coffin." Ask your child how this kind of description affects his or her understanding of the scene? Why would Anderson compare these heavy coins to dirt falling on a coffin? Do you see somewhere in the text that helps you talk about this? Continue looking for additional uses of rich language and analysing the word choice made by the author.
5. On page 197, Isabel narrates to the reader, "My bees a'swarmed back into my brainpan. They hummed loud so I need not ponder on the baby doll. The burned-over district looked like the inside of me. It was hard to tell where one stopped and the other started. I feared my wits had been melted by the flames, twisted and charred." Now, go back to the events in the previous chapter and then the entire story. What is Isabel talking about? Ask your child: How do the descriptions of the events and setting mirror what was happening inside Isabel?
6. Liberty and freedom are frequently referenced in patriotic symbols, songs, artwork, and words of Americans. Challenge your child to compare these notions of liberty and freedom to various characters in the book, beginning with Isabel. For example, on page 270, reread the opening reference to the Declaration of Independence. Compare these words to the lives of the different characters. Does the Declaration of

Independence apply to their lives? What do you think Anderson is saying about liberty and freedom? In what ways does she say it?

EXTRA ACTIVITIES

1. Like many stories from this historical period, *Chains* references the book *Robinson Crusoe*. Consider exploring this story by reading portions or watching the movie together. There is an abbreviated version by Stephen Feinstein. Talk about why this story might relate to *Chains*. Why would the author reference this famous story? Use examples from the movie and book while you talk about how *Chains* is related to *Robinson Crusoe*.
2. Books like *Chains* are examples of historical fiction, or stories that take place in history. These books make for excellent opportunities to use history as a platform for additional study and research. As a family, identify a short topic for research that is related to the events or historical period found in this book. For example, your child might wonder about prison conditions during the Revolutionary War or slavery in the colonies. Locate primary source documents from the National Archives (www.archives.gov), Library or Congress (www.loc.gov), or the site sponsored by Colonial Williamsburg (www.history.org) to begin investigating the answers to your questions. Afterward, continue looking into the many other history sites in your communities and Internet.