Based on
Chains
By Laurie Halse Anderson

About the Book:
Although Isabel is a slave in Rhode Island, her life is relatively peaceful. That is until her elderly owner dies. Then Isabel and her younger sister, Ruth, are sold to a couple in New York City. The year is 1776 and there is great turmoil in the North American British colonies. Revolutionaries and British soldiers have already clashed. Isabel and Ruth's new owners, the Locktons, are against the revolution and loyal to the crown. Isabel is almost immediately caught in the middle of the two sides when a slave named Curzon asks her to spy for the Americans. She does this hoping that the Americans can help her secure her freedom. Life in the Lockton household is anything but peaceful. Madam Lockton is demanding and cruel, and this is truly apparent when she sells Ruth. Isabel is desperate for her freedom now because she needs to find Ruth. As an entire nation struggles for freedom, so does Isabel. As things become unbearable for her, Isabel displays great courage and strength to save herself and her friend Curzon.

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:

• The story takes place in New York City during the American Revolution. Discuss with the students the concept of historical fiction. Present the definition of historical fiction, characteristics, examples, and non-examples.

• Talk about the political climate of the time and what was happening between the colonists and the British. Use a map of the colonies to show where the book takes place.

• Discuss with students background information about slavery in the American colonies.

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:

• Describe Isabel’s feelings about New York City. How was this different from where she came from?

• Why does Curzon believe that Isabel can help the American cause? What does Isabel hope to gain from helping Curzon?

• Why was it so easy for Isabel to listen to Mr. Lockton and his associates talk of the British plans?

• Initially, Madam Lockton dressed Ruth in fancy clothes and didn’t require her to work, but Isabel labored long hours. Why were the two treated so differently? Why was Isabel so upset about the treatment of Ruth? What happened to change Madam’s treatment of Ruth?

• Describe Isabel’s time under arrest and her trial. What did she mean by bees in her head? Isabel's punishment was to have an “I” for insolent branded on her cheek. How does this change her? By the end of the book Isabel decided that the “I” stood for something else. Why? Why was this important to her emotional healing?

• At the Tea Water Pump, Grandfather tells Isabel, “Everything that stands between you and freedom is the River Jordan.” What did he mean by that? What was Isabel’s River Jordan? In our current day, what River Jordans exist for people seeking freedom?

• Isabel continues to risk her safety to help the Americans when New York City is occupied by the British. Did she do the right thing? Would you have done the same in her situation?

• Isabel struggles with the question that if an entire nation could seek its freedom, why not a girl? Was the American Revolution fought for the freedom of all or just a few? Explain. Do all Americans today have freedom?

• At the end of the book, Isabel shows great loyalty toward Curzon. She risks her escape efforts to save him. What would probably happen to Curzon if it had not been for Isabel? What would have happened to her if she had not chosen to escape that night?
**Student Activity** *(found on the last page of this PDF):*
In this activity, the students will match cause and effect statements.

**Answers:** 1, F; 2, C; 3, G; 4, E; 5, A; 6, H; 7, D; 8, B; 9, J; 10, I.

**Related Activities:**
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Print It:** Divide students into groups of four or five. Have the students develop a newspaper that might have been published in New York at the time Isabel lived there. Assign some of the groups to write from a Tory perspective and some from a Revolutionist perspective. Have them include various kinds of articles such as one about the war, one about the economy, one about fashion, a political cartoon, and an editorial.

- **Biography:** This book is historical fiction. Many events in the story are based on real events. Many people mentioned briefly in the book were also real. Have students choose an important person from the Revolutionary War who was mentioned in the book. Then have them write a summary of how they impacted the American Revolution.

- **A Diary:** Have students choose a character other than Isabel from the book and write several diary entries for that character. Have students include what is taking place and how the character is feeling.

- **What’s Next?:** The book ends with Isabel and Curzon washed up on the bank of the river in Jersey. Isabel is free but not reunited with her sister or settled into a new life. Have students take turns telling what could happen next, each building off the one before them. Continue until each student has had a turn to contribute. Then encourage students to read Laurie Halse Anderson’s new book *Forged*, which tells the rest of the story about Isabel and Curzon.

- **Fashion of the Time:** Madam Lockton was concerned with what to wear to the Queen’s birthday celebration. Have students research what kinds of clothes a wealthy person of the time might have worn. Then have students research what a slave girl or boy would have worn. Have them prepare a poster with drawings and pictures of the two drastically different modes of dress.
Chain Reaction
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Directions: Match the cause statements with the effect statements.

Causes:

1. Miss Mary Finch dies.
2. Madam Lockton refuses to let Bellingham’s men search her clothes chest.
3. Mr. Lockton treats Isabel as if she is not in the room.
4. Ruth has a seizure.
5. Isabel is drugged and oversleeps.
6. The British take over New York City.
7. Isabel wants to visit the prison regularly.
9. Jane Drinkwater spots Isabel talking to a rebel officer.
10. Isabel realizes that Ruth has not been sold but is at the Lockton’s home in Charleston.

Effects:

A. Madam is able to remove Ruth from the house without Isabel knowing.
B. Isabel believes if a nation can fight for freedom, so can she.
C. Mr. Lockton is able to smuggle money into New York City to bribe Americans.
D. Isabel volunteers to go to the Tea Water Pump every morning.
E. Madam no longer wants Ruth around.
F. Robert Finch sells Isabel and Ruth.
H. Cuzon is imprisoned with other rebel soldiers.
I. Isabel decides that she can’t give up on her freedom and makes a daring escape from New York City.
J. Madam locks Isabel in the potato bin.