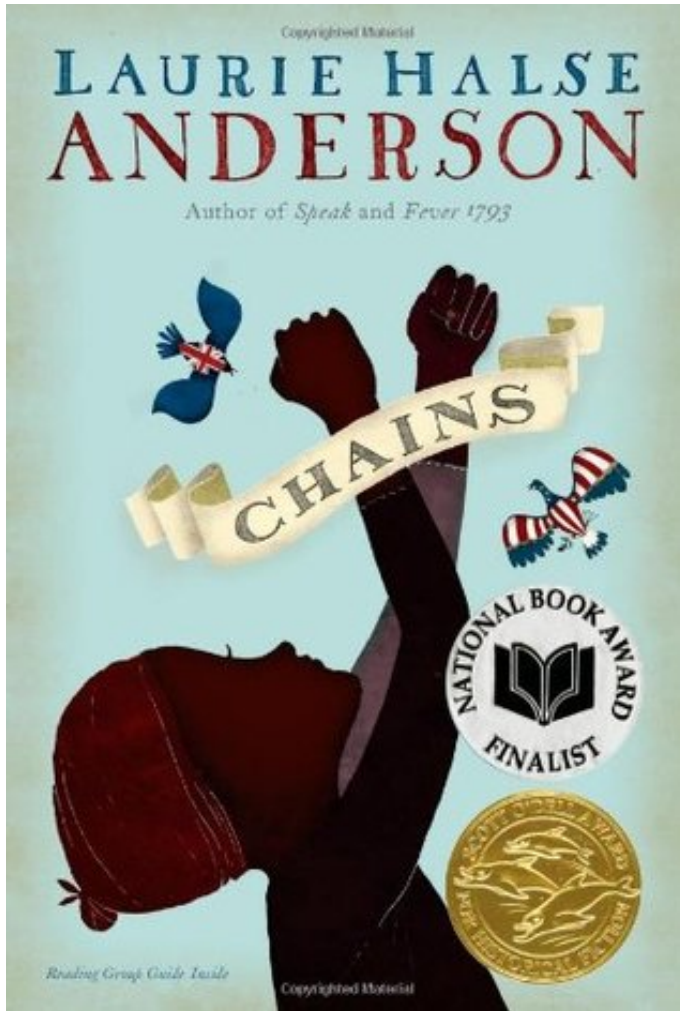

Laurie Halse Anderson

Chains (Seeds of America #1)



Title: Chains (Seeds of America #1)

Author: Laurie Halse Anderson

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Description

If an entire nation could seek its freedom *why not a girl?*

As the Revolutionary War begins, thirteen-year-old Isabel wages her own fight...for freedom. Promised freedom upon the death of their owner, she and her sister, Ruth, in a cruel twist of fate become the property of a malicious New York City couple, the Locktons, who have no sympathy for the American Revolution and even less for Ruth and Isabel. When Isabel meets Curzon, a slave with ties to the Patriots, he encourages her to spy on her owners, who know details of British plans for invasion. She is reluctant at first, but when the unthinkable happens to Ruth, Isabel realizes her loyalty is available to the bidder who can provide her with freedom.

From acclaimed author Laurie Halse Anderson comes this compelling, impeccably researched novel that shows the lengths we can go to cast off our chains, both physical and spiritual.

Insightful reviews

Brooke Shirts: It's taken me forever to getting around to writing a review of this book -- I read it about six weeks ago. I suppose this is because it's getting near-universal acclaim, while I found it rather ho-hum. Perhaps reading all the positive reviews of this book got my expectations up too high.

My main complaint is that the protagonist, Isabel, doesn't come off as a believable 18th-century character to me. It's the same problem I had with [Catherine Called Birdy](#) -- a girl in that time and place may have had those thoughts, but would she have *said* them? To people who have power over her? It also seems odd that Isabel can read so well -- she secretly pours through *Robinson Crusoe* and later stumbles through "Common Sense," which would, I think, require a lot of practice in the act of reading. How likely is it that a slave girl raised in rural Rhode Island in the 1770s would have been given such an opportunity? But Anderson gives us little information regarding Isabel's life before the Locktons, so I can only guess that her previous owner spent an unusual amount of time educating her, which seems unlikely, especially since we are told that her former owner spent her last years in dottering senility.

This is just one example of how strange a character Isabel seemed to me -- more like a 21st century girl in costume than a believable person from her time and place.

To me, being able to correctly portray not just the events and details of a historical period, but its attitudes and ways of thinking is the most important aspect of historical fiction (and probably the most difficult to portray). It's often the gold standard by which I judge historical fiction. Want examples of this, well done? Check out Katherine Paterson's *Lyddie* (in which the protagonist is forced to do backbreaking work under horrible conditions, and when her superiors treat her poorly, her reaction is to work all the harder to prove herself to them) or Joan M. Blos' *A Gathering of Days* (in which the protagonist concludes that it was unwise to give a homemade quilt to a starving runaway slave).

There, I said it. Now let me just get ready to duck the rotten tomatoes . . .

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist": Just a thoroughly enjoyable read. Young adults are the target audience, but the only way you can tell is that there is perhaps a narrower focus than you might find in an adult book. Thirteen-year-old Isabel tells her story from her limited situation, but brings in important events taking place in the larger arena at the start of our Revolutionary War.

This is a very well-told, well-researched story that just flows so nicely. There's a lot of skillful descriptive writing that made me put down the book and get a picture of the scene in my mind. And hey, I even learned some more things I didn't know about the American Revolution.

I really appreciated the fact that the author didn't go for the cheap emotional hook. You can feel the sadness and loss and betrayal, but she doesn't overdo it. Isabel is a strong, intelligent, resourceful girl who doesn't let the despair keep her down.

Betsy: My discovery of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Chains* came at the best possible time. I had recently read and reviewed Steve Sheinkin's, [King George, What Was His Problem?](#), a book that looks at the stories behind the American Revolution that they don't teach you in school. I enjoyed the title thoroughly, but one point had me baffled. Why on earth did American slaves fight or aid the Revolution when Britain was anti-slavery? It just didn't make any sense. It reminded me of that black character on the kids' show *Liberty's Kids* and my husband asking, "So... is he insane?" And up until now no book written for kids, fiction or informational, has ever really addressed this question to my satisfaction. Enter Laurie Halse Anderson. As she says of the book, "A decade ago, while researching [Fever 1793](#), I came across facts that shocked me; that Benjamin Franklin owned slaves, that twenty percent of New York City in 1776 was held in bondage, and that the Revolution was not fought for the freedom of all Americans." The result of this shock is *Chains*, a complex but kid-friendly look at the Revolutionary War through the eyes of a Loyalist's slave. As Anderson says in her Author's Note at the end, "you really can't look at this through good guy/bad guy glasses." So it is that you end up with a book that is nuanced, historically accurate within an inch of its life, and infinitely readable.

They were supposed to be free. That was the promise that old Miss Mary Finch made to Isabel and her little sister Ruth before she died. She even put it in writing, though the man who wrote it up for her departed before her death, leaving no proof. Now the sisters have been sold to the Lockton household and things look bad. The Locktons are Loyalists living in New York City, and soon Isabel finds that the island itself makes for an ideal prison from which escape is near impossible. With the Revolutionary War beginning and England taking over the city, Isabel is torn between aiding the Colonists or the Loyalists. Both sides fail to take slaves into account, using them as tools rather than people. To find her own way Isabel must use her head and determine whom it is that she can trust and how to use what little power she has. Each chapter begins with a quote from a real person or advertisement during this time period. An Author's Note at the end provides additional details, source notes for further reading, and clarifications on tricky points.

I wanted to start off here with something along the lines of "Well, *of course* the writing is good," but maybe that's not the given I think it is. Maybe you haven't read a Laurie Halse Anderson

book before. Or maybe you did but it was a long time ago and somehow you've managed to conflate her in your mind with fellow revolutionary author [M.T. Anderson](#). Maybe I shouldn't go about assuming that you are familiar then with her wordplay and wit then. Take as one such example a moment when Isabel discovers that her mistress has done the unthinkable. Anderson writes, "She did not look into my eyes, did not see the lion inside. She did not see the me of me, the Isabel. I saw her. I saw all the way down to her withered soul." That's just a taste, but you get the picture. Anderson accomplishes the unenviable task of having to write someone in a helpless position who can somehow remain strong in spite of the odds. On top of that she fills her tale with likeable and unlikeable characters together. Yet every person here, no matter how briefly they flit across the page, has a story. My husband is fond of saying of people that "they only want what they want." In other words, everyone has their own number one prerogative in mind. They're all looking out for number one. What makes Isabel such a stunning protagonist and hero is that in spite of the odds and her trials, she is able to look out for other people even in the midst of her own wants and needs.

Anderson also knows how to write a good villain. Mrs. Lockton is systematic in her abuse, and perfectly created as well. A two-dimensional villain is something you see in children's books every day, but Anderson is clever enough to give Madam a little more depth than that. She is herself abused by her husband, and one chapter begins with an unsigned Colonial-Era letter that reads, "Among all the species and degrees of slavery that have excited the attention of mankind . . . there is perhaps none more pitiable than that of the ill-sooted Wife." It is not an excuse for what she does to the people she owns, but at least you understand her nastiness a little better.

Of course, there are some portions in this book where not a lot happens and you find yourself waiting for the next event to take place. For much of the story Isabel has to remain a kind of static character. When she does take matters into her own hands while in the thrall of anger, it can lead to problems. So for a while she has to bide her time and you, the reader, are biding right alongside her. This accounts for some of the sections in the center of the novel where we have to get a little overheard exposition to know what's going on in the state and the country. Fortunately the stakes are hoisted up beautifully after that and the storyline proceeds at a bracing clip.

That each chapter begins with a real-life quote makes for a beautiful dichotomy. On the one hand you have the Continental Congress saying, "The time is now near at hand which must probably determine, whether Americans are to be, Freemen, or Slaves," and on the other you have Isabel nearly dying on us all thanks to actual slavery. These quotes become their own counter-narrative. Fiction is often limited by the fact that if you're writing in the first-person you're only really getting one point of view. Unless a character eavesdrops on others (or, in the case of this book, is almost invisible to them) they can't get alternative voices. So when you enter in quotes from the day from the Revolutionaries, you remember all the other stories being told during this time in history. Without them you wouldn't be able to place Isabel's dilemma, and the dilemma of all the New York slaves of this time period, in history. Thus does Anderson give everyone a voice without sacrificing that of her main character.

I've heard the faint but unmistakable cry to "Replace schools reading [Johnny Tremain](#) with

Chains! It's quiet at the moment, but I expect the movement to gather momentum any day now. Don't get me wrong, I'm fond of *Johnny Tremain* too (didn't Bart Simpson want to rename it "Johnny Deformed"?), but I don't know that its historical accuracy and kid-friendly interest level can really compete with Anderson's book. *Chains* disproves the notion that a children's book written for the middle reader set can't have complexity and interesting characters. Best of all, it's a great read. Sucks you in and doesn't spit you out until the very end. I look forward to the sequel (as there is bound to be one) and hope that this book gets into the hands of teachers everywhere as soon as possible. If you read only one piece of historical fiction from 2008, read this.

Ages 10 and up

Beth: 4.5 stars! I'm joyful that we selected this publication for incoming eighth graders to decide on for his or her summer time reading. Isabel/Sal is an awesome character. Laurie Halse Anderson does a notable activity recreating lifestyles in NY urban in the course of 1776-1777. What an enticing time in history.

Thomas: *Chains* was once a superb booklet via Laurie Halse Anderson - unhappy and jam-packed with sorrow, yet hopeful on the comparable time. It really is old fiction, which typically includes deterring facts, yet Anderson writes super good and retains the characters compelling. The tale facilitates round Isabel, who used to be promised freedom along her sister yet via a merciless accident ended up being bought again. She works for an inhumane Tory family, of whom the headmistress is principally evil. Isabel is inspirited though, and should do no matter what it takes to unfasten herself and her sister from the clutches in their master. I didn't recognize there has been going to be a sequel (I do not believe it says so at the cover) yet I assume that is a superb thing.

Donalyn: throughout the progressive War, whereas Patriots fought for freedom from British tyranny, the enslavement of African captives persisted on either sides. Laurie Halse Anderson offers one other standpoint at the war, advised in the course of the studies of Isabel, a black slave in a Tory household, who's used as a pawn to undercover agent for the rebels, who promise to assist her achieve her freedom. I concept this e-book supplied a brand new lens for taking a look at the progressive battle (and slavery) and that I watch for passing this ebook to my 6th grade students. This publication is identical in to Anderson's different nice ancient fiction book, *Fever 1793*.

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