

Laurie Halse Anderson Lesson Plans and Classroom Resources

Winner of the 2017 Zarrow Award for Young Readers' Literature –
Laurie Halse Anderson

Lesson ideas for selected reading: *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson

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Lesson: What Do You Remember about 1776? Revolutionary War Mind Maps

The importance of activating prior or background knowledge to improve reading comprehension is well-established. Simply put, before you read about a topic, the easier it will be to read if you first remind yourself what you already know. (“When was World War I? 1939? No, that was the second world war. WWI was 1914, though the U.S. didn’t enter until a few years later. Didn’t they call it the ‘war to end all wars’? Something about Archduke Ferdinand....” As disjointed as this sounds, it will definitely help to recall before reading a novel set in WWI.)

In this lesson, you will help students map their knowledge of the Revolutionary War, which is the setting for Laurie Halse Anderson’s novel, *Chains*.

1. Determine if you would like students to brainstorm on their own first, do this as a group project, or create a mind map as a class.
2. “We’re going to write down everything we remember about the American Revolution. We’ll put ‘Revolutionary War’ in the middle of our map and just start working out from there. To start, think ‘I already know that...’”
 - a. Use mind map example, below, and tips on creating mind maps.
 - b. Some questions to ask if students get stuck: “Who are some people who were important in the Revolutionary War? Can you think of important objects related to the colonies and the Revolution that you know about? Where did the Revolutionary War take place?”
3. If you have a Smart Board, you can visit (or ask students to research on their own) <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/revwartimeline.html> to fill in any “gaps” of knowledge on mind maps.
4. Another good site with information, games, and activities about the Revolutionary War is <http://mrnussbaum.com/american-revolution>.
5. Finally, to build knowledge about the African-American experience during the Revolutionary War, share the following article from the “African American Experience” database of historical research, which can be found on the library’s web site – www.tulsalibrary.org – “Research & Learn” – “Alphabetical list of Resources” – “African American Experience”. (You will have to enter a current and valid library card number to access.)

TOPIC CENTER: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1763–1787

The American Revolution, 1763–1787

African Americans played a significant role during the [American Revolution](#) from 1763 to 1787. The Revolutionary period began shortly after the [French and Indian War](#), when England sought to gain greater control over its North American colonies by imposing taxes and other restrictions. The colonists, who had become used to a great deal of autonomy since settling in America, and angry that England was restricting their expansion westward, began unifying in a common goal of independence from British rule. Agitation would lead to war between the English government and their allies (Loyalists) and the American colonies and their allies (Patriots). Everyone was pulled into this conflict, including nearly 100,000 African Americans, who believed that their loyalty to one side or the other would earn them freedom and equality. The ideals of independence fostered by the Revolution brought American slavery to the forefront as a divisive issue between American colonies, and one that highlighted the hypocrisy of white slave owners proclaiming the right of every man to be free while holding men as property.

Choosing Sides

African Americans allied themselves on both the American and British sides. Ultimately, their main motivator was not so much the Loyalist or Patriot cause, but the principle of freedom from slavery.

The majority of African Americans in the United States, mostly slaves, chose to side with the British in the Revolutionary War because they were drawn to the same cause which propelled white patriots to declare independence from Britain—freedom. However, they sided with the English because to them, the white colonists (slave owners) were the oppressor. In addition, British officials—most famously, [Lord Dunmore](#)—promised freedom to any black man who joined the Loyalists. As a result, the majority of blacks did fight on the British side because they believed that a British-run America would secure their freedom, while an independent America would only continue its established [slave culture](#).

Although in lesser numbers, both free and enslaved blacks also joined the Patriot cause. Those blacks that fought on the American side were likely swayed by the ideals put forth in the [Declaration of Independence](#). This document affirmed the freedom and equality of all men and garnered support by drawing on the idea of the colonists as slaves of the British, imagery to which blacks could relate. In addition, enslaved blacks were further convinced to join the Patriot cause by the original draft of the Declaration, which included a passage denouncing the slave trade—wording that would be deleted after the American victory because of the southern colonies' opposition to [emancipation](#).

Phillis Wheatley and the Revolution

One notable African American supporter of the Patriot cause was [Phillis Wheatley](#), an educated slave and the first African American to publish a book of poems. She lived in Boston, where she was a house slave, experienced the American Revolution and the occupation of Boston by British troops, Lesson Plans for “Chains” by 2017 Zarrow Award Winner Laurie Halse Anderson – Created by Youth Services Department, Tulsa City-County Library, page 2

and where she became a significant black voice in the revolutionary cause.

Wheatley spoke to the American fight for independence through the poem, "His Excellency George Washington," which she sent to the general; he, in turn, received it warmly and even invited her to visit him. The poem praises Washington's efforts for the colonies, although it does not criticize slavery, and was used as propaganda to bolster support for the Patriots during the Revolutionary War.

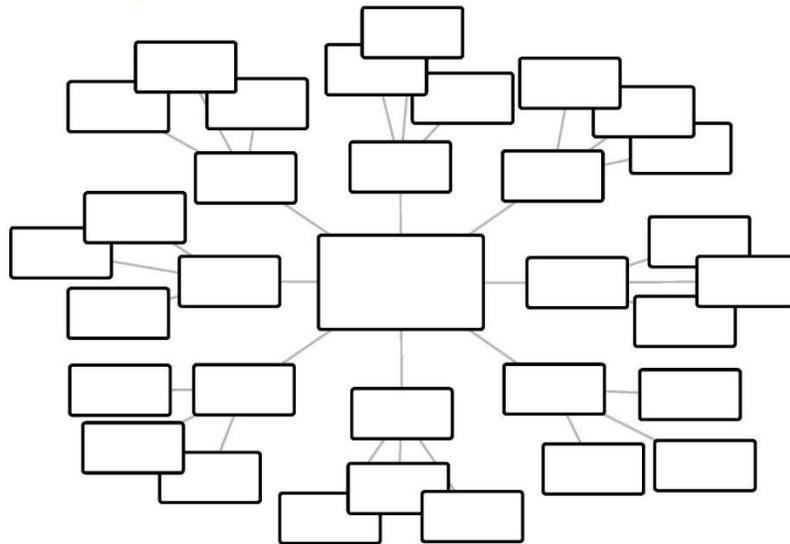
In the end, the Loyalists and the Patriots were unable to keep their promises of freedom to their black fighters. The British had been expelled, and the Americans, in the dawn of independence, decided that forming a strong union between the states was more important than freeing its slave population. Although the practice endured, many slaves, as a result of the war, found freedom on their own by escaping north to Canada. Despite its continued practice, the institution of slavery was weakened in that slavery was abolished in some northern states and the slave trade was also abolished. Although the close of the international slave trade did not end slavery at home, it weakened its practice by deeply altering U.S. slave culture and creating greater awareness of its evils—and the beginnings of the abolition movement.

Fatima Policarpo

MLA Citation

Policarpo, Fatima. "The American Revolution, 1763–1787." *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2017, africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Topics/Display/6. Accessed 20 Jan. 2017

mindmap

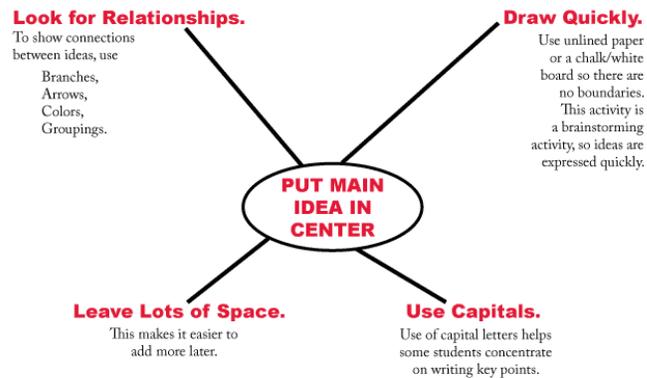


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How to Construct a Mind Map



RELATED LESSON:

See Pre-Reading Activity: Historical Timeline on

<http://www.npenn.org/cms/lib/PA09000087/Centricity/Domain/328/Chains.pdf>

This lesson gives a two-page historical summary of the events that are important to the world of “Chains.” Students read the summary, create timeline activity cards about 8 events, and then create a timeline using the cards. In addition to the Revolutionary War mind map, this lesson will prepare students for better understanding the novel as they read it.

Lesson: How Do Your Daily Chores Compare to Isabel’s? Compare and Contrast Charts

The Booklist review of *Chains* explains: “The specifics of Isabel’s daily drudgery may slow some readers, but the catalogue of chores communicates the brutal rhythms of unrelenting toil, helping readers to imagine vividly the realities of Isabel’s life.” Help students connect their personal lives with the main character’s – even if just in stark contrast!

1. As an individual assignment, students should make a list of their own personal chores every day or week.
2. Ask students to then make a list of chores that Isabel must carry out every day. You may want to do this as an individual assignment, small groups, or as a class, as long as it is shared as a class.
3. “Do we have a volunteer who is willing to share his or her chore list?” (If you do not have one student who would like to do this, ask for one task from several students to create a full chore list of a typical student from today.)
4. Use the side-by-side lists to lead a discussion of the chores and their implications to the story of *Chains*.

| My Chores | Isabel’s Chores |
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Lesson: Can Spies Be Heroes? Class Discussion

Isabel acts as a spy for the rebels, sneaking into a Patriot camp and sharing a crucial Loyalist secret in exchange for passage to Rhode Island for herself and her sister. A real-life African-American spy during the Revolutionary War was James Armistead-Lafayette.

1. Read aloud or ask students to read in groups a short description of James Armistead-Lafayette, below, from the “African American Experience” database of historical research, which can be found on the library’s web site – www.tulsalibrary.org – “Research & Learn” – “Alphabetical list of Resources” – “African American Experience”. (You will have to enter a current and valid library card number to access.)

James Armistead-Lafayette was an African American double agent during the Revolutionary War.

The details of James Armistead-Lafayette's early life as a slave are unknown, though he was believed to have been born in 1748. In 1781, he was enslaved to William Armistead, a commissary merchant providing military supplies to a [Continental Army](#) under the local command of the Marquis de La Fayette in Richmond, Virginia. La Fayette and his small force arrived in Virginia several months earlier to stop the British Army's raids in the area. To support his mission, La Fayette needed spies to keep him informed of the British Army's activities. Armistead-Lafayette heard the call for spies and received permission from his master to work for La Fayette. Initially, Armistead-Lafayette carried messages from La Fayette back and forth to other French units in the area. As La Fayette's trust in Armistead-Lafayette grew, he sent him on more dangerous missions behind British lines to spy on the former American and now British Maj. Gen. Benedict Arnold. Posing initially as a [runaway slave](#), Armistead-Lafayette volunteered his services to the British and assumed the role of a forager collecting food. Armistead-Lafayette served the British so well they later allowed him to guide a few raids into Virginia.

Information suggests that Armistead-Lafayette could not read or write, which was typical of the slave population at the time. He recognized his disadvantage and instead served the colonial cause by memorizing conversations he heard between British officers and carrying notes written by other American spies in the British camp back and forth between the lines. Only after Arnold left Virginia and Lt. Gen. Charles Cornwallis assumed command did Armistead-Lafayette earn his true place in American history as a double agent. Armistead-Lafayette's reputation for faithful service to Arnold led Cornwallis to ask him to spy for the British. The British assumed that their offer of freedom to the slave was enough to ensure his loyalty and make him a perfect source of information. Armistead-Lafayette provided the British with just enough information, such as the note of misinformation provided by La Fayette, to keep them satisfied, but not enough to hurt the American cause. Armistead-Lafayette's steady flow of accurate information back to La Fayette contributed to Cornwallis's defeat in October 1781 at the Battle of Yorktown. Cornwallis realized his error in trusting Armistead-Lafayette when he saw him in a colonial servant's uniform at La Fayette's headquarters several days after his surrender.

Armistead-Lafayette was never promised his freedom by the Americans, and after the war he returned to William Armistead as a slave. Based on his war record and with help from William Armistead, Armistead-Lafayette applied to the Virginia legislature to purchase his freedom in 1784, but was turned down. In 1785, La Fayette wrote Armistead-Lafayette a personal testimonial highlighting the latter's faithful service during the Revolution. With the additional support of La Fayette's testimonial, Armistead-Lafayette applied to the Virginia legislature again in 1786 and was

granted his freedom in 1787. As a free man, Armistead-Lafayette adapted Lafayette as his last name in honor of his hero. Armistead-Lafayette started a family and became a farmer, purchasing 40 acres next to William Armistead's estate in New Kent County, Virginia. Years later, poor and infirm, Armistead-Lafayette petitioned the Virginia legislature and was granted an annual pension based on this wartime service, which he received for the rest of his life. In 1824, Armistead-Lafayette met La Fayette one last time at a ceremony on the old Yorktown battlefield, and the two embraced in front of the crowd. Armistead-Lafayette entered the public eye again in 1828 as a subsidiary hero in James E. Heath's novel *Edge-hill; or, The Family of the Fitzroyals*. James Armistead-Lafayette passed away on his farm on August 9, 1830.

Bernard F. Harris Jr.

Further Reading

Davis, Burke. *Black Heroes of the American Revolution*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 1976;
Lanning, Michael L. *African Americans in the Revolutionary War*. New York: Kensington Publishing, 2000;
Nash, Gary B., and Graham R. Hodges. *Friends of Liberty: A Tale of Three Patriots, Two Revolutions, and a Tragic Betrayal of Freedom in the New Nation*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

MLA Citation

Harris, Bernard F. "James Armistead-Lafayette." *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2017, africanamerican.abc-clio.com. Accessed 20 Jan. 2017.

2. Ask, "How is Isabel's experience similar to James Armistead-Lafayette's? How was it different?" List similarities and differences as a class, in small groups, or as an individual assignment before sharing.
3. Lead a discussion about the morality of spies – in particular, whether spying is ever justified and if so, why. Be sure to request specific details from Isabel's story and James Armistead-Lafayette's life to support their viewpoints.

Lesson: Quick Write: Freedom

1. Ask students to complete a “Quick Write” (5 minutes of writing without stopping or editing) about the idea of FREEDOM in their own lives. What does freedom look like? What happens when they feel their personal freedom is taken away?
2. Share responses with the class.
3. Ask students to complete a second “Quick Write” from the point of view of any character in the novel *Chains*. What does freedom look like for him/her? What does not having freedom mean for them?
4. Lead a discussion about the parts of “FREEDOM” that are unchanging – i.e., what was true during the Revolutionary War that is true today – and the parts that are highly specific to the historical year (1776 or 2017).

RELATED LESSON:

See Analyzing Theme lesson on

<http://www.npenn.org/cms/lib/PA09000087/Centricity/Domain/328/Chains.pdf>

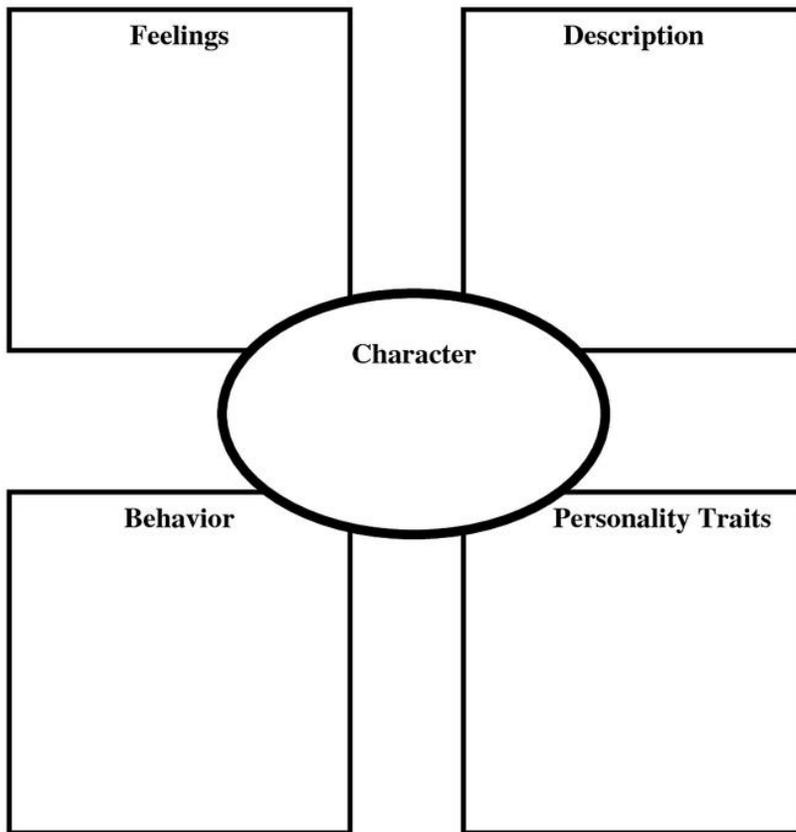
This lesson is designed to be presented during or after the reading of Chapters XI through XVI. It asks students to take the perspectives of different characters and what liberty means to them personally.

Lesson: Who Is Isabel? Character Map

Isabel is a fascinating character that readers learn a great deal about because the novel is told from her point of view or perspective. Ask students to complete a “Character Map” about Isabel, either as an individual assignment, in groups, or as a class.

CHARACTER MAP #1

Name: _____ Date: _____



GO.5.1

RELATED LESSON:

See Examining Characters lesson on <http://www.npenn.org/cms/lib/PA09000087/Centricity/Domain/328/Chains.pdf>

This lesson encourages students to further understand the character of Isabel.

Other Resources

A complete teachers' guide to *Chains*, which includes historical background, timeline activities, vocabulary words, and discussion questions:

<http://www.npenn.org/cms/lib/PA09000087/Centricity/Domain/328/Chains.pdf>

Author biographies:

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributor/laurie-halse-anderson>

<http://madwomanintheforest.com/laurie/>

Be sure to check out the *Chains* playlist and the author's inspiration for *Chains*.

Summary and awards:

<http://madwomanintheforest.com/historical-chains/>

Tips for teaching sensitive topics such as slavery:

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-46-spring-2014/feature/tongue-tied>

<http://www.tolerance.org/teach-sensitive-topics>

Historical timeline:

<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/revwartimeline.html>

A great website for information on the American Revolution, including games and activities:

<http://mrnussbaum.com/american-revolution/>

Discussion questions:

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/free-lesson-plans/search?query=chains+by+laurie+halse+anderson>

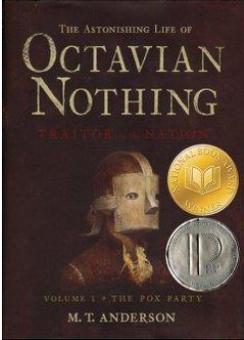
Common Core Standards:

<http://teachers.madwomanintheforest.com/chains-ccs/>

This includes a reflection activity with graphic organizer to use with quotes at the beginning of chapters.

Related Novels

Three middle-grade novels with similar themes or settings include:

| | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Stella by Starlight by Sharon Draper</p> <p>When a burning cross set by the Klan causes panic and fear in 1932 Bumblebee, North Carolina, fifth-grader Stella must face prejudice and find the strength to demand change in her segregated town. <i>Although this novel is set in the 1930s, the themes of African-American empowerment, family, and freedom are predominant. The character of Stella has interesting parallels to Isabel. (Sharon Draper is also a former Zarrow Award winner.)</i></p> |
|  | <p>Nightjohn by Gary Paulsen</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Sarny's brutal life as a slave becomes even more dangerous when a newly arrived slave offers to teach her how to read. <i>Historical fiction with a slave character who uses reading and writing to attempt escape and a better life.</i></p> |
|  | <p>The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing by M.T. Anderson</p> <p>At the dawn of the Revolutionary War, young Octavian is raised in highly unusual circumstances at the Novanglian College of Lucidity. Though the scholars give him a first-rate education, they also monitor him closely...too closely. As he grows older, Octavian learns the horrifying truth of his situation, and that truth leads him to question his understanding of himself and the Revolution: if the Patriots can fight for their freedom, why can't he fight for his? <i>This is the novel that is most cited as a "read-alike" for Chains. They are similar in setting, perspective, and tone.</i></p> |

If you are looking for similar fictional accounts of the Revolutionary War for young readers, NoveList has a “Grab and Go” list, “[American Colonial and Revolutionary Periods: Fiction for Grades 6-8.](#)” You can find this and other lists by going to www.tulsalibrary.org – “Explore” – “Reader Tools” – “NoveList.” (You will need to enter a current and valid library card number.)