

Chains Teacher's Guide

Discussion Questions

What kind of place was New York City in 1776? Was it larger or smaller than it is now? What kind of smells, sights and sounds would you experience if you were transported back in time and wound up there?

What would you have done in New York City back then? Would you have worked, been a slave, or played outside? Which children went to school? What kind of activities would you do with your friends?

New York City was a very busy place, even back in 1776. Would you have been brave enough to leave your house in the middle of the night?

Isabel had a very painful and horrifying moment when she was branded with the letter 'I'. What has been the worst time of your life and how does it compare to Isabel's pain?

How does the title Chains connect to this book? Can you think of any alternative titles that could have been used?

Have you ever dealt with an older sibling leaving for college or moving out of the house? How do you think this compares to how Ruth and Isabel felt when they were separated?

Many children have chores to do around the house, but could you imagine doing the things Isabel did! What are your responsibilities around the house? Are they close to the same things Isabel was forced to do?

What do you think the adults did all day in 1776? Did they work, fight or sit around the house? Is this what your parents do?

It can be hard to watch your younger (or older!) siblings have it easier than you. What does this feel like to you, and to Isabel?

Do you think it is fair to ask a twelve-year-old to work as hard as Isabel?

Living in New York City right at the birth of our country must have been wonderful! How do you think other children reacted when they heard news of the Declaration of Independence? Were they happy to be free, nervous for their family to have to fight or something else? How do you think the slaves felt hearing this news?

Mattie, from Fever 1793, felt many of the same things as Isabel but almost 20 years later. How do you think these girls were similar? Could they have been friends?

Did you know that the northern states had slaves? What did it feel like to learn that Isabel was a slave from Rhode Island?

Did you know that the Declaration of Independence was first approved on July 2, 1776? How would you have reacted when you heard the news?

How did it feel to hear the Locktons lie and pretend to be Patriots so that they could get past the docks?

What would you have done when you learned that Elihu Lockton was working for the Loyalists? Do you think Isabel did the right thing?

Isabel frequently goes to the water pump to get water for cooking and bathing. On one trip, a group of enslaved African Americans are discussing their options for freedom (page 161). Which option would you have taken?

What did the Grandfather mean at the water pump when he told Isabel to find her River Jordan? Have you heard that phrase anywhere else before?

Cross-Curricular Activities

Language Arts

Write up a missing slave ad that Madam Lockton might write while she is looking for Isabel. You can study the runaway ads at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways/1770s.html> for details.

Isabel has several vivid dreams in Chains. Create a dream journal that she might have kept by her bed to document them. You might find it fun to create new dreams relevant to her daily activities. Remember, while she could write (roughly ten percent of slaves in the North could), pictures would also help explain what she's feeling.

Science

Research weather patterns and plant types in the region of New York City. Try to figure out what kind of seeds Isabel might have planted throughout the year to keep her garden going.

It must have hurt when Isabel was branded with the letter 'I' on her cheek! How would a doctor, or maid, have cared for her? What type of pain medication and wound cleaners did they have? You probably won't find Ibuprofen and Neosporin!

Social Studies

The area of the fire has historically been prone to harsh times in New York City. What are some other things that have happened to that part of the city? Create a letter to send to Real Estate Agents letting them know what has happened there and come up with some ideas of what to create on the land.

Many people don't realize how fundamental slavery was in their area before, during and after the Revolution. Was slavery legal in your state? If so, when was it finally abolished? Look up the progress of African American rights and come up with a timeline of the important events.

Math

Pretend you are the Lockton family. Come up with a budget plan for living in those days. Don't forget to pay your maids, but not the slaves. You will also have to remember to save money for the groceries, care of the horses, fabric for clothing and a few special items for Elihu when he comes home.

Find the number of residents and slaves in New York City in 1776. What percentage of people were slaves? Create a graph to represent this information.

Other Activities

It is time to do the grocery shopping. How often do you think you will have to go? What should you buy when you go? How will you get it home? Remember that they didn't have refrigerators or cars. They had to be very careful to not let any food spoil, especially in the summer months. Try to list the ingredients needed for a breakfast of muffins, sandwiches for lunch and a big chicken supper (you can add the side dishes!).

Split the classroom up into Patriots and Loyalists. Recreate a few scenes from Chains that have a lot of action and characters. The slave auction, docking in New York City, water pump, reading of the Declaration of Independence and Colonel Regan's fort are a few good places to start!

Turn your classroom into New York City circa 1776. Find a map of the city at the time and allow students to find where they would like to live. To recreate the daily battles you could have contests in math, history or vocabulary (period related if you would like!). The winner of the contest, Patriot or Loyalist, would then get to take over another part of the city from their opponent.

Contact

If you have classroom activities that you would like to add to this page, please email them to Louise, QueenLouise AT writrlady DOT com. Be sure to include your name, school, and address so we can give you credit for your contribution!

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