

2003

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Fever 1793*. Simon and Schuster, 2000.

SUMMARY:

The year is 1793. Mattie Cook lives with her mother and grandfather. They own a coffeehouse in Philadelphia. Yellow fever is spreading through the city and panic is everywhere. Each new report of a death sends the rest of the community into further turmoil. Farmers and merchants are even afraid to bring their goods into the city.

Mattie's mother catches the fever and sends Mattie and her grandfather to a friend's farm in order to escape. However, along the way grandfather starts feeling ill and they are not allowed to continue. Mattie herself becomes ill, but finds a way to watch over grandfather and a way back to Philadelphia.

As the epidemic spreads and Mattie journeys home, grandfather dies, the coffeehouse is ransacked by thieves and Mattie "adopts" Nell, an infant who is found in the arms of her dead mother. It is with the help of Eliza, the coffeehouse cook who is active in the Free African Society, that the women find a way to nurse all their patients as the family makes it through to the first frost, the death of the mosquitoes, and the end of the epidemic.

QUESTIONS:

Why doesn't Mrs. Cook listen to her daughter?

Mattie feels that Eliza is her best friend. Why is this unusual?

Discuss the following events in the book when Mattie talks about her feelings.

- Thieves have ransacked Mattie's home. How does she feel about this?
- Mattie is being sent to the country to avoid the fever. What are her feelings about leaving her home?
- When people started returning home, Mattie feels like they are dancing on a grave with no thought to the suffering they had escaped. Why does Mattie feel that way?

Nell becomes Mattie's "adopted" daughter. Why does Mattie take on the responsibility of caring for Nell?

JOURNAL STARTER:

During the quarantine, I spent my time....

ACTIVITIES:

Clean something with vinegar.

Choose a topic to research from the following: Quarantine; Philadelphia in 1763; Yellow Fever; Charles Wilson Peale; Quakers; Free American Society; Food (cornbread, gingerbread, hoe cake, pippin apples, diet bread).

Define the following phrases: Addle-pated nitwit; Supper sorrow with a big spoon; Noodle over-boiled in the stewpot; Stupid Cow Eyes.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-8

BOOK TALK:

Sixteen-year-old Mattie Cook has dreams about what she wants to do as an adult, but an epidemic of yellow fever hits Philadelphia, and people are leaving town. Houses are being boarded up and quarantine signs are everywhere. So many people are dying that they are just being thrown into one big grave. Before long, Mattie has no time to think of any kind of future when she could be the next one to come down with the dreaded fever. Read from Chapter Three, p. 14 in the hardback, beginning from “Dead? Polly’s dead?” to page 15, “It couldn’t be real. How could Polly be dead?” Will Mattie survive?

READ-ALIKES:

Collier, James Lincoln. *The Empty Mirror*. Bloomsbury, 2004.

Giblin, James Cross. *Boy Who Saved Cleveland*. Henry Holt, 2006.

Kositsky, Lynne. *Claire By Moonlight*. Tundra Books, 2005.

Laxalt, Robert. *Time of the Rabies*. University of Nevada Press, 2000.

Murphy, Jim. *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*. Clarion, 2003.

Myers, Anna. *The Graveyard Girl*. Walker, 1995

Spooner, Michael. *Last Child*. Henry Holt, 2005.

RELATED WEB SITES:

Laurie Halse Anderson’s Website: www.writerlady.com

Teacher’s Guide for Fever, 1793: www.writerlady.com/nffever1793_teachers.html

Scholastic Literature Circle Guide: http://teacher.scholastic.com/clubs/pdfs/fever1793_t.pdf

One Book, Two Villages:

<http://www.onebooktwovillages.org/kidquestions.php?bookid=44089242>

OTHER RECOGNITION:

Great Lakes’ Great Books Award (Michigan), 2003.