

Chains Study Guide

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Plot Summary

"Chains" is the story of thirteen-year-old slave Isabel's journey to discover her inner strength and fight for her freedom amidst the depravity of slavery and the upheaval of the Revolutionary War that divided America.

The novel opens on the day of Miss Mary Finch's funeral. Miss Mary Finch was the owner of Isabel and her little sister, Ruth. Before Miss Finch died, she ensured that both girls would be given their freedom in her will, but an evil relative of Miss Finch sells the two girls back into slavery for a profit. The girls' new owners, the Locktons, are devout Loyalists living in New York. They are minorities in the divided city as most in the colonies support General Washington and his desire to free America from British rule. On her first day in New York, Isabel is confronted by a Patriot officer's slave, a boy named Curzon, who asks Isabel to spy on her new masters to help the Patriot cause. He knows that messages from the Loyalist army may pass through the Locktons' home, and he hopes Isabel will share that information with the Patriot Army. He promises that his master will ensure Isabel's freedom in exchange for her help. Although she is wary, Isabel agrees.

Isabel quickly realizes that the Locktons view her and all other slaves as not human beings. They talk about intensely private affairs in her presence because as a slave, she is invisible to them. It is easy for Isabel to gather condemning information but she knows that if she is caught consorting with a Patriot soldier, she will be beaten, sold, or worse, killed. It is only when Madam Lockton begins beating Ruth and eventually sells her to the highest bidder, that Isabel gets serious about her spying duties. She gathers the most useful information for the Patriot Army, a list of soldiers seeking to assassinate General Washington, and runs to the Patriot barracks. The Patriot general that promised to save Isabel turns his back on her once she shares what she knows, and Isabel is returned to the abusive hands of Madam Lockton. As punishment for her insolence, Madam Lockton brands Isabel's cheek with the letter "I." Isabel fears all hope is lost until she learns that the British, if they remain control of the colonies, will seek to free all slaves. If she is free, Isabel may be able to find her sister and reunite her family. She reaches out to the Loyalist leaders but is once again rebuked.

At the same time, Isabel's friend Curzon enlists in the army in the stead of his master, hoping that his bravery, should he live through the battle, will earn him his freedom. He is captured by the Loyalist Army and held as a prisoner of war in horrendous winter conditions. When Isabel hears of this, she begins visiting him, bringing him food and warm clothes. Knowing that she no one to depend on but herself, Isabel hatches an ingenious plan to escape enslavement. On the night of the queen's birthday ball, Isabel escapes from the Lockton home and with the help of a kindly prison guard, helps rescue Curzon from certain death. She steals a rowboat and rows through the night, ultimately ending up in the free state of New Jersey. After years of abuse and struggle, Isabel is free.



Part I: Chapters I - VI

Part I: Chapters I - VI Summary

The novel opens on the day of Miss Mary Finch's funeral. Her nephew has come to Rhode Island to settle her estate and has taken charge of Miss Finch's two slaves, sisters Isabel and Ruth. Isabel, who is thirteen-years-old walks behind the carriage pulling Miss Finch's coffin to the cemetery while her younger sister rides with the carriage driver because she suffers from epilepsy and is mentally impaired. Outside of the cemetery, Isabel runs ahead to visit her mother's grave. She asks her mother's ghost for guidance. Today is the day they've been waiting for: the day the girls are to be set free.

Immediately after Miss Finch's funeral, Isabel boldly walks up to the pastor and asks his help in finding work. Miss Finch freed the girls in her will and Isabel is unsure where she should go next. Miss Finch's nephew curtly cuts the conversation short and says that since his aunt's will cannot be found, the girls are his property and he plans to sell them as soon as possible. Afraid to start a fight with the gentleman, Pastor Weeks bows his head and allows Mr. Robert to lead the girls away. He takes them to an alehouse where he auctions them off to the highest bidder, despite the pleas of the tavern owner, Jenny, a white woman who had been friends with the girls' mother. The girls are sold to a New York couple in town for business, the Locktons, and are in the belly of a cargo ship headed to New York City the next morning.

After the boat docks in New York however, the Locktons come immediately under suspicion. Soldiers ask to search the Lockton's belongings. It is clear they have suspicions about what the couple is carrying. Madam Lockton convinces the soldiers to release her chest, which contains her underwear, and once that is safely back in her possession, she has no qualms about leaving the rest of her belongings behind. She orders Isabel to the water hole and another slave boy, Curzon, offers to show her the way. As they travel through the city, Curzon explains that Master Lockton is under suspicion of supporting the loyalists rather than the rebels who hope to win America's independence from Britain. He promises to help Isabel and Ruth escape to freedom if Isabel is willing to spy on her new master and report what she learns to the Patriot Army.

Part I: Chapters I - VI Analysis

This section immediately showcases two important elements in Isabel's character: she is bold and she will stop at nothing to protect her sister. It is uncommon to see such an emboldened slave, particularly of her age, because silence and respect is often beaten into slave children from birth. This shows that Miss Mary Finch, although a slave owner, was a kindly mistress to the girls. She kept the family together - until the girls' mother died - and even taught the youngsters how to read. Because Isabel and Ruth have



grown up in an affectionate, safe environment, they will not be well prepared to live among a new, ill-tempered master.

Many confusing elements about this particular time in history are introduced in this section as well. When the Locktons arrive back in New York, it is clear they are not welcome. America, as the land will come to be known, is on the brink of the Revolutionary War, but the official emancipation from British control has not yet happened. On paper, America is still loyal to the king, but rebel soldiers, under the leadership of General George Washington, have been planning their attack. In these unstable political times, is considered very dangerous to remain loyal to the king, and Master Lockton is under suspicion of being a Loyalist. At the New York dock, Mister Bellingham is keen to search the Locktons' belongings for proof that the couple is supporting the Loyalist army. The only piece of property he does not search is Madam Lockton's underwear chest, although it is very clear in the novel that Madam is hiding incriminating evidence there.

The relationship between Isabel and Ruth is immediately characterized when Madam Lockton asks which girl giggled at the harbor. It is clear that a punishment is coming to whichever girl committed the innocent crime, and Isabel takes the blow from Madam's hand to protect her younger sister. This desire to protect Ruth from danger will be Isabel's driving motivation in the novel. Even though it is extremely dangerous to spy on her master, Curzon's offer of freedom in exchange for Isabel's betrayal of her master, is alluring. Curzon is Bellingham's slave, so any information Isabel brings to him will reach a Patriot leader immediately. Clearly Curzon believes that if Isabel puts her life on the line for the Patriot cause, his master will immediately whisk Isabel and Ruth away to safety before Master Lockton realizes who betrayed him. Now, Isabel has to decide if the reward is worth the risk.



Part I: Chapters VII - X

Part I: Chapters VII - X Summary

When Isabel returns to the Lockton house after her excursion with Curzon to the watering hole, she meets Becky Berry, the head maid of the house. She informs Isabel that Madam Lockton has taken a particular liking to Ruth and will use her as her personal entertainment in the house. Isabel, meanwhile, is to assist Becky with all the tasks that keep a gentleman's house in order. She also tells Isabel that she'd better listen to everything the Madam says: she has a tendency to beat her slaves, and one girl nearly died as a result of her injuries. If she wants to keep herself safe, and keep her little sister safe, she'd better be seen and not heard.

Each day, Isabel works diligently around the house, struggling to keep her mouth shut when she sees Madam dressing Ruth up and parading her around like a dancing monkey for the amusement of her friends. One afternoon, she sees Ruth crying due to Madam's treatment and vows to get her sister out of there as soon as possible. Becky comes home from the market every afternoon with gossip about the brewing war between the Loyalists and Patriots. The first time Master Lockton entertains his friends, he calls for Isabel to serve them food and drink. The men talk openly about their Loyalist ties, and Master Lockton reveals what was hidden in his wife's underwear chest: stacks and stacks of paper currency the Loyalists plan to use to bribe Patriot farmers into joining their cause. Isabel is astounded that the men would speak so freely in front of her and she struggles to retain every ounce of information. Late that night, after the Locktons fall asleep, Isabel knows what she must do. She creeps out of bed and sneaks to the house Curzon directed her to. She raps quietly on the window and, when Curzon answers, quickly whispers the information she gathered in Master Lockton's library during the meeting. Curzon promises to pass the information on in the hopes that Bellingham will help set the girls free as reward, but he can make no promises.

Part I: Chapters VII - X Analysis

Isabel has taken a particular offence to Madam Lockton's desire to treat Ruth as her personal pet. Because Ruth is simple minded, Isabel feels Madam is taking advantage of her, and Isabel has vowed to protect her sister from all harm, even if that harm comes in the form of pretty dresses and sweet treats. Isabel knows that Madam's mood can turn quickly, and the closer Ruth is when those mood swings take hold, the more danger she is in of being at the brunt of the woman's temper. In order to protect her sister, Isabel decides to trust Curzon and his plan to reveal Lockton as a Loyalist. If Lockton is arrested, or better yet, killed, Bellingham will be in a good position to return the girls to Rhode Island where Isabel can track down the lawyer who wrote Miss Finch's will, ensuring her rightful freedom. When Isabel rushes to Bellingham's home in the middle of the night, she believes she will deliver her message and Bellingham will rush her and Ruth to a ship that very night. This fantastical belief highlights Isabel's naivety. While



she is very brave, Isabel doesn't have a full grasp of how complicated the Revolutionary War will be. All the soldiers are wary of incriminating themselves in a crime and are therefore slow to reveal their knowledge. Even though Bellingham now has information that could lead to Lockton's arrest, he will likely bide his time before striking. The longer he waits, the more danger Isabel and Ruth are in.



Part I: Chapters XI - XV

Part I: Chapters XI - XV Summary

The next morning, Isabel is exhausted having not slept well the night before, but there is much to do around the home. She is only given a moment's rest when six soldiers come knocking on the front door. Her heart nearly leaps out of her chest when she sees that Bellingham is leading the pack of soldiers as they stride through the Locktons' home with crowbars, removing all the windows. They claim that they will be melting down the lead window frames to make bullets for the Patriot Army and that all Patriots are making great sacrifices at this time of need. Isabel wants to shout at the soldiers to look for the linen chest, but she restrains herself. Finally, one soldier shouts that he's found something and they all race upstairs as he opens up the chest. Lockton stands by smugly as Bellingham inspects the contents but does not find any evidence. He has moved the cash to another location. The sight of the empty chest devastates Isabel. Her risky decision has not paid off. Despite this, Bellingham places Lockton under arrest for suspicion of aiding the enemy. Isabel is sent to fetch Lady Seymour, Lockton's aunt, to help Madam. Lady Seymour is very wealthy and Isabel is surprised to be treated kindly by her. She gives Isabel milk and cookies and speaks to her in the same manner she would a white child. The next morning, Lockton is released from jail. Isabel is terrified that he will suspect her as a spy, but it is clear that he thinks Inkstained, one of his previous accomplices that fled the city when he heard of Lockton's arrest, is to blame. When he returns, Lockton starts a violent fight with his wife, but Madam blames Isabel's laziness - claiming that she slipped on candle wax and hit her head - for her injuries.

A few days later, Lockton once again entertains a group of men in his library, but this meeting is far more secretive. Desperate to know what is going on inside, Madam sends Isabel in to serve the men despite her husband's objections. Isabel does her best to blend in with the furniture when the men begin discussing their new plan. It proved harder than expected to bribe the Patriots into changing sides. The mayor of New York, a new addition to Lockton's roundtable discussions, says that the time of bribery and persuasion is in the past. Now, it is time to send a deliberate message. He suggests assassinating the rebel leader, George Washington: "With Washington gone, the revolution will collapse. War will be averted and countless lives saved. Our world will return to the former state of tranquility we enjoyed before all this nonsense" (p. 90). He has even gone so far as to pay off one of the Life Guards, the army hired to protect Washington from such attacks, to carry out the killing. He needs Lockton's money to pay the hit man off. Lockton is no fool. He knows that if this plan is discovered, he will be hung for his involvement. He agrees to give the mayor money under one condition: the mayor must write down, in his own handwriting, the names of everyone involved in the plot. That way, if Lockton is arrested again, he will have evidence to incriminate each one of them. Lockton hopes that if he is ever put in danger, these powerful men will ensure his safety so Lockton will not reveal their names. The mayor agrees, inking a lengthy list of names, including his own. Immediately after that meeting, Ruth has a seizure, prompting a horrific beating from Madam who is certain Ruth is possessed by



the devil. She vows that if anything like this ever happens again, she will have Ruth sold off to the highest bidder. With a newfound determination to protect her sister, Isabel knows what she must do: she must steal the list from Lockton's library and hope it is enough to earn her freedom with the Patriots.

Part I: Chapters XI - XV Analysis

Isabel escapes a dangerous fate when Lockton returns from jail. Like many slave owners at the time, Lockton barely registers Isabel's presence when she is in the room. In Lockton's eyes, Isabel is so lowly she is practically invisible. She is simply there to serve him, so he has no qualms about discussing his plots in front of her. He doesn't think she has the brain power to use that information against him for her personal gain, or perhaps he foolishly thinks that since he feeds and houses Isabel, she will be loyal to him. Rather than blaming his slave, Lockton blames Inkstained, one of his former accomplices, for turning against him. When word spread that Lockton had been arrested, many Loyalists fled the city out of fear of being discovered and arrested alongside him. Madam Lockton, like Inkstained, feared retribution and began packing her bags while her husband was imprisoned. Upon returning home, this news infuriates Lockton and he beats his wife for disobeying him. Madam's smooth excuses, claiming that she slipped on wax, shows that fights like this have happened before. Portraying Madam Lockton as a battered woman provides a depth to her character, making her a complex villain. While this information does not justify Madam's treatment of the girls, her systematic abuse of them makes sense within her character when the reader considers the context of abuse in Madam's world.



Part I: Chapters XVI - XX

Part I: Chapters XVI - XX Summary

Isabel stays with Ruth as she falls asleep. True to her character, Ruth hasn't complained about the massive lump on her head from the fall in the kitchen and hasn't shown any signs of understanding Madam's threats to sell her off. Isabel wants desperately to protect her sister's innocence, so when the house has fallen asleep, she sneaks upstairs into the library and quietly steals Lockton's list of accomplices. After her last encounter with Bellingham, Isabel fears that he may not have the authority to grant her freedom and the freedom of her sister, so Isabel decides to take her information straight to the Patriot leader, Colonel Regen. From the various conversations she's overheard in Lockton's library, she knows exactly where his army is positioned and she rushes there under the cover of night. Boldly, Isabel bursts into Colonel Regen's tent and tells him what she knows. Isabel's news that there is plan to assassinate General Washington is consistent with other information Regen has received, so he takes her words very seriously. Regen asks Isabel to plant the list back in Lockton's library so he won't know it has been compromised, and he gives her the code phrase "ad astra" which means "to the stars" to use as a permanent pass on the streets. If a soldier ever catches her walking through the streets unaccompanied, she simply need speak the code phrase to continue her mission.

A few days later, the plan to assassinate Washington is officially discovered. Goldbuttons, one of Lockton's accomplices, races over to the house to tell Lockton that arrests are being made all over the city. Lockton quickly arranges to be wheeled out of his house in a cheese crate, while he demands that Madam stay behind to guard their belongings from looting Patriot soldiers. Madam is incensed. She cannot believe her husband would abandon her to the dangers of a rebel army and she insists that he take her with him. Lockton punches his wife in the face for daring talk back to him, not caring which of his slaves or guests sees him. He orders Isabel to build a fire and burn all his papers. When the Patriot soldiers finally arrive to arrest Lockton, he is long gone and all evidence of his involvement in the plot against Washington has been destroyed. The next morning, Isabel takes Ruth to the center of town to watch the hanging of Life Guard Hickey who is sentenced to death for his crimes of mutiny and sedition, and for holding a "treacherous correspondence with, and receiving pay from, the enemy" (p. 116). Isabel searches the crowds for Colonel Regen, but he is nowhere to be found.

In the days that follow, British ships invade the harbors and people can no longer deny the impending war. Positive that the British presence in New York will quickly defeat the rebel Patriots, and the king will maintain his control over the colonies, Madam Lockton orders all the silver in the house to be polished, sure she will be dining with dignitaries soon. Isabel struggles to understand why Bellingham or Regen haven't ensured her escort out of the country, given all she has risked to aide their cause. In one of her high spirits, Madam Lockton invites friends over and calls for Ruth once again to be dressed in fine clothes for their amusement. She sends a plate of cookies and a jug of milk to



Isabel's room. Isabel eats the gift quickly and falls asleep. For that, she says, she will never forgive herself.

Part I: Chapters XVI - XX Analysis

Emboldened by Madam Lockton's latest threats to sell Ruth off after her seizure, Isabel knows that her window of time to act is shrinking. It is extremely dangerous for a slave to be out at night without a pass from her master, and exponentially more dangerous for that slave to enter a camp of soldiers. Isabel fears that this is her only option and that the rewards far outweigh the risks. Regen's positive reaction to Isabel's news confirms her gamble, and she is sure he will help return her and Ruth to Rhode Island in exchange for the information. Regen promises Isabel he will do all that he can to keep his word, but a shifty look at one of his assistants signals to the reader, if not to Isabel, that Regen may not be a man of his word. Once again, Isabel is put in a position of great danger waiting for Lockton to be arrested, and she is forced to sit and wait. The arrival of a British fleet upend the city of New York as it becomes clear that war is imminent. Loyalists like Madam Lockton are thrilled with the news, sure that it means the king will maintain his power over the colonies. Madam Lockton even begins treating the girls kindly again. The end of the section, however, is extremely ominous as Isabel claims falling asleep on the evening of milk and cookies is something she will never forgive herself for. Anderson often employs this cliffhanger tactic to entice her readers to turn the next page, making *Chains* a nearly impossible book to put down.



Part I: Chapters XXI - XXIV

Part I: Chapters XXI - XXIV Summary

Isabel wakes from a terrible nightmare to find that her sister Ruth is missing. It is late in the morning, and she cannot believe that she slept in so long. Why didn't anyone wake her? She races around the estate calling Ruth's name, but she cannot find her. Becky emerges, eyes red from weeping, and breaks the news: while Isabel slept last night, Madam Lockton sold Ruth to a family that has sent her to the West Indies. Isabel is outraged. She confronts Madam and demands an answer. Madam cannot believe Isabel would dare speak to her in that tone, and she tears a painting off the wall, hurling it at Isabel. Isabel turns and runs out of the house, heading straight for Colonel Regan's headquarters. She shouts the password and begs for the colonel's help. Moments later, Madam Lockton arrives at the camp demanding that Regan return her property: Isabel. Isabel shouts that Madam Lockton is abusive and begs Regan to purchase her from Madam, putting her to work for the army. Regan doesn't even look Isabel in the eyes before handing her back over to Madam.

The next thing Isabel remembers, she is waking up from a horrible beating. Her hands are bound behind her back and blood pours from wounds all over her body. She is in a crude, dank prison filled with rats. She is held there, without food or water, for three days before her trial. Madam speaks out against Isabel's crime of insolence. At Madam's specific request, Isabel is sentenced to having the letter "I" branded onto her face to, "alert people to her tendencies and serve as a reminder of her weakness" (p. 145). Isabel is thrown back into the prison and the next morning, brought to her punishment in the city center, where Hickey had previously been hung. When the hot brand is pressed into her cheek, Isabel sees stars, then the ghosts of her dead parents, and then nothing. When she wakes again, it is six days later and she is being nursed back to health in Lady Seymour's home. Lady Seymour asked to care for Isabel so she wouldn't die, and Madam Lockton only agreed if Lady Seymour promised to alert her once Isabel woke again. She wanted her property back, and she also wanted to prove a point. Lady Seymour feeds Isabel a huge breakfast of eggs, toast, fruit compote, and cream before curtly nodding her head. It is time.

Part I: Chapters XXI - XXIV Analysis

This section is generally considered to be the turning point in the novel. Isabel's world has turned completely upside down. Her sister, whom she has lived her whole life to protect, has been sold to the Virgin Islands, while Madam Lockton's systematic abuse of Isabel has reached its pinnacle. Without the care of Lady Seymour, Isabel almost certainly would have died in the prison as a result of her branding. Branding, the process of pressing hot irons on a person's skin, is a horrific, inhumane practice that will scar Isabel, physically and emotionally, for life. The recovery process is extensive and painful. Even if Isabel earns her freedom, she will never be able to live a free life. The



scar on her face will prevent her from finding work and will be a permanent reminder, unavoidable in every conversation and situation, that she was accused of "insolence".

This is also a turning point for Isabel because she realizes the fantasy she has constructed, that putting herself in danger for the sake of the Rebel Army will earn her freedom, will not come true. The magic words, *ad astra*, are not magical at all. The fantasy is representative of the final glints of childhood Isabel has clung to. Now, there will be no more fantasies of heroic escape. If Isabel wants her freedom, she is going to have to give a bloody fight to earn it.



Part II: Chapters XXV - XXIX

Part II: Chapters XXV - XXIX Summary

Isabel lives in a state of constant depression. She is forced to continue working for Madam Lockton, who won't even address Isabel directly. She only speaks through Becky. Isabel has withdrawn completely from the world, actually relishing the physical pain of her brand as it heals because it keeps her mind off the emotional pain of her losses. Curzon tries to visit with Isabel but she wants nothing to do with him, feeling that he, like Colonel Regan, has lied to her. Curzon is persistent and even stops by the Lockton house, forcing Isabel to speak with him. HE asks if Lockton has received any more letters. Isabel is outraged. Her hatred for Curzon and the damage his plans have done to her, and she vows to never speak to him again. Later that week, Isabel overhears the other slaves talking about the Loyalists, and how if the British win the war, all slaves will be freed. Isabel has never heard this before. She is also startled to hear that Curzon has enlisted as a soldier in place of his owner, Bellingham, who promised to set Curzon free if he lives through the battle. Curzon helps carry Isabel's water buckets back to the house, but he doesn't try to speak to her.

That Sunday, the British truly invaded New York City, firing their cannons at the Patriot fleets. As they rush from church, Madam Lockton realizes that the Rebel soldiers are quickly gathering their belongings to feel the fight. She is elated and considers this a victory for Britain, and therefore herself, before the war has even begun. As soon as they are home, Madam prepares a shopping list for Isabel, ordering her into the middle of the fight to purchase ingredients for a Welcome Home feast she plans to prepare for her husband. Isabel jumps at the chance to leave Madam's house. Realizing that a chance to escape may not come again, she plans to run to the British soldiers in the hopes that they will free her. When she walks outside, the battle tears up the streets. Muskets fire, cannons whiz through the streets, buildings seem to explode around her. She finds an abandoned shop and hides there until she sees that the last of the civilians have left the city. When she is the only person on the decimated streets, Isabel rushes to where the British boats are coming ashore. She finds a Captain, Captain Campbell, and tells him that she is a slave running away from an abusive owner. Captain Campbell is sympathetic to Isabel's situation and it appears that he will help Isabel until he learns that she comes from a Loyalist, not a Patriot, home: "I cannot accept your service, child. We only employ slaves run away from rebel owners" (p. 181). Isabel is horrified and considers continuing her run to freedom, but the next man to step off the ship is Master Lockton. He jovially greets Isabel, assuming she has come to fetch him home. Isabel knows she is trapped once again.

Part II: Chapters XXV - XXIX Analysis

This section highlights the strange divide slaves were forced into during the Revolutionary War. Many slaves aided the Loyalist Army under the beliefs that if the



British won, they would be freed. Others, like Curzon, have tried to earn their freedom by signing up to fight in place of their owners. Hopefully, if they live through the war, their masters will be true to their word and free the slave that put his life on the line, but there is no guarantee. Still other slaves, out of fear or another motivation, supported whatever side their master supported, not wanting to put themselves in danger by contradicting those who feed, clothe, and house them. These conflicting interests are at the heart of why Anderson chose to write this novel. Many historians have struggled to understand why slaves would enlist to fight on the American side of the war when the British promised to free them. It is estimated that 5,000 slaves enlisted to fight on the American side of the Revolutionary War, and Curzon's sense of responsibility for and allegiance to his master Bellingham attempts to represent their motivation. Captain Campbell's refusal to free Isabel because she belonged to a Loyalist family shows that the British were not interested in freeing slaves because it was the morally right thing to do. They wanted to free the slaves to ruin the Patriot economy.



Part II: Chapters XXX - XXXV

Part II: Chapters XXX - XXXV Summary

Once again, Isabel struggles through her days in a near constant state of depression. She knows that her hands are peeling potatoes, roasting chickens, turning down beds, but she watches her hands as if they do not belong to her. After the invasion, the British soldiers moved into the homes of Loyalist families, so Isabel is not only serving Master and Madam Lockton, she is also serving a houseful of British soldiers. A few days after the invasion, a letter from Lady Seymour arrives requesting Isabel for service at her home. She has somehow found herself housing a dozen German soldiers while the Locktons house only two. Although it infuriates Madam, Isabel is sent to serve at the Seymour home. Although Lady Seymour feeds Isabel well and gives her a comfortable bed to sleep in, daily life doesn't change. She simply has more mouths to feed and more boots to polish.

One morning, Isabel wakes to a terrible fire in the Seymour home. She chokes and coughs, flames curl around the windows. The entire block is ablaze with fire making it appear that there is nowhere safe to run. Even so, Isabel knows that she must get out, now. Isabel drops to the floor and crawls to the doorway. She passes Lady Seymour's room and reaches out to help save the old woman. Lady Seymour is frantically trying to pack up her valuable possessions. Quickly, Isabel's pockets a stack of letters and old photographs. She knows they must leave the rest to burn. Lady Seymour tries to carry a large pile of belongings, but she loses her footing on the stairway and crashes to the ground, twisting her ankle. Forgetting her own safety, Isabel rushes back to the woman and pulls her by the arm, out of the burning house, and halfway down the street. Half-naked people, dazed, burned, and bleeding, flood the streets. The screams of people and horses, locked in their pens, burning alive threaten to deafen Isabel. Knowing that she must transport Lady Seymour somewhere safe, Isabel manages to carry the woman's full weight down several blocks and up to the Lockton's front door.

Five hundred homes are destroyed this night, plus countless shops, churches, and stables. The Lockton's home overflowed with British soldiers looking for safe housing after their previous arrangements burned down. They housed eleven soldiers and five of their wives. Lady Seymour recovers from her injuries at the Lockton home and feels deeply indebted to Isabel for saving her. She hires seamstresses to sew a new wardrobe for Isabel, including a heavy warm cape for winter. While at the water pump one day, Isabel hears that the British soldiers have captured a large group of Patriot fighters, including Curzon who is being held at a nearby prison. That evening, the Lockton's throw a celebratory dinner where they discuss the conditions of the prison where these soldiers are being held. They laugh and joke, saying they hope the soldiers freeze to death in the cold. Even though she has sworn off speaking to Curzon, the thought of him freezing to death unnerves Isabel. Three days later, she manages to sneak off to the prison, bringing a bucket of scraps to feed the starving soldiers. Curzon is extremely weak but pleased to see Isabel. He asks if she would be willing to pass



messages to his captain for him, but she says she cannot risk the danger. She feeds the cell of soldiers and allows Curzon to wrap himself in her cape until he has warmed.

Part II: Chapters XXX - XXXV Analysis

Many of the exiles and British soldiers that flooded New York during the invasion were surprised to see their homes had been taken over by rebels while they were away. What few homes were left were soon packed to the gills with soldiers looking for safety from the cannons that boomed in the streets. Those housing the soldiers either had no choice in the matter since everyone has to make sacrifices in times of war or viewed their hospitality as a way of aiding the British agenda.

The fire destroying much of the city further cements the growing bond between Isabel and Lady Seymour. Lady Seymour had always treated Isabel kindly and clearly objected to the brutish forms of slavery the Locktons took part in. During the fire, Isabel not only saves Lady Seymour's life, she also manages to save Lady Seymour's photos of her beloved husband and the last letters he wrote to her. Lady Seymour feels deeply indebted to Isabel for this kindness and the reader can expect that the new clothes she purchases for the girl will only be the beginning.

It is interesting to note that when Isabel visits the prison where Curzon is held, she brings a bucket of scraps to feed the starving soldiers with. The men in Curzon's cell all belonged to the same unit of the army, and they pass the bucket between themselves, each man taking only one morsel of food at a time. This act of camaraderie shows that even though the soldiers have been put in an inhuman situation, humanity has not yet left their consciousness.



Part II: Chapters XXXVI - XL

Part II: Chapters XXXVI - XL Summary

Lady Seymour falls ill with a fever and needs to recuperate at the Lockton home. Isabel is put in charge of nursing the old woman back to health, and she is graced with long afternoons of reading the newspaper aloud, a luxury she never would have been afforded otherwise. Isabel still tries to steal away to the prison once a day with food, but she is terrified of being discovered. There is one kindly guard who always grants Isabel access to the prisoners in exchange for a handful of the food she brings. One afternoon, Lady Seymour hands over a biscuit and knowingly tells her to give it to the prisoner she feeds. Then she warns, "Take care how you go, Isabel. Many people think it is a fine and Christian thing to help the prisoners. I do not think my niece is one of them" (p. 227). Then Lady Seymour hands over a large shopping list, including a book from the bookseller, for Isabel to collect for her. While she is at the bookshop, the keeper hands her a copy of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine saying that there are many in the colonies still trying to help the cause. He is likely talking about abolition.

A few days later is Christmas and the Lockton house is a buzz with food preparations. Two of the soldier wives, Mary and Hannah, get into a terrible argument about whose turn it is to fetch water from the pump. Isabel volunteers to fetch water every morning before sunup knowing that doing so will give her time to sneak to the prison everyday to visit Curzon. When she arrives, she is told that visitors are no longer permitted. She may only speak to Curzon from the window. When she calls his name, however, a dirty prison named Dibdin comes to the window wearing Curzon's hat, with Curzon's blanket wrapped around his shoulders. Curzon is near death, but Dibdin will ensure Curzon is fed and kept warm if Isabel agrees to pass messages to their Captain. Isabel agrees, promising that if Curzon dies, those alive in the prison will never see her again. On Christmas Day, Lady Seymour gives Isabel a new pair of shoes. Madam Lockton finds out that Isabel has been visiting the prison and forbids her from further visits saying that if she catches her there again, she will sell her. At the fish market the next day, Captain Morse, the captain of the men in prison, asks Isabel to meet him at the tavern later that day. Panicking, Isabel quickly agrees. When she arrives, he tells Isabel that instead of retreating, the rebels attack and had won the battle. He knew this news would strengthen the spirits of the imprisoned men.

Part II: Chapters XXXVI - XL Analysis

Once again, Isabel is forced to deliver messages for various soldiers, putting herself in constant danger, to help care for those she loves. Initially, Isabel began this mission to save Ruth, but now she continues endangering herself to repay the debt she feels toward Curzon. Without Curzon, Isabel does not believe she would have survived the branding. It was Curzon who alerted Lady Seymour to her punishment, ensuring that she had a safe place to recover. Isabel knows she must deliver these messages as a



way of thanking him. The previous gentlemanly behavior from the last section has completely disintegrated in the prison as the soldiers have turned against each other in the horrendous conditions in order to survive. Dibdin has taken over control of the cell and has confiscated all of Curzon's belongings. He will only return them if Isabel agrees to do his bidding. As always, Lady Seymour provides a sense of security for Isabel, even going so far as to lie to her niece when she catches Isabel hanging around the prison saying that Isabel only went there because she had asked her to. Lady Seymour, like Isabel, feels a sense of indebtedness. Isabel helped save her from the fire and now, Lady Seymour will do anything to show her appreciation.

Part II: Chapters XL - XLV

Part II: Chapters XL - XLV Summary

At the market, the kindly soldier who had previously given Isabel access to the prisoners asked if it would be possible to hire Isabel to help clean the cells. Shocked, Isabel says she would happily take the work, but she knows Madam Lockton would never agree. Later that day, Lady Seymour calls Isabel to her bedside and apologizes for not purchasing her from Madam Lockton. She wishes she had brought Isabel to her home instead of letting her suffer in the Locktons. A few days later, Lady Lockton suffers an apparent stroke and is completely bedridden and unable to speak. Meanwhile, Madam Lockton prepares for the Queen's birthday ball. She has ordered a new dress and the most expensive hairdresser in town. When it begins to snow, Isabel weeps knowing that her sister Ruth would never see this beautiful white. Isabel falls asleep each night dreaming of ways to escape the Lockton home but New York is an island, making escape impossible without a boat and she would never find the city asleep enough to steal a boat.

The next time Isabel sees Captain Morse, he asks her deliver a message to a friend on Warren Street. Isabel knows that Madam Lockton is deep in preparations for the Queen's ball and will not miss her. She is happy to help. When she drops off the note, Captain Farrer gives her another note to bring back to Morse. Isabel is alarmed. She didn't intend to become a carrier pigeon. She has no time to return to Morse's home and tells herself that this message, however urgent, will have to wait. When she returns home, Madam Lockton is waiting with a riding crop. As soon as Isabel walks through the door, Madam slashes her across the face with the whip. She has found out about Isabel carrying messages for the rebel soldiers and demands to see the note Captain Farrer has just given her. Emboldened, Isabel hurls the note into the fire. Enraged, Madam Lockton shouts that she will sell Isabel and her little sister Ruth as well. Isabel is astounded: Madam sold Ruth months ago, didn't she? As it turns out, Madam couldn't find a buyer for Ruth and is holding her in Charleston. Her shouts are interrupted by the hairdresser who has come to dress Madam for the ball that night. She orders Isabel locked in the potato closet until she returns that night.

Locked in the wooden box, Isabel hears that the house above her is silent. She finds a few waterlogged boards and kicks them free. She takes the stairs two at a time and steals everything she will need for an escape: maps, money, and most importantly, a slave pass she forges to say that she is free. The name she gives herself on the pass is Isabel Gardner, the name she feels best suits her. She rushes to the prison and is pleased to see the kindly guard on duty tonight. She says that she has come to clean the cells as he requested. When he is not looking, Isabel loads Curzon's lifeless body into her wheelbarrow and pushes him to safety at the dock. The ball distracts the entire city and the celebratory fireworks provide the perfect cover for Isabel to steal a boat and being rowing toward freedom. She rows fearlessly throughout the night, sometimes



passing out with exhaustion, but in the morning, she reaches the sandy shores of New Jersey and knows that for the first time in her life, she is free.

Part II: Chapters XL - XLV Analysis

In this final section of the novel, Isabel finally escapes to freedom and takes her best friend Curzon with her. There are many significant references in her escape. First, there is the strong reference to Cinderella with the presence of the Queen's birthday ball. All around Isabel, rich women prepare themselves to attend the festivities she would never be able to attend. Like Cinderella, Isabel is forced to work on the night of the party and is even locked in a potato cellar to prevent escape. But Isabel's story is not a fairy tale. She is not going to be rescued by a fairy godmother nor a prince charming. Isabel's strength is her own spirit, which gives a modern spin to this tale and makes Isabel a perfect role model for young women: she doesn't wait around for anyone to save her; she saves herself. Additionally, Isabel subverts the role of the traditional hero - typically a handsome prince who swoops in and rescues the damsel in distress by saving a male character. On top of all these things, Isabel is a black character and an underrepresented minority in literature like this.

It is also interesting to note Isabel's struggle in naming herself on the forged pass. She knows she is not a Finch or a Lockton. She considers naming herself after her mother or father as a way of honoring their memory, but she no longer wants to be tied to the past. She is looking forward, embracing her new, free future. She renames herself Isabel Gardener for her favorite memories of home: tending to the garden, the growing new life. Keen readers may remember the seeds Isabel tried to grow when she first moved to the Lockton home. Like Isabel's hopes for freedom, the new growth was crushed during a battle and never replanted. Now, Isabel is figuratively replanting those seeds and waiting to watch her future blossom.

Anderson is careful not to tie Isabel's story up too neatly as she has written a sequel to the story that she hopes readers will purchase. Isabel is in New Jersey now and will likely continue her journey to Charleston. The second novel will likely surround Isabel's struggle to free her sister.



Characters

Isabel Gardener / Isabel Finch / Isabel Lockton / Sal Lockto

Isabel Gardener / Isabel Finch / Isabel Lockton / Sal Lockton / Just Sal / Country is the thirteen-year-old protagonist of the novel. She is an intelligent, bold girl who knows that she was not born to be a slave and that she is deserving of a life lived in freedom. Isabel's key character trait is her dedication to those she loves. In the first half of the novel, that love and protection is reserved for her younger sister, Ruth. Ruth suffers from epilepsy and Isabel knows that puts the girl in danger of being sold off. Her main mission in life is to protect her sister from abuse and she will stop at nothing to ensure they stay together. In the second half of the novel, that protection is reserved for Curzon, the slave boy who helps her recuperate after being branded as punishment for her insolence. The only other character Isabel loves and protects is Lady Seymour, an old woman abused by her family. Throughout the novel, Isabel is seen putting others' needs in front of her own, even endangering herself to ensure that the ones she loves are safe. This is seen in small acts such as telling Madam Lockton that she giggled at the docks so she would receive a beating rather than Ruth, to endangering her life to deliver messages for the Patriot Army in exchange for Curzon's medical care. This is one of the many reasons why Isabel is considered an iconic literary heroine. Unlike in fairy tales, this heroine is not going to be rescued by a magical godmother or a prince charming. Isabel's strength is her own spirit, which gives a modern spin to this tale and makes Isabel a perfect role model for young women: she doesn't wait around for anyone to save her; she saves herself. Additionally, Isabel subverts the role of the traditional hero by saving a male character. On top of all these things, Isabel is a black character, an underrepresented minority in literature like this.

Madam Anne Lockton

Madam Anne Lockton is the chief villain in the novel. Madam Lockton is a middle-aged, rich woman who has a fierce loyalty to the king and will stop at nothing to preserve Britain's reign over the American colonies. The first time the reader meets Madam Lockton, she is lying to Patriot soldiers about the contents of her linen chest. She says that the chest holds her unmentionables and would therefore be inappropriate for the soldiers to search. In truth, the chest holds money that will be used to bribe Patriot soldiers into joining the Loyalist cause. That same day, when Madam Lockton meets Isabel, she slaps the girl cruelly across the face. Throughout the novel, Madam Lockton systematically abuses Isabel and Ruth, forcing them into a position of fear. She believes this abuse will keep the girls loyal to her, but in fact, it motivates Isabel to seek freedom at every opportunity. Madam Lockton's character is complicated in that she too is a victim of abuse. Her husband is physically and emotionally abusive, frequently beating and berating his wife. She is imprisoned in an abusive marriage in which her opinion holds no weight. Like a slave, Madam Lockton is ignored and dismissed. Unlike a slave,



however, Madam seeks to regain her power through the abuse of those "below" her, like her slaves and hired help. Through the theme of abuse, Madam Lockton and Isabel are tied through their struggles to obtain power and regain a sense of control over their own lives.

Ruth

Ruth is Isabel's five-year-old sister who suffers from epilepsy. On occasion, Ruth falls victim to fits in which she convulses on the ground. When Madam Lockton witnesses one of these fits, she is sure Ruth is possessed by the devil and attempts to sell the girl off. Although she tells Isabel that Ruth has been sold, in truth, Madam could not find a buyer and sent Ruth down to Charleston to live until further arrangements could be made.

Curzon

Curzon is Isabel's first and only true friend in New York. Like Isabel, Curzon is a teenaged slave, but unlike Isabel, Curzon's master gives him a sense of freedom in his daily life. He wears fancy clothes and is allowed to walk the streets of the city. When the Revolutionary War breaks out, Curzon's master asks him to enlist in his stead. If Curzon manages to survive the war, his master promises him that he will free him. Unfortunately, Curzon is captured in battle and held as a prisoner-of-war where he would have died had Isabel not saved him. Curzon is a curious character, always seen wearing a bright red hat, and the reader often wonders if he is a "good guy" or a "bad guy". He is obsessed with the Patriot cause and asks Isabel to help spy on Loyalist soldiers.

Elihu Lockton

Elihu Lockton is the owner of Isabel and Ruth in New York. He is a fierce loyalist, dedicated to the king with the hopes that Britain will maintain its control over the American colonies, ensuring that Lockton will be able to continue his lavish lifestyle. Lockton is an unpredictable, violent man who is prone to outbursts of screaming and beating his wife.

Miss Mary Finch

Miss Mary Finch is Isabel's original owner in Rhode Island. She intended to free Isabel and Ruth after her death and had that added to her will, but her nephew in charge of her estate ignored this request and sold the girls back into slavery for his profit.



Jenny

Jenny is the tavern owner in Rhode Island who attempts to purchase Isabel and Ruth to prevent them being sold back into slavery. She grew up as an indentured servant alongside the girls' mother and wished to help free them as a way of honoring her old friend. In the end, Jenny does not have enough money to purchase the girls and loses them in a bidding war with the Locktons.

Bellingham

Bellingham is Curzon's owner and a member of the Patriot Army. He tells Curzon that he will help free Isabel if she spies for the Patriots and that he will free Curzon if he enlists in the army during wartime in his stead. Bellingham breaks both of these promises, forcing both children to remain in slavery despite their sacrifices for the Patriot cause.

Becky Berry

Becky Berry is the head servant at the Lockton home. She takes Isabel under her wing and ensures that as long as the girl stays out of trouble, she won't fall victim to Madam Lockton's abusive hand. When the British invade New York, Becky, along with many other freed servants, escape from the Lockton home.

Lady Seymour

Lady Seymour is Elihu Lockton's wealthy aunt. While she appears to be a Loyalist to the outside world, she harbors deep sympathies for the Patriots as well as for the slaves. She treats Isabel with respect, often feeding and caring for her when she is sick. At the end of the novel, Lady Seymour admits that she wishes she had purchased Isabel from Madam Lockton when she had the chance, prompting Isabel to think, "I tried to be grateful but could not. A body does not like being bought and sold like a basket of eggs, even if the person who cracks the shells is kind" (Page 261).

Grandfather

Grandfather is the old slave man who works the water pump in town. He is a frail but wise man who offers many tidbits of advice to the slaves to come to fetch water with him. He is the first character to tell Isabel that she is strong and that if she focuses her thoughts on freedom, she will find her way to paradise.



Colonel Regan

Colonel Regan is the Patriot colonel who promises Isabel freedom if she will spy on Elihu Lockton for him. He gives Isabel the password "ad astra" to use to enter the Patriot camp. He is the first person Isabel tells about Lockton's plan to assassinate General Washington, but she is not rewarded with freedom. In fact, when the time comes for Colonel Regan to keep his promise, he turns his back on the girl claiming that his hands are tied.

Hickey

Hickey is the Life Guard bribed by the Loyalist conspirators to assassinate General Washington. When their plan is discovered, Hicky is the first and only soldier to be hanged for their crime.

Captain Campbell

Captain Campbell is the British Army leader Isabel runs to after escaping from Lockton home during the invasion. She has heard that the British will set slaves free, but Campbell refuses to free Isabel saying that he could not steal from a Loyalist family. He turns Isabel over to the hands of Elihu Lockton.



Objects/Places

The Linen Chest

The Linen Chest is Madam Lockton's prized possession because it is where she and her husband have hidden the Loyalist funds that will be used to bribe Patriot farmers to their cause. When the Locktons arrive at New York Harbor, Patriot soldiers demand to search their belongings, but Madam Lockton manages to keep them away from the linen chest, claiming it contains her unmentionables.

The List of Accomplices

The List of Accomplices is what Isabel steals from Master Lockton's library to use as evidence against the Loyalist Army. She presents the information to Colonel Regan of the Patriot Army in the hopes that it will ensure her passage to freedom. Although Colonel Regan promises to help Isabel return to Rhode Island in exchange for her information, he never follows through with his promise.

The Battery

The Battery is the fort on the southern tip of New York and the headquarters for the Patriot Army. This is where Isabel sneaks to in the middle of the night when she wants to deliver information to Colonel Regan.

The Scar

The Scar is a result of branding on Isabel's face after her first attempt to escape from Madam Lockton's home. To the outside world, the "I" scar represents insolence, but to Isabel, it represents Independence as she is permanently reminded that she can depend on no one but herself.

Canvastown

Canvastown is the name New York City is given after the great fire of 1776 destroyed nearly a quarter of the homes in town. Those who survived the disaster and sought to rebuild the city hung canvas tents against the crumbling brick walls of what remained of their houses.



The Cornhusk Doll

The Cornhusk Doll is what Isabel makes for Ruth after they are forced to leave everything behind when leaving Miss Mary Finch's home. The girls were not allowed to take any of their belongings when they left, and Ruth felt that she couldn't sleep without her beloved doll. After Madam Lockton sells Ruth, the cornhusk doll becomes Isabel's only comfort. It pushes her to her emotional breaking point when the doll is destroyed in the 1776 fire.

The Photograph

The Photograph is what Isabel saves during the 1776 fire that nearly destroyed all of New York City. The photograph belonged to Lady Seymour and was a photo of her late husband. From that day on, Lady Seymour felt a deep sense of indebtedness to Isabel for saving the photograph. She would cover up and forgive many of Isabel's indiscretions in her pursuit of freedom.

The Potato Bin

The Potato Bin is where Madam Lockton locks Isabel on the night of the Queen's birthday ball. Isabel remembers that the bottom corner of the bin is waterlogged and damaged, so when the house is quiet, she is able to kick her feet through the rotting boards and run to freedom.

Warren Street

Warren Street is where Isabel is sent to deliver messages by Captain Morse. This is also where Isabel is caught consorting with a rebel soldier and is turned into Madam Lockton who beats her with a riding crop.

Common Sense

Common Sense is a pamphlet written by Thomas Paine and gifted to Isabel by an abolitionist bookshop keeper. This is one of the few printed materials Isabel has access to, and she devours its contents ravenously.

Bridewell Prison

Bridewell Prison is where the Patriot prisoners-of-war, like Curzon, are housed during the Revolutionary War. The prison is kept in deplorable conditions. The prisoners are rarely given food aside from raw meat, the cells are never cleaned, and men die constantly from the freezing, damp conditions, infectious diseases, and starvation.



Themes

Ghosts

From the opening of the novel, the text is steeped in death and ghosts. In the first chapter, Isabel visits her mother's grave and asks her for guidance. In this way, the reader knows that there will be a heavy reliance on the spirit world, particularly when Isabel is faced with adversity. Throughout the novel, Isabel seeks guidance not only from her mother, but from all the other slaves that have died before her, those she knows and those she doesn't know. Grandfather, as the old man at the well is called, embodies the voice of the spirit world when he tells Isabel, "You must choose your own side, find your road through the valley of darkness that will lead you to the river Jordan" (p. 167). On one level, Grandfather is referencing the two sides of the war: Loyalists and Patriots. On another level, he is referencing the two sides of one's soul: the living and the dead. Slaves who submit to their fate and never rise against it are like walking dead. They will live and die as slaves. Others, like Ruth, cling to life and the promise of freedom. Grandfather is urging her to use the spirits of those who passed before her to lead her to the river Jordan. When Isabel sits on the banks of New York on Christmas Day - a day of rebirth - she hears the voices of the ghosts calling out to her: "A few lights twinkled across the water in faraway New Jersey. I thought of all the ancestors waiting at the water's edge for their stolen children to come home ... A though surfaced through my ashes. She cannot chain my soul" (p. 246). They have led her to the figurative river Jordan. Through this water, she will be made free.

Good Versus Evil

This novel makes a strong effort to show that nothing, not even in war, is strictly black and white, good versus evil. In many history books, the British are portrayed as "the bad guys" at the time of the Revolutionary War because they fought against American liberty, while Americans are portrayed as "the good guys" because they fought for the American ideal. This novel shows that the Americans were not solely good and the British were not solely bad. The British, after all, promised to free the slaves when the Americans would not. But even this promise is not stark: they will free only the slaves that have runaway from Patriot farmers, in the hopes of crippling the American economy. Concepts like war are extremely complex and this novel attempts to represent that complexity in its story. Even villainous characters like Madam Lockton are not one-dimensional. Madam is given a strong back-story to explain - not excuse - her horrendous treatment of Isabel and Ruth. Creating such a complex fictional world, particularly when it is based in fact, shows a deep sense of trust in the reader. Anderson trusts that her reader will understand the motivations of individual characters and entire armies. She strives to represent humanity as it truly is, not as it is easiest to understand. For these reasons, many schools have chosen to replace antiquated texts about the Revolutionary War with this modern, realistic story of struggle, survival, and redemption.



Imprisonment

There are many instances of imprisonment seen in this novel that tie all the characters together in ways they never dreamed. The most obvious imprisonment is Isabel's imprisonment in slavery. She is not allowed to live the life she wants and is forced to endure cruel abuse and punishment at the hands of her master. Curzon is imprisoned in the same institution but he does not view slavery as grimly as Isabel does. He has a better daily life than she does, and Curzon is given the opportunity to engage his future by enlisting in the army in Master Bellingham's stead. However, as Isabel discovered earlier in the novel, many men, whether Loyalist or Patriot, are not men of their word. Curzon's imprisonment continues in a more literal way when he is captured as a prisoner of war and housed in a physical prison. While Curzon is imprisoned, Isabel realizes for the first time in their relationship that both of them are fighting for the same thing: freedom, even though they seek to obtain it in different ways. When Isabel realizes this, she knows she cannot turn her back on Curzon and she frees him on her way to New Jersey. Similarly, Isabel feels a sense of camaraderie toward Lady Seymour when she is imprisoned in her illness during the second half of the novel. The two characters had always shared a bond, but that bond intensified when Lady Seymour was imprisoned in her own body, unable to speak, move, or care for herself. Like Lady Seymour, Ruth was also imprisoned in her body, in addition to being imprisoned by slavery, with her seizures. Because of her afflictions, Ruth fell victim to horrendous abuse at Madam Lockton's hand and was even sent to be sold off when Madam became convinced that the little girl was possessed. Perhaps the most interesting imprisonment is seen through Madam Lockton's character. She is imprisoned in an abusive marriage in which her opinion holds no weight. Like a slave, Madam Lockton is ignored and dismissed. Unlike a slave, however, Madam seeks to regain her power through the abuse of those "below" her, like her slaves and hired help. Despite this, all the characters are symbolically tied through their struggles to obtain power and regain a sense of control over their own lives.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person, limited omniscience narration, told from the perspective of Isabel Finch/Lockton. This point-of-view is important to the novel because it creates a strong bond between the reader and the protagonist. This connection is integral to the success of the story, which focuses on a slave girl's decision about which side she should support during the Revolutionary War. As Isabel struggles to decide whether to spy for the Patriot or Loyalist Army during the Revolutionary War, the reader is given full access into her desperate, private thoughts. Both sides provide benefits and drawbacks for Isabel if she were to work for them, and without full access into Isabel's emotional journey, the reader would be very confused as to why Isabel flip-flops her loyalty so many times. Because the reader is held very close to Isabel, they are rewarded with a rich, complex character that will be impossible to forget. One of the most important themes in the novel is Isabel's exploration of loyalty, and if it were not for the specific point-of-view of the novel's narration, the reader would not be privy to her emotions, which make up a bulk of the narration. The novel is told primarily in exposition with scenes of dialogue used to characterize different relationships. The exposition beautifully creates the vivid historic world of New York during the Revolutionary War in well-researched detail that brings the history and emotionality of the time to life.

Setting

This novel opens in Rhode Island in 1776 but quickly moves to New York City at the onset of the Revolutionary War. At the time of this novel's setting, New York is an American colony struggling for its independence from British rule. The city is divided between Loyalists who believe America should still be controlled by the British king, and the Patriots who believe America should govern itself, independent of British control. Halfway through the novel, the British soldiers arrive in New York and a flurry of gunfire and cannon shots decimate the infrastructure, collapsing buildings and blowing out windows. Escaping the battle and the impending punishment for supporting the rebel army, most New Yorkers flee the city. Those who remain, mainly Loyalists and slaves, do not have the time or resources to repair the city and it suffers further damage when a horrific fire ravages the city, destroying a quarter of the homes. As a result, many homeowners are forced to hang canvas tents over the battered brick walls to block out the weather. During this time, New York City was known as "Canvastown". On the outskirts of the city, the Patriot Army set up their camp along the water of the island creating a divided setting of military and pedestrian presence alongside the divide of slaves and their masters.



Language and Meaning

Since the novel is written for teenage readers, the language is conversational and accessible to a wide range of readers. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also to gain momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to highlight the action of the plot, enticing the reader to turn the next page. The language of the narration, formed with bold phrases and violent descriptions form cliffhangers which add to the intensity of the story. While the novel likely would have been successful on plot alone, Anderson creates a stunning, poetic world full of symbols, metaphors, and other beautiful uses of figurative language. Such decorated language creates another level of depth and meaning for interested readers. Occasionally, there are passages of dialogue in vernacular, which affects grammar, spelling, and syntax. Therefore, some of the dialogue may be difficult for readers to understand but it helps create a vivid portrayal of the contrast between the slave world and the "white" world. While most readers should be able to deduce what this dialogue means contextually, readers should be encouraged to read such phrases out loud, and hearing the way the words are pronounced can clarify the confusion in a way reading silently on the page cannot. This language is important because it adds depth to the novel, allowing the reader to glimpse into a historic world made believable through the language of the characters. Although the novel is set over 250 years in the past, the history is well researched and the language is accessible, giving all readers access into the world of slavery without much confusion.

Structure

This novel is comprised of 45 chapters ranging in length from 2 to 11 pages. Each chapter begins with an actual newspaper headline that was printed during the Revolutionary War, or a quote that was spoken during that time. Each of these headings refers to an action or event within the novel that foreshadows what the reader is about to read. The chapters tend to be short and full of action, which propels the reader through the novel. The novel revolves around Isabel's journey from slavery to freedom during the time when the American colonies pursue their own liberty from British control. The two stories interweave seamlessly as themes of freedom, liberty, and control work in tandem. The novel is divided into two parts: Part I and Part II. The first half of the novel, arguably, deals with Isabel's experiences in slavery while she still has the dreamy mind of a child. The second half focuses on her adult decisions and desperate attempts to find freedom, not only for herself, but for the ones she loves: Ruth and Curzon. The climax of the novel arguably occurs when Isabel is branded after her first attempt to runaway from the Lockton home. Until this point, Isabel harbored a naïve daydream that if she met the right soldier, he would spirit her away to freedom. During this first escape, Isabel confronts the man who promised her freedom, Colonel Regen, and discovers that he was not a man of his word. As a result, Isabel was branded with the permanent scar on her face. To the outside world, the "I" scar represents insolence, but to Isabel, it represents Independence as she is permanently reminded that she can depend on no one but herself.



Quotes

"The words tasted bitter. Being loyal to the one who owned me gave me prickly thoughts, like burrs trapped in my shift, pressing into my skin with every step" (p. 39).

"Some folks switch back and forth. One day they're for the King, the next, it's all 'liberty and freedom, huzzah!' A tribe of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, that's what you'll find in New York" (p. 46).

"Ten circles to the left, ten circles to the righty, all make the blade sharp and mighty" (p. 56).

"Idles gossip and pipe smoke," I said. "You hear it on every street corner. It's a wonder we don't all choke to death on it" (p. 83).

"I beseech thee, O Lord, by Thy great mercy take us home, by the hand of Colonel Regan, take us home, in all Thy glory, take us home, ad astra, ad astra, ad astra" (p. 118).

"Madam looked down without seeing me; she looked at my face, my kerchief, my shift neatly tucked into my skirt, looked at my shoes pinching my feet, looked at my hands that were stronger than hers. She did not look into my eyes, did not see the lion inside. She did not see the me of me, the Isabel" (p. 134).

"This is not our fight," the old man said. "British or American, that is not the choice. You must choose your own side, find your road through the valley of darkness that will lead you to the river Jordan" (p. 167).

"The burned-over district looked like the inside of me. It was hard to tell where one stopped and other started. I feared my wits had been melted by the flames, twisted and charred" (p. 198).

"A few lights twinkled across the water in faraway New Jersey. I thought of all the ancestors waiting at the water's edge for their stolen children to come home ... A thought surfaced through my ashes. She cannot chain my soul" (p. 246).

"The news spread from the prison as fast as it had spread from cell to cell. The rebels had attacked instead of running. The rebels had advanced instead of retreating. The rebels had won a battle. Folks could scarce credit it" (p. 255).

"I tried to be grateful but could not. A body does not like being bought and sold like a basket of eggs, even if the person who cracks the shells is kind" (p. 261).



Topics for Discussion

Describe the life of a slave in the American colonies during the early 1700s. Does this representation of slave life, particularly in the northern state of New York, surprise you? Why or why not? What different views of slavery do the characters in the novel represent? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What symbolism do plants have in the novel? Explain the symbolism of the seeds that Isabel hides in her pocket when she leaves Miss Mary Finch's home. What does it mean to Isabel, and to the symbolism, when she realizes that the seeds she planted at the Lockton home have died? How might these scenes tie into the New York mayor's comparison of rebels and vines? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the conflicting representations of loyalty in the novel. Elihu and Anne Lockton, for example, are "Loyalists" (p. 38). What does this mean? Who or what are the Locktons loyal to? Who or what is Isabel loyal to? What role do clashing or divided loyalties play in the novel? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

The Revolutionary War was a battle for freedom and liberty. How does Master Lockton's statement that "freedom and liberty have different meanings" affect his participation in the war? How do his views of freedom compare / contrast with Isabel's definitions of the same terms? Are either of these definitions "right" or "wrong and by whose standards? How is this conflict of terms represented in the novel? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

There are many instances of coded language in the novel, including the woman singing "Yankee Doodle" on the streets, and the password Isabel needs to enter the rebel camp. Why was coded language important at this particular time in American history? What symbolism can be found in this language, particularly as it relates to Isabel's journey toward freedom? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

The mayor of New York, a Loyalist, says, "The beast has grown too large. If it breaks free of its chains, we are all in danger. We need to cut off its head" (p. 89). What does he mean by this? Who is the beast? What is the head? How does this early reference to chains relate to Isabel's later statement, "I was chained between two nations" (p. 182)? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Explain the following metaphor, "Melancholy held me hostage, and the bees built a hive of sadness in my soul" (p. 157). What precipitates such sadness in Isabel? How does the hive grow bigger before Isabel learns to destroy it? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.