

Fever 1793 Study Guide

Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson

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Overview

Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers published Anderson's novel *Fever 1793* in 2000, an historical novel set in Philadelphia during the post-Revolutionary War.

Readers encounter the harrowing experience of the 1793 yellow fever epidemic.

Anderson gives insight into this deadly disease that killed nearly five thousand people, ten percent of the Philadelphia population, and halted its prosperity. The story uses real-life recollections to develop the bitterness and fear of neighbor toward neighbor as people physically cast aside the infected and buried thousands.

The novel begins by showing the normal, everyday conflicts teenagers face in dealing with strict parents, changing body images, and the death of friends. It then weaves a realistic tale of the losses that occurred as it conveys to young adults a message of hope. Readers realize that, through perseverance and self-reliance, any horror can be faced.

About the Author

Laurie Halse (rhymes with "waltz") was born on October 23, 1961 in Potsdam, New York, to Methodist minister Frank A., Jr. and manager Joyce Holcomb Halse. The author says that she decided to become a writer in second grade. Her teacher taught the class how to write haiku. She enjoyed it a lot and hopes that every second grader will learn to write poetry. Halse soon started reading library books for hours. The magic of the elementary school library came alive in life. Heidi, one of Halse's favorite books, sparked her interest in foreign cultures.

Halse's creative thoughts began as a child.

For instance, Halse recalls trudging through the snow on her way to school. She imagined that she had changed into an enormous polar bear.

Writing also started as a little girl for Halse. She enjoyed watching her father write poetry and read the comics spread out on his office floor. She used her father's old typewriter for hours, writing newspaper columns, stories, and letters. Halse declares that the dictionary is her favorite book.

As a senior in high school, Halse visited Denmark as an American Field Service exchange student. She lived on a pig farm and learned to speak Danish. The author obtained an associate of arts degree in 1981 from Onandaga County Community College. She married Gregory H. Anderson, chief executive officer of Anderson Financial Systems, on June 19, 1983. They raised two children: Stephanie and Meredith. The author earned a bachelor of science in Languages and Linguistics (B.S.L.L.) degree in 1984 from Georgetown University. Laurie Halse Anderson belongs to the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Anderson organized the SCBWI's Fall Conference in Philadelphia from 1994 to 1996.

She decided to write *Fever 1793* after reading a newspaper article in August of 1993 that explained the yellow fever epidemic that devastated Philadelphia 200 years earlier. The U.S. capital in 1793, Philadelphia served as the political and cultural hub of the nation. Anderson believed these ingredients would create a story with strong elements of conflict and a rich background.

She also suspected that stories written about this period were rare. Moreover, her upbringing near Philadelphia inspired her to begin research.

Researching the idea proved to be no simple task, however. It took two years.

Anderson read about the period's architecture, food, class structure, social roles of taverns and coffeehouses, education levels, gardening, religion, and politics. She visited museums and studied her findings.

She sought out eyewitness accounts of the epidemic. As she did her work, she began to develop the realistic characters of the era, like Mattie's critical mother.

Fever 1793 won several book awards, including The New York Public Library Best 2001 Books for the Teenage, 2001 Teacher's Choice; American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults; and the Junior Library Guild named it as a selection. It received a starred review from the Bank Street College of Education as one of "The Best Children's Books of 2001."

Anderson believes that the world holds an abundance of goodness. She hopes that her books contribute goodness. She thinks that being an author has been an privilege.

Anderson enjoys travel, reading, history, genealogy, running, skiing, hiking, and basketball.



Plot Summary

Fever 1793 tells the story of Mattie Cook, a young girl who comes of age in Philadelphia during a tumultuous period of epidemic. Mattie is a typical young American girl who lives with her mother in a coffeehouse operated by the family. The business is profitable and enjoyable until rumors begin to circulate of fever. The rumors are proved true as hundreds and then thousands sicken and die from disease. Mattie's mother, several friends, and Mattie herself eventually contract the disease - many survive, but some die. At the conclusion of the novel, Mattie has matured into a capable young woman who looks forward to life with a certainty of purpose.

In the fall of 1793, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is the largest and most prosperous city in the newly established United States of America. Not only is Philadelphia the nation's usual seat of government, it is also the hub of national commerce and transportation. Mattie Cook and her small family, who earn a living by operating a popular coffeehouse near the center of the city, enjoy the city's splendor.

Rumors of sickness and fever begin to be heard amidst the daily chatter of politics and gossip. As the days go by the talk of fever becomes ever more present and then Polly Logan, a serving girl at the Cook Coffeehouse, contracts yellow fever, and quickly dies. Over the next several days hundreds, and then thousands, become sick as yellow fever rages through the city. Mattie's mother falls ill and then Mattie herself falls into the delirium caused by the fever. She awakens in a hospital to discover her mother is missing and the family coffeehouse has been burglarized and vandalized.

After Mattie has somewhat recovered from the fever, she returns to the coffeehouse to live with her grandfather. Tragically, robbers once again invade the coffeehouse and in the ensuing scuffle, Mattie's grandfather is killed. She helps to bury her grandfather in an unmarked mass grave and then seeks out Eliza, an African-American family friend. Over the next several weeks Mattie and Eliza's friendship grows ever stronger as they pledge themselves to helping others as the fever continues to spread.

The wealthy flee the city as thousands die. Horrible scenes of death and inhumanity are seen everywhere. Food, money, medicine, and other necessities become nearly non-existent because farmers and others refuse to travel to the city, which is effectively under quarantine. Ultimately, 4,000 of Philadelphia's 40,000 inhabitants perish from the disease, and many thousands of others are sickened but eventually recover. Finally, the first frosts of winter kill the mosquitoes that transmit the disease, and the epidemic comes to a sudden end as order is gradually restored to the chaotic city.

After the fever danger has passed, President George Washington and other famous politicians return to the city as Mattie and Eliza re-open the Cook Coffeehouse to a brisk business. Mattie is overjoyed when her mother finally returns to the city, although she is distraught to learn that her mother's previously hale constitution has been shattered by her prolonged bout with fever. As life gradually returns to normal, Mattie realizes that

she has changed - no longer a girl, she is now a young woman running a business and caring for her ailing mother.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Fever 1793 tells the story of Mattie Cook, a young girl who comes of age in Philadelphia during a tumultuous period of epidemic. Mattie is a typical young American girl who lives with her mother in a coffeehouse operated by the family. The business is profitable and enjoyable until rumors begin to circulate of fever. The rumors are proved true as hundreds and then thousands sicken and die from the disease. Mattie's mother, several friends, and Mattie herself eventually contract the disease - many survive, but some die. At the conclusion of the novel, Mattie has matured into a capable young woman who looks forward to life with a certainty of purpose.

Mattie Cook tries to sleep in but is awakened by her mother's insistent shouts. Mattie is informed that Polly, the working girl, has not reported for work at the Cook Coffeehouse and Mattie is therefore expected to step in and perform Polly's daily work. While Mattie wakes up, her pet cat Silas chases down and kills a mouse in her bedroom. Mattie takes the dead mouse and flings it outside with disgust. The mid-August day is hot and already unpleasant, and mosquitoes and other insects fly about Mattie's bedroom. Mattie thinks that Polly is probably dawdling around at the blacksmith's shop, admiring the apprentice Matthew's good looks. Mattie then thinks of Nathaniel Benson, a boy with whom she is infatuated. Mattie gets dressed and looks out her second-story bedroom window at the sprawling city of Philadelphia in the year 1793.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapters 1 through 4 all occur in chronological order on the same day. The first chapter introduces the primary setting, the historical context, and the principle characters within just a few brief pages. The pace of plot development is established as rapid and linear, constructed around a traditionally chronological timeline. Setting texture is primarily established through imagery. The characters behave in a somewhat modern way, which makes their actions immediately intelligible and familiar. Mattie, the narrator and principle protagonist of the novel, is established as a typical if somewhat modern young teenage girl who is focused primarily on boys and on having fun. The references to stifling summer heat, pervasive insects such as mosquitoes, and indoor vermin like mice all provide somewhat heavy-handed foreshadowing of contagion.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Mattie goes downstairs to the kitchen and eats a fast breakfast provided by Eliza, the coffeehouse cook. She recalls how her father had built the coffeehouse after the Revolutionary War had ended and briefly recounts some of her family's history. She remembers how, after building the coffeehouse, her father had been killed in an accident. Shortly thereafter, her grandfather had come to the coffeehouse to live and help. Although the family's surname is Cook, the family members are ironically not particularly good cooks, and thus they have hired Eliza, an African-American woman, to prepare the meals and snacks served to customers. After breakfast, Mattie begins to work by watering the garden, a task that Polly, the scullery girl, would normally do. Mrs. Cook goes in search of Polly. After an hour or so Mattie has finished drawing well water and pouring it over the plants. Her mother returns and delivers shocking news - Polly is dead.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Mattie refers to the Revolutionary War as the War for Independence, and notes that it ended in 1783. This reference is indicative that Mattie's perspective of some things varies considerably from a modern person's perspective; it also is a sample of how numerous non-fictional elements are present in the novel. The recounting of the Cook family's history completes the background development of the setting and completes the characterization of the principle characters in the novel. Mrs. Cook's position in society is credible and the entire setting is established as a believable setting within the historical constraints of the novel. The chapter ends on the shocking disclosure that Polly Logan has died of disease - although the characters are not yet aware of it, the yellow fever epidemic has begun.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Mattie remembers details about Polly - the two girls had grown up together and were fast friends. Mattie is devastated by Polly's unexpected death. Mattie's mother explains that Polly died of an undiagnosed fever, and she ensures that Mattie is not ill. Mattie wants to visit Polly's house and attend her funeral, but Mrs. Cook forbids it. Mattie believes her mother's fear of fever-contagion is ridiculous but abides by her mother's wishes.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Mrs. Cook fully explains the situation of Polly's death in this short chapter. Mattie's character continues to be developed - she wants to do what she perceives as right, although at this point in the novel Mattie still acquiesces to her mother's demands. It is interesting to contrast Mattie's character in this chapter with the developed character of later chapters: here Mattie does not particularly value her mother's wisdom but does allow her mother to make important decisions - in later chapters, Mattie will highly value her mother's wisdom but has learned to make her own important decisions.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

During the afternoon, the coffeehouse crowd is abuzz with talk of fever. Various wild theories are put forward accounting for the origin and effects of fever. Mattie's grandfather and a few regulars doubt that any fever is spreading in the city, and instead tease Mattie about finding a husband. The talk then turns to politics and further discussion of fever is abandoned. The day concludes and, as the last guests leave for the evening, Mattie helps her mother clean the coffeehouse.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 concludes the events of August 16, the first day of the novel's primary timeline. The first day of the primary timeline is not particularly eventful, but four chapters are devoted to it to firmly establish setting and characterization. The novel's construction is thus carefully crafted to allow a chronologically slow but developmentally complete introduction to events. Following chapters typically contain more plot development and less background development, which provides an appropriate and enjoyable pace of reading. The first day of the novel concludes with the widespread talk of fever being easily dismissed as rumor.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Several days pass while Mattie works as a scullery maid in the family coffeehouse. Rumors of fever spread and dozens of people in the city die from illness. Mrs. Cook considers sending Mattie to the country to live with some friends in case the fever becomes prevalent, but Mattie does not want to go. One day Mattie is sent shopping to the market on Fourth Street. While shopping, she engages in conversation with some of the shopkeepers and learns that the fever appears to be growing ever more widespread. On the way home from market she encounters Nathaniel Benson. Mattie and Nathaniel share a common infatuation and the two young adults engage in an easy banter for several minutes. Nathaniel is apprenticed to a local painter. While they talk, the church bell begins to toll for another dead person, reminding Mattie that she should return to the coffeehouse and resume her work.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The church bell rings once for every year in age of every fever victim; thus, the church bells are constantly tolling, reminding everyone that death is common in the city. The age-specific tolling also allows Mattie to notice that at least some victims are young and, presumably, healthy individuals. The bell is also symbolic of death and of Mattie's development - the tolling reminds her that she has responsibilities. She will later, of course, become a highly responsible individual largely because of the extensive death caused by the epidemic, even though the church bells no longer toll. Mattie's excursion into the market allows her character to engage with a wider world and begin her individual development. She learns that the fever is, indeed, spreading and that fear of contagion is fairly widespread. The chapter also introduces Nathaniel Benson, Mattie's love interest. Although Nathaniel will remain a minor character in the novel, he does make frequent, if small, narrative intrusions.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Mattie and her grandfather perform various chores around the coffeehouse, including doing the laundry. One day as Mattie finishes washing the laundry her cat Silas, chasing another mouse, leaps into the pile of wet laundry and knocks it over into the dust. Mattie angrily washes the laundry a second time. Later in the day Mrs. Cook and Mattie's grandfather discuss the future while Mattie eats lunch and sneaks food to her pet cat. A messenger delivers an invitation to afternoon tea with Pernilla Ogilvie, a highly regarded society lady of Philadelphia. Mattie is not eager to attend tea, but Mrs. Cook hopes that Edward Ogilvie, Mrs. Ogilvie's youngest son, may perhaps one day prove a suitable suitor for Mattie. Mattie gets hastily dressed in her best clothing, noting how uncomfortable it is, and complains while Eliza brushes the many tangles from her hair. On the way out the door Mattie's grandfather comments on how beautiful she appears.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Mrs. Cook obviously regards the Ogilvie family with esteem and apparently harbors hopes that Mattie can be married to Edward, the youngest Ogilvie child. Mattie, at this stage of the novel, appears to begrudgingly acquiesce to her mother's matrimonial plans - by the end of the novel Mattie has learned to make her own decisions. The chapter presents some interesting scenes during Mattie's semi-comical attempts to become appropriately groomed for a social call with the putative upper crust of Philadelphia society.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Mattie and her mother travel to the Ogilvie's expensive and large home where they are greeted by Mrs. Ogilvie and her two daughters, Colette and Jeannine. The tea is particularly unpleasant for Mattie - her clothing is uncomfortable and fragile, her mother is distracted and unintentionally rude, and Colette and Jeannine are rude and insulting. When Mrs. Cook gently hints that Mattie might perhaps be a suitable wife for Mrs. Ogilvie's youngest son Edward, Jeannine rudely interrupts and scoffs at the idea. The conversation turns to Colette's recent engagement. Instead of being excited, however, Colette appears ill at ease and pale. She spills tea on herself and then begins to pant, finally collapsing with a high fever.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The events described in Chapter 7 occur on the same day as Chapter 6. The Ogilvie family is a somewhat comically self-important society family in Philadelphia. Although Mrs. Cook finds the family impressive and socially important, Mattie sees through the convention and realizes the family's children are simply rude and selfish. All of the Ogilvie family members are minor characters in the novel, and the social call is an inappropriately timed interlude before the epidemic begins to rage through the city. The fever continues to intrude into Mattie's direct experiences as she watches Colette collapse. This chapter marks a significant shift in the novel's plot, as the epidemic has clearly moved from the lower-class riverfront to the upper-class center of town.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Over the next few days, the church bells toll continually for the dead, as August makes way to September. The Ogilvie family, along with other affluent families, flees from the city as the fever spreads. Business at the coffeehouse almost completely vanishes. One day Mattie and her grandfather walk into another part of town and stop by a printer's shop. They learn that the College of Physicians has printed handbills advising several strategies for avoiding the fever, and that the city has decided to stop ringing church bells when people die. The almshouse has been shut down to prevent contagion, hundreds of people have died of the fever, and the rich families and the politicians have fled the city. After visiting the print shop Mattie and her grandfather return home where, just outside of the coffeehouse, they see a man wheeling a body along in a rickety wheelbarrow. Mattie's grandfather shouts at the man, telling him to take the fever victim away from that area of town. Instead, the man dumps the barely-conscious person from his wheelbarrow and Mattie is stunned when she realizes the feverish victim is her mother.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 presents events that span several days although the conclusion of the chapter deals primarily with Mrs. Cook's illness. The epidemic has permeated the entire city, which becomes evident to Mattie and her grandfather as they stroll through the city and observe the extensive and abrupt changes that have taken place. Throughout their walk, the various church bells toll incessantly, announcing scores of fever deaths. Families with financial means flee from the city for the countryside even as Mattie's grandfather willfully ignores the inescapable conclusion that an epidemic is upon the city. His refusal to come to terms with the reality of the situation is shattered as he approaches the coffeehouse and sees a ragged man wheeling an obviously sick woman along the street. At first, he is outraged to see a fever victim so close to the city center, but his outrage quickly changes to shock as he realizes the feverish person is his own daughter-in-law, Mrs. Cook. The fever has now affected Mattie directly and will change her life forever.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Mattie helps her grandfather carry her mother into the coffeehouse where they place her in her bed. While Mrs. Cook sleeps, Mattie, Eliza, and Grandfather Cook worry and complete the day's business. At the end of the day, Mr. Rowley, a supposed medical doctor, looks in on Mrs. Cook. After a cursory examination, Mr. Rowley announces that Mrs. Cook does not have yellow fever but simply a grippe. He prescribes routine bathing and clean, cool, conditions for rest.

After Mr. Rowley departs Mattie bathes her mother every four hours in heated water mixed with black pepper and myrrh. Mrs. Cook is extremely ill and generally delirious. Mattie spends the evening tending to her mother and then falls asleep in a chair next to her mother's bed. She is awakened when her mother begins to violently vomit blood. Mattie, alone in the house, tries to care for her mother as best as she can but her mother eventually realizes the danger of contagion and orders Mattie to leave her alone.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The events described in Chapter 9 occur on the same day as Chapter 8. Mr. Rowley is a patron of the Cook Coffeehouse and styles himself a medical doctor - his supposed credentials are not particularly impressive and later events prove him more of a charlatan than a *bona fide* medical practitioner. He nevertheless performs his medical responsibilities more or less in a fashion consistent with then-common medical processes. It is doubtful, however, that constant bathing in peppered hot water does much good for Mrs. Cook's rapidly deteriorating health. Although Mrs. Cook orders Mattie from the sickroom after several hours, later events make it clear that Mrs. Cook's good common sense is probably too late.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In the morning, Eliza and her grandfather, who has brought Dr. Kerr, an educated physician, join Mattie. Dr. Kerr examines Mrs. Cook and quickly pronounces a diagnosis of yellow fever, also vituperating Mr. Rowley's supposed medical skills. Dr. Kerr insists that Mrs. Cook be bled, though Mattie disagrees. Citing Dr. Rush, a prominent local physician, Dr. Kerr insists that bleeding is the only hope for Mrs. Cook. He then takes a lancet and bleeds Mrs. Cook of 20 ounces of blood. When Mrs. Cook regains consciousness, she demands again that Mattie be excluded from the sick room. Dr. Kerr agrees, and takes Mattie downstairs where he arranges for her to be sent to the country for at least several weeks. Mattie requests her mother accompany her, but Dr. Kerr explains that all towns and villages surrounding Philadelphia are refusing to allow fever patients to enter their area of influence.

Although Mattie does not want to be sent to the country to live with strangers, her grandfather and Eliza agree with Dr. Kerr and begin to prepare her to vacate the city. While Mattie is packing, a message arrives for her. The message is a painting of flowers and a brief letter from Nathaniel Benson. Nathaniel's letter states that his master, Mr. Peale, is sealing his house and grounds from the rest of the city to hopefully prevent fever contagion in his family and staff.

In the morning, a farmer who is taking his family out of Philadelphia picks up Mattie and her grandfather. Mattie suspiciously eyes the single flea-bitten nag pulling the wagon and wonders if the old horse will be up to the task of transportation. Grandfather Cook chooses to dress in his Revolutionary War regimental jacket and sword, and brings along his pet parrot.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10, unlike most of the other chapters in the novel, contains events that occur during two days of the novel's primary timeline. Dr. Kerr, presumably more professional and capable than Mr. Rowley, attends to Mrs. Cook and bleeds her, a common medical practice of the time. Against all odds, the bleeding does appear to somewhat revive Mrs. Cook who once again orders Mattie from the sickroom. A comparison of the two doctor's treatments seems to comically suggest that the less-educated Mr. Rowley was probably the superior physician in that he did less harm than Dr. Kerr. Mrs. Cook determines to have Mattie sent away to the country to live with some acquaintances away from the epidemic. For the last time in her life, Mattie disagrees with a major decision but silently acquiesces to her mother's decisions.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Mattie, her grandfather, and the farmer's family ride the wagon out of Philadelphia. Grandfather Cook develops a worrying cough that often leaves him breathless and red-faced. To console her, Mattie's grandfather lectures her about being a good soldier and talks about some of his experiences in the Revolutionary War - his talking lulls Mattie to sleep.

Mattie awakes several hours later when the wagon comes to an abrupt halt. Four horsemen with muskets block the road. They announce all people in the wagon must pass a medical inspection before they can continue on their journey. Unfortunately, Grandfather Cook fails to pass the medical inspection because of his cough. The farmer ejects Mattie and her grandfather from the wagon, and quickly continues on his way with all of their food, supplies, and belongings. Mattie argues with the soldiers but they are resolute and demand she return, by foot, to Philadelphia.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 contains an anomalous sentence written in the third-person point of view; "The farmer turned around in his seat and glared at them" (p. 79). This is probably an editing error in the novel and does not appear to have any meta-fictional significance though it is an interesting construction.

Mattie's abortive trip to the countryside comes to an unfortunate end as her grandfather develops a sickness. Although his illness does not appear to be yellow fever, he is nevertheless very ill and Mattie and her grandfather find themselves in a dire situation. The blockade is indicative of how worried the surrounding communities are about the fever, and how resolved they are to prevent its spread. Although the enforced quarantine may appear ruthless, it was, in fact, the only effective method of containing epidemic disease available at the time. Forced quarantine remains, even today, one of the surest methods of epidemic containment and continues to be practiced as necessary by all modern governments.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Mattie and her grandfather walk back toward Philadelphia for about an hour but eventually Grandfather Cook becomes feverish and ill and must rest. They sit beneath a tree and Grandfather Cook quickly falls asleep. Mattie looks around and sees a distant stand of willow trees. Realizing that willow trees probably indicate water, Mattie walks to the trees and locates a stream. She washes, drinks, and fills a canteen. She then finds some wild raspberries and picks them all. She returns to her grandfather and gives him water and berries. She inspects his eyes and is relieved to find them clear - her grandfather does not have yellow fever but simply a "summer grippe." They spend the night under the tree.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter details Mattie's attempt to return to Philadelphia. Her grandfather's illness, however, prevents him from making the journey. Mattie is capable of amazing resolute behavior and takes the situation in hand. She locates water, finds some meager food, and makes life-saving decisions for her grandfather. In this chapter, Mattie's character development continues as she begins to become an adult.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Grandfather Cook remains extremely ill and incapable of making decisions. Mattie takes charge even though King George talks to her in a way that makes her feel he is making fun. Mattie again fetches water and finds more food, then returns to her grandfather and makes a fire to keep him warm. Mattie then scouts around and approaches several farmhouses seeking assistance, but she is run off by the inhabitants because they fear she might be contagious. Mattie searches for more food and then becomes lightheaded and sick. She tries to return to her sleeping grandfather but becomes increasingly disoriented and finally collapses in delirium.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Mattie continues to care for her grandfather in adverse conditions. She attempts to secure help from the local populace but they run her off because they are afraid - correctly, as it turns out - that she may be infected with yellow fever. King George is the only thing that will talk to Mattie and the parrot's humorous repetition and interjection serves only to confuse the situation. Interestingly, King George does not appear again in the novel. Mattie's attempts to care for her grandfather have apparently allowed him to recover sufficiently to begin to care for her after her collapse.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Mattie wakes two days later and discovers she is in some type of hospital. She slips in and out of consciousness for several days. She finally becomes mentally alert enough to learn that her grandfather has transported her to Bush Hill Hospital in Philadelphia. She finds herself under the care of Mrs. Flagg, a hospital volunteer. Mattie is at first alarmed because Bush Hill has a reputation for being a filthy place where people are sent to die. She quickly learns, however, that Bush Hill has been completely refurbished by a wealthy local citizen and it is now the finest medical facility still operating in Philadelphia. Over the next several days, Mattie recovers from yellow fever while her grandfather occasionally visits and flirts with Mrs. Flagg.

Mattie eventually learns that her mother's location is unknown - the coffeehouse is vacant and locked up, and none of the neighbors know where Mrs. Cook has gone. Mattie fears that, perhaps, her mother has died. Mattie is also attended by French physicians who have experience in dealing with yellow fever; instead of bleeding her they keep her cool and calm, and give her as much liquid as she can tolerate.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Mattie awakens from a prolonged unconsciousness - she has contracted yellow fever. For several days, she slips in and out of consciousness. Mattie, the narrator, is unaware of most events for a prolonged period and thus the narration simply skips over several days. This period is never examined in the narrative except briefly during conversation and provides an interesting fictional construction. Mattie comes to realize she is in a hospital, although how she came to be there is never fully explained. Presumably her grandfather was physically recovered enough to carry her or otherwise secure transportation from the country to the city hospital.

The hospital, Bush Hill, was considered a place of last resort where terminally ill patients were sent to await death. During the epidemic, however, it was refurbished and modernized under the direction of a wealthy Philadelphia philanthropist, and it became one of the few places for adequate healthcare. The hospital was staffed by French doctors and used French medical practices learned from treating tropical fevers in the French colonies. The medical procedures at the hospital varied considerable from American medical procedures at the time - for example, the hospital at Bush Hill did not routinely bleed patients.

Even though Mattie begins to recover and, indeed, eventually fully recovers from the fever, all is not well with her family. She learns that her mother has simply vanished from the coffeehouse. Mattie is unable to learn of her mother's whereabouts and therefore suspects the worst.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

While Mattie continues to convalesce, she hears many stories of the horrors caused by the fever epidemic. All around her, other patients die even as she continues to recover her health and strength. Mattie frets about her mother and often wonders what will become of her once she is discharged from Bush Hill. She becomes well enough to be moved from the hospital to an outlying recovery building. While she recovers her grandfather visits several times each day.

Finally, Mattie is discharged from the hospital. A hospital clerk suggests that the proper place for Mattie is the orphanage, as her mother is missing, but Mattie insists she be allowed to return to the coffeehouse. With her grandfather's support, Mattie convinces the clerk that she is not simply an orphaned child, and she is allowed to leave the hospital under her own care.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Mattie's experiences in this chapter are representative of the whole class of ill people during the epidemic. Although she survives, many do not, and the hospital is full of the recovering and the dying. Mattie hears numerous anecdotal stories related to the effects of the illness on the inhabitants of the city. This chapter contains a large amount of historic facts and non-fictional situations and bears a close reading, as the material presented is particularly interesting.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

After two days, Mattie is discharged. She climbs into a wagon full of orphaned fever survivors, and helps the smaller children along until they reach the orphanage. Mattie talks to one of the orphanage workers and tells her that she, Mattie, will be turning fifteen in just three more months. The orphanage worker suggests that Mattie could become a scullery maid at the orphanage, but Mattie declines the offer. Instead, she allows herself to contemplate her future and drifts off into a daydream about becoming a successful and wealthy coffeehouse matron.

As the wagon drives through Philadelphia Mattie's daydreams are interrupted by horrible scenes - dead bodies cast into the road, abandoned shops and homes, and frightened fugitives who flee when they hear the wagon's approach. The wagon drives by a huge cemetery full of freshly-dug trenches that are used as mass graves; Mattie learns that over two thousand people have died of yellow fever in the previous month. The wagon finally arrives at the orphanage and discharges the load of orphaned children.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Mattie recovers enough to be discharged. As later chapters will indicate, this does not mean she is fully recuperated. She is still very weak and often becomes dizzy or slightly disoriented. It will be many weeks before her strength and health are completely restored. Upon discharge, she moves through the city on a wagon, accompanied by numerous orphans. Like Chapter 15, this chapter contains a large amount of historic facts and non-fictional situations and is particularly interesting. Mattie has emerged from her illness as a decisive adult - instead of taking the advice of others to live at the orphanage, Mattie determines to return to her own home and personally assess the situation. Mattie's new confidence will remain throughout the rest of the novel and will serve her well in the days ahead.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The wagon continues onward and takes Mattie and her grandfather to their coffeehouse. They find that their residence has been looted and vandalized. Mattie discovers that the upstairs is untouched, though the downstairs is in a shambles. She happily finds that the hidden strongbox has eluded the burglars and still contains a fair amount of money. Mattie and her grandfather despair about the future and Mattie finds herself on the verge of tears. Instead of crying, she steels her resolve and begins to clean the coffeehouse and search for food. She finds that her pet cat Silas is still prowling around, but also finds that the small family garden plot is nearly non-existent. She manages to haul water inside, water what plants remain, and gather some scraps of food that the insects haven't eaten. After her grandfather drifts to sleep, Mattie reacquaints herself with Silas and then says a prayer, thanking God for sparing her life and asking for blessings on her friends and family.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The social conditions within Philadelphia continue to deteriorate as evidenced by the vandalized and robbed coffeehouse. Just days before the coffeehouse had stood secure and closed up, but now it has been raided - apparently several times. Food within the city has grown scarce and highwaymen are apparently unafraid of being pursued by law enforcement. Mattie continues to develop as a character, and instead of collapsing into tears or returning to the orphanage, she controls her emotions and begins to clean and gather food. Silas, by now on his own for several days, appears unaffected by the epidemic and its secondary effects. At the end of the day, finally once again home, Mattie offers prayers of thanks.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

In the morning, Mattie boils water and continues to clean the coffeehouse. She airs out the entire building and manages to make it presentably clean. After cleaning for several hours, she realizes she is in filthy clothing, crusted with the filth of the fever. She bathes herself and then reluctantly dresses herself in her mother's clothing. She then wakes her grandfather, serves him a thin soup, and continues to clean. Mattie spends the rest of the stifflingly hot day tending to the remains of the garden and manages to dig up a handful of potatoes for supper. In the evening, she decides to leave the shutters open because the slight wind cools the coffeehouse somewhat. She then falls sleep on the ground floor.

Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter completes the transformation of Mattie from a child to an adult. She takes the situation in hand and completes the cleaning of the area. She begins to restore the small-plot garden to health even though doing so entails hours of backbreaking labor, and even though the potential gains lie far in the future, Mattie is intelligent enough to begin to plan far ahead. In a symbolic manifestation of her new adulthood, Mattie clothes herself in her mother's clothing and realizes that it in fact fits her and suits her quite well.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Mattie is awakened from a dream of food by the sound of a boot scraping on the floor. She realizes that two strange men have climbed into the coffeehouse through the open windows. The two men argue about what to steal, and then begin to look for items of value. Mattie is frightened and hides in the deep shadows while one of the villains picks up her grandfather's sword. After a few more minutes, the villains discover Mattie and they threaten her with injury if she does not produce money. Mattie's grandfather, upstairs, awakens from the noise and comes down the stairs armed with a musket. Grandfather Cook instructs the men to leave, but instead they advance on him - he discharges the musket but misses his mark. One of the men flees but the other beats Grandfather Cook and begins to strangle him. Mattie picks up the sword and slashes the intruder causing him, finally, to flee. Mattie checks on her grandfather and finds he is nearly dead. She wants to fetch a doctor but Grandfather Cook stays her, tells her how proud of her he is and that he loves her, and then dies. Mattie is senseless with grief and spends the remainder of the night feeling despair and crushing grief.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Although the climax of the novel is Mattie's recovery, the plot development continues and more confrontation lies ahead. The coffeehouse is once again burglarized by ruffians - one of which a somewhat unwilling accomplice, the other a hardened murderer. Although Mattie eventually chases the men from the coffeehouse, her grandfather is killed in the encounter. It is indeed sad that a common thief murders Grandfather Cook in the middle of the night in his own home after he had survived war, many years of life, a recent bout with a summer cold, and the raging epidemic. Nevertheless, his death is heroic and to the end of his life, he manages to protect the people and things that are of importance to him. Grandfather Cook's death is a major turning point in the novel. Mattie is now completely alone and bereft of any external support; she must care for herself and survive entirely by her own wits.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Mattie awakens the next day to the sound of the corpse collector walking down the street with a cart and calling for dead bodies. Although she is disgusted by the thought of loading her grandfather's body onto such a cart, she realizes that in the heat he will begin to decompose quickly and she has no way of transporting him to the cemetery. She flags down the corpse collector and helps him load her grandfather's body. She then assists him in pushing the cart through the streets and out to the cemetery where she watches her grandfather's body be interred in a mass grave. Mattie insists that her grandfather receive Christian burial rites, but a minister is not to be found. Instead, she takes an offered Bible and reads a Psalm. The men then bury her grandfather's body.

Mattie then wanders through the deserted city, finding the market completely empty. She stops by a printer's shop and discovers it is still marginally open for business, although the printer cannot place a newspaper advertisement for Mattie, seeking her mother, because he does not have enough paper to run a newspaper. She then wanders the city looking for familiar faces but is driven off by fearful residents. Mattie then begins to walk back to the coffeehouse, crestfallen and forlorn. Along the way she spies a frightened baby girl hiding inside a house and goes to inquire within, only to discover the girl's mother is recently dead of fever, still within the house, and the small child is an orphan.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The corpse collector calls for the dead as he walks down the street, indicating how serious the epidemic has become. His cart is symbolic not only of the serious state of affairs within the city, but also of Mattie's personal loss. The constant death caused by the epidemic has completely overloaded the city's ability to care for the dead. Corpses are now flung into the street where they are heaped up on carts and transported to newly created graveyards for internment in mass graves, without benefit of religious attendance. This mass disposal of the dead is very difficult for Mattie, as it dehumanizes her grandfather. Instead of simply accepting it, however, Mattie accompanies her grandfather's body to the cemetery, loudly proclaims him to have been a great man, and personally administers a form of religious observance before he is buried. Mattie's last respects to her grandfather are profound and indicate how much value she places in her family relationships.

This theme of family relationships is repeated a second time in the chapter when Mattie finds a very young girl crying in an otherwise empty house. Like Mattie, the girl is newly alone in the world - Mattie finds the toddler's mother's corpse inside the house. Mattie takes the tiny orphan in her arms and offers what comfort she can.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Mattie learns the young girl's name is Nell. She carries the little girl into the streets, wondering what course of action would be best. Then she thinks she sees Eliza walking in the distance, and runs after her calling her name. She knocks on several doors in the area and asks for Eliza but is unable to find her. Several people ask her if she is from the Free African Society, but Mattie is not. They tell Mattie that the Free African Society has been bringing food and medicine, and has been caring for the ill. Mattie continues to search for Eliza and finally finds her in a strange section of town.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Mattie sees Eliza by chance and then determinedly searches her out. This meeting provides another major turning point in the novel's plot, as Mattie now begins to rely on her friends instead of her family. The older Eliza has been performing public service for several weeks and has fortunately not become infected with the fever.

This chapter also introduces the Free African Society, a group of free African-Americans living in Philadelphia. Although slavery at this time is still legal in most of the United States of America, many freed slaves and many free African-Americans live in and around Philadelphia. These individuals formed the historic Free African Society and provided valuable healthcare and social services to the citizens of Philadelphia during the period of epidemic at incredible personal risk. Their selfless devotion to others, regardless of race or class, is truly remarkable.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Mattie tells Eliza about all that has happened to her since the epidemic began. Eliza tells Mattie that Mrs. Cook had recovered somewhat and had gone to the Luddington's farm where she supposed she would find Mattie and Grandfather Cook. Mattie is enormously relieved to discover that her mother is, perhaps, still alive. Eliza and Mattie then proceed to the home of Eliza's brother, Joseph. Joseph's wife has recently died from yellow fever, and he is ill with the disease. Eliza feeds Mattie and Joseph's twin boys, Robert and William. Mattie learns that while Eliza spends her days helping others, an older woman sits with the twin children. In the evening, Mattie and Eliza relate all of the details of the events that have transpired since they became separated. Mattie sobs as she tells Eliza of Grandfather Cook's death. Eliza has Mattie repair clothing and perform other household chores. Eliza tells Mattie that before the fever outbreak many white doctors predicted that black people would not get the fever - this ridiculous notion has been proven false, as hundreds of African-Americans have succumbed to the disease.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Eliza tells Mattie good news - Mrs. Cook has most likely survived her illness and is probably in the country. Since Mattie and her grandfather were unable to communicate with Mrs. Cook to let her know they had been prevented from going to the county, it is only normal that Mrs. Cook would seek to join them there once her convalescence allowed it.

Mattie's personal recent history is mirrored by Eliza's personal recent history - illness has touched every family in the city to some degree, and Eliza's sister-in-law has recently died of yellow fever while her brother is currently ill but beginning to recover. Together, Eliza and Mattie begin to strengthen their already good friendship as they begin to help others.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The next day, Mattie awakens to discover that Nell has soiled the bed. Mattie then spends the morning washing laundry and cleaning the house - Eliza has already left to help other people in the city. Mattie worries about her mother and then considers taking Nell to the orphanage, and decides it is the only proper course of action. In the afternoon, Eliza returns and she helps Mattie take Nell to the orphanage. However, when they arrive at the orphanage they are told that it is already full well beyond its capacity, and the orphanage matron implores Mattie to retain Nell, explaining that the over-taxed orphanage cannot supply the needs of all of the children. Mattie is happy to retain Nell because she has grown quite fond of the child the short period they have been together.

On the way home, Mattie and Eliza pass the Ogilvie's abandoned house. Eliza tells Mattie that Colette, while feverish, had revealed a startling and scandalous fact - she had secretly married her French tutor. The entire family then fled the city. Mattie and Eliza continue on their way and walk past the Peale house where several flowers float down to them from an opened upper-story window. Confused at first, Mattie realizes that Nathaniel Benson is tossing the flowers down to her while remaining hidden within the cloistered house. Mattie and Eliza finally return to the recuperating Robert's house where they discuss the immediate future. Mattie decides to live with Eliza and Robert for the next several days and help Eliza care for the sick in the city.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Mattie feels that she must deliver Nell to the orphanage because it is the proper thing to do. It is interesting to note that, by this point in the novel, Mattie does not base her decisions on what is personally rewarding. Instead, she makes her decisions based upon what is right for others and places her own desires aside. Because the orphanage is already overwhelmed, however, Mattie is happy to learn that Nell will, after all, be better off staying with her. Thus, Mattie effectively adopts Nell. Just as Mattie has symbolically taken her mother's role, Nell subsequently takes Mattie's role as needy child.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

September gives way to October as Mattie and Eliza make daily trips through the city to alleviate what suffering they can. Joseph recovers from yellow fever and begins to work again. Food is running so short in the city that some people begin to mix sawdust with their flour when baking bread. Medicines and money are also in very short supply. Mattie surprises Eliza because she works long hours without complaining.

One mid-October day after making long rounds in the city, Mattie and Eliza return home to discover Joseph weeping in a chair in the house - he informs them that Robert, William, and Nell have all become sick with yellow fever. Mattie and Eliza are alarmed and decide they must transport the children away from the heat and the river. Mattie suggests that the Cook Coffeehouse would be a suitable place to take them, and Eliza agrees.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The descriptions of the sick and the methods used to care for them are both fascinating and gruesome. Like some previous chapters, this chapter contains a large amount of non-fictional information and makes particularly interesting reading even as it spans several days with very little plot development. The epidemic continues in the city while Mattie, Eliza, the Free African Society, and others begin to organize and restore some semblance of social order.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Mattie washes a cart with boiling vinegar to make it as sterile as possible. Then she and Eliza load the three sick children into the cart and transport them across town to the coffeehouse. They place a mattress on a table and put the children in the makeshift bed. Over the next several days, they care for the children. Mattie and Eliza are exhausted and on the verge of collapse from the continuous ordeal of washing, cleaning, and caring. Food is scarce and their only source of water is the garden well. Eliza wants to send for a doctor to bleed the children, but Mattie insists that bleeding is harmful and notes that the French physicians do not bleed patients. Eliza finally agrees and the two women then focus on using what scant medicines they can purchase or find. One-day Mattie collapses in the garden, too exhausted to go inside to sleep. She sleeps in the dirt as a gentle cool wind blows over her.

Chapter 25 Analysis

The descriptions of the sick children and the progression of yellow fever from the initial stages through the height of infection are particularly detailed. Like Chapter 24, this chapter contains a large amount of non-fictional information. Whereas Chapter 24 dealt with the fever's effects on a large-scale or social scale, this chapter describes the effects of the fever on the three small children that Mattie and Eliza care for. Mattie's insistence on not bleeding the children shows a particularly modern sensibility even though it is perhaps anachronistic.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Silas awakens Mattie by licking her face. Mattie is surprised and pleased to find herself covered in a delicate frost - the end of October has brought the first hint of winter. Mattie realizes that the frost will drive away the epidemic, and calls out excitedly for Eliza. The two women quickly carry the mattress and children outdoors so their fevers will come down in the frigid air.

With the first frost, the farmers begin to return to the city, and Joseph begins sending packages of fresh produce and meat. With the drop in temperature and the regular food, the children begin to recover. When Joseph stops by for a visit, he tells Mattie the market is again open and full of news and gossip. Mattie goes to the market to see if she can learn anything about her mother's condition and location. She sees several people she knows but cannot gain any information about her mother, although she does overhear a substantial amount of other gossip. She buys treats for the children and eats some herself. Mattie considers what she must do now, and thinks that perhaps she will have to sell the coffeehouse and become a scullery maid.

Nathaniel Benson interrupts her brooding. Mattie and Nathaniel swap stories about the epidemic. Nathaniel and the Peale family did not contract the fever, but stayed inside the family house. Nathaniel walks Mattie to the coffeehouse and reassures her that her mother will be fine.

Chapter 26 Analysis

The novel's resolution begins in this chapter - winter has arrived and the cold weather and frost promises an end to the epidemic. While this is clearly good news to Mattie, it does not end her personal development which continues through the end of the novel. Life in the city continues to return to normal albeit at a greatly accelerated pace. As soon as the winter arrives, the farmers begin to return to the city and provide produce. Thus, foodstuffs become available and the markets open again. Social calls become possible and business begins to pick up.

The frost ends the epidemic because it kills the mosquitoes that transmit the disease. Medical science has not yet recognized that the disease is transmitted in this way, however, or else simple methods such as mosquito netting could have prevented such widespread transmission.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Nathaniel calls on Mattie every day for a week, and the nightly frost continues. As word of the winter season spreads into the countryside, more and more people flock back to Philadelphia. Mattie feels as if those returning are intruding upon a solemn event. She visits the graveyard where her grandfather is buried but is unable to determine the exact location of his grave. Mattie writes and mails several letters inquiring about her mother, but postal service is not yet functioning routinely.

One day Eliza makes a thanksgiving feast and Mattie, Robert, Nathaniel, the children, and some other friends attend the dinner. The table talk centers on what will happen in the future, and speculation about Eliza and Mattie's future employment becomes the focus. Mattie ends the speculation by announcing that she intends to retain the coffeehouse and continue operating it as a business. She then tells Eliza she would like her to be a business partner, and offers Eliza half of the business. Eliza initially declines but quickly and graciously accepts the offer. Later that day a businessman calls on the coffeehouse and announces that a new shipment of tea leaves and coffee beans has arrived in the port.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Mattie returns to the graveyard where her grandfather is buried only to discover she cannot recall the exact location of the grave. This uncertainty is understandable, given the situation when her grandfather was buried - but it is also symbolic of the past fading away as the future become ever more important. Mattie is focusing on her life ahead by developing her relationship with Nathaniel and by inviting Eliza to participate in the family business, instead of focusing on the experiences of the past.

The discussion about legally establishing Eliza's part-ownership in the coffeehouse business bears close reading. Ordinarily for the times, a handshake agreement would suffice. However, since Eliza is African-American all agree that a legal document would serve everyone's best interests. This is not because Mattie's intentions are suspect but to protect Eliza in the unlikely event that Mattie died.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

October turns to early November as the coffeehouse again opens for business. Patronage is brisk and soon the coffeehouse is again filled with paying customers. Nearly all aspects of the city return to the way they were before the yellow fever epidemic. Eliza and Mattie discuss business and make plans for future expansion even as Mattie begins to despair of ever seeing her mother again.

Then one day Nathaniel runs into the coffeehouse and excitedly announces that President George Washington has finally returned to Philadelphia. All of the customers, along with Mattie and Eliza, rush to High Street to watch President Washington ride by with his entourage; his return marks the official end of the epidemic.

Mattie sees a large crowd of wagons and people following President Washington. Mattie initially thinks the crowd is composed of Washington's cabinet, but a man next to her tells her the crowd is made up of all those people who were waiting for Washington's return, knowing that once the President returned the city would be completely safe. Mattie returns to the coffeehouse in time to see a very frail woman being helped out of a carriage - with a shock, she realizes the woman is her mother, alive and returned at last.

Chapter 28 Analysis

The novel's plot is nearly completed in this chapter as Mrs. Cook returns to the coffeehouse along with President Washington. Although many have previously returned to the city, the President's return is the signal that everything is surely safe and the epidemic is a thing of the past. Mrs. Cook, believing that Grandfather Cook and Mattie must still be living somewhere in the country, has waited for President Washington's return because she felt certain that is what Grandfather Cook would have waited for.

Just as Mattie has matured from a child into a woman, Mrs. Cook has also undergone profound changes. Her body has been essentially wracked and ruined by her bout with fever, and Mattie is stunned to see her once active mother reduced to a frail old woman.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Mattie rushes into her mother's arms. Mrs. Cook introduces Mattie to Mrs. Luddington, with whom she had been staying in the country. Mattie invites Mrs. Luddington inside, but she declines saying she must return to her farm immediately. Mattie then takes her mother inside the coffeehouse and a joyful reunion takes place, even though Mattie is shocked at her mother's delicate and frail condition. Mattie learns that her mother's health has been ruined by the prolonged fever, and she can no longer perform most physically strenuous activities. After a few more minutes of getting reacquainted, Mattie helps her mother upstairs to take an afternoon nap.

Chapter 29 Analysis

In this concluding chapter of the novel, a happy ending is presented. All of the characters are anxiously engaged in their own business and development, and family and friends have returned to the Cook Coffeehouse and its supportive network. Even though Mrs. Cook's physical body is no longer capable of strenuous work, Mattie finds in her mother the same emotional and spiritual resolve she so admires. The novel thus presents a picture of the advancement of a generation - instead of Grandfather Cook, Mrs. Cook, and Mattie, the new family structure is Mrs. Cook, Mattie, and Nell - each character passing on to the next logical stage in life.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

In mid-December, Mattie awakens early in the pre-dawn and begins the daily routine of getting the coffeehouse ready for customers. She works hard for about an hour before she hears footsteps overhead. She sits alone in the dark and quiet, and watches through the window as a lamplighter extinguishes the street lamps outside. Mattie contemplates her recent life and, now an adult and responsible woman, she realizes her life is good. The sun begins to rise as a new day, indeed, a new period of life, begins.

Epilogue Analysis

Mattie mentally compares the rising sun to Blanchard's yellow balloon. Just as the balloon had symbolized a new era in the development of the city and nation, the rising sun marks the beginning of a new day, which will be met with newfound enthusiasm. Mattie has fully matured into a woman capable of operating her own business and managing her own household. She has an adopted child, cares for her frail mother, has forged solid friendships and business acquaintances, and has a serious suitor. For Mattie, the future is indeed beckoning.

Appendix

Appendix Summary

The appendix contains factual data about events that are described in the novel, including notes about the epidemic and the various treatment strategies espoused by doctors of the time. The appendix also discusses the disposition of the mass graves, the flight of Blanchard's hot air balloon, and the historical Charles Willson Peale family. A section on the Free African Society summarizes the organized contribution of African-Americans during the epidemic. Additional notes discuss life in Philadelphia during the 1790s, including coffeehouses, French influence, politics, and food markets. Several famous physicians are noted and discussed, as is the current world situation regarding Yellow Fever.

Appendix Analysis

The appendix contains many interesting notes about historic events and non-fictional people, and serves as an introduction to many aspects of the novel that are supported by extensive extra-textual information. Its placement at the end of the fictional chapters allows the novel to fully integrate with its historic setting without compromising any of the plot turning points that are presented throughout.



Characters

Matilda ("Mattie") Cook

Mattie was born in 1779 and is 14 years old at the time of the events described in the novel. She is the narrator and the principle protagonist. Mattie is present in every scene described in the novel and, indeed, is generally the driving force behind most of the action.

In the novel's opening scenes, Mattie is described as a typical teenager with a strongly modern view on life. Although capable of hard work, she much prefers an easy life and looks for ways to avoid physical labor while enjoying the good things life has to offer. Mattie is content to let others, such as her mother or Polly Logan, perform the hard work; she would prefer to eat a breakfast sweetened with sugar while someone else scrubs the pots.

During the novel, Mattie experiences numerous hardships and is faced with several choices. In every instance, Mattie rises to the occasion and takes a proper, if difficult, course of action. As the novel progresses, Mattie matures from a child to a young woman through prolonged hardship.

When Mattie's mother becomes sick with yellow fever, she sends Mattie to the country to escape the epidemic. Mattie is accompanied by her grandfather who himself becomes sick with a summer cold on the journey, forcing the two characters to try and return to Philadelphia on foot. Mattie cares for her ailing grandfather until he recovers, whereupon she falls ill with yellow fever. Mattie then awakens in a hospital several days later and convalesces for several weeks. She discovers her mother has vanished and the family coffeehouse has been robbed and vandalized. Mattie sets to work but is once again brutalized when robbers break into the family house, beat her, and murder her grandfather. Saddened but not daunted, Mattie continues to place her life in order - she finds Eliza and helps her care for others while the epidemic rages. Finally, they return to the family coffeehouse, clean it thoroughly, and reopen it for business. The arrival of winter ends the epidemic and Mrs. Cook, having traveled to the country, finally returns home.

Mrs. Lucille ("Mother") Cook

Lucille Cook is Mattie's mother. She married Mattie's father when she was only seventeen years old, probably sometime during the Revolutionary War. Mrs. Cook gave birth to Mattie in 1779 and became widowed in 1783 when her husband died in an accident. For the next ten years, Mrs. Cook successfully operated a coffeehouse with the occasional assistance of her father-in-law.

Then novel opens with the Cook Coffeehouse doing a brisk business in downtown Philadelphia. Mrs. Cook is obviously competent and a hard worker, and indulges her



daughter while simultaneously demanding hard work from all. Mrs. Cook falls ill with yellow fever during the opening stages of the epidemic. To prevent Mattie from becoming ill, Mrs. Cook tries to send her away to the country. When Mrs. Cook recovers enough to travel, she goes to the country in search of Mattie. Although she does not find Mattie, she spends many hours looking for her and her health suffers markedly during her search efforts. After the epidemic ends Mrs. Cook returns home to discover Mattie successfully operating the family business.

Polly Logan

Polly is a long-time girlfriend of Mattie Cook - the two girls grew up together. Polly works for Mrs. Cook at the coffeehouse as a scullery maid and admires Matthew the blacksmith. In the opening chapters of the novel, Mattie learns that Polly has contracted yellow fever and died. Polly is a minor character in the novel.

Matthew

Matthew is the son and apprentice of a local blacksmith. He is particularly well built and strong and is the object of Polly Logan's affection. Matthew's fate during and after the fever is not disclosed. Matthew is a minor character in the novel.

Nathaniel Benson

Nathaniel Benson is a young man who is apprenticed to a famous local painter. He is infatuated with Mattie who reciprocates his feelings. During the epidemic, Nathaniel is shut up inside his master's house, which is placed on a voluntary isolation. Because of this, Nathaniel is spared the disease that afflicts Mattie and others. After the epidemic ends, Nathaniel emerges and once begins in earnest to court Mattie. Although Nathaniel appears several times in the novel, he essentially remains a minor character.

Mr. William ("Father") Cook, Jr.

William Cook, Jr., is Mattie's father, and a carpenter by trade. He died in 1783, shortly after construction of the Cook Coffeehouse when he fell off a ladder and broke his neck. He does not appear in the novel except by reference and is a minor character.

Mr. William ("Grandfather") Farnsworth Cook

William Cook is Mattie's grandfather and Lucille Cook's father-in-law. He is generally referred to as "Grandfather" in the novel. Grandfather Cook is a veteran of the Revolutionary War and still proudly owns his uniform, musket, and sword. After the death of Mr. Cook, Jr., Grandfather Cook moved into the Cook Coffeehouse to assist Mattie and her mother operate the business. He is patriotic and proud of his service,



and spends most of his days engaged in raucous conversation with the coffeehouse patrons.

Grandfather Cook accompanies Mattie on an abortive trip to the countryside where he falls ill from a serious summer cold. Mattie cares for him in the countryside for a few days before she falls ill from yellow fever. Grandfather Cook apparently then somehow transports Mattie back to Philadelphia and enrolls her in a hospital for care. After Mattie recovers, she accompanies Grandfather Cook back to the family coffeehouse where he is murdered one night in an attempted robbery. Mattie has his body buried in an unmarked mass grave.

Eliza

Eliza is the cook at the Cook Coffeehouse, and a close family friend of the Cook family. Eliza, an African-American, was born a slave near Williamsburg, Virginia. Her husband, also a slave, had saved enough money to purchase her freedom. Eliza then moved to Philadelphia and began saving her wages in order to one day send for her husband. He was killed in an accident in 1787, before she could secure his freedom. Eliza lives by the river and walks along Seventh Street to her job at the Cook Coffeehouse.

When the epidemic begins, Eliza associates herself with the Free African Society and begins to provide social and healthcare services to the ailing citizens of Philadelphia. This activity obviously is pursued only at incredible personal risk. Eliza also helps care for her brother's family when they become ill with yellow fever.

When Mattie's grandfather is killed, Eliza takes her in to her own home and provides food and shelter for Mattie. Mattie later joins Eliza on her rounds of the neighborhood and the two women tend three small family children who fall seriously ill with yellow fever. In the end of the novel, Eliza is invited by Mattie to share in the coffeehouse business as a partner - an offer that she courteously accepts. Eliza is a particularly likable and strong character in the novel and forms a good complement to Mattie's development.

The Luddingtons

The Luddington family lives in Gwynedd, away from Philadelphia. They are family friends of the Cook family, and they own a country farm. Mrs. Cook goes and lives with the Luddingtons during her convalescence. Although Mrs. Luddington makes an appearance in the novel, the family remains a family of minor characters.

Pernilla Ogilvie

Pernilla Ogilvie is the affluent and influential society woman and mother of six children, including Edward, whom Lucille Cook hopes will one day marry her daughter Mattie, and Colette and Jeannine, two somewhat impudent girls that Mattie meets during an



invitation to tea at the Ogilvie's home. Mrs. Ogilvie, unlike her rude daughters, appears to have some social graces. When Colette falls ill with yellow fever, Mrs. Ogilvie takes the entire family away to the countryside where she subsequently discovers that one of her supposed virgin daughter has actually secretly wed her French tutor. The Ogilvie family provides some comic relief in the novel but remains essentially a family of minor characters.

Mrs. Bridget Flagg

Mrs. Flagg is a hospital volunteer who cares for Mattie while she recuperates from yellow fever at Bush Hill Hospital. Mrs. Flagg finds Grandfather Cook attractive and flirts with him. She is a minor character in the novel.

Nell

Nell is a very young girl of indeterminate age - probably around three years old. Her father's whereabouts are undisclosed but her mother has died of yellow fever, leaving Nell an orphaned epidemic survivor. Fortunately, Mattie rescues her and takes her in, providing for her for several days. When Mattie tries to take Nell to the orphanage, Mattie learns that the orphanage is impossibly over-crowded and not capable of accepting more orphans. Mattie then unofficially adopts Nell. Mattie cares for Nell even as she falls ill with a mild case of yellow fever. Nell, apparently, spends the remainder of her life as Mattie's daughter. Although Nell is a fairly major character in the novel she is not involved particularly in the plot development as she is simply a toddler who receives care and affection.

Joseph, Robert, and William

Joseph is Eliza's brother and Robert and William are Joseph's twin sons. Joseph, a cooper by trade, operated a successful business prior to the epidemic. Joseph's unnamed wife falls ill with yellow fever and eventually dies during the early stages of the epidemic. Eliza subsequently moves in with Joseph to help him care for the twin boys and then Joseph himself falls ill with yellow fever. Joseph eventually recovers somewhat and invites Mattie to also live in his home until the epidemic subsides. Once Joseph becomes well he is devastated when Robert and William fall ill with the fever. Under Eliza and Mattie's care, however, both twin boys survive the illness. Joseph, Robert, and William are all somewhat minor characters in the novel.



Objects/Places

The Cook Coffeehouse

The Cook Coffeehouse sits on the corner of Seventh and High Streets in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was built by Mr. Cook in 1783. The coffeehouse has a first floor with a large four-windowed serving area and a kitchen in back, and has a second story that is composed of two bedrooms. The coffeehouse does not serve liquor but does tolerate some gambling and card games which makes it a popular cafe for socializing. The coffeehouse is robbed and vandalized during the epidemic but cleaned, repaired, and returned to active business by Mattie and Eliza.

Silas

Silas is Mattie's pet cat. He is a rambunctious, orange-furred cat who hunts mice and lives in and around the Cook Coffeehouse. Silas is abandoned for several days as the epidemic rages through the city but he remains at the coffeehouse until Mattie's eventual return. Silas is a source of minor comfort to Eliza and is symbolic of the disease's inability to destroy or affect all living things.

Family Small-Plot Gardens

During the time of the novel, refrigeration was not available - thus, foods would not keep for long and daily trips to the market were in order. The market, in turn, was supplied with fresh goods by daily deliveries from farmers outside of the city. As the epidemic spread, farmers refused to enter the city and thus within just a few days food became incredibly rare. Mattie, fortunately, had recourse to a small-plot family garden which previously had supplemented the coffeehouse's market purchases. Mattie finds some things to eat in the garden on several occasions, even though it appears completely stripped of all foods. Mattie also spends a good deal of time and effort drawing water from a well to water the plants in the family garden.

King George

King George is the Cook's pet parrot. King George lives in a cage in the main area of the Cook Coffeehouse. The parrot has learned to mimic words and speaks often, usually repeating words or phrases recently spoken in conversation. Grandfather Cook brings King George along on his abortive trip to escape Philadelphia. King George survives for a few days on the trip - at least through the time when Mattie collapses - but he is thereafter absent from the novel.



Grandfather Cook's Sword

Grandfather Cook served as a captain in the Pennsylvanian Fifth Regiment during the Revolutionary War. After the war, he retained his sword, musket, and uniform and derives much pleasure from these symbols of patriotic service. His sword remains on the coffeehouse mantle where it serves as a symbol of his duty and dedication to freedom. Mattie uses the sword to slash a would-be robber and drive him away.

Bush Hill Hospital

Formerly a rundown institution with a poor reputation, Bush Hill Hospital was transformed during the epidemic into the premier hospital for the care of the sick. Largely due to the efforts and money of Stephen Girard, Bush Hill emerged as a center practicing advanced and efficacious medicine. Mattie convalesces from yellow fever at Bush Hill Hospital.

Free African Society

The Free African Society, founded in 1787, was a mutual-aid organization devoted to helping the ill, widowed, and out-of-work African-Americans. It was also, clearly, anti-slavery. During the epidemic, the Free African Society organized fever-relief efforts in the city and was one of the only functioning organizations throughout the epidemic. After the epidemic, the Free African Society was attacked for perceived political gain; the Mayor of Philadelphia declaimed these baseless aspersions.

The Balloon

Jean Pierre Blanchard launched the first hot-air balloon flown in the United States of America from Walnut Street, Philadelphia, in early 1793. The flying balloon and soaring aeronaut stunned and captivated the citizens of Philadelphia. A subsequent planned balloon flight was rendered impossible by the epidemic described in the novel. Blanchard's yellow silk balloon is presented as a symbol of hope in the novel, and Mattie compares it to the rising sun that starts a new day.

Bleeding

Bleeding is a controversial medical procedure, now completely abandoned, involving the deliberate loss of blood from a sick patient. Various medical theories - all of them unsound - supported the practice of bleeding and it was widely implement in the United States of America during the time described in the novel. Bleeding the individuals suffering from yellow fever probably did more harm than good, weakening them while they were already seriously ill, and serving no useful purpose. Although several characters are bled and survive, Mattie is firmly against the procedure and convinces



Eliza to spare several sick children from being bled. Mattie is not bled because she convalesces in a hospital practicing French medicine, which does not support the practice of bleeding.

Nathaniel's Painting

Nathaniel Benson paints a small board with a scene and delivers it to Mattie just as the epidemic begins. Mattie loses track of the painting but re-discovers it after she has recovered from yellow fever. To Mattie, the painting is a token of Nathaniel's affection and she places the painting on the mantle.



Setting

The significant events occur within a four-month period during which the characters of this once-thriving town are changed forever. The story begins with Mattie waking to a mosquito whining in one ear and her mother hollering in the other.

Mattie lives in a room above the family coffeehouse. It is August and the relentless heat pours into the modest bedchamber.

Struggling to awaken to begin her chores, Mattie typifies the life of a teen. She struggles with her desire to do the right thing and her need to have some fun. She finds her mother annoying and dreams of the day when she can slip free of family restrictions. Mattie thinks of her friend, Nathaniel Benson, who understands her dreams.

Anderson effectively puts readers in the hubbub of the nation's capital, Philadelphia. She describes the hustle and bustle of the city, with its horsemen, carriages, and carts. A neighbor gossips as a dog barks at a pig running loose in the street. A blacksmith's hammer hits his anvil.

The author sets the topography and political climate. From Mattie's coffeehouse, she can see the rooftop of the State House where the Congress met. The coffeehouse sits two blocks away from President Washington's house. Politicians, as well as merchants and gentlemen, enjoy cups of coffee, a bite to eat, and the daily news. On a clear day, Mattie can see the masts of the ships anchored at the docks of the Delaware River.

These historical and geographical details place the readers in the era quickly and effectively.

Anderson uses unique events to substantiate her historical depiction. She refers to Blanchard's yellow hot air balloon that rose over Philadelphia in January of 1793.

She incorporates the work of the African Free Society and its heroic members. She bases Mattie's adventures on the real-life events of yellow fever with credible symptoms, treatments, and attitudes.

The author shows the compassionate and honest nature of teenagers. She portrays Mattie like an authentic teen—trying new ideas, new personalities, and new dreams.

Anderson seems to view the world as if she is fifteen years old. She grabs the readers' attention and takes them through Mattie's experience. She does this so effectively that readers may begin to cheer when Mattie's secret sweetheart, Nathaniel Benson, notices her.



Social Sensitivity

Anderson shows compassion for the people dealing with this deadly epidemic. Her characters reflect true-life attitudes and exist in a historical context. From the happenings at the coffeehouse to the heroic volunteers of the Free African Society, Anderson shows an understanding of women and girls—how they dream and how far they feel they can stretch for them.

Anderson created a facts appendix to answer questions that readers may have that she could not fit into the story. This additional part of the book adds to its historical value.

Treating teenagers in a kindly way, Anderson tells an honest story about an event that affected thousands of people.

She tells it using a teenage perspective, which makes the story connect with teen readers' attitudes and concerns.

The author shows Mattie's burgeoning romance with Nathaniel in a tasteful and appropriate way. They engage in mild flirting, take extra notice of each other, and have a lot of fun.

Anderson approaches the intrinsic struggle in illness and death with compassion.

She shows how horrific circumstances can lead to horrific responses, such as the dumping of the sick out onto the street. The Free African Society exemplifies how horrific circumstances can bring out extraordinary acts of human love and kindness.

Literary Qualities

Anderson employs a plain writing style by using simple sentences, dialect from everyday speech, and clear and direct statements. She narrates the story in chronological order through the protagonist's eyes.

Her realism depicts the epidemic of yellow fever and the frequently callous responses to it.

Anderson's imagery is detailed and effective and yet occasionally hard to fathom.

She gives readers a concrete sensation of the aspects of yellow fever; the delirium caused by the fever, and the vomiting of blood and black liquid. She describes the gruesome reality of people discarding dying people on the street, banning sick people from other cities, and burying the dead in mass graves. Anderson presents enough information to make the events believable, without turning the novel into a horror story.

Anderson uses historical speech patterns and period slang of 1793. Doing so may facilitate young adults' understanding of this time in history.



Themes

Bravery in Adversity

Mattie Cook, the novel's narrator and principle protagonist, begins the novel as a young and somewhat inexperienced girl. She is quickly thrust into a world full of adversity where fever rages through her home city and kills one in ten people. In addition, food becomes scarce, crime runs rampant, money is unavailable, and family members either die or vanish. Mattie is not alone in her catastrophic misfortune - all around her, she sees the dead and dying, and she meets numerous newly orphaned children only a few years younger than she.

Given this situation it would be expected that a young girl would either give up or, perhaps, consign her fate into the hands of others. At first, of course, Mattie does allow her mother and grandfather to largely dictate her course of action. However, after her grandfather dies and her mother vanishes, Mattie finds herself nearly completely alone. Many people strongly urge Mattie to simply report to the orphanage as yet another orphan in need of care. Others suggest that she try to hire on at the orphanage as a sort of part-resident/part-employee, while others tell her that her future must surely be that of a scullery maid. Mattie resists all of these suggestions because of her inherent bravery and her determination to succeed despite adversity.

Because of Mattie's bravery in the face of adversity, she not only retains her personal dignity, but she secures her own future financial success, finds a suitable suitor, firmly establishes numerous new friendships and strengthens existing friendships, and becomes a strong force for not only her family, but also the community through a particularly trying time.

Family and Friendship

The novel is constructed around the experiences of the Cook family and family friends. For example, the novel's beginning and concluding scenes deal with the Cook family interacting with their network of friends and acquaintances, and the entire construction of the narrative is based around the Cook family experience. One other family has a large role in the novel - the extended family of Eliza.

In all of the salient narrative elements, the history of the two families runs in parallel. This repetitive narrative construction allows the various families, the Cook family in particular, to represent an entire class of Philadelphia families. Because of this, the narrative takes on a broad social significance beyond the day-to-day details of Mattie's family history. All of the novel's characters derive a great deal of support from intra-family relationships.

The family structure is mirrored by the numerous but straightforward friendships described in the narrative. Mattie is like a sister to Polly and Eliza. Mattie adopts Nell as



a child even as she searches for her own missing mother. Mattie and Nathaniel grow from friends toward becoming wife and husband. These friendships weld the novel's characters into a network of support that allows the characters to develop and enjoy an optimistic and forward-looking existence even in the midst of extreme adversity.

Epidemic Disease

The novel is based around an epidemic of yellow fever that historically spread through the non-fictional city of Philadelphia in 1793. Yellow Fever is an acute viral disease, usually causing severe jaundice, high fever, muscle ache, headache, and sometimes accompanied by hemorrhagic bleeding which causes bloody, black vomit and diarrhea. Afflicted individuals are typically delirious and often suffer seizures, dehydration, coma, and often death. The disease has a three to six day incubation period and is caused by a virus transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Disease outbreaks in urban areas are usually more serious than outbreaks in rural areas. Although yellow fever used to be somewhat common in the United States of America, today it has been eradicated as a serious public health threat by improved sanitation, mosquito control, and vaccination.

Several characters in the novel contract the disease, including Mattie, Mrs. Cook, Colette Ogilvie, Eliza's brother Robert, and three infants including Nell. Numerous other minor characters are infected and many die - including Eliza's unnamed sister-in-law and Nell's unnamed mother. Out of a city population of around 40,000 nearly 4,000 individuals, or 10 percent of the population, died in the epidemic - many, many more became ill. The huge caseload swamped the city's infrastructure and corpses were often flung into the streets where they remained for days.

Although the novel describes the events surrounding one particular epidemic, in a more general sense the novel represents what is likely to occur in any large epidemic that overwhelms society's capabilities. Mass unmarked graves, lawlessness, hunger and starvation, orphans, wild stories, and spurious medical practitioners are all likely outcomes of any large contagious disease outbreak, even today.



Themes/Characters

Anderson employs the first person point of view. The fourteen-year-old protagonist, Mattie, gives readers the facts of Philadelphia and the epidemic quickly.

Anderson selected the title *Fever 1793* because the story occurs during the period when Philadelphia suffered severe losses from the 1793 yellow fever epidemic. Set in the post-Revolutionary era, the story explores the worldwide themes of friendship and death. As Mattie matures, she learns perseverance, hope, and self-reliance.

Mattie is in conflict with her mother, at odds with her body, and is dreaming about her future when she hears about the death of her childhood friend Polly. Shocked, she finds little time to grieve as she helps her mother serve coffeehouse clients. Confused about what killed Polly, Mattie and her family begin to hear about yellow fever but quickly dismiss the predictions as pessimistic.

Readers learn in the first chapter about Mattie's crush on Nathaniel Benson. Nathaniel enjoys Mattie's sharp wit and her zest to try new things. Together they reminisce about the launch of Blanchard's hot air balloon, an event symbolic of the new attitudes that Mattie and Nathaniel embrace.

Nathaniel gives Mattie flowers as a way to remember him as the city locks its doors to the fever. Mattie's memories help her to endure her many hardships. It is this hope that keeps Mattie going until the first frost that ends the epidemic.

Lucinda, Mattie's mother, serves as the antagonist. Widowed for several years, she raises Mattie by herself as she manages the coffeehouse. Lucinda knows how to persevere through tough times, and she passes on this ability to Mattie.

Mattie describes her mother as the type of person who "had given birth . . . in the morning and cooked supper for ten that night." Lucinda drives herself hard. Luanda's callous character forces Mattie to stand up for herself. Mattie wonders if her mother enjoys her life or if it is filled with bitterness. She shows little compassion for herself or for Mattie, making Mattie's journey to adulthood a hard one.

Lucinda gets yellow fever. Mattie finds out when a stranger dumps her out of a wheelbarrow in front of the coffeehouse.

For the first time, Mattie sees her mother out of control. Mattie fears for her mother's life as she sees her mother shiver and vomit uncontrollably. Luanda's eyes are poisoned with streaks of yellow and red. Mattie, like her mother, puts her fears and sadness aside so that she can go about the business of taking care of her mother.

Fearful that Mattie will catch the contagious disease, Lucinda sends her out of town to the Ludingtons at Gwynedd with Mattie's grandfather. Mattie experiences a mix of



emotions. She wants to nurse her mother to health and ensure she is okay, yet she feels helpless against this unknown and deadly virus.

Mattie does not find out if her mother survives the fever. This unresolved conflict effectively adds to the suspense of the novel.

Mattie's grandfather, Captain William Farnsworth Cook, protects her like a father figure. He teaches her practical lessons. For example, he frequently interrogates her about what a soldier needs to fight. Mattie answers: a sturdy pair of boots, a full belly, and a good night's sleep.

Mattie and her grandfather leave for the Ludingtons. Grandfather's cough and drowsiness raises their coachman's suspicions about his health. Fearing the grandfather has yellow fever, the coachman dumps Mattie and Grandfather outside Pembroke.

Mattie cares for her grandfather. She makes good decisions that provide them with shelter, food, and water. This experience cultivates her self-confidence and she experiences self-reliance.

Grandfather and Mattie travel together, overcoming several misfortunes. Grandfather takes Mattie to Philadelphia when she catches yellow fever. He helps nurse her back to health, and they return to the abandoned coffeehouse. Grandfather dies in a battle against thieves who have come in the middle of the night to ransack the coffeehouse.

Mattie grieves his death and remembers his life. She demands a reading from the Bible at his burial in a mass grave as a way of honoring him. Mattie's relationship with her grandfather enables her to expand her self-reliance and perseverance. It teaches her practical ways to handle tough situations, and it provides her with courage to win her battles.

After Grandfather's death, Mattie reaches her lowest point. The life she knew has vanished. The coffeehouse is vandalized and empty. Disease and death surround her. Mattie wanders the streets, wondering what to do.

She discovers baby Nell cowering in a corner and sucking her thumb, her blonde hair loose and tangled, her feet bare and black with dirt. Nell's mother has died of the fever. Mattie decides to care for Nell.

She finds Eliza, Lucinda's valued peer, who joined the Free African Society. Thick into the action, Eliza befriends Mattie. She asks Mattie to work alongside her as an equal, thus giving Mattie the opportunity to further realize her self-worth. She does not interfere when Mattie makes her own decisions, helping Mattie mature to the woman she is quickly becoming.

When Nell contracts yellow fever, Mattie and Eliza follow the French medical treatment: fresh air, rest, and fluids. Her suggestion works, and Nell heals. Nell symbolizes hope for a brighter future, and she enables Mattie to take on the responsibility of adulthood.



At the novel's resolution, Mattie's character transforms as she realizes that she must persevere. She knows that she has many choices. Mattie cultivates her friendship with Nathaniel. She opens up the coffeehouse with Eliza as her partner and begins to implement her dreams for a growing business. Nell stays with her and depends on her like a mother.

Lucinda returns from the country in ill health. Forced into a life of leisure, Lucinda must also depend on and trust in Mattie to run the coffeehouse. Lucinda begins to respect Mattie's choices and to treat her with respect and compassion.

Anderson does an excellent job of developing believable characters with realistic themes set against a rich background. She shows how this disease changed her characters, much as horrific life events change real lives. Young adults will emerge from this novel with a sense of hope, perseverance, and understanding.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is Mattie Cook, a fourteen-year-old girl and the principle protagonist in all scenes of the novel. There is one exception to this first-person point of view, which is a single sentence on page 79 that is written in the third-person point of view - an apparent editing error.

The first-person point of view is appropriate for the novel and makes the narrative engaging and appealing. Mattie is a sympathetic and likable character that simultaneously shares many traits of a teenager with the resolve and capability of an adult. As a protagonist, she is enjoyable, believable, and compelling. Her outlook on life and her response to the yellow fever epidemic are the focus of the novel and, coupled with the development of plot, provide the basic structure of the novel.

The first-person point of view becomes somewhat complicated when Mattie herself contracts and survives yellow fever. For a period of several days Mattie, the narrator, is unconscious and therefore not able to narrate the novel. When Mattie initially regains her consciousness, her ability to remain fully coherent for extended periods is limited. This portion of the narrative presents chronological gaps that are interesting and appropriate; a careful reading of this area of the novel will illustrate the superbly crafted plot development.

Setting

The novel's principle setting is Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1793. The setting represents a non-fictional location during a historic epidemic and references to non-fictional persons and events are common. However, the principle characters and specific locations, such as Mattie and the Cook Coffeehouse, are fictional elements. This combination of real and fictive events and characters allows the setting to develop a tone and texture beyond what is typically possible in short novels. It also encourages interested readers to read beyond the novel by exploring additional historic resources to learn more about the events portrayed.

Within the city of Philadelphia, several areas are further developed as specific settings. The Delaware River, though not specifically named in the novel, runs through the city and the epidemic of yellow fever begins on the waterfront. The area first affected by the spreading disease is an area marked by extreme poverty, crowding, and poor sanitation. A second area that serves as a specific focus is the Cook Coffeehouse - a fictional two-story cady that is situated in the center of the city, north and west away from the river, in a more affluent part of the town. The coffeehouse is particularly well described and serves as the primary setting for the bulk of the action that takes place in the novel.



Other settings that are described in some detail include Bush Hill, a historic hospital, a cemetery, some other houses in Philadelphia, and the countryside and towns around Philadelphia. However, these locations receive less detail in the novel, as they are less important to the plot development.

Language and Meaning

The novel is presented in easily accessible language with modern construction and modern sentiment. Within this basic construction of meaning, the novel uses some anachronistic language and social customs to create a historic atmosphere and tone. The essentially modern tone of the novel does allow it to be understood by a wide range of readers but somewhat conveys the mistaken sentiment that Philadelphia, 1793, is culturally similar to Philadelphia, 1993.

An example of this is, for example, Mattie's unshakable opinion that medical bleeding is not only not efficacious, but also actually harmful. The novel does provide a somewhat plausible rationale for Mattie's opinion because of her exposure to the French doctors' general opinion of the procedure. While most modern-day readers would probably not voluntarily allow themselves to be bled as medical treatment, it is somewhat unbelievable that the fourteen-year-old Mattie would have such a strong negative opinion of bleeding while many, indeed most, physicians and practitioners at the time considered it to be a standard procedure - especially considering the fact that so many survivors of yellow fever were bled during treatment, including Mrs. Cook and Robert, for example.

Other elements of life during the 1790s are presented in a far more credible manner - the well as the only water source at the Cook Coffeehouse, the prevalence of private small-plot gardens, the near-daily trips to the produce market, and the lack of infant diapers are all examples of a well-researched historic construction. Some contemporaneously conventional - if bizarre - beliefs about fever prevention are also presented and make for particularly interesting reading.

Structure

The 251-page novel is divided into twenty-nine short chapters of roughly equal length and concludes with an epilogue and an eight-page appendix that contains notes regarding non-fictional elements and characters referred to in the novel. In general, each chapter focuses on the events of a relatively short period of time - often a single day - and the specific date on which the events of the chapter begins is noted as the chapter's sub-title. Several particularly eventful days are described throughout several chapters, while some chapters describe larger periods, up to several days. The novel spans the period from August 16 through December 11, 1793, although most of the events discussed happen in August and September.

Since each chronologically arranged chapter covers a specific period some chapters contain more plot development than others, while some chapters are primarily devoted

to character development or the portrayal of American life in Philadelphia during the historic period in which the novel is set. The novel's structure is well balanced and contributes to the easy accessibility of the novel's presentation of a difficult but important topic. Not only does the novel present a solid piece of fiction, it also creates a believable atmosphere of historic importance and demonstrates the timelessness of human caring.



Quotes

"My father had built our home and business after the War for Independence ended in 1783. I was four years old. The coffeehouse sat just off the corner of Seventh and High Streets. At first we were lucky if a lost farmer strayed in, but business improved when President Washington's house was built two blocks away." (p. 7)

"Grandfather stayed silent until we approached a limping man dressed in dark rags, pushing a car.

"'Wonder where that fellow's going?' he said. 'Looks like he belongs on the waterfront.'

"A thin white arm flopped over the side of the car as it jostled over the cobblestones.

"'Hullo there, good man!' called Grandfather. 'There is no place for the dead up here. Hullo!'" (p. 61)

"Grandfather chuckled. The laughter caught in his throat and made him cough. I watched with alarm as his face reddened. I pounded his back until he raised his arm in protest.

"'I'm fine, child, I'm fine. No need to beat me senseless.'

The farmer turned around in his seat and glared at them.

"'He ain't sick, is he? I'll not have fever victims in my wagon.'

"'Take care you don't drive off the road. We're fine back here. Mind your horse,' I snapped.

"Grandfather raised an eyebrow." (pp. 78-79)

"I jolted awake. Moonlight spilled in through the open windows. I rubbed my eyes, trying to sort out where the nightmare stopped and the waking world began. My sheets and shift were soaked through with sweat, blood, and the foul-smelling black substance that marked a victim of yellow fever.

"Yellow fever.

"There were beds on either side of me. To my left slept a young woman, her hair in two dirty braids. To my right lay a figure covered with a sheet. A corpse.

"Who was dead and who was alive? Was it Grandfather? Was it Mother?

"I reached for the sheet, but stopped. My head spun as if I were on a rope swing, twisting dizzily. I closed my eyes until the sensation faded. Taking a deep breath, I lifted the sheet at the side of the body. The hand was thin and the fingers slender, with



tapered nails and fine bones. It was not the fleshy, scarred hand of Grandfather. Nor the work-worn hand of my mother. My eyes filled with tears." (p. 98)

"They told of a small child found huddled around the body of her dead mother. As volunteers placed the mother in a coffin, the child had cried out, 'Why are you putting Mamma in that box?' They had to turn the child over to a neighbor and take the mother away for burial.

"They told of the dying man who pulled himself to the window of his bedchamber and begged people to bring him a drink of water. Many passed him by, hurrying away from the sound of his voice, until a brave soul entered the house to help him.

"They told of thieves who crept in and stole jewelry off the dead and dying.

"They told of good people who refused to take any money for helping strangers, even though they themselves were poor and near destitute.

"They told of the mighty who had fallen ill: Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and Dr. Rush himself. Both men had recovered, though Dr. Rush's sister had died. Hamilton had fled the city.

"They told of terror: patients who had tried to jump out of windows when the fever robbed their reason, screams that pierced the night, people who were buried alive, parents praying to die after burying all their children." (pp. 105-106)

"'What's that?' I asked, pointing to something on the marble steps of a three-story house.

"'Don't look, Matilda,' said Grandfather. 'Turn your head and say a prayer.'

"I looked. It appeared to be a bundle of bed linens that had been cast out of an upper window, but then I saw a leg and an arm.

"'It's a man. Stop the wagon, we must help him!'

"'He is past helping, Miss,' the driver said as he urged on the horses. 'I checked him on the way out to fetch you this morning. He were too far gone to go to the hospital. His family tossed him out so as they wouldn't catch the fever. The death cart will get him soon for burying.'

"I couldn't help but stare as the wagon rolled by the stoop. He looked about seventeen and wore well-tailored clothes stained with the effects of the fever. Only his polished boots remained clean. His yellow eyes stared lifelessly at the clouds, and flies collected on his open mouth." (pp. 118-119)

"I dreamt of roast beef, sliced pink and dripping with juice. A roast beef bigger than a horse, set on a giant platter that took up the entire front room, surrounded by steaming potatoes and parsnips, and loaves of fresh bread. I had a bowl of butter all to myself,



and my very own pitcher of cold apple cider. The smell of mincemeat pie floated in from the kitchen.

"I lifted the first bit to my mouth when a noise snapped me awake." (p. 138)

"Smack! The tall man slapped me across the face, jerking my head backward.

"Don't hit her,' the short man protested.

"I'll do what I please,' the tall man said as he wiped his face on his sleeve. 'Now, missy, the silver and the strongbox. Where are they?'

"We've already been robbed. They took everything. You're too late,' I said.

"See? We're too late. Let's go.' The short man pulled on his partner's sleeve.

"Shove off,' the tall man shouted. 'What if she's lying? You think she's going to hand over all her money because we ask her nicely? She needs to be convinced.' He drew back his arm to hit me again." (p. 143)

"I picked up the broken doll and heard a whimpering sound coming from an old doorway. I put my head through the door and waited for my eyes to adjust to the gloom.

"A small child cowered in the corner, her blonde hair loose and tangled, her feet bare and black with dirt. She was sucking her thumb and keening to herself. I held out the doll to her. 'Is this yours?' I asked.

"Broken,' she said.

"Is your mama here? Or your papa? Perhaps they can fix it.'

"The little girl whispered something. I stepped closer to hear her.

"Mama's broken too,' she said." (pp. 161-162)

"What do you mean, "if only the doctors had been right?""

"Eliza held the shirt up to the light to check the evenness of the stitches.

"After a few weeks of nursing the sick and burying the dead, our own people started to sicken. Black people can get sick with yellow fever just like white people or Indians. I do know some who have never been sick, but there are white people who can say the same thing.'

"We stitched in silence, each deep in thought.

"Are we going to die, Eliza?' I asked finally.

"Eliza snorted.



"That's foolish talk. I'm not going to die. I have too much work to do." (pp. 176-177)

"Robert woke with a shriek that ended all discussion. A few minutes later William woke, vomiting blood and crying. Nell startled and cried weakly. We worked frantically drawing water, washing the burning bodies, and trying every herb, tea, and poultice to break the fever and banish the infection." (p. 206)

"The water finally boiled. I made a coffee for myself, a mug for Eliza, and one for Mother. I cut a lump of sugar off the loaf and added it along with a healthy dollop of milk to my mug. Being the first one awake did bring some privileges, I thought with a smile.

"Overhead, footsteps crossed the room. I hurried to set out the breakfast dishes before Eliza came downstairs. She didn't begrudge me a few minutes of quiet, but the table-setting came first." (p. 242)

"The first hot-air balloon flown in the United States was launched from the Walnut Street Jail on January 9, 1793, by the French aeronaut Jean Pierre Blanchard. Nearly every person in Philadelphia stopped what they were doing and watched as the yellow silk balloon carried him 5,800 feet in the air.

"Blanchard performed several scientific experiments aloft, filling six bottles of air, taking his pulse, and making observations about the air pressure, temperature, and weather. If Benjamin Franklin has lived long enough (he died in 1790), he would have been thrilled with the event.

"The wind blew Blanchard fifteen miles, across the Delaware River to New Jersey. Blanchard shared a bottle of wine with the farmer in whose field he landed, and showed the man his 'passport,' a letter of safe passage written by President George Washington.

"A crowd soon gathered, and a wagon was found to transport Blanchard and his deflated balloon back across the river. He was greeted in Philadelphia by a cheering crowd. Blanchard's plans for a second flight in the city were ruined by the yellow fever epidemic." (pp. 245-246)

Adaptations

Fever 1793 can be enjoyed in an unabridged edition audiocassette (six hours, four cassettes) narrated by Emily Bergl (Listening Library Inc., October 2000). In addition to Fever 1793, the work includes other unabridged titles that tell stories of children who lived during various historical periods; for example, in a New York orphanage in 1926 and during the potato famine in Ireland.

According to Audio File 2001, Bergl sets a reasonable pace in Fever 1793. She avoids sounding maudlin during a nonstop series of hardships. She conveys the hopefulness and joyfulness of Mattie, as well as the resolve of other key people in the novel.

The book can be purchased in large print edition (Thorndike Press, June 2001).



Topics for Discussion

1. Characterize Mattie. How does she grow and change during the story? What characteristics enable her to survive her illness and traumas?
2. Describe Luanda, Mattie's mother. What makes this character important? Why?
What events in Lucinda's past contribute to making her the adult she is?
3. Characterize Eliza. What role does she play in developing Mattie's character?
4. Characterize Mattie's grandfather. How did he support Mattie? Why is his character essential in Mattie's maturation?
5. Mattie befriends Nathaniel Benson.
Describe Nathaniel's importance. How is the relationship between Mattie and Nathaniel different from comparable ones in the early twenty-first century?
6. List the attitudes of the Federalist Era in Philadelphia in 1793. What kinds of heroic acts, and by whom, helped the people overcome their fears?
7. What important part did Nell play as Mattie's companion?
8. Compare and contrast life in Philadelphia before and after the fever of 1793.
What positive changes arose from this experience?
9. Animals frequently play a significant part in our lives. What role does Mattie's cat, Silas, play in the story? What does he contribute to the story?
10. List the literary techniques that Anderson employs in *Fever 1793*. How do they contribute to the novel's effectiveness?



Essay Topics

In the opening scenes of the novel, Mattie expresses envy that Eliza lives by the beautiful river, while Mattie lives away from the river in urban downtown Philadelphia. What advantages might there be to living away from the river?

Describe what Philadelphia was like in 1793. How is the city different today? Would you rather be a teenager in Philadelphia today or a teenager in Philadelphia in the 1790s?

Blanchard flew a yellow balloon. Strips of yellow cloth are tied around doorknobs to warn of fever. Infected people's eyes turn yellowish. The sunrise at the end of the novel is yellow. What does the color yellow symbolize within the novel?

Mattie begins the novel as a child and ends the novel as a young adult. What events in Mattie's life caused her maturation to occur so quickly?

Discuss the voluntary aid activities provided to sick residents by the Free African Society. Why do you think so many African-Americans risked their own health and safety to care for strangers?

Today, yellow fever is largely controlled within the United States of America. What conditions would make another epidemic of yellow fever possible? Contrast the 1793 yellow fever epidemic to a modern-day epidemic such as AIDS.

Describe the physical symptoms of yellow fever. Do you think that bleeding, as prescribed by Dr. Rush, was helpful or harmful to individuals sick with yellow fever? What other treatments are described in the novel? Do you think they would be beneficial or harmful?

Do you think that Silas and other pets in the city of Philadelphia were at risk of contracting yellow fever? Why or why not?

Mattie, Eliza, and others waited and hoped for winter's first frost. Once overnight winter frosts started the epidemic ended and within a few weeks, nobody was sick any more. Why do you think frost and cold weather stopped the epidemic?

When Blanchard flew his yellow silk balloon over Philadelphia, the citizens were amazed and flocked to the streets to watch the hot-air balloon pass overhead. Why do you think a simple hot air balloon was so interesting to the citizens of the city in the 1790s?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Research the political climate in 1793.

Why was the capital in Philadelphia?

Where did the Congress meet? What issues did the government officials handle?

2. Detail the real-life impact of yellow fever in the United States in 1793. What causes yellow fever? Can it be found in the world today? What medical changes occurred because of this tragedy? How would this disease be treated in the early twenty-first century?

3. Animals frequently play a valuable part in history. What types of pets did Philadelphians own in the late 1790s?

What useful purposes did they serve besides companionship? What animals would be in the city which were not pets? What roles did these animals have?

4. The story occurs in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1793. Compare and contrast Philadelphia in 1793 and today.

Describe its layout and traditions. What businesses support the culture then and now? How did the city change after the epidemic to make it what it is today?

5. Anderson refers to a hot air balloon in her story. Research the event that occurred on January 9, 1793. What makes it significant? Did this event affect hot air balloons as we know them today?

6. Compare and contrast the coffeehouses of the time. What purposes did they fulfill? What food and beverages did owners serve? How do they compare to modern day coffeehouses?

7. Describe the medical community and remedies available in 1793. What credentials did the society require, if any?

How did these circumstances contribute to how the disease spread and killed?

What good arose out of the tragedy?

8. Polly, Mattie's childhood friend, spent time at the blacksmith's shop, eyeing the blacksmith's son. Research the history of the blacksmith. What did a blacksmith do? Is black smithing still engaged in today? How has it changed since the 1700s?



Further Study

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Related Websites

Laurie's Bookshelf. <http://www.writerlady.com>. Accessed October 2002. This official author's site contains biographical information as well as books she recommends and links.



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