

Fever 1793

Recommended for Grades 6-8

Book Summary: Fever 1793

It is 1793 in Philadelphia. Fourteen year-old Mattie Cook lives with her mother and grandfather at the coffee shop they own. She hates having to work and do chores and despises the young men her mother keeps trying to introduce her to as prospective husbands. Mattie is far more interested in her old friend Nathaniel, whom her mother thinks is unsuitable because he is only apprenticed to be a painter.

Everything changes for Mattie and her family when sickness comes to Philadelphia. People are rapidly fleeing the city. Her family is determined to stay until her mother is taken ill. Her mother demands that Mattie and her grandfather leave the city before they too become ill. They leave, but don't get far when their ride abandons them. Then Mattie becomes ill. Fortunately, she recovers.

[SPOILER] Mattie and her grandfather return to Philadelphia, having nowhere else to go. One night thieves break in and kill Mattie's grandfather. Mattie's mother has disappeared. It seems she will have to sell the coffee shop and go to an orphanage. All these hardships have turned Mattie from a child to an adult. She determines that she will not sell the shop. She will run it herself. She is successful. Finally, her mother returns to Philadelphia. She is frail and weak. It is now Mattie who must take care of everything while her mother recovers.

Author Biography: Laurie Halse Anderson

Laurie Halse Anderson was born on October 23, 1961 in Potsdam, New York. As a child, she enjoyed writing, but wanted to be a doctor. She was also interested in foreign cultures and languages. During her final year in high school, Laurie was an exchange student in Denmark. While there, she lived on a pig farm. When she returned, she attended Onondaga Community College for two years. She then transferred to Georgetown University and earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Languages and Linguistics.

Laurie married Greg Anderson and they had two children together. She became a freelance reporter. In her spare time, she worked on several novels. For her efforts, she received many rejection letters. Finally, in 1996, her first book was published. She has written many books since then, including Speak, Fever 1793, the Wild at Heart series, and Catalyst.

Laurie and Greg have divorced, though they remain friends. Laurie has moved to Mexico, New York with her new husband, Scot Larrabee. Their blended family now includes Scot's two children as well.

Laurie continues to write novels for young adults.



Oswego Campus
32 W Jefferson Street
Oswego, IL 60543
www.oswego.lib.il.us

Montgomery Campus
1111 Reading Drive
Montgomery, IL 60538
(630) 978-1272

Fever 1793

Recommended for Grades 6-8

Discussion Questions

1. Mattie's mother is always saying that when she was a girl, they did so much more work and never complained because it was the war. Do you think Mattie is just lazy or do all kids just do what they have to and no more? Why do you think so?
 2. Throughout the story, Blanchard's balloon is mentioned (p. 2, 4). What is this balloon a symbol of for Mattie?
 3. Mattie's mother ran off to marry someone of the working class (p. 8). Why do you think she is so determined that Mattie not do the same? Why is Mattie determined not to do as her mother says? Does love factor in anywhere?
 4. When news of a fever starts to spread and it is rumored that hundreds have died, why doesn't Mattie's family leave? What did they have to gain by staying?
 5. The refugee's from Barbados are blamed for bringing the fever (p. 38) and yet it is also said that black people are immune to it. Why do you think the Free African Society steps up to help the sick when no one else will? Why do you think they continue to do so even once it is known that black people can get the sickness too?
 6. When Mattie's mother sends her away, does Mattie do the right thing in leaving? Or should she have stayed to help care for her? Why do you think so?
 7. Mattie wonders what is wrong with the world when no one will help them because they fear they have the fever (p. 93). Should people risk their own health and that of their families to help people they don't know? Or is it better to protect those you love and not worry about people you don't know? Why?
 8. Grandfather says, "These are trying times. They seem to bring out the best and worst in the people around us." (p. 114) Is this true? Can you think of any recent events that support your opinion?
 9. At what point in the story does Mattie become more like an adult than a child? Was there a particular event that caused this change? Or a combination of events?
 10. Mattie decides she will not go to an orphanage where she will likely end up as a scullery maid, but instead she will run the shop herself (p. 215). Could she have determined her own destiny without the help and support of her friends? Can anyone?
 11. Could an epidemic like this happen in today? Can you think of any recent illnesses that have been as destructive as yellow fever was? Did people react in the same way as in the book or not? How does modern medicine and science effect epidemics today?
-



Oswego Campus
32 W Jefferson Street
Oswego, IL 60543
www.oswego.lib.il.us

Montgomery Campus
1111 Reading Drive
Montgomery, IL 60538
(630) 978-1272