



## CHAINS by Laurie Halse Anderson

1. At what point do you realise that the narrator, Isabel is a black slave? How do you feel about people being 'owned' by other people? Is it right? Is it fair?

2. Chains is a work of historical fiction, but the background is real – the American War of Independence? What did you know about America as a former British colony before reading Chains? Was American Independence a good thing? In what way does Isabel's struggle to seek her freedom echo that of the nation?

3 At the beginning of each chapter, there is a short quote from authors and writers living in America at the time of their struggle for independence.

Why has the author included these writings in Chains? What do they contribute to your appreciation of the story? Are any of the writers featured in the story? Why is this relevant?

4. *'Slaves don't read,' Mr Robert said. 'I should beat you for lying.'*

Isabel can read and write which is uncommon for a slave at this time. In what way does this set her apart? How is this information also important to the story? Why does she keep these skills secret mostly? In what way does she use them to her own advantage?

5. How is Isabel treated by her owner, Madam Lockton? Why does she re-name Isabel? What is the significance of her new name? What does Isabel make of her new name?

How would you feel if you had to take on the name of the person who owned you?

6. At various stages in the story, Isabel has to suffer beatings at the hands of Madam Lockton. How does this affect her? Does it make her respect her owner more, or less? What other indignities are Isabel and her sister Ruth forced to suffer? Why does Madam Lockton treat the girls in this way?

7. When Isabel meets Curzon at the execution of Hickey, he tells her, *'The world turns upside down every day.'*

What does he mean by this? How do you think Isabel and Curzon adjust to the changes taking place around them? Are things changing for the better, do you think?

8. Why does Madam Lockton insist on branding Isabel with the letter I? What does it stand for? What effect does this branding have on Isabel?

Toward the end of the story, when Isabel catches her reflection, she traces the brand with her fingertip and says *'this mark stands for Isabel'*.

Why is this such a watershed moment for Isabel? What has she comes to realise through her branding?

9. Has Isabel found her freedom at the end of the story? Or is she just another slave on the run?

There will be a sequel to Chains that follows the further fortunes of Isabel and Curzon. What do you think will happen to them? Will Isabel find her sister Ruth, do you think?

10. *'She cannot chain my soul.'*

Why is this an important statement from Isabel? Why is Chains a fitting title for the book? Does Isabel ever break free of her chains? Is she brave to act in the way she does, or would she better off not to struggle?

