

Grade 6: Unit 3

Chains: Introduction

Purpose: Why This Unit?

Chains by Laurie Halse Anderson is a gripping historical fiction novel that follows Isabel, a slave during the American Revolution, on her journey to freedom. During the next few weeks, you will help your scholars understand Isabel's struggle to control her fate during this tumultuous period in American history.

Your job, though, is first and foremost that of a reading teacher. You must ensure that your scholars enlist the basic tools of great readers — envisioning, reading with fluency, engaging in word attack, and, of course, using plot, setting, and character development — to understand the book's provocative ideas. You must know your scholars' Fountas & Pinnell levels and ensure that they are swiftly growing as readers. You must ensure that your scholars are reading and writing at home and that your scholars' parents are invested in their learning.

You are also a teacher of writing. You must ensure that your scholars are deeply invested in improving their writing and that they give you their best work. Always set sky-high expectations and settle only for scholars' best effort. It is your responsibility to dramatically improve your scholars' writing capacities. You will need to study the Top 5 Writing Tactics and ensure that scholars know how to be critics of their own writing.

In particular, you are responsible for the following outcomes:

- First and foremost, you must get 100% of your scholars independently reading at least four books per month.
- You are responsible for 100% of your scholars completing nightly literacy homework that will develop them as readers and writers.

- You are responsible for getting minimally 90% of your scholars on or above grade level in reading, as measured by the Fountas & Pinnell Reading Assessment.

You will not achieve 100% without setting clear expectations for your scholars AND their parents, and driving relentlessly toward these goals. If you hold scholars and parents accountable and are an absolute stickler at the beginning, you will make it easier for yourself and frankly for your scholars and their parents. The worst thing you can do as a teacher is let scholars slide and then get tough. You will breed resentment and distrust, whereas clear expectations and utter consistency breed trust and respect.

Themes in *Chains*

In order to successfully teach this unit, you must be intellectually prepared at the highest level. This means reading and studying the entire book before launching the unit, and understanding the major themes that Laurie Halse Anderson communicates through the book. By the time your scholars finish reading *Chains*, they should be able to articulate and explain these themes.

The table below outlines the major topics and themes highlighted in *Chains*. Note that you should NOT review these with scholars before they begin reading the book. Rather, scholars will uncover themes organically through their reading. As a teacher of reading, your job is to facilitate rich conversations about the meaning of each chapter. You will do this by posing the discussion questions provided in each seminar. As scholars read the text, you will press them to analyze how the author uses events in the book to communicate the major themes.

While there is not one correct thematic statement for each major topic discussed in the book, there are accurate (evidence-based) and inaccurate (non-evidence-based) interpretations of what the author is arguing. Therefore, we have provided exemplar thematic statements in the table below.

Topic	Theme
Loyalty to Self vs. Loyalty to Others	Loyalty to a personal moral code sometimes requires social betrayal. On the other hand, loyalty to others often requires personal sacrifice.
The Importance of Hope	Maintaining an optimistic outlook can help individuals overcome difficult challenges.
The Importance of Relationships	Strong bonds with others are crucial for overcoming life's challenges, and are worth risking everything to preserve.
The Meaning of Freedom	When freedom is defined in different ways by different people, it can actually lead to oppression.
Coming of Age	Bravery, especially in the face of danger, can contribute greatly to a person's coming of age.
Physical Bondage vs. Mental Bondage	One can maintain freedom of thought, even in the absence of physical freedom.