

Integrating Literature and Social Studies with *Fever 1793*

Overview

Students are drawn into post-Revolutionary Philadelphia during the midst of the infamous yellow fever epidemic of 1793 by reading Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Fever 1793*. Use this novel as supplemental reading to assist students in developing their understanding of and interest in colonial times, while heightening their reading skills and ability for higher order thinking.

Grade

5

North Carolina Essential Standards for 5th Grade Social Studies

- 5.H.2.3- Compare the changing roles of women and minorities on American society from pre-Colonial through Reconstruction.
- 5.G.1.2- Explain the positive and negative effects of human activity on the physical environment of the United States, past and present.
- 5.G.1.3- Exemplify how technological advances (communication, transportation and agriculture) have allowed people to overcome geographic limitations.
- 5.G.1.4- Exemplify migration within or immigration to the United States in order to identify push and pull factors (why people left/why people came).

Materials

Copies of *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson

Duration

Varies

Procedure

Simulating the Spread of Yellow Fever

1. Previous to the start of class, teachers should cut the attached Yellow Fever Simulation squares apart and place them into a container. (Another option involving less preparation is to use small Post-It notes of two different colors.) As students enter class, have them draw a square of paper from a container (ensure students cannot see what they are drawing out.) Project the attached image of Yellow Fever and tell students who drew a paper with a mosquito on it to stand. Tell these students that you are very sorry, but due to having been bitten by a mosquito, they are now infected with the virus that they are looking at, **Yellow Fever**.
2. Explain to students what to expect as the virus takes hold:
 - Generally there is an incubation period of three to six days.
 - The first signs of yellow fever include muscle pain (with prominent backache), headache, shivers, loss of appetite, and nausea and/or vomiting. (Tell students to remember a time when they have had the flu. Tell them to remember how bad they felt, and to imagine feeling worse than that!)
 - Depending on how many students are standing, tell most of them to sit so that only 15 percent of those infected are still standing. Tell those who sat that thought they experienced great sickness, they are lucky. After three to four days most patients improve and their symptoms disappear.

- However, 15 percent of patients enter a toxic phase within 24 hours. Tell the students still standing that unfortunately, this is the situation they are in.
- In the toxic phase, your fever reappears.
- The patient rapidly develops jaundice and complains of abdominal pain with vomiting.
- Bleeding can occur from the mouth, nose, eyes and/or stomach.
- Once this happens, blood appears in the vomit and feces.
- Kidney function deteriorates; this can lead to complete kidney failure with no urine production.
- Generally half of patients recover from the toxic phase with no significant organ damage (tell half of the students still standing to sit). Most unfortunately however, the other half die within ten to fourteen days. Tell the student(s) still standing that you are very sorry, but they have passed away, dying a gruesome death, of yellow fever.

Introducing *Fever 1793*

3. Hold up a copy of the book *Fever 1793* and explain to students that they will be reading this novel to compliment their study of colonial times and/or post-Revolutionary America. Ask students to make predictions on what they think the book is about based on their first impressions of the cover. Give students an overview of the book, letting them know that the story is told by a person their age who is living in the city of Philadelphia in the year 1793, the year when an outbreak of yellow fever killed thousands.
4. To get students excited about the book, it is recommended that the teacher read chapters 1 and 2 out loud to students, as dramatically as possible. Chapter 2 ends in a cliff hanger with the words, “Polly’s dead”, so students are often excited to begin reading immediately and find out what happens next. After reading, allow students to discuss:
 - Describe your first impressions of Matilda (Mattie).
 - Characterize Mattie’s relationship with her mother.
 - Compare and contrast Mattie to yourself, as well as her relationship to her mother with you and your parents. Can you relate at all? Explain.
 - Mattie says, “I vowed to do that one day, slip free of the ropes that held me.” (p. 4) How do you interpret this comment? What do you think the ropes symbolize? What does she want to “slip free” from?
 - There are references to Mattie’s desire to want to grow up. Why do so many young people share this desire?
 - Based on the information given thus far, what social class do you think Mattie’s family is from? What evidence makes you think this?
 - Visualize Philadelphia. What do you see? Smell? Hear?
 - Based on the descriptions thus far in the novel, how would you characterize people’s living conditions and hygiene in 1793?
 - What is your first impression of Eliza?
 - Mattie comments, “Eliza was the luckiest person I knew”(p. 9). What is ironic about this statement?
 - Where in chapter two can you find an example of foreshadowing? (p. 10-“*There’s talk of sickness by the river.*”)
 - What do you think happened to Polly? What do you predict will happen next?

Project Ideas

- Have students choose a character in the novel and write a monologue from that character’s perspective in which they recount the events of the yellow fever epidemic as they experienced them. Students can then dress in costume and present their monologues to class in character.

- Compile a list of 10 different preventions and treatments for yellow fever mentioned throughout *Fever 1793*. Describe each treatment or prevention and rate its effectiveness. Describe how yellow fever is prevented and treated in modern society.
- Based on the poem from page 96, have students create their own poetry based on themes from the novel. Hold a poetry reading in which students share their work with classmates.
- Research other yellow fever outbreaks in the history of the US. Compare and contrast one of those outbreaks to the yellow fever outbreak in 1793 Philadelphia. Research other outbreaks of disease (small pox, influenza, etc.) to compare and contrast as well.
- Several chapters end in such a way that the reader isn't quite sure what will happen next (for example, chapter 8, 11, 13). Instruct students to make a creative prediction and write how they think the next chapter will go before reading it. Once finishing the book, give students the assignment of writing an alternate ending.
- Mrs. Bowles says, "These are trying times. They seem to bring out the best and worst in the people around us." While many community values are lost though out the yellow fever crisis, there are active, responsible citizens who care for those affected in various ways by the disease. The Free African Society does much throughout the yellow fever crisis to aid community members in need, Eliza and other members deliver food baskets and care for the sick, Mattie takes in an orphan, Grandfather assists Bush Hill in caring for the sick, etc. Identify an area of needed assistance in your own community and organize a service learning project.
- Host a Fever 1793 tea party. Students can bring treats and beverages and discuss the book while snacking. Students could also dress in 1700s costumes for the party.
- If you have available facilities at your school, have your class cook various recipes from the 1700s, such as Eliza's gingerbread.
- Instruct students to visualize particular scenes from the novel and recreate those scenes in art work.

Questions for Fever 1793

The following questions can be used for class discussion, literature circles/reading group questions, or written assessments.

Chapter 1-2

- Describe your first impressions of Matilda (Mattie).
- Characterize Mattie's relationship with her mother.
- Compare and contrast Mattie to yourself. Can you relate at all?
- Mattie says, "I vowed to do that one day, slip free of the ropes that held me." (p. 4) How do you interpret this comment? What do you think the ropes symbolize? What does she want to "slip free" from?
- There are references to Mattie's desire to want to grow up. Why do so many young people share this desire?
- Based on the information given thus far, what social class do you think Mattie's family is from? What evidence makes you think this?
- Visualize Philadelphia. What do you see? Smell? Hear?
- Based on the descriptions thus far in the novel, how would you characterize people's living conditions and hygiene in 1793?
- What is your first impression of Eliza?
- Mattie comments, "Eliza was the luckiest person I knew"(p. 9). What is ironic about this statement?
- Where in chapter two can you find an example of foreshadowing? (p. 10-*"There's talk of sickness by the river."*)
- Predict what happened to Polly.

Chapter 3

- How does Mattie view her mother? What change has Mattie seen in her mother in her lifetime? What might have caused this?
- Compare the two sides of Mattie's mother you see in this chapter.
- Why do you think Mattie's mother won't let her attend Polly's funeral?

Chapter 4

- Visualize the coffee house. What do you see? Smell? Hear? What purposes do you think the coffeehouse serves for the community (*not only is it a place for coffee and meals, it is also an information source*)?
- We hear the mention of a husband for Mattie a second time in this chapter. Why does this issue keep coming up? What do you think Mattie's feelings on the issue are?

Chapter 5

- "A week later, sixty-four people had died, though no one seemed quite sure what killed them." (p. 24) How would you feel being in the city at this point?
- How does Mattie's grandfather feel about the small yet rising death toll? (p. 26)
- How does Mrs. Epler think you can protect yourself from the fever? Do you agree or disagree with her opinion?
- How does Mattie feel about Nathaniel?
- What sense do you get thus far about the role of women in 1793? (*see quote on p. 24*)
- Why does Mattie's mother not want her going to the market? Why does she want to send her to the county? How does Mattie view these ideas? Have you ever experienced a situation like this with your parents?
- What sound is left in your mind after reading this chapter? (*the sound of the death tolls ringing*)

Chapter 6

- Why is Mattie's mother so excited about the invitation to tea at the Olgivie's? Why is Mattie so unenthused?
- What do you think of Grandfather's views on the causes of the fever? (p. 38)
- What types of ideas does Mattie have for the coffee house? Why does her mother not entertain these ideas? What do you think of her ideas?

Chapter 7

- Describe the Olgivies. Compare their social class to Mattie and her mother's social class.
- Why do you think Mrs. Olgivie invited Mattie and her mother to tea?
- How do think the Olgivie's view people from social classes different than their own? (p. 51) How do they specifically view Mattie and her mother?
- Why does Mattie say "We did not belong here. I did not belong here?" (p. 52)

Chapter 8

- Why are guns and cannons being fired into the air?
- Compare and contrast the experience of the rich to those who are poor in regards to the fever.
- Describe Grandfather's view of the fever. How do you view his attitude towards it?
- Regarding the list titled "On Advice From The College of Physicians" (p. 58), which of the fever advices is most beneficial? Which is most ridiculous? What are the various ways thus far mentioned to combat the fever?
- Page 63 contains a quote from Ben Franklin: "He's the best physician that knows the worthlessness of most medicines." What message is Franklin trying to convey? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- This chapter ends with Mattie's mother being dumped from a wheelbarrow onto the street. Predict what is going to happen next!

Chapter 9

- Though out this chapter, Mattie's mother is portrayed as terribly ill. If you were in Mattie's position and seeing someone you love like this, how would you feel? What do you imagine she is worried about?

Chapter 10

- At the beginning of this chapter, the quote reads: “The patient is to be placed in a large empty tub, and two buckets full of water, of the temperature of 75 or 80 degrees Fahrenheit’s thermometer...are to be thrown on him.” Go back through your book and examine all of the treatments and preventions mentioned for yellow fever thus far. Rate their effectiveness.
- What does Mattie mean when she says “and so I left home, in a manner quite unpredicted?” (p77)
- Imagine being among strangers and becoming severely ill. How would you feel? What would you have to rely on for survival?

Chapter 11

- What is happening to “community ideals” with this worsening disease outbreak? Why?
- Imagine if an infectious disease struck our area...how do you think people would behave?
- Predict what will happen next.

Chapter 12

- Put yourself into Mattie’s current situation (mother sick and left behind, grandfather now ill, stranded in the middle of nowhere, etc.) How would you feel? What would you do to survive?
- In what way has grandfather’s attitude towards the sickness changed? (p. 87)

Chapter 13

- On pg. 93, Mattie says, “What was wrong with the world? Would I next see birds flying backward, or cows crocheting doilies?” What is she trying to convey?
- Page 95 ends with, “Then, blackness.” What do you think will happen next?

Chapter 14

- Think of a time when you were very ill. What comforted you? What treatments made you feel better?
- How is Bush Hill described in rumors? Compare and contrast the rumors to how it is in actuality.
- What is bloodletting? What do French doctors think about the treatment of bloodletting compared to the Americans? Why does this worry Mattie?
- Out of all Mattie has endured thus far, what do you think has been the most difficult and why?

Chapter 15

- According to Charles Brown’s quote from his memoirs (p. 105), what is the situation like in Philadelphia?
- Based upon reading p. 105-106, how would you describe the societal environment that the fever has created?
- What does Mrs. Flagg mean by “You can’t solve tomorrow’s problems today?” (p. 107)
- How has grandfather contributed to the fever effort? (p. 108)
- According to p. 109, how do some people see African American’s in relation to the fever?

Chapter 16

- Mrs. Bowles says on p. 114, “These are trying times. They seem to bring out the best and worst in the people around us.” What does she mean? What examples have you seen of this in the book thus far?
- What type of picture does Mrs. Bowles paint of Philadelphia? (p. 116)
- What are the consequences of the post office being shut down for 1793 Philadelphia society? How would this affect our society today?
- Mattie and her grandfather return to Philadelphia. After reading page 118, when Mattie comments, “We were in the center of a dying city,” describe the conditions in town.

Chapter 17

- Describe the state of Mattie’s home when she and Grandfather return. Based on the description given in this chapter, what do you imagine would it feel like to find your home in this state? (p. 122-123)
- On page 125-126, how would you characterize Mattie’s attitude (“It could be worse, I thought...”) What is your opinion of her outlook on things?

Chapter 18

- What changes have you seen in Mattie thus far? What chores is she now doing on her own that she before griped about?
- Why is Mattie so excited about finding a few potatoes in her garden?

Chapter 19

- Why does Mattie pass the night “praying that the morning would not come”?
- Predict what you think will become of Mattie.

Chapter 20

- At the beginning of chapter 20, what are the details of Mattie’s situation? What do you think her chances of survival are?
- How has the fever effected the population of Philadelphia?
- How does the shutting down of the newspapers effect society (p. 157)?
- How has Philadelphia changed since the start of the story?
- It seems Mattie is ready to give up hope in this chapter. Do you think she will? Why or why not?
- Why does the little girl say, “Mama’s broken too?” What do you predict Mattie will do with the little girl?

Chapter 21

- On page 21, there is a quote from Richard Allen and Absalom Jones: “...at other places we found a parent dead, and none but little innocent babes to be seen, whose ignorance led them to think their parent was asleep...” What information regarding the effect of the fever on society can we glean from this?
- What is the Free African Society? What information is the reader given about them in this chapter?

Chapter 22

- Why do you think Mattie finally breaks down once she finds Eliza?
- What contributions does the Free African Society make to Philadelphia during the fever crisis?
- Reverend Allen says that the situation with the fever is a chance for black people to do what? (p. 175-176)
- Eliza says, “For everything there is a season”. What does she mean?
- Visualize Mother Smith. What is your impression of her?

Chapter 23

- Dr. Benjamin Rush’s quote opens this chapter: “There is great distress in the city for want of cash. Friendship is nearly entirely banished from our city.” How would you feel living in Philadelphia based on Rush’s quote?
- Do you think Mattie made the right decision regarding Nell? Why or why not?

Chapter 24

- Re-read pg. 193. How has rumor played a part in the madness and disease affecting the city?
- How has Mattie matured throughout this story?

Chapter 25

- How is the Philadelphia described here different than in the start of the novel?

Chapter 26

- What turning point occurs in this chapter?
- On pg. 218, what does Mattie mean by, “We’re supposed to go back to the way we lived before, but everything has changed?”

Chapter 27

- On p. 221, Nathaniel says “Don’t give up hope...” Has Mattie given up hope at any points throughout the novel? Explain?
- What is your opinion of Mattie’s decisions regarding the coffee house?
- What are some possible alternate endings for this book?







Multiple Intelligences

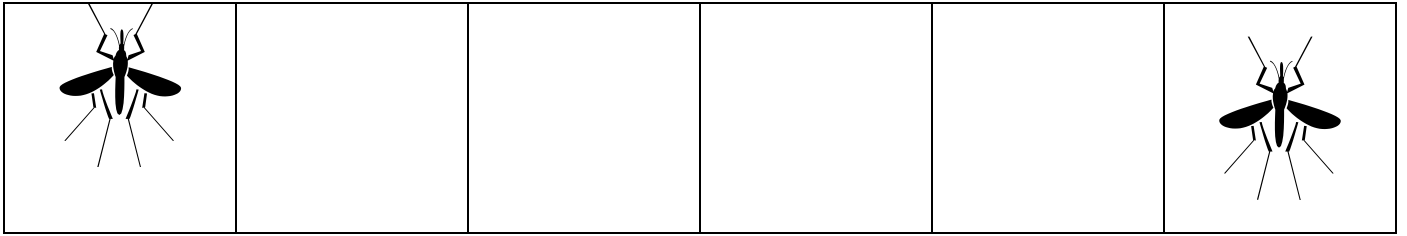
Linguistic; Logical-mathematical; Visual-spatial; Body-kinesthetic; Interpersonal; Intrapersonal; Naturalist

Resources

<http://www.writerlady.com/fever1793.html> (this link is unavailable, however, this might be a decent alternative
<http://www.shmoop.com/fever-1793/>)

Yellow Fever Simulation Squares



Yellow Fever Image

