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Problems and Dilemmas of Teaching Secondary Social Studies on December
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Chains: Decreasing Marginalization and Increasing Awareness

Subject Area – History and Social Studies

United States History: American Revolution

United States History: Slavery in the 1700s

Subject Area – Literature and English Language Arts

American Fiction (Historical)

Subject Area – Home Economics

Subject Area – Mathematics

Grades: Middle School 6 – 8

Time Required for the Lesson: Four (4) or five (5) class periods of fifty (50) minutes each or three (3) class blocks of ninety (90) minutes each class session.

Introduction

Imagine a life relegated to the control and constraints of another person because their skin color and elitist status in society. Envision a life of marginalization and constant struggle in a fight towards a freedom that seemingly does not exist. Visualize the departure of a close family member and losing them not because of their death but as a result of being sold to another landowner. These are the experiences of Isabel, a northern slave girl, who must intelligently battle her way towards “the River of Jordon” in hopes of achieving freedom. Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Chains* is a wonderfully written historical fiction novel that situates Isabel and her younger sister Ruth amidst the on-going struggle for American independence at the height of the American Revolution. Caught between the everyday realities of northern slavery and the waging war between Patriots and Loyalists, Isabel must fight her way to keep her and Ruth alive while striving towards their freedom. Along her journey she confides in another slave, a young male named Curzon, who lavishly encourages her to spy on her owners, the Locktons, to expose their support for the Loyalists and the details of a British plan for invasion.

Skeptically, Isabel decides to wage a personal war against the Patriots and Loyalists in an attempt to utilize each group's resources and power to acquire her freedom.

The intentions of the lesson enable students to understand and analyze the dilemmas that Isabel endured throughout the novel. Dilemmas concerning Isabel's freedoms, her loyalty towards the Patriots and Loyalists, her autonomy within the confines of the Lockton household, the power relations she encounters, and the marginalization of her culture as a result of her enslavement. The lesson will also allow students to further develop their understanding of the American Revolution from a social, political, and military perspective. Students can examine the social relationships and lives between slaves, servants, soldiers, Patriots, and Loyalists during the revolution, and they can enhance their knowledge of the political and military dynamics which shaped the course of the war. Finally, students will gain the valuable experience of utilizing the narrative of a traditionally marginalized actor in history and integrate its importance into their evolving discourse of American history.

Guiding Questions

- How does the title *Chains* connect to this book? Can you think of any alternative titles that could have been used?
- Despite the book taking place in the North (Rhode Island, Boston, and New York City), how are African, African Americans, and blacks treated? Why do you think they are treated in this manner?
- Why would some colonists label themselves Loyalists and others claim themselves as Patriots? What side would you have chosen and why?

Learning Objectives

At the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- Define the terms servant, indentured servant, and slave, and determine each of their relevance to the American Revolution.
- Analyze the differences between northern slavery versus southern slavery.
- Demonstrate their overall content knowledge of the American Revolution to comprehend and successfully complete all assessments associated with the lesson.
- Examine and analyze the primary sources and contextualize their salience to *Chains*.
- Describe the wretched lives and living conditions prisoners of war endured during the American Revolution.
- Graph and interpret data concerning the nature of demographics during the American Revolution.
- Predict what will occur in Anderson's forthcoming novel *Forge* utilizing their existing understanding of *Chains*' storyline and content knowledge of the American Revolution.

Chains and Isabel's battle for freedom occurs in a rather peculiar setting when considering the circumstances of analyzing the experiences of slaves in revolutionary America. In fact many students do not realize the existence and habitation of slaves in America before and during the American Revolution. Instead, many students only focus their attentions concerning slavery in the southern United States during the Civil War. Uniquely and thankfully, *Chains* provides young readers an insight into the harsh realities of northern slavery.

Slavery has existed world wide for centuries and in the colonies of North America slavery was most prevalent in the South; however, a slow and uneven transformation swept across the northern landscape, affecting the middle colonies and cities mostly, while introducing slave societies. The Atlantic economy that emerged as a result of Great Britain's quest of a global economy ignited the interests and needs of an enslaved African population to ensure the market's success. While the long-standing establishment and utility of indentured servitude began to falter amidst the materializing Atlantic economy, demands of increasing the northern slave population gained support. For instance, Rhode Island, the place of Isabel's residence at the beginning of the novel, had an increase in the black population from 500 Africans in 1720 to 3,000 Africans 1750. In New York, where Isabel would soon find her struggle for freedom, the black population increased to account for 11 to 15 percent of the total population. By the early 1760s, in most cities like Philadelphia and New York, one worker in five was a slave, and by the time of the American Revolution, the black population attributed to 12 to 14 percent of the total population of New York.

But as slavery expanded into the urban centers of large cities slaveownership became a universal adoption of the elite. Most notably, the higher echelons of society in New York, Newport, and Boston became invested in slavery. Slave labor in the households of the gentry swiftly became integrated with the workshops of artisans and merchants. As the Seven Year's War continued the white indentured servant population decreased and the switch to servants and slave labor accelerated. However, slaves in the North did not resemble the slaves of a gang-labor system most associated with the antebellum slave system in the South. Rather, slaves became "jacks-of-all-trades" engaging in plantation and household work. Similar to Isabel, slave women migrated into the domestic service; employed in kitchens and pantries while serving their masters of the white elite of the northern urban cities.

Before the American Revolution the majority of slaves originated from the Caribbean and not Africa, but after 1740, the proportions of slaves from each location reversed causing a ripple effect in the emerging African cultures between slaves. Skewed sex ratios emerged; heavily favoring males over females. Culture, linguistics, and native-tribal markings soon became prevalent indications of slaves' origins relegating them to further subjugation of their masters and the populace. However, urban slavery enabled an implicit independence to cultivate in the lives of slaves. Urban households could only house a certain number of slaves and each household had various jobs that drastically differed than those present on a plantation. In the case of Isabel, her chores required her to leave her quarters and her master's house in order to go to the market to buy goods. This "freedom" accounted for the little independence that slaves may have had during the revolution.

Ultimately, Isabel’s experiences are indicative of the trends and lifestyles of Africans, African Americans, and slaves during the American Revolution. The dilemmas she suffered illustrate the daily lives of these subjugated groups. *Chains* presents a strikingly vivid image for readers who do not know or understand the dynamics of northern slavery.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

This lesson assumes each student has read the book and has had time to internalize and conceptualize the characters, themes, and any other relevant main points derived from the book. Before the lesson and pursuing the activities, a clear and coherent understanding of the American Revolution must have been accomplished. In doing so, during the unit covering the American Revolution, students will have had time to read *Chains* in order to support and supplement their materials pertaining to the unit of study. The novel could have been read prior to the unit covering the American Revolution so long as the book’s completion is accomplished prior to the end of the American Revolution unit. The complexities of the American Revolution can at times obscure the many narratives presented throughout its history. Understanding the political, social, and military dynamics of the revolution will ultimately enable students to actively and purposefully engage in each of the activities for the lesson.

Suggested Activities

Students will have the option of choosing three (3) lesson activities associated with *Chains*, the American Revolution, and northern slavery. Below is a diagram illustrating the options that each student will have allowing them to choose from four (4) “activity pathways” that will guide them through their three lesson activities. Each “activity pathway” will be comprised of an activity devoted to social studies, English Language Arts, and a free choice involving mathematics, home economics, or creative arts.

1. Social Studies	2. Home Economics	3. English Language Arts
8. Social Studies	Activities for <i>Chains</i>	4. Mathematics
7. English Language Arts	6. Creative Arts	5. Social Studies

Students’ “activity pathway” options are as follows:

- Option 1: 1. Social Studies, 2. Home Economics, and 3. English Language Arts
- Option 2: 3. English Language Arts, 4. Mathematics, and 5. Social Studies

- Option 3: 5. Social Studies, 6. Creative Arts, and 7. English Language Arts
- Option 4: 7. English Language Arts, 8. Social Studies, and 1. Social Studies

Activity One

Primary sources enable students to really engage in the materials and contextualize the salience of main ideas and events throughout a time period. One of the most prominent occurrences throughout *Chains* was the constant pressures of labeling colonists as either Patriots or Loyalists. This identification crisis, though, did not just plague white colonists; rather, Africans, African Americans, and slaves all endured the moral dilemma. Isabel, for example, was willing to assume the role of either a Patriot or a Loyalist just to ensure her and Ruth's safety and freedom. Throughout the American Revolution about one-third of colonists considered themselves Patriots, another one-third considered themselves Loyalists, and the other one-third was still undecided at the time of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Subsequently, this activity enables students to analyze two primary sources documents: one a photograph and the other a first-person memoir from an African American Loyalist. Students need to examine each document and explain its significance to the American Revolution while relating back to *Chains*. Each document requires anywhere from one page to two pages of analysis.

PRIMARY SOURCE #1

PRIMARY SOURCE #2

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6615>



Activity Two

Throughout the story, Isabel's constant subjugation and confinement to the Lockton's kitchen exposes her to a variety of British delicacies and food items. One way for students to delve into the realities of the American Revolution time period is to sample the food that either slaves, servants, or the elite enjoyed. For this activity, students will be required to prepare one food item from the following list: lemon cakes, strawberry tarts, or plum cakes. The ingredients and directions to prepare each item are

provided. Students should bring in samples of their “revolutionary” food item towards the end of the week/lesson for their peers to sample and experience.

Lemon Cakes

Ingredients

- 1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter at room temperature
- 2 1/2 cups granulated sugar, divided
- 4 extra-large eggs, at room temperature
- 1/3 cup grated lemon zest lightly packed (6 to 8 large lemons - Use only fresh lemon juice and zest)
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 3/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 3/4 cup buttermilk, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

For the glaze:

- 2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 3 1/2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease and flour 2 (8 1/2 by 4 1/4 by 2 1/2-inch) loaf pans.

Directions

Cream the butter and 2 cups granulated sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, the key to great cakes is beating the butter and sugar until the mixture's until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. With the mixer on medium speed add the eggs, (break the eggs into a dish before adding to the batter to avoid a bad egg or shells in the batter) 1 at a time, and the lemon zest. Sift together the flour, to make sure there are no lumps, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a bowl. Separately, combine 1/4 cup lemon juice, the buttermilk, and vanilla. Add the flour and buttermilk mixtures alternately, beginning and ending with the flour. Divide evenly between the pans, smooth the tops, and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until a cake tester comes out clean.

Cook 1/2 cup granulated sugar with 1/2 cup lemon juice in a small saucepan and cook over low heat until the sugar dissolves. When the cakes are done, cool for 10 minutes, invert them onto a rack set over a tray and spoon the lemon syrup over the cakes. Allow the cakes to cool completely.

For the glaze, combine the confectioners' sugar and the lemon juice in a bowl, mixing with a wire whisk until smooth. Pour over the tops of the cakes and allow the glaze to drizzle down the sides.

To freeze these cakes, prepare them except the glaze. Wrap them well in plastic wrap and freeze. When you're ready to use, defrost and glaze.

Strawberry Tarts

Ingredients

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons sugar

- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) cold unsalted butter, diced
- 2 tablespoons cold shortening (recommended: Crisco)
- 1/4 cup ice water
- 2 cups Pastry Cream, recipe follows
- 2 pints whole strawberries, hulled and halved
- 1/3 cup apricot jelly
- 3 tablespoons shelled pistachios, halved, optional

Directions

Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a small bowl and place in the freezer for 30 minutes. Put the flour mixture in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Add the butter and shortening and pulse about 10 times, or until the butter is in the size of peas. Add the ice water and process until the dough comes together. Dump on a well-floured board and form into a disk. Wrap in plastic and chill for at least 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

Roll out the dough and fit into 4 (4 1/2-inch) tart pans with removable sides. Don't stretch the dough when placing it in the pans or it will shrink during baking. Cut off the excess by rolling the pin across the top of each pan. Line the tart shells with a piece of buttered aluminum foil, butter side down, and fill them with dried beans or rice. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove the beans and foil, prick the bottom of the shells all over with a fork, and bake for another 15 to 20 minutes until lightly browned. Set aside to cool.

Before serving, fill the tart shells with the pastry cream. Arrange the berries decoratively on top of the cream. Melt the apricot jelly with 1 teaspoon of water and brush the top of the tarts. Sprinkle with pistachios, if using, and serve.

Pastry Cream:

5 extra-large egg yolks, room temperature

3/4 cup sugar 3 tablespoons cornstarch

1 1/2 cups scalded milk

1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 teaspoon Cognac

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 tablespoon heavy cream

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the egg yolks and sugar on medium-high speed for 4 minutes, or until very thick. Reduce to low speed, and add the cornstarch.

With the mixer still on low, slowly pour the hot milk into the egg mixture. Pour the mixture into a medium saucepan and cook over low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture thickens, 5 to 7 minutes. Don't be alarmed when the custard comes to a boil and appears to curdle; switch to a whisk and beat vigorously. Cook, whisking constantly, for another 2 minutes; the custard will come together and

become very thick, like pudding. Stir in the vanilla, Cognac, butter, and heavy cream. Pour the custard through a sieve into a bowl. Place plastic wrap directly on the custard and refrigerate until cold.

Yield: 2 cups

Plum Cakes

Ingredients

- 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra for greasing the dish
- 10 to 12 purple "prune" plums, cut in half and pitted
- 1 3/4 cups granulated sugar, divided
- 2 extra-large eggs, at room temperature
- 1/3 cup sour cream
- 1/2 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- Confectioners' sugar

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Generously butter a 9-inch glass pie dish and arrange the plums in the dish, cut side down.

Combine 1 cup of the granulated sugar and 1/3 cup water in a small saucepan and cook over high heat until it turns a warm amber color, about 360 degrees F on a candy thermometer. Swirl the pan but don't stir. Pour evenly over the plums.

Meanwhile, cream the 6 tablespoons of butter and the remaining 3/4 cup of granulated sugar in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, until light and fluffy. Lower the speed and beat in the eggs one at a time. Add the sour cream, zest, and vanilla and mix until combined. Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt and, with the mixer on low speed, add it to the butter mixture. Mix only until combined.

Pour the cake batter evenly over the plums and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, until a cake tester comes out clean. Cool for 15 minutes, then invert the cake onto a flat plate. If a plum sticks, ease it out and replace it in the design on top of the cake. Serve warm or at room temperature, dusted with confectioners' sugar.

Activity Three

Focusing on English Language Arts, students need to identify the plot, setting, main characteristics (protagonists and antagonists), main ideas, themes, climax, and the rising/falling action in *Chains*. Students should place their answers on 3x5 index cards to ensure organization; each index card indicating at the top whether the focus is plot, setting, etc. While performing this activity, students need to particular focus their attentions on understanding the main ideas and dilemmas Isabel and other characters encountered throughout the story, as well as, the climatic point of the novel. Students should support their choice of a climax with evidence and valid arguments as to why their climatic choice is indicative of the book.

Activity Four

Integrating mathematics into the lesson plan, students will be asked to search for the number of slaves, Africans, and African Americans present in New York in 1776. While finding the total population of New York in 1776, students will graph the percentage of slaves in relation to freemen (white and black) during the beginning years of the American Revolution. After conducting research regarding New York, students will then repeat the same process for their own state keeping in mind questions such as: When did New York ban slavery? When did your state ban slavery? When was slavery outlawed in Britain and the United States? Students can compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the two graphs and explain why one state may have had more slaves, Africans, and/or African Americans than the other state. The analysis and written portion of this activity should be one (1) page to two (2) pages if necessary.

Activity Five

One of the most salient facets of *Chains* is Anderson's integration of primary source excerpts at the beginning of each chapter. Primary sources enable students to relate the novel to real life situations and events during the American Revolution while validating Anderson's historical accuracy. Students need to choose seven (7) chapters and examine the primary source excerpt provided at the beginning of each chapter. In doing so, students will contextualize each primary source statement and explain how the excerpt relates to the chapter underscoring the similarities and differences, and clarifying how the statements help readers grasp the overall meaning and/or message of the chapter. Each primary source analysis should be three (3) to four (4) paragraphs in length.

Activity Six

Many have artistic abilities and skills that supersede their desires of writing essays or performing mathematics equations; thus, this lesson provides students with the chance to illustrate an image from *Chains*. Parochial methods of assessment bore students at times. In the lesson students have the opportunity to illustrate/draw a picture to depict a character(s), setting, or an event that symbolizes a prominent aspect of the novel. Afterwards, students need to write a two (2) to three (3) paragraph essay explaining the image's importance and relevance to the American Revolution and *Chains*. A for student's to consider: How might their illustration benefit other students' understanding of the political, social, and military aspects of the time period?

Activity Seven

One of the greatest indicators that students have mastered the content materials is for them to make predictions about what may or may not happen based on their existing

knowledge of the subject materials. In activity seven students will utilize their prior knowledge of the American Revolution and the storyline of *Chains* to begin the completion of Anderson's forthcoming sequel *Forge*. Focusing on the events occurring during 1777 of the American Revolution and Isabel and Curzon's journey towards freedom, students need to write a two (2) to three (3) page essay detailing their struggle south to find freedom. Students should utilize their knowledge to create a historically accurate portrayal of the time period to situate their story.

Activity Eight

Anderson's novel reveals quite a bit of information regarding the differences between servants, indentured servants, and slaves. For the majority of students these terms seem almost synonymous, but each term has a strikingly different meaning and pathway throughout life. Subsequently, students will define each of the three terms and decide whether servants, indentured servants, or slaves prominently appeared in the North or the South. Afterwards, students will write a one (1) to two (2) page summary of the job descriptions of each group, which title they would rather have, and the daily life experiences of each marginalized group.

Assessment and Extending the Discussion

Since the nature of the lesson has students actively engage in performance assessments the need for a formal evaluation/assessment seems redundant and unnecessary. Students' "activity pathways" will be graded accordingly to their performance and completion of each activity. For nearly a week, and possibly more, students will have completed three activities that not only focus on social studies, the American Revolution, and *Chains*, but also, focusing on the activities that horizontally integrate other disciplines of their education. Extending discussion from the lesson however can occur through the use of Anderson's appendix section beginning on page 303 where she amazingly addresses some of the most frequently asked questions about *Chains* concerning the historical accuracy of the novel. Students can choose one or two of the questions and research their answers for themselves during a final class period and report to their classmates with the answers to the questions; ultimately enabling the teacher to clarify and diminish any unresolved questions or concerns regarding the American Revolution and *Chains*.

Most importantly teachers should utilize the opportunity of having performed these activities and reading *Chains* to eventually segue into the hotly contested debates of sectionalism and the rise of chattel slavery. Not only will students have acquired the necessary knowledge to undertake such strides in their educational endeavors, but the content materials during the antebellum and sectionalism years before the American Civil War will be much easier for students to comprehend.

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