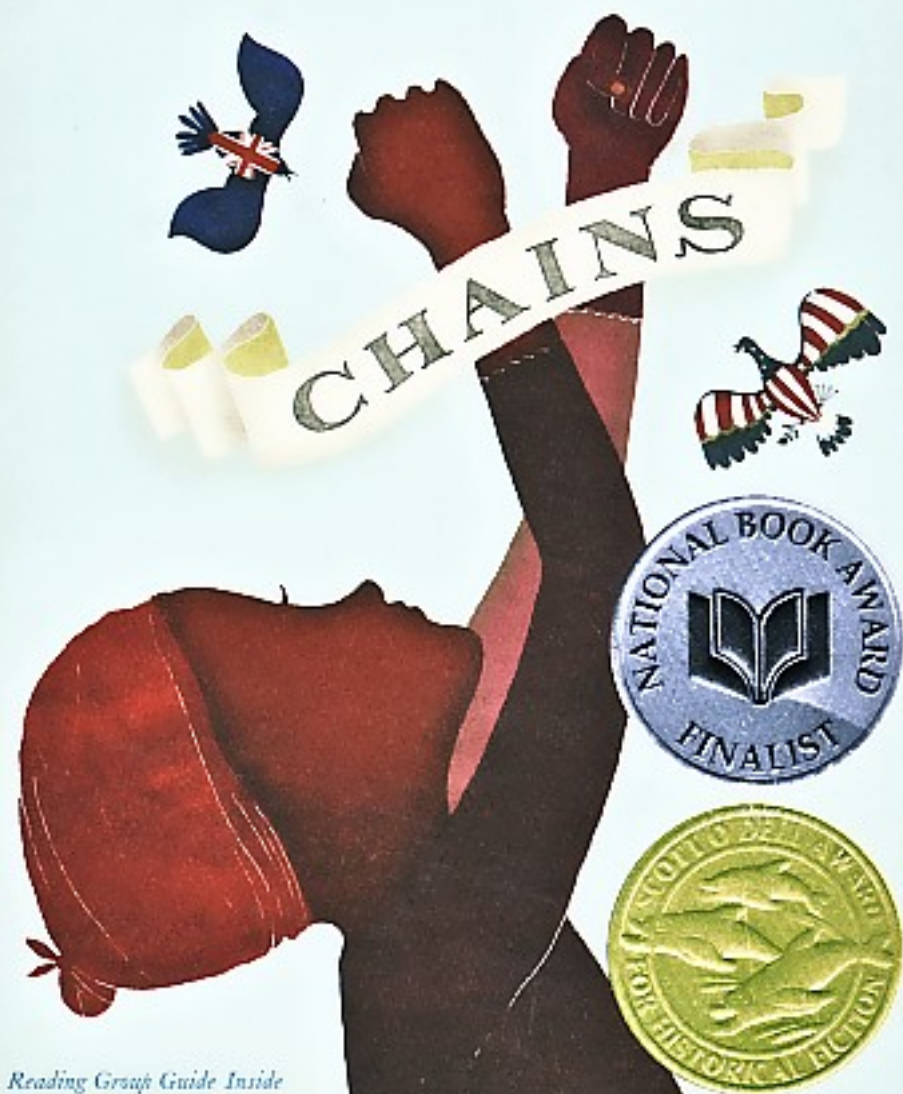


LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

Author of *Speak* and *Fever 1793*



Reading Group Guide Inside

CHAPTER I

Monday, May 27, 1776

YOUTH IS THE SEED TIME OF GOOD HABITS,
AS WELL IN NATIONS AS IN INDIVIDUALS.

—THOMAS PAINE, *COMMON SENSE*

THE BEST TIME TO TALK TO GHOSTS is just before the sun comes up. That's when they can hear us true, Momma said. That's when ghosts can answer us.

The eastern sky was peach colored, but a handful of lazy stars still blinked in the west. It was almost time.

"May I run ahead, sir?" I asked.

Pastor Weeks sat at the front of his squeaky wagon with Old Ben next to him, the mules' reins loose in his hands. The pine coffin that held Miss Mary Finch—wearing her best dress, with her hair washed clean and combed—bounced in the back when the wagon wheels hit a rut. My sister, Ruth, sat next to the coffin. Ruth was too big to carry, plus the pastor knew about her peculiar manner of being, so it was the wagon for her and the road for me.

Old Ben looked to the east and gave me a little nod. He knew a few things about ghosts, too.

Pastor Weeks turned around to talk to Mr. Robert Finch, who rode his horse a few lengths behind the wagon.

"The child wants to run ahead," Pastor explained to him. "She has kin buried there. Do you give leave for a quick visit?"

Mr. Robert's mouth tightened like a rope pulled taut. He had showed up a few weeks earlier to visit Miss Mary Finch, his aunt and only living relation. He looked around her tidy farm, listened to her ragged, wet cough, and moved in. Miss Mary wasn't even cold on her deathbed when he helped himself to the coins in her strongbox. He hurried along her burying, too, most improper. He didn't care that the neighbors would want to come around with cakes and platters of cold meat, and drink ale to the rememory of Miss Mary Finch of Tew, Rhode Island. He had to get on with things, he said.

I stole a look backward. Mr. Robert Finch was filled up with trouble from his dirty boots to the brim of his scraggly hat.

"Please, sir," I said.

"Go then," he said. "But don't tarry. I've much business today."

I ran as fast as I could.

I hurried past the stone fence that surrounded the white graveyard, to the split-rail fence that marked our ground, and stopped outside the gate to pick a handful of chilly violets, wet with dew. The morning mist twisted and hung low over the field. No ghosts yet, just ash trees and maples lined up in a mournful row.

I entered.

Momma was buried in the back, her feet to the east, her head to the west. Someday I would pay the stone carver for

a proper marker with her name on it: *Dinah, wife of Cuffe, mother of Isabel and Ruth*. For now, there was a wooden cross and a gray rock the size of a dinner plate lying flat on the ground in front of it.

We had buried her the year before, when the first roses bloomed.

"Smallpox is tricky," Miss Mary Finch said to me when Momma died. "There's no telling who it'll take." The pox had left Ruth and me with scars like tiny stars scattered on our skin. It took Momma home to Our Maker.

I looked back at the road. Old Ben had slowed the mules to give me time. I knelt down and set the violets on the grave. "It's here, Momma," I whispered. "The day you promised. But I need your help. Can you please cross back over for just a little bit?"

I stared without blinking at the mist, looking for the curve of her back or the silhouette of her head wrapped in a pretty kerchief. A small flock of robins swooped out of the maple trees.

"I don't have much time," I told the grass-covered grave. "Where do you want us to go? What should we do?"

The mist swirled between the tall grass and the low-hanging branches. Two black butterflies danced through a cloud of bugs and disappeared. Chickadees and barn swallows called overhead.

"Whoa." Old Ben stopped the wagon next to the open hole near the iron fence, then climbed down and walked to where Nehemiah the gravedigger was waiting. The two men reached for the coffin.

"Please, Momma," I whispered urgently. "I need your help." I squinted into the ash grove, where the mist was heaviest.

Praise for CHAINS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

National
Book
Award
nominee

Winner of the Scott O'Dell Award
for Historical Fiction



★ "Startlingly
provocative . . .
nuanced and
evenhanded . . .
a fast-moving,
emotionally
involving plot."

—*Publishers Weekly*,
STARRED REVIEW

★ "Readers will care
deeply about Isabel..."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, STARRED REVIEW

★ "Anderson explores elemental themes of power, freedom,
and the sources of human strength in this
searing, fascinating story."

—*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW



"[K]nocks on the
CONSCIENCE
of a nation."

—*Christian Science Monitor*

**"ENGROSSING . . .
a heart-racing story."**

—*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

Meet the author,
watch videos, and get extras at
KIDS.SimonandSchuster.com