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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit  
*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



## Fever 1793

by Laurie Halse Anderson

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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# Fever 1793

## Note to the Teacher

*Fever 1793* is a historical novel that chronicles the yellow fever epidemic that occurred in Philadelphia. The book focuses on Matilda “Mattie” Cook and how she and her family are affected by this mosquito-borne disease. Although the Cook family is fictional, Anderson includes a number of historical events and figures, such as the launch of Blanchard’s hot air balloon, Dr. Benjamin Rush, and Richard Allen, the founder of the Free African Society. As the fever infects people in Philadelphia, and the wealthy travel to the countryside, Mattie witnesses the city transform into an unfamiliar landscape. During this trying time, Mattie also undergoes her own transformation as she matures from a girl into a determined young woman.

Laurie Halse Anderson was born in Potsdam, New York, in 1961. She began her career as an author by writing picture books, but she is best known for her young adult novels, including the award-winning novel *Speak*. She has always been interested in American history. *Fever 1793*, her first historical novel, has been a long time in the making. She began researching and rewriting the book in 1993, and finally published it in 2000. *Fever 1793* has won multiple awards, including the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, and has been adapted into a stage play that was performed in May 2004 in Syracuse, New York.

All references come from the Simon & Schuster edition of *Fever 1793*, copyright 2000.

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. write an essay that explains and supports how *Fever 1793* is a coming-of-age story.
2. infer meanings about characters and events when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
3. identify historical figures and events within the novel.
4. analyze the effect Anderson creates by quoting historical sources in the epigraphs.
5. discuss and understand the significance of the insects mentioned throughout the novel.
6. compare the characters Matilda and Lucille Cook.
7. explain how class and race influenced how people were affected by yellow fever.
8. understand the various methods of treating and preventing yellow fever and discuss the effectiveness of these methods.
9. explain how the Revolutionary War maintains an underlying presence in the novel.
10. define the term “symbol” and analyze the meaning(s) and significance of the following symbols:
  - the yellow hot air balloon
  - mockingbirds
  - the garden
11. discuss how Philadelphia changes over the course of the novel and determine how the city environment may have caused the disease to spread rapidly.
12. evaluate the ways in which society breaks down or endures during the yellow fever outbreak.
13. discuss the role of religion and its importance to characters in the novel.
14. define the following literary terms and identify examples of them within the text:
  - anaphora
  - hyperbole
  - irony
  - personification
  - simile

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. The culture and daily life depicted in *Fever 1793* is, in many ways, quite different from that of modern America. Discuss the significant differences between the historical culture and that of modern day, and describe how certain elements, such as people's behaviors and relationships, remain the same.
2. Characters mention a number of possible sources of the fever, from foul smells to refugees. Discuss likely causes of the illness and how Anderson suggests the actual source of the contagion.
3. Pembroke stopped fever victims from entering the town. Discuss whether such policies are inhumane or justifiable methods of preventing the spread of disease.
4. In the epigraphs, Anderson quotes primary sources, including writings by people who also appear in *Fever 1793*. How do these quotations make Anderson's historical novel appear more credible?
5. Matilda is upset by insensitive treatment of the dead. Why is this indifferent handling justifiable? Why does the treatment of the dead matter?
6. This novel contains many similes. Identify examples of similes from the text and analyze how this literary device is used and the effect it has on the audience.
7. *Fever 1793* is told through Matilda's point of view. How does her perspective affect the portrayal of characters and events?
8. The novel is set about a decade after the Revolutionary War ended. Write a one-page essay in which you explain how the War has affected how characters perceive themselves and events. Cite specific incidents from the text to support your answer.
9. Discuss how Matilda's attitude toward the future changes over the course of the novel.
10. Trace the breakdown and later recovery of society during the yellow fever outbreak.
11. Grandfather emphasizes the importance of family. Examine how Matilda's family includes people other than relatives.

# Fever 1793

## Chapter One – August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1793

### VOCABULARY

**abhorred** – strongly disliked; loathed  
**clattered** – moved quickly with a loud rattling sound  
**dawdling** – wasting time; moving slowly  
**droned** – continued to speak in a dull, monotonous tone  
**noggin** – a head  
**rouse** – to awaken someone; to cause someone to become active  
**stays** – a type of corset  
**tardy** – late; not on time  
**teemed** – was filled with  
**wretched** – unpleasant; miserable

1. What pests does Matilda encounter in the bedchamber?

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2. How does anaphora emphasize Matilda's reluctance to face the day?

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3. How does Matilda compare to her mother's expectations for how a child should act?

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## Chapter Seven – August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1793

### VOCABULARY

**bombazine** – a specially woven fabric made of silk or silk and wool  
**brocaded** – woven with a raised design  
**Chippendale** – an eighteenth-century furniture design with elegant outlines and ornate carvings  
**damask** – thick, shiny cloth woven with patterns  
**discretion** – good judgement; the quality of having careful judgement  
**dregs** – the least desirable part of something  
**grog** – an alcoholic drink  
**hovels** – small, poorly constructed, often dirty houses  
**implore** – to beg; to make an emotional request  
**mahogany** – reddish-brown wood, usually used for making furniture  
**man-of-war** – a battleship  
**mangy** – having a skin disease  
**parched** – extremely thirsty  
**sideboard** – a piece of furniture that holds dishes, silverware, and linens  
**tedious** – boring; tiresome  
**vile** – unpleasant; foul; disgusting

1. Why does Mother briefly speak to Matilda in a “gentle tone”?

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2. Matilda describes Pernilla Ogilvie as “sail[ing] across the room like a man-of-war.” How does this simile reveal Mattie’s attitude toward Mrs. Ogilvie?

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3. What does Lucille’s reaction upon seeing Pernilla indicate?

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