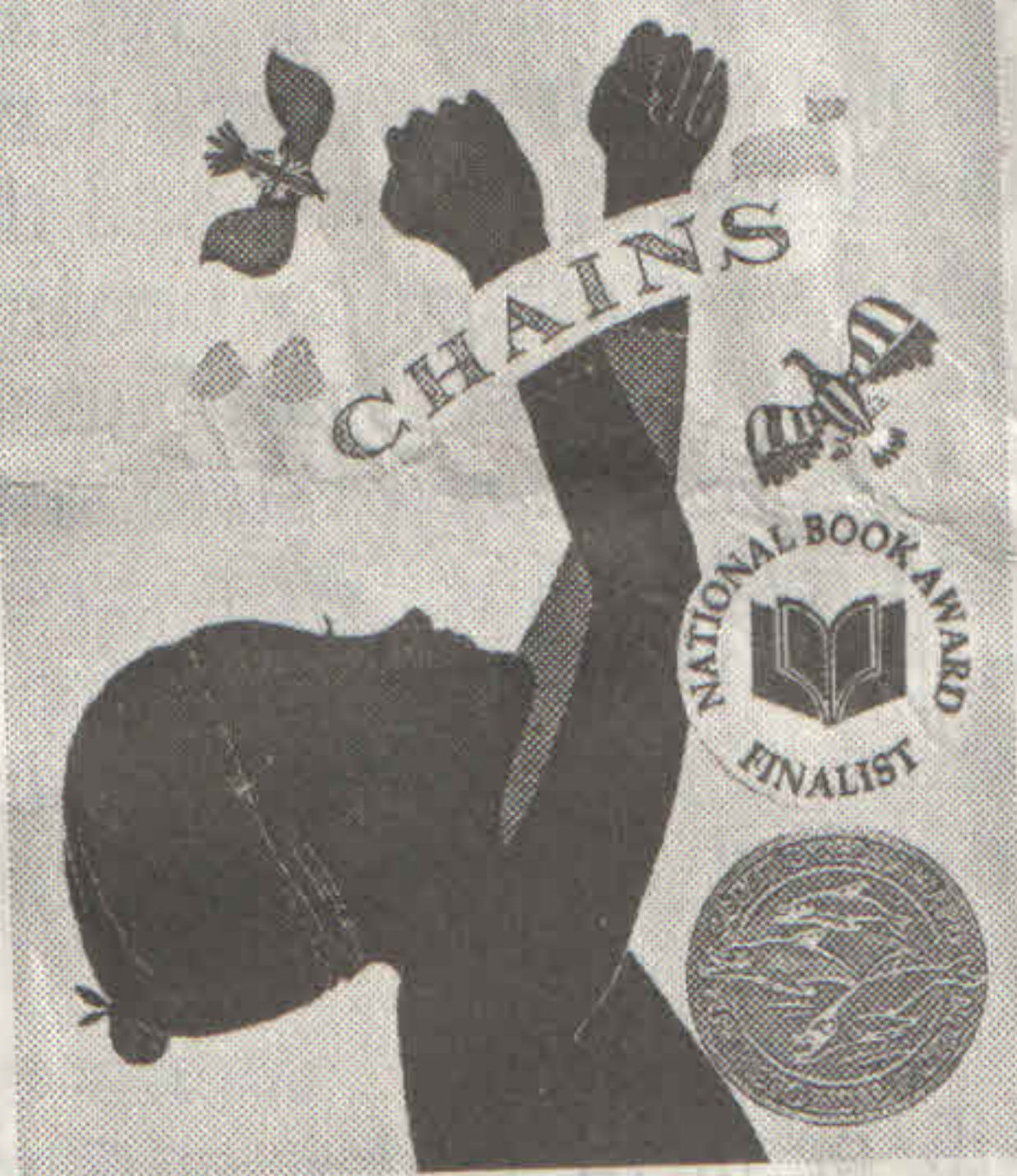




The Village
School's
**Children's Book
of the Month**

**LAURIE HALSE
ANDERSON**

Author of Speak and Fever 1793



**Book reviewed by
Wendy Davenport**
(Curriculum Director)

'Chains'

By Laurie Halse Andersen

Most of us have been taught that the American Revolutionary War was a fight for freedom, but many forget that the vision of freedom did not apply to everyone.

"Chains," by Laurie Halse Andersen, is set at the beginning of the American Revolution and is told from the perspective of Isabel, a slave whose owner, Mary Finch, had taught her to read and promised that she and her sister, Ruth, would be free upon her death. However, just as Miss Finch dies, the owner's greedy nephew comes, and takes full advantage of the civil unrest brewing in the colonies; no one is willing to contact the lawyer in Boston that drew up the will — especially for a slave. The nephew gobbles up the property and sells Isabel and Ruth before anyone can blink an eye. Unfortunately for Isabel and Ruth, they are sold to the Locktons, a cruel couple who are Loyalists from New York.

In the Lockton household, Isabel is forced to work long, hard hours in terrible conditions, while Ruth becomes a pet of Mrs. Lockton. The worst part is being forced to attend to the unpredictable whims of Mrs. Lockton, who has high standards and a terrible temper. Isabel is befriended by a slave with Patriot ties, named Curzon. Curzon is convinced that joining the rebels' fight against the British will mean freedom for him and for all slaves that support the cause, and he tries to get Isabel to spy for the Patriots.

At first, Isabel is concerned only with taking care of her sister, Ruth, and is unwilling to engage in politics or do anything to jeopardize their safety. When something happens to Ruth, Isabel is determined to save her and win freedom for them both. Isabel uses her position in a Tory household to gain and pass on valuable information at enormous risk to herself. It soon becomes clear that even though her information greatly benefits the rebels' cause, her freedom is not a priority for them. She hears that the British will give freedom to slaves who join their cause, but only slaves who desert Patriot households. Since she belongs to Loyalists, they will not grant her freedom either. It becomes obvious that despite the rhetoric about fighting for freedom from tyranny, neither side is interested in abolishing slavery.

Meanwhile the developing war puts more and more and more stress on Mrs. Lockton's household, and her treatment of Isabel gets crueler and crueler.

Realizing that neither side is going to act on their promises and grant her freedom, Ruth instead puts her energy into using information to save her friend, Curzon, who is now a prisoner of war. The conditions for British prisoners of war were unimaginably terrible, and Isabel risks her life daily to trade information, which allows her to deliver scraps of food to keep Curzon alive. At one point, when she defies her mistress's orders so she can help Curzon, Mrs. Lockton has Isabel branded on her cheek with the letter I, for insolent.

Eventually, Isabel discovers that she can shake her spiritual chains, and decides to wear her branded I with pride. She determines that I stands not for insolent, but for Isabel. However, it is unclear whether Isabel will be able to dissolve the legal chains that bind her. You must read the book to find out what happens!

This is a riveting story. Isabel is a compelling character and it is fascinating to see how the revolution affected the citizens of New York through her eyes. It is a poignant reminder that many gave their lives for a freedom they would never attain.

"Chains" is the first book in the Seeds of the American Revolution Trilogy. The second book, "Forge," is told through the eyes of Curzon as he spends a winter in Valley Forge. The third book, "Ashes," comes out in January.

"Chains" is a good read for sixth to 12th graders, and of course, adults.