

REBELLION 1776

READING GROUP GUIDE

PREREADING ACTIVITY

1. Discuss the difference between a primary and a secondary source.
2. Read about the Siege of Boston on this website from the Massachusetts Historical Society: <https://www.masshist.org/online/siege/index.php>. Which type of source are the eyewitness accounts?
3. How does Laurie Halse Anderson make use of primary sources at the beginning of each chapter? Primary sources are considered the “raw materials” of history. Split the class or group into two, then have one team create a list of examples of what would be considered a primary source, and the other team create a list of secondary source examples.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “Conflict” in a novel is the struggle or problem to be solved. It may be internal, external, or both. What is the conflict within Elsbeth Culpepper? Discuss the external conflict that she faces. How are these conflicts resolved?

“One of the many advantages of being a practiced liar was that my ears were sharply tuned to the falsehoods of others.” (Chapter fifteen) Discuss her intuition about the character of Captain Hunter and of Billy Rawdon.
2. The antagonist in a work of historical fiction is usually the “bad guy” who stands in the way of the main character. Identify the antagonists in *Rebellion 1776*. Debate whether the raging rebellion in Boston and the smallpox epidemic may be considered antagonists.
3. What are Elsbeth Culpepper and her father seeking when they move from Philadelphia to Boston? Discuss what they find upon their arrival. How does this change the life they had planned for themselves?
4. Elsbeth’s father is a sailmaker, and he works at the sail loft of Grenock and Withers. Her father never reveals which side of the war he favors. Why is it difficult to stay neutral in Boston at this time? Discuss the circumstances of his disappearance. How does he find his way back to Boston by the end of the novel?
5. Elsbeth Culpepper has been taught that lying is a sin. So why does she lie about her age when she seeks employment at the home of Judge Bellingham? What other lies does she tell, and how does she justify them? Elsbeth says,

6. Describe the life of a serving girl. Judge Bellingham, a loyalist, flees Boston after the British admit defeat. Why does Elsbeth’s father insist that she stay at the Bellingham house? What forces her to leave?

7. How does Elsbeth end up working for Mister Pike, a shipping tycoon? Explain what Mister Pike means, “How remarkable, two rebellious towns in one girl.” (Chapter seven) Describe Widow Nash, the family’s cook. How do things change when Missus Pike and their seven children arrive?

8. Hannah Sparhawk lives with the Pikes while her guardian, Captain Hunter, is away. What is Elsbeth’s first impression of Hannah? Explain what Elsbeth means, “She [Hannah] was the most puzzlingest person I’d ever met.” (Chapter thirteen) Why does Elsbeth call Hannah a “kindred spirit”?

9. Elsbeth becomes the personal maidservant to Hannah. What are her duties? Explain what she means, “Hannah Sparhawk was the exact opposite of Widow Nash, in the way that summer was to winter or sunshine to rain.” (Chapter eighteen)



10. How does Hannah find out that her grandmother is dead? Why didn't Missus Pike tell her? Explain how Hannah feels betrayed by Missus Pike. Describe how Elsbeth supports Hannah.
11. Discuss the rules for women and girls in eighteenth-century Boston. How does Elsbeth challenge the rules? Elsbeth goes to the sail loft of Grenock and Withers to see her father. He forbids her to come there again and calls her "ignorant of the evils of the world." (Chapter four) To what evils is he referring? Cite other times in the novel when her unworldliness gets her in trouble.
12. What is the first clue that the Pikes are broke? Cite evidence that Captain Hunter has the Pikes under his complete control. Why does Elsbeth suspect that the Pikes' marriage is in "its own sort of battlefield"? (Chapter twenty)
13. Describe Elsbeth's first encounter with Nyott Doubt. Which side of the war is Doubt on? How do his loyalties confuse Elsbeth? Debate whether his loyalties change as the novel progresses. How does Elsbeth know Mister Doubt has eyes for Hannah?
14. Define *epidemic*. Describe the smallpox epidemic that is raging in Boston during the novel. How does the city attempt to control the epidemic? Explain what Elsbeth means, "But smallpox interfered with death as much as life." (Chapter forty)
15. Doctor Crookshank is inoculating patients against smallpox. Describe the procedure. Why is Missus Pike so against inoculation? Explain why Elsbeth doesn't need to be inoculated. Discuss Elsbeth's attention to Missus Pike and the children as they become ill after receiving the inoculation. How is she devoted to Hannah in the days leading up to her death?
16. Elsbeth is summoned to a meeting of the Committee of Correspondence, Inspection, and Safety. What is the purpose of the meeting? How does she deduce that Widow Nash is behind this meeting? What makes Widow Nash so sure that Elsbeth is a spy? Explain what happens in the meeting.
17. Discuss what Elsbeth means when she calls Shubel Kent her "boon companion." (Chapter three) At what point does she fall in love with him?
18. What is the central theme of the novel? Discuss the secondary themes.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Explore and define the differences between inoculation and vaccination. Based on the information gathered, create a Venn Diagram that explains your understanding of the differences in the two procedures, putting any similarities in the overlapping space. Afterward, discuss which of the procedures Dr. Crookshank administers on the Pike family and other citizens of Boston in *Rebellion 1776*. Why do many people resist his procedure? Research Dr. Edward Jenner, the man credited with developing the smallpox vaccine, on the following website: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1200696/>. Write a paragraph for a health textbook that discusses how his work eventually eradicated smallpox. Why is his work considered the "foundation of immunology"?
2. Read about the history of the smallpox vaccine on the following website: <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/history-of-vaccination/history-of-smallpox-vaccination>. Then create a timeline of the vaccine's development and its use in the United States. Make note of when the last smallpox vaccine was administered. Debate whether it's likely that smallpox could reemerge in our society.
3. In 1855, Massachusetts became the first state to require that children receive the smallpox vaccine before attending school. Write a letter that the school system might have sent to parents explaining the decision that all school children be vaccinated.
4. Explain why Missus Pike doesn't approve of young ladies talking about newspapers, politics, and pox. Elsbeth is very much in support of the smallpox vaccine and shares her opinion publicly. Prepare and deliver a speech that Elsbeth might give about the importance of being vaccinated. Make reference to her losing family and friends to the disease.
5. Elsbeth says, "Momma had raised me to do hard things, especially when I didn't want to." (Chapter six) Write a letter that Elsbeth might send to Pappa relating the hardest thing she has had to do while living in the Pike household.



6. Historical figures like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thoman Jefferson are mentioned in the book. Women also played a prominent role in the war. Research one of the following women:

- a. Abigail Adams
- b. Martha Washington
- c. Deborah Sampson
- d. Phillis Wheatley
- e. Mercy Otis Warren
- f. Laura Collins Wolcott
- g. Prudence Cummings Wright

Prepare a visual presentation, or write a brief biographical paper about her role in the American Revolution. Include a conclusion that discusses what Elsbeth Culpepper would most admire about this particular female figure.

7. Write a feature article for *The Continental Journal* about the celebration in Boston on the day the colonies declared independence. Remember to include Who, What, When, and How. Include interviews with Elsbeth Culpepper, Tabitha Pike, Missus Wheeler, Missus Pike, and Shubel Kent.

8. Tabitha Pike considers herself an expert on democracy. Use books in the library or trusted sites on the internet to research the basic tenets of a democratic government. Then write a short paper titled “Democracy and a New Nation” that Tabitha might write for *The Continental Journal*.

9. Elsbeth says that Billy Rawdon reminds her of a “cunning fox, devious and sly.” (Chapter twenty-five) Discuss the following idioms:

- a. Wise as an owl
- b. Strong as a bear
- c. Fierce as a lion
- d. Stubborn as a mule
- e. Free as a bird
- f. Eyes like a hawk

Select one character from the novel and write a one-page essay that explains which idiom best describes that character. Cite specific scenes or quotes from the novel to support your thoughts.

10. Consider the relationship between Hannah and Elsbeth, and write a eulogy that Elsbeth might deliver at Hannah’s graveside.

VOCABULARY AND USE OF LANGUAGE

Have students jot down unfamiliar words and define them, taking clues from context. Such words may include:

- lethal (p. 1)
- auspicious (p. 14)
- insolent (p. 68)
- perilous (p. 73)
- perambulate (p. 77)
- desolation (p. 125)
- odious (p. 140)
- demoralizing (p. 161)
- inoculate (p. 178)
- pectoral (p. 327)



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FEVER 1793

READING GROUP GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

August 1793. Fourteen-year-old Mattie Cook is ambitious, adventurous, and sick to death of listening to her mother. Mattie has plans of her own. She wants to turn the Cook Coffeehouse into the finest business in Philadelphia, the capital of the new United States. But the waterfront is abuzz with reports of disease. “Fever” spreads from the docks and creeps toward Mattie’s home, threatening everything she holds dear. As the cemeteries fill with fever victims, fear turns to panic, and thousands flee the city. Then tragedy strikes the coffeehouse, and Mattie is trapped in a living nightmare. Suddenly her struggle to build a better life must give way to something even more important—the fight to stay alive.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What was Philadelphia like in 1793? What were the advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside outside of Philadelphia?
2. How was the life of a fourteen-year-old in 1793 different from the life of a fourteen-year-old today? In which period would you rather live? Why?
3. Mattie’s grandfather didn’t think there was any need to rush out of Philadelphia when the fever started to spread. Why did some people think it was safe to stay? What would you have done?
4. The color yellow is used throughout the story. What does it symbolize? What other symbols are used in the book?
5. What do you think will happen to Mattie, her mother, and friends in 1794? What will their lives look like in 1800? In 1813?
6. During the Revolutionary War, women took on tasks that were traditionally performed by men. After the war they were expected to go back to their spinning wheels and kitchens. How are Maggie’s dreams in conflict with what her society expects of young women? Why does Maggie’s mother want a different life for her daughter?
7. The Free African Society volunteered to take care of the sick and bury the dead, even though there was no cure for yellow fever. Why did they do that? Would you have helped?

PROJECTS AND RESEARCH

History

- Mattie was born in 1776, Make a time line of Mattie’s life and the history of the United States.
- Philadelphia was home to the largest population of free African-Americans in the United States. Research how escaped slaves made their way to Philadelphia. When did these routes become the Underground Railroad? Make a multimedia presentation using music from the late 1700’s.

Language Arts

- Rewrite a scene from Eliza’s point of view.
- Make a list of words they used in 1793 that we don’t use today, such as “balderdash” and “bunkum.” What words that we use today might sound strange and old-fashioned in the year 2200?

Math

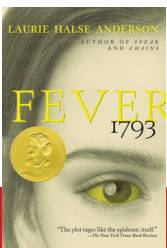
- Calculate how many people died in the yellow fever epidemic. Compare the mortality rate with that of the 1918 influenza epidemic and the AIDS epidemic.

Science

- Research the work of Dr. Walter Reed. How do mosquitoes spread yellow fever? What other diseases do mosquitoes spread? Why aren’t all diseases spread this way?

Classroom Activity

- Put on a tea party like the Ogilvies did, or turn your classroom into the Cook Coffeehouse. Use recipes from the late 1700’s and invite the community?



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