

Fever 1793

Laurie Halse Anderson

Reviewed by Rachel Johnson, 42

Teen Star Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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14-year-old Matilda Cook lives with her mother and grandfather in Philadelphia. They run a bustling coffeehouse. One morning the server does not show up to work, her mother says she passed away the night before. One doctor in the coffeehouse mentions Yellow Fever, but no one was overly concerned because it has not been seen for decades. The death rate begins to rise, and families begin to leave the city for the country. Matilda's mother comes down with the fever and decides it is time to send Matilda to stay with friends in the country. Accompanied by her grandfather, the two board a wagon with a couple out of town. Along the way, they come upon a checkpoint and the officers think Matilda's grandfather is infected because he has a bad cough.

The two are put off the wagon and told to walk back to the city. Matilda must look for food and water because her grandfather cannot go far. She collapses after a day and wakes days later in a hospital made to care for patients with the fever. Matilda recovers and her and her grandfather are taken back to the city. Everything has changed, businesses are boarded up and there are no people on the street. Food is scarce, men with wheelbarrows walk the streets to collect the dead and mass burials are happening daily. Matilda and her grandfather arrive home and the coffeehouse has been broken into, robbed and vandalized. Her mother is also nowhere to be found. Will Matilda survive this epidemic?

Fever 1793 is a historical fiction based on real events. Laurie Halse Anderson does a wonderful job creating the atmosphere during this time, with vivid, detailed descriptions. The beginning of each chapter features a small excerpt written by people who lived through The Fever of 1793. The fictional characters are believable, and incorporating actual people is a nice touch. I enjoyed following Matilda's journey through this tough period. She began as a teen who did not care much for work but matured into a young lady who was brave, cared for others and appreciated challenging work. Although the story is incredibly sad because so many people died, there are moments of good times and humor. It was interesting learning what medical care was like then (bleeding a patient was commonplace in the 1700's). There's an appendix included at the end of the story that provides educational information about the epidemic, doctors, burial site, Free African Society, political figures, and several other things referenced throughout the story. This book would make a great gift for anyone who enjoys American History. The book is informative and entertaining. Be aware that there is sickness and death throughout the story. Recommended to ages 12+

Recommended Titles

The Light in Hidden Places, by Sharon Cameron

Displacement, by Kiku Hughes

An Elephant In The Garden, by Michael Morpurgo

