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Book Talk

**Book Talk on *Ashes***

Laurie Halse Anderson writes books ranging from children to teen and young adult novels, because in her words, “I don’t like adults.” Anderson has written over thirty books and has sold more than eight million copies overall. Her interest in writing historical fiction began when she learned that her hero Benjamin Franklin owned slaves. From that point on, she has written the untold stories of slaves who lived during the American Revolution, and how they survived and contributed to earning the nation’s freedom, working with five historians at a time to fact check her work for authenticity. Anderson attempts to discuss controversial issues with her readers at an early age, doing so through tactful humor and sensitive realism. She has won numerous awards for her bold works, and continues to fight for diverse publishing as well as against censorship. <http://madwomanintheforest.com/>

***Ashes* Summary**

 The final installment of Anderson’s *The Seeds of America* trilogy, *Ashes* begins with Isabel and Curzon, two escaped slaves who have been on the run for almost five years, searching for Isabel’s stolen sister, Ruth. Caught between two sides of a revolution that promise them freedom but want them in chains, Isabel is faced with the choice to run and hope for safety for herself and her sister, or choosing a side in order to keep her ragtag family together and fight for the liberty promised to all but given to few. Will the war for freedom end with liberty for all, or will it tear Isabel’s world apart and leave her, her friends, and her family in chains once again? While America fights to become a free country, Isabel is fighting her own war, and at the end of five long years of fighting, spanning three entire books, she is not giving up now that she is so close to gaining the life of a free woman that she has dreamed of for so long.

**Significant Quotes**

* “After years of keeping to the shadows, it unnerved me to walk in the sunlight, surrounded by so many strangers… *Chin up*” (87-88).

 Isabel’s inner monologue is a pattern carried throughout the series, and is of importance to her character because it is representative of her inner strength which she has built up over the span of all three books.

* ‘“You must choose a side, Isabel,’ he said softly. ‘Rebel or redcoat.’… “He frowned. ‘No one wants to be in a war. But that is out circumstance. You must choose a side, else you become a target for both”’ (126).

 This quote captures a pivotal moment, not just in the book, but in Isabel’s life. She has seen the good and bad of both sides, and is slow to trust either. But the choice is inescapable, the war closing in on her, and her own battle for freedom shrinks in comparison to the war around her. She must take the step to join something bigger than herself.

* ‘“Look there,’ said Sibby, pointing at the road… Our band of lasses stood with respectful attention. We understood their sacrifice”’ (258).

This moment in particular is of historical importance, highlighting the sacrifice made by those who did not carry guns or wear uniforms, but who served all the same. It is a moment of recognition for the unsung heroes of the revolution as well as a time for human understanding despite the difference of sides of the war.

**Literary Response**

 **Exeter Qualities**

2. Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative hooks and fast pace.

5. Lively, varied, and imaginative language that is grammatically correct while being neither patronizing and simplistic nor unnecessarily confusing through lexical density or complexity.

6. Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate issues and global concerns.

 **Archetypes**

Caregiver: Isabel to Ruth

Friends: Isabel and Curzon/ Ruth and Aberdeen

Lovers: Isabel and Curzon

**Rationale**

 Historical fiction is an important genre for understanding the present. Anderson chose to tell the untold story of many stolen children of Africa and their fight for freedom and equality during the American Revolution. While the fight for racial equality is most often highlighted during the Civil War era, the fight was just as prevalent during the original fight for American liberty. The characters created by Anderson represent many lives who suffered and endured and sacrificed in order to gain the freedom we have today. In a turbulent time where patriotism is hard to find and at times even harder to muster, *Ashes* stands as a reminder of what makes the nation great as well as how we are to treat one another in respect and equality. In reading Anderson’s *The Seeds of America* trilogy, readers will be looking forward even while they look back.