

## *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson *An American Plague* by Jim Murphy

**Subjects:** *Fever 1793*: Yellow fever—Fiction; Epidemics—Fiction; Pennsylvania—History—1775–1865—Fiction; Survival—Fiction; *An American Plague*: Yellow fever—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—History—18<sup>th</sup> century—Juvenile literature

**Awards:** *Fever 1793*: Best Books for Young Adults; *An American Plague*: Best Books for Young Adults, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, Newbery Honor Book, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, Outstanding Science Trade Books for Students K-12, Sibert Informational Book Medal Winner

**Book Lists:** Middle School, North America, Reluctant Readers

**Props:** Mosquito puppet, Audio file of bells tolling



I recently heard a quote by Rudyard Kipling. He said, “If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.” And this story, *Fever 1793*, based on historical events, is worth remembering.

*(Buzz mosquito puppet around, swatting at it in irritation)* The story begins August 16<sup>th</sup> in the year 1793 above a Philadelphia coffeehouse. Seventeen-year-old Mattie was awakened by the sound of a mosquito buzzing in her left ear *(swat mosquito away, put puppet down)* and her mother’s distant yelling. Apparently Polly, the serving girl, was late and Mattie would have to get up and do her work for her. Mattie’s father had passed away 10 years ago and her mother had only Polly, who was late, Eliza, the coffeehouse cook, and Mattie’s grandfather to help her run the family coffeehouse business. So, Mattie got up.

It was later that day when they heard. Polly wasn’t late, she was dead. She had been sewing by candlelight after dinner the night before and then simply collapsed. She was dead less than an hour later. It was the Yellow Fever. The symptoms included a flushed face, yellow eyes, and thick black vomit. *(Turn on bell sounds)* Church bells tolled the deaths. Ringing again and again as so many

died that wagons traveled the city, gathering the dead—or near dead—transporting them to common graveyards outside the city, where their bodies were dumped. *(Turn off bell sounds)*

The killer’s name was yellow fever. But everything else about it was a mystery. Its cause was unknown and there was no cure. Many city residents fled in fear while others stayed and helped the sick. It was one of the worst plagues in US history. In only three months, nearly 5,000 people, about ten percent of the entire city’s population, died. Will Mattie and her family flee? Will they stay and survive? Or will they stay, and be numbered among the dead?

If this book interests you, you may want to learn more about the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in this nonfiction book, *An American Plague* by Jim Murphy. This book, though full of copies of newspapers, firsthand accounts of the epidemic, and interesting facts is more importantly a riveting, suspenseful, true story of a city under attack. Read them both, *(Hold up books)* *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *An American Plague* by Jim Murphy.