Historical Background to Chains

Slaves Arrive in America
The first black Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619. They were treated as indentured servants, people who came to America under contract to work for an employer for a period of years. About a decade later, the first African slaves arrived in New Amsterdam (current-day New York City). By the end of the 17th century, every colony had slaves. On the eve of the American Revolution, about 1 in 5 colonists was a slave — around 500,000 people. Most black Africans were enslaved in the southern colonies, but there were slaves all over the colonies, including big cities like Boston and New York.

International War Breaks Out
By 1750, the British, French, and Spanish all held claims to various parts of North America. In 1754, the French built a fort in the disputed Ohio Valley, leading to an attack on the French fort by a colonial militia led by a young George Washington. The attack sparked a war which became known as the French and Indian War. While the British sent thousands of troops to the colonies to lead the war effort, France relied on its Indian allies. The war finally ended in 1763 with France ceding all of Canada to Britain. As a result, Britain became the dominant colonial power in Eastern North America, and the American colonists were able to settle in new parts.

Colonists are Taxed
Despite its victory, the war left Britain in great debt. To pay it off, the British government issued a Stamp Act in 1765, forcing colonists to buy a stamp for every piece of paper they used. Most colonists were furious! For decades, they had made their own laws and now Parliament hundreds of miles away was taxing them. Newspapers mocked the Act, and many protested by refusing to buy the stamps. The Stamp Act was repealed several months later, but not before the seeds of anti-British sentiment had begun to spread throughout the colonies.

In 1767, the British Parliament further angered the colonists. Intent on raising money to keep British troops in America, the Parliament issued the Townsend Acts. These acts taxed American colonists on common items like tea, clothes, and lead. In response, groups of colonists organized a boycott of British goods. In 1770, the British Parliament repealed all of the Townsend Acts except the tax on tea.

Shots Are Fired
By the spring of 1770, tension in Boston between the colonists and British soldiers was high. On March 5, a mob of colonists surrounded a British sentry. Soon after, British soldiers fired into the crowd killing 5 Bostonians. The "Boston Massacre" as the event became known, stirred up passion throughout the colonies. Some called for the British troops to leave the colonies for good and to allow the colonies to be free of British rule — this group became known as Patriots. Others remained loyal to the British King — those colonists were known as Loyalists and they hoped that the colonies would remain under British rule.
**Tea is Dumped**

The colonist boycott of British goods, especially that of tea, had greatly diminished the profits of the British East India Company. By 1773, the company needed to sell millions of pounds of its tea or go broke. In an attempt to rescue the company, the British government actually lowered the cost of tea so that colonists would buy it. Soon the company gained complete control over the tea trade in the colonies.

Patriot leaders in Boston, known as the Sons of Liberty, were enraged that the British company had gained a monopoly off the drinking habits of the colonists. And so, on December 16, 1773, they dumped about 90,000 pounds of tea into the Boston Harbor. This event became known as the **Boston Tea Party.** When news of the event reached Britain, Parliament reacted with a new set of laws, so harsh that they were termed “the Intolerable Acts”.

**Colonists Begin to Organize**

In September 1774, Patriots and Loyalists leaders from twelve colonies convened at the First Continental Congress. They agreed to send a letter to the British King George asking for a repeal of the Intolerable Acts. They also decided to initiate a peaceful boycott of British goods and to meet again in May.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1774-75, leaders urged colonists to continue to boycott British goods. They also organized local militias where volunteers (called Minutemen) trained to be ready to fight in case of a rebellion.

**Onward to Lexington and Concord**

On April 19, 1775, two Patriot spies, Paul Revere and William Dawes, learned that British troops were going to march to Concord, Massachusetts, to destroy a purported stash of colonist military supplies. Revere and Dawes rode through the night warning villagers of the upcoming British attack. Fighting broke out at sunrise in Lexington and soon eight colonial soldiers were dead. When the British arrived in Concord, however, the local militia was waiting; after the first British shots rang out, Minutemen surrounded the British and forced them to retreat back to Boston. Despite their losses, colonists saw the British retreat as a victory and as proof that colonists were willing to fight for their freedom.

**The American Revolution Begins**

In May 1775, colonial leaders met again in Philadelphia during the Second Continental Congress. There they chose George Washington to lead the Continental Army against the British. They also set about managing the war effort and writing the Declaration of Independence.

In January 1776 Patriot Thomas Paine published a pamphlet called **Common Sense.** In it, Paine called on colonists to overthrow its British tyrants and to become independent. Over 120,000 copies were distributed throughout the colonies and Paine’s words persuaded many to support the Patriot cause.

Despite Washington’s ragtag army, the Continental Army had some early successes, including pushing the British out of Boston in March 1776. Washington then moved his army south anticipating a British naval attack on New York City.

By May 1776, New York residents felt an attack by the British was imminent.
Identifying Setting  RL.8.2
The setting of a novel refers to its time period and location. It usually changes as the story unfolds. Answer the following questions to identify the initial setting of Chains.

1. What dates do the first five chapters span?

2. In which colony does the story begin? To what city do Isabel and Ruth travel in Chapter IV?

3. Based on what you’ve read so far and what you know about the historical significance of this time period, why will the setting play an important role in the story?

Determining Point of View  RL.8.6
The point of view of a story refers to the perspective from which the story is told. Chains is told in the first person point of view because the story is narrated by a character (Isabel), we can only see her perspective, and the author uses the pronouns “I” and “me” when referring to the narrator.

4. Write down a quote that shows that the story is told from the first person point of view. Circle 1 – 3 words in that quote that signal the first person point of view.
Expanding Vocabulary

Chapters XVI – XXV / LS.8.4a; RL.8.4

DIRECTIONS: Read each sentence from Chains. Use the context of each sentence to determine which of the definitions in the box below make the most sense to replace the underline word. Write that definition in the blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a medicinal concoction</th>
<th>sheath for a sword</th>
<th>bold and disrespectful</th>
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<tr>
<td>a sudden loss of consciousness, similar to a stroke</td>
<td>causing a feeling of disgust</td>
<td>crooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incitement of resistance to authority</td>
<td>to beg for urgently</td>
<td>pan for holding burning coals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>something that is contagious or infectious</td>
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1. Two mornings after my meeting with the colonel, a visitor pounded at the kitchen door. ... The noise near gave me **apoplexy**. (p. 107)

   From this passage, apoplexy might mean __________________________.

2. Instead of wearing a hat or coat, he had a long cloak draped over his head, and his wig sat **askew**. (p. 107)

   From this passage, askew might mean __________________________.

3. The captain said something that we couldn't hear, and then he pulled the sword from his **scabbard** ... . (p. 115)

   From this passage, a scabbard might be a __________________________.

4. Thomas Hickey, you have been ... found guilty of the capital crimes of mutiny and **sedition**, of holding a treacherous correspondence with, and receiving pay from, the enemy ... . (p. 116)

   From this passage, sedition might mean __________________________.
5. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers ... (p. 118)

From this passage, beseech might mean ________________________________.

6. Within the pouch lay a green flask filled with a calming elixir prescribed by the doctor. (p. 124)

From this passage, an elixir is probably a ________________________________.

7. "You will not address me in that insolent manner." (p. 134)

From this passage, insolent probably means ________________________________.

8. A brazier filled with hot coals sat on the ground a few lengths in front of me. (p. 146)

From this passage, a brazier is probably a ________________________________.

9. "The healer woman put a comfrey salve on it to draw out the pestilence." (p. 151)

From this passage, pestilence is probably ________________________________.

10. "I find the buying and selling of children most repugnant." (p. 152)

From this passage, repugnant probably means ________________________________.
**Task**  Having read about Isabel's experiences during the early part of the American Revolution, you are now going to write a letter from her perspective to the government of the newly created United States explaining why you deserve your freedom. Below are four sources to help you form a well-constructed argument.

In Part 1, you will review each source and answer the questions that follow.

Then, in Part 2, you will write your letter using what you've gathered from these sources as well as your background knowledge from reading *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson.

**Part 1**

**Sources for Performance Task:** Read each source carefully, thinking about what information it gives you regarding the value of independence, the states' fight for freedom, and the argument Isabel might make in favor of her own freedom. Answer the questions that follow.

**Source A: Passage from *Chains* (pages 271 – 272)**

I finished reading *Common Sense* the night before the ball. The bookseller was right; the words were dangerous, every one of them. I ought throw it in the fire but could not bring myself to do it. Mr. Paine knew how to stir up the pot; he went right after the King and attacked the crown on his head.

I laid down one long road of a sentence in my remembrance: "For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever." Way I saw it, Mr. Paine was saying all people were the same, that no one deserved a crown or was born to be higher than another. That's why America could make its own freedom.

'Twas a wonder the book did not explode into flames in my own hands.

I buried it back in its hidey-hole and laid myself down to sleep.

My eyes would not close. My thoughts were churned up like muddy water, with dangerous eels thrashing through it.

If an entire nation could seek its freedom, why not a girl? And if a girl was to seek her freedom, how could she do such a fool-headed thing? Especially a girl trapped in New York? Best thing would be to break into the desk of a British commander, steal a pass and forge her name and his name on it, and act free.

And pigs were likely to fly, too.
Questions for Source A:

1. According to this passage, what did Isabel and America have in common?

2. In what way were they different?

3. Do you think Isabel's line of thinking is logical? Why or why not?
Source B: An Excerpt from Common Sense by Thomas Paine

MANKIND being originally equals in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance; the distinctions of rich, and poor, ... Oppression is often the consequence, ...

But there is another and greater distinction for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, ... the distinction of men into KINGS and SUBJECTS. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, ..., is worth enquiring into ...

O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe ... . O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

Source: http://www.ushistory.org/paine/commonsense/

Questions for Source B:

1. In the first few sentences, what does Paine say destroyed equality of mankind?

2. What is Paine urging Americans to do? Why?

3. How might his argument apply to Isabel?
Source C: An Excerpt from the poem “To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth,” by Phillis Wheatley

(Note: Wheatley was the first black poet in America to publish a book. She was taught to read and write by her masters and freed from slavery when they died, somewhere between 1774 and 1778. The underlined words in the poem are defined below.)

No more, America, in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land.
Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Africa's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

unredressed: not compensated for
wanton: cruel, malicious
peruse: examine
molest: abuse
steeled: strengthened for a tough ordeal

Source: http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/20274
Questions for Source C:

1. Re-read the first five lines of the poem. What event is Wheatley celebrating? What is the mood of these lines?

2. Now, re-read the lines beginning with “I, young in life ...” through the end. What happened to her as a child? What is her hope for the new nation?

3. Re-read the final two lines of this poem. Who are the “others” she is referring to? What is Wheatley praying for them?

4. After reading this poem, what might Wheatley say about Isabel’s desire for freedom?
Source D: The Declaration of Independence

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Source: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

Questions for Source D:

1. What is the purpose of this document? Underline at least one sentence or phrase from the passage above that illustrates this purpose.

2. Which part of this document do you think most applies to Isabel's argument that she is as deserving of her freedom as every other American?
Part 2
You will now review your sources, take notes, plan, write, and edit your letter.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT: You must now write a multi-paragraph letter from Isabel's point of view where you argue that you deserve to be given your freedom. You must include information from all of the sources above, as well as what you learned reading Chains, to support the main arguments in your letter. You should address your letter to the Continental Congress and date it January, 1777.

Your article will be graded on the following:

Accuracy and Strength of Content: How well did you incorporate information from the four sources into your letter? Did you present enough facts to support your arguments? Are your arguments clear and concise?

Organization: Is your letter organized clearly? Are your arguments defined and well-stated? Is the information presented in such a way that it is easy to follow?

Conventions: How well did you follow the rules of grammar usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling?