



'Year of the Sister'

Well-Read Mom Family Supplement

Well-Read Mom's Guide to Bringing the Great Books into Your Home

March: When What's Legal Isn't What's Right

Discuss along with *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez

What must I do if the structures of society are wrong? How can I take action when what I do will never be enough to right the injustices I see in the world? In *In the Time of the Butterflies* the Mirabal sisters add their lives—their actions and their deaths—to the weight of the scales of justice in the world. In *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson and *Nasreen's Secret School* by Jeanette Winter, children act with courageous justice in their small corner of society. We realize that what they do is not small but heroic. We begin to learn, in the words of St. Augustine, "To him that does what in him lies, God will not deny His grace."

***Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson (13+)**

After the death of her owner, Isabel and her sister expected to be freed. Instead, the inheritor sells the sisters to a prideful and violent woman who takes them to pre-Revolutionary New York. There, Isabel is enriched by the kindness of the family's aunt, Lady Seymour, who is troubled by the morality of slavery. She makes a new friend who insists she choose sides between the Patriots and Loyalists as he has done, arguing in favor of the Patriots. Isabel wavers for some time: the Patriots have no plans to free slaves, while the British declare freedom for any slave who joins their cause (and lives). When her Loyalist owner wickedly sells her sister and brands Isabel with an "I" for insolence, she decides her loyalties are very local. She writes her own pass out of New York to go in search of her sister.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does law shape our sense of morality? Does law have the status of a kind of teacher, declaring what is "allowable," "good to do," or what evils are to be avoided? How does law shape my conscience?
2. In what ways do Isabel and Lady Seymour see beyond the divides of master/slave?
3. When Lady Seymour cares for Isabel after imprisonment, branding, and illness this care for another ends up saving her later—because Isabel saves Lady Seymour from the fire. By the end of the book we see that in saving Lady Seymour, Isabel saved herself. How is the "other" in my life another self?
4. St. Ambrose says, "No one heals himself by wounding another." How do we see this in Madam's relationship to Isabel? How do we see this in Lady Seymour's gift and word to Isabel at the end?
5. Isabel chooses loyalty to herself, to Curzon, and her sister. How is this justified? How is this "self-loyalty" not enough?



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More for older readers:

The Apple and the Arrow by Mary and Conrad Buff

The Bicycle Spy by Yona Zeldis MacDonaugh

The Adventures of Robin Hood by J. Walter McSpadden

For Younger Readers

***Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan* by Jeanette Winter**

Since her parents disappeared, little Nasreen has not spoken. Her loving and daring grandmother enrolls Nasreen in a secret school for girls. The community of girls, the teacher, and Nasreen's new friend open her heart and her lips again.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Nasreen's grandmother risk sending her to the secret school?
2. What does Mina say that impacts Nasreen? How does friendship with Mina change Nasreen? Has friendship ever helped you to change and become brave?
3. How would you feel if you weren't allowed to go to school because you were a girl/boy? What do you think your parents would do? What do you hope your brother/sisters would do?

More for younger readers:

The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq by Jeanette Winter

Before She Was Harriet by Lesa Cline-Ransome

One Grain of Rice by Demi

Courage by Bernard Wabeer