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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2013 Volume I: Picture Writing

Picturing a Different America: "Reading" Images, Reading Strategies, and Historical Contradiction — Without "Frontloading"?

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"I read the words, but just didn't couldn't get any pictures in my head while I was reading." How can a teacher of reading help students visualize unfamiliar contexts? This unit offers an approach to using historical fiction in a middle-school English class to support and expand on what students are learning in Social Studies and vice versa. *Forge*, a young-adult novel by Laurie Halse Anderson, set during the American Revolution, puts a teen escaped slave, Curzon, in the context of a war, the contentious culture of slavery in a newborn country, and his conflicted feelings for a young slave girl, Isabel, whose own story of escape and rebellion is told in the companion book, National Book Award Finalist, *Chains.* Teachers might be tempted to pre-teach the historical context for this or other novels, but should they? This unit addresses new Common Core State Standards' recommendations in English Language Arts to downplay or eliminate the practice of "frontloading" reading with pre-reading lessons. Additionally, assignments in this unit are designed to help students critically evaluate the hypocrisy of our slave-owning Founding Fathers, while retaining empathy for them, some of whom appear in *Forge,* whose culture believed that only some "men are created equal."

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 8; recommended for English Language Arts and possibly Social Studies, grades 6-8)