

## **Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review**

Teacher: Brian Baertsche, Kelly Cable, Laura Calland, Amanda McCleary, and Brian Nicola  
Grade: 9 School: Olentangy Orange High School

Book Title: A Prayer for Owen Meany Genre: Fiction

Author: John Irving Pages: 640

Publisher: Random House Publishing Group Copyright: 1990

*In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.*

**Book Summary and summary citation:** (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, published by Ballantine in 1989, is a long, sprawling novel in the tradition of Charles Dickens and other nineteenth-century novelists. John Wheelwright, a former American who is now a Canadian citizen living in Toronto, tells the story. John recalls growing up in a small town in New Hampshire with a very unusual best friend, a tiny boy with a high voice named Owen Meany. Despite his strange appearance and voice, Owen is a boy with a strong personality, intellectual gifts, and an air of authority that enables him to take charge of a situation. Owen also possesses a strong religious faith and an uncanny knowledge of future events in his life—including the exact time and circumstances of his own tragic but heroic death. It is through Owen Meany that John becomes a religious believer.

*A Prayer for Owen Meany* is Irving's seventh novel. Compellingly readable, it contains a large cast of idiosyncratic small-town characters and has many hilarious scenes and episodes. It also contains serious political and religious themes, exploring issues such as faith and doubt, predestination, the Vietnam War, and the wider issue of American foreign policy from the 1960s to the 1980s. The book is also a mine of information about American social history, from the advent of television in the 1950s to the rock videos of the 1980s.

(from ENotes.com)

**Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s):** (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

- Close-read in order to interpret increasingly challenging texts.
- Describe what makes an author's style unique from the styles of others.
- Relate a literary work to its context.

**Include two professional reviews of this title:** (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

## Review #1

A Prayer for Owen Meany has absolutely everything a reader wants in a story. There is romance and intrigue. There are moments of incredible joy and great wickedness. The characters come alive and become part of your world while you are reading this book. You begin to look for Owen and the others when you are in the grocery store or on the train. A Prayer for Owen Meany is like almost all of Irving's other books it starts off nowhere and ends nowhere but it is one wicked ride and somehow when you are finished reading the book you are a better person. You have a greater understanding of humanity and what is it like to be an outsider and the power that you have to make one decision that will change and improve the lives of thousands.

As for Owen himself he is magnificent. He is a boy small in stature and large in spirit. He believes he was born for greatness and he shares this belief with his best friend and anyone and everyone else who will listen. Since Owen is sure he was born for greatness he is always on the lookout for his destiny. Owen also has a strong and amazing faith in God and this is something that can drive the others in his life insane as they tend to be a group of questioners and skeptics. Owen is many things but a skeptic is not one of them. Irving describes Owen in great detail including his voice and throughout the book everything that Owen says is written in capital letters. While this style may take some getting used to once you have lost yourself in the book and you will the capital letters become a very effective tool. They helped to remind you of everything that Owen is and is not.

Throw in a stuffed and stolen armadillo, a grandmother who is often mistaken for a screaming banshee and a mystery surrounding paternity and you have a book for the ages. I encourage you to run to your local book store and purchase this fabulously funny, uplifting, love story of a book that is ultimately about the ability of everyone to make a difference no matter our age, our size or our history.

(from AssociatedContent.com)

## Review #2

OWEN MEANY (we must always use the upper case for OWEN, because that is how he speaks) is a very small boy with A VERY BIG VOICE who has become an icon in American literature. Readers have bestowed a reverence verging on the worshipful regarding the book, A PRAYER FOR OWEN MEANY.

When OWEN accidentally kills his best friend's mother with a foul ball in a Little League game, he becomes convinced that he is an instrument of God and that only martyrdom will redeem his act. The story begins on that fateful day in 1953, but it plays out against the Vietnam War. Some readers believe it to be a novel about America's involvement in Vietnam, and it is, to some degree. Others proclaim it as a great religious novel, or at least one that examines religious beliefs and morality. That, too, is accurate. It is, as are all Irving's novels, a highly complex story with intertwining subplots, strange characters with dark secrets and Irving's very own entertaining and often hilarious narrative. Still others call it John Irving's greatest accomplishment, and some go so far as to say it is the best book they've ever read. However it is viewed, Armadillos, dress forms and Christmas pageants will forever summon visions of OWEN MEANY in the hearts and minds of millions of readers.

This was John Irving's seventh novel, published in 1989, four years after THE CIDER HOUSE RULES.

(from BookReporter.com)

**What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?**

Title: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn    Author: Mark Twain

Title: Great Expectations    Author: Charles Dickens

Title:                      Author:

Title:                      Author:

Title:                      Author:

Title:                      Author:

**Document any potentially controversial content:**

This novel contains several brief instances of profanity, as well as frank discussions about relationships, religion, and death.

**Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)**

Gifted/Accelerated    Regular    At Risk

**GRADE LEVEL(S):**            6            7            8            9            10            11            12

**Reading level of this title (if applicable):** 9

**Date Submitted to Department Chair:** 2 February 2010

**Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:**

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults