

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Gannon/Degiorgio	School:	Hyatts Middle School
Book Title:	Anna of Byzantium	Genre:	historical fiction
Author:	Tracy Barrett	Pages:	224
Publisher:	Laurel Leaf	Copyright:	2000

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.)

Anna Comnena has every reason to feel entitled. She's a princess, her father's firstborn and his chosen successor. Someday she expects to sit on the throne and rule the vast Byzantine Empire. So the birth of a baby brother doesn't perturb her. Nor do the "barbarians" from foreign lands, who think only a son should ascend to power. Anna is as dismissive of them as are her father and his most trusted adviser--his mother, a manipulative woman with whom Anna studies the art of diplomacy. Anna relishes her lessons, proving adept at checkmating opponents in swift moves of mental chess. But as she matures into a young woman, her arrogance and intelligence threaten her grandmother. Anna will be no one's puppet. Almost overnight, Anna sees her dreams of power wrenched from her and bestowed on her little brother. Bitter at the betrayal, Anna waits to avenge herself, and to seize what is rightfully hers.

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)

CCS #1-10

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

From Publishers Weekly

This uneven first novel is narrated by Anna, the first-born daughter of the Emperor of Byzantium, poised to inherit the throne. Inspired by the real Anna Comnena (1083-1153) who chronicled her father's reign in *The Alexiad*, the story begins in a convent, where 17-year-old Anna lives in exile. Most of the book flashes back to the princess's upbringing and her attempt on her brother John's life that led to her monastic imprisonment. Although the author successfully evokes an aura of claustrophobia within the castle and convent, she provides few details to distinguish one setting from another. The scenes in the throne room involving visiting dignitaries or soldiers do little to illustrate the pageantry or politics of the age, and the main characters lack definition with the exception of the Machiavellian grandmother. Anna herself, with her education in history, classics

and science, may reverse any preconceived assumptions about the ignorance and lowly position of women in the Middle Ages, but her character as portrayed here is not likable until the book's conclusion. Readers may not stay around long enough to witness her humbling fall from power and transition to scholar. Ages 10-up. (June)

Review #2

From School Library Journal

Grade 6-10-The 11th-century Byzantine princess Anna Comnena was a remarkable woman. Designated as a child to inherit the throne, she was educated to be a ruler. She learned, from her mother and grandmother, to manipulate the intrigues and factions of the court, and when she was displaced as heir by her brother, she schemed, without success, to assassinate him and regain her position. In this novel, Anna tells her own story, looking back on her former life from the convent to which she has been banished. The first-person device serves well to focus the action on the princess and to build a plausible character study of a brilliant and tempestuous young woman frustrated and embittered by the loss of her expectations of achieving supreme power. However, the book exemplifies the difficulty of writing a historical novel about a real person. Anna's brother is depicted throughout as a spoiled monster who (in contrast to the brilliant Anna) refuses to learn to read. Yet historians characterize John's rule as one of personal virtue and administrative competence and tell that he forgave his sister for her many conspiracies against him. Barrett acknowledges in an afterword that she "changed some of the facts," but, unfortunately, it is the story she spins that will remain with young readers. Still, few books, with the notable exception of Peter Dickinson's *The Dancing Bear* (Little, Brown, 1972; o.p.), have as their backdrop the colorful and historically significant Byzantine Empire.

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

Title: **Crispin:Cross of Lead**

Author: **Avi**

Title: **The Midwife's Apprentice**

Author: **Karen Cushman**

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

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):

Date Submitted to Department Chair: April 13, 2012

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