

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Teri Shoemaker

School: Olentangy High School

Book Title: *Between Shades of Gray*; also  
titled *Ashes in the Snow*

Genre: Historical Fiction

Author: Ruta Sepetys

Pages: 338

Publisher: Penguin Books

Copyright: 2011

*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.)

Fifteen-year-old Lina is a Lithuanian girl living an ordinary life -- until Soviet officers invade her home and tear her family apart. Separated from her father and forced onto a crowded train, Lina, her mother, and her young brother make their way to a Siberian work camp, where they are forced to fight for their lives. Lina finds solace in her art, documenting these events by drawing. Risking everything, she imbeds clues in her drawings of their location and secretly passes them along, hoping her drawings will make their way to her father's prison camp. But will strength, love, and hope be enough for Lina and her family to survive? (Amazon.com).

Lina is just like any other fifteen-year-old Lithuanian girl in 1941. She paints, she draws, she gets crushes on boys. Until one night when Soviet officers barge into her home, tearing her family from the comfortable life they've known. Separated from her father, forced onto a crowded and dirty train car, Lina, her mother, and her young brother slowly make their way north, crossing the Arctic Circle, to a work camp in the coldest reaches of Siberia. Here they are forced, under Stalin's orders, to dig for beets and fight for their lives under the cruelest of conditions.

Lina finds solace in her art, meticulously--and at great risk--documenting events by drawing, hoping these messages will make their way to her father's prison camp to let him know they are still alive. It is a long and harrowing journey, spanning years and covering 6,500 miles, but it is through incredible strength, love, and hope that Lina ultimately survives. *Between Shades of Gray* is a novel that will steal your breath and capture your heart (Goodreads).

**Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum blueprints and/or State standards.**

### Instructional Rationale

I plan to use this book as a quick read since it covers the 7-9 range in reading level, and the students in the ID Honors English 9 classes are well within that range (or beyond). The story itself is quite compelling in its descriptions of the treatment of citizens of Lithuania who were forced to move to labor camps in Siberia in the 1940's. Since the book is based on a specific historical time period and is meticulously researched, students will get a picture of another

culture and people who were part of a genocide. It is important for students to realize that not only the Jews were subjected to a Holocaust and that Hitler was not the only one to annihilate millions of people.

I plan to use the topics within the novel to springboard a narrative written assignment as well as a small research paper. After studying WW I and WWII in the World History side of the ID course, I want the students to write about this time in history to share their understanding of the people and cultures involved. By having students write in a narrative (either writing poetry or short story) as well as a citation-based paper, they will be able to express themselves in two different writing formats, both of which may teach them more about themselves, this time in history and the divisiveness of the human condition.

### **Ohio State Standards**

**RL.9-10.6** Analyze how a point of view, perspective, or cultural experience is reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

**RL.9-10.10** By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, building background knowledge and activating prior knowledge in order to make personal, historical, and cultural connections that deepen understanding of complex text.

**W.9-10.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. a. Establish a clear and thorough thesis to present information. b. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connection and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia to aid comprehension, if needed. c. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic. d. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationship among complex ideas and concepts. e. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic. f. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. g. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

**W.9-10.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. a. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. c. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole. d. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters. e. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

**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). Reviews should suggest an appropriate grade-level or grade-band.

**Review #1**

***Common Sense Media says***

age 12+

Parents need to know that *Between Shades of Gray* is a story of horrific cruelty and violence for mature tweens and up. It's the story of 15-year-old Lina, her younger brother, and their mother, whom the Soviets deport from their Lithuanian home to a Siberian labor camp in 1941. Babies, children, the elderly, and even grieving parents die awful deaths, and many more suffer terribly as they struggle to survive. Families are torn apart. There's just enough telling detail here to drive home the climate of terror in which the deportees lived, without lingering on the gruesome details. The novel illuminates an often-overlooked chapter in history, drawing comparisons to the misery inflicted by the Nazi regime. It's a very worthwhile read, but parents may want to make themselves available to discuss the troubling questions the book raises. The book was adapted for a 2019 film with the title *Ashes in the Snow*. (Common Sense Media).

**Review #2**

“Her prose is restrained and powerful, as unadorned as the landscape in which her characters struggle to survive---Few books are beautifully written, fewer still are important; this novel is both.” --The Washington Post

**Review #3**

*Between Shades of Gray* and the other books in this tiny but perhaps widening historical niche are worth a young reader's time not just because they move or uplift (which they do). These volumes also give children the opportunity to develop as clear and educated an opinion about communism as they will have already formed about Nazism. And that's something worth having.” --Wall Street Journal

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

Title: The Diary of Anne Frank

Author: Anne Frank

Title: The Librarian of Auschwitz

Author: Antonio Iturbe

Title: Nightingale

Author: Kristin Hannah

**Document any potentially controversial content:**

Treatment of deportees by Stalin's military (extremely poor living conditions, lice, extreme cold, starvation, shootings, verbal harassment)

NOTE: The author takes great care to create an authentic text for teenaged readers. She avoids vulgar language and descriptions without weakening the realism of the deplorable conditions and treatment given to these people.

**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):**

**Suggested Professional Literacy 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

**Signatures:**

**Teacher:** Jeri A. Shemak

**Date:** Jan. 23, 2019

**Department Head:** Amada Sheehey

**Date:** January 23, 2019

**Building Administrator:** [Signature]

**Date:** 1/24/19

**Curriculum Supervisor:** [Signature]

**Date:** 1/29/19