

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Jessica Hendershot Grade: 7 School: OBMS

Book Title: If I Grow Up Genre: Realistic Fiction

Author: Todd Strasser Pages: 240

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Copyright: 2009

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.)

In a gripping novel with a plot pulled from the headlines, Todd Strasser turns his attention to gang life in the inner-city projects. DeShawn is a teenager growing up in the projects. Most of his friends only see one choice: join up to a gang. DeShawn is smart enough to want to stay in school and make something more of himself, but when his family is starving while his friends have fancy bling and new sneakers, DeShawn is forced to decide--is his integrity more important than feeding his family?

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)

Reading Applications: Literary Text Indicator: Explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including poetry, drama, myths, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, fiction and non-fiction.

This is a great text that supports a modern problem research topic - gangs, drug abuse, poverty, teenage pregnancy, weapons trafficking, and how the consequence of poor decisions and actions lead to prison, or worse - death.

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

In this superficially compelling but heavy-handed book about gang culture, narrator DeShawn faces tough circumstances and limited choices. Readers first meet DeShawn as a smart 12-year-old with potential; four years later, he is a gang member in charge of operations at his housing project. While the story has a Law and Order-type drama, it also runs on cliché: the determined grandmother, the star-crossed love, the jealous second-in-command, the concerned cop and the teacher who reaches out knowing his offer will be rejected. The plot serves the author's agenda, which Strasser (Give a Boy a Gun) puts in plain sight: he opens each section with a statistic plus a rap lyric, and his foreword and last chapter argue that significant numbers of American citizens—mostly minorities,

and many living in impoverished inner-city areas—are doomed to fail. Given that Strasser's foreword explicitly defines himself and his audience as more privileged than his characters (we forget that millions of inner-city denizens are just like us), it's hard to escape the feeling that his story is more well-meaning than authentic. Ages 12–up. (Feb.)

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Review #2

From School Library Journal

Grade 8–10—For DeShawn, joining a gang seems like a terrible decision—why would he want to work for a pittance running drugs when the inevitable consequences are jail or an early death? A bright boy, he does well in school and tries his best to obey the grandmother who has raised him since his mother's accidental death in gang crossfire. But as DeShawn enters adolescence, the lure of the streets becomes a stronger force, pulling him away from his seemingly meaningless academics and toward the glamour of life in the Douglass Disciples, his housing project's premier gang. He knows he's risking his life, but DeShawn sees no other hope for supporting his pregnant girlfriend and growing family without the fast money life as a Disciple can provide. But when he finds himself entangled in a series of political struggles and murderous schemes within his own crew, the wisdom of his choice becomes less clear, and the danger of imminent death or life in prison looms closer than ever. Strasser's didactic purpose for this novel couldn't be more obvious; the events that it chronicles are unremittingly grim to the point of unbelievability, and characters sometimes seem to exist only to demonstrate the miscellaneous horrors of housing-project life. Tight plotting and a crisp style will satisfy readers looking for nonstop action and plenty of urban drama. However, for a more subtle take on inner-city poverty from a teen's perspective that shows more depth and compassion, try Coe Booth's *Tyrell* (Scholastic, 2006).—Meredith Robbins, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School, New York City

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

Title: *Thirteen reasons Why* Author: Jay Asher

Title: *Boot Camp* Author: Todd Strasser

Title: *Hate List* Author: Jennifer Brown

Title: *Snitch* Author: Allison van Diepen

Title: *Can't Get There from Here* Author: Todd Strasser

Title: *Street Pharm* Author: Allison van Diepen

Document any potentially controversial content:

Throughout the book, Strasser uses gang related vocabulary and topics: gangbanger (meaning an gang member), cocktailed, baby's momma, guns - shooting and killing, getting jumped in, drugs such as: marijuana (dope, bud), crack, prostitution, teenage sex and pregnancy, gangstas, junkie-hooker, hook up, skank, thugs, loose women, and some cussing.

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): Ages 12 and up

Date Submitted to Department Chair: 5/29/2012

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