

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Weaver/Holibaugh	School:	Hyatts Middle School
Book Title:	Letters from Rifka	Genre:	Historical Fiction
Author:	Karen Hesse	Pages:	143
Publisher:	Puffin	Copyright:	1992

*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 letters to her cousin, a young Jewish girl chronicles her family's flight from Russia in 1919 and her own experiences when she must be left in Belgium for a while when the others immigrate to America.

**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 7

10. Determine and analyze the conflict in the text based on the sequence of events leading up to the climax and the resolution.

Reading Applications 8

12. Compare and contrast literary elements in similar literary works.

**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

Booklist (Vol. 88, No. 21 (July 1992))

Gr. 5-8. In letters to her cousin back "home" in Russia, 12-year-old Rifka tells of her journey to America in 1919, from the dangerous escape over the border to the journey through Europe and across the sea to the new country. Rifka gets ringworm and has to stay behind in Belgium for nearly a year while her parents and brothers go on to America. The best part of the book is about her time on Ellis Island, in limbo, waiting to see if the authorities will declare her infection-free. The letters format is occasionally contrived, and few kids will care for the inflated poetry that heads each letter, though it is moving to discover that she's writing everything in the margins of her beloved book of Pushkin. The letters do allow her to bring in memories of what she has left behind, including the fierce racist persecution. Based on the experience of Hesse's great-aunt, the narrative flashes occasionally with lively Yiddish idiom ("You are bored?" her mother says to Rifka, "So I'll hire you a band"). What especially raises it above docu-novel is the emerging sense of Rifka's personality. Bald from the ringworm, poor and needy, she proves she's no greenhorn; she has a gift for languages, she's brave and clever, and if she talks too much, so be it.

### Review #2

School Library Journal (August 1992)

Gr 4-8-- In 1919, Rifka's family flees from the persecution inflicted upon them as Jews in Russia for what they hope will be a better life in America. However, the steamship company refuses to allow 12-year-old Rifka passage because she has ringworm. After more than six months of treatment in Antwerp, she is finally cured and nearly reunited with her family, only to be detained at Ellis Island. Officials there feel she could become a burden to society because her disease has left her bald; without hair she is considered less attractive and therefore may never get married. Ultimately, Rifka and a young peasant boy, who is also in danger of being refused entry, help each other gain admittance to the country of their dreams. The story is told through her letters to her Russian cousin and squeezed onto the blank pages of a book of Aleksandr Pushkin's poetry; appropriate quotes from the poet precede and presage the events described in the letters, which detail the embarrassment of a medical examination by a drunken and prying doctor; battles with typhus, hunger and loneliness; and a disastrous ocean crossing. Countering the misery and uncertainty are the main character's courage, determination, and sense of hope as well as the happy ending. Based largely on the memories of the author's great-aunt, this historical novel has a plot, characters, and style that will make it an often-requested choice from young readers. A vivid, memorable, and involving reading experience, in spite of the somewhat morose and bleak cover.-

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

Title: **A Time of Angels**

Author: **Karen Hesse**

Title: **Lupita Manana**

Author: **Patricia Beatty**

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

**Document any potentially controversial content:**  
immigration

**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):** 12+

**Date Submitted to Department Chair:** 12/10/07

**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