

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Byard/DeGiorgio	School:	Hyatts Middle School
Book Title:	Nightjohn	Genre:	historical fiction
Author:	Gary Paulsen	Pages:	112
Publisher:	Laurel Leaf	Copyright:	1995

*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.)

Sarny, a female slave at the Waller plantation, first sees Nightjohn when he is brought there with a rope around his neck, his body covered in scars.

He had escaped north to freedom, but he came back--came back to teach reading. Knowing that the penalty for reading is dismemberment Nightjohn still returned to slavery to teach others how to read. And twelve-year-old Sarny is willing to take the risk to learn.

Set in the 1850s, Gary Paulsen's groundbreaking new novel is unlike anything else the award-winning author has written. It is a meticulously researched, historically accurate, and artistically crafted portrayal of a grim time in our nation's past, brought to light through the personal history of two unforgettable characters.

**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 Reading Literature

**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

Amazon.com Review

Imagine being beaten for learning to read, shackled and whipped for learning a few letters of the alphabet. Now, imagine a man brave enough to risk torture in order to teach others how to read; his name is Nightjohn, and he sneaks into the slave camps at night to teach other slaves how to read and write. Celebrated author Gary Paulsen writes a searing meditation on why the ability to read and

write is radical, empowering , and so necessary to our freedom. These skills threaten our oppressors because they allow us to communicate--to learn the real status of our slavery and to seek liberation. In this tightly written, painful, joyous little novel is a key that may unlock the power of reading for even the most reluctant teens.

Review #2

From Publishers Weekly

Among the most powerful of Paulsen's works ( Hatchet ; The Winter Room ; Dogsong ), this impeccably researched novel sheds light on cruel truths in American history as it traces the experiences of a 12-year-old slave girl in the 1850s. Narrator Sarny exposes the abuse (routine beatings, bondage, dog attacks, forced "breeding") suffered by her people on the Waller plantation. The punishment for learning to read and write, she knows, is a bloody one, but when new slave Nightjohn offers to teach her the alphabet, Sarny readily agrees. Her decision causes pain for others as well as for herself, yet, inspired by the bravery of Nightjohn, who has given up a chance for freedom in order to educate slaves, Sarny continues her studies. Convincingly written in dialect, this graphic depiction of slavery evokes shame for this country's forefathers and sorrow for the victims of their inhumanity. Ages 12-up.

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

Title: War comes to Willy Freeman

Author: James Lincloln Collier

Title: Chains

Author: Laura Halse Anderson

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

**Document any potentially controversial content:**

Use of the word hell with respect to heaven and hell  
Cursing using references to God  
brutality and beatings  
reference to slaves being "bred"  
reference to slaves being "naked" or "stripped"

**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):** 4.2

**Date Submitted to Department Chair:**

**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