

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Weaver / Holibaugh	School:	Hyatts
Book Title:	Penny From Heaven	Genre:	Realistic fiction
Author:	Jennifer L. Holm	Pages:	265
Publisher:	Random House	Copyright:	2006

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.)

It's 1953 and 11-year-old Penny dreams of a summer of butter pecan ice cream, swimming, and baseball. But nothing's that easy in Penny's family. For starters, she can't go swimming because her mother's afraid she'll catch polio at the pool. To make matters worse, her favorite uncle is living in a car. Her Nonny cries every time her father's name is mentioned. And the two sides of her family aren't speaking to each other!

Inspired by Newbery Honor winner Jennifer Holm's own Italian American family, Penny from Heaven is a shining story about the everyday and the extraordinary, about a time in America's history, not all that long ago, when being Italian meant that you were the enemy. But most of all, it's a story about families—about the things that tear them apart and bring them together. And Holm tells it with all the richness and the layers, the love and the laughter of a Sunday dinner at Nonny's. So pull up a chair and enjoy the feast! Buon appetito!

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 Process: To develop and apply strategies to comprehend and interpret text.

Reading Applications: To gain and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the human story by reading a variety of texts.

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 School Library Journal

Grade 5-7—Penny Falucci, 11, lives with her widowed mother and maternal grandparents, but her father's large, Italian family is tremendously important to her, too. It frustrates her that no one talks about his death, but as the summer of 1953 progresses, several events occur. First, her mother begins dating the milkman, and, when Penny's arm goes through the wringer on the washing machine, things come to a head. Finally, the secrets behind her father's death come out. Aunt Gina tells her about a minor incident that had horrifying consequences for him because of the restrictions placed on Italian Americans during World War II. Penny and her world are clearly drawn and eminently believable, made up of seamlessly interwoven details from everyday life. The period is

lovingly re-created, from the fear of catching polio to Penny's use of the word swell. An author's note with photos is included. Recommend this novel to readers who enjoyed Ann M. Martin's *A Corner of the Universe* (Scholastic, 2002) for another intricate picture of a girl with knotty ties to an imperfect family in a not-too-distant past.—Faith Brautigam, Gail Borden Public Library, Elgin, IL
Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review #2

From Booklist

Gr. 5-8. Penny lives with her "plain old American" mother and grandparents, but she has an open invitation to visit her deceased father's Italian family, where the delicious aromas are as inviting as the boisterous relatives who welcome her. Against the backdrop of these contrasting 1950s households, the author of Newbery Honor Book *Our Only May Amelia* (1999) charts the summer of Penny's twelfth birthday, marked by hapless episodes as well as serious tensions arising from the estranged families' refusal to discuss her father's death. Penny is a low-key character, often taking a backseat role in escapades with high-spirited cousin Frankie. However, Holm impressively wraps pathos with comedy in this coming-of-age story, populated by a cast of vivid characters (a burping, farting grandpa; an eccentric uncle who lives in his car—"not exactly normal for people in New Jersey"). Concluding with a photo-illustrated endnote explaining Holm's inspirations in family history, this languidly paced novel will appeal most to readers who appreciate gentle, episodic tales with a nostalgic flavor. Hand selling may be necessary to overcome the staid jacket illustration.

Jennifer Mattson

Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

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

Title: **Corner of the Universe**

Author: **Ann Martin**

Title: **Higher Power of Lucky**

Author: **Susan Patron**

Title: **Esperanza Rising**

Author: **Pam Munoz Ryan**

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): ages 9 - 12

Date Submitted to Department Chair: 11/08/07

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