

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Ross/Schubert	School:	OSMS
Book Title:	Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina	Genre:	Literary Nonfiction/Memoir
Author:	Micahaela DePrince and Elaine DePrince	Pages:	256
Publisher:	Random House Children's Books	Copyright:	2016

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.)

Michaela DePrince was known as girl Number 27 at the orphanage, where she was abandoned at a young age and tormented as a “devil child” for a skin condition that makes her skin appear spotted. But it was at the orphanage that Michaela would find a picture of a beautiful ballerina en pointe that would help change the course of her life.

At the age of four, Michaela was adopted by an American family, who encouraged her love of dancing and enrolled her in classes. She went on to study at the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at the American Ballet Theatre and is now the youngest principal dancer with the Dance Theatre of Harlem. She has appeared in the ballet documentary First Position, as well as on Dancing with the Stars, Good Morning America, and Nightline. -Barnes and Noble Website

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)

Team 801 at SMS plans to use this novel as a choice text for a literary nonfiction unit. Each of the novels selected for this unit showcase real "characters" who overcome obstacles on the way to creating their own legacies. The following CCSS will be addressed during our reading:

RI 8.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI 8.2: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI 8.3: Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

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

Publishers Weekly

★ 08/11/2014

A compelling narrative of the journey of an African orphan whose hard work, emotional strength, and supportive adoptive American parents helped her build a life as a professional dancer, 19-year-old Michaela DePrince's memoir, coauthored by her mother, holds many stories. Chapters on Michaela's early childhood in Africa present a powerful portrait of family love and affection set against horrific images of the violence enacted by rebels in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Later chapters offer a close look at the ups and downs of adapting to life in America for the four African girls Elaine DePrince and her husband ultimately adopted. The book's strong thread is Michaela's lifelong passion for ballet and her candid depiction of the physical and emotional struggles of becoming a black classical ballerina. There is plenty of ballet detail for dance lovers to revel in, and the authors achieve a believable, distinctive teenage voice with a nice touch of lyrical description: "I... learned that pain, like the green of the jungle leaves, comes in many shades." Photos not seen by PW. Ages 12–up. Agent: Adriana Dominguez, Full Circle Literary. (Oct.)

Review #2

School Library Journal

11/01/2014

Gr 6 Up—In this moving memoir, DePrince, who in 1995 was born in war-torn Sierra Leone but went on to become an acclaimed professional ballerina, tells her story. Her struggles started early: it was discovered that she had vitiligo, a medical condition that results in blotchy, irregular patches of skin, and her biological parents both died when she was only three. DePrince was sold to an orphanage, where she was starved and abused and where she witnessed the brutal murder of her pregnant teacher, a memory that would forever haunt her. After the orphanage was bombed, DePrince and the other orphans fled to a refugee camp. When she was four years old, she and her best friend, Mia, were adopted by the same family and taken to live in the United States. Just before leaving, DePrince found a magazine photograph of a ballerina, and her dream of becoming a dancer was born. Her supportive family did everything they could to help her attain her goal, but the girl still encountered challenges, including prejudice from those who believed African American dancers to be less suited for the craft ("Black girls just shouldn't be dancing ballet. They're too athletic. They should leave the classical ballet to white girls."). However, she persevered and succeeded, becoming the youngest principal dancer for the Dance Theatre of Harlem and joining the Dutch National Ballet. Though the text is accessible and engaging, there are events that are glossed over or not fully fleshed out, such as details of her adopted sister's medical problems. Overall, though, DePrince is an inspiring narrator, wise beyond her years. An uplifting story about overcoming the odds.—Stephanie Farnlacher, Trace Crossings Elementary School, Hoover, AL

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

Title: **Unbroken (Young Adult Adaptation)** Author: **Laura Hillenbrand**

Title: **The Diary of a Young Girl** Author: **Anne Frank**

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

Parents need to know that *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina*, by Michaela DePrince with her mother, Elaine DePrince, is a frank and honest look at Michaela's life as an orphan in Sierra Leone, including the malnutrition, abuses, and atrocities she witnessed and suffered. There are descriptions of death, including the murder of a pregnant teacher and her newborn. There's also discussion of Michaela's life in America, including her adjustment as an international adoptee, the death of her brother from AIDS, and her experience of racism in the dance world. Parents should be prepared to discuss child abuse, war horrors, interracial families, and cultural views of ballet. -This comes from Common Sense Media

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): 940 Lexile Level

Date Submitted to Department Chair: 02/2017

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