

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	OLHS ENGLISH	School:	OLHS
Book Title:	The Road	Genre:	Fiction novel
Author:	Cormac McCarthy	Pages:	287
Publisher:	Vintage	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.)

The searing, postapocalyptic novel destined to become Cormac McCarthy's masterpiece.

A father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. It is cold enough to crack stones, and when the snow falls it is gray. The sky is dark. Their destination is the coast, although they don't know what, if anything, awaits them there. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food—and each other.

The Road is the profoundly moving story of a journey. It boldly imagines a future in which no hope remains, but in which the father and his son, "each the other's world entire," are sustained by love. Awesome in the totality of its vision, it is an unflinching meditation on the worst and the best that we are capable of: ultimate destructiveness, desperate tenacity, and the tenderness that keeps two people alive in the face of total devastation.

- Summary from [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)

**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)

We hope to use this Pulitzer prize winning novel to assess students' abilities to analyze the theme of a literary work, and to study how an author uses elements of written style (language choices), characterization, plot structure, and other literary devices to develop purpose. The writing in this novel is rich with description and McCarthy's fragmented style. Since this is a summer title, we also want to assess students' abilities to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate a work of literature independently (the contemporary nature of the book and its high interest story works well for a book students will read outside of a classroom environment).

**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 Booklist

A man and a boy, father and son, "each the other's world entire," walk a road in "the ashes of the late world." In this stunning departure from his previous work, McCarthy (*No Country for Old Men*, 2005) envisions a postapocalyptic scenario. Cities have been destroyed, plants and animals have died, and few humans survive. The sun is hidden by ash, and it is winter. With every scrap of food looted, many of the living have turned to cannibalism. The man and the boy plod toward the sea. The man remembers the world before; as his memories die, so, too dies that world. The boy was born after everything changed. The man, dying, has a fierce paternal love and will to survive--yet he saves his last two bullets for himself and his son. Although the holocaust is never explained, this is the kind of grim warning that leads to nightmares. Its spare, precise language is rich with other explorations, too: hope in the face of hopelessness, the ephemeral nature of our existence, the vanishing worlds we all carry within us. McCarthy evokes Beckett, using repetition and negation to crushing effect, showing us by their absence the things we will miss. Hypnotic and haunting, relentlessly dark, this is a novel to read in late-night solitude. Though the focus never leaves the two travelers, they carry our humanity, and we can't help but feel the world hangs in the balance of their hopeless quest. A masterpiece. Keir Graff Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

## Review #2

From The New York Times Review of Books:

By JANET MASLIN

Published: September 25, 2006

In "The Road" a boy and his father lurch across the cold, wretched, wet, corpse-strewn, ashen landscape of a post-apocalyptic world. The imagery is brutal even by Cormac McCarthy's high standards for despair. This parable is also trenchant and terrifying, written with stripped-down urgency and fueled by the force of a universal nightmare. "The Road" would be pure misery if not for its stunning, savage beauty

This is an exquisitely bleak incantation — pure poetic brimstone. Mr. McCarthy has summoned his fiercest visions to invoke the devastation. He gives voice to the unspeakable in a terse cautionary tale that is too potent to be numbing, despite the stupefying ravages it describes. Mr. McCarthy brings an almost biblical fury as he bears witness to sights man was never meant to see.

"There is no prophet in the earth's long chronicle who is not honored here today," the father says, trying to make his son understand why they inhabit a gray moonscape. "Whatever form you spoke of you were right." Thus "The Road" keeps pace with the most enterprising doomsayers as death and desperation manifest themselves on every page. And in a perverse miracle it yields one last calamity when it seems that things cannot possibly get worse.

Yet as the boy and man wander, encountering remnants of the lost world and providing the reader with more and more clues about what destroyed it, this narrative is also illuminated by extraordinary tenderness. "He knew only that the child was his warrant," it says of the father and his mission. "He said: if he is not the word of God God never spoke."

The father's loving efforts to shepherd his son are made that much more wrenching by the unavailability of food, shelter, safety, companionship or hope in most places where they scavenge to subsist.

Keeping memory alive is difficult, since the past grows increasingly remote. It is as if these lonely characters are experiencing "the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world." The past has become like a place inhabited by the newly blind, all of it slowly slipping away. As for looking toward the future, "there is no later," the book says starkly. "This is later."

The ruined setting of "The Road" is strewn with terrible, revealing artifacts. There are old newspapers. ("The curious news. The quaint concerns.") There is one lone bottle of Coca-Cola, still absurdly fizzy when all else is dust. There are charred corpses frozen in their final postures, like the

long-dead man who sits on a porch like “a straw man set out to announce some holiday.” Sometimes these prompt the father to recall “a dull rose glow in the windowglass” at 1:17 in the morning, the moment when the clocks stopped forever.

“The Road” is not concerned with explaining what caused this cataclysm. It is more abstract than that. Instead it becomes a relentless cautionary tale with “Lord of the Flies”-style symbolic impact, marked by a dark fascination with the primal laws of survival. Much of its impact comes from the absolute lawlessness of its backdrop as it undermines the father’s only remaining certitude: that he must keep his boy alive no matter what danger befalls them.

As they move down the metaphorical road of the title, father and son encounter all manner of perils. The weather is bitter, the landscape colorless, the threat of starvation imminent. There is also the occasional interloper or ominous relic, since the road is not entirely abandoned.

The sight of a scorched, shuffling man prompts the boy to ask what is wrong with him; the father simply replies that the man has been struck by lightning. Spear-carrying marchers on the road offer other hints about recent history. Groups of people are stowed away in hidden places as if they were other people’s food supply. In a book filled with virtual zombies and fixated on the living dead, it turns out that they are.

Since the cataclysm has presumably incinerated all dictionaries, Mr. McCarthy’s affinity for words like rachitic and crozzled has as much visceral, atmospheric power as precise meaning. His use of language is as exultant as his imaginings are hellish, a hint that “The Road” will ultimately be more radiant than it is punishing. Somehow Mr. McCarthy is able to hold firm to his pessimism while allowing the reader to see beyond it. This is art that both frightens and inspires.

Although “The Road” is entirely un sentimental, it gives father and son a memory to keep them moving, even if it is the memory of how and why the boy’s mother chose to die. She was pregnant when the world exploded, and the boy was born a few days after she and the man “watched distant cities burn.”

Ultimately she gave up and took a bullet: “She was gone and the coldness of it was her final gift.” In a book whose events are isolated and carefully chosen, the appearance of a flare gun late in the story is filled with echoes of her final decision.

The mother’s suicide is one more reason for astonishment at Mr. McCarthy’s final gesture here: an embrace of faith in the face of no hope whatsoever. Coming as it does after such intense moments of despondency, this faith is even more of a leap than it might be in a more forgiving story. It adds immeasurably to the staying power of a book that is simple yet mysterious, simultaneously cryptic and crystal clear.

“The Road” offers nothing in the way of escape or comfort. But its fearless wisdom is more indelible than reassurance could ever be.

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

Title: **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

Author: **Mark Twain**

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

### **Document any potentially controversial content:**

There are a few scenes in the book that could be seen as controversial due to their shocking or disturbing nature. When the father shoots the man who tries to kidnap his son, McCarthy describes the man's brains splattering. Cannibalism is mentioned, both indirectly and directly, in the novel. Most of the mentions are indirect, but there are a few graphic and disturbing scenes. One of which

has the father and son open a door to a basement to see a group of slaves, whose limbs are being harvested slowly for food, groaning and in terrible pain. Another scene has the father and son encounter a dead infant roasting on a spit. Neither of these scenes are described in graphic detail; they are mentioned, and the narrative moves on. The purpose of these scenes is draw a definite line between the "good guys" and "bad guys" mentioned in the novel, to illustrate the harrowing journey the man and son must endure, and to develop the theme of the loss of humanity in the novel. These scenes only serve to highlight the morals that the man and his son strive to cling to as they make their journey through the dying world.

**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):**

**Date Submitted to Department Chair:** 6/19/2009

**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