

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Alisha Sheely    Grade: 6    School: Orange Middle School

Book Title: The Watson's Go to Birmingham, 1963    Genre: Realistic Fiction/Historical Fiction

Author: Christopher Paul Curtis    Pages: 210

Publisher: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books    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.)

A wonderful middle-grade novel narrated by Kenny, 9, about his middle-class black family, the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan. When Kenny's 13-year-old brother, Byron, gets to be too much trouble, they head South to Birmingham to visit Grandma, the one person who can shape him up

**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

Comprehension Strategies

5. Summarize the information in texts, recognizing important ideas and supporting details as well as noting gaps or contradictions. 7RPB

6. Critically compare across texts noting author's style as well as literal and implied contents of texts. 7RPB

7. Predict or hypothesize as appropriate from information in the text, supporting with specific references to a literary work. 7RPB

Self-monitor

8. Apply self-monitoring strategies to clarify confusion about text and to monitor comprehension. 7RPD

**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

Kenny's family is known in Flint, Michigan, as the Weird Watsons, for lots of good reasons. Younger sister Joetta has been led to believe she has to be overdressed in the winter because Southern folks (their mother is from Alabama) freeze solid and have to be picked up by the city garbage trucks. Kenny, the narrator, does well in school and tries to meet his hard-working parents' expectations. After a string of misdeeds, Mr. and Mrs. Watson decide that tough guy, older brother Byron must be removed from the bad influences of the city and his gang. They feel that his maternal grandmother and a different way of life in Birmingham might make him appreciate what he has.

Since the story is set in 1963, the family must make careful preparations for their trip, for they cannot count on food or housing being available on the road once they cross into the South. The slow, sultry pace of life has a beneficial effect on all of the children until the fateful day when a local church is bombed, and Kenny runs to look for his sister. Written in a full-throated, hearty voice, this is a perfectly described piece of past imperfect. Curtis's ability to switch from fun and funky to pinpoint-accurate psychological imagery works unusually well. Although the horrific Birmingham Sunday throws Kenny into temporary withdrawal, this story is really about the strength of family love and endurance. Ribald humor, sly sibling digs, and a totally believable child's view of the world will make this book an instant hit.

From School Library Journal

Cindy Darling Codell, Clark Middle School, Winchester, KY

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### Review #2

Curtis introduces the reader to ten-year-old Kenny and his family, the Watsons - Momma, Dad, Joetta, Kenny, and Byron - in his first, but unforgettable, novel. We meet the Watsons one super-cold Saturday in their home in Flint, Michigan. We immediately sense the family closeness through the comedic dialogue of the characters. However, we soon travel with the family from their somewhat calm life in the North to Birmingham, Alabama, where the Civil Rights movement was just beginning. Curtis introduces us to the South of the 1960s-a place where African Americans couldn't eat in restaurants, use public restrooms, or be seen on the streets after dark. The trip with Kenny and his family is realistic: I felt I was in the car with them. I saw the water fountains with the NO BLACKS signs. I saw the busses where African Americans stood near the rear. And I heard my African-American friends admit that they were afraid to travel in certain areas of our country. Traveling with the Watsons to Birmingham was like looking at a picture from the past. I trust that picture will keep changing for the better. I feel re-awakened. Thank you, Christopher Paul Curtis.

The ALAN Review

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

Title: Number the Stars    Author: Lois Lowry

Title: Esperanza Rising    Author: Pam Munoz Ryan

Title:                    Author:

Title:                    Author:

Title:                    Author:

Title:                    Author:

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

The Watsons are a black family during the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. The family lives in Michigan so much of the violence that is going on in the country is much further south. The book deals with racial barriers that the family ends up facing together while visiting the deep south during the infamous church bombings of 1963.

### **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: 2/20/07**