



OLENTANGY SCHOOLS LITERATURE SELECTION REVIEW FORM

LOCATION

Building(s): Shanahan

Classes/Grade Level(s): ELA 6-8

ABOUT THE BOOK

Selection Title/Author: Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus by Dusti Bowling

Genre: Realistic Fiction; Mystery

Lexile Reading Level: 700L

Total number of pages: 288

Book Summary (abbreviated, bulleted list or link to a book summary)

After Aven's family unexpectedly moves to run an old west themed amusement park, she becomes less confident when new classmates aren't used to her physical differences (she was born without arms) until she works with her new friends to solve a mystery.

Potentially Objectionable Content (list all categories and at least one example, referenced with a page or chapter number)

The premise of the book is Aven's birth differences, how others react to them, and she feels about herself. References to disabilities and physical differences occur throughout the novel.

Various instances of unkindness are described such as strarring, laughing, name calling, and asking rude questions such as on page 42.

Aven lives with her adoptive parents and they describe adopting her on page 109. It is revealed on pages 232-233 that Aven's birth mom died when she was a newborn and her birth father is unknown.

One of Aven's friends has Tourette's. At a support group, other children with Tourette's say odd phrases like "chicken nipple" (pg. 128). At one point, a character remarks that a hill looks like a "boob".

The central mystery of the book is about the owners of the amusement park that no one has seen for years, and Aven incorrectly imagines they may have been murdered (this is not the case). See pg. 108 for example.

There is a bar at the amusement park that the kids sometimes get soft drinks from. (pg. 217)



Book Reviews (2-3 links) Note: teacher is not responsible for broken links

From Publisher's Weekly: Thirteen-year-old Aven Green, the heroine of Bowling's sensitive and funny novel, was born without arms due to a rare genetic condition. When her adoptive parents take jobs at an Arizona theme park, Aven leaves behind her comfortable social life, starting over with new peers and teachers to stare at her. After days of self-consciously eating her lunches in a bathroom stall at school (she eats with her feet), Aven opens up to two students: Connor, who has Tourette's syndrome, and Zion, who is teased for being overweight. Bowling, the author of three self-published YA novels, lets readers see Aven as a full, complex teenager—even while those around her have trouble doing so—and gives her a sharp sense of humor, including a penchant for inventing gruesome stories about how she lost her arms. Bowling's novel demonstrates how negotiating others' discomfort can be one of the most challenging aspects of having a physical difference and how friendship can mitigate that discomfort. A major revelation that leads to a somewhat-too-tidy ending is a minor blemish in an otherwise openhearted, empathic book.

From Kirkus: Born without arms, "problem-solving ninja" Aven Green can do almost anything with her feet instead—even solve a mystery. "Now that I'm thirteen years old, I don't need much help with anything. True story." Aven's adoptive parents have always encouraged her independence. She's never felt self-conscious among her friends in Kansas, playing soccer and guitar and mischievously spinning wild yarns about losing her arms. But when her father suddenly gets a job managing Stagecoach Pass, a run-down theme park in Arizona, tales of alligator wrestling can't stop her new classmates' gawking. Making friends with Connor, a self-conscious white boy with Tourette's syndrome, and Zion, a shy, overweight, black boy, allows her to blend in between them. Contrasted with the boys' shyness, Aven's tough love and occasional insensitivity provide a glimpse of how—and why—attitudes toward disability can vary. While investigating the park's suspiciously absent owner, the kids discover clues with eerie ties to Aven. The mystery's twist ending is somewhat fairy-tale-esque, but Connor's Tourette's support-group meetings and Aven's witty, increasingly honest discussions of the pros and cons of "lack of armage" give the book excellent educational potential. Though much of this earnest effort reads like an after-school special, its portrayal of characters with rarely depicted disabilities is informative, funny, and supportive.

ABOUT THE CLASS

Rationale for the Literature Selection (in addition to standards): (To be completed by the teacher or team)

Students will focus on the various elements of literature while reading this book and practice how we analyze them at the middle school level. Particular attention will be focused on character, plot, and how the plot and characters combine to create a theme.

The Ohio Department of Education ELA Standards (list priority standards *only and* abbreviations of the main ideas of the priority standards) [Link to Ohio's ELA Standards](#)

1. RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. RL.6.2 Analyze literary text development.



ALTERNATIVE TEXTS

What alternative texts would allow students to meet the same objectives? (Title/author)

1. Out of My Mind by Sharon Draper
2. Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick

SIGNATURES (embedded jpegs of authentic signatures are fine OR download/print form and obtain traditional signatures)

Teacher: Valerie Biggum Date: 8/22/22
Department Chair: Valerie Biggum Date: 8/22/22
Building Principal: [Signature] Date: 8/22/22
District Curriculum Administrator: [Signature] Date: 8/22/22