# OLENTANGY SCHOOLS LITERATURE SELECTION REVIEW FORM

## LOCATION

**Building(s):** OSMS
**Classes/Grade Level(s):** 6th Grade

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Selection Title/Author:** Girl of the Southern Sea by Michelle Kadarusman
**Genre:** Realistic Fiction
**Lexile Reading Level: 660**
**Total number of pages:** 224

**Book Summary**
From the time she was a little girl, Nia has dreamed up adventures about the Javanese mythical princess, Dewi Kadita. Now fourteen, Nia would love nothing more than to continue her education and become a writer. But high school costs too much. Her father sells banana fritters at the train station, but many of his earnings go toward his drinking habit. Too often Nia is left alone to take over the food cart as well as care for her brother and their home in the Jakarta slums.

But Nia is determined to find a way to earn her school fees. After she survives a minibus accident unharmed and the locals say she is blessed with 'good luck magic,' Nia exploits the notion for all its worth by charging double for her fried bananas. Selling superstitions can be dangerous, and when the tide turns it becomes clear that Nia's future is being mapped without her consent.

If Nia is to write a new story for herself, she must overcome more obstacles than she could ever conceive of for her mythical princess, and summon courage she isn't sure she has.

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

**Implicit and explicit sexual content and sexual innuendo**

- An older woman warns the main character that she can tell by a glance if a young girl "falls from grace". (pg 29)
- The main character's friend is going to the train station in fancy clothes to make money by taking pictures with tourists and the main character warns her against it, saying, "what if a tourist wants more than a photo with you?" (pg 69)

**Violence and/or abuse**

- The main character is writing a story in which a monkey and a girl get attacked for stealing. They are threatened with a machete when the monkey scratches the man's face. (pg 78)
- There is an accident between two vehicles and the driver dies; others bloodied and led away to ambulances (pg 105)
- The main character has a nightmare about the accident and she sees people with blood on their faces (pg

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| | 135)<br>• After being accused of cheating people out of money, an angry mob attacks the main character, but the woman who sweeps the cemetery comes and saves her. (pg 158)<br>• The woman from the cemetery tells the main character that she too was attacked as a young girl and shows how they took her ear as a trophy. (pg 158)<br><br>**Alcohol, drugs, smoking**<br>• The main character finds out that her best friend has been making money by delivering drugs (marijuana) to tourists. (pg 145)<br>• The protagonist's father is an alcoholic (through entire novel) |

**Book Reviews (1-2 link(s))** *Note: teacher is not responsible for broken links*
From Kirkus Reviews:
A teenage girl living in the slums of Jakarta, Indonesia, finds the resolve to defy her unfortunate circumstances and achieve her dreams. Fourteen-year-old Nia desperately wants to continue her education and become a writer, but her family can't afford the school fees. Instead, she spends her days looking after her 5-year-old brother, Rudi, doing chores, and helping her alcoholic father sell banana fritters at the market. To escape their miserable existence, Nia tells Rudi stories about their late mother and writes stories inspired by her favorite folktale, "Queen of the Southern Sea." And just as she promised her late mother, Nia ensures that the protagonist in her stories, Dewi Kadita, always comes out on top. One day, Nia miraculously escapes from a minibus accident unscathed. Smooth operator Oskar witnesses the accident and embellishes her survival into "a miracle"; from then on, Nia's "good-luck magic" fritters sell like hot cakes. Against her good judgement, Nia starts charging double so she can save up for her school fees. But things backfire and tension mounts. In the end, Nia draws strength from her heroine, Dewi, and finds the courage to seize control of her own destiny. Punctuating Nia's thoughtful, present-tense narration with her stories about Dewi, Kadarusman effectively weaves a gentle tale of love and loss and illuminates the power of storytelling. A thought-provoking peek into a culture deserving of more attention in North America. (author's note) (Fiction. 9-14)

From School Library Journal:
Gr 6 Up—Nia lives in a slum in Jakarta, Indonesia, with her younger brother and her alcoholic father. Her mother died giving birth to her brother. Her father is irresponsible and leaves Nia to

take care of her brother, tend to their home, and help earn money for their family. There are fees for high school, and Nia's family doesn't have enough money for her to get a high school education and pursue her dream of becoming a writer. Still, she meets with a friend to review their textbooks and keep up their studies and Nia continues to write stories about Dewi Kadits, a character in Java's traditional folklore. She knows one of the three most important rules of living in the slum are to never disobey your father, but her father's behavior requires her to be independent and make serious decisions. A gripping, emotional realistic novel describing the grim realities of growing up in Indonesian poverty. A glossary of Indonesian words is included at the front of the book and a map provides the location of the story's setting. The author's note explains how the seeds of this story were planted long ago when Kadarusman observed poverty while traveling with her family to her father's hometown in West Java. VERDICT A riveting read featuring a determined and talented teenager.

## ABOUT THE CLASS

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

This book is being used in 6th grade ELA as part of a cross-content ELA and social studies project on the 5 themes of geography, culture, and modern countries in the Eastern Hemisphere. Students will read the novel, and then research the country featured in the novel in preparation for sharing what they've learned with the class. They will research the elements of the country's culture and then they will evaluate the presentation of that culture in the novel they read.

This book has been selected because of its setting and genre. First, it is set in a modern day country in the Eastern Hemisphere, and second, it is a realistic fiction novel that allows students to learn about a culture by reading a story set in that culture. In addition to the culture of the country, students will be asked to describe the 5 themes of geography in relation to that specific country, and to evaluate whether the book's author accurately and fully portrayed the culture.

**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

- RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL.6.2 Analyze literary text development. B. Incorporate a theme and story details into an objective summary of the text.
- RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

## ALTERNATIVE TEXTS

**What alternative texts would allow students to meet the same objectives?**

1. Middle School: Escape to Australia by James Patterson
2. Rickshaw Girl by Mitali Perkins

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

Teacher: [signature] Date: 8/28/25

Department Chair: Valerie Bigham Date: 8.28.25

Building Principal: [signature] Date: 8/29/25

District Curriculum Administrator: Steve Ford Date: 9/26/25