OLENTANGY SCHOOLS LITERATURE SELECTION REVIEW FORM

LOCATION

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

ABOUT THE BOOK

Selection Title/Author: The Kaya Girl by Mamle Wolo
Genre: Realistic Fiction
Lexile Reading Level: Grades 3-7 (lexile unavailable)
Total number of pages: 336

Book Summary
An extraordinary tale of two teenagers from vastly different walks of life, this page-turner transports readers to a bustling market in Ghana's capital city where one friendship transforms two lives.
Writing with effortlessly engaging prose, Wolo showcases the interweaving layers of Ghanaian culture to create a prismatic, multifaceted world in which two young girls, against all odds, are able to find each other. When Faiza, a Muslim migrant girl from northern Ghana, and Abena, a wealthy doctor's daughter from the south, meet by chance in Accra's largest market, where Faiza works as a porter or *kaya girl*, they strike up an unlikely and powerful friendship that transcends their social inequities and opens up new worlds to them both.

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

Profanity

- "Hell bent" pg 22
- "Hot as hell" pg 227 (describing the temperature outside)

Implicit and explicit sexual content and sexual innuendo

- Teen girls sometimes describe boys as "fine" or discuss having crushes on teenage male characters: pg 35, 38, 44.
- A few mentions of arranged marriages; one mention of a character's relative being married off to a rich man with three wives (pg 74). Another mention of a character who is arranged to be married but likes someone else (pg 75).

Book Reviews (1-2 link(s)) *Note: teacher is not responsible for broken links*
From Kirkus Reviews:
Two Ghanaian girls from different backgrounds form an unlikely bond. Fourteen-year-old Abena was born to rich parents. Her father is a doctor, and she has lived a sheltered life: Her family has a personal chef and she attends the American international school. When Abena goes to spend the summer holidays with her Auntie Lydia, who has a fabric shop in Accra's crowded and colorful Makola Market, she meets Faiza, also 14, who is a kayayoo, or porter girl.

Despite their stark difference in social class and initial inability to speak each other's languages, Abena and Faiza form a quick and solid bond. The girls learn about each other's lives, and both begin to see the world through new eyes. Through Abena's first-person narration, readers observe Faiza's journey as she dreams of academic success and works in pursuit of it despite the odds against her as a girl from a village in the rural north. Wolo's prose has an ease that draws readers in and keeps them engaged. Through the skillful descriptions of shared moments both momentous and trivial, they witness the blossoming of a beautiful connection between the two girls. Abena's voice reads as realistic for someone of her age, status, and experience—or lack thereof—as she grows in her understanding of societal prejudice, the ways it affects her friend's life, and the power of her own voice. A heartwarming and inspiring tale of a friendship that surpasses class differences and social stigma. (Fiction. 9-14)

From School Library Journal:
Gr 4-7–Plenty of kids can relate to being shipped off for the summer. Camps, trips to visit family, or even extra educational classes are common. Adena is no different from most kids that way, but her summer experience with Aunt Lydia certainly will be. Middle graders will enjoy being transported to the sights, sounds, smells, and flavors of the Makola Market in Accra, Ghana, which set the stage for Adena's summer. At first, her assignment seems to be a punishment, but it soon becomes an endearing story of forbidden friendship. Adena is a student at a private school for the children of wealthy Ghanaians, and Faiza is a kayayoo, a porter for shoppers in the Makola Market. An unlikely pair due to their very different lives, they become fast friends when Adena is sent to live with her aunt. The speed with which the girls overcome their language barrier is a tad unrealistic, but they share plenty of other connections: current fashion fads, music, and cute boys. A few of the phrases and names may present a bit of difficulty for unfamiliar readers, but the surprising twist in the latter half of the novel makes the effort all worthwhile. VERDICT Including subtle yet important history and geography lessons, Wolo's book gives readers an opportunity to become immersed in West African culture while realizing the lessons of growing up include universal experiences: prejudice, poverty, and self-determination.

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: _____ Date: 8/28/25

Department Chair: Valerie Bridgeman Date: 8.28.25

Building Principal: _____ Date: 8/29/25

District Curriculum Administrator: Elaine Ford Date: 9/24/25