OLENTANGY SCHOOLS LITERATURE SELECTION REVIEW FORM

LOCATION

Building(s): OSMS

Classes/Grade Level(s): 6th Grade

ABOUT THE BOOK

Selection Title/Author: Half a World Away by Cynthia Kadohata

Genre: realistic fiction

Lexile Reading Level: 670L

Total number of pages: 256

Book Summary	**Potentially Objectionable Content** (list all categories and at least one example, referenced with a page or chapter number)
Eleven-year-old Jaden is adopted, and he knows he's an "epic fail." That's why his family is traveling to Kazakhstan to adopt a new baby--to replace him, he's sure. And he gets it. He is incapable of stopping his stealing, hoarding, lighting fires, aggressive running, and obsession with electricity. He knows his parents love him, but he feels...nothing. When they get to Kazakhstan, it turns out the infant they've traveled for has already been adopted, and literally within minutes are faced with having to choose from six other babies. While his parents agonize, Jaden is more interested in the toddlers. One, a little guy named Dimash, spies Jaden and barrels over to him every time he sees him. Jaden finds himself increasingly intrigued by and worried about Dimash. Already three years old and barely able to speak, Dimash will soon age out of the orphanage, and then his life will be as hopeless as Jaden feels now. For the first time in his life, Jaden actually feels something that isn't pure blinding fury, and there's no way to control it, or its power.	**Romance/Dating** The main character mentions that a girl who had a crush on him had bought him a fancy night light. (Pg 28)

Book Reviews (1-2 link(s)) *Note: teacher is not responsible for broken links*

From Kirkus Reviews:

Despite flaws, a realistic—and much-needed—portrait of older-child adoption.

Four years ago, Jaden, 12, was adopted from Romania, but he still grieves for the birth mother

who abandoned him; accompanying his parents to Kazakhstan to adopt his new brother, Jaden's confused feelings intensify. Jaden doesn't remember his biological mother, and memories of the years between her abandonment and his adoption are vague but horrific. He's learned to use his passionate interest in electricity to calm himself. After years of therapy, he's stopped setting fires, but he continues to hoard food and to steal. He recognizes that his behaviors cause his parents pain and exhaustion. In Kazakhstan, everyone's expectations are upended. As his parents struggle to accept new adoption ground rules, Jaden befriends a toddler and the prickly driver assigned to his family, with whom he finds common ground. Kadohata excels at turning complicated realities into compelling middle-grade fiction, but this is difficult narrative terrain. Children traumatized by abandonment, abuse and neglect; well-intentioned but naïve affluent parents adopting children in impoverished countries where corruption is rife: These subjects challenge adult comprehension. No surprise then that distilling these matters into compact storytelling for young readers proves problematic. Much-needed exposition slows the pace, yet troubling questions remain: Jaden's parents don't question the ethics of an adoption that requires paying a facilitator $14,000 in crisp new $100 bills, even after things go wrong. Despite flaws, a realistic—and much-needed—portrait of older-child adoption. (Fiction. 10-14)

From Horn Book:
Twelve-year-old Jaden, adopted from Romania at age eight, travels from the U.S. to Kazakhstan with his parents, who have decided to adopt a second child. Sadly, Jaden believes he is defective and that his parents' disappointment with him is the reason they are adopting an infant. He suffers from attachment disorder and is keenly aware of their exhaustion and exasperation with him; several therapists have attempted to curb his hoarding, lying, and fire-setting, having success only with the last. Jaden knows that Penni and Steve (as he thinks of them) love him, but he doesn't feel much of anything for them except annoyance—for taking him away from Romania and his birth mother, who gave him up when he was four. As Jaden's parents struggle to bond with an emotionally unresponsive infant at the "baby house" in Kazakhstan, Jaden bonds with Dimash, a disabled toddler there. The novel makes it clear that Jaden's parents feel bad for Dimash and see Jaden's poignant relationship with him as a real breakthrough for their son, but their decision to adopt both "emotionless" baby and special-needs toddler is hard to swallow. (Don't they already have enough on their plate?) Nevertheless, readers will undoubtedly feel happy for Jaden, and this story about a deeply troubled adoptee and the equally troubling issues of international adoption is both compelling and emotionally involving.

ABOUT THE CLASS

Rationale for the Literature Selection (in addition to standards):

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: 9/3/25

Department Chair: Valerie Bingham Date: 9.2.25

Building Principal: _____ Date: 9.11.25

District Curriculum Administrator: _____ Date: 10-1-25