

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: E. Stringer and L. Calland
School: OOHS
Book Title: *Long Way Down*
Genre: Poetry

Author: Jason Reynolds
Pages: 305
Publisher: Atheneum, Simon & Schuster
Copyright: 2017

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 cannon. A strap.
A piece. A biscuit.
A burner. A heater.
A chopper. A gat.
A hammer
A tool
for RULE
Or, you can call it a gun.

That's what fifteen-year-old Will has shoved in the back waistband of his jeans. See, his brother Shawn was just murdered. And Will knows the rules. No crying. No snitching. *Revenge*. That's where Will's now heading, with that gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, the gun that was his brother's gun. He gets on the elevator, seventh floor, stoked. He knows who he's after. Or does he? As the elevator stops on the sixth floor, on comes Buck. Buck, Will finds out, is who gave Shawn the gun before Will took the gun. Buck tells Will to check that the gun is even loaded. And that's when Will sees that one bullet is missing. And the only one who could have fired Shawn's gun was Shawn. Huh. Will didn't know that Shawn had ever actually USED his gun. Bigger huh. BUCK IS DEAD. But Buck's in the elevator? Just as Will's trying to think this through, the door to the next floor opens. A teenage girl gets on, waves away the smoke from Dead Buck's cigarette. Will doesn't know her, but she knew him. Knew. When they were eight. And stray bullets had cut through the playground, and Will had tried to cover her, but she was hit anyway, and so what she wants to know, on that fifth floor elevator stop, is, what if Will, Will with the gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, MISSES.

And so it goes, the whole long way down, as the elevator stops on each floor, and at each stop someone connected to his brother gets on to give Will a piece to a bigger story than the one he thinks he knows. A story that might never know an END...if WILL gets *off* that elevator. Told in short, fierce staccato narrative verse, *Long Way Down* is a fast and furious, dazzlingly brilliant look at teenage gun violence, as could only be told by Jason Reynolds.

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s):

This novel will be used to explore how various styles of communication and writing can be used to address social issues and to further develop an author's argument. It will be partnered with other genres and styles of writing to "round-out" a quarter long study of rhetoric and communication in our world today. This specific text is unique in that it is a novel written entirely in prose poetry, offering students a new angle on writing approaches and encouraging discussion of strengths and weaknesses.

Discussion, debate and reflection are anchored in the text which serves as a springboard to explore the complex intersection of writing and social issues. Specific District and Common Core Standards include:

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2 | ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6 |
| ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 | ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 |
| ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2 | ● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3 |

Include two professional reviews of this title:

KIRKUS REVIEW

After 15-year-old Will sees his older brother, Shawn, gunned down on the streets, he sets out to do the expected: the rules dictate no crying, no snitching, and revenge.

Though the African-American teen has never held one, Will leaves his apartment with his brother's gun tucked in his waistband. As he travels down on the elevator, the door opens on certain floors, and Will is confronted with a different figure from his past, each a victim of gun violence, each important in his life. They also force Will to face the questions he has about his plan. As each "ghost" speaks, Will realizes how much of his own story has been unknown to him and how intricately woven they are. Told in free-verse poems, this is a raw, powerful, and emotional depiction of urban violence. The structure of the novel heightens the tension, as each stop of the elevator brings a new challenge until the narrative arrives at its taut, ambiguous ending. There is considerable symbolism, including the 15 bullets in the gun and the way the elevator rules parallel street rules. Reynolds masterfully weaves in textured glimpses of the supporting characters. Throughout, readers get a vivid picture of Will and the people in his life, all trying to cope with the circumstances of their environment while expressing the love, uncertainty, and hope that all humans share.

This astonishing book will generate much needed discussion.

Publisher's Weekly

Will, 15, is following his neighborhood's well-established rules—don't cry, don't snitch, but do get revenge "if someone you love/ gets killed"—when he leaves his apartment, intent on killing whoever murdered his older brother, Shawn. He's emboldened by the gun tucked into his waistband: "I put my hand behind my back/ felt the imprint/ of the piece, like/ another piece/ of me/ an extra vertebra,/ some more/ backbone." As Will makes his way to the ground floor of his building, the elevator stops to accept passengers, each an important figure from his past, all victims of gun violence. Are these ghosts? Or is it Will's subconscious at work, forcing him to think about what he intends to do and what it will accomplish? The story unfolds in the time it takes for the elevator to descend, and it ends with a two-word question that hits like a punch to the gut. Written entirely in spare verse, this is a tour de force from a writer who continues to demonstrate his skill as an exceptionally perceptive chronicler of what it means to be a black teen in America. Ages 12–up. *Agent: Elena Giovino, Pippin Properties. (Oct.)*

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

- *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson

Document any potentially controversial content:

- Infrequent use of strong language
- Mention of gun-related violence
- Reference to drug and alcohol use

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):

Grade 9 - 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable):

HL720L

Date Submitted for District Review: December 5, 2019

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults