

Approved for use in 8th grade

Summary of the Work:

"America," the girl repeated. "What will you do there?" "I was silent for a little time. "I will do everything there," I answered. Rifka knows nothing about America when she flees from Russia with her family in 1919. But she dreams that in the new country she will at last be safe from the Russian soldiers and their harsh treatment of the Jews. Throughout her journey, Rifka carries with her a cherished volume of poetry by Alexander Pushkin. In it, she records her observations and experiences in the form of letters to Tovah, the beloved cousin she has left behind. Strong-hearted and determined, Rifka must endure a great deal: humiliating examinations by doctors and soldiers, deadly typhus, separation from all she has ever known and loved, murderous storms at sea, detainment on Ellis Island--and is if this is not enough, the loss of her glorious golden hair. Based on a true story from the author's family, *Letters from Rifka* presents a real-life heroine with an uncommon courage and unsinkable spirit.

Rationale:

Most of us have recent family immigration stories. This is a great tale that most of us can relate with our families. It opens itself for discussing the Russian Revolution, immigration, disease, and the importance of family and perseverance. The format of the novel is in letters, which leads to a wonderful writing assignment. Also tied into the fabric is anti-Semitism, her ability to learn new languages, and her love for writing. Because of the context of time, this book leaves itself open to interdisciplinary work with social studies.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

From School Library Journal

Refused passage in 1919 because she has ringworm, a young Jewish girl from Russia battles supercilious officials and yards of red tape before she is finally reunited with her family in America. Historical fiction with a memorable heroine, a vivid sense of place, and a happily-ever-after ending.

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* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, 1992
- American Library Association Notable Children's Books, 1992
- IRA Children's Book Award, 1992
- Christopher Awards - Winner, 1992
- National Jewish Book Award - Nominee, 1992
- Sydney Taylor Award, 1992
- Horn Book Magazine Fanfare List, 1992
- School Library Journal Best Books of the Year, 1992
- Utah Children's Book Award, 1992

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 660L
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Graphic description of disease
Anti-Semitism

Connection to the Curriculum:

See Rationale

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

Film: *The Terminal*