

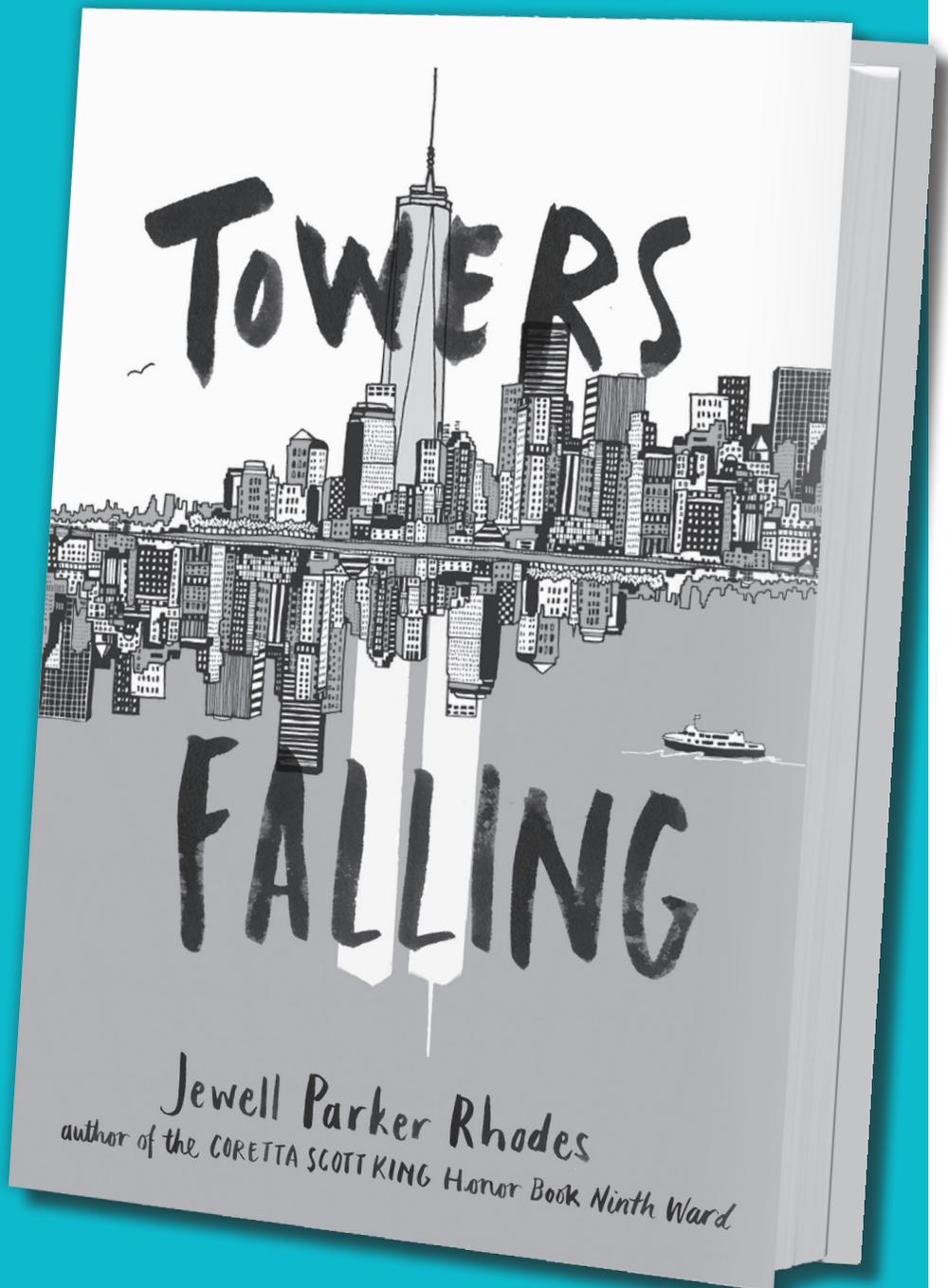
TOWERS FALLING

Curriculum connections

- ❖ History
- ❖ Social Studies
- ❖ Prejudice

Ages 8 – 12

BY
Jewell
Parker
Rhodes



TOWERS FALLING

September 11, 2001 is a day that our country will never forget. The events of 9/11 are hard to understand, and even harder to explain to children. In *Towers Falling*, author Jewell Parker Rhodes tells a powerful story that masterfully touches upon the heartache of that day, through the point of view of contemporary children who did not live through it directly. With this story, students will gain a deeper understanding about how that day changed our nation, how understanding and compassion can conquer fear, and how the events of 9/11 continue to touch so many lives. This guide contains resources and activities that have been developed to support a study of the novel, and has been divided into three areas: **Pre-Reading**, **During Reading**, and **After Reading**. These resources can be used independently or sequentially as a themed unit. Activities have been designed to meet the needs of all learners through socio-emotional connections, project-based tasks that encourage critical thinking, and interdisciplinary lessons.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

COMPARE & CONTRAST IMAGES

Using a document camera, display the first two photographs below of the New York City skyline or choose your own images. One photo is pre-9/11, and the other is post-9/11. Let students know that these photographs were taken from the same location, aimed at the same view. What similarities do they notice between the two photographs? What differences do they notice?

Create a KWL chart for students to share what they **Know** about the Twin Towers and what they **Want** to know. Leave the L column empty; as students read the novel, you can return to fill in what they have **Learned** during this unit. When students have finished reading the book, display the third image of the Tribute in Light. Discuss what the lights represent and how the lights connect to themes, characters, and the mood in *Towers Falling*.



ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Towers Falling will cause readers to reflect on their own emotions, biases, and perspectives. The Anticipation Guide (see pages 3 and 4) safely confronts students with these sensitive subjects in the form of belief statements. Prior to reading the text, with conscious guidance from the teacher, students can gauge their own feelings toward these statements by agreeing or disagreeing with them. This activity will provoke students to be truthful in understanding and sharing their own thoughts, ideas, opinions, misconceptions, and prejudices throughout the process of reading this novel. Following the story, students can revisit this anticipation guide and analyze their initial response to each belief statement. Perhaps there has been an observable change in one of their belief systems, or perhaps the anticipation guide has validated their own moral compass.

BUILDING BACKGROUND RESEARCH PROJECT

Appreciation for one's country and history is one of the important themes that plays out in this story. Students can gain a deeper understanding and build background knowledge about America by conducting their own American Research Project. After a whole-class brainstorming session, students will conduct research and create posters (see page 5) that represent what it means to be an American—a question that arises frequently in the novel. Following this project, students are encouraged to participate in a Poster Gallery Walk where they view the work of their peers and identify connections between projects (see page 6). These connections are the common threads that define our country, clarify what it means for them to be an American, and develop the background knowledge students need to successfully approach and understand this meaningful text.

TOWERS FALLING

TOWERS FALLING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Answer each question independently. Then, in a small group, discuss each statement.

PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN HOMELESS SHELTERS LOOK SHABBY.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR HOME IS THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE THERE WITH YOU.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS ARE NOT REAL AMERICANS.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

ONLY PEOPLE FROM NEW YORK WERE AFFECTED BY THE EVENTS OF 9/11.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

TOWERS FALLING

TOWERS FALLING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Answer each question independently. Then, in a small group, discuss each statement.

I KNOW WHAT A TERRORIST LOOKS LIKE.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

THE AMERICAN DREAM IS ABOUT COMING TO AMERICA AND MAKING LOTS OF MONEY.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

YOU CAN TELL A LOT ABOUT A PERSON BASED ON THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

AS AMERICANS, WE ARE ALL CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER.

Disagree

Agree

Explanation

TOWERS FALLING

BUILDING BACKGROUND RESEARCH PROJECT FOR STUDENTS

For this assignment, you will research and create a poster on a topic related to what it means to be an American.

You will also use your information to write a brief one-page summary of your topic.

WHERE DO I START?

Conduct research on your topic by using print resources and the Internet, focusing on what it means to be an American, American symbols, and our country's history.

Break your topic into three subtopics that you will research. This will help you focus your research. For example, if your topic is the Statue of Liberty, three subtopics could be: where is the statue located, what does it represent, and who built the Statue of Liberty.

THE CONNECTION

Now that you have researched your topic think about how your topic relates to our world today. For example, if your topic is the Declaration of Independence, how does that impact our lives today?

SOURCES AND SHARING

You must use a minimum of three resources. Make an effort to vary your research by using both texts and digital resources. Be sure to document all sources that you use.



IMPORTANT DETAILS

- ✓ Create a visually pleasing poster using your research.
- ✓ Make subheadings for each of your subtopics.
- ✓ You may need to type or hand or handwrite the information.
- ✓ Your poster must have a headline stating your topic.
- ✓ You must have at least four photos, graphics, or illustrations for the poster.
- ✓ Each picture needs a caption identifying what is being shown.

TOWERS FALLING

BUILDING BACKGROUND – AMERICAN RESEARCH PROJECT POSTER GALLERY WALK

Review three posters and complete the following table during your gallery walk.

POSTER TOPIC	THREE KEY DETAILS FROM THE POSTER
1.	
2.	
3.	

1. Are there any common themes that you observed after viewing the American posters? Do you agree with all of the research? Why or why not?
2. You have had the opportunity to conduct your own research, as well as review your peers' work through the gallery walk. Based on the information you have gained from these two experiences, what do you think it means to be an American? Share your answer in 2-3 sentences below.

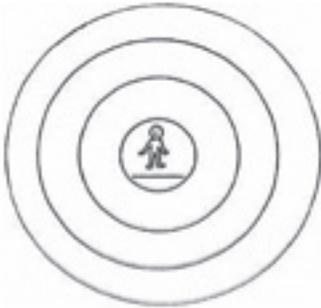
TOWERS FALLING

DURING READING ACTIVITIES

SOCIAL UNITS DIAGRAM

Students can create their own social units diagram similar to the one Déja's class makes in the book on page 66. Helping students identify the different social units they belong to creates a deep sense of belonging and understanding.

Begin by having students illustrate and label their own image in the very middle circle. Next, guide students through labeling each tier moving outward from the center: family, school, neighbors, community, city, state, country. Then, students can go back and add specific names into each circle or tier to fully develop their own social units diagram. Students can also add symbols and artwork to represent their social units.



Reflection questions that students can craft as a written response, or share with a partner:

1. Describe and/or explain your diagram. What are the different units you created?
2. Was this an easy assignment for you or a difficult assignment? Why?
3. Were there any names that were difficult for you to place in a specific unit or circle? Why?
4. Are there any names that could go in more than one specific unit or circle? Which names? Why?
5. In your opinion, what effect did making a social units diagram have on Déja? How does your own experience compare with hers?

LYRIC STUDY

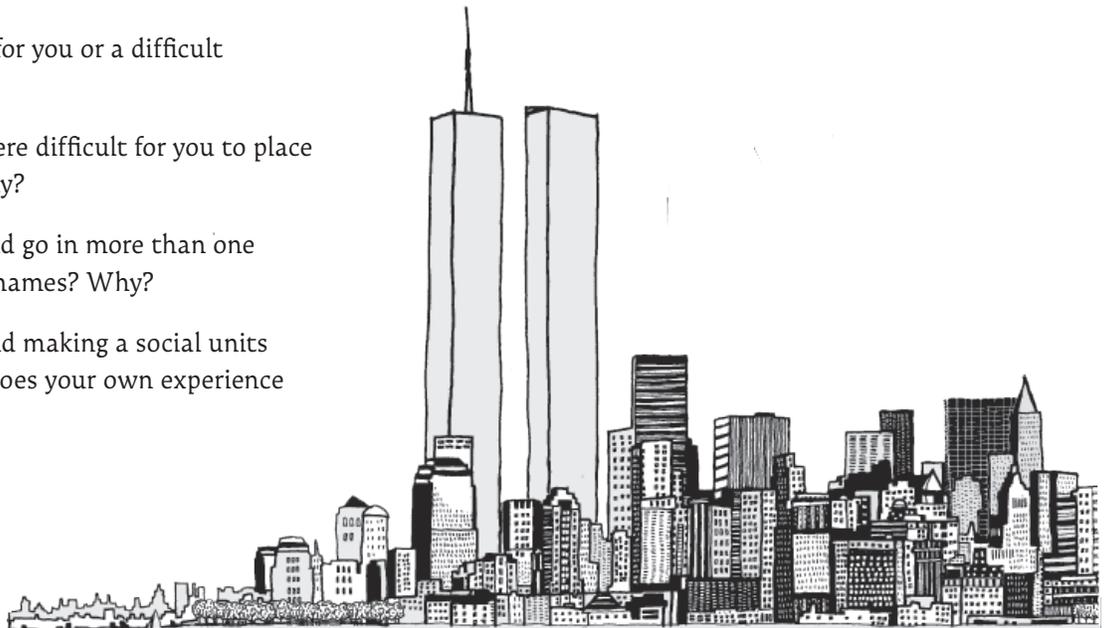
In the chapter “Homeroom,” Déja studies the lyrics to the song *My Country 'Tis of Thee* and learns that this song is about America. Here are the lyrics to the refrain:

*My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet Land of Liberty
of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
let freedom ring.*

Guide students in reading these lyrics, and then allow them to listen to this song.

Direct their attention to the fourth line: “*Land where my fathers died.*” Ask the class what they think this means. What father or fathers is this line referring to?

Let music be the teacher as students analyze and explore the story told through other patriotic songs, and learn the history of our country written in lyrics.



TOWERS FALLING

DURING READING ACTIVITIES

LYRIC STUDY EXTENSION

Like Déja and her classmates, students can learn a great deal about history through the stories told in America’s music. Below, you will find songs and song lyrics that help provide a deeper understanding of our country’s rich history.

- ◆ Present the written lyrics of *The Star-Spangled Banner* for students to read:

*O say can you see, by the dawn’s early light,
What so proudly we hail’d at the twilight’s last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight
O’er the ramparts we watch’d were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

Next, listen to the song as students read along. Examining the lyrics while listening to this song not only supports fluency practice, but also highlights some background about a pivotal moment in our American history.

- ◆ Share the following article and story behind the Star Spangled Banner with students:
smithsonianmag.com/history/the-story-behind-the-star-spangled-banner-149220970/?no-ist

Ask students to work in small groups and reflect on the following questions:

1. What connections can you make between the lyrics to this song and the article?
2. What event is this song about? How did this event impact or change history?
3. What do you think it means to be patriotic? Why is this considered a patriotic song?
4. What is meant by the words “gave proof through the night that our flag was still there”?
5. In one paragraph or less, write about this moment in history, in your own words. What happened? What is this song about? Why is this song so meaningful for some people?

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Towers Falling introduces readers to fascinating and complex characters. Analyzing characters gives students the opportunity to explore and understand their role in the story. Character analysis focuses on the traits that determine the person’s importance to the story.

In the first box, write words that Déja would use to describe herself. In the next box, write words other characters would use to describe her. Include evidence from the text.

How Déja sees herself at the beginning of the text:

How others see Déja at the beginning of the text:

How Déja sees herself at the end of the text:

How others see Déja at the end of the text:

What changes did you observe in how Déja viewed *herself* from the start of the story to its conclusion?

What changes did you observe in how *others* viewed Déja from the start of the story to its conclusion?

TOWERS FALLING

AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES

AUTHOR STUDY ACTIVITIES

Here's a quote from author Jewell Parker Rhodes:

We're united by our humanity, united by stories.

What does the author mean by this?

Ask students to do a Quick Write response about this quote, and share what it means to them. How does it relate to their own lives? What can they infer about Jewell Parker Rhodes from her words?

"I AM" POEM

In 2015, author Jewell Parker Rhodes gave a speech entitled "Diversity and Character-Driven Stories" for the Children's Institute of the American Booksellers Association. In this speech, Rhodes said, "*I am, 'Being able to say 'I am' is the greatest civil right for all of us. Standing on our own two feet, comfortable and free to be 'I am,' will lessen, I truly believe, any urge to oppress, to make someone else 'other.'"*

Students can begin to explore their own narrative by writing an "I am" poem* by using the following frame:

I am:	I pretend:	I understand:
I wonder:	I whisper:	I found:
I hear:	I feel:	I shout:
I see:	I wish:	I need:
I lost:	I touch:	I dream:
I want:	I worry:	I try:
I believe:	I cry:	I hope:
I am:	I am:	I am:

Upon completion of *I am* poems, students can participate in a group sharing exercise or Poetry Slam.

*adaptation based on poem from ReadWriteThink.org



AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COLLAGE PROJECT

In her speech, Jewell Parker Rhodes also said, "*Imaginative mirrors encourage all of us to be comfortable in our own skin. No one has to feel less than. Ever. All are included, none excluded, and everyone's own narrative is as important as any other's. The more narrative threads we add—the rainbow threads, the diverse threads—the more American we become.*"

Through this message, the author encourages us to explore our own history and narrative threads, family, questions, and stories. Using various mediums, students can create a piece of art that explores and shares their story or personal truth.

Use these suggestions to guide students in creating their personal art project:

- ◆ Websites like NPR's This I Believe (npr.org/series/4538138/this-i-believe) and StoryCorps (storycorps.org/about) share great examples of personal belief statements. Select one story (or more) to share with students as inspiration for expressing their own personal narrative through their collages.
- ◆ Encourage students to find and cut out words or pictures from magazines to answer the following questions. If the exact word can't be found, students can cut out letters to spell the word. Words and images can be glued in a collage format to create their piece of art.
 - What are three words that best describe you?
 - What is your best personality trait?
 - What are you really good at?
 - What do you love?
 - What makes you happy?
 - What is an image or word that represents your family?
 - What do you want to do when you grow up?
 - What is something you believe in?
 - What do you wish for?
 - What inspires you?
 - Who do you admire?
 - What challenge did you overcome?
 - What is a word or image that represents something you are proud of?

Students can share their collages through a Gallery Walk, evening of personal narratives, or video slide-show.

TOWERS FALLING

AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES

TEXT AND ART: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

Like music, artwork can often tell a story. Artists present stories in many different ways. Use the worksheet below to analyze two different artistic resources on the impact the events of 9/11 had on our country. Compare a work of art (recommended artwork on page 11) to Rhodes's text. You may feel inspired to create your own art that tells a personal story or reaction to *Towers Falling*.

Text: *Towers Falling* by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Artwork:

Key details of the text:	Key details of the artwork:
What does the writer emphasize about the subject?	What does the artist emphasize about the subject?
What resonates with you the most from the text?	What resonates with you the most from the artwork?
What did you notice from the text that was absent in the artwork?	What did you notice from the artwork that was absent from the text?
How did this text bring more depth to your understanding of the subject?	How did this piece of art bring more depth to your understanding of the subject?

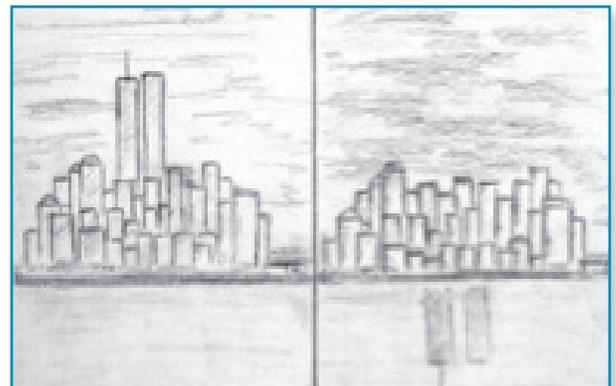
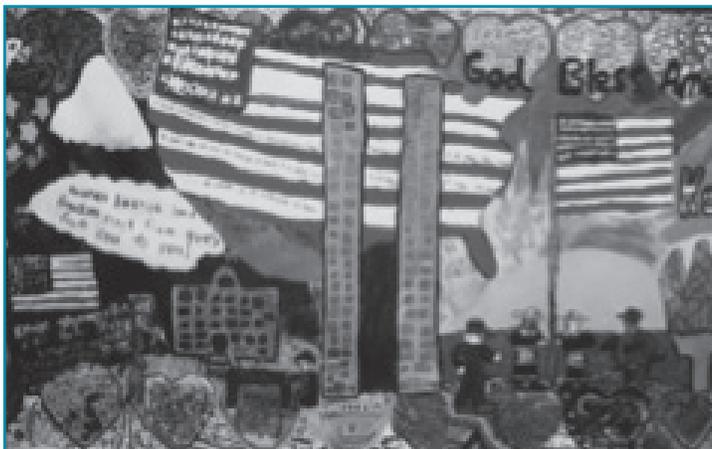
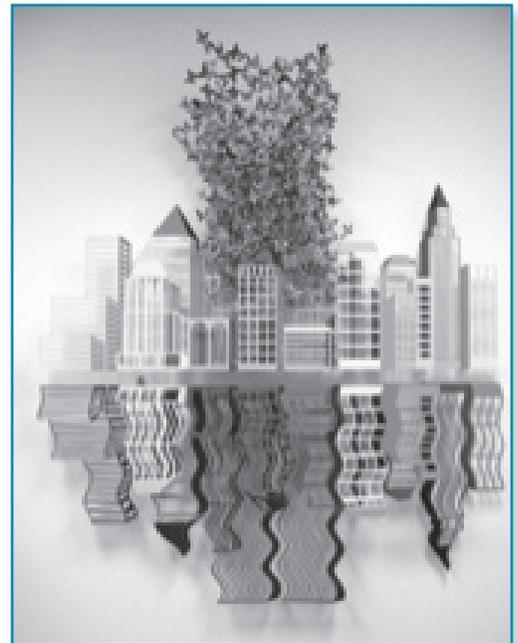
Upon completion of this table, share your work with a partner who analyzed a different piece of art. Reflect on the following questions, and be prepared to share with your class:

- How do different artists use different mediums to cover the same topic?
- Which artist do you think was most effective in getting their message across? Explain.



TOWERS FALLING

TEXT AND ART: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING



Artwork courtesy of The 9/11 Memorial Blog (911memorial.org/blog/children's-response-art-911-part-memorial-museum's-collection)

TOWERS FALLING

AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES

TRIBUTE & THANK YOU TO FIRST RESPONDERS

Towers Falling introduces us to a number of dynamic characters like Pop. Throughout the story we wonder why it is that Pop is so sick all the time, and why he seems so sad. The reader questions what happened in Pop's life that brought about his despair and challenges. In the end, we learn that Pop not only worked at the Twin Towers and personally experienced the horror of 9/11, but that he was integral in efforts to rescue and help save other people's lives.

Firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and other people in emergency service roles are called first responders. Like the numerous real-life first responders who helped rescue people on 9/11, Pop ran towards the danger when everyone else was running away from it. He put his own life in jeopardy in order to save others, as our first responders do every single day, in every single city and state in our country.

Through video, word cloud creation, thank you letters, and written self-reflection, this culminating activity encourages students to learn more about the role our brave First Responders had on 9/11, and why they are our heroes.

- ◆ Watch the following video: [youtube.com/watch?v=Cbl37WKDj-8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbl37WKDj-8). As you are watching, write down adjectives or describing words that come to mind. Here are a few to get started:

- Courageous
- Hero
- Selfless

- ◆ Work with a partner to share and compare word lists. Together, create a Wordle ([wordle.net](https://www.wordle.net)) of your first responder describing words.

Wordle is a program that generates "word clouds" from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the text that you enter, meaning if you type the word "hero" more times than any other word it will appear larger in size. You can change your clouds with different fonts, layouts, and color schemes. The images you create with Wordle are yours to print, share, save, or use however you like.

- ◆ Next, with your partner, write a letter to a first responder thanking them for their service in your community and letting them know how much they are valued. Include the Wordle with your letter, and mail these to your local firehouse or police station to show you recognize their members' courage and compassion.
- ◆ Reflect on the following statement from the 9/11 Memorial:

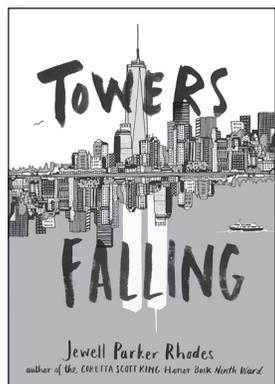
May the lives remembered, the deeds recognized, and the spirit reawakened be eternal beacons, which reaffirm respect for life, strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom, and inspire an end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance.

In your own words, write what this statement means to you.



TOWERS FALLING

about the book



TOWERS FALLING
HC 978-0-316-26222-4
Also available as an eBook

From award-winning author Jewell Parker Rhodes, a powerful novel set fifteen years after September 11th, 2001, following three dynamic students who know the events only as history—but slowly discover how much the attacks still color their community.

praise for *Towers Falling*

“History made personal—and what a person! Déja’s voice is real and memorable, her compelling story one of hope unmarred by sentimentality.”

—Newbery Medalist Linda Sue Park

“This tender retelling of tragedy is a solid vessel to help young readers understand the gravity of 9/11 and how it touches all Americans, no matter where we come from.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“This is a welcome contribution to children’s literature.”

—School Library Journal

“Rhodes approaches a complex, painful topic with insight and grace, providing context to an event distant to the book’s audience.”

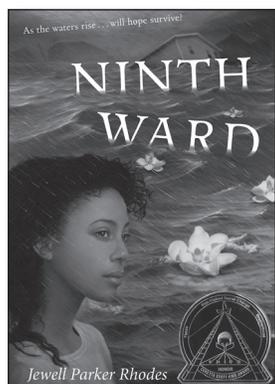
—Publishers Weekly

about the author

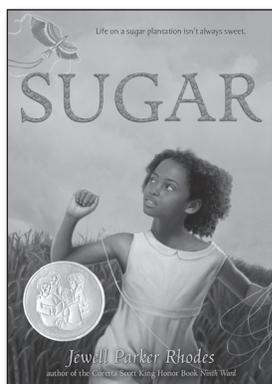


Jewell Parker Rhodes is the Piper Endowed Chair and founding artistic director of the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing at Arizona State University. She has won numerous awards for her books for children and adults. *Ninth Ward*, her first novel for young readers, was named a Coretta Scott King Honor Book, a Notable Book for a Global Society, and a Today show All’s Book Club for Kids selection. You can visit Jewell online at JewellParkerRhodes.com.

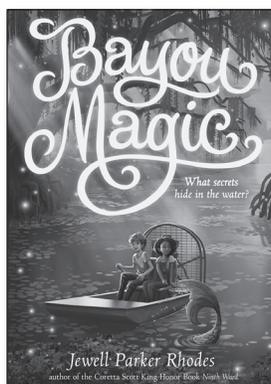
also by Jewell Parker Rhodes



NINTH WARD
HC 978-0-316-04307-6
PB 978-0-316-04308-3
Also available as an eBook



SUGAR
HC 978-0-316-04305-2
PB 978-0-316-04306-9
Also available as an eBook



BAYOU MAGIC
HC 978-0-316-22484-0
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Also available as an eBook



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This guide was prepared by Erica Rand Silverman and Sharon Kennedy, former English teachers and co-founders of Room 228 | www.rm228.com, along with Kelly Hoover, a Colorado elementary school teacher. Erica and Sharon were teaching in NYC on September 11 and feel honored to have worked on this guide.