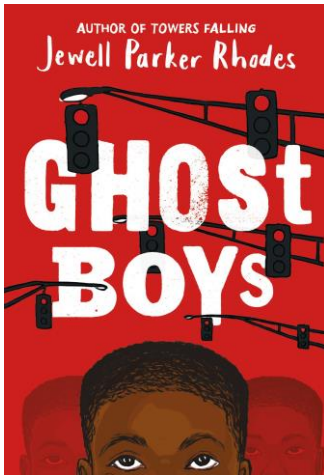


Book Resume: Ghost Boys



Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018

ISBN: 9780316262286 (hardcover); 9780316262262 (paperback); 9780316408219 (Spanish edition)

*Age Range: 10 & up (Suggested by Publisher)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

A heartbreaking and powerful story about a black boy killed by a police officer, drawing connections through history, from award-winning author Jewell Parker Rhodes.

Only the living can make the world better. Live and make it better.

Twelve-year-old Jerome is shot by a police officer who mistakes his toy gun for a real threat. As a ghost, he observes the devastation that's been unleashed on his family and community in the wake of what they see as an unjust and brutal killing.

Soon Jerome meets another ghost: Emmett Till, a boy from a very different time but similar circumstances. Emmett helps Jerome process what has happened, on a journey towards recognizing how historical racism may have led to the events that ended his life. Jerome also meets Sarah, the daughter of the police officer, who grapples with her father's actions.

Once again Jewell Parker Rhodes deftly weaves historical and socio-political layers into a gripping and poignant story about how children and families face the complexities of today's world, and how one boy grows to understand American blackness in the aftermath of his own death.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "Rhodes captures the all-too-real pain of racial injustice and provides an important window for readers who are just beginning to explore the ideas of privilege and implicit bias." —*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ "An excellent novel that delves into the timely topic of racism... with the question of whether or not we really have come far when dealing with race relations." —*School Library Connection*, starred review

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★ “Rhodes writes in short, poetic chapters that offer graphic depictions of avoidable tragedies; her hope for a better world packs a powerful punch, delivering a call to action to speak out against prejudice and erase harmful misconceptions.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “Rhodes beautifully weaves together the fictional and the historical... in this gripping and all-too-necessary novel about police brutality, injustice, and the power of bearing witness to the stories of those who are gone.” —*Booklist*, starred review

“This was one of my most anticipated 2018 books and I was not disappointed. A must read.” —Angie Thomas, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Hate U Give*

“In writing that's spare and powerful, Rhodes takes us into the hearts and minds of those who are left behind, and then out into a vast and luminous world where ghost boys wander among the living, pursuing their mysterious mission. Rhodes has achieved something remarkable here: a kid's-eye-view of violence and racism that balances innocence and outrage, wrenching loss and hard-won hope.” —*Chicago Tribune*

“A timely, challenging book that's worthy of a read, further discussion, and action.” —*Kirkus*

“[A] potent story that deserves to be read.” —*VOYA*

“*Ghost Boys* is powerful in prose, and so important at this time. I hope parents will read this book to their children.” —*The Monitor*

“Written beautifully...an important novel.” —WCMU Public Radio

“Unblinkingly confronts challenging perspectives and the mutability of truth.” —*Shelf Awareness*

“*Ghost Boys* gently walks readers through the minefield of young black boys who have been killed due to racism, dating back to the murder of Emmett Till. By exploring the fear that is at the core of these murders, Jewell Parker Rhodes suggests ways the living can crack that fear and, eventually, end this epidemic of death.” —Nikki Grimes, bestselling and award-winning author of *Garvey's Choice* and *One Last Word*

“The voice of *Ghost Boys* is nothing less than prophetic: it rings out in its plot lines, in its characters, in its tones, in its images. And here is what that voice says: ‘Bear witness.’ Parker Rhodes undergirds the urgency of that call with the sweetness of grace-filled hope, so that, dear reader, you will come away from this tale, made larger—which, of course, is what truly great stories do.” —Gary Schmidt, two-time Newbery Honor-Winning Author

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A *New York Times* Bestseller
- An IndieBound Bestseller
- A Publisher's Weekly Best Seller

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- #1 Globe and Mail Best Seller
- The #1 Kids' Indies Next Pick
- A 2018 Nerdies List Book
- An ALA 2019 Children's Notables List Pick
- 2022 Trinity Schools Book Award winner
- 2020-2021 William Allen White Children's Book Award winner (Grades 6-8)
- 2020-2021 Nebraska Golden Sower Award winner (Grades 7-8)
- 2020-2021 Pennsylvania Young Readers Choice Nominee (6-8 category)
- 2020-2021 MASL Readers Awards Final Nominee (Grades 6-8)
- 2020-2021 Young Hoosier Book Award
- 2019-2020 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award
- 2019 YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Readers
- 2019 CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People
- 2019 ABA E. B. White Read-Aloud Middle Reader Award
- 2019 SCBWI Golden Kite Award
- 2019 WNDB Walter Award, Younger Readers Category
- 2019 Sakura Medal Award Nominee
- 2019 Charlotte Huck Honor Award for Outstanding Children's Fiction
- 2019 Longlist, CILIP Carnegie Medal
- 2019 Texas Lone Star Reading List
- 2019 Longlist, United Kingdom Literary Association Book Awards
- 2019 Jane Addams Children's Book Award
- 2019 Texas Blue Bonnet List
- 2018-2019 Read Across America Selection
- 2018-2019 Project LIT Book Club Middle Grade Selection
- 2018 Chicago Public Library Best Fiction for Older Readers of 2018
- 2018 Huffington Post Best Children's Books Of 2018, According To Librarians
- 2018 CSMCL Best Books of 2018
- 2018 NAIBA Book of the Year Winner
- 2018 Goodreads Choice Awards Finalist: Best Middle Grade & Children's Books
- 2018 Amazon Best Children's Books of the Year So Far: Ages 9 to 12

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [GHOST BOYS by Jewell Parker Rhodes Read by Miles Harvey - Audiobook Excerpt](#)
- [Ghost Boys Educator's Guide](#)
- [Ghost Boys Book Club Guide](#)
- [New York Times - New Crop of Young Adult Novels Explores Race and Police Brutality](#)
- [MarketWatch - Why teens should be reading about police brutality and racism](#)
- [Publishers Weekly - Galley Talk: 'Ghost Boys' by Jewell Parker Rhodes](#)
- [The Takeaway - "Ghost Boys" Tackles Police Violence for a Young Audience](#)
- [ASU News - Professor Jewell Parker Rhodes addresses police brutality, race relations in 'Ghost Boys'](#)

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- [The Children's Book Podcast – Jewell Parker Rhodes](#)
- [Publishers Weekly - Q & A with Jewell Parker Rhodes](#)
- [The Longest Shortest Time - Black Lives Matter for Middle Schoolers](#)
- [ReadingZone - Jewell Parker Rhodes](#)
- [Book Club for Kids – Jewell Parker Rhodes](#)
- [TODAY - 3 young readers share their favorite books featuring diverse characters](#)

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

[Eanes Westlake Innovative School District \(Austin, TX, November 2022\):](#)

Ghost Boys reflects a narrative that represents many ethnic, religious, and cultural groups and their contributions to the national heritage and world community. Different character traits and perspectives were presented in the text. Examples include racial injustice, bias - conscious and unconscious. Historical context is presented throughout the text to offer readers information applicable to the fictional storyline. The author conveys prejudice masked as fear, power of witnessing stories of those who are gone in an age appropriate manner. Inter- and Intra-personal social and emotional skills/components of forgiveness, diversity in celebrations, family dynamics, friendship, kindness, understanding, legal proceeding details/judicial system were also embedded throughout the book.

Resources chosen by district professional staff shall be chosen to clarify historical and contemporary forces by presenting and analyzing intergroup tension and conflict objectively, placing emphasis on recognizing and understanding social and economic problems. The author embeds the historical context and framework that served as a catalyst for this text in a balanced and fairly neutral approach. SES components of income and poverty within the city accurately presented different perspectives. Multiple perspectives were presented (eg. Sarah's voice, the Ghost Boys' voices, etc.) throughout the text. Options for continued study on these topics are embedded as an afterword within the text. Forgiveness and activism are dually embedded in character development. Bullying is portrayed in a humane way that offers some reflective opportunities for the reader.

[The Lariat \(Cooper City, FL, May 2021\):](#)

The death of Emmett Till spurred the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-to-late 1900s, while the death of Tamir Rice fueled the flames of the Black Lives Matter movement in the present day. Introducing children to these intensely heartbreaking realities in a controlled classroom environment gives them an outlet to empathize with the victims of police brutality and racism, and may allow them to think more critically in order to recognize and avoid prejudice.

Across the country, challenged and banned books often deal with controversial topics like racism. "To Kill A Mockingbird," a book commonly read in the ninth grade, is one such example. Now, "Ghost Boys" serves as another.

The use of serious novels like "Ghost Boys" in classrooms should be carefully monitored due to their intense nature. However, ruling out this book entirely and claiming it convinces readers that police officers are liars,

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murderers and rapists is severely underestimating students' critical thinking skills and misunderstanding the point of "Ghost Boys" entirely.

The book is not meant to brainwash kids, but to get them thinking about a perspective they may not be familiar with.

[National Coalition Against Censorship \(May 2021\):](#)

This action raises serious First Amendment concerns. First, it does not appear to be the District's policy to require parental notification for all books. By singling out *Ghost Boys* for special scrutiny because of its supposed position on police practice, the District has engaged in viewpoint discrimination, which almost always violates the First Amendment. Moreover, singling out a certain type of content necessarily gives a biased perspective, casts a negative light on the book regardless of its literary worth, and needlessly stokes alarm among parents.

The parent's complaint is based on a misapprehension of the very purpose of exposing students to literature. Literature is not social science; it is not taught as objective truth. Rather, the purpose of literature is to evoke empathy with a variety of human experiences. Characters in a book can often espouse points of view that some, or even most, people disagree with. The District's response to the complaint should have been to inform the parent of all this and explain that literature is not meant to indoctrinate students, but rather to expose them to different viewpoints and experiences. Such a position is clearly indicated in Florida's Grade 5 literature standards, which explicitly call for students to question the viewpoints of literary characters, by "[d]escrib[ing] how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described." Instead, the District paused the teaching of the book and impermissibly singled it out for parental notification.

AUTHOR STATEMENT

[Refinery29, February 2023:](#)

I was honestly shocked when *Ghost Boys* was banned. I spent two and a half years writing a book that educators and parents could use to discuss the differences between racism and unconscious bias. The book is about love and how children, in terms of their open-heartedness, can help rid the world of oppression, discrimination, and prejudice to become a collective group of heroes and heroines who engage in an affirmative, nonviolent change. We are failing in our job as educators and parents and adults to equip our children with the skills they need to be responsible citizens if we take away discourse around these issues. We're saying we want our kids to grow up in a fantasy rather than to be prepared to take over and run the world. And they will run the world. They're going to be old enough to vote, and they will be reshaping our destiny, so important conversations must be had to get them to be educated and to be a citizen in the deepest, deepest sense.

There are a lot of young writers today who are just so self-assured that they're just going to stand up and speak. When I was a young writer, the banning would make me want to shut down. But of course, today, I can't shut down because I tell the truth, I'm an artist, and I have a commitment to my craft and my own humanity more than anything else. If I had been a different kind of person, I would have quit, but I was born to tell stories and educate.

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***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

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