

Ninth Ward

Twelve-year-old Lanesha lives in a tight-knit community in New Orleans' Ninth Ward. She doesn't have a fancy house like her uptown family or lots of friends like other kids on her street. But what she does have is Mama Ya-Ya, her fiercely loving caretaker, wise in the ways of the world and able to predict the future. So when Mama Ya-Ya's visions show a powerful hurricane-Katrina-fast approaching, it's up to Lanesha to call upon the hope and strength Mama Ya-Ya has given her to help them both survive the storm.

Ninth Ward is a celebration of resilience, love, family, and friendship, and a deeply emotional story of transformation.

57th Street Books

“Ninth Ward by Jewell Parker Rhodes is a deceptive book in that it is not actually about Hurricane Katrina. The novel, which is set in New Orleans in the days preceding and through the disaster, is really a remarkably thoughtful and exceptionally written coming of age story centered around a young African-American girl named Laneesha. Rhodes uses the backdrop of the storm, but what she really focuses the readers attention on is strength of character, questions of belonging, ideas of family and, most of all, hope in oneself and others. In the midst of all these things is a special brand of magical realism that incorporates the mystery and spirit of the city of New Orleans. The reader is catapulted into life within the ninth ward and into Laneesha's story so that when the storm hits, we believe in the journey that unfolds for Laneesha and her family. While Hurricane Katrina plays an important role in the book, its effect is limited by the way in which it acts as a catalyst for Laneesha's movement toward adulthood. If you are looking for a novel that lays blame about the devastation of New Orleans' Ninth Ward, this is not it. If you are interested in a novel that captures the essence of New Orleans and its people while simultaneously illustrating how tragedy makes us stronger, Ninth Ward is a must read.”

— Tara Baldridge, 57th Street Books, Chicago, IL

<http://www.bookpeople.com/book/9780316043083>

Publishers Weekly – Starred Review

Ninth Ward

Jewell Parker Rhodes, Little, Brown, \$15.99 (224p) ISBN 978-0-316-04307-6

With a mix of magical and gritty realism, Rhodes's (*Voodoo Dreams*) first novel for young readers imagines Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding through the eyes of resourceful 12-year-old Lanesha. Lanesha lives with Mama Ya-Ya, an 82-year-old seer and midwife who delivered Lanesha and has cared for her since her teenage mother died in childbirth. Living in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Lanesha is viewed as an unusual child (she was born with a caul and is able to see ghosts) and is ostracized at school. Lanesha finds strength in Mama Ya-Ya's constant love and axioms of affection and reassurance (“When the time's right... the universe shines down love”). The story becomes gripping as the waters rise and Lanesha, with help from a young neighbor and her mother's ghostly presence, finds a way to keep body and soul together. The spare but vivid prose, lilting dialogue, and skilled storytelling brings this tragedy to life; the powerful sense of community Rhodes evokes in the Ninth Ward prior to the storm makes the devastation and the hardships Lanesha endures all the more powerful. Ages 10–up. (Aug.)

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-316-04307-6>

School Library Journal – Starred Review

Ninth Ward has shown up on several Mock Newberies and best-of-the-year lists (as well as in many of your comments here). It's a new author (her first novel for young readers at least) in a refreshing and captivating voice. Rhodes does a wonderful job of establishing sensory setting—the suffocating heat and darkness of that night trapped in the attic during the worst of Hurricane Katrina are still palpable.

This was a last hanger-on for "almost" both times we looked at our shortlist. It would have certainly made for great comparison with Keeper just for the "suspense in a boat" aspect. I think it has strengths in all the Newbery criteria, but to me there was always another book that seemed clearly stronger in one or the other. In Character: One Crazy Summer, Kneebone Boy, Countdown, Conspiracy...most of the fiction titles on our list do a better job I feel. In Plot: well, Conspiracy is a standout, but for a more similar style I feel Keeper has a more distinguished narrative. Style/Theme: Sugar, Dark Emperor and several of the other fiction titles just seem more adept. I could go on, but you get the picture.

Often with talked-up favorites of the year, we find books with subjects that we feel emotionally inclined to. Books that cover subjects we think are important, or haven't been done before (Out of My Mind...). While this is an important criteria in evaluating children's books in general...it's specifically not a criteria for the Newbery. Now, surely it's possible (even likely) that that comes into play our choices of with One Crazy Summer or KKK (for the social subject) or Dark Emperor or City Dog Country Frog (because Jonathan and I are advocates for the less-usual genres for Newbery), but with these I always felt the literary quality supported their place on our shortlist. With Ninth Ward...almost, but not quite.

Now you may differ, and I expect the actual Newbery Committee is looking closely at this one. I would certainly not be sorry to see it honored. It just never quite made my top 12. Might have if we'd gone 15?

<http://blogs.slj.com/heavymedal/2010/12/23/ninth-ward/>

Jewell Parker Rhodes is the author of the Louisiana Girls children's book trilogy, which includes *Ninth Ward*, *Sugar*, and *Bayou Magic*. Her children's books have received the Parents' Choice Foundation Award, the Coretta Scott King Author Honor Award, and the Jane Addam's Children's Book Award, among others. *Towers Falling*, her new middle grade novel, was published in July 2016.

Jewell is also the author of six adult novels: *Voodoo Dreams*, *Magic City*, *Douglass' Women*, *Season, Moon*, and *Hurricane*, as well as the memoir *Porch Stories: A Grandmother's Guide to Happiness*, and two writing guides, *Free Within Ourselves: Fiction Lessons for Black Authors* and *The African American Guide to Writing and Publishing Non-Fiction*.

Her work has been published in China, Korea, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, and has appeared on NPR's "Selected Shorts." Her adult literary awards include: the American Book Award, the National Endowment of the Arts Award in Fiction, the Black Caucus of the American Library Award for Literary Excellence, the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award for Outstanding Writing, two Arizona Book Awards, and a finalist citation for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award.

Jewell grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Drama Criticism, a Master of Arts in English, and a Doctor of Arts in English (Creative Writing) from Carnegie Mellon University. She is also a professor of Creative Writing and American Literature and the former Director of the Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing.



As the waters rise...will hope survive?

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