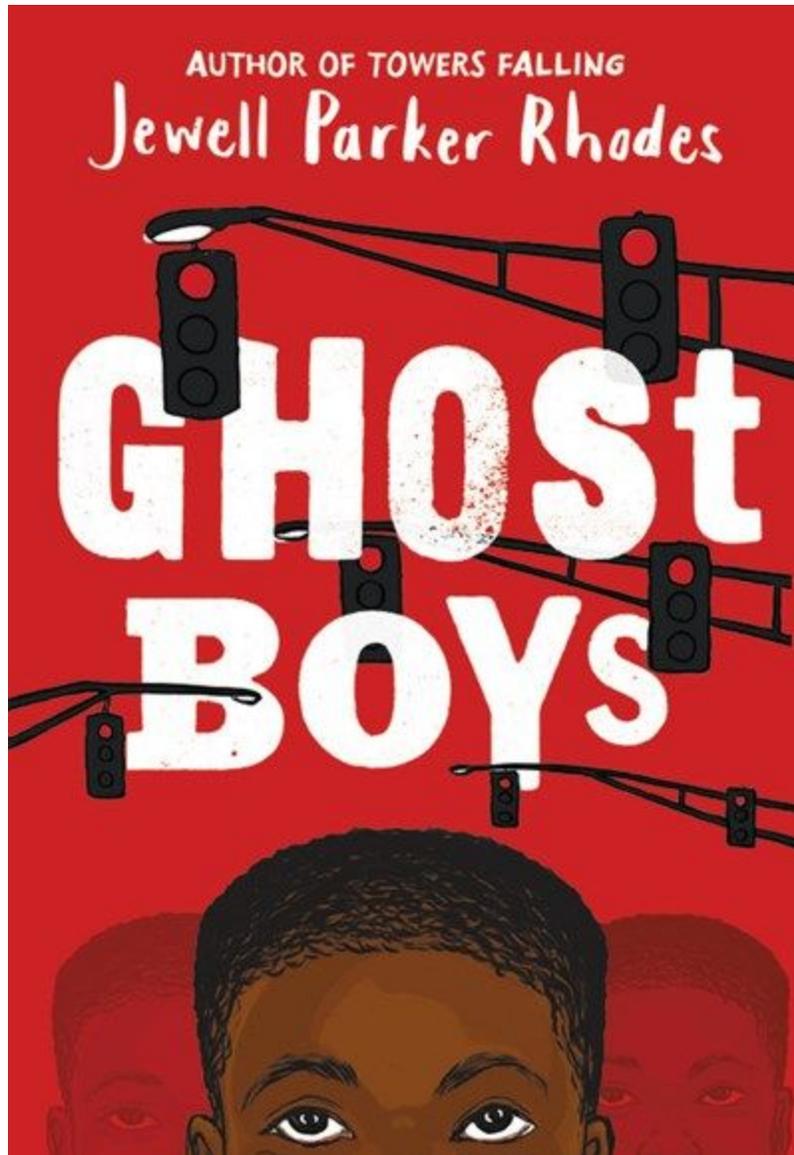


LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Educator Guide | Ages: 10 & Up



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OVERVIEW

This Educator Guide highlights approaches and resources for teachers to use in engaging students with the novel *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes. Rather than providing a prescribed curriculum or a pacing calendar, this guide is intended to inspire and challenge educators to design instructional experiences that are best suited to their particular students. Materials and activities are organized thematically and need not be implemented in the order in which they appear here.

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I. INTRODUCING *GHOST BOYS* TO STUDENTS

A. Centering Students' Voices

While *Ghost Boys* alludes to many historical figures and events, consider launching the novel with minimal front-loading of background information. Instead, allow students to respond authentically to what they're reading. In keeping with *Ghost Boys* as a book about lifting up voices and stories that are often silenced, consider using the novel as an opportunity to promote student-centered discussion in response to students' emotional experiences with the book.

- [Save the Last Word for Me](#): Discussion protocols promote equity of voice by ensuring that all speakers have equal air time. They also allow students who are eager to speak to practice their active listening skills. This particular protocol provides an entry point for all students because it does not require participants to have read the whole text in advance nor to be experts on their passage. In fact, students can choose to share a passage that they *don't* understand in order to learn from what their classmates think about it.
- [Inside/Outside Circles](#): This discussion protocol provides kinesthetic opportunities for students to engage in conversation with a range of classmates in order to build relationships and promote a sense of community.

- [Silent Conversation](#): This activity allows every student to be “speaking” at the same time by conducting their conversation in writing. It also ensures that there is a written record of the discussion that can be assessed, celebrated, and returned to for further study and reflection.

B. Cultivating Background Knowledge

Your instructional expertise will allow you to anticipate students’ questions about the historical context of *Ghost Boys*. You can also determine in advance whether students need direct instruction about historical figures and events or whether you can engage them in developing their own understanding by reading independently. The following activities provide alternatives to direct instruction by cultivating background knowledge through active engagement rather than teacher-directed frontloading.

- [Question Formulation Technique \(QFT\)](#): QFT is a protocol for engaging students in authentically developing their own questions that are genuinely interesting to them. Through QFT, students brainstorm the questions they’d like to answer, enhance and prioritize their questions, and decide what they’d like to do to address their most important questions, such as discussion or research.
- [5 Minute Research Project](#): Many teachers feel apprehensive and overwhelmed about teaching students to conduct research. This activity makes student research manageable and approachable by empowering students to learn about the background references that are most interesting and meaningful to them. Students conduct research in small chunks using whatever resources (technological or otherwise) are easily accessible to them. They also have opportunities to teach and learn from each other. Finally, this activity can be expanded into research projects where students present their findings through writing, presentation, and/or digital publication.

Procedure:

1. Students select or are assigned research topics. Research topics for *Ghost Boys* might include Emmett Till, Tamir Rice, Peter Pan, Trayvon Martin, *Little Women*, Thurgood Marshall, Laquan McDonald, and Mike Brown.
2. Students conduct online research for 5-15 minutes using any available resources (including their cell phones!). Research prompts for *Ghost Boys* might include:
 - Find basic information about your topic: Who or what is it? What are the “need-to-knows”?
 - What are the connections to *Ghost Boys*? Challenge yourself to consider less obvious relationships.
3. Participants join others who researched the same topic to share, compare, and enhance findings.
4. Participants [jigsaw](#) with others who researched different topics to teach, discuss, and synthesize.
5. Participants reconvene as a whole group to discuss trends, conclusions, and other takeaways. A discussion prompt for *Ghost Boys* might be: How has your understanding of the novel been enhanced by learning more about these references?

C. Supporting Ongoing Reading and Discussion

You might decide to read *Ghost Boys* aloud as a whole class, in small groups, independently, or in some combination. Many students may benefit from opportunities to write, draw, and discuss their responses while they are reading. In addition to questions generated by students through the Question Formulation Technique (see **Cultivating Background Knowledge**) and prompts of your own design, the [Ghost Boys Book Club Guide](#) includes questions to inspire student thinking and discussion at various points. Suggested techniques for engaging students in critical thinking during the reading process include:

- [Stop and Jot](#)
- [Turn and Talk](#)
- [Think-Pair-Share](#)
- [Double-Entry Journal](#)

II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

A. Close Reading

Once students begin reading *Ghost Boys*, foster their engagement with the text through close reading activities and analytical prompts that illuminate their emotional responses to the novel. General resources for close reading include:

- [ReadWriteThink.org](https://www.readwritethink.org/) offers many resources to support the design of close reading instruction, including this [Close Reading of Literary Texts Strategy Guide](#) by Scott Filkins.
- [Achieve the Core](#) offers [Close Reading Model Lessons](#) to support instructional design.

Close reading lessons on specific elements of *Ghost Boys* might focus on:

- **Pivotal scenes**, including those that are most interesting to students as well as those that include motifs that return throughout the novel.
 - Jerome's grandmother frequently asks others to "tell me three good things." Track the repetition of this motif throughout the novel. What does it reveal about Grandma, Jerome, and other characters? When does it reappear and what are the relationships between those scenes?
 - Jerome feels conflicted about taking the gun from Carlos but ultimately accepts it (p. 76-80). What does his ambivalence in this scene reveal? Compare this scene to the later episode when Carlos tells Grandma about the gun (p. 172-174). How do the two boys' complicated attitudes toward the gun illuminate broader themes in the novel?
- **Author's craft** in order to analyze how the author's choices affect the reader's experience.
 - *Ghost Boys* begins with Jerome's death and proceeds nonlinearly. It also juxtaposes Jerome's narration with newspaper articles and court scenes. How does the novel's structure impact the reader's experience?
 - Which living characters are able to see the ghosts? Why would the author select those characters in particular? What does the author's decision to differentiate these characters in this way reveal about the characters, their relationships, and the broader themes of the novel, such as bearing witness?
- **Characterization**, including major characters like Jerome, Emmett, and Sarah, as well as Grandma, Kim, and Carlos.
 - How do Jerome's speech patterns shift throughout the novel? How does this evolution in his language illuminate or connect to other changes that he experiences?
 - Rewrite a scene in another character's voice. For example, reimagine the scene in the bathroom with the toy gun from Carlos's point of view.
 - In the chapter "Silence" (p.177-186), Jerome describes changes that he notices in Sarah, we learn that Sarah is developing a website called "End Racism, Injustice," and Jerome convinces Sarah to reconcile with her father. How does the characterization of Sarah connect to the novel's themes around bearing witness? How does she illuminate the actions we all can take to ensure that young black boys do not continue to die like Jerome?
- **Historical and literary allusions**, as well as relationships to other literary works.
 - Variation on 5 Minute Research Project (see **Cultivating Background Research** above): After students research the historical and contemporary figures alluded to in *Ghost Boys*, invite them to analyze the author's use of these references to provide context and to illuminate the novel's themes. How do these allusions impact the reader's understanding of the novel?
 - What is the significance of references to Peter Pan (p. 91-97, 99, 120) and *Little Women* (p. 188) in *Ghost Boys*? How do these allusions to classic children's literature impact the novel's themes around childhood innocence, the loss of young black lives, and cultural representation?
 - Consider pairing *Ghost Boys* with another text in any genre. Support students in analyzing relationships between texts, rather than simply identifying similarities and differences. Invite

students to explore how the texts “talk” to each other: How does one text enhance our understanding of the other? Depending on grade level, literary works for young people that could be interesting to explore in relation to *Ghost Boys* might include:

- *All American Boys*, Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely
- *Beloved*, Toni Morrison
- *Between the World and Me*, Ta-nehisi Coates
- *Coco*, directed by Lee Unkrich
- *Dear Martin*, Nic Stone
- *Finding Langston*, Lesa Cline-Ransome
- *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas
- *I am Alfonso Jones*, Tony Medina
- *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison
- *Long Way Down*, Jason Reynolds
- *The Lovely Bones*, Alice Sebold
- *Spoon River Anthology*, Lee Edgar Masters
- “Strange Fruit” [Lyrics](#) by Abel Meeropol and Recordings by [Billie Holiday](#) and [Nina Simone](#)
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee
- *Towers Falling*, Jewell Parker Rhodes
- *Wonder*, R.J. Palacio

For additional texts in other genres to explore in relation to *Ghost Boys*, see **Cultural Context: Past, Present, and Future**.

B. Bullying

One facet of Jerome’s life that students may note is his experience of being bullied by classmates at school. Some students may empathize personally with him, and instances of bullying in the novel may naturally come to their attention. Consider exploring the idea of bullying as it reveals elements of characterization, conflict, and themes of guilt, blame, forgiveness, and empathy. Prompts for writing and discussion may include:

- How does Jerome’s experience of being bullied affect his sense of self and his relationships with family members?
- How does Jerome’s friendship with Carlos impact his relationships with Eddie, Mike, and Snap?
- How does Jerome’s death impact Eddie, Mike, and Snap, and their relationships with Carlos and Kim?

C. Racial Bias

One of the central truths of *Ghost Boys* is that young black boys are imperiled by racist violence, sometimes rooted in implicit bias. Consider engaging students in researching the sociocultural factors that promote this violence and then composing a persuasive oral or written response about who or what is to blame for Jerome’s death. The following resources and activities can be used to prepare for and facilitate discussions about structural racism, implicit bias, and the impact of pervasive racism on children:

- [Helping Students Discuss Race Openly](#): This *Educational Leadership* article provides a guide for educators in planning for and facilitating open conversations among students about race, starting with reflection on teachers’ own identities and building a trusting community where such discussions are possible and productive.
- [Teaching about Race, Racism and Police Violence](#): This collection of resources for educators includes comprehensive and regularly updated materials, including articles, professional development resources, classroom materials, and external sources for further exploration.
- [A Look at Race Relations through a Child’s Eyes](#): Children of various ages and ethnicities are interviewed about their relationships with race.

- [Project Implicit](#): These interactive “tests” reveal potential implicit biases based on race, sex, religion, and other identities. Thoroughly explore this resource on your own before introducing it in order to ensure that it is developmentally appropriate for your students and that you can adequately support them. Students should have a strong understanding of implicit bias in order to understand what their results mean.
- [Why Police Officers Aren't Held Accountable When They Kill People](#): Students may have questions about why the police officer in *Ghost Boys* (and many in real life) does not face charges for killing Jerome. This *Teen Vogue* article provides helpful context about legal precedent and explains why this happens so often.

III. CULTURAL CONTEXT: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

This section highlights numerous resources for exploration, analysis, and synthesis. The discussion protocols listed under **Centering Students' Voices** (see above) can be used to support students in collaboratively engaging with these resources. The following techniques also work well:

- [Text Rendering Experience](#)
- [Chalk Talk](#)
- [The Final Word](#)
- [Making Meaning](#)
- [Four Corners](#)
- [See/Think/Wonder](#)
- [Analyzing Images](#)
- [Gallery Walk](#)
- [Zoom In](#)

A. African-American Storytelling and Spiritual Traditions

Few children's books draw on these traditions, and many students first encounter them when they are in high school or even in college. Introducing this context to younger students as they read *Ghost Boys* will deepen their understanding of the novel's use of language and its representation of ghosts. Many students may associate ghosts with horror or magic, but in African-American storytelling and spiritual traditions, ghosts are real. Engage students in considering the roles that the ghosts play in the novel: What do the reader and the other characters learn through them?

- [“Don't call the dead if you aren't serious”](#): This excerpt from *Ghost Boys* author Jewell Parker Rhodes's memoir *Porch Stories* contextualizes *Ghost Boys* within the spiritual and storytelling traditions that Jewell carries forward from her grandmother.
- [The legacy of storytelling in African-American history](#): This video on black artistic expression and the context for modern black storytelling includes interviews with a variety of black artists and creators. Consider sharing the entire video with students as well as focusing on selected excerpts.
- [From Remus to Rap: A History in Theory and Practice of the African-American Storytelling Tradition](#): These lesson plans explore black oral storytelling from its roots to its contemporary forms. Writers including Martin Luther King, Jr., Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston are included.
- [Day of the Dead Educational Activity Guide](#): This guide provides comprehensive information about the history and cultural context of Dia de los Muertos, in addition to ready-to-implement activities and recipes for traditional foods.
- [Rethinking Identity: Afro-Mexican History](#): This article was written by a teacher who implemented a student-centered unit on Afro-Mexican history and culture. Note that full access to the article requires a subscription to *Rethinking Schools*.

B. Bearing Witness and the Oral Tradition

The oral tradition predates written communication as a mechanism for bearing witness. Support students in understanding these concepts as well as the relationships between them by exploring works of art in other genres that bear witness in ways that transcend written language. Introduce students to these works of art and invite them to make connections to *Ghost Boys*.

- [Martin Luther King, Jr. - "I Have A Dream" Speech - August 28, 1963](#): Many students may be familiar with the oft-quoted passages of this speech, but this video provides a fuller understanding of the speech as a whole and the context for its delivery. This text can be used for understanding the Civil Rights Movement as well as the African-American oral tradition.
- Engage students in analyzing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech as both poetry and political rhetoric. Prompts for discussion and writing might include:
 - What do you notice about the cadence of King's speech?
 - How does King juxtapose different types of oral communication, such as speech and song, and melody and rhythm?

For more information, see the PBS [lesson plan](#) "Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' Speech as a Work of Literature," including the extension that invites students to compare the speech to Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" and John F. Kennedy's inaugural address.

- [The Importance of Bearing Witness by Fernando Pérez](#). This TEDx talk aptly demonstrates the philosophy of bearing witness as it appears in *Ghost Boys* and is age-appropriate for high school students. Consider showing selected excerpts to middle school students.

C. The Civil Rights Movement

Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago who was lynched while visiting relatives in Mississippi in 1955. (Although the word "lynched" is often associated with hanging, it can refer to any extrajudicial murder, especially by a mob.) His mother, Mamie Till, insisted on having an open casket at his funeral so that the world would bear witness to the torture and death of her child. *Jet* magazine's publication of the funeral photographs helped to spark the Civil Rights Movement. In the chapter "Civil Rights" in *Ghost Boys* (p.113-117), Ms. Penny, the librarian at Sarah's school, explains what happened to Emmett Till and shows Sarah these photographs. Support students in developing an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and especially the role of young people in it through the Children's March.

- [The Body of Emmett Till](#): This video from *Time* Magazine's "100 Photos: The Most Influential Images of All Time" provides additional background information and context about the impact of the funeral photographs of Emmett Till as well as the broader role that still and video images have played in both the Civil Rights Movement and the Movement for Black Lives. In keeping with the novel's themes, invite students to consider how the dissemination of images throughout these movements has variously served as a call to action, a form of activism, and a way to bear witness.
- [American Freedom Stories: Children's Crusade of 1963](#): The Children's Crusade or Children's March is a logical historical touchstone in studying *Ghost Boys*, as it both illustrates the role of children in the Civil Rights Movement in response to the death of Emmett Till and anticipates contemporary youth activism such as the March for Our Lives.
- [The Sit-Ins](#): This video was created for a fifth-grade class to foster an understanding of the lunch counter sit-ins as a key moment in Civil Rights history, particularly with respect to nonviolent protest.
- Variation on 5 Minute Research Project (see **Historical and literary allusions** above): In keeping with the novel's themes, honor students' voices by focusing on the aspects of the Civil Rights Movement that are most compelling and resonant for them. After students research the historical and contemporary figures and events alluded to in *Ghost Boys*, invite them to analyze the author's use of

these references to provide context and to illuminate the novel's themes. How do these allusions impact the reader's understanding of the novel?

- Consider working with a local museum or historical society to host a field trip for your students so that they can engage directly with artifacts from this historical period. If a field trip is not possible, you might inquire about the possibility of a museum educator, teaching artist, or local expert visiting your school to speak with your students. Many institutions, notably the [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) in Washington, DC, offer extensive online resources, allowing students to conduct a “virtual” museum visit.
- See resources for analyzing Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Have a Dream Speech” under **Bearing Witness and the Oral Tradition** above.
- See [The Power to Change History: A Teaching Unit on Student Activism in History and Today](#) under **Engaging Students in Action and Activism**.

D. The Movement for Black Lives

Students may bring to the classroom a variety of knowledge, understandings, and questions about the Movement for Black Lives. Consider the extent to which students would benefit from an overview of it before inviting them to make connections between the Civil Rights Movement and the Movement for Black Lives.

- A [gallery walk](#) of images produced by contemporary photographers, painters, and other artists can provide students with an opportunity to explore their own interpretations of the artwork. Use a [See/Think/Wonder](#) protocol to engage students in reflective writing and/or discussion. See [Black Lives Matter: A movement in photos](#) for contemporary images.
- Additionally, this collection of [Black Lives Matter in Schools Resources](#) from D.C. Area Educators for Social Justice is an excellent set of resources and lesson plans on the Movement for Black Lives as well as African-American history and diversity more broadly.

Prompts for discussion and writing about the relationships between the Civil Rights Movement and the Movement for Black Lives might include:

- What do these movements have in common?
- What distinguishes them from each other?
- What has changed in the decades between them?
- What can we learn from the past to inform our actions in the present and future?

Extend student understanding of movements for social justice by introducing them to varied forms of current activism.

- [Our Lives Matter PSA](#): This short video illustrates grassroots youth activism. It can also be used as an opening activity when introducing the novel as it connects to multiple themes addressed in *Ghost Boys*.
- [#BlackLivesMatter: A Look Into The Movement's History](#): This video provides an overview of the origin of the Movement for Black Lives while also capturing how grassroots activism emerges, gains momentum, and achieves social change.
- “Glory” [Lyrics](#) and [Recording](#): The song “Glory” by John Legend and Common from the film *Selma* provides a clear example of contemporary art at the intersection of the Civil Rights Movement, the Movement for Black Lives, and the black oral tradition.
- “Glory” [Dance Performance](#): This piece, choreographed by Shontal Snider and performed by the Capitol Movement Pre-Professional Company in 2015, provides a further example of art as activism. Invite students to discuss the relationship between the “Glory” lyric “Justice for all just ain't specific enough” and the “All lives matter” banner that appears at the conclusion of the performance.
- [Black Lives Matter: A movement in photos](#): These powerful photographs document contemporary examples of bearing witness and art as activism as well as children and young people as activists. This

collection could be used to initiate writing and discussion on the Movement for Black Lives as well as in comparison to images from the Civil Rights Movement. Note that individual photographers are credited in the lower right corner of each photo.

E. Engaging Students in Action and Activism

Ghost Boys closes with a call to action: “Bear witness. My tale is told. Wake. Only the living can make the world better. Live and make it better.” Engage students in taking action in response to what they’ve learned, felt, and experienced as readers.

- Invite students to write a “Letter from the Living” in which they respond to the novel’s call to action and create art that fosters positive political change. This activity invites students to make personal connections to broader texts, issues, and themes, provides varied opportunities for student choice, and promotes authenticity through writing for a specific audience beyond the teacher. Consider incorporating a public speaking element to reinforce the novel’s emphasis on the oral tradition. Options might include writing to a character in the book such as Jerome, Emmett, Sarah, Carlos, Kim, or Grandma; author Jewell Parker Rhodes; a current politician or public figure; or a historical figure.
- Engage students in writing previously untold stories by introducing them to [Overlooked](#) from *The New York Times*. This multimedia initiative seeks to remedy the omission of women and people of color from the *Times*’s obituary section by publishing obituaries for people who were ignored. Prompts for discussion and writing might include:
 - Whose stories have been ignored?
 - What do we do to address past wrongs?
- [Social Justice Projects in the Classroom](#): This *Edutopia* article highlights a range of project ideas for engaging students in varied types of activism both in and outside of the classroom and across different media.
- [The Power to Change History: A Teaching Unit on Student Activism in History and Today](#): These lesson plans address youth activism past and present, including the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The final section includes student activities for identifying social issues that resonate with them and determining how they will take action.
- [Art and Activism](#): This series of lessons from Teaching Tolerance engages students in learning about how art has historically served as a form of activism. Students then create their own mural as an act of communal activism. Although it is intended for elementary school students, it can be adapted for older students.

An instant *New York Times* bestseller
An instant IndieBound bestseller
The #1 Kids' Indie Next Pick
A *Publisher's Weekly* Best Seller

About the Book

“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 toward 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 sociopolitical 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.

Praise for the Book

- “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
- “Rhodes beautifully weaves together the fictional and the historical—Jerome comes across the ghosts of real-life individuals like Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin—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
- “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
- “[Rhodes’s] hope for a better world packs a powerful punch.” –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 AI’s Book Club for Kids selection. You can visit Jewell online at JewellParkerRhodes.com.