



2018

Ghost Boys

Karen Abbott

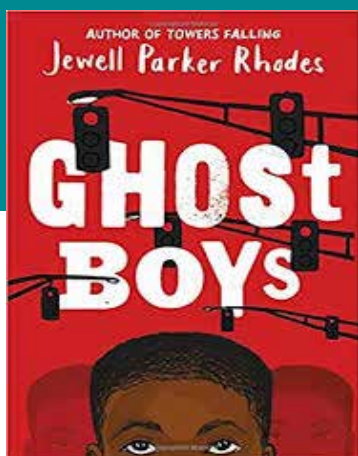
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Book Review

Ghost Boys

Author

Jewell Parker Rhodes

Illustrator

N/A

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate

Pages

224

Year

2018

Publisher

Little, Brown Books for

ISBN

9780374327972

Jerome, a twelve-year-old black child, is bullied at school, loved at home, and is a good kid. He makes his very first friend and is shot in the back by a white policeman on the very same day. Jerome lives in the slums and his family is close-knit and struggling to scrape up a living. The story alternates between his last day alive and his new experiences and feelings now that he is dead. His life and the events leading to the shooting are revealed a piece at a time. He witnesses the cop's trial and in court realizes that the policeman's daughter, Sarah, can see and hear him. She is also twelve and also in anguish over her family's situation. Another ghost has also begun to appear to them both: a black child killed in Mississippi in 1955, Emmett Till. Emmett helps Jerome release his pain and Jerome helps Sarah reconnect with her father and find a voice to challenge racism. Jerome becomes one of the ghost boys whose purpose it is to keep the memory of racial injustice alive until racism itself is dead.

This is a POWERFUL story, perhaps a new Uncle Tom's Cabin that will start a peace instead of a war. Jerome's character is robustly and modestly revealed in his own words as he tells his story to the reader. He exposes his hopes, his ambivalent love for his little sister, his sense of responsibility to protect and please his parents and grandmother, and his acquiescence to the daily bullying that he endures. His realistic debate over whether or not to make a friend tells us how hard his life really is. This intensifies the agony of his death for the reader. His new friend gives him a realistic looking toy gun and the one time he decides to be free and have fun the police are called and react too quickly. The anguish of the officer and his daughter are also keenly felt. The book's only weakness is placing perhaps too much emphasis on the responsibility of the past for current racial challenges. Not every issue can be dealt with in a single book, and the issues addressed in this novel are discussed intelligently, emotionally, and relevantly. Pain and healing have equal and genuine interaction and impact. Read this book. Please, read this book.

*Moderate violence.