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Bayou Magic



Synopsis

A magical coming-of-age story from Coretta Scott King honor author Jewell Parker Rhodes, rich with Southern folklore, friendship, family, fireflies and mermaids, plus an environmental twist. It's city-girl Maddy's first summer in the bayou, and she just falls in love with her new surroundings - the glimmering fireflies, the glorious landscape, and something else, deep within the water, that only she can see. Could it be a mermaid? As her grandmother shares wisdom about sayings and signs, Maddy realizes she may be the only sibling to carry on her family's magical legacy. And when a disastrous oil leak threatens the bayou, she knows she may also be the only one who can help. Does she have what it takes to be a hero? Jewell Parker Rhodes weaves a rich tale celebrating the magic within.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Following in the tradition of her previous books for children, Jewell Parker Rhodes spins a coming-of-age tale that's steeped in a perplexing piece of American history with BAYOU MAGIC: The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Consistent with her stories, Rhodes often features quiet, unassuming characters who are the least likely to make significant waves in their lives. In BAYOU MAGIC, Rhodes creates 10-year old Madison Isabelle Lavalier Johnson (Maddy) --- the youngest in a family of five worldly-minded sisters, as she prepares to leave New Orleans for the bayou to

spend the summer with her Grandmère. Unlike her sisters' disconcerting comments about their grandmother and her strange lifestyle, Maddy has a connection with this unusual woman and she feels like she's living "in a magical cottage deep in the forest." And it is indeed magical as Maddy explores deep into the bayou with a gangly boy named Bear, acquaints herself with the Bayou Bon Temps community, hears Grandmère's firefly stories and, most importantly, sees a mermaid. Grandmère calls Mami Wata. In the midst of upbeat moments, Maddy's dreams tell her things aren't as perfect as they seem. When crude oil starts taking over the waterways after an oilrig explosion, Maddy has to find a way to stop it from destroying Bon Temps. Surrounded with a tight cast of foiled characters, Maddy feels the pressure to get out of her protective shell and face her fears. Two prime foiled examples are Grandmère, whose odd yet encouraging comments have Maddy constantly wondering about life and the environment; and Bear, whose adventuresome spirit keeps Maddy on her toes. Rhodes utilizes other literary tools to keep her narrative fresh and moving.

I never would have picked up this book on my own. I had never heard of it or the author. My 4th grader found it at the library, and I decided to read it because the African-American girl on the cover piqued my interest. I am a big fan of multiculturalism in literature, though I admit, as an Asian-American, I tend to seek out books by and about Asian-Americans. I can't speak to the authenticity of the African-American experience in this book, but as a reader, I was drawn into the world of the Louisiana bayou along with Maddy, the main character, and I didn't want to leave. Firstly, this book is beautifully written. The writing is very descriptive, even poetic. Metaphors abound. Maddy, the main character, is a city girl from New Orleans who is sent to spend the summer with her grandmother in the Louisiana bayou. She meets a boy named Bear who is self-reliant, independent, and at one with nature. He is a compelling character, and once I met him, I wanted to read more about him. As Maddy is introduced to the bayou, there is a bit of a lesson about environmentalism. As the book progresses, the lesson becomes explicit, a central theme. Faith in things unseen is also an important message. There's a bit of magic realism as Maddy discovers, and struggles to understand, some "gifts" she inherited through her maternal ancestors. About two-thirds of the way through the book, the story takes a very serious turn. Though the events were predictable, having suspected that they would happen did not detract from the book because I was already invested in the characters, and I wanted to see how the story would end.

Short and Sweet: I loved this magical middle grade set in the bayou! I highly recommend for anyone who favors *The Princess and the Frog* Disney movie. To Elaborate: I stumbled onto BAYOU

MAGIC when I was browsing in Barnes and Noble, and I have no idea how I've missed this author. I love middle grade books, and Jewell Parker Rhodes has not only written several, she's also received awards for them. She even has a book releasing next month, TOWERS FALLING (set 15 years after 9/11), which I've heard next to nothing about. I'm so glad I picked this one up because I'm officially a huge fan, and I want to read the rest of her works. This story follows Maddy, the last of her sisters to spend a summer with her Grandmother in the bayou. While Maddy is worried she'll miss the city, she starts to fall in love with the community, fireflies, surroundings, and magic of the bayou. While adventuring with a new friend, Maddy sees a mermaid. Her grandmother explains the history of magic in their family, involving African culture, and Maddy will be the one to carry on the magical legacy. However, something bad is on the horizon, and Maddy must find strength, courage, and kindness to help. While it took me a few chapters to get used to the writing style (short, quick sentences), I soon fell in love with this atmospheric tale of magic, history, and community. Maddy is smart and easily likable, and the way she sees the world is fascinating. Her conversations with her grandmother, and all of her family members, are moving, often hilarious, and sweet. One of the big issues explored in this book is environmentalism, something I'm very passionate about.

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