



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Towers Falling

Jewell Parker Rhodes (Author)

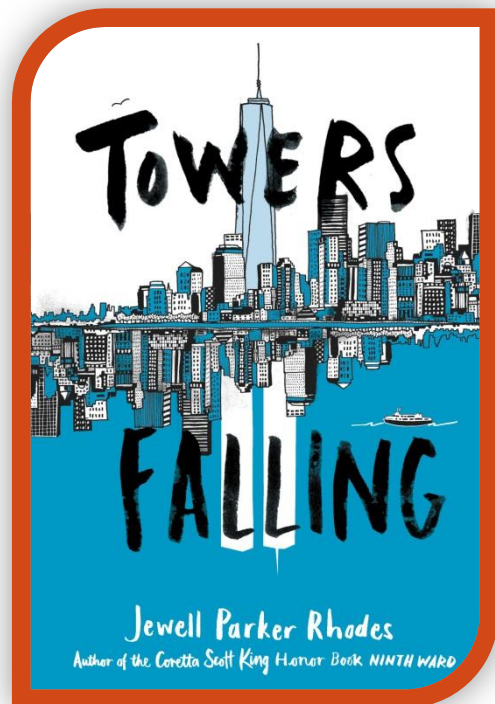
When her fifth-grade teacher hints that a series of lessons about home and community will culminate with one big answer about two tall towers once visible outside their classroom window, Dèja can't help but feel confused. She sets off on a journey of discovery, with new friends Ben and Sabeen by her side. But just as she gets closer to answering big questions about who she is, what America means and how communities can grow and heal, she uncovers new questions, too. Like, why does Pop get so angry when she brings up anything about the towers?

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Publisher: Little, Brown and Company

Year Published: 2016

Age Range: 8–12



Book Themes

Diversity, Tragic events, Stereotypes, Community, Friendship, Homelessness, 9/11

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the meanings as they come up in the book. See ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

- anxious
- assumption
- complaining
- depressed
- asserting
- collapsing
- confidence
- disrespect

- embarrassed
- eviction
- freedom
- heritage
- immigration
- inappropriate
- innocent
- integrated
- memorial
- niqab
- outsiders
- privacy
- processional
- protective
- sarcastic
- shelter
- skyline
- terrorist
- void

Advance Preparation

Towers Falling is about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11) and specifically the Twin Towers in New York City. If you decide to have students read the book, you may want to tell parents in advance. In addition, you will also want to give your students some background information about 9/11 prior to reading the book (see below).

Optional: Use a KWL chart during the reading and post-reading discussion of the book, before students read the book, distribute a KWL chart as follows:

What I K now	What I W ant to Know	What I L earned

Before reading, have students record everything they already know about September 11 ("K" column) and add a few questions they have or what more they want to know ("W" column). Then, after reading the book, they can record their additional questions ("W" column) and what they learned ("L" column), which can be done during Extension Activity #1 below.

Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- What do you learn about Dèja and her family in the first chapter?
- How would you describe Dèja's personality and how does she change throughout the book?
- When Dèja first attends her new school, what does she think about it?
- How does the friendship between Dèja, Ben and Sabeen form? What do they have in common? What differences exist between them?
- What do you learn about the different cultures (or heritage) of the students at the school from the bulletin board with the map of the world? What did you learn about Dèja, Ben and Sabeen when they talked about it?
- What do you think is going on with Dèja's Pop? How does your thinking change as Dèja gets more information?

- What did you know about 9/11 before reading the book and what did you learn about it from the book?
- How do students in the class respond when one of the students says, "Muslims did it."
- How does Dèja feel when the class homework assignment is to write about and draw about where they live?
- What happens when Dèja, Sabeen and Ben share their pictures and essays with each other? Why do you think Dèja reacts the way she does?
- How does Miss Garcia respond to Dèja's drawing? How does Dèja feel when Miss Garcia tells the class she expressed home best, because she included her family?
- Based on the book, how would you describe "social unit" and who is in your social unit?
- When Dèja says to Ben and Sabeen, "we're different but friends," what do you think she means?
- When the three friends talk about 9/11, why does Sabeen say that her family doesn't leave the house much? How does Sabeen respond to Dèja asking her what that means?
- How does Dèja feel when Ben shows her the video of the attack on the Twin Towers?
- Why do you think Dèja's Pop responds the way he does when Dèja tells him what she saw (Twin Towers attack) on Ben's computer?
- Why does Pop think Dèja is too young to know? What do you think about that? When did you learn about 9/11 and how did you find out about it?
- Why do you think Dèja gets mad at herself when she acts surprised that Sabeen's mother speaks English? Has anything like that ever happened to you, where you made an assumption about someone and then caught yourself?
- What is it like when Dèja has dinner at Sabeen's house? How does she feel being there?
- What happens when Pop visits Dèja's school? Why does Pop cry and what do Pop and Dèja talk about after school? What does Dèja figure out about Pop from their conversation?
- In Miss Garcia's class, they talk about history being alive and why it matters. What does this mean to you? How is history alive for you?
- Why do you think Miss Garcia has the students in the class construct skyscrapers? What did they learn?
- What does Dèja discover when she goes through Pop's suitcase? How does she feel?
- When Mr. Schmidt teaches the class about 9/11, what does he tell them and what is their response?
- Why do Ben and Dèja decide to go to Freedom Tower, where the Twin Towers used to be?
- What do they see and hear when they visit Freedom Tower?
- What does Pop tell Dèja about his experience on 9/11? How does Pop feel? How does Dèja feel?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What is the overall theme and message(s) of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with children in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Discuss September 11

Ask students: *Why is the book called Towers Falling? What important event was the book about?* Elicit from students that the book is about the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and in particular, the Twin Towers in New York City. Ask: *What did you know about September 11 before reading the book? What facts did you learn about September 11 by reading the book?* As students share what they learned from the book, record their responses on the board. They may include items such as:

- When the Twin Towers were constructed in the 1960s, sixty people died during the construction.
- Terrorists (identified as “Al-Qaeda”) attacked the “Twin Towers” (World Trade Center buildings) on September 11, 2001. Less than two hours after the planes hit each of the buildings, the buildings collapsed. Some people escaped and many people were killed in the towers.
- 2,753 people (from over 90 nations) were killed when the towers were hit by two hijacked planes which were crashed into the towers on purpose.
- The oldest victim was 85 years old and the youngest was two years old. 403 of the victims were first responders (firefighters and police officers).
- A new building called Freedom Tower was built where the Twin Towers used to stand.
- Because the terrorists identified as Muslim, since September 11, many Muslim people feel like they have to be careful because some people generalize and “think we’re all terrorists.”
- In addition to the Twin Towers, there were two other planes hijacked by terrorists: one hit the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and the other crashed in Pennsylvania.

As you review this information, have students add to their KWL chart under “L” for what they learned. Then ask: *What else do you want to know? What new questions do you have?* Record those as well and have students write them in the “W” column. Use their questions to share more information about September 11 using the following websites and others: [9-11 Attacks](#) (History), [9-11 Facts](#) (Kids Connect), [Terrorist Attacks Against the U.S.](#) (Fact Monster) and [September 11, 2001: Background and timeline of the attacks](#) (CNN). If time permits, assign students (individual or pairs) to conduct a research project about one of their questions. They can first ask their parents and family members about what they know and then look at books and conduct Internet research to learn more.

2. Reading Response Writing Activities

- **Write the next chapter of the book:** Have students discuss what might happen next in the book and write an additional chapter. Remind students how the book ends and ask the following questions: *What do you think happens after Pop tells Dèja about his experience on 9/11? Do you think they will go to the 9/11 Memorial Museum together and if so, what do you think that experience will be like for them? What do you think the rest of the school year will be like for Dèja, Sabeen and Ben? How do you think their friendship develops?* Have students write the next chapter of the book, either beginning with when Pop and Dèja go to the 9/11 Memorial Museum, or the next day at school.

- Diary Entry of Character:** Have students select a character from the book, which could include: Dèja, Sabeen, Ben, Miss Garcia (Dèja's teacher), any of the parents of Dèja, Ben or Sabeen. Then have them write diary entries for the chosen character, writing 5–8 diary entries that the character might have kept before, during or after the book's events. Remind students that the character's thoughts and feelings are very important in a diary as well as their reaction to the day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout the book. You may choose to have students engage in pre-writing discussions with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas out. After they have completed the assignment, have them share their diary entries with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.
- Book Review of Book Talk:** Have students write a book review of *Towers Falling*. The elements of a book review should include: (1) title, author, genre and theme; (2) personal reflections about the book—how it made you feel, what you learned and your thoughts about it; (3) plot summary—describe what happened without giving away spoilers; (4) people/characters you loved or disliked, (5) a theme or message that resonated with you and why and (6) why it is worth reading or not. Consider sharing the reviews on a class blog, using [GoodReads](#) for online reviews. In addition, students can do a “book talk” with the class in which they discuss the elements of their book review based on the categories above, or read it aloud and answer questions.

3. My Social Unit

Remind students about the “social units” that the students in Miss Garcia's class created (starting on page 64). Using a diagram like the one in the book, have students draw their own social unit, putting themselves in the middle and thinking about different kinds of social units in their lives. They can start with family (or friends) as the inner circle and then move to their school, community, neighborhood, city, state, country, etc. as the circles extend outward. After creating the social units circles, they can include additional words, symbols or images inside the circles that represent something about each group. Then, have students write a title and caption for their social unit drawing. Display the drawings around the room, giving students an opportunity to do a “gallery walk” where they can view each other's drawings. You can also invite parents/family members in to participate in the gallery walk and discussion.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on identity, bullying, anti-Muslim bigotry and responding to hate and violence.

Curriculum Resources

“Anti-Muslim Bigotry and Being an Ally,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/anti-muslim-bigotry-and-being-an-ally.html.

“Beyond Stigma and Stereotypes: What is Homelessness?,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/beyond-stigma-and-stereotypes.html.

“Identity-Based Bullying,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/identity-based-bullying.html.

“Responding to Hate and Violence,” *Curriculum Connections*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/responding-to-hate-and-violence.html.

“Social Justice Poetry,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/social-justice-poetry.html.

“Who Am I? Identity Poems,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html.

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Be An Ally: Six Simple Ways

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment.html

Provides tips for the classroom educator to create an anti-bias learning environment.

Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/empowering-young-people-in-the-aftermath-of-hate.html

A guide for educators and families that provide the tools they need to help young people confront hate effectively in the aftermath of hate violence or terrorism in their community.

Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/helping-students-make-sense.html

Provides suggestions, strategies and resources to help make discussions about national news stories that involve incidents of bias and injustice rich and productive for students.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Religious Bigotry: Muslim/Muslim American, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/religion-religious-bigotry-books.html?subreligion=muslim-muslim-american

People, Identity and Culture, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-identity-culture.html

General Anti-Bias: Socioeconomic Bias, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/general-books.html?generalsub=socioeconomic-bias