

# Ninth Ward



By

Jewell Parker Rhodes

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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**About the author:** Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit [novelstudies.org](http://novelstudies.org).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of *Ninth Ward* and is comprised of these distinct sections:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include coping with disasters (Hurricane Katrina), independence and survival, dealing with life as an *outsider*, courage and persistence, loyalty, family and friendship.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Listing compound words
8. Identifying parts of speech
9. Identify *personification*.
10. Identification of root words

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Complete a Plot Outline
5. Identify the climax of the novel.

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write about your personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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## Synopsis

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 survive the storm.

*Ninth Ward* is a celebration of resilience, love, family, and friendship, and a deeply emotional story of transformation. [Courtesy of The Author's website]

## Author Biography

*Jewell Parker Rhodes*

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.

Dr. Jewell Parker Rhodes is the author of *Ghost Boys*, *Towers Falling*, and the Louisiana Girls children's book trilogy, which includes *Ninth Ward*, *Sugar*, and *Bayou Magic*. The books in this series 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. She currently lives in San Jose. (Courtesy of Dr. Rhodes' website <http://jewellparkerrhodes.com>)



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## Student Checklist

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

# Ninth Ward



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Sunday



## Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *Ninth Ward* is Lanesha, who lives in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans. It is very important for the main character of a story to be appealing in some way, and be able to hold the reader's interest. What is one book (or movie) that you have read or seen which features an unforgettable protagonist? What was it that made this character so memorable?




## Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

jambalaya	pralines	tragedy	memorize
cursive	magnolias	dignity	eucalyptus

1. It is difficult to maintain one's \_\_\_\_\_ during such an embarrassing event.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ tree has over 700 species.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ usually consist of pecans, sugar and cream.
4. Our teacher expects us to practice our \_\_\_\_\_ writing each morning.
5. I had to \_\_\_\_\_ the poem *The Highwayman* when I was in grade seven.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ usually consists of a mixture of rice, meat and vegetables.
7. Would you consider *Romeo and Juliet* to be a comedy or a \_\_\_\_\_?
8. There are plenty of \_\_\_\_\_ in my grandmother's flower garden.



# Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?


2. According to Mama Ya-Ya, why were most of the people in Lanesha's family scared of her? What other possible reason might they have had for ignoring her?


3. Mama Ya-Ya is \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

4. Who did Mama Ya-Ya believe Lanesha's father might have been? Why hadn't Lanesha's mother been able to tell them who he was?


5. Do you think you would like to have Lanesha for a friend? Think of one reason why she would make for a fascinating friend, and one reason why she would not.

Good Friend.	
Not so much.	

6. Why do you think Lanesha was so captivated by the story of Romeo and Juliet?


7. What does *star-crossed* mean?

--

8. Who was Mama-Ya-Ya's favourite president?

--

9. Investigate: *Ninth Ward* takes place in the year of Hurricane Katrina. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, find out the year of this traumatic event. Calculate how old Lanesha would be today.


10. How do you think you would feel about having Mama Ya-Ya as a guardian? Please explain your response.


11. According to Mama Ya-Ya, the color blue means *strength, friendliness and happiness*. What do you think the meaning of your favorite color might be?


12. Why did Lanesha feel that a butterfly is strong? Do you agree? Why or why not?


## Language Activities



**A.** A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter One is *Her head tilts; her body relaxes in the chair like a balloon losing air*. In this example, what is her body being compared to?



--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) being scared


b) the taste of a spicy soup


**B.** Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here is such an example from Chapter One: *She wears white angel wings.*



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

A tragic moment.	
The howl of a wolf.	
Your choice.	

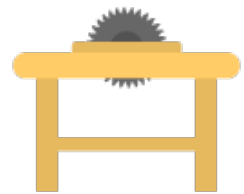
**C. Personification** is giving human qualities to something that is not human. The following is an example from Chapter One: *Lace curtains hang limp over the two front windows.*

Describe how the lace curtains are personified in this sentence.


Create your own example of personification.


## D. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first chapter of *Ninth Ward*.

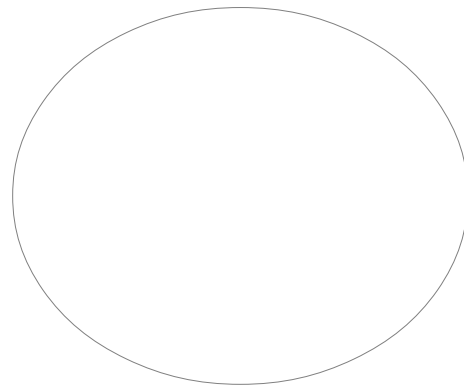
Word	Anagram	Clue
poster		Favorite word of some magicians.
dream		Packing heat.
scold		Lumps of earth.
silver		Don't get one of these in your finger.
tragedy		Whirled.
scared		Trees that love growing by the water.
teacher		100 acres.

## E. 5 Ws and an H.

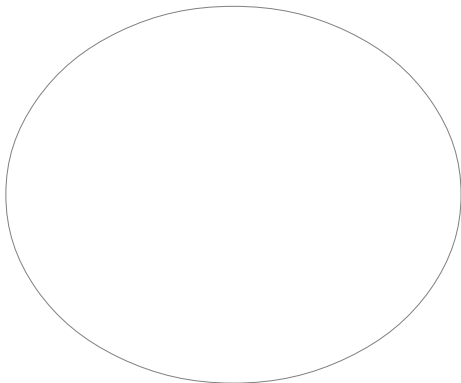
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



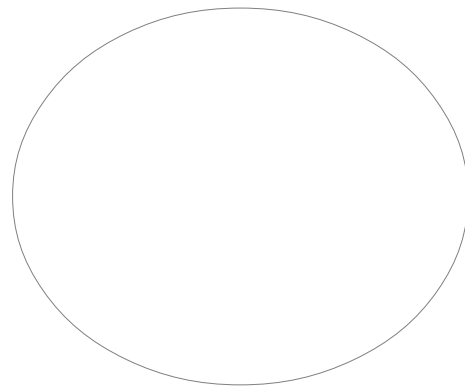
***WHO?***



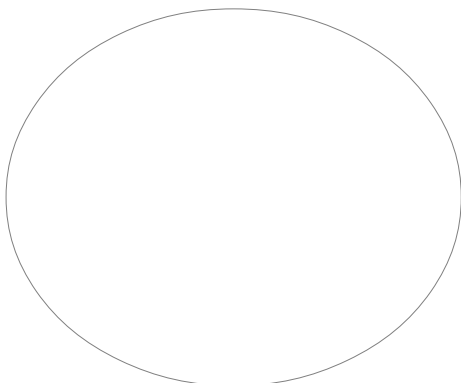
***WHAT?***



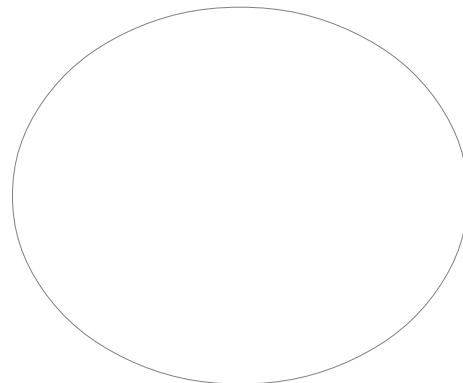
***WHEN?***



***WHERE?***



***WHY?***



***HOW?***

## F. An Acrostic Poem

There are many forms of poetry available to the aspiring poet other than the rhyming poem. An ACROSTIC poem is one example. In an acrostic poem the first letters of each line are aligned vertically to form a word. The word often is the subject of the poem. Here is an example written by the acclaimed poet, Atrocious Halitosis:

### The Firefly

Freaky-looking  
Itches me when I touch  
Restless at night  
Early or late  
Fearless  
Little  
Yellowfly



### The Acrostic Poem

Now create your own Acrostic Poem on a subject featured in this novel. Your poem must have at least four lines (and doesn't need to rhyme).

**Title:** .....


# Extension Activity



## A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words



Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of the first chapter.

Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture:	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: