



# Bayou Magic

*Jewell Parker Rhodes*

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**If only Maddy sees the mermaid, can it be real?**

It's Maddy's turn to have a bayou summer. At first she misses life back home in the city, but soon she grows to love everything about her new surroundings -- the glimmering fireflies, the glorious landscape, and something else, deep within the water, that only Maddy sees. Could it be a mermaid? As her grandmother shares wisdom about sayings and signs, Maddy realizes she may be only the 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?

A coming-of-age tale rich with folk magic, set in the wake of the Gulf oil spill, *Bayou Magic* celebrates hope, friendship, and family, and captures the wonder of life in the Deep South.

## Bayou Magic Details

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Author : Jewell Parker Rhodes

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# From Reader Review Bayou Magic for online ebook

## Nikki says

I have fallen in love with Jewell Parker Rhodes' MG books. Such a brilliant author, combining magic, family, mystery, nature, tragedy, and humor in her incredibly written books. Bayou Magic was just that: magic. I was caught in its spell from the moment I turned the first page.

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## Jennifer says

Maddy is about to spend her first summer with her grandmother, Grandmère, a prospect that makes her nervous since all of her older sisters say that she is weird and that the bayou is boring. Nevertheless, off Maddy goes to Bon Temps, LA. At first, she is unsure of what to think of Grandmère, and then she discovers that Grandmère tells wonderful stories about their family past: stories of Mami Watta and Membe. Then she introduces Maddy to Bear, a boy who lives nearby with his father who works on an oil platform. At first, the summer is perfect, and Maddy is able to learn from Grandmère and explore the bayou. But then she starts having bad dreams, and Bear disappears for days on end. What has happened to Maddy's friend? And do her bad dreams mean something is about to happen? If so, will Maddy be able to save Bon Temps?

This story is a wonderful mix of folk stories and childhood fantasy, with a healthy dose of environmental realism. This book is recommended for imaginative children who don't mind a bit of realism in their fantasy. Due to some sensitive topics, it is recommended that children be around 4th or 5th grade before reading this story.

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## Waffle says

Second time listening to a Jewel Parker Rhodes story, and again I felt disconnected from the emotional core of the book because it felt like a reductive, positive to the point of glib, take on hard tragedies. I liked the magical elements, up to the point they were an easy fix solution to a massive ecological disaster. Simply put, EXTREMELY UNSATISFYING. Also the child abuse and neglect of a character is completely dismissed, even explained away as okay.

TBH I didn't completely finish, but I was really close. The magical wall was a breaking point.

Guess I know now that she isn't the writer for me.

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## alix says

JPR does it again. Beautifully interwoven elements of fantasy and realism, with themes of environmentalism/ conservation, self-discovery, family/ community, interconnectedness, history/ intergenerational trauma and healing. I'm using this as my anchor text for our fantasy text next year.

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## **Lady Bill says**

I really enjoyed this book. Solidly middle grade with an introverted african american main character and MERMAIDS. 10 year old me would have loved this story.

The YA @ Heart Book Club talked all about it on our youtube channel:

(PSA: CURSING and MANY SPOILERS in the video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLrgu...>

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## **Rachel Gilbertson says**

I really enjoyed this book. I love that you get to learn about life on the Bayou in Louisiana. Also learn about the Cajun Culture. So it is a really good book to teach multiple subjects, (English, Social Studies, Science, Art, etc.) Was an easy read as well, I really enjoyed the plot because of the family relationship was really strong. I also loved how I was able to learn more about life in Louisiana and compare to my own life experience and see the similarities and differences.

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## **Bea Charmed says**

I read about this book in an issue of School Library Journal and immediately went to NetGalley to request it then to up my odds I also entered to win an eGalley of it. Yep, I wanted this book. :D I liked what the author, Rhodes, had to say in the article, and the mix of fantasy and folklore plus it featured a heroine who wasn't your basic white middle-class American seen so often in children's books and that includes the books that I review. And look at that cover, it's so joyful. Stacking the odds paid off as I was approved and I won an eGalley. :D

So, after all that hype, hype which I usually run from, was the book All That? Well, it's not one I'll likely read again but it kept me reading. I was about halfway or so through the book before I realized that not a whole lot had actually happened yet. "Bayou Magic" very much a character driven story though near the end the action picks up and drives the remainder of the story. I was engaged, curious, and involved. I wanted to know if Maddy and her grandmother truly had magic, were there really mermaids in the Louisiana bayou and I loved that I learned, quite a bit actually, including the fact that mermaid stories are much more global than I ever realized. Rhodes, just like Maddy's grandmere, lays a foundation, building the story bit by bit, working up to the final lessons and Maddy's test. By the time the action begins, we pretty much know what's going to happen but how it gets resolved and how Maddy rises to the challenge are worth the read, they're the pay off.

The messages in the book - family, friendship, hope, faith, the perils of pride, and stewardship of the earth - are not subtle and any pretense of subtly is thrown out the window towards the end of the story. While I agree with the messages, I wish Rhodes had been less overt and let readers come to their own conclusions. Still, the story is one worth reading.

Tweens and young teens will be able to relate to Maddy's insecurities, her seemingly contradictory desires to be both special and just a regular girl. She gains confidence during her summer with her grandmere and discovers that she can make a difference. Her friendship with local boy Bear enriches her summer and teaches her a valuable lesson, as well as her grandmere too. What child hasn't wished they could teach a grownup something? Maddy was shy, smart, courageous, compassionate, and eager to learn, eager to find the magic around her.

"Bayou Magic" wasn't quite magical for me and the magic in the story is mostly subtle but it's a delightful story for children and adults alike.

There were several good quotes so rather than choose one I'm sharing several.

In this one, Maddy's grandmere is singing a lullaby and Maddy translates it into English:

Something like: "Sleep, little one. A crab will eat you if you don't." A bogeyman lullaby. Why do grown-ups like to scare kids to sleep?

Why do grown-ups do that? SMH

In New Orleans, lots I didn't know. Wasn't much I needed to know.

Eat. Sleep. Go to school. Pay attention to traffic lights, rules. Don't irritate my sisters. Get hugs and kisses from Ma and Pa.

Maybe the whole world is one big puzzle, and I just didn't know it. I only know in the bayou, my feelings are stronger. Sensitive.

I feel-know-something's wrong and Grandmere's not telling.

This last one is so true.

In real life, it's hard to be a hero. Bad things happen and you can't fix everything yourself. You need good friends and hope.

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## **Samantha says**

4.5/5 stars

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 Grandmère 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. The bayou is threatened by an oil rig immediately, but the story also reflects the bigger picture of some of the destroyed and lost land. There is an immense respect for the land, air, and water in Maddy's new community, and you can feel their pain when that physical community is under harm. Rhodes has a lovely author note at the end that goes into a little more detail, and it's very beautiful and heartbreaking.

If you enjoy a bayou setting, firefly and mermaid magic, and a close community feel, then I would highly recommend this quick middle grade read!

Originally posted at The Forest of Words and Pages: <http://www.forestofwordsandpages.com/...>

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## **Samantha says**

Maddy is the youngest in her family and it's finally her turn to spend the summer with her Grandmere (her mother's mother) who lives in the Louisiana Bayou. Her sisters fill her head with all sorts of stories about Grandmere, all painting her as mysterious, cranky, and stubborn. She's lived in the Louisiana Bayou without modern conveniences her entire life and Maddy firmly identifies herself as a city girl (she lives in New Orleans) so, needless to say, she's a little nervous about visiting her grandmother.

Once she arrives and gets settled in to a daily routine, Maddy falls in love with the Bayou. She meets a boy around her age and the two become fast friends. While out exploring one day, Maddy sees a creature beneath the water which leads to the discovery of her mystical powers, a trait she shares with her grandmother. She begins to have prophetic dreams that warn of trouble. As she learns more about the creatures that only she can see (mermaids), her dreams reveal more details about the impending doom soon to descend on the Bayou.

An oil spill releases thousands of gallons of crude oil into the Bayou ecosystem. Maddy enlists the help of her mermaid friends to put a stop to the destruction of the environment, but even with magical help it takes time. With the oil spill brought to a happy conclusion, Maddy makes plans to spend every summer in the future in the Bayou.

The story feels a little rushed to me. I wanted to really soak in the setting and the fantasy elements, but the story moved along at a steady pace. I was hoping for some beautiful dialogue too considering the setting, but it was only okay (Grandmere inserts bits of French into her speech). A secondary plot involves domestic violence which isn't really dealt with and then a death makes dealing with the issue impossible and leaves loose ends that don't read as firmly tied up by the novel's close for me.

I was really excited for this book, but overall it was only okay for me. I think it's a fun summer read for grades 4-6 and I like the way concern for the environment is woven into the problem and rising action, though it didn't blow me away.

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### **Akoss says**

Maddy is the youngest of five sisters. Every Summer one sister is sent to spend time with their grandma in Bon Temps. This Summer, it's Maddy's turn. Having heard supposedly horror stories from her sisters, she is more than apprehensive. What she discovers however, once she gets there changes her life forever and for the best.

This is a story of love, family, community and culture. Maddy's summer in Bon Temps is marked with good food, magic, but also a tragedy known as the Deep-water Horizon Oil Spill.

The story is beautifully told. The writing is seamless and the characters have so much personality. I also appreciated the author's take on the water deity known as Mamy Wata to my people in West Africa. This book is definitely a keeper.

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### **Ellie M says**

Bayou Magic was a good story that combined friendship, family, environmental awareness, and just a bit of magic. It provides a brief look into African folklore and also contains an important message about protecting the environment. A great read that I would recommend to others!

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### **Becky Osmon says**

Lovely middle grade story, I liked the optimism and how it spoke deeply to Louisiana and African American history.

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### **Stephanie says**

Beautiful magical realism full of rich family relationships, strong women and girls, and beautiful writing. It isn't fast-paced, but it is *luscious*! I looooved dipping into it a bit at a time, and I always came out of each reading session feeling better about the world.

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## **Irene says**

This book is wonderful.

I never would have picked it up 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.

For the parents out there who like to know what to expect, I don't want to give too much away, but I will say that this book doesn't hide the fact that life is complicated. There is a death, and a violent drunk. But both are handled in as gentle a manner as you might expect when narrated from the perspective of a thoughtful 10-year-old girl.

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## **Brandy Painter says**

3.5 stars

This is a great book to hand to 3rd-5th graders who love stories of magic, friendship, and family. I enjoyed the relationship between Maddy and her grandmother most of all. This is a story rich in history and tradition. The bayou setting is beautiful, detailed, and feels exactly as I imagine the bayou to be. The book's only real weakness is its pacing. There are parts that are a little too slow and others that feel rushed. This may have been intentional for the plot, but it made for a disconcerting reading experience at times.

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