

## The Colors of the Rain

**R.L. Toalson**

Yellow Jacket (Sep 18, 2018)

Hardcover \$17.99 (384pp)

978-1-4998-0717-2

R. L. Toalson's heart-wrenching *The Colors of the Rain* traces a boy's journey through incredible loss amid tense racial issues.

In 1972, in Houston, Texas, Paulie Sanders's father is killed after fleeing the scene of a bar fight. The situation is wrought: Paulie's father was defending a black man, and ended up killing someone in the bar. He was then chased down by three other patrons.

Paulie's mother has not recovered; she has started drinking, and she neglects her two young children. Paulie and his sister Charlie move in with their Aunt Bee, an elementary-school principal at Paulie's newly desegregated school. Paulie is not interested in school or his classmates, though he likes his art teacher, Mr. Langley, a black man who is close to Aunt Bee. Paulie is very aware of the tension caused by the integration of black students; his feelings are conflicted, and he constantly remembers that his father's death was tied to issues of race.

Paulie does not make any friends at his new school. He begins to take his hurt and anger out on a black classmate, Greg, whom he bullies just because he can. With great patience and support from his family and Mr. Langley, Paulie learns how much he has in common with Greg, and comes to feel less alone in his suffering. A shocking family secret helps him move beyond his desolation and redefine his relationships and his outlook on life.

The story is written entirely in verse. Stark, powerful descriptions effectively capture the complexity of Paulie's suffering, and the brutality of the racial discrimination around him. Both sorrowful and poignant, the novel finds Paulie dealing with huge issues at a young age. Important lessons in hope, love, and acceptance emerge from his tragedies and trials.

CATHERINE THURESON (September/October 2018)

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