



The Colors of the Rain

R.L. Toalson

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This historical middle grade novel written in free verse, set against the backdrop of the desegregation battles that took place in Houston, Texas, in 1972, is about a young boy and his family dealing with loss and the revelation of dark family secrets.

Ten-year-old Paulie Sanders hates his name because it also belonged to his daddy-his daddy who killed a fellow white man and then crashed his car. With his mama unable to cope, Paulie and his sister, Charlie, move in with their Aunt Bee and attend a new elementary school. But it's 1972, and this new school puts them right in the middle of the Houston School District's war on desegregation.

Paulie soon begins to question everything. He hears his daddy's crime was a race-related one; he killed a white man defending a black man, and when Paulie starts picking fights with a black boy at school, he must face his reasons for doing so. When dark family secrets are revealed, the way forward for everyone will change the way Paulie thinks about family forever.

The Colors of the Rain is an authentic, heartbreaking portrait of loss and human connection during an era fraught with racial tension set in verse from debut author R. L. Toalson.

The Colors of the Rain Details

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Author : R.L. Toalson

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From Reader Review *The Colors of the Rain* for online ebook

Ms. Yingling says

ARC provided by the publisher

Paulie lives in Texas in 1972 and is having a difficult life. His father, who struggled with alcohol after coming back from Vietnam, has been in a fight that left one man dead, and then was in a car crash and shot by friends of the man he killed. Paulie's mother is unable to cope, and after her struggles with prescription medication, Paulie and his sister Charlotte (Charlie) end up in the care of their Aunt Bee. Bee is a school principal, and wants the children to come to her school even though it is the center of an integration battle. White parents are upset that black children will be attending their children's school and are threatening to make their own district. Paulie, who is very artistic, find refuge with Mr. Langely (who is black) in the school art room, but he also feels some rage at a black boy, Greg, and picks on him. His aunt isn't happy, and Paulie has to work through his emotions at his own difficulties in order to deal with the racial tensions at his school. There are tensions within his own family as well, as secrets come out about Aunt Bee's past, as well as her current relationships.

Strengths: I was in elementary school during this time period and had no idea of the bigger issues of busing that were occurring. It's a topic that needs to be addressed, and there are a few other stories from around the US, like Hitchcock's *Ruby Lee and Me* (Alabama) and Frank's *Charlie and Armstrong* (California). Your average twelve-year-old does not have a good grasp of Civil Rights history, and this addresses several issues that would have been a concern at this time. The verse format of this makes it a fairly quick read.

Weaknesses: Because of the verse format, some information that would be helpful is not presented as clearly as it would have been in prose. For example, for half the book, I thought Paulie's family was black. (Mainly because of the descriptions of food, which must be common in Texas and is not in Ohio! Also, it was mentioned that it was rare for a woman to be principal, and I knew a fair number of white women principals during this time.) There are some confusing issues presented, and more description would be helpful to readers unfamiliar with this time.

What I really think: Debating. I need more books on this time period, but the cover isn't great. It should be in a 1970s color palette and incorporate some of the great 1970s fonts! What I really need is a book dealing with the busing in Cleveland in the late 1970s.

J.H. Diehl says

A white fifth-grader's family tragedies and secrets are woven into the brutal realities of a community's resistance to school integration in this sensitively-told novel-in-verse, set in the early 1970s in Texas. One thing that struck me about the story was how its characters, both black and white, all in some tragic way bruised by life, find ways to anchor and buoy each other through difficult, changing times and - especially for the protagonist Paulie - as those hard secrets unveil.

Ginger says

A heart-breaking story beautifully told diving into topics of racism, abuse, family, and grief.

Sydney ? says

So this was waaaay more emotional than I had anticipated. It was such an inspiring and thought provoking book for a middle grade level, which I think is really important! This book raises topics that are tough and not normally talked about!

The free verse way this was written in was so beautiful. I think it added a lot to the story I think that everyone needs to read this.

Laurie says

An ambitious, moving novel-in-verse that doesn't shy away from tough topics and features a resilient protagonist.

Rebecca says

So many positive things about this book:

Novel in verse

Historical time

Families

Loss

Rekindling

Recovery from the past

So many things packed into this page turning novel in verse! It may seem like a big book but you're going to want to continue reading page after page to find out what's next!

Sandy O'Brien says

"Sometimes families don't look exactly the way we expect it to.

Sometimes it looks maybe just a little bit better."

#TheColorsOfTheRain is a novel written in verse.

It takes you on a journey with 10-year-old Paulie as he navigates life during the war on desegregation in Houston. Not only has he lost his dad, but things seem to keep falling apart at the seams.

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Will Paulie be able to trust again?

Will he find a way to be happy despite all of the setbacks he continues to face?

Anne O'Brien Carelli says

I was given an ARC to review and was pulled right in to a compelling story, told in a way that makes it easy to digest the content and feel the emotion. After reading it, I went back through and really studied the use of words and poetry and it made me appreciate the book even more. The author has taken an ugly, uncomfortable subject and infused it with compassion and understanding. It will probably be a new topic for middle graders (and YA readers, as well), but it's an excellent way for them to look at history from different points of view. The author did a beautiful job of tackling a tough topic so that kids will want to continue to read and find out more. I highly recommend it.

Mandy Stallard says

Wow! This novel-in-verse from R. L. Toalson is a must read. Paulie's father was killed on a rainy evening, and ever since that day, his mom hasn't been the same. She's started drinking and is rarely home. Since his mother can no longer take care of them, Paulie and his older sister, Charlie, go to live with their Aunt Bee who happens to be the principal of Paulie's new elementary school. It's 1972 in Houston, and the community is boiling with protests over school desegregation. At his new school, Paulie meets Mr. Langley, the art teacher. Mr. Langley is different than any other teacher Paulie has had before because he is black, but Paulie quickly feels a connection to him. Paulie also meets a black student named Greg who has a special connection to Mr. Langley as well. Unfortunately for Greg, he becomes the target of Paulie's repressed anger over losing his dad and his mom. Eventually, Paulie realizes that he and Greg are more alike than he could have ever imagined.

Aunt Bee has the nicest house Paulie and Charlie have ever seen; she cooks for them and provides for them in ways their mother never could. Paulie and Charlie are loving their new life until their mom throws a wrench in it. She wants them back. The children are faced with the dilemma of disappointing their aunt if they leave and disappointing their mom if they stay. There is an amazing surprise in the plot that unfolds near the end of the book. This twist will leave readers in tears (both happy and sad), and they will be rethinking all of Aunt Bee's prior actions.

Novels-in-verse are quickly becoming one of my favorite genres. They are such quick reads and beautifully lyrical. This book is no exception. I snapped four or five pictures of lines that I didn't want to forget because they were too special to just keep reading. I love when an author writes such beautiful lines that I just want to savor them, and there were many lines worth savoring in *The Colors of the Rain*

Lorie Barber says

Wow. An incredibly important historical fiction novel on verse that would pair beautifully with *Brown Girl Dreaming*, or to read aloud during a Civil Rights unit. I was so touched, surprised, and in love with the characters - especially Paulie, Greg, and Aunt Bee - their struggles, and how they learned and grew.

Kristin Crouch says

Thank you to the author for gifting me an ARC.

R. L. Toalson has woven so many wonderful elements into this novel in verse. Paulie's father has died, his mother is debilitated by grief and addiction, and racial tensions are running high as his town is struggling to integrate. Luckily, he has his sister, Charlie, and his Aunt Bea to support him.

Thinking back through the novel, I am overwhelmed at everything this young man had to face. But the book never felt overwhelming. There was so much struggle and sadness, but Paulie found peace in his art, his dog, and his extended family. R. L. Toalson wrote a very heavy novel that never once feels too heavy to bear - a wonderful talent, in my opinion.

The Colors of the Rain is a beautiful book to hand to students who are interested in integration, who've faced any type of loss or grief, who've witnessed addiction, or who struggle with finding and being their best selves. Basically, it should be made available to any kids you may know!

Melanie Sumrow says

Told in stunning verse, this is a heartbreaking story filled with hope. Paulie's world falls apart, but he learns to piece it back together as he re-examines what it means to be both a family and a friend. Set with the 1970's war on desegregation as its backdrop, the author does a masterful job of integrating the racial tension of the day from a child's perspective.

Laura Shovan says

THE COLORS OF THE RAIN is a beautiful middle grade verse novel by debut author R. L. Toalson. This heart-centered book is about Paulie, a boy in the 1970s South whose family is struggling. When he goes to live with an aunt, a school principal, desegregation impacts his life in unexpected ways. Readers will connect with Paulie's honest, emotionally raw voice.

An ARC of this book was shared with the #BookExpedition reading group.

Cassie Thomas says

“I’ve never felt so alone in my life, even though there are people all around me.”

Set in 1972 during a time where the war on desegregation was hot, Paulie Sanders is discovering who he is after the only family he thought he knew, ends. This story, written in verse, takes you through Paulie’s life after the death of his father and how he learns to cope. Not only with losing his Dad, but all of the other issues that arise, and then the secrets. All of the family secrets.

Out in September, this will be a must read.
